

# **The SEO Handbook**

# The SEO Handbook

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# Welcome To The SEO Handbook!

This course covers everything that you could ever want to know about getting high rankings in the search engines. Many courses only give you a little bit of information and then try to sell you additional courses with the “real secrets” in them. You’ll never have to worry about that with this course.

If you aren’t familiar with what Search Engine Optimization is let’s break that down so you understand it. Search Engine Optimization or SEO is simply the act of manipulating the pages of your website to be easily accessible by search engine spiders so they can be easily spidered and indexed. A spider is a robot that search engines use to check millions of web pages very quickly and sort them by relevance. A page is indexed when it is spidered and deemed appropriate content to be placed in the search engines results for people to click on.

Search engine marketing and promotion companies, will look at the plan for your site and make recommendations to increase your search engine ranking and website traffic. If you wish, they will also provide ongoing consultation and reporting to monitor your website and make recommendations for editing and improvements to keep your site traffic flow and your search engine ranking high. Normally your search engine optimization experts work with your web designer to build an integrated plan right away so that all aspects of design are considered at the same time.

It is the search engines that finally bring your website to the notice of the prospective customers. When a topic is typed for search, nearly instantly, the search engine will sift through the millions of pages it has indexed about and present you with ones that match your topic. The searched matches are also ranked, so that the most relevant ones come first.

Remember that a prospective customer will probably only look at the first 2-3 listings in the search results. So it does matter where your website appears in the search engine ranking.

Further, they all use one of the top 6-7 search engines and these search engines attract more visitors to websites than anything else. So finally it all depends on which search engines the customers use and how they rank your site.

It is the Keywords that play an important role than any expensive online or offline advertising of your website.

It is found by surveys that, when customers want to find a website for information or to buy a product or service, they find their information in one of the following ways:

- The first option is they find their site through a search engine.
- Secondly they find their site by clicking on a link from another website or page that relates to the topic in which they are interested.
- Occasionally, they find a site by hearing about it from a friend or reading in an article or e-zine/newsletter.

Thus it's obvious the most popular way to find a site, by search engine, represents more than 90% of online users. In other words, only 10% of the people looking for a website will use methods other than search engines.

All search engines employ a ranking algorithm and one of the main rules in a ranking algorithm is to check the *location and frequency of keywords on a web page*. Don't forget that algorithms also give weight to link popularity (number of web pages linking to your site). When performed by a qualified, experienced search engine optimization consultant, your site for high search engine rankings really does work, unless you have a lot of money and can afford to pay the expert. With better knowledge of search engines and how they work, you can also do it on your own.

A search engine is the most effective tool that can bring a prospective customer to your Company website. Millions of web visits are initiated daily through one or the other search engine to locate information or sources of supply. This is considered to be the most effective and targeted channel for you as a website owner to acquire a hot lead. Businesses all the over the world spend a huge sum on designing, building, maintaining and promoting their websites.

Online advertising and marketing budgets have also soared. Relative to these, the investment required for getting traffic through search engines is much lower. However, as search engines have millions of pages in their coverage, it is important to have a proper approach to using this channel effectively.

The art and science of understanding how search engines identify pages that are relevant to a query made by a visitor and designing marketing strategies

based on this is called search engine optimization. Search engines offer the most cost effective mechanism to acquire “real” and “live” business leads. It is found that in most cases search engine optimization delivers better ROI than other forms such as online advertisements, e-mail marketing and newsletters, affiliate and pay per click advertising, and digital campaigns and promotions.

Before you begin to develop your own strategy and implementation plan to optimize your website for improved page ranking and more importantly **Search Engine Result Position (SERP)**, you have to reflect on what is the major objective of this initiative. Is it your objective to attract more visitors to your site or convert more persons from being a visitor to a loyal stakeholder in your business, (A customer)?

The dot com mania period showed a marked change in evaluating a website's success in terms of number of eyeballs that it could collect, without a perspective as to what these eyeballs or site visits meant to the business. The attitude was; “If we get enough visits, the money will come.” That has changed now, and most companies realize getting new visitors and making them RETURN visitors is what's really critical to a business unit's success. It is sticky visitors, loyalty and ultimately the impact return customers have on its bottom line.

Valuing a website in terms of what advertising it can attract and sustain is no longer the benchmark or performance indicator; what is certainly more important is what the site does to acquire and retain ***new*** customers and retain existing customers.

As search engines have several million pages that are available on the world-wide web, it is necessary to use specialized techniques to match your web page with the algorithms and ranking criteria that such engines use, thereby improving the chance of catching the limited attention span of the visitor.

### ***What Is Your SEO Plan***

The first step that advertisers and marketing professionals need to take to apply optimization techniques to a website is to articulate the objective and characterize the visitor, the desired visitor experience and outcome. The optimization plan should evolve out of this.

The word optimization by itself suggests that the plan should balance the initiative and the budget so as to get cost effective results. If the stakes are high, it may sustain higher advertisement and paid listing options. How much would you like to spend on this exercise? If the budget is limited, the expensive options of several advertisements, linking programs, directory listings will have to be forsaken and attention given to getting the best results from limited but focused efforts. The key metrics to this program is to assess the ROI it delivers: marketing dollars vis-à-vis measurable benefits to the organization.

### ***The Biggest Bang For Your Buck***

Search Engines provide you an effective vehicle for promotion of your website. There are no doubt other channels available. 'Directories' is often included in the generic term 'search engines' although they are distinct in their characteristics and function.

Advertisements through banner displays at popular and often visited sites and "portals", reciprocal links, affiliate links and programs that direct visitors from one site to a targeted site (with a payment associated with such arrangements) and publicity through other media are other well known avenues of promotion. Mass email campaigns, publishing and distributing internet newsletters, 'permission marketing' using list servers and internet based marketing promotions including coupons and sweepstakes are other forms of online advertising.

The key determinant is what value the initiative offers you in return for the investment. Metrics are somewhat more difficult to establish for search engine optimization compared to other direct forms of advertisement. Some suggested measures for determining ROI are discussed in a later section.

# Submitting Your Site To The Search Engines

This section will show you how to go about submitting your website to the search engines and directories in the most efficient manner.

If you have a web-based business or if a significant portion of your business is done on the web through your website, then the best advertising and marketing is done by submitting to a search engine. No amount of press release, newspaper or radio ad, banner ad, spam email or newsletter will achieve the same results, although, maybe effective in a small proportion.

Beware of companies that promise automatic submission of your website to hundreds of search engines which are but only false promises. The best way to submit your website for search engine ranking and inclusion is to do it yourself or to hire an expert to do it manually, by contacting the search engine companies and directories.

## ***Be Prepared***

Before you begin to submit your website to search engines, ensure your website pages are thoroughly designed to the professional quality using the right key words, the right amount of keywords good graphics and pictures with "Alt" description tags and the relevant spell and grammar checked content. Don't submit websites or web pages that are incomplete. While submitting to a search engine, make sure to provide information about your

website, keywords and any other information that may be pertinent, including the name and contact information of your business. Preparation will be discussed in more detail later.

### ***What Will Site Submission Get You***

Mere submission to search engine companies does not guarantee that your site would be immediately listed and the ranking will be high. Because there are thousands of new websites coming up every day and it may take quite sometime before they take up your site for review by human editors.

### **Site Maps**

One important factor to remember while submitting a site is to include a site map of your website which makes the crawling easy for the web robots. Search engines like 'http://www.google.com' hardly considers submissions without sitemaps. (More on site maps in a later chapter.)

### **Submission Software**

There are many online companies that accept search engine submission services. You can choose to do it yourself with a software package and service like this one:

(Free Trial Available)

[http://www.webposition.com/order/trial.asp?WT.mc\\_id=google%3A%7Bifsearch%3Asearch%7D%7Bifcontent%3Acontent%7D%3A%7Bcreative%7D%3Atrial%3A%7Bkeyword%7D&WT.srch=1](http://www.webposition.com/order/trial.asp?WT.mc_id=google%3A%7Bifsearch%3Asearch%7D%7Bifcontent%3Acontent%7D%3A%7Bcreative%7D%3Atrial%3A%7Bkeyword%7D&WT.srch=1)

## **If Budget Allows**

Or if you want professional help try the following sites:

[http://www.addpro.com/professional\\_submission](http://www.addpro.com/professional_submission)

<http://www.submitawebsite.com/aboutus.html>

Don't use the automatic submission services.

## ***Search Engines and Directories***

Here is a list of the most popular Search Engines and directory companies:

### **Search Engine List**

*Go.com/InfoSeek AltaVista*

*Google.com, HotBot*

*Excite.com/Webcrawler*

*Ask.com*

### **Directories**

*AOL Search PositionTech*

*Lycos Open Directory*

*MSN, Yahoo!*

*LookSmart Snap*

In addition to the above there are thousands of search engines and site directory companies, where you can submit your website to as many

companies as possible. The following links gives info on other search engines and directories:

<http://websearch.about.com/library/searchengine/blsearchenginesatoz.htm>

<http://websearch.about.com/library/tableofcontents/blsearchenginetableofcontents.htm>

### ***Free Listing***

Free listing is available with some major search engines such as Google, AltaVista, and Webcrawler. As stated earlier, even after submission of your website, a listing is not guaranteed. Generally, it takes up to 2 to 3 months to be listed after submission. A recent research concluded that the audience potential for websites submitted through free search engines is about 39%. Do not let that deter you. There are ways to get listed faster discussed later in this course.

### ***Paid Listing***

Some search engines charge a nominal fee for every URL submitted. You are more likely to get favorable results by submitting your website to a search engine with paid inclusion. AskJeeves, PositionTech, AOL, and LookSmart are the most popular search engines in this category. Once you submit your website with these Search Engines, your website is most likely to be listed within a week. The Audience potential for paid search engines is 100%.

Search engines generally list pages of ten to twenty results per page. Most search items will return thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of results.

Obviously the key is to get listed among the top results if you expect to get any appreciable traffic through your search engine results.

There are two methods of submitting your URL to Search Engines. One is to use Search Engine Submission services such as "Submit it", which is a part of MSN Central. The fee for submitting URLs using this service ranges from \$79 to \$299 per year. Another is to submit your URL by submitting it individually to popular Search Engines and thus avoiding the fee charged by submission services. The prevailing counsel is that manual submissions should be made to the top five search engines or so and one could use automatic submission services for the rest.

It is possible to submit your URL to search engines for free. At the same time, you have to keep in mind that there are premium programs offered by some search engines that assure listing or provide better positioning in ranking. Some use of paid listing programs is recommended if you wish to receive serious traffic on your website from the search engine. Paid Listing Programs are explained later in this chapter.

Free submission could result in much lower traffic, a low rank, positioning the results returned, and longer period of time before your website actually shows up in the results returned by the search engine. (That is unless you have a few tricks up your sleeve.) Also there is no guarantee that your website would be included with these free services. To avoid these issues some search engines offer "paid participation" that guarantees high traffic and ranking for a fixed fee per year.

Formulating a Search Engine submission budget is crucial. It should be such that you have the best possible combination of free submission, paid submission and paid placement programs for the absolute best results.

How much would you like to spend on this exercise? If the budget is limited, options such as some of the paid programs, advertisements, expensive directory listings will have to be forsaken and attention given to getting the best results from limited but focused efforts.

### ***A Balanced Submission Plan***

The key is to strike a balance between free and paid programs that yield maximum ROI. You should submit your website to all the free search engines such as Google, AltaVista, and WebCrawler, at least one paid search engine such as PositionTech.com (\$89 for submission of 3 URLs), and Yahoo Directory (\$299 a year). Apart from these, you should think of submitting your website to a couple of "paid participation" or "paid placement" programs such as Google Adwords, which is discussed later.

Google is probably the most widely used web crawler search engine. One way of letting Google automatically detect and include your web page URL is as discussed in the above paragraph. Submission to Google through its free listing program can be done using the Add URL form available at <http://www.google.com/addurl.html>

Having mentioned that, there is no guarantee that Google would include a web page submitted to it by either of the free methods. Also, it might take as long as a month before Google lists your web pages.

Google has advertising program called "Adwords" that offers you a combination of paid listing and positioning of your pages in search results. Paid listings in Google appear above and to the side of its regular results. These are discussed in detail in the section on Paid Placement programs.

Google allows maximum 5 to 10 web pages from a website to be submitted per day.

### ***Free and/or Paid Search Engine Submissions***

Other web crawler search engines with both free as well as paid submission services are discussed below. The free submission method for these search engines is very similar to those described in the case of Google.

To submit a homepage using Add URL, you would have to use one of PositionTech's partners. HotBot UK is recommended for this purpose.

HotBot UK Add URL - <http://www.hotbot.lycos.co.uk/submit.html>

The submission through the addurl feature is levied a penalty on ranking if that is the only way the page has been crawled. If the same page gets covered through normal crawling or through paid inclusion, the ranking penalty is removed.

PositionTech has a paid submission program called "Search Submit" that charges a fee of \$39 a year for your homepage. More web pages can be added for \$25 per web page. After a year, if you do not renew the service, PositionTech might drop your homepage. PositionTech's partners sell this program.

Search Submit - <http://www.PositionTech.com>

PositionTech allows maximum 20 web pages from each website to be submitted per day. PositionTech also provides Bulk Program wherein you can add thousands of web pages at a time. A small fee is charged each time someone clicks on your web page listing.

The Add URL page for Fast Search: [http://www.alltheweb.com/add\\_url.php](http://www.alltheweb.com/add_url.php)  
With this it might take up to six weeks until your web pages show up.

Fast Search's paid submission service cannot be accessed directly by you. It can be used through its partner Lycos. The fee for this service is \$30 for one year. Additional pages can be submitted at \$12 per page.

Paid submission service – <http://search.lycos.com/searchservices/>

Fast Search also provides Bulk Program wherein you can add thousands of web pages at a time. A small fee is charged every time someone clicks on your web page listing.

This is owned by Ask Jeeves (Ask.com), one of the popular search engines. Like other engines, it has a paid submission program for a fee of \$30 a year. Additional pages can be submitted at \$18 per page. Paid service can be accessed at:

Ask.com/Ask.com Site Submit - <http://ask.ineedhits.com/>

Fortunately, there are ways to verify and whether your site has been listed or not. This is described in the section on “verify and monitor listing”.

Directories are very popular and are widely used by people as a source of information. Web crawler search engines may also have better chances of finding your website if it is listed with any of these directories. Most of the directories charge a fee for listing your website. Some sites such as Yahoo offer free submission as well.

An important aspect of submitting your website to a directory is to have a 25 word or less description of the website. This allows the web crawler search engines to efficiently find and include your website.

