

13 SEO BEST PRACTICES

Because 13 is our favorite prime number

If you own a website, or are thinking of building one, you need to be concerned about how appealing your website is to search engines like Google. Making websites attractive to search engines is now a multi-billion dollar industry. This article will help you understand the most important aspects of Search Engine Optimization.



Let's begin by defining a few choice words and concepts.

SEO

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO is a broad term that includes everything you do to get your site noticed by search engines. Why do you care? Because search engine results are how most people find most websites. Optimizing your website for search engines can be the most cost-effective way to improve your website's performance.

Google

The biggest, baddest and most used search engine. We use the term in this document as a generic term for all search engines.

Organic Search Result

When you search on Google, the responses that come back on the left side are natural or "organic". No one paid for those. Google's complex search algorithms have decided those websites are the most relevant to your search. If someone clicks on a link, doesn't like it, and returns to Google's search results page, Google adjusts their position downward. This is but one of the many ways Google determines who makes it to the top of the list.

Number One Spot™

The first position in the search results for your keyword. It gets the most clicks and it's where you want to be.



AdWords

Online advertising made popular by Google. Every time someone searches for a word you have purchased, you have a chance to show up on the right side of the search results as a mini-ad. You offer a maximum price you will pay for that ad, and you only pay when someone clicks on it. Most small business owners with smart SEO Gals are paying somewhere between 20 cents and 2 dollars a click.

PageRank

A general value of how important Google thinks you are. Google ranks you from 1-10 (10 is best). The higher your PageRank, the cooler you are. A higher rank means you pay less for the same AdWords and you show up higher in the organic results.

Keywords and Keyphrases

Words and phrases that describe you, your products, your services and/or your organization. Keywords and keyphrases describe not only who you think you are, but who your customers think you are. Remember, they're the ones typing the words into the Search Engine. Speak their language.

Spiders

Search engines use tiny programs called spiders to crawl around the Internet looking for words to eat. That's all they do... eat words. These words are the nutrients Google lives on. Spiders bring the words home to the mother ship, which sucks them up and processes them into search results. The better the words on your site, the better Google can define you.

Usability

The easier your site is to use, the more money your website will make. Your Web Guy employs a set of tools and techniques to make the path between your customer and your product as short and easy as possible. Most improvements in website usability will also improve your search results ranking.

SEO Gal

The SEO guru you turn to for help with your online marketing efforts. You can do it yourself, but a good SEO Gal can make you a star.

Web Guy

The website guru who builds and updates your website. Learn to love him as he will keep your star shining.

1. Do You Know Where You Want To Go? Your Keywords Will Take You There.

Everyone wants to be in the coveted Number One Spot™ on Google. They fancy up their website graphics, they tweak their code, add a little Flash, change their product lines... often with limited success after a lot of investment. Why? Number One Spot™ websites don't get there because of their design... and they don't get there because of their code. *They get there because of the words on the pages!*

Google's intelligence is derived from the words on your website, so your first task is to develop list of the words and phrases you'd like to rank highly for. What makes you better than everyone else? Why are you different? What words do your customers use to describe what you offer?

Now you need to go and ask your SEO Gal for help to expand the list. She's got tools that will double or triple the size of your list. Once you have a comprehensive list of hundreds of words and phrases, you will want to narrow it down into a really powerful set. Use a few general words, but it's more important to include as many specialty or niche words and phrases as you can. The most profitable keywords are the ones with little competition and healthy interest. In other words, if you sell organic kid's clothes, *don't try to rank for "children's apparel", try to rank for "organic cotton girl's dresses."*

Your website name is part of the game. If you already have a good website name, keep it. If you don't, get the best one you can find. We love using the website pnames.com. Try to keep it short, do not use hyphens and stay away from double letters (saillighttwo.com). Check with your Web Guy and make sure he likes your choice. Make your domain name easy to remember, easy to say and easy to spell.

Print out your keyword list and tape it next to your monitor. Write the content for your website using those words liberally. Integrate your keywords naturally, using them in the first sentence of your paragraphs and your headings and as often as you can.

Remember that your keywords can have impact offline as well. Train your staff to use those keywords when they talk to people on the phone and in person about your offerings. Repeat your keyword list like a mantra. Visualize yourself in the Number One Spot™ for those keywords.

