



Search engine optimization

Don't launch your website without it

by Michael Daily

A web design or development project can be successful only if the target audience finds the site. At Scott Design, we place great importance on search engine optimization (SEO), the process of generating worthwhile traffic via non-paid search results. SEO is a fully integrated part of our process for designing, building, and launching a website.

Here are a few important SEO recommendations we make to our clients. We won't design and build a website without following them.

Don't try to fool the search engines

It's very hard to fool today's sophisticated search engines, so don't attempt tricks like hidden text, keyword stuffing, link spamming, etc. Search engines include complex ranking algorithms that can take into account hundreds of factors. Most of them are unknown



outside of the major search engines' developer teams. So the best way to benefit from non-paid search results is to identify key phrases visitors most likely will use when conducting searches. You should then incorporate those phrases into appealing, organized content.

Create compelling, link-worthy content

Write and present content that is compelling enough to make others link to your site. "Link-worthy" copy will produce better short-term and long-term search results than any SEO tricks.

You can dramatically increase meaningful visits to your site by receiving traffic via links from other quality sites. Additionally, if those sites have a lot of other quality sites linking to them, you can enhance your results exponentially. Bottom line: Create content that key players in your industry find compelling, and they will link to your site.

Write clear, descriptive copy that includes key phrases

Don't write primarily for Google or Yahoo. Write for your target audience, the people you hope will visit your site. Be descriptive and clear. Use an active voice and a passionate tone. Keep it readable, and include content that is unique.

Focus on key phrases — combinations of words that a search engine user might type and/or a site visitor seeks when scanning your web pages. Write headlines, sub-headlines, and opening paragraphs that include key phrases. Feel free to use a key, relevant phrase two or three times on a page, or use close variations on the phrase, so your copy won't be redundant. Using the same phrase more than five times on a page will not improve the search results.

In brief...

- Don't try to fool the search engines
- Create compelling, link-worthy content
- Write clear, descriptive copy that includes key phrases
- Properly name title tags, URLs, headlines, and navigation links
- Make clean, organized coding a priority
- Give it time, and track success with web analytics

Talk with your established customers. Discover which words and phrases they used to find your site. You also can determine key phrases by checking your web analytics, looking at competitors' sites, and reading influential blogs and forums on community sites.

Properly name title tags, URLs, headlines, and navigation links

Give logical, accurate names to URLs, page titles, headlines, and links. This will make your content easily accessible to the search engine "spiders" that crawl through websites collecting information. And be consistent on each web page: Include the same key words in the page title (which appears in the bar at the top of the browser), URL, meta description tag, headline, navigation link, and first paragraph or two of the copy.

The title is the single most important SEO factor on a page, so use a unique and relevant page title on each one. It's rare to yield impressive search engine results for a term that is not part of the page title. Also, the meta description tag won't enhance your results, but it often appears as the text snippet below your listing in the search results, so it should include the relevant keyword(s) and be written to encourage searchers to click on your listing.

The headline on your page (H1) should include key phrases that reflect the content of the page. Any sub-navigation title (for example, in the left-side navigation) should be nearly identical to the headline. This avoids potential confusion for both the search engine and the site visitor.

Make clean, organized coding a priority

By using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), content can exist separately from coding, making the content easier for search engines to read.

Specific tags on each page define headings and content. Search engines look for those tags as indicators of what's



important on a page. You must have an H1 heading, and H2 tags also are valuable.


Use more than just Flash for navigation. Search engines cannot see what's in a Flash file. Selective use of Flash to enhance visual appeal is fine, but be aware that the content in Flash components probably will not be indexed by the search engines.

Give it time, and track success with web analytics

Search engine optimization is an investment that requires patience and an ongoing commitment. For most sites, it takes 2-3 months for SEO initiatives to have an impact. It's advisable to minimize changes for 3-4 months after the initial SEO initiative. You'll get more accurate results by sticking with initial content.

You should have clearly defined goals for your SEO efforts. To determine whether you're meeting those goals, you'll need web analytics software — like Google Analytics — in place at launch so you can track what's working and what's not.

You could spend countless hours learning the intricacies of SEO, so we've provided a list of websites (see the right column) that might save you some time. But no matter how much you learn, keep it simple: Create appealing, properly named, well-organized content. If you do, you'll get the visitors you seek.

If you would like to start a conversation about redesigning your site and improving your organic search results, contact our team of experts at info@hotdesign.com. 

Learn more about optimizing your site for search engines

- Google Keyword Tool
- Wordtracker Keyword Tool
- Google AdWords
- Search Engine Keyword Tracker & Keyword Ranking Tool
- Google Tool Bar
- Aaron Wall's SEO Book Keyword Suggestion Tool
- Search Engine Watch
- Search Engine Land
- SEO Book Blog
- Cre8asite Forum
- Search Engine Roundtable
- MarketingPilgrim Internet Marketing and Online Advertising
- Website Rankings
- Google Analytics

For URLs, please visit http://hotdesign.com/expertise/search_engine_optimization.html

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