Yahoo and the Open Directory Project (DMOZ) are some of the most popular directory services on the World Wide Web.

Yahoo provides two submission options: Free submission known as “Standard” and paid submission known as “Yahoo Express”. The free submission cannot be used for commercial websites. Also, with free submission there is no guarantee that your website will be approved for submission.

Submission of commercial websites can be done with Yahoo Express that has a fee of \$299 per year. Although a majority of websites are accepted in this category, note that, paid submission also doesn’t guarantee acceptance of your website. It only ensures an answer whether your site was accepted or not. For non-commercial websites there is a one-time fee of \$299.

For submission of free non-commercial websites you will have to fill up a submission form that is displayed once you click the "Suggest a Site" link at the bottom of each category. In case of paid commercial websites you would have to fill up the submission form that can be accessed at <http://add.yahoo.com/fast/add?+Business>

Once your website is approved for submission, you can submit your website by using the "Manage" link at the top of each of the categories.

Having your website listed with Open Directory Project (DMOZ) is essential. It provides results to Google, AOL, Lycos and Netscape Search. Open Directory doesn't have a paid submission service. Commercial as well as non-commercial websites can be submitted to Open Directory absolutely free of cost. This, however, has its drawbacks.

There is no guarantee if and when your website will be approved for submission. Having mentioned that, Open Directory does generate high traffic for your website, once approved. Thus, submission to this directory is worth the uncertainty involved.

Submission can be done by using the "Add URL" link at the top of each of the categories. Generally, if your website is accepted, it would appear within the directory in about three weeks' time. If rejected, there is no limit to how many times you can resubmit your website.

These are three most important Directories on the World Wide Web. Getting your site listed on each of these is a must as it can lead to a significantly large audience for your website.

Yahoo requires that you submit the Title, Description, Your name and Email for website submission, whereas Open Directory only require the Title and Description of the website.

Yahoo allows a maximum submission for one category per website; Open Directory allows a maximum submission for one category per URL.

### ***FFA Link Sites NOT Search Engines***

There are currently hundreds of search engines out there, most of them are not much more than an advanced FFA page. You can surely not submit your site to each of these. The best strategy to follow is to use automated submittal software as discussed earlier for the Search Engines that are less popular, while hand submitting to the top 10 Search Engines.

Beware of the ads such as 'submit to the top 500 search engines for only \$99', because generally only the top 10 will drive traffic to your site. It doesn't take much time to manually submit to these top engines and your \$99 could better be spent on Google Adwords or buying ads in ezines or whatever.

At the moment the top ten search sites - meaning both directories and search engines account for just over 93% of all search engine traffic. The other 6.something% is made up of hundreds of sites claiming to be search engines. Even at that the 11th - 15th biggest search engines make up most of that figure. So what are the search sites you need to concentrate on? Some of the top search engines are discussed above. There are a few others which are also quite popular. The following is a suggested list of search engines and directories.

- Yahoo.com
- Dmoz.com (ODP)
- Google.com
- Alltheweb.com (Fast)
- PositionTech (AOL, Hotbot, MSN + more)
- Altavista.com
- Lycos.com
- Ask.com
- Directhit.com
- Ask.com

## Directories, Search Engines & Traffic...

Want to know the difference between a search engine and a directories and why each is so important to your success? This section will give you all of that information and more.

You would be using search engines so you know how they work from the user perspective. From your own experience as a user, you also know that only those results that list at the top of the heap are most likely to attract you. It doesn't amuse you to know that your search yielded 44316 results. Perhaps even number 50 on your list will not get your custom or even your attention. Thus you know that getting listed on the top or as near to the top is crucial. Since most of the search engine traffic is free, you'll usually find it worth your time to learn a few tricks to maximize the results from your time and effort. In the next section, you will see how search engine works – from your perspective as a website owner.

### ***Web Crawlers***

It is the search engines that finally bring your website to the notice of the prospective customers. Hence it is better to know how these search engines actually work and how they present information to the customer initiating a search.

There are basically two types of search engines. The first is by robots called crawlers or spiders.

*Search Engines* use spiders to index websites. When you submit your website pages to a search engine by completing their required submission page, the search engine spider will index your entire site. A 'spider' is an automated program that is run by the search engine system.

A Spider visits a web site, reads the content on the actual site, the site's Meta tags and also follow the links that the site connects to. The spider then returns all that information back to a central depository, where the data is indexed. It will visit each link you have on your website and index those sites as well. Some spiders will only index a certain number of pages on your site, so don't create a site with 500 pages!

The spider will periodically return to the sites to check for any information that has changed. The frequency with which this happens is determined by the moderators of the search engine.

A spider is almost like a book where it contains the table of contents, the actual content and the links and references for all the websites it finds during its search, and it may index up to a million pages a day.

***Example:*** *Excite, Lycos, AltaVista and Google.*

When you ask a search engine to locate information, it is actually searching through the index which it has created and not actually searching the Web. Different search engines produce different rankings because not every search engine uses the same algorithm to search through the indices.

## ***SpamDexing***

One of the things that a search engine algorithm scans for is the frequency and location of keywords on a web page, but it can also detect artificial keyword *stuffing* or *spamdexing*. Then the algorithms analyze the way that pages link to other pages in the Web. By checking how pages link to each other, an engine can both determine what a page is about, if the keywords of the linked pages are similar to the keywords on the original page.

Most of the top-ranked search engines are crawler based search engines while some may be based on human compiled directories. The people behind the search engines want the same thing every webmaster wants - traffic to their site. Since their content is mainly links to other sites, the thing for them to do is to make their search engine bring up the most relevant sites to the search query, and to display the best of these results first.

In order to accomplish this, they use a complex set of rules called algorithms. When a search query is submitted at a search engine, sites are determined to be relevant or not relevant to the search query according to these algorithms, and then ranked in the order it calculates from these algorithms to be the best matches first.

Search engines keep their algorithms secret and change them often in order to prevent webmasters from manipulating their databases and dominating search results. They also want to provide new sites at the top of the search results on a regular basis rather than always having the same old sites show up month after month.

An important difference to realize is that search engines and directories are not the same. Search engines use a spider to "crawl" the web and the web sites they find, as well as submitted sites. As they crawl the web, they gather the information that is used by their algorithms in order to rank your site.

Directories rely on submissions from webmasters, with live humans viewing your site to determine if it will be accepted. If accepted, directories often rank sites in alphanumeric order, with paid listings sometimes on top. Some search engines also place paid listings at the top, so it's not always possible to get a ranking in the top three or more places unless you're willing to pay for it.

Let us now look at a more detailed explanation on how Search Engines work. Crawler based search engines are primarily composed of three parts.

### ***Spidering***

A search engine robot's action is called spidering, as it resembles the multiple legged spiders. The spider's job is to go to a web page, read the contents, connect to any other pages on that web site through links, and bring back the information. From one page it will travel to several pages and this proliferation follows several parallel and nested paths simultaneously. Spiders frequent the site at some interval, may be a month to a few months, and re-index the pages. This way any changes that may have occurred in your pages could also be reflected in the index.

The spiders automatically visit your web pages and create their listings. An important aspect is to study what factors promote "deep crawl" – the depth to which the spider will go into your website from the page it first visited.

Listing (submitting or registering) with a search engine is a step that could accelerate and increase the chances of that engine “spidering” your pages.

The spider’s movement across web pages stores those pages in its memory, but the key action is in indexing. The index is a huge database containing all the information brought back by the spider. The index is constantly being updated as the spider collects more information. The entire page is not indexed and the searching and page-ranking algorithm is applied only to the index that has been created.

### ***Indexing***

Most search engines claim that they index the full visible body text of a page. In a subsequent section, we explain the key considerations to ensure that indexing of your web pages improves relevance during search. The combined understanding of the indexing and the page-ranking process will lead to developing the right strategies.

### ***Meta Tags***

The Meta tags ‘Description’ and ‘Keywords’ have a vital role as they are indexed in a specific way. Some of the top search engines do not index the keywords that they consider spam. They will also not index certain ‘stop words’ (commonly used words such as ‘a’ or ‘the’ or ‘of’) so as to save space or speed up the process. Images are obviously not indexed, but image descriptions or Alt text or “text within comments” is included in the index by some search engines.

The search engine software or program is the final part. When a person requests a search on a keyword or phrase, the search engine software searches the index for relevant information. The software then provides a report back to the searcher with the most relevant web pages listed first. The algorithm-based processes used to determine ranking of results are discussed in greater detail later.

These directories compile listings of websites into specific industry and subject categories and they usually carry a short description about the website. Inclusion in directories is a human task and requires submission to the directory producers. Visitors and researchers over the net quite often use these directories to locate relevant sites and information sources. Thus directories assist in structured search.

Another important reason is that crawler engines quite often find websites to crawl through their listing and links in directories. Yahoo and The Open Directory are amongst the largest and most well known directories. Lycos is an example of a site that pioneered the search engine but shifted to the Directory model depending on AlltheWeb.com for its listings.

### ***Hybrids***

Hybrid Search Engines are both crawler based as well as human powered. In plain words, these search engines have two sets of listings based on both the mechanisms mentioned above. The best example of hybrid search engines is Yahoo, which has got a human powered directory as well as a Search toolbar administered by Google. Although, such engines provide both listings they are generally dominated by one of the two mechanisms. Yahoo is known more for its directory rather than crawler based search engine.

## **Keywords**

Search engines rank web pages according to the software's understanding of the web page's relevancy to the term being searched. To determine relevancy, each search engine follows its own group of rules. The most important rules are

- The location of keywords on your web page; and
- How often those keywords appear on the page (the frequency)

For example, if the keyword appears in the title of the page, then it would be considered to be far more relevant than the keyword appearing in the text at the bottom of the page.

Search engines consider keywords to be more relevant if they appear sooner on the page (like in the headline) rather than later. The idea is that you'll be putting the most important words – the ones that really have the relevant information – on the page first.

Search engines also consider the frequency with which keywords appear. The frequency is usually determined by how often the keywords are used out of all the words on a page. If the keyword is used 4 times out of 100 words, the frequency would be 4%.

Of course, you can now develop the perfect relevant page with one keyword at 100% frequency - just put a single word on the page and make it the title of the page as well. Unfortunately, the search engines don't make things that simple.

While all search engines do follow the same basic rules of relevancy, location and frequency, each search engine has its own special way of determining rankings. To make things more interesting, the search engines change the rules from time to time so that the rankings change even if the web pages have remained the same.

One method of determining relevancy used by some search engines (like HotBot and Infoseek), but not others (like Lycos), is the Meta tags. Meta tags are hidden HTML codes that provide the search engine spiders with potentially important information like the page description and the page keywords.

### ***Meta Tags Versus Back Link Popularity***

Meta tags are often labeled as the secret to getting high rankings, but meta tags alone will not get you a top 10 ranking. On the other hand, they certainly don't hurt. Detailed information on meta-tags and other ways of improving search engine ranking is given later in this chapter. Fact is, these days with popularity playing a more major role in search engine positioning, meta tags do not carry as much weight as they used to.

In the early days of the web, webmasters would repeat a keyword hundreds of times in the Meta tags and then add it hundreds of times to the text on the web page by making it the same color as the background. However, now, major search engines have algorithms that may exclude a page from ranking if it has resorted to "keyword spamming"; in fact some search engines will downgrade ranking in such cases and penalize the page.

Link analysis and 'click through' measurement are certain other factors that are "off the page" and yet crucial in the ranking mechanism adopted by some leading search engines. This has emerged as the most important determinant of ranking, but before we study this, we must first look at the most popular search engines and then look at the various steps you can take to improve your success at each of the stages – spidering, indexing and ranking.

Google is a privately held company that was founded by two Stanford graduates, Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998. Dr. Eric Schmidt, the CEO joined in 2001 and by the end of the year the company had shown a profit.

Google is the search engine that powers the search directory for Yahoo. This partnership started in the year 2000 and recently there was a report that the contract is being extended. Last year, Yahoo paid Google about \$7.2 million for Web search services. PositionTech has been a contender too for Yahoo's business. Google also provides an Apple-specific Search Engine specifically tailored to deliver highly targeted results related to Apple Computer and the Macintosh computing platform.

The Apple-specific search engine, located at [www.google.com/mac.html](http://www.google.com/mac.html), makes searching for everything from Apple's corporate information to product-related news faster and easier.

PositionTech has a robust networking business and a foothold in enterprise search. However, it recently posted deep losses. The company reported a wider net loss in the second quarter 2002, with lower revenue. Its loss broadened to \$104 million or 72 cents a share, from \$58.3 million, or 46

cents a share, a year earlier. Revenue fell to \$30.8 million from \$39.5 million a year earlier.

To stay healthy and competitive in consumer search, PositionTech introduced in the last year a program that generates fees from Web sites listed in its database. PositionTech charges companies such as Amazon.com and eBay to list more than 1,000 Web addresses; they might pay anywhere from 5 cents to 40 cents per click when Web surfers jump to their pages from PositionTech's database. The revenue generated from paid inclusion is shared with partners such as MSN.

The most recent 2007 estimates, according to "Internet World Stats, there are an estimated 232 million Internet users online in North America alone, at work or at home, 90 percent of whom are estimated to have made some type of search request during any month.

AltaVista is one of the oldest and most well-known search engines. It was launched in December 1995. It was owned by Digital, then run by Compaq (which purchased Digital in 1998), then spun off into a separate company, which is now controlled by CMGI and is now owned by Overture Services, Inc. Over the years it has lost its prominent position to Google and Yahoo.

In March 2002 AltaVista was the last launched release of Enterprise Search v2.0 software that it sells to the Enterprise search market, similar to Verity prior to the Overture buy out. AltaVista was the first to launch 'important freshness and relevancy initiatives', crawling key areas of the Internet four times per day and increasing relevancy by 40%.

America Online signed a multiyear pact with Google for Web search results and accompanying ad-sponsored links, ending relationships with pay-for-performance service, its algorithmic search provider of nearly three years

We thought it worth mentioning Verity in this, although this is not relevant to search engine optimization. Verity is among the leading providers of enterprise search software. This software is used by numerous enterprises for offering information search within their own sites, portals, intranets/extranets and e-commerce sites.

Several software OEMs providing portal or enterprise software also bundle such software in their offerings. If you wish to provide search facilities to visitors within your site, Verity may be an option, particularly if you have a large site with lots of information. However, GOOGLE has made it extremely to use their search tool for individual sites and it's free.