Give your Web Guy your list of keyphrases, if possible, before he builds a single page. Target landing pages are web pages that appeal more strongly to one type of visitor (Persona) in order to subtly influence purchasing decisions. You will want to build a few of these and tie a section of the keyword list to a specific



Persona.

As your site matures and you give your Web Guy more content, always provide captions and descriptive text for your images in order to make them digestible to spiders. Use human language and avoid describing products using manufacturing item numbers. Listen to how your customers describe your products.

2. Code Is Poetry

Your Web Guy spins webs of lean, clean, standards-compliant code. He will insert your keywords into the structure of your website so the spiders can scuttle around confidently. Your SEO Gal studies the algorithms the search engines use and keeps abreast of the latest changes. She checks her Google rankings compulsively the way some people check their stock prices. By the way, if your SEO Gal guarantees you a Number One Spot™, you need a new SEO Gal. The all-knowing Google does not suffer fools gladly and will punish you severely if you get caught using unethical practices.

A good technical team puts you at the head of the search engine optimization pack. A savvy team knows you are busy enough running your business without having to learn the finer points of keyword density percentages and fretting over social bookmarking techniques. And if your Web and SEO team doesn't know what software coined the phrase "Code is Poetry", fire them immediately. (Hint: This article was written using it.)

3. Design Matters

Besides being the main reason people make emotional purchase decisions, design also impacts your search engine optimization. Your Web Guy knows that good web design is not primarily about bells and whistles since they should mainly be used as shortcuts to promotional items or the checkout line.

The two best examples of fantastic web design are Google and Craigslist. Is their design pretty? Nope. Their design enables you to get things done. Aspire to be like them. Focus on usability

and intuitive navigation, pare down extraneous and distracting elements, and then judiciously add some high-quality images and pull it all together in a layout that works on every computer.



Usable design gets out of the way and provides a clear path from your customer to the item of their heart's desire. **If you have trouble finding something on your website, chances are your customer does too.** Get your Web Guy to fix it.

If your website is easier to navigate than your competitor's, and you are competing for the same AdWords spot, you win the higher rank, the lower price per click and the customer!

Cautionary note: Be very careful not to build an entire website in Flash. Spiders are blind to Flash. Besides, your website's purpose is probably not to entertain your clients with music and moving images (there are exceptions of course). They are looking for something and they are asking you to provide it for them. **Give it to them as quickly as possible and let them get back to their lives.**

4. Keep An Eye On The Joneses

Watch your competition closely. What words are they advertising for? How much are they paying? Your SEO Gal has some amazing tools that can help you spy on them and learn from their campaigns - and their mistakes.



5. Kneel Down And Submit

There's no getting around it: At some point in time, you're going to just have to walk up, hat in hand, and beg for inclusion in a people-run directory. There are a few lumbering old behemoths of the Internet and because there are real human beings editing them, Google considers them to be the absolute authority in their field. Problem is, they're slow as molasses to invite new people into the fold. You have to submit your request politely and humbly. **Then you have to wait, and wait, and wait...** Do not pester them.

The upside is, if you're a children's clothing store and you get a link from Berkeley Parents Network, you basically don't even need to run a yellow page ad anymore, for the life of your business. Ask your SEO Gal for three directories you should submit to and make sure she reviews your request. Make the submissions and then just forget about them. One day you'll get a nice surprise.

6. You Can't Yelp Too Loudly

One of the best things about the current state of the internet (often called Web 2.0) is that it allows ordinary people to voice their opinions. The web has changed from a monologue to a group conversation. Websites that allow people to publish their opinions are one of the strongest segments on the internet today. This has major implications for you if you're a small, local, service-oriented business. **Simply tell every happy customer, "Thanks, come again, please review me online"**. They will hurry off to blab into Yelp, Yahoo! Local, Judy's List, Google Local, Craigslist, etc.

It doesn't really matter which list they write on as long as they spell your name correctly and say something nice. You will see the search engine rank benefits accruing remarkably quickly.

7. Blog - Because If You Don't, Your Grandma Will

Ask any teen about blogging and they'll snort "yesterday's news." The truth is, there are sexier and newer technologies out there than blogs. But blogs are still amazing because they give people just like you (and your Grandma) the ability to publish website pages as often as you like without having to learn how to do anything but type and click.

Blogging increases your search ranking. In case you were wondering how it all works, your Web Guy has set up your blog so that the words in your blog posts get programmed into your website automatically. You just publish and wait for the spiders to come a-crawling.

