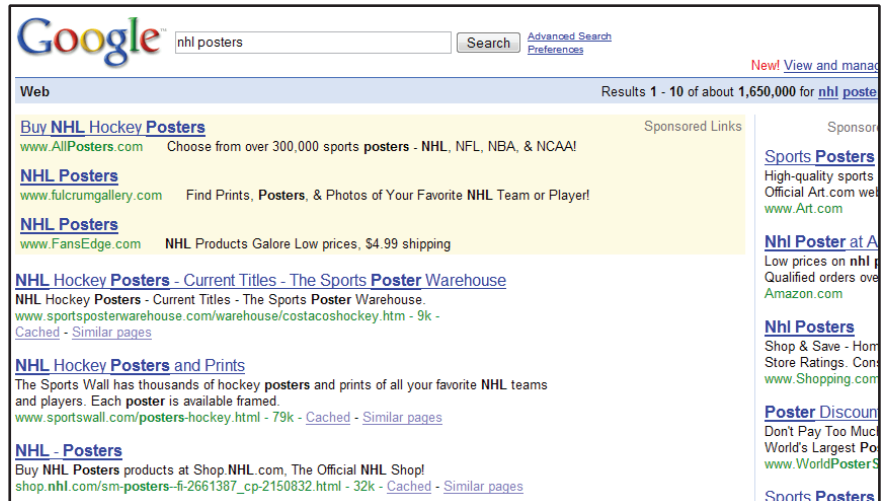


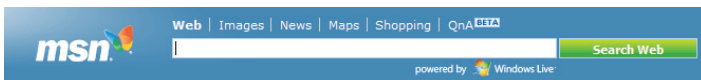
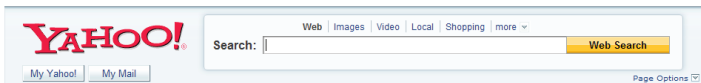
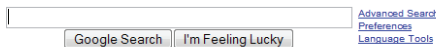
90% of people who have used the Internet have used a search engine to find information, products or services. As a small businesses owner, you want to ensure that your customers find your business when they look for it, or for a service you provide, on an Internet search engine. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is performed through a set of techniques designed to increase the probability that your business Web site will rank higher in search engine results. This will increase the probability that your Web site will appear in the first listings on your customer's results page.



This document will guide you through the process of developing a new Web site (or updating an existing one) that is fully optimized for search engine rankings. The higher your Web site is located on the search engine results pages, the more likely your business is to obtain sales. Search Engines go to considerable effort to rank pages according to what Web users find more relevant and appealing. Therefore, following SEO guidelines not only increases your rank on search engine results pages, but also generally makes your Web site more organized and compelling to visitors.

## Introduction

The 3 major search engines are Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft which cover 55%, 22% and 10% of the market, respectively. While each search engine evaluates Web sites in a slightly different way, the factors they consider in ranking sites are all essentially the same. Therefore, following the best practices in this guide will optimize your Web site across the board.



**You should never forget, however, that the ultimate purpose of your Web site is to convince people to buy a product or service that you provide.** A Web site that has utilized SEO techniques to an extreme may rank highly in the search engines, but may not be appealing to potential customers.

Search Engines have a vast number of computer programs called 'bots' or 'spiders'. These constantly navigate the Web, going from page to page by following links, and save the text and links of all the pages they reach in a master index.

The search engine then ranks the Web pages against the keywords that users enter in a search query. Each search engine has its own proprietary algorithm that weighs **on-the-page** and **off-the-page** factors on your Web site. As has been mentioned, while the relative weight of these factors varies by search engine, the factors themselves do not and are as follows:

- I. On-the-page Factors (Page Content)
  - a. How well the content on the page, the title of the page, and information within the page's code matches the query.
  
- II. Off-the-page Factors (External Links)
  - a. Search engines score your Web site by its popularity. Popularity is determined by the number of sites that link to yours, and by the popularity of those sites.
    - i. Having 1 link from a 'popular' page is better than 100 links from 'unpopular' pages
    - ii. Popularity is determined by the number of non-SPAM links pointing to a page.

