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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DO IT FOR FREE

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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

In this document we aim to provide you with some basic steps you can take to dramatically increase the visibility of your website in natural search engine results and drive more sales with your only expense being your time.

Many small businesses lack the technical expertise or have large marketing budgets to promote and design their website. Without this knowledge most turn to expensive "Pay per click" campaigns or third party agencies and often get very little in return.

Search Engine Optimisation or "SEO" basically means getting your website to rank as high as possible in the search results without having to pay anything to the search engine…. and with this document no need to pay anyone!

HOW IS IT DONE

Effective SEO is achieved by having a complete knowledge of the integral workings of the internet and expert knowledge of how to process this information and put it in place.

There are a number of key factors that contribute to the success of your website, most notably **Quality & Relevance** and **Popularity**.

1) **Quality**: This covers things such as the folder structure of your site, site content, descriptions and keywords, ease of use and navigation.
2) **Relevance**: Relevance generally refers to things such as your domain name, amount of content, external links from your site and your keywords and descriptions.

"61% of small businesses with a website spend less than three hours per week marketing their website on and offline"

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1. **Inbound Links (Who links to you?)**
2. **Site Build Quality**
3. **Meta-Tags**
4. **Folder/URL Structure**
5. **Keywords & Description**
6. **Search Engine Submission**
7. **Quality of Competitors**
8. **Site Content**

3) **Popularity**: We don't mean how many visits you get here (that is a large misconception) we mean who links to your website from their website e.g. industry sites, business directories etc.

Following our method you should start to see results within days as opposed to months and be able to track your traffic to see your success.

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QUALITY & RELEVANCE

Quality refers to the following areas of your website;

1) Site Structure
2) Site Content
3) Navigation
4) External Links

Site Structure

The first thing to consider is obviously the domain name you choose. It's important for corporate identity and protect your brand to buy at least the .com and .co.uk for your company name but before starting your consumer facing website think about the relevance of your company name vs your product range. For example if your company name is Joe Bloggs Ltd and you sold building materials, is www.joebloggs.com the right domain name to use or would www.buildingmaterials.com be better?

A good idea is to have both, the first for a corporate website describing your business and history etc. and a domain name that better describes your actual products for an ecommerce enabled site.

Another option is use a sub-domain of your corporate website such as http://building-materials.joebloggs.com .

For static websites the structure of your website is vital when it comes to search engines visiting your site, it needs to be setup in a way that the "spiders" can easily find their way around and understand what they are looking at.

Firstly make sure that where possible your page names reflect their content e.g. a page about lawnmowers should not be called *"product12.html"* but be called *"lawnmowers.html"*. This then also applies to your folders on your web server, for the same example this should be something like *http://www.mycompany.com/gardening-products/lawnmowers.html*

Notice the separating of the folder/category title in this example being "gardening-products" as opposed to "gardeningproducts" adding the "-" makes the URL clearer and easier to read. For page titles and images separate words with either "_" or "-", avoid using spaces as these are replaced by "%20" in the internet browsers.

NOTE: This does NOT apply to dynamically created websites such as most hosted online shops

Sitemap

You should also include a sitemap.xml file on the root of your server. This is essentially a simply formatted text file that provides information about all of the pages in your website in one file. If the software that you used to create your website provide one automatically you can generate one at XML Sitemaps for free at http://www.xml-sitemaps.com.

"80% of search engine users never look past the first three pages"

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Site Content

Think carefully when creating the pages of your website, inserting lot's of images can make the page look clumsy and take a long time to load.

Images

If you use any images always make sure to give them a description using the "ALT" value. ALT means "Alternate Text" and is very important for the search engines to understand what the image relates to, so for example for your websites logo the source code would look like;

**

Note also the name of the image *"mycompany_logo.gif"* gives an idea of what it is there to describe.