If you blog, you benefit from it. If you don't, your Grandma is totally going to leave a nasty comment on your Facebook wall.



8. It's Just Like High School. Unfortunately.

Everyone wants to know how Google decides who gets the Number One Spot™. Well, the truth is that part of all search engines operate a little like high school cliques: If the cool people think you are cool, then you must be cool.

The fact of the matter is, the best, slowest, hardest, cheapest way to rise to that holy Number One Spot™ is to get other people with quality websites to link to your website using your favorite keyphrases as the target of the link. Of course, your trusty Web Guy already knows this and has a bunch of sample links for you. **Your task is to find websites that you'd like to get links from.** Write to them.

So go out and butter up the cool kids, because their links to you are your social capital. And for goodness sakes, get some better clothes! Your SEO Gal has a few tricks that can help you get invited to the cool kids' parties. And don't worry, none of them involve getting your older brother to buy beer.

9. Despite All The Rumors, Advertising Is Not Dead. It Just Moved Online.

PPC, CPC, CPA, SMO, whatever acronym you want to use, it's paying Google to send customers to your site. **Pay per Click advertising is how Google makes its bajillions and how**

smart marketers buy targeted website traffic. It can also help your website get out of the timing penalty known as the “sandbox” if you have a brand-new website. If you pay Google, you’ll float a little more towards the cool kid category. Your SEO Gal can give you guidelines on budgeting for and maintaining a strong, precisely targeted SEM campaign.

10. Analytics: A Good Justification For Skipping Math Class.

The great thing about web analytics these days is the computers do all the statistical number crunching. You just need to ask the right questions. Here are three example questions. Your SEO Gal has got dozens more.

A) What words did your visitors type into the search engine before they got to your site?

Do they match words on your list? Highlight those words with a big yellow highlighter. Move them to the top of the list. Find more like them.

B) Where is the most popular “in” door on your website?

You need to optimize that page so it leads people on the most profitable path through your site.

C) What is the most profitable path through your website?

Example: Search Engine Ad > Targeted Landing Page > Product Page > Checkout

What? You don’t have a targeted landing page? Better talk to your Web Guy or your SEO Gal. Landing pages, done correctly, can increase sales astronomically.

11. Public Relations Two Point Oh

Here’s what PR used to be like:

PR 1.0

- 1) Write press release
- 2) Send to media
- 3) Hope to make news
- 4) GOTO 1

This is what PR is like now:

PR 2.0

- 1) Write press release
- 2) Publish on your blog
- 3) Make news in the blogosphere
AND/OR
- 4) Make print or broadcast news
- 5) Continue to rank highly for the keyphrases in your press release years later
- 6) GOTO 1



*You should be cranking out keyword-rich press releases anytime you have a new **anything**.* Your Web Guy has already set up your blog to push new content out to the media. Simply publish them on your blog and walk away.

12. Hop On The RSS Train

RSS (Real Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary) is THE tool for up-to-the-second marketers. All it means is giving your visitors a way to subscribe to your website so they stay hip to your latest news, latest products, latest whatever you want to sing about - without you having to send them an email or a postcard or a smoke signal. *If you have a blog, you already have RSS.*

Oh, and if you don't have a blog yet... you may want to go back and begin reading at the top again. And take notes this time!

13. Publish Or Perish

If you're not publishing new content every day, you should be. If you want to be noticed, you have to say something people are interested in. The more you say, the less you have to pay Google.

Google has an army of voracious spiders looking for food. If you don't feed them, your competitors will. And if you don't feed them often, you will need to pay Google to send folks your way.

To Summarize

To Do:

1. Get a savvy Web Guy and a smart SEO Gal
2. Go forth with keywords and publish
3. Repeat 2



©YVOD, LLC 2007. Some Rights Reserved. This article and all its contents are licensed under a Creative Commons License. You are free to reprint this article in its entirety, with hyperlinks below intact and proper credit given. *Thanks for being a good net citizen!*

YVOD LLC

YVOD builds websites for individuals, nonprofits and small businesses.

Ulan McKnight CEO

Web Guy

Ulan dreams of changing the world through technology and kindness. When he's not geeking out at the Apple Store, he's getting pelted with water balloons or shooting off rockets with all the neighborhood kids.



Marisa DeSalles CMO

SEO Gal

Marisa likes to talk to trees. If you're looking for her, she's either blogging about marketing, dancing up a storm or camping with her son Brandon.