The sections below describe what specific design steps should be implemented in the Web design process to ensure that search engines rank your site as highly as possible.

## Title

Ensure that each page of your Web site has a unique HTML title (inside the <TITLE> tag) – that clearly states the purpose of the page.

The title of each Web page should be unique, written in plain English (or the language of the page), and should be keyword centric, meaning that it should reflect the most probable words that will be used to search.

- I. The title is the most important of the SEO standards since it is the number one way that a search engine determines the topic of your page. The search engine will use that topic, or classification, to determine the search results for which your page will be considered.
  
- II. Summarize the content of your page in less than 10 words and then enter your business' name (separated by a hyphen '-' or a vertical line '|').



## Page Text

The text on each page of your Web site should be full of keywords, including synonyms, plurals, etc., which are relevant to the topic of the page.

This step is the simplest to explain, yet the most difficult to implement. You need to try to achieve the optimal balance between keyword-dense text and text that is engaging to the reader.

- I. Keep the human reader in mind! Make sure your SEO efforts don't override your sales and marketing messaging.
- II. Effective keywords are words and phrases users would commonly type when searching for the content offered on the page.

## External Links

Search engines strive for search results that are relevant for the user. To that end, they use the popularity of a page as a proxy to relevance. This popularity is determined by the number and quality of inbound links.

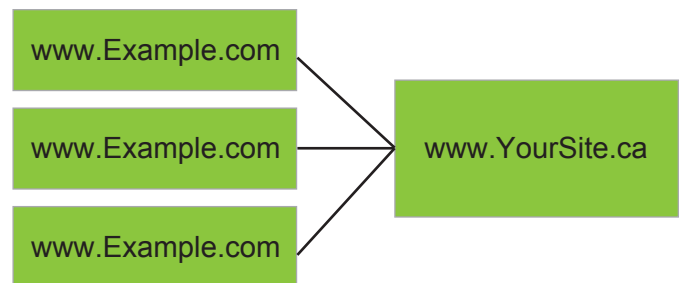
Generally, the links on a Web site that point to external pages are placed there to direct the audience to other compelling content or to better explain an on-page topic .

Therefore, it is easy to see how informational pages (blogs, encyclopedia-style pages, articles, etc.) would get more external links than commerce/transactional pages.

Recognizing that it is more difficult for commerce-focused pages to be linked to in this manner, it is necessary, for SEO purposes for you to actively seek out such links.

Not all links are created equal, however. Just as a search engine determines the relevancy or popularity of your Web page by the number of links that point to you; a search engine will also use the respective popularity of the linking page

to weigh the popularity of your page. One link from a "popular" Web site (such as cnet.com or cbc.ca) is worth more than many links from Web sites that themselves have few inbound links. Links from "trusted" pages such as government pages or educational institution Web sites are generally considered to be the most valuable.



Inbound links from sites that search engines consider spam-related have NO impact, or may even have a negative impact, on your SEO rankings. Search engines generally do a good job of determining whether a site is a spam site. Buying links from a disreputable affiliate network or link-farm will not help the search engine rank of your Web site, and it might lead to your site being banned from a search engine's listings.

## Page Layout

Where possible, the text on your page (in the body, on menus, captions, side-boxes, etc.) should be coded into the page. Search engines cannot read text that is imbedded in an image file.

If you need to have text on your page imbedded in an image (for your logo, for example, or if you need to use a non-standard font for branding purposes) use the <ALT> tag for that image to write out the text. Also, all photos or graphics on your site should have a descriptive <ALT> tag.

Search engines cannot read the content that is not coded into the page. However, many sites enhance the user experience by using JavaScript, Flash, Ajax or Frames. Text in such format should also appear in the plain HTML markup. Keep the following in mind.

- I. Search Engines cannot read JavaScript markup.
- II. Frames should not be used for important text content for which users may be searching. The text within the frame will NOT be associated with the parent page.
- III. The use of AJAX can prevent a page's content from being indexed.
- IV. The use of Flash can greatly enhance the user experience, but it cannot be indexed by search engines.