America Online signed a multiyear pact with Google for Web search results and accompanying ad-sponsored links, ending relationships with pay-for-performance service Overture Services and PositionTech, its algorithmic search provider of nearly three years

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Several software OEMs providing portal or enterprise software also bundle such software in their offerings. Verity (VRTY) went public in 1995 and has achieved sales worth \$ 145 million in fiscal 2001. It is a profitable company. If you wish to provide search facilities to visitors within your site, this may be an option, particularly if you have a large site with lots of information.

### ***Meta Search Engines***

**Dogpile** is a meta-search engine that searches the Internet's top search engines such as About, Ask, FAST, FindWhat, Google, LookSmart, Overture and many more. With one single, powerful search engine, you get more relevant and comprehensive results. When you use Dogpile, you are actually searching many search engines simultaneously.

Dogpile, founded in 1996, is the most popular Internet meta-search engine. The site joined the InfoSpace Network in 2000 and is owned and operated by InfoSpace, Inc.

**Mamma.com** is a "smart" meta-search engine - every time you type in a query Mamma simultaneously searches a variety of engines, directories, and deep content sites, properly formats the words and syntax for each, compiles their results in a virtual database, eliminates duplicates, and displays them in a uniform manner according to relevance. It's like using multiple search engines, all at the same time.

Created in 1996 as a master's thesis, Mamma.com helped to introduce meta-search to the Internet as one of the first of its kind. Due to its quality results, and the benefits of meta-search, Mamma grew rapidly through word

of mouth, and quickly became an established presence on the Internet. Mamma.com's ability to gather the best results available from top Internet sources and to procure an impressive array of advertisers during the Internet boom of the late 1990s caught the interest of many potential investors. In late 1999 Intasys Corporation (Nasdaq: INTA) invested in a 69% stake of the company and in July 2001 bought the remaining shares and now fully owns Mamma.com.

### **A Search Engine Is Just A Tool**

A search engine is just a tool. It's only as smart as the people who master-minded it. If **IxQuick™** is smarter and more relevant in its findings than other metasearch engines (and many highly qualified people would agree that it is), it's because it was conceived to meet the needs of some of the most inquisitive minds in the world - those of researchers, educators, scholars and the world scientific community.

When a user enters a query at the **IxQuick.com** website, their powerful proprietary technology simultaneously queries ten major search engines and properly formats the words and syntax for each source being probed.

**IxQuick™** then creates a virtual database, organizes the results into a uniform format and presents them by relevance and source. In this manner, **IxQuick.com** provides users with highly relevant and comprehensive search results.

# What The Heck Is An Algorithm?

Each search engine has something called an algorithm which is the formula that each search engine uses to evaluate web pages and determine their relevance and value when crawling them for possible inclusion in their search engine. A crawler is the robot that browses all of these pages for the search engine.

## ***GOOGLE Algorithm Is Key***

Google has a comprehensive and highly developed technology, a straightforward interface and a wide-ranging array of search tools which enable the users to easily access a variety of information online.

Google users can browse the web and find information in various languages, retrieve maps, stock quotes and read news, search for a long lost friend using the phonebook listings available on Google for all of US cities and basically surf the 3 billion odd web pages on the internet!

Google boasts of having world's largest archive of Usenet messages, dating all the way back to 1981. Google's technology can be accessed from any conventional desktop PC as well as from various wireless platforms such as WAP and i-mode phones, handheld devices and other such Internet equipped gadgets.

## ***Page Rank Based On Popularity***

The web search technology offered by Google is often the technology of choice of the world's leading portals and websites. It has also benefited the advertisers with its unique advertising program that does not hamper the

web surfing experience of its users but still brings revenues to the advertisers.

When you search for a particular keyword or a phrase, most of the search engines return a list of page in order of the number of times the keyword or phrase appears on the website. Google web search technology involves the use of its indigenously designed Page Rank Technology and hypertext-matching analysis which makes several instantaneous calculations undertaken without any human intervention. Google's structural design also expands simultaneously as the internet expands.

Page Rank technology involves the use of an equation which comprises of millions of variables and terms and determines a factual measurement of the significance of web pages and is calculated by solving an equation of 500 million variables and more than 3 billion terms. Unlike some other search engines, Google does not calculate links but utilizes the extensive link structure of the web as an organizational tool. When the link to a Page, lets say Page B is clicked from a Page A, then that click is attributed as a vote towards Page B on behalf of Page A.

### ***Consider Back Links Popularity Votes***

Quintessentially, Google calculates the importance of a page by the number of such 'votes' it receives. Not only that, Google also assesses the importance of the pages that are involved in the voting process.

Consequently, pages that are themselves ahead in ranking and are important in that way also help to make other pages important. One thing to note here is that Google's technology does not involve human intervention in anyway and uses the inherent intelligence of the internet and its resources to determine the ranking and importance of any page.

**Hypertext-Matching Analysis:** Unlike its conventional counterparts, Google is a search engine which is hypertext-based. This means that it analyzes all the content on each web page and factors in fonts, subdivisions, and the exact positions of all terms on the page. Not only that, Google also evaluates the content of its nearest web pages. This policy of not disregarding any subject matter pays off in the end and enables Google to return results that are closest to user queries.

Google has a very simple 3-step procedure in handling a query submitted in its search box:

1. When the query is submitted and the enter key is pressed, the web server sends the query to the index servers. Index server is exactly what its name suggests; it consists of an index much like the index of a book which displays where the particular page containing the queried term is located in the entire book.
2. After this, the query proceeds to the doc servers, and these servers actually retrieve the stored documents. Page descriptions or "snippets" are then generated to suitably describe each search result.
3. These results are then returned to the user in less than a one second! (Normally)

Approximately once a month, Google updates their index by recalculating the Page Ranks of each of the web pages that they have crawled. The period during the update is known as the Google dance.

## ***Do You Know The GOOGLE Dance?***

### **The Algorithm Shuffle**

Because of the nature of Page Rank, the calculations need to be performed about 40 times and, because the index is so large, the calculations take several days to complete. During this period, the search results fluctuate; sometimes minute-by-minute. It is because of these fluctuations that the term, **Google Dance**, was coined. The dance usually takes place sometime during the last third of each month.

Google has two other servers that can be used for searching. The search results on them also change during the monthly update and they are part of the Google dance.

For the rest of the month, fluctuations sometimes occur in the search results, but they should not be confused with the actual dance. They are due to Google's fresh crawl and to what is known "Everflux".

Google has two other searchable servers apart from [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). They are [www2.google.com](http://www2.google.com) and [www3.google.com](http://www3.google.com). Most of the time, the results on all 3 servers are the same, but during the dance, they are different.

For most of the dance, the rankings that can be seen on [www2](http://www2.google.com) and [www3](http://www3.google.com) are the new rankings that will transfer to [www](http://www.google.com) when the dance is over. Even though the calculations are done about 40 times, the final rankings can be seen from very early on. This is because, during the first few iterations, the calculated figures merge to being close to their final figures.

You can see this with the Page Rank Calculator by checking the Data box and performing some calculations. After the first few iterations the search results on www2 and www3 may still change, but only slightly.

During the dance, the results from www2 and www3 will sometimes show on the www server, but only briefly. Also, new results on www2 and www3 can disappear for short periods. At the end of the dance, the results on www will match those on www2 and www3.

## **GOOGLE Dance Tool**

This Google Dance Tool allows you to check your rankings on all three tools [www](#), [www2](#) and [www3](#) and on all 9 datacenters simultaneously.

The Google Web Directory works in combination of the Google Search Technology and the Netscape Open Directory Project which makes it possible to search the Internet organized by topic. Google displays the pages in order of the rank given to it using the Page Rank Technology. It not only searches the titles and descriptions of the websites, but searches the entire content of sites within a related category, which ultimately delivers a comprehensive search to the users. Google also has a fully functional web directory which categorizes all the searches in order.

## ***Features And Tools From Google***

### **In case you are feeling lucky**

- The Google I'm Feeling Lucky™ search button is recommended when searching for a highest ranked web page for a particular search. This saves time in searching for a webpage.

## **The multi-faceted Google Toolbar**

- The Google Toolbar™ can seamlessly integrate with a user's web browser and be of quick assistance.

## **Pandora's Box**

- Google enables its users to search for U.S. street maps immediately by just typing the street name in the query box.

## **Stock Quotes**

- Latest stock quotes are just a click away. Just type in the company ticker symbol or the name of one of the stock indices stock and mutual fund information and Google will return the relevant information in association with high-profile financial and trading concerns.

Google takes a snapshot of each page it examined as it crawls the web and stores or caches them as a back-up in case the original page is unavailable. This cached link always displays the page in the same manner as it was indexed and this is used by Google to match the relevancy of the page to the query submitted by the user. The "Cached" link will be missing for sites that have not been indexed, as well as for sites whose owners have requested Google not to cache their content.

Google offers a variety of special features which helps users to find exactly what they are looking which is all in addition to providing easy access to more than 3 billion web pages. The following is an overview of its key features:

## ***Google Free Tools And Software***

Examples:

## **Calculator**

Google has a built-in calculator function which can be used to calculate mathematical expressions involving basic arithmetic, more complicated math, units of measure and conversions, physical constants and even hexadecimal and binary numbering systems. You can simply enter the expression you'd like evaluated in the search box and hit the Enter key or click the Google Search button.

## **Dictionary Definitions**

When searching about any particular term, if the Google database has a definition or meaning for the term, then it will be highlighted with an underline on the results page. This definition is derived in association with a reliable dictionary source.

## **File Types**

In addition to HTML files, Google search also supports 12 other formats such as PDF, Microsoft Office, PostScript, Corel WordPerfect, Lotus 1-2-3, and others. Additionally, Google also offers the user the ability to "View as HTML", which allows users to view these files in case the corresponding software is not installed on the user's PC. It also eliminates the hazards of opening a virus-infected document.

## **News Headlines**

While searching for a particular term, if that term is also in any of the current news, it is displayed as a separate news link on the results page. This is derived from various news providers who work in association with Google and who let Google monitor them.

## **Advanced News Search**

A new offering from Google - Advanced News Search, allows visitors to scour headlines by date, location, exact phrases or publication. People can use it retrieve articles from more than 4,500 news outlets publishing on the Web. Advanced News Search lets visitors search for headlines using several parameters. Among other features, people can locate stories that contain an exact phrase, within the United States or abroad, or written by a specific publisher.

## **Similar Pages**

The results page also displays a link for 'similar pages' which uses the GoogleScout technology to explore the web for similar pages. This is particularly helpful if you have hit upon a page which has relevant content, but you want something similar but more.

## **Web Page Translation**

This feature is particularly helpful if your search has non-English results. Google offers a facility to automatically translate a page for you in English. Currently, Google supports Italian, French, Spanish, German, and Portuguese languages.

## **SafeSearch Filtering**

Google provides a SafeSearch option to filter pornographic contents from its results page. This is especially useful for shared computers which need to be protected for children surfing the Internet. Google's technology tries to check keywords and phrases, URLs and Open Directory categories and eliminate these from the search results.

## ***Submitting your URL to Google***

Google is primarily a fully-automatic search engine with no human-intervention involved in the search process. It utilizes robots known as 'spiders' to crawl the web on a regular basis for new updates and new websites to be included in the Google Index. This robot software follows hyperlinks from site to site. Google does not require that you should submit your URL to its database for inclusion in the index, as it is done anyway automatically by the 'spiders'. However, manual submission of URL can be done by going to the Google website and clicking the related link. One important thing here is that Google does not accept payment of any sort for site submission or improving page rank of your website. Also, submitting your site through the Google website does not guarantee listing in the index.

## ***Cloaking***

Sometimes, a webmaster might program the server in such a way that it returns different content to Google than it returns to regular users, which is often done to misrepresent search engine rankings. This process is referred to as cloaking as it conceals the actual website and returns distorted web pages to search engines crawling the site. This can mislead users about what they'll find when they click on a search result. Google highly disapproves of any such practice and might place a ban on the website which is found guilty of cloaking.

## ***Google Guidelines***

Here are some of the important tips and tricks that can be employed while dealing with Google.

## **Do's**

- A website should have crystal clear hierarchy and links and should preferably be easy to navigate.
- A site map is required to help the users go around your site and in case the site map has more than 100 links, then it is advisable to break it into several pages to avoid clutter.
- Come up with essential and precise keywords and make sure that your website features relevant and informative content.
- The Google crawler will not recognize text hidden in the images, so when describing important names, keywords or links; stick with plain text.
- The TITLE and ALT tags should be descriptive and accurate and the website should have no broken links or incorrect HTML.
- Dynamic pages (the URL consisting of a '?' character) should be kept to a minimum as not every search engine spider is able to crawl them.
- The robots.txt file on your web server should be current and should not block the Googlebot crawler. This file tells crawlers which directories can or cannot be crawled.

## **Don'ts**

- When making a site, do not cheat your users, i.e. those people who will surf your website. Do not provide them with irrelevant content or present them with any fraudulent schemes.
- Avoid tricks or link schemes designed to increase your site's ranking.
- Do not employ hidden texts or hidden links.
- Google frowns upon websites using cloaking technique. Hence, it is advisable to avoid that.
- Automated queries should not be sent to Google.

- Avoid stuffing pages with irrelevant words and content. Also don't create multiple pages, sub-domains, or domains with significantly duplicate content.
- Avoid "doorway" pages created just for search engines or other "cookie cutter" approaches such as affiliate programs with hardly any original content.

## ***Google Services***

### **Google Answers**

Google Answers is an interesting cross between 'online marketplace' and probably a 'virtual classroom'. Those who wish to participate must register with Google Answers. Here, the researchers who have considerable expertise in online researching provide answers to the queries posted by other users for a fee. When a user posts a question, he or she also needs to mention the price the user is willing to pay in case the question is answered. When the question is answered by any user, then the payment is made accordingly to the user answering the question. Moreover, the questions and the discussion that ensues will be publicly viewable and other registered users can also share their opinions and insights.

There is a non-refundable listing fee of \$0.50 per question plus an additional 'price' you set for your question that reflects how much you're willing to pay for an answer. Three-quarters of your question price goes directly to the Researcher who answers your question; the remaining 25 percent goes to Google to support the service.

## **Google Groups**

Google Groups is an online discussion forum and it contains the entire archive of Usenet discussion groups dating back to 1981. These discussions cover the full range of human dissertation and present a fascinating look at evolving viewpoints, debate and advice on every subject from politics to technology. Users can access all of this information all in a database that contains more than 800 million posts by using the search feature of Google.