Links

Any links whether they are internal or external, from text or from an image, should have a description or "title" value. This helps in two ways, firstly by telling the search engine more information about what it will find and also for adding valuable text & keywords into your page. For example if this were a link to your "About Us" page it might look like:

About Us

Or for a page about "Products"

Products

And from your logo to return to your home page

**

"A picture speaks a thousand words……. or does it??? Not to a search engine!"

Textual Content

Having plenty of relevant text is essential, though "*RELEVANT*" is the key word here! Pages and pages of text are going to bore your visitors just as lots of images will confuse them. If you aren't sure about where to start the best thing to do is look at your competition. Do a search in Google for the keywords you want to get high rankings for and look in detail at the first ten results for the following things:

1) Title – In the top of your browser
2) Use of the keyword(s) within their pages
3) How long their product descriptions are
4) Are they using external content such as linking or embedding Wiki articles or user reviews

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This may sound simple but at the end of the day if they are in the Top 10 results their websites are working for them!!

Navigation

Would you go on holiday and not take a map (or GPS!) if not and there were no street signs how would you know where to go?

This is exactly the same for your website if you have poor navigation your visitors won't hang around they will go to your competition. The same is true with the search engine spiders if they can't "crawl" your website easily they won't bother. The XML sitemap is a good start but there are some simple things you do with the rest of the navigation for SEO purposes.

Firstly (taking into account the links section of this document) where possible use text links with CSS styling for your menus as opposed to images.

Have more than one menu, for example a "top menu" and a "side menu". A common use of this would be to have the "About Us & Contact Us" type links in the "top menu" and "product category" type links in a "side menu". The more direct links to your content pages the better.

If you have lots of links that you want to use in a single menu but are worried it is going to look a mess, consider using AJAX/Javascript to create a dynamic menu. You can find some readymade scripts at the following links:

www.dynamicdrive.com

http://plugins.jquery.com

www.mootools.com

http://javascript.internet.com

www.dhtmlgoodies.com

"The Footer"

The "Footer" of your web pages are a great place to add links as most visitors don't look at it. This is generally where you place legal notices such as © and company registration numbers.

Some good examples of this are www.download.com and http://business.bt.com both use this area to fill it with links to the main areas of their website to make it as simple as possible for the search engines to find their way around.

This is also a good area to place discreet back links to other relevant websites and websites that require you to link back to them before they place a link to you such as some free business directories and forums.

You should also link to your XML sitemap file and if possible to a HTML (web page) version as well.

"Just as it is important in business to network and be *linkedin*, it is just as important for your website"

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External Links & Content

Linking to external websites and specifically to similar or related content is a very useful tool for the search engines perception of the importance of your site. There are masses of freely available content you can use from YouTube videos through to product ratings, Wikipedia content and News Feeds.

If used in the right way this can add value for your visitors, as well as additional content and relevant cross reference links for the search engines.

Embedding External Content

There are many different ways you can embed external content within your website, for example some packages come with their own RSS Widget's to allow you to easily embed RSS feeds from anywhere. The most common ways to embed external content are:

1) RSS Feeds for news feeds and frequently updated content
2) Widgets – often used for embedding weather information and location maps
3) External Embed – Such as embedding Videos from YouTube where the content is hosted elsewhere or product reviews.

RSS Feeds

RSS Feeds or "Really Simple Syndication" as it stands for are structured in a very similar way to your XML sitemap. They are essentially the textual content from external web pages that can be "pulled" into your website. There are a number of reasons why it is great to embed them;

1) The content in the Feed changes often which makes your website more "alive" to the search engines, very useful if you don't change the content regularly as the more frequently your website changes the more frequently the search engines will visit your website.
2) If you have space to fill on your site they can provide free relevant up to date content which looks professional and is informative for your visitors.

Sources for RSS feeds are everywhere from BBC News to Blogger just do a search for RSS & the topic e.g. "RSS Technology" or create your own from a site such as Moreover.com. There are many free tools available to embed these feeds in your site such as www.feedzilla.com and www.newsfeedmaker.com.