**If any of the above features are important to the look and feel of your Web site, you should consider providing a plain text link to a script-free version of the content on those pages.**

## META Tags

### **META Description Tag**

Each page in your Web site should have a META Description tag. This tag should consist of a brief keyword-rich description of the topic and purpose of the Web page.

Often, this is the blurb that search engines use to present in the natural result for a page. Search engines will typically show the first 20 words of the description. Guidelines for an effective META description are as follows:

- I. Keep the description to fewer than 200 characters.
- II. Describe only content that is visible on the page.
- III. Use plain, natural language.

## **META Keywords Tag**

The META Keywords tag is sometimes used by search engines for classification purposes. Keyword tags containing keywords that do not appear in the body of the Web page are sometimes flagged by search engines as being spam.

- I. Note that the keyword tag is used for classification purposes and not for page ranking.

## URL Guidelines

The URL of each page of your Web site should be a concise summary of the page title. Other URL guidelines are as follows:

- I. Use dashes '-' to represent spaces between words
- II. Do not repeat keywords more than once in the URL
- III. Do not use more than 5 words between slashes '/'
- IV. The keywords in the URL should appear within the plain English text on the page.
  - a. For example: The Web page of an apparel store that sells Gucci Suits should identify the most important keyword "store" "Gucci" and "Suits" in the URL.  
`www.YourFashion.com/store/gucci-suits`
- V. **Where possible the URL should be free of dynamic query parameters such as**  
`www.example.com?pageid=23&param1=c4331`
  - a. This can be accomplished via a mod\_rewrite or URL rewrite engine. For example, a URL like `www.example.com/23/c4331` is more search engine friendly.
  - b. Search engine crawlers have a difficult time indexing parameters. If parameters are necessary, there should not be more than 2 sets of parameters.
  - c. Dynamic URLs should follow the descriptive URL guidelines where possible.

## Permanent Links and Sitemap

A user should be able to navigate to every page in your Web site – from any page in your Web site. Therefore, each of your Web pages should have at least one permanent text link that points to it. (A permanent link is one that exists on a page that is a permanent part of the site, such as a sitemap, rather than a temporary page like a promotional page.) Secure pages that require a user to log in or temporary pages, such as promotional pages, are excluded from this standard and do not need a permanent link that points to them.

Search engines favor text links. They use the text that is part of the link to determine the topic of the linked page. Other link guidelines are as follows:

- I. All of the content on your Web site should be accessible in no more than 4 clicks from any other page. Search engines consider content buried deep in your site to be less important, and may not index it.
  - a. Your home page should be reachable from every page in your Web site. This tells the search engine that it is the most important page in your site.
  - b. Consider using a Sitemap and other navigational links to help meet this goal.
- II. Links on your Web site should exist inside HTML page elements in the code of a page (and not in a Frame or in Flash, JavaScript, Ajax or other programming language) Search engines commonly follow links in HTML code. The examples below show an HTML link code and part of a JavaScript link code which a search engine cannot read :
  - a. For example:
    - i. HTML Link: `<a href="www.example.com/sample-page.htm">` is preferred to:
    - ii. JavaScript link: `... var linkHTML = "";var thisURL = window.location + "..."`
  - b. Include descriptive text in the `<ALT>` tag for each link that is not text-based, such as an image-based link. Keep in mind, however, that non-text-based links should be avoided
  - c. Links inside Flash, JavaScript, or AJAX are totally invisible to search engines and do not have any SEO-related impact .
- III. A page with no links to it is considered an orphaned page. Except for specific reasons such as pages placed outside of normal navigation as Pay-per-click landing pages or pages created for testing purposes, no page on your Web site should be an orphan.
- IV. SITEMAP – Your business Web site should have a sitemap of crawlable text links to enable search engines to easily reach all content areas.
  - a. However, no page on your site, even a sitemap, should have more than 50 links per page – break up the sitemap into multiple pages if this is a concern.

## Cookies

Cookies must not be required to view the site's indexable content. If your site uses cookies, (e.g. for region-specific offers), you should also offer a default navigation that reaches indexable content without requiring cookies.