## **Google's Image Search**

Google offers a wide collection of images from around the web; its comprehensive database consists of more than 425 million images. All a user has to do is to enter a query in the image search box, then click on the "Search" button. On the results page, by clicking the thumbnail a larger version of the image can be seen, as well as the web page on which the image is located. By default, Google's Image Search uses its mature content filter on the initial search by any user. The filter removes many adult images but it cannot guarantee that all such content will be filtered out. It is not possible to ensure with 100% accuracy that all mature content will be removed from image search results using filters.

Google analyzes the text on the page near the image, the image caption and dozens of other factors which enables it to determine the image content. Google also utilizes several sophisticated algorithms which make it possible to remove duplicates and it in turn ensures that the highest quality images are presented first in the results. Google's Image search supports all the complex search strategies like Boolean operators, etc.

## **Google's Catalog Search**

Google offers a unique service in the form of its Catalog Search. Google's Catalog Search has made it easy to find information published in mail-order catalogs that were not previously available online. It includes the full content of hundreds of mail-order catalogs selling everything from industrial adhesives to clothing and home furnishings. Google's Catalog Search can help you if you are looking to buy for either yourself or for your business.

The printed copies of catalogs are scanned and the text portion is converted into a format which makes it easy for users to search for the catalog. The same sophisticated algorithm employed by the Google Web Search is then employed to search for catalogs. This makes sure that most recent and relevant catalogs are displayed. Google is not associated with any catalog vendors and is not liable for any misuse of this service on part of the users.

## **Froogle**

The word 'froogle' is a combination of the word 'frugal' which means 'penny-wise' or 'economical' and of course 'Google'. Currently in its beta version, or testing format, Froogle is a recent concept put forth by Google. Google's spidering software crawls the web looking for information about products for sale online. It does so by focusing entirely on product search and applying the power of Google's search technology to locate stores that sell items you want and consequently pointing you to that specific store.

Just like the Google Web Search, Froogle also ranks store sites based only on their relevance to the search terms entered by the users. Google does not accept payment for placement within their actual search results. Froogle also includes product information submitted electronically by merchants. Its search results are automatically generated by Google's ranking software.

## ***AltaVista***

AltaVista has an index that is built by sending out a crawler (a robot program) that captures text and brings it back.

The main crawler is called "Scooter." Scooter sends out thousands of threads simultaneously. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, Scooter and its cousins access thousands of pages at a time, like thousands of blind users grabbing text, pulling it back, throwing it into the indexing machines so the next day that text can be in the index. And at the same time, they pull off, from all those pages, every hyperlink that they find, to put in a list of where to go to next.

In a typical day Scooter and its cousins visit over 10 million pages. If there are a lot of hyperlinks from other pages to yours, that increases your chances of being found. But if this is your own personal site, or if this is a brand new Web page, that's not too likely.

AltaVista has in incredibly large database of Web sites, such that searches often return hundreds of thousands of Web site matches. AltaVista's spider goes down about three pages into your site. This is important to remember if you have different topical pages that won't be found within three clicks of the main page. You will have to index them separately.

You cannot tell Alta Vista how to index your site, it is all done via their spider, but you can go to their site and give the spider a nudge by submitting specific pages. That way, AltaVista's spider knows to visit that page and index it. Once you have done that, it's all up to your META tags

and your page's content! AltaVista's spider may revisit your site each month after its initial visit.

AltaVista ranking algorithms reward keywords in the <TITLE> tag. If a keyword is not in a title tag, it will likely not appear anywhere near the top of the search results! AltaVista also rewards keywords near one another, and keywords near the beginning of a page

### **Add a Page**

Search results on AltaVista are powered by Yahoo! Search Technology. For fast submission to the Yahoo! Search index via the Yahoo! Search Marketing Search Submit program. If you give it a URL for a page that doesn't exist, it will come back with Error 404, which means there is no such page. If that page was in the index, it will remove that page from the index the next day.

### ***Crawler/Spider Considerations***

Also, consider technical factors. If a site has a slow connection, it might time-out for the crawler. Very complex pages, too, may time out before the crawler can harvest the text.

If you have a hierarchy of directories at your site, put the most important information high, not deep. Some search engines will presume that the higher you placed the information, the more important it is. And crawlers may not venture deeper than three or four or five directory levels.

Above all remember the obvious - full-text search engines such index text. You may well be tempted to use fancy and expensive design techniques that

either block search engine crawlers or leave your pages with very little plain text that can be indexed. Don't fall prey to that temptation.

### ***Ranking Rules Of Thumb***

The simple rule of thumb is that content counts, and that content near the top of a page counts for more than content at the end. In particular, the HTML title and the first couple lines of text are the most important part of your pages. If the words and phrases that match a query happen to appear in the HTML title or first couple lines of text of one of your pages, chances are very good that that page will appear high in the list of search results.

A crawler/spider search engine can base its ranking on both static factors (a computation of the value of page independent of any particular query) and query-dependent factors.

#### **Values:**

- Long pages, which are rich in meaningful text (not randomly generated letters and words).
- Pages that serve as good hubs, with lots of links to pages that that have related content (topic similarity, rather than random meaningless links, such as those generated by link exchange programs or intended to generate a false impression of "popularity").
- The connectivity of pages, including not just how many links there are to a page but where the links come from: the number of distinct domains and the "quality" ranking of those particular sites. This is

calculated for the site and also for individual pages. A site or a page is "good" if many pages at many different sites point to it, and especially if many "good" sites point to it.

- The level of the directory in which the page is found. Higher is considered more important. If a page is buried too deep, and the crawler simply won't go that far and will never find it.

These static factors are recomputed about once a week, and new good pages slowly percolate upward in the rankings. Note that there are advantages to having a simple address and sticking to it, so others can build links to it, and so you know that it's in the index

**Query-dependent factors include:**

- The HTML title.
- The first lines of text.
- Query words and phrases appearing early in a page rather than late.
- Meta tags, which are treated as ordinary words in the text, but like words that appear early in the text (unless the meta tags are patently unrelated to the content on the page itself, in which case the page will be penalized)
- Words mentioned in the "anchor" text associated with hyperlinks to your pages. (E.g., if lots of good sites link to your site with anchor text "breast cancer" and the query is "breast cancer," chances are good that you will appear high in the list of matches.)

## **Blanket policy on doorway pages and cloaking**

Many search engines are opposed to doorway pages and cloaking. they considers doorway and cloaked pages to be spam and encourages people to use other avenues to increase the relevancy of their pages. A description of doorway pages and cloaking is given later on in this guide.

## **Meta tags (Ask.com as an Example)**

Though Meta tags are indexed and considered to be regular text, Ask.com claims it doesn't give them priority over HTML titles and other text. Though you should use meta tags in all your pages, some webmasters claim their doorway pages for Ask.com a rank better when they don't use them.

If you do use Meta tags, make your description tag no more than 150 characters and your keywords tag no more than 1,024 characters long.

## **Keywords in the URL and file names**

It's generally believed that Ask.com gives some weight to keywords in filenames and URL names. If you're creating a file, try to name it with keywords.

## **Keywords in the ALT tags**

Ask.com indexes ALT tags, so if you use images on your site, make sure to add them. ALT tags should contain more than the image's description. They should include keywords, especially if the image is at the top of the page. ALT tags are explained later.

## **Page Length**

There's been some debate about how long doorway pages for AltaVista should be. Some webmasters say short pages rank higher, while others argue that long pages are the way to go. According to AltaVista's help

section, it prefers long and informative pages. We've found that pages with 600-900 words are most likely to rank well.

### **Frame support**

AltaVista has the ability to index frames, but it sometimes indexes and links to pages intended only as navigation. To keep this from happening to you, submit a frame-free site map containing the pages that you want indexed. You may also want to include a "robots.txt" file to prohibit AltaVista from indexing certain pages.

### **Ask.com Search Features**

Ask.com offers a wide range of search features. Most of these options are available in its "Advanced Search" section.

- Boolean search - Limited Boolean searching is available. Ask defaults to an AND between search terms and supports the use of - for NOT. Either OR or ORR can be used for an OR operation, but the operator must be in all upper case. Unfortunately, no nesting is available, so `term1 term2 OR term3` is processed as `(term1 AND term2) OR term3`. Try the [advanced search](#), but it is still difficult to do a `term1 AND (term2 OR term3)` search.
- Phrase - Available. Put quotes around the phrase, such as "New York Times" Ask also supports phrase searching when a dash is used between words with no spaces as in `cd-rom-drivers`.
- Proximity - Available. NEAR operator means within ten words of one another. Can be nested with other tags.

- Word Stemming - Available. You cannot use the wild card (\*) at the end or in the middle of a word.
  
- Field Search - The following options are available:
  - Applet: searches for the name of an applet
  - Domain: specifies the domain extension, such as .com
  - Host: searches for pages within a particular site
  - Image: searches for an image name
  - Link: searches for pages that link to the specified site
  - Object: search engines - searches for the name of an object
  - Text: excludes Meta tags information
  - Title: search in the HTML title only
  - URL: searches for sites that have a specified word in the URL
  
- Date Searching - Available under Advanced Search section.
  
- Search within results - Available. This option is offered after each search.
  
- Media Type searching - Available for Images, Music/MP3, and Video.
  
- Language Searching - AltaVista has very extensive language support. It supports around 30 languages.

### ***Ask Owns Ask.com Technology***

Ask.com adds a new dimension and level of authority to search results through its approach, known as: **Subject-Specific Popularity<sup>SM</sup>**.

To determine the authority—and thus the overall quality and relevance—of a site's content, Ask.com uses **Subject-Specific Popularity<sup>SM</sup>**. Subject-

Specific Popularity ranks a site based on the number of same-subject pages that reference it, not just general popularity. In a test performed by *Search Engine Watch*, Ask.com's relevance grade was raised to an "A" following the integration of Ask.com 2.0.

## **Ask.com 2.0: Evolution and Growth**

In early 2003, Ask.com 2.0 was launched. The enhanced version represents a major evolution in terms of improvements to relevance and an expansion of the overall advanced search functionalities. Below are detailed explanations for the improvements made in this version:

### **More Communities**

Like social networks in the real world, the Web is clustered into local communities. Communities are groups of Web pages that are about or are closely related to the same subject. Ask.com is the only search technology that can view these communities as they naturally occur on the Web. This method allows Ask.com to generate more finely tuned search results. In other words, Ask.com's community-based approach reveals a 3-D image of the Web, providing it with more information about a particular Web page than other search engines, which have only a one-dimensional view of the Web.

Ask.com is now owned by Ask.com

### **Web-Based Spell Check**

Ask.com's proprietary Spell Check technology identifies query misspellings and offers corrections that help improve the relevance and precision of search results. The Spell Check technology, developed by Ask.com's team of

scientists, leverages the real-time content of the Web to determine the correct spelling of a word.

### **Dynamic Descriptions<sup>SM</sup>**

Dynamic Descriptions enhance search results by showing the context of search terms as they actually appear on referring Web pages. This feature provides searchers with information that helps them to determine the relevance of a given Web page in association with their query.

### **Advanced Search Tools**

Ask.com's Advanced Search tools allow searchers to search using specific criteria, such as exact phrase, page location, geographic region, domain and site, date, and other word filters. Users can also search using 10 Western languages, including Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish. A link to Ask.com's Advanced Search tools can be found next to the search box on Ask.com.com.

### **The Ask.com Algorithm**

In addition to utilizing existing search techniques, Ask.com applies what they call authority, a new measure of relevance, to deliver search results. For this purpose, Ask.com employs three proprietary techniques:

### **Refine, Results and Resources.**

#### **Refine**

First, Ask.com organizes sites into naturally occurring communities that are about the subject of each search query. These communities are presented under the heading "**Refine**" on the Ask.com.com results page. This tool allows a user to further focus his or her specific search.

For example, a search for "Soprano" would present a user with a set of refinement suggestions such as "Marie-Adele McArther" (a renowned soprano), "Three Sopranos" (the operatic trio), "The Sopranos" (the wildly-popular HBO television show) as well as several other choices. No other technology can dynamically cluster search results into the actual communities as they exist on the Web.

## **Results**

Next, after identifying these communities, Ask.com employs a technique called **Subject-Specific Popularity**<sup>SM</sup>. Subject-Specific Popularity analyzes the relationship of sites within a community, ranking a site based on the number of same-subject pages that reference it, among hundreds of other criteria. In other words, Ask.com determines the best answer for a search by asking experts within a specific subject community about who they believe is the best resource for that subject. By assessing the opinions of a site's peers, Ask.com establishes authority for the search result. Relevant search results ranked by Subject-Specific Popularity are presented under the heading "**Results**" on the Ask.com results page.

In some instances companies pay to have their Web sites included within Ask.com's dataset, otherwise known as the Ask.com Index. Like all Web sites, these sites are processed through Ask.com's search algorithms and are not guaranteed placement in the results. This ensures that relevancy is the primary driver of results.

## **Resources**

Finally, by dividing the Web into local subject communities, Ask.com is able to find and identify expert resources about a particular subject. These sites feature lists of other authoritative sites and links relating to the search topic.

For example, a professor of Middle Eastern history may have created a page devoted to his collection of sites that explain the geography and topography of the Persian Gulf. This site would appear under the heading "**Resources**" in response to a Persian Gulf-related query. No previous search technology has been able to find and rank these sites.

### **Sponsored Links**

Search results appearing under the heading "**Sponsored Links**" are provided by Google<sup>®</sup>, a third party provider of pay for performance search listings. Google generates highly relevant sponsored results by allowing advertisers to bid for placement in this area based on relevant keywords. These results, which are powered by Google's advanced algorithms, are then distributed across the Internet to some of the world's most popular and well-known Web sites, including Ask.com.com and Ask Jeeves.

### **Other factors**

#### **Boolean Searching**

Limited Boolean searching is available. Ask.com defaults to an AND between search terms and supports the use of - for NOT. Either OR or ORR can be used for an OR operation, but the operator must be in all upper case. Unfortunately, no nesting is available.

#### **Proximity Searching**

Phrase searching is available by using "double quotes" around a phrase or by checking the "Phrase Match" box. Ask.com also supports phrase searching when a dash is used between words with no spaces. Until Nov. 2002, Ask.com's help page stated that "Ask.com returns results which exactly or

closely matches the given phrase" which meant that not all phrases matches will necessarily be accurate. As of Nov. 2002, that appears to have been corrected and phrase searching now works properly.

### **Truncation**

No truncation is currently available.

### **Case Sensitivity**

Searches are not case sensitive. Search terms entered in lowercase, uppercase, or mixed case all get the same number of hits.

### **Stop Words**

Ask.com technology as do most search engine technologies, do ignore frequently occurring words such as 'the,' 'of', 'and', and 'or'. However, like at Google, these stop words can be searched by putting a + in front of them or by including them within a phrase search.