Widgets

Widgets are a great way to add content to your site, you might have noticed local weather or travel information on a local businesses website. There are millions of widgets available on the web, some good places to start are www.widgetbox.com and bravenet.com.

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External Embedding

Embedding external content is perhaps the easiest way to add someone elses content to your website. You'll notice on a lot of websites such as YouTube you'll have a "share this" or "embed" area which will contain code similar to the following:

<object width="560" height="340"><param name="movie" value="http://www.youtube.com/v/TDZUIMlMq7c&hl=en&fs=1&"></param><param name="allowFullScreen" value="true"></param><param name="allowscriptaccess" value="always"></param><embed src="http://www.youtube.com/v/TDZUIMlMq7c&hl=en&fs=1&" type="application/x-shockwave-flash" allowscriptaccess="always" allowfullscreen="true" width="560" height="340"></embed></object>

All you then need to do is paste this code into your webpage where you want it to appear. In this YouTube example which is embedding a Flash video you can also change the parameter *param name="movie"* to whatever you like, this example is a Michael Jackson video so I might want to change this to *param name="My Favourite Michael Jackson Video"* to tell the search engines why it is there.

External Links

Any other external links should always be relevant to your website's content and don't be scared to change the "title" value in an external link to something more relevant such as "Free Business Directory" you could change to "Builders Directory" or anything else you like. When signing up to Free Business Directories that require a link back to their site always try and link back to the page on their directory that contains your information.

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POPULARITY

So you've now made your website as search engine friendly as possible, we now need to give them a bit of help to find you and start indexing your site. We now need to consider the following areas;

1) Inbound Links
2) Search Engine Submission
3) Social Networking

Inbound Links

Links from other websites are an important tool for increasing your popularity. Not only will you get more visitors but the search engines will also hold your website in higher regard the more people who are linking to you. There are some really easy and again free ways to do this;

1) Press Releases
2) Business Directories
3) Networking Forums

Press Releases

This is one of the most powerful free tools, a well written press release both promotes your company to potential customers and can create hundreds of back links to your website. They are often picked up by automated RSS readers and can very quickly spread around the web. You can also create as many as you want!

A few things to bear in mind when you write the release are, make it catchy, always write in the third person, where you can include your logo always do and always put a link back to your website where you can.

There are many free press release sites available a few being:

www.free-press-release.com

www.i-newswire.com

www.prlog.com

www.1888pressrelease.com

www.freepressreleases.co.uk

Business Directories

Business directories are a great way to get some genuine static links to your site, take the time to fill out as much content as you can and be careful which categories you place your business in. A quick web search for "Free Business Directories" brings up hundreds, a few examples are:

www.freeindex.co.uk

www.applegate.co.uk

www.ukbusinessdirectory.co.uk

www.bttradespace.com

www.brownbook.net

www.trustpilot.com

Networking Forums

These are a great place to go and promote your website as well as take advantage of free back links. Most of these sites let you have a link in your forum post signature (though on some you have to post X posts first). A few popular ones are:

www.ukbusinessforums.co.uk

http://forums.teneric.co.uk

www.businesszone.co.uk

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Search Engine Submission

Search Engine submission is an important tool that can help speed up the time it takes for the search engines to find and index your website. It is not recommended to submit your website more often than every 6-8 weeks, to get you started below are some links to the submission pages of a number of search engines, just click the "submission page" text next to the search engines name to go straight there.