- I. Search engines cannot view or accept cookies, so it is important that reaching content does not depend on their existence.
- II. Requiring cookies is acceptable if the cookie requirement is on a page that need not be indexed by the search engines – as in the case of an order page or shopping cart.

## Search Engine Bot/Spider Control

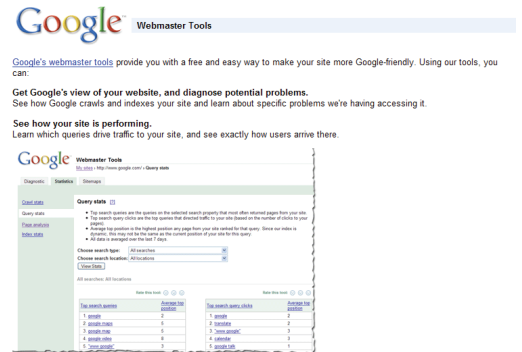
Content pages (such as an order form or a testing page) that are not intended to be indexed should use the META Robots tag. This prevents search engines from indexing the page or following links on the page.

- I. Use the META Robots tag: `<META name="ROBOTS" content="NOINDEX, NOFOLLOW">`
  - a. "noindex" indicates that the page may not be indexed by a search service.
  - b. "nofollow" indicates that search engines are not to follow links from this page.
- II. Ensure that the META Robots tag does not appear on pages that should be indexed.
- III. Ensure that META Robots tag is applied to duplicate pages, as described below:
  - a. Duplicate Content – Ensure that a page/site with identical or approximately identical HTML does not exist elsewhere on the Web.
  - b. If a duplicate page exists (for testing purposes, etc.) ensure that it is not indexed.
- IV. Redirects – All redirects should be handled on the server-side and return one of status code 301 (permanent) or status code 302 (temporary). Redirects are not to be handled with JavaScript or a META refresh as these block search engines. Redirects are useful when you have 2 two URLs that point to the same page (for example: ca.yahoo.com and yahoo.ca both point to the same page). Choose 1 one URL to be the primary page and include a redirect on the other URL. This tells the search engine that you don't have 2two identical pages, but simply 1one page with 2two URLs that point to it, one of which is the primary one.

## Use Google's Free Tools

Google offers Webmasters 2 free tools that are particularly important for SEO purposes:

- I. Sitemap Submission Tool ([www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps](http://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps))
  - a. Giving Google a sitemap of your Web site increases the likelihood that Google will index all of the content on your site.
  - b. Please note that this is not a magic tool! This will not help with the ranking of your pages. Using the sitemap submission tool only increases the likelihood that Google actually reads all of your content. The rank that it will assign your Web site is based following the SEO practices in this document.



- II. Google Local Business Center ([www.google.com/local/add](http://www.google.com/local/add))
  - a. Search Engine users are increasingly turning to local search features such as Google Maps to find businesses in their area (or an area which they plan to visit). Google has a local search directory to which you can add your business – so that region-specific searches may find your business.

## DO NOT Engage in Spam

Search engines are typically more capable at identifying spam than most professional Web designers are at hiding it. You should be aware that the following practices will not help your site's ranking in search engine results:

- I. Buying or selling links (except through reputable affiliate agencies).
- II. Hiding text from human users (by using white fonts color, CSS attributes, or other methods).
- III. Hiding external links with small images.
- IV. Publishing pages that are not intended for human users, or content on pages that is not intended for people to see.

## Conclusion

As you create or update a Web site, only you can determine the balance between optimizing for search engines and making a compelling Web site for your customers.

On an ongoing basis, you should be seeking inbound links and reviewing your Web site to ensure that it is optimized.

You should understand that there is no guarantee that your page will appear first in the search results for your desired search terms. Also, ranking improvements typically take weeks or months to become fully evident. This is due to the lag between the time you make changes to your Web site and the time your Web site is re-indexed by the search engines, as well as the tendency of search engines to favor the status quo of their listings for the sake of consistency.

However, consistently following the guidelines in this document for your Web site will ensure a positive impact in the ranking of your Web pages and ultimately, will result in improved visibility for your business.