### **Sorting**

By defaults, sites are sorted in order of perceived relevance. They also have site collapsing (showing only two pages per site with the rest link via a "More Results" message. There is no option for sorting alphabetically, by site, or by date.

### **Display**

Ask.com displays the title (roughly first 60 characters), a two line keyword-in-context extract from the page, and the beginning of the URL for each hit. Some will also have a link to "Related Pages" which finds related records based on identifying Web communities by analyzing link patterns. Two other

sections displayed are the "Refine" section (formerly folders) that suggest other related searches based on words that Ask.com uses to identify communities on the Web and the "Resources: Link collections from experts and enthusiasts" (formerly "Experts' Links") which are Web pages that include numerous links to external resources – meta sites or Internet resource guides. Some "Sponsored Links" may show up at the top. These are ads from the Google AdWords program.

Ask.com will only display 10 Web page records at a time; however, up to a 100 at a time can be displayed through a change in the preferences and on the advanced search page. Ask.com may also display up to 10 metasites under the "Resources" heading and up to 6 Refine suggestions.

PositionTech is one of the most popular crawler based search engines. PositionTech is a crawler-based search engine. However, it does not make its index available to the public through its own site like other crawler-based search engines, such as Lycos or Alltheweb. PositionTech licenses other companies to use its search index. These companies are then able to provide search services to their visitors without having to build their own index.

It uses a robot named Slurp to crawl and index web pages.

### **Slurp – The PositionTech Robot**

Slurp collects documents from the web to build a searchable index for search services using the PositionTech search engine, including Microsoft and HotBot. Some of the characteristics of Slurp are given below:

*Frequency of accesses*

Slurp accesses a website once every five seconds on average. Since network delays are involved it is possible over short periods the rate will appear to be slightly higher, but the average frequency generally remains below once per minute.

### *robots.txt*

Slurp obeys the Robot Exclusion Standard. Specifically, Slurp adheres to the 1994 Robots Exclusion Standard (RES). Where the 1996 proposed standard disambiguates the 1994 standard, the proposed standard is followed.

Slurp will obey the first record in the robots.txt file with a User-Agent containing "Slurp". If there is no such record, it will obey the first entry with a User-Agent of "\*".

This is discussed in detail later in this book.

### *NOINDEX meta-tag*

Slurp obeys the NOINDEX meta-tag. If you place

```
<META NAME="robots" CONTENT="noindex">
```

in the head of your web document, Slurp will retrieve the document, but it will not index the document or place it in the search engine's database.

### *Repeat downloads*

In general, Slurp would only download one copy of each file from your site during a given crawl. Occasionally the crawler is stopped and restarted, and it re-crawls pages it has recently retrieved. These re-crawls happen infrequently, and should not be any cause for alarm.

### *Searching the results*

Slurp crawls from websites to the PositionTech search engines immediately. The documents are indexed and entered into the search database in quick time.

### *Following links*

Slurp follows HREF links. It does not follow SRC links. This means that Slurp does not retrieve or index individual frames referred to by SRC links.

### *Dynamic links*

Slurp has the ability to crawl dynamic links or dynamically generated documents. It will not, however, crawl them by default. There are a number of good reasons for this. A couple of reasons are that dynamically generated documents can make up infinite URL spaces, and that dynamically generated links and documents can be different for every retrieval so there is no use in indexing them.

## **Content guidelines for PositionTech**

Given here are the content guidelines and policies for PositionTech. In other words, listed below is the content PositionTech indexes and the content it avoids.

PositionTech indexes:

- Original and unique content of genuine value
- Pages designed primarily for humans, with search engine considerations secondary
- Hyperlinks intended to help people find interesting, related content, when applicable
- Metadata (including title and description) that accurately describes the contents of a Web page
- Good Web design in general

PositionTech avoids:

- Pages that harm accuracy, diversity or relevance of search results
- Pages dedicated to directing the user to another page
- Pages that have substantially the same content as other pages
- Sites with numerous, unnecessary virtual hostnames
- Pages in great quantity, automatically generated or of little value
- Pages using methods to artificially inflate search engine ranking
- The use of text that is hidden from the user
- Pages that give the search engine different content than what the end-user sees
- Excessively cross-linking sites to inflate a site's apparent popularity
- Pages built primarily for the search engines
- Misuse of competitor names
- Multiple sites offering the same content
- Pages that use excessive pop-ups, interfering with user navigation

- Pages that seem deceptive, fraudulent or provide a poor user experience

PositionTech's policies are designed to ensure that poor-quality pages do not degrade the user experience in any way. As with PositionTech's other guidelines, PositionTech reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to take any and all action it deems appropriate to insure the quality of its index.

PositionTech encourages Web designers to focus most of their energy on the content of the pages themselves. They like to see truly original text content, intended to be of value to the public. The search engine algorithm is sophisticated and is designed to match the regular text in Web pages to search queries. Therefore, no special treatment needs to be done to the text in the pages.

They do not guarantee that your web page will appear at the top of the search results for any particular keyword.

### **How does PositionTech rank web pages?**

PositionTech search results are ranked based on a combination of how well the page contents match the search query and on how "important" the page is, based on its appearance as a reference in other web pages.

The quality of match to the query terms is not just a simple text string match, but a text analysis that examines the relationships and context of the words in the document. The query match considers the full text content of the page and the content of the pages that link to it when determining how well the page matches a query.

Here are a few tips that can make sure your page can be found by a focused search on the Internet:

- Think carefully about key terms that your users will search on, and use those terms to construct your page.
- Documents are ranked higher if the matching search terms are in the title. Users are also more likely to click a link if the title matches what they're looking for. Choose terms for the title that match the concept of your document.
- Use a "description" meta-tag and write your description carefully. After a title, users click on a link because the description draws them in. Placing high in search results does little good if the document title and description do not attract interest.
- Use a "keyword" meta-tag to list key words for the document. Use a distinct list of keywords for each page on your site instead of using one broad set of keywords on every page. (Keywords do not have much effect on ranking, but they do have an effect.)
- Keep relevant text and links in HTML. Placing them in graphics or image maps means search engines can't search for the text and the crawler can't follow links to your site's other pages. An HTML site map, with a link from your welcome page, can help make sure all your pages are crawled.

- Use ALT text for graphics. It's good page design to accommodate text browsers or visually impaired visitors, and it helps improve the text content of your page for search purposes.
- Correspond with webmasters and other content providers and build rich linkages between related pages. Note: "Link farms" create links between unrelated pages for no reason except to increase page link counts. Using link farms violates PositionTech content guidelines, and will not improve your page ranking.

### **PositionTech's Spamming Policies**

Sites that violate the PositionTech content guidelines may be removed from the index. These sites are considered as spam. PositionTech considers techniques such as tiny text, invisible text, keyword stuffing, doorway pages, and fake links as spam.

Pages with no unique text or no text at all may drop out of the index or may never be indexed. If you want a page to appear in web search results, be sure that page includes some unique text content to be indexed.

PositionTech, however, does index dynamic pages. For page discovery, PositionTech mostly follows static links, and the avoidance of dynamically generated href links except in directories disallowed by a /robots.txt exclusion rule is recommended.

#### **Spamming includes:**

- Embedding deceptive text in the body of web documents.

- Creating metadata that does not accurately describe the content of web documents.
- Fabricating URLs that redirect to other URLs for no legitimate purpose.
- Web documents with intentionally misleading links
- Cloaking/doorway pages that feed PositionTech crawlers content that is not reflective of the actual page
- Creating inbound links for the sole purpose of boosting the popularity score of the URL
- The misuse of third party affiliate or referral programs

### **Click popularity measurement**

As mentioned earlier, PositionTech measures the click popularity of web pages while deciding the rank of a web page. Click popularity is the number of times the surfers click on your web page listing and how long they stay in your site.

The number of click on your site's listing can be improved by utilizing the title and the Meta tags. These two tags not only help you in attaining a high rank in the search engines, but they also can be utilized to write a good marketing text about your site. The text in the title and Meta description tag appears in the hyperlink listings on the search engine results page. If the text is attractive to the net surfers, the chances of getting more clicks is greater.

Another factor which decides the click popularity factor of your web site is the time that the visitors spend in your site. The secret behind retaining visitors in your web site is the content of your site. Informative and useful

content relevant to the search terms will help to retain visitors to your site and make them come back again.

### **PositionTech's Partner sites**

PositionTech provides search results to many search sites. The different search portals may also use results from other information sources, so not all of their results come from the PositionTech search database. These search portals also apply different selection or ranking constraints to their search requests, so PositionTech results at different portals may not be the same.

Following are PositionTech's partner sites:

<http://www.about.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

<http://www.bluewin.ch/>

<http://www.blueyonder.co.uk/>

<http://www.espotting.com/>

<http://www.fi/>

<http://www.goo.ne.jp/>

<http://www.hotbot.com>

<http://www.hotbot.co.uk/>

<http://www.looksmart.com>

<http://search.msn.com/>

<http://www.soneraplaza.fi/>

<http://www.tocc.co.jp/search/>

<http://www.wp.pl/>

## What Your Website Absolutely Needs

This section will go over some of the most important elements that a page that hopes to get high research engine rankings needs. Make sure that you go through this while section very carefully as each of these can have a dramatic impact on the rankings that your website will ultimately achieve.

### ***Just don't focus on the home page, keywords and titles.***

The first step to sales when customers visit your site to see the products they were looking for. Of course, search engine optimization and better rankings can't keep your customer on your site or make them buy. The customer having visited your site, now ensure that he gets interested in your products or services and stays around. Motivate him to buy the product by providing clear and unambiguous information. Thus if you happen to sell more than one product or service, provide all necessary information about this, may be by keeping the information at a different page. By providing suitable and easily visible links, the customer can navigate to these pages and get the details.

### ***Understanding Your Target Customer***

If you design a website you think will attract clients, but you don't really know who your customers are and what they want to buy, it is unlikely you make much money. Website business is an extension or replacement for a standard storefront. You can send email to your existing clients and ask them to complete a survey or even while they are browsing on your website. Ask them about their choices. Why do they like your products? Do you discount prices or offer coupons? Are your prices consistently lower than others? Is your shipping price cheaper? Do you respond faster to client

questions? Are your product descriptions better? Your return policies and guarantees better than your competitor's? To know your customer you can check credit card records or ask your customer to complete a simple contact form with name, address, age, gender, etc. when they purchase a product.

### ***Does your website give enough contact information?***

When you sell from a website, your customer can buy your products 24 hrs a day and also your customers may be from other states that are thousands of miles away. Always provide contact information, preferably on every page of your website, complete with mailing address, telephone number and an email address that reaches you. People may need to contact you about sales, general information or technical problems on your site. Also have your email forwarded to another email address if you do not check your website mailbox often. When customer wants to buy online provide enough options like credit card, PayPal or other online payment service.

In the field of search engine optimization (SEO), writing a strong homepage that will rank high in the engines and will read well with your site visitors can sometimes present a challenge, even to some seasoned SEO professionals. Once you have clearly identified your exact keywords and key phrases, the exact location on your homepage where you will place those carefully researched keywords will have a drastic impact in the end results of your homepage optimization.

One thing we keep most people say is that they don't want to change the looks or more especially the wording on their homepage. Understandably, some of them went to great lengths and invested either a lot of time and/or money to make it the best it can be. Being the best it can be for your site

visitors is one thing. But is it the best it can be for the search engines, in terms of how your site will rank?

If you need powerful rankings in the major search engines and at the same time you want to successfully convert your visitors and prospects into real buyers, it's important to effectively write your homepage the proper way the first time! You should always remember that a powerfully optimized homepage pleases both the search engines and your prospects. In randomly inserting keywords and key phrases into your old homepage, you might run the risk of getting good rankings, but at the same time it might jeopardize your marketing flow. That is a mistake nobody would ever want to do with their homepage.

Even today, there are still some people that will say you can edit your homepage for key phrases, without re-writing the whole page. There are important reasons why that strategy might not work.

### ***Your homepage is the most important page on your web site***

If you concentrate your most important keywords and key phrases in your homepage many times, the search engines will surely notice and index it accordingly. But will it still read easily and will the sentences flow freely to your real human visitors? There are some good chances that it might not. As a primer, having just 40 or 50 words on your homepage will not deliver the message effectively. To be powerful and effective, a homepage needs at least 300 to 400 words for maximum search engine throughput and effectiveness.

One way to do that is to increase your word count with more value-added content. This often means rewriting your whole homepage all over again. The main reason to this is you will probably never have enough room to skillfully work your important keywords and key phrases into the body text

of your homepage. This may not please your boss or marketing department, but a full re-write is often necessary and highly advisable to achieve high rankings in the engines, while at the same time having a homepage that will please your site visitors and convert a good proportion of them into real buyers.

### ***The Acid Test***

Here is the acid test that will prove what we just said is right: Carefully examine the body text of your existing homepage. Then, attempt to insert three to five different keywords and key phrases three to four times each, somewhere within the actual body of your existing page. In doing that, chances are you will end up with a homepage that is next to impossible to understand and read.

One mistake some people do is to force their prospects to wade through endless key phrase lists or paragraphs, in an attempt to describe their features and benefits. The other reason they do that is in trying to please the search engines at the same time. Writing a powerful and effective homepage around carefully defined keywords and key phrases is a sure way you can drive targeted traffic to your web site and keep them there once you do.

If some people still say re-writing a homepage takes too much time and costs too much money, think of the cost of losing prospective clients and the real cost of lost sales and lost opportunities. In the end, writing a strong homepage that will achieve all your desired goals will largely justify your time invested and the efforts you will have placed in the re-writing of your homepage.

We discussed the importance of the Homepage. This section presents a recommended layout for your homepage in order to make it as search

engine friendly as possible. This is where you set the theme of your site. Let's suppose the primary focus of your site is about online education. You also have secondary content that is there as alternative content for those not interested online education. There is also other content that you would like to share with your visitors. For example, this might include book reviews, humor, and links.

The top of your homepage, as discussed earlier is the most important. This is where you set the keywords and theme for the most important part of your site, the thing you really want to be found for.