Burf - Submission Page
Exalead - Submission Page
guruji - Submission Page
Gigablast - Submission Page
Entireweb - Submission Page
FyberSearch - Submission Page
MixCat - Submission Page
OneSeek - Submission Page
WhatUseek - Submission Page
Scrub The Web - Submission Page
Search Site - Submission Page
Infotiger - Submission Page
SonicRun - Submission Page
Abacho - Submission Page
Acoon.com - Submission Page
Amfibi - Submission Page
homerweb - Submission Page
JGDO - Submission Page
Myahint - Submission Page
Walhello - Submission Page
Big Finder - Submission Page
Web Squash - Submission Page
W8 Search - Submission Page
Google - Submission Page
Yahoo - Submission Page
MSN/LIVE/Bing - Submission Page
Search-O-Rama - Submission Page
Igwanna - Submission Page
Cipinet - Submission Page
Navisso - Submission Page
AxxaSearch - Submission Page
Dino Search - Submission Page
Boitho - Submission Page
Gheto Search - Submission Page
Intel Seek - Submission Page
Search Ramp - Site Submission
Ultimate Web Search - Site Submission
Find Once - Submission Page
Net Search - Submission Page
Susy Search - Submission Page
iASK - Submission Page
ZhongSou.com - Submission Page
Famhoo) - Submission Page
Megaglobe - Submission Page
AnooX - Submission Page
Alexa - Submission Page
Aesop - Submission Page
Shoula! Search - Submission Page
NetSearch - Submission Page
SearchIt - Submission Page
Official Search - Submission Page
Iconnic - Submission Page
Coolfishy - Submission Page
Enter UK - Submission Page
Antya - Submission Page
Searchme - Submission Page
Claymont Search - Submission Page
BoroLook - Submission Page
Stopdog - Submission Page
searchengine.com - Submission Page
eXactBot - Submission Page
Vmgo.com - Submission Page
eBingBong - Submission Page
Swoogle - Submission Page
Knoole - Submission Page
XavierSeek - Submission Page
Lexxe - Submission Page
Xoole - Submission Page
eTracking (- Submission Page
Yoozila - Submission Page
Searchii - Submission Page
Web Portal Guide - Submission Page
Search Blast - Submission Page
iDoFind.com - Submission Page
SpongeLink - Submission Page
ubExact - Submission Page
Thorseek (- Submission Page
Oriango - Submission Page
Find Once - Submission Page
cuil - Submission Page
WASALive! - Submission Page
Super.Info - Submission Page
Abraham Search - Submission Page
Searchers - Submission Page
Majestic-12 - Submission Page
SearchWiz - Submission Page
All Xplore - Submission Page

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Social Networking

Social Networking for Business is still not being used as much as it should be though websites such as Facebook and Myspace are very highly ranked by the search engines and having a page for your business can prove very useful. You should also encourage your employees to "become a fan" or join your network as you never know who their friends might be – they might just be your target market. Some of these networks such as Facebook also allow you to have a sub-domain such as network.com/mycompany. A few of the biggest are:

www.facebook.com

www.myspace.com

www.linkedin.com

Another useful tool for your website is to add a way for your visitors to add a link to your website on their own Social networking page. People are often using this now to save their "Favourites/BookMarks" so that they are accessible wherever they might be, tools such as "addthis" make it very easy to include these on your site.

"SEO is an ongoing project and should be an integral part of your overall marketing strategy and done correctly can provide an excellent, cost effective route to market."

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TRACKING YOUR SUCCESS

So you've now submitted your website to the search engines, sent out your press release and created your Facebook page, how do you know how successful you've been??

There are lots of ways to measure the traffic to your site, the obvious one being an increase in orders though this doesn't tell you how many you are missing where customers are visiting your site but not staying or are leaving through the checkout process.

There are a number of free statistical tools available such as from www.statcounter.com and Google Analytics (www.google.co.uk/analytics) that will provide you with detailed statistics for the traffic to your website. All that you need to do is insert a piece of code, similar to embedding a YouTube video, within the code of your website and let it do its job. When signing up you will be given a username and password so you can login and view the information it has collected.

Other websites that hold statistical data or will analyse your traffic for free are:

www.alexa.com

www.urltrends.com

www.about.com

www.addfreestats.com

www.gostats.com

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