### ***Step By Step Page Optimization***

**Starting at the top of your index/home page something like this:**

(After your logo or header graphic)

- 1) A heading tag that includes a keyword(s) or keyword phrases. A heading tag is bigger and bolder text than normal body text, so a search engine places more importance on it because you emphasize it.
- 2) Heading sizes range from h1 - h6 with h1 being the largest text. If you learn to use just a little Cascading Style Sheet code you can control the size of your headings. You could set an h1 sized heading to be only slightly larger than your normal text if you choose, and the search engine will still see it as an important heading.
- 3) Next would be an introduction that describes your main theme. This would include several of your top keywords and keyword phrases. Repeat your top 1 or 2 keywords several times, include other

- keyword search terms too, but make it read in sentences that makes sense to your visitors.
- 4) A second paragraph could be added that got more specific using other words related to online education.
  - 5) Next you could put smaller heading.
  - 6) Then you'd list the links to your pages, and ideally have a brief decision of each link using keywords and keyword phrases in the text. You also want to have several pages of quality content to link to. Repeat that procedure for all your links that relate to your theme.
  - 7) Next you might include a closing, keyword laden paragraph. More is not necessarily better when it comes to keywords, at least after a certain point. Writing "online education" fifty times across your page would probably result in you being caught for trying to cheat. Ideally, somewhere from 3% - 20% of your page text would be keywords. The percentage changes often and is different at each search engine. The 3-20 rule is a general guideline, and you can go higher if it makes sense and isn't redundant.
  - 8) Finally, you can list your secondary content of book reviews, humor, and links. Skip the descriptions if they aren't necessary, or they may water down your theme too much. If you must include descriptions for these non-theme related links, keep them short and sweet. You also might include all the other site sections as simply a link to another index that lists them all. You could call it Entertainment, Miscellaneous, or whatever. These can be sub-indexes that can be optimized toward their own theme, which is the ideal way to go.

Now you've set the all important top of your page up with a strong theme. So far so good, but this isn't the only way you can create a strong theme so

don't be compelled into following this exact formula. This was just an example to show you one way to set up a strong site theme. Use your imagination, you many come up with an even better way.

### ***One Site – One Theme***

It's important to note that you shouldn't try to optimize your home page for more than one theme. They just end up weakening each other's strength when you do that. By using simple links to your alternative content, a link to your humor page can get folks where they want to go, and then you can write your humor page as a secondary index optimized toward a humor theme. In the end, each page should be optimized for search engines for the main topic of that page or site section.

Search engine optimization is made up of many simple techniques that work together to create a comprehensive overall strategy. This combination of techniques is greater as a whole than the sum of the parts. While you can skip any small technique that is a part of the overall strategy, it will subtract from the edge you'd gain by employing all the tactics.

### ***Affiliate Sites & Dynamic URLs***

In affiliate programs, sites that send you traffic and visitors, have to be paid on the basis of per click or other parameters (such as number of pages visited on your site, duration spent, transactions etc). Most common contractual understanding revolves around payment per click or click throughs. Affiliates use tracking software that monitors such clicks using a redirection measurement system. The validity of affiliate programs in boosting your link analysis is doubtful. Nevertheless, it is felt that it does not actually do any harm. It does provide you visitors, and that is important. In the case of some search engines re-directs may even count in favor of your

link analysis. Use affiliate programs, but this is not a major strategy for optimization.

Several pages in e-commerce and other functional sites are generated dynamically and have "?" or "&" sign in their dynamic URLs. These signs separate the CGI variables. While Google will crawl these pages, many other engines will not. One inconvenient solution is to develop static equivalent of the dynamic pages and have them on your site.

Another way to avoid such dynamic URLs is to rewrite these URLs using a syntax that is accepted by the crawler and also understood as equivalent to the dynamic URL by the application server. The Amazon site shows dynamic URLs in such syntax. If you are using Apache web server, you can use Apache rewrite rules to enable this conversion.

One good tip is that you should prepare a crawler page (or pages) and submit this to the search engines. This page should have no text or content except for links to all the important pages that you wished to be crawled. When the spider reaches this page it would crawl to all the links and would suck all the desired pages into its index. You can also break up the main crawler page into several smaller pages if the size becomes too large. The crawler shall not reject smaller pages, whereas larger pages may get bypassed if the crawler finds them too slow to be spidered.

You do not have to be concerned that the result may throw up this "site-map" page and would disappoint the visitor. This will not happen, as the "site-map" has no searchable content and will not get included in the results, rather all other pages would. We found the site wired.com had published hierarchical sets of crawler pages. The first crawler page lists all the

category headlines, these links lead to a set of links with all story headlines, which in turn lead to the news stories.

### ***Page Size Can Be A Factor***

We have written above that the spiders may bypass long and “difficult” pages. They would have their own time-out characteristics or other controls that help them come unstuck from such pages. So you do not want to have such a page become your “gateway” page. One tip is to keep the page size below 100 kb.

### ***How many Pages To Submit***

You do not have to submit all the pages of your site. As stated earlier, many sites have restrictions on the number of pages you submit. A key page or a page that has links to many inner pages is ideal, but you must submit some inner pages. This insures that even if the first page is missed, the crawler does get to access other pages and all the important pages through them. Submit your key 3 to 4 pages at least. Choose the ones that have the most relevant content and keywords to suit your target search string and verify that they link to other pages properly.

### ***Should You Use Frames?***

Many websites make use of frames on their web pages. In some cases, more than two frames would be used on a single web page. The reason why most websites use frames is because each frame’s content has a different source. A master page known as “Frameset” controls the process of clubbing content from different sources into a single web page. Such frames make it easier

for webmasters to club multiple sources into a single web page. This, however, has a huge disadvantage when it comes to Search Engines.

Some of the older Search Engines do not have the capability to read content from frames. These only crawl through the frameset instead of all the web pages. Consequently web pages with multiple frames are ignored by the spider. There are certain tags known as "NOFRAMES" (Information ignored by frames capable browser) that can be inserted in the HTML of these web pages. Spiders are able to read information within the NOFRAMES tags. Thus, Search Engines only see the Frameset. Moreover, there cannot be any links to other web pages in the NOFRAMES blocks. That means the search engines won't crawl past the frameset, thus ignoring all the content rich web pages that are controlled by the frameset.

Hence, it is always advisable to have web pages without frames as these could easily make your website invisible to Search Engines.

### ***Making frames visible to Search Engines***

We discussed earlier the prominence of frames based websites. Many amateur web designers do not understand the drastic effects frames can have on search engine visibility. Such ignorance is augmented by the fact that some Search Engines such as Google and Ask.com are actually frames capable. Ask.com spiders can crawl through frames and index all web pages of a website. However, this is only true for a few Search Engines.

The best solution as stated above is to avoid frames all together. If you still decide to use frames another remedy to this problem is using JavaScripts. JavaScripts can be added anywhere and are visible to Search Engines. These

would enable spiders to crawl to other web pages, even if they do not recognize frames.

With a little trial and error, you can make your frame sites accessible to both types of search engines.

## Robot.txt More Than A Little Useful

We discussed the ROBOTS tag in brief earlier. Let us understand this tag a little more in detail.

Sometimes we rank well on one engine for a particular key phrase and assume that all search engines will like our pages, and hence we will rank well for that key phrase on a number of engines. Unfortunately this is rarely the case. All the major search engines differ somewhat, so what's get you ranked high on one engine may actually help to lower your ranking on another engine.

It is for this reason that some people like to optimize pages for each particular search engine. Usually these pages would only be slightly different but this slight difference could make all the difference when it comes to ranking high.

However because search engine spiders crawl through sites indexing every page it can find, it might come across your search engine specific optimizes pages and because they are very similar, the spider may think you are spamming it and will do one of two things, ban your site altogether or severely punish you in the form of lower rankings.

The solution in this case is to stop specific Search Engine spiders from indexing some of your web pages. This is done using a **robots.txt** file which resides on your web space.

A **Robots.txt** file is a vital part of any webmasters battle against getting banned or punished by the search engines if he or she designs different pages for different search engines.

The **robots.txt** file is just a simple text file as the file extension suggests. It's created using a simple text editor like notepad or WordPad, complicated word processors such as Microsoft Word will only corrupt the file.

You can insert certain code in this text file to make it work. This is how it can be done.

User-Agent: (Spider Name)

Disallow: (File Name)

The User-Agent is the name of the search engines spider and Disallow is the name of the file that you don't want that spider to index.

You have to start a new batch of code for each engine, but if you want to list multiply disallow files you can one under another. For example –

User-Agent: Slurp (PositionTech's spider)

Disallow: xyz-gg.html

Disallow: xyz-al.html

Disallow: xxyyzz-gg.html

Disallow: xxyyzz-al.html

The above code disallows PositionTech to spider two pages optimized for Google (gg) and two pages optimized for AltaVista (al). If PositionTech were

allowed to spider these pages as well as the pages specifically made for PositionTech, you may run the risk of being banned or penalized. Hence, it's always a good idea to use a robots.txt file.

The **robots.txt** file resides on your web space, but where on your web space? The root directory! If you upload your file to sub-directories it will not work. If you wanted to disallow all engines from indexing a file, you simply use the \* character where the engines name would usually be. However beware that the \* character won't work on the Disallow line.

Here are the names of a few of the big engines:

Excite - ArchitextSpider

AltaVista - Scooter

Lycos - Lycos\_Spider\_(T-Rex)

Google - Googlebot

Alltheweb - FAST-WebCrawler

Be sure to check over the file before uploading it, as you may have made a simple mistake, which could mean your pages are indexed by engines you don't want to index them, or even worse none of your pages might be indexed.

Another advantage of the Robots.txt file is that by examining it, you can get information on what spiders, or agents have accessed your web pages. This will give you a list of all the host names as well as agent names of the spiders. Moreover, information of very small search engines also gets recorded in the text file. Thus, you know what Search Engines are likely to list your website.

Most Search Engines scan and index all of the text in a web page. However, some Search Engines ignore certain text known as Stop Words, which is explained below. Apart from this, almost all Search Engines ignore spam.

### ***STOP Words***

Stop words are common words that are ignored by search engines at the time of searching a key phrase. This is done in order to save space on their server, and also to accelerate the search process.

When a search is conducted in a search engine, it will exclude the stop words from the search query, and will use the query by replacing all the stop words with a marker. A marker is a symbol that is substituted with the stop words. The intention is to save space. This way, the search engines are able to save more web pages in that extra space, as well as retain the relevancy of the search query.

Besides, omitting a few words also speeds up the search process. For instance, if a query consists of three words. The Search Engine would generally make three runs for each of the words and display the listings. However, if one of the words is such that omitting it does not make a difference to search results, it can be excluded from the query and consequently the search process becomes faster.

#### **Some commonly excluded "stop words" are:**

- after
- also
- an

and  
as  
at  
be  
because  
before  
between  
but  
before  
for  
however  
from  
if  
in  
into  
of  
or  
other  
out  
since  
such  
than  
that  
the  
these  
there  
this  
those  
to

under  
upon  
when  
where  
whether  
which  
with  
within  
without

### ***Image Alt Tag Descriptions***

Search engines are unable to view graphics or distinguish text that might be contained within them. For this reason, most engines will read the content of the image ALT tags to determine the purpose of a graphic. By taking the time to craft relevant, yet keyword rich ALT tags for the images on your web site, you increase the keyword density of your site.

Although many search engines read and index the text contained within ALT tags, it's important NOT to go overboard in using these tags as part of your SEO campaign. Most engines will not give this text any more weight than the text within the body of your site.

Invisible text is content on a web site that is coded in a manner that makes it invisible to human visitors, but readable by search engine spiders. This is done in order to artificially inflate the keyword density of a web site without affecting the visual appearance of it. Hidden text is a recognized spam tactic and nearly all of the major search engines recognize and penalize sites that use this tactic.

This is the technique of placing text on a page in a small font size. Pages that are predominantly heavy in tiny text may be dismissed as spam. Or, the tiny text may not be indexed. As a general guideline, try to avoid pages where the font size is predominantly smaller than normal. Make sure that you're not spamming the engine by using keyword after keyword in a very small font size. Your tiny text may be a copyright notice at the very bottom of the page, or even your contact information. If so, that's fine

# Regional Search Engines

Almost all Search Engines serve different countries. Search Engines do list content from other countries but most of the content that is listed is either US or UK dominated content.

With this in mind, most popular Search Engines have started deploying regional editions that serve only a specific country. For instance, Google has an Indian edition (<http://www.google.co.in>) that caters to the Indian audience.

## ***Types of Regional Search Engines***

Given below are some of the types of Search Engine Regional Editions.

Regional Interface is nothing but a translated version of the main Search Engine. Many Search Engines have interfaces in different languages such as French, German, Spanish, Japanese etc. However, the only difference between these regional interfaces and the main version of the Search Engine is that the language used on the interface is not English. In other words, if you search using a keyword on both the interfaces, the listings are exactly the same.

Regional Interfaces are aimed at an audience that does not understand English.

**Human Categorization**, as the name suggests, is categorization of websites by human beings. Search Engine employees categorize different websites

into regional listings. Websites that are more relevant to a specific country are listed in that edition of the Search Engine. Hence, for a French edition a search would mainly list documents from France. This eliminates the problem mentioned above. The only caveat being that the whole process is manual. Directories such as Yahoo, LookSmart, and Open Directory make use of this process.

**Domain Filtering** automatically segregates websites from different countries into their respective regional editions. This segregation is done on the basis of domain names. For instance a website from Australia would generally have a domain .au. The Domain filtering mechanism looks at the domains of all websites and creates a country specific edition listing.

Some Search Engines also have region specific editions which contain listings from the whole of that region. As an example: A French edition of Google may also return German or Spanish websites in some cases.

Domain Filtering has a drawback though. This mechanism can only filter out websites based on the domain name, and hence .com is always considered to be a United States website. This is obviously not true. Many websites from other countries also have .com domains.

### ***Maintaining A Local And Regional Site***

Domain crawling is probably the best solution for maintaining both a main site and a regional version. With domain crawling the regional listing is far more comprehensive as compared to the other mechanisms explained above. Some pages, although regional may be listed in the main listing as well.

# SpamDexing And Cloaking – Time Wasters

A couple of years ago spamming may have worked wonders for your website. However, with sophisticated algorithms being developed by all popular search engines, spamming can only backfire. Algorithms, these days, can easily detect spam and not only ignore your website but also ban your website.

Besides, instead of spending considerable time and effort on spamming you can always follow other proven strategies and have a higher rank with most search engines. Spamming can also easily irritate readers. Think about it – if your homepage has unnecessary repetitions of a particular keyword, it is bound to frustrate a reader. Consequently your site, instead of being content rich, would be junk rich. This can have nothing but a negative impact on your business.

Search engine cloaking is a technique used by webmasters to enable them to get an advantage over other websites. It works on the idea that one page is delivered to the various search engine spiders and robots, while the real page is delivered to real people. In other words, browsers such as Netscape and MSIE are served one page, and spiders visiting the same address are served a different page.

The page the spider will see is a bare bones HTML page optimized for the search engines. It won't look pretty but it will be configured exactly the way the search engines want it to be for it to be ranked high. These 'ghost pages'

are never actually seen by any real person except for the webmasters that created it of course.

When real people visit a site using cloaking, the cloaking technology (which is usually based on Perl/CGI) will send them the real page, that look's good and is just a regular HTML page.

The cloaking technology is able to tell the difference between a human and spider because it knows the spiders IP address, no IP address in the same, so when an IP address visits a site which is using cloaking the script will compare the IP address with the IP addresses in its list of search engine IP's, if there's a match, the script knows that it's a search engine visiting and sends out the bare bones HTML page setup for nothing but high rankings.

There are two types of cloaking. The first is called User Agent Cloaking and the second is called IP Based Cloaking. IP based cloaking is the best method as IP addresses are very hard to fake, so your competition won't be able to pretend to be any of the search engines in order to steal your code.

User Agent Cloaking is similar to IP cloaking, in that the cloaking script compares the User Agent text string which is sent when a page is requested with it's list of search engine names (user agent = name) and then serves the appropriate page.

The problem with User Agent cloaking is that Agent names can be easily faked. Search Engines can easily formulate a new anti-spam method to beat cloaklers, all they need to do is fake their name and pretend they are a normal person using Internet explorer or Netscape, the cloaking software

will take Search Engine spiders to the non - optimized page and hence your search engine rankings will suffer.

To sum up, Search engine cloaking is not as effective as it used to be, this is because the search engines are becoming increasingly aware of the different cloaking techniques being used by webmasters and they are gradually introducing more sophisticated technology to combat them. It may be considered as unethical by Search Engines if not used properly.

# Web hosting Services and Domain Names

Choosing an appropriate domain name is very important. First and foremost, when it comes to domain names, try to stay away from the silly, stupid, ridiculous or clever. Keep your domain name simple and make it something your customers can remember if they lose the link to your business website.

## ***Avoid Freebie Sites***

Take note that, while your domain name on Geocities or AOL may seem like the least expensive way to go, it may also get you dropped from certain search engines. Some search engines ignore domain addresses that reside on these 'free servers' or on the 'cheap' servers.

Even if your site is recognized and considered by search engines, a professional domain name that uses your primary company name or associated words is likely to get more attention and be considered as a stable business by your prospective customers.

Purchasing domain names are not that expensive which cost about \$100 and there are many companies that can register the name for you, provided it is available and has not already been used by another company.

## ***Using Keywords In Your Domain Name***

Using one of your keywords in your domain name can increase your score on some search engines. For example, *solderingirons.com* could be more effective as *Electric-soldering-irons.com*, if that domain name was available.

You might also choose to establish more than one domain name using keywords and then link your 'doorway' domain sites to your primary site. But you will have to pay for each of the domain name and also the monthly hosting fees. It all depends on the type and size of your business and your competition.

### ***Doorway Sites/pages***

Keep in mind that some search engines disregard 'doorway' sites. So put at least a page of content on the doorway site with some useful information and then link it to your primary site. But don't design it as an empty page. The other reason being, you can have one, three, five, or even more email addresses that all contain your business name, and give your business a professional feel. When customers get emails from dominicstone@solderingirons.com they feel as if they are dealing with a stable, professional business operation.

No need for customers to understand how you manage all your email boxes on your domain. They just need to feel your business is dependable and reputable.

### ***Web Hosting Companies***

With thousands of web hosting companies in the market it can be difficult if not impossible to know which web site hosting companies truly provide an excellent hosting solution at an excellent price. When you have an established domain name with a good web hosting company, you can get reports on your traffic and which of your pages your customers are visiting most often, as well as many other statistics.

Your web host will charge you a fee for monthly service that ranges from \$5 or \$20 to the more expensive \$50.00 per month. Depending on your site's needs, plan to pay between \$60 and \$600 per year to your web host.

**Always avoid free or very inexpensive** web hosting services, because you may experience bouts of server downtimes and you are likely to have significant limitations in storage, number of email addresses, FTP upload etc.

Be sure your web host can accommodate e-commerce and storefronts, wireless capability, blogs, forums, chats, online interactive helps and anything else you want to add onto your site.

Estimate what your growth needs are and ensure that this web host can serve you as you grow. The last thing you want to do is change host mid way unless you absolutely have to do so.

### ***What To Look For***

Check your bandwidth capability to be sure that, if your website traffic grows rapidly, your customers will not have to wait to download or view information. Three things to look for in a web hosting company are:

1. **Excellent Customer Support:** Your hosting provider should be there for you 24/7 and give you instant access to the technicians you need to solve your problem. Ask them how long it takes for them to typically respond to your problem. A good test is to call them in the mid night to check if you get to a live, level 3 support.

2. **A Sound Infrastructure:** Check whether they offer a multi-homed network powered by multiple bandwidth providers to ensure redundancy. Some offer a 100% guarantee on its network availability or network uptime.

3. **Financial Stability:** If you're running very critical operations, you can't afford to be with a hosting company that may not be in business in a few months.

### ***The Role Of Your Domain Name***

Domain Names play a huge role in search engine optimization for obtaining high search engine ranking. Type in any keyword into Google for example, and the chances are high that you will find that more than 80% of the first 10 sites contain that particular keyword in their domain names. Thus, domain name is one area that can be fully utilized (obviously taking into consideration that you are optimizing a brand new site from scratch and not an existing one).

### ***Hyphens – Yes Or No?***

If most of your traffic is going to be coming through search engine click through and links, hyphens or dashes between the words of your domain name; i.e. MyWebBiz.com (No Hyphens) versus My-Web-Biz.com (Hyphens included), if the hyphens are going to help with search engine positioning, are the worth it?

It is also a good idea to include hyphens (-) between each of the keywords within your domain name. This tells a search engine spider that each word is a separate word, not one continuous word. The search engines which use keywords in the domain name as a part of their ranking formula will not be

able to recognize keywords unless they are separated by a hyphen (or a slash or underscore for sub-directories). Search Engines prefer the use of hyphens in domain names because they can produce more accurate search results by being able to recognize specified key words in your URL.

Keep in mind that a domain with words separated by hyphens will be harder for users to remember (and may also decrease the value of the domain). However, if keywords are used with hyphens the keywords may be interpreted as such by search engines thereby helping rank a site higher. If at all possible, try to register both forms of the name for example, [websitemarketing.com](http://websitemarketing.com) and [web-site-marketing.com](http://web-site-marketing.com).

To have a good web site marketing plan, you must realize alphabetical priority of domain names is still used by some search engines as a key factor in their ranking formula.

### ***Alphanumeric Considerations***

Alphabetical hierarchy is even more important to web site marketing, because this method is used by directories, which strictly list sites in alphabetical order based on the results of the keyword(s) search.

### **Giving YAHOO! Its Alphanumeric Due**

Your web site marketing plan must acknowledge Yahoo!. Yahoo! is the number one directory and search site with 52.7 million different visitors each month, accounting for 69.1 percent of all Internet surfers. An astounding 53.4 percent of all search-related traffic comes from Yahoo!, or as much as half the traffic received to many sites. Many prefer to use Yahoo! because

each site submitted to Yahoo! is human-reviewed, delivering more accurate search results for their visitors.

To include alphabetical hierarchy in your web site marketing strategy, realize that alphabetical priority does not only consist of letters, it includes numbers that can rank higher than an "A".

**This is the alphanumeric order:**

- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

This means that the domain "www.1-800-ABC-NEWS.com" will rank higher with the search sites that use alphabetical priority in their ranking formula, than just "www.ABC.com"

***Is It Link Popularity or Click Popularity***

We discussed about Link Popularity. Another factor influencing search engine placement in some search engines is Click Popularity. The number of users clicking on links to your page from the search results is counted. Pages that are frequently clicked will get a popularity boost.

Your site is awarded a certain number of points each time someone clicks your link from the search results. If your Web site already has a high ranking you will get fewer points compared to a low ranking site. This way all sites have an equal chance to get click through points awarded.

Don't be tempted to click your own link over and over again. Repeated clicks from the same IP will be detected. Clicking on your link and quickly returning to the search engine again might actually hurt your rank. The search engines

will believe you did not find anything interesting at the page. That is not a good search engine optimization strategy.

### **Influencing Click Popularity**

How can you influence click popularity then? By putting some work into your page title and description Meta tag. These are the main factors influencing people's decision to click your link. High quality content will make visitors stay at your search engine optimized web site, and will stop them from quickly returning to the search engine.

# Registering Your Domain Name

Domain name registration is one of the most important things to consider when you are designing a site for high search engine placement. Here are some dos and don'ts of domain name registration.

## ***Dos And Don'ts***

Some Webmasters use shared domains or sub-domains available for free from popular Web hosting services, or some kind of free domain name redirect service. This might be cheap, but if you want a good search engine placement, it's not an option.

- **Free Web Hosts** - Some search engines do ban free Web hosts because search engine spammers frequently use them for hosting duplicate sites (mirrors) and doorway pages.
- **Sharing domains or IP addresses** with spammers can get your search engine position penalized or your entire site banned. Note this statement from AltaVista: "You could wind up being penalized or excluded simply because the underlying IP address for that service is the same for all the virtual domains it includes."
- **Sub-Domains** - Most search engines limit the number of submissions or number of listings for each domain. This will make it very hard to get your site indexed. Other sites on the same domain might already take all the available spots.
- **Shared Domains Spell Trouble** - If you do manage to get your site indexed, the search engine will have a hard time finding the "theme" for your site if you are sharing a domain with other sites on many

different subjects. Pages are no longer ranked one by one, all content within the domain is considered.

- **You Must Own Your Domain – Not Your Host** - Without your own domain, you will be forced to start working from scratch again if the host goes out of business or if he decides to change your URL. Many Webmasters have lost their search engine positions, link popularity and Web traffic because of this.

***Keywords in the domain name are crucial.*** It makes sense to put your primary keywords into your domain name.

- **Separate multiple keywords** like my-keywords-phrase.com instead of typing it all in one word: mykeywordphrase.com. This will make it possible for the search engines to understand your keyword phrases correctly.
- **Character Limit** - Keep in mind that Yahoo and some other search engines reject domain submissions with URL's in excess of 54 characters. You would be wise to stay under the **55 character limit** when choosing a domain name.
- **Directories** like Yahoo, LookSmart and ODP will not look for keywords in the text of your page, and editors will often edit keywords out of your title and description. This leaves your internet domain name as the single most important place to put keywords for your site.
- **Too Many Hyphens/Dashes** - in a domain name might trigger the spam filters of some search engines.
- **Yet another benefit** of keyword rich domain names is in reciprocal linking. If the domain name keywords appear within the text of incoming links, you will get a major boost in ranking, especially in Google.

## Choosing A Host For Your Web Site

Choosing a Web host provider for your site is no small decision. When you make a choice of a Web page host, you are actually placing your Internet business in the hands of your Web host provider. Choosing the wrong Web page hosting plan can cause permanent damage to your search engine placement.

Selecting a Web page host is like renting an office. You want to get it right the first time. It is always possible to move somewhere else, but it's no easy task to move your entire business - not to mention the damage that already could be caused by then.

### ***You Are Renting Space And Bandwidth***

We are going to look at some little known facts about Web page hosting and how it can effect your search engine placement.

Did you submit your site over and over again without ever getting it indexed in the search engines? Or was your site indexed, but is nowhere to be found when you type your search terms into the engines? Your Web host provider might be the cause of that. As Ask.com states:

"If being found via search engines is important to your business, be very careful about where you have your pages hosted. If the hosting service also hosts spammers and pornographers, you could wind up being penalized or excluded."

AltaVista is not the only search engine enforcing this policy against certain Web Hosting services. This is a common practice causing many sites to lose their rank. Choosing the right host for your Web hosting needs is of great importance if you really care about your search engine position.

### ***A Short List Of Things To Watch Out For***

#### **Shared IP hosting**

Many Web hosting services do not give out unique IP addresses to customers. The name-based system of virtual Web hosting allows multiple domains to be hosted by a single IP. This means several hundred domain names could all be using the same IP address. Are you sharing an IP address with people you don't even know?

If someone else, who is hosted on the same server as your site, gets banned on a search engine, then your Web site will be caught and banned as well. This happens on a regular basis causing serious problems for those who are affected.

#### **Downtime**

If your Web host provider cannot keep servers up and running 24/7, people will not be able to find your site. The search engine spiders won't find it either. They will assume your site is gone and remove it from the search engine index. You will have to resubmit and wait weeks or months for the

spider to re-index your site. If your site already is indexed and ranking well, it might lose its position altogether.

No matter what web host provider you use, it is highly recommended that you sign up for a free site monitoring service like EasyMonitor. This guarantees that you're alerted within minutes when your site goes down. This enables you to get to work immediately to solve the problem and dramatically increase the time your site is up and running.

The speed and reliability of your Web host provider will depend on several factors.

### ***Look For A Web Site Host With:***

- **An OC-3 - 155 megabits per second** connection (or better) close to a primary Internet backbone
- **Safeguards** against systems, network or power failure
- **Redundant rollover connections** to the Internet (in case one goes down)
- **Backup power** supplies and
- **"Uptime guarantee"** with at least 95% uptime

### **24 hour server back ups**

### ***No logs? Why, Its Your Data***

Access to raw web log files is one feature often missing with low quality Web hosting services. Some Web host providers provide logs, but do not include referrer information. Others delete logs frequently, making it impossible to

use them effectively. Make sure your Web hosting service gives you access to raw server logs, preferably in "Extended Common Log File Format", a standard that can be understood by most log analyzers.

### ***Logs Provide You With Valuable Information***

The server logs will give you some valuable information for your search engine optimization work, including what search engines people are using to find your site, exactly which keywords do they type into the search box, and when the search engine spiders visit your site. This is crucial information. You cannot properly optimize your site without it.

**Other features include** daily back up of your data, high bandwidth and, of course, the quality of their support services. In addition, you must consider the features offered by the Web page host. Some features to consider are

- The space available for your site
- Monthly transfer limits
- POP mail server availability
- Support for CGI, SSI, Perl, databases and FrontPage 2000 extensions
- Secure server access (SSL)
- Anonymous FTP and
- Shopping Cart Software.

# Search Engines May Seem Picky

## ***A Case For Case Sensitivity***

Some Search Engines are case sensitive. This gives rise to a new dilemma for webmasters. Should they include keywords in both lower case as well as upper case, especially in Meta tags? Most webmasters actually do so. For instance, they would list the keywords as a set of all possible combinations of upper and lower case.

Webmasters may feel that this is the safest technique to avoid losing potential visitors. However, such repetition may be considered by the Search Engine to be Spam! After all, higher the number of words, higher the combinations.

The best way to get around this problem is to list keywords in lower case only. Most surfers always search in lower case. There are very few cases where surfers use capitals even if the word is a proper name. Of course, you may run a very small risk of losing a few visitors who use upper case, but this risk is minimal. Besides, you do not want to be banned for Spam.

## ***Keyword stuffing and spamming***

Important keywords and descriptions should be used in your content in visible Meta tags and you should choose the words carefully and position them near the top and have proper frequency for such words. However it is very important to adopt moderation in this. Keyword stuffing or spamming is

a No-No today. Most search engine algorithms can spot this, bypass the spam and some may even penalize it.

### ***Dynamic URLs***

Several pages in e-commerce and other functional sites are generated dynamically and have ? or & sign in their dynamic URLs. These signs separate the CGI variables. While Google will crawl these pages, many other engines will not. One inconvenient solution is to develop static equivalent of the dynamic pages and have them on your site. Another way to avoid such dynamic URLs is to rewrite these URLs using a syntax that is accepted by the crawler and also understood as equivalent to the dynamic URL by the application server. The Amazon site shows dynamic URLs in such syntax. If you are using Apache webserver, you can use Apache rewrite rules to enable this conversion.

### ***Re-direct pages***

Sometimes pages have a Meta refresh tag that redirects any visitor automatically to another page. Some search engines refuse to index a page that has a high refresh rate. The meta refresh tag however does not affect Google.

### ***Image maps without alt text***

Avoid image maps without text or with links. Image maps should have alt text (as also required under the American Disabilities Act, for public websites) and the home page should not have images as links. Instead

HTML links should be used. This is because search engines would not read image links and the linked pages may not get crawled.

## ***Frames***

There are some engines whose spiders won't work with frames on your site. A web page that is built using frames is actually a combination of content from separate "pages" that have been blended into a single page through a 'frameset' instruction page. The frameset page does not have any content or links that would have promoted spidering. The frameset page could block the spider's movement. The workaround is by placing a summary of the page content and relevant description in the frameset page and also by placing a link to the home page on it.

## ***Tables***

When you use tables on the key pages and if some columns have descriptions while others have numbers, it is possible that this may push your keywords down the page. Search engines break up the table and read them for the content the columns have. The first column is read first, then the next and so on. Thus if the first column had numbers, and the next one had useful descriptions, the positioning of these descriptions will suffer. The strategy is to avoid using such tables near the top of the key pages. Large sections of Java scripts also will have the same effect on the search engines. The HTML part will be pushed down. Thus again, place your long Javascripts lower down on key pages.

## ***Link spamming***

Realizing the importance of links and link analysis in search engine results, several link farms and Free for All sites have appeared that offer to provide links to your site. This is also referred to as link spamming. Most search engines are smarter to this obvious tactic and know how to spot this. Such FFA sites, as they are known, do not provide link quality or link context, two factors that are important in link analysis. Thus the correct strategy is to avoid link spamming and not get carried away by what seems to be too simple a solution.

# Increasing Your SE Rank and Improving Your Search Engine Positioning

If you're looking for some simple things that you can do to increase the position of your sites rank in the search engines or directories, this section will give you some hard hitting and simple tips that you can put into action right away.

## ***The Simple Basic Principles***

It is worth cataloging the basic principles to be enforced to increase website traffic and search engine rankings.

- Create a site with valuable content, products or services.
- Place primary and secondary keywords within the first 25 words in your page content and spread them evenly throughout the document.
- Research and use the right keywords/phrases to attract your target customers.
- Use your keywords in the right fields and references within your web page. Like Title, META tags, Headers, etc.
- Keep your site design simple so that your customers can navigate easily between web pages, find what they want and buy products and services.
- Submit your web pages i.e. every web page and not just the home page, to the most popular search engines and directory services. Hire

someone to do so, if required. Be sure this is a manual submission. Do not engage an automated submission service.

- Keep track of changes in search engine algorithms and processes and accordingly modify your web pages so your search engine ranking remains high. Use online tools and utilities to keep track of how your website is doing.
- Monitor your competitors and the top ranked websites to see what they are doing right in the way of design, navigation, content, keywords, etc.
- Use reports and logs from your web hosting company to see where your traffic is coming from. Analyze your visitor location and their incoming sources whether search engines or links from other sites and the keywords they used to find you.
- Make your customer visit easy and give them plenty of ways to remember you in the form of newsletters, free reports, reduction coupons etc.
- Demonstrate your industry and product or service expertise by writing and submitting articles for your website or for article banks so you are perceived as an expert in your field.
- When selling products online, use simple payment and shipment methods to make your customer's experience fast and easy.
- When not sure, hire professionals. Though it may seem costly, but it is a lot less expensive than spending your money on a website which no one visits.
- Don't look at your website as a static brochure. Treat it as a dynamic, ever-changing sales tool and location, just like your real store to which your customers with the same seriousness.

## ***Your Web Site Copy/Content***

Experts feel that web pages have to be search engine friendly in order to improve search engine rankings. Having a well designed and relevant web copy/content is crucial. This will help search engines easily index your web pages and rank them high.

Besides internal page factors including frequency and positioning of relevant keyword phrases, the leading search engines now suggest the importance of off the page factors, particularly links from other domains.

## ***Ranking By Popularity***

Google ranks individual URLs based on which other URLs linking to them, which URLs link to those, and so on. Thus the steps you have to take are:

- Choose the terms that you wish to include as the most productive search terms for your site, terms that you associate with the correct target visitors to your site. Put those in the search engines and find what pages rank near the top for them. These top-ranking sites/pages would be on the top of your list, if you needed to plant links to your site on other pages.
- Once you have found the top ranked pages/sites for your chosen search term(s), you should check what sites or pages link to that site. If you get links from any of these sites to your target pages, you may be able to dramatically improve your ranking on Google and other crawler based Search Engines.

- If a website has a lot of interlinked pages, then even an obscure page from that site could be a reasonably effective candidate for having a link to your site. It is not essential that the link should be on the home page or prominent page of a popular site.

Creating fake domains and letting those domains point to your site is a trick thought to be effective for improving page ranking at Google. However Google claims that this is not true and they are able to spot duplicate domains and domain scams.

### **And What Is Link Popularity Again?**

Your "link popularity" is simply a count of the number of web pages that are linked to you. Improving your website's link popularity is absolutely vital for improving the visibility of your website with regard to Search Engines. You may want to know your link popularity for two reasons. The first is that your link popularity will improve your ranking on all crawler search engines. As discussed earlier, all crawler-based search engines have a component called the spider, which crawls from one webpage to another through links. Hence, more the websites linking to your website, the better are your chances of getting listed through a search engine. The second reason is that you might want to know which websites are linked to you and potentially referring traffic.

Search engines give sites with good inbound and outbound links a higher ranking. The logic goes that if you provide outbound links to other material you are providing a valuable service: and, if other sites link to you then you must have content of value.

## ***Learn To Analyze Your Server Logs***

The best way to discover how people are finding your web site is to analyze your site's activity logs. If you are unable to analyze their logs can instead use search engines to track down referral links. In particular, this method gives you an idea of how "popular" a search engine believes your site to be. Be aware that "popularity" is only one part of the link analysis systems that search engines such as Google use to rank web pages. The quality and context of links is also taken into account, rather than sheer numbers.

You can use link: 'site URL' feature of many search engines to list all the pages that link to the selected site, and that too in order of Page Rank. For Google, North Light and AltaVista, use link: xxyyzz.com to find the listing of pages that link to the web site [www.xxyyzz.com](http://www.xxyyzz.com) For Alltheweb use link.all instead of link and for PositionTech use 'linkdomain' instead of 'link' in the above example. The results would be a list of all pages (if indexed by the search engine) that link to your target site, listed in the order of popularity.

If you need to find the link to specific pages instead of to an entire site, then the above link: feature will not work. Use the Advanced search features offered by HotBot and MSN Search, enter the full URL of the target page including http:// and use the option "links to URL" or similar.

**Some sites offer to run comparison** of the links to a chosen site vis-à-vis three other chosen sites.

<http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/.com/publinkpop/> is a site where you could submit your target URL and three other URLs that you wish to have a comparison done. [www.linkpopularity.com](http://www.linkpopularity.com) is a site that will analyze the link popularity of a chosen URL in three prominent search engines.

Link analysis is somewhat different than measuring link popularity. While link popularity is generally used to measure the number of pages that link to a particular site, link analysis will go beyond this and analyze the popularity of the pages that link to your pages. In a way link analysis is a chain analysis system that accords weighting to every page that links to the target site, with weights determined by the popularity of those pages.

Search engines use link analysis in their page-ranking algorithm. Search engines also try to determine the context of those links, in other words, how closely those links relate to the search string. For example if the search string was "toys", and if there were links from other sites that either had the word toys within the link or in close proximity of the link, the ranking algorithm determines that this a higher priority link and ranks the page, that this is linked to, higher.

## ***Linking Strategies***

### **There's Good And Bad Back Links**

As a site owner, you want to seek links from good pages that are related to the terms you want to be found for. Linking strategy is not a trick as many get rich quick merchants would have you believe. Links for the sake of links have no value whatsoever. Indeed, they can damage your rankings. So forget about link farms and other such nonsense. A small number of inbound links from great, relevant sites will be much more valuable than many links from low-traffic, irrelevant sites.

However, you should not become obsessed by link popularity alone. Treat linking as one important aspect of your Search Engine Optimization strategy. Decide how much time and effort you are prepared to invest in relation to your other activities and be disciplined about your approach. Monitor your results and adapt your strategy as necessary.

### **Reciprocal Links**

Once you have found the candidate sites that have high link popularity and link quality as seen through link analysis, the next step is to choose those that you believe may agree to reciprocal linking. Your competitors obviously would not, but in respect of others, you must try. Several sites have a page where they list useful links or relevant links, as a service to their site visitors. You can locate the email of the company or of the person who handles link requests for such list pages.

When you make a request for reciprocal linking, approach the target site owner or webmaster or link request handler by providing your URL and a short description and explain how providing this link would be a valuable and useful addition for the benefit of their audience. The description is important as often that would be what appears in their links page. Offer them reciprocal linking from your site's links and resources page. Better still tell them that you have already provided a reciprocal link to their site.

### **Outbound Links**

Build a good links and resources page on your website. Present the links in an organized manner so that this is useful to your site visitors too. Of course, you do not want this links page to be amongst the first pages accessed by your visitor, as this may induce the person to leave your site. Some webmasters try to build a standalone links page that is totally isolated

from all other pages on their site. This would perhaps provide an URL to the reciprocal link provider, but in reality it is not a genuine link page at all. Avoid these tactics; they will not work in the long run.

Finally, not all sites are equal and therefore not all links are equal. A link from a high traffic industry portal is worth infinitely more than a link from a low-traffic free-for-all site. Concentrate on giving the search engines what they really want - great content, well-organized, well-published and linked to other relevant material. Concentrate on that and you will be rewarded.

### **Inbound Links (Also Know As Back Links)**

Like reciprocal linking, inward links to your website can be an effective strategy to increase your website's visibility to Search Engines. Inward links are links pointing to your websites from other websites without providing a reciprocal link from your website.

There are many techniques to improve inward linking. Many of these have enjoyed success with Search Engines. The most proven technique for inward linking is through Ebooks. You can offer interesting and educative Ebooks for free to other websites and they could install them on their sites. The Ebook you create would have a link to your website. This will allow a spider to crawl through that link and visit your website. For example, a footer on every alternate page can have a link to your website that would increase the probability of your website being listed with a crawler based Search Engine.

Other techniques include posting newsletters, white papers, news stories and press releases to other websites, particularly industry specific and

general portals. The newsletters and press releases would contain a link pointing to your website, thus, increase its visibility to crawlers.

Affiliate programs also help in improving inward linking. In affiliate schemes, you provide incentives (usually a commission on the sale of your product or service) for other websites to become affiliates (i.e. *carriers*). These affiliates then generate you direct traffic; the added bonus comes in the form of those inward links to your site. Affiliate Programs create powerful alliances between your web site and your various "affiliate" web sites. Providing affiliate links to your website would improve your website's search engine ranking. It makes your website more visible to crawlers.

### ***More On Meta Tags***

While Meta tags are not the complete answer to the question of "How do I improve my search engine ranking?" they can help with some search engines. Since there are millions of pages with Meta tags, you can add all the pages you want and still not control a sizeable percentage of the pages on the World Wide Web.

What are Meta tags? They are information inserted into the "head" area of your web pages. Other than the title tag, information in the head area of your web pages is not seen by those viewing your pages in browsers. Instead, Meta information in this area is used to communicate information that a human visitor may not be concerned with. Meta tags, for example, can tell a browser what "character set" to use or whether a web page has self-rated itself in terms of adult content.

Meta tags may help you with some search engines, so you'll want to consider adding them to every page you create. On the other hand, you can find many highly ranked web pages without Meta tags. For example, Meta tags have no effect on how humans will view your pages and enter your information into directories like Yahoo.

### ***Page Heading Titles***

It is recommended to use keywords in page titles itself. This title tag is different from a Meta tag, but it's worth considering it in relation to them. Whatever text one places in the title tag (between the <title> and </title> portions) will appear in the title bar of browsers when they view the web page. Some browsers also append whatever you put in the title tag by adding their own name, as for example Microsoft's Internet Explorer, Mozilla FireFox or OPERA.

The actual text you use in the title tag is one of the most important factors in how a search engine may decide to rank your web page. In addition, all major web crawlers will use the text of your title tag as the text they use for the title of your page in your listings.

If you have designed your website as a series of websites or linked pages and not just a single Home Page, you must bear in mind that *each page* of your website must be search engine optimized. The title of each page i.e. the keywords you use on that page and the phrases you use in the content will draw traffic to your site.

The unique combination of these words and phrases and content will draw customers using different search engine terms and techniques, so be sure

you capture all the keywords and phrases you need for each product, service or information page.

The most common mistake made by small business owners when they first design their website is to place their business name or firm name in every title of every page. Actually most of your prospective customers do not bother to know the name of your firm until after they have looked at your site and decided it is worth book marking.

So, while you want your business name in the title of the home page, it is probably a waste of valuable keywords and space to put it in the title line of every page on your site. Why not consider putting keywords in the title so that your page will display closer to the top of the search engine listing.

Dedicating first three positions for keywords in title avoiding the stop words like 'and', 'at' and the like is crucial in search engine optimization.

### ***Title Tags***

The TITLE tag is an important one for search engines like Google, as that is often the first one indexed and it is given higher weighting in the relevance rankings. You have to pay attention to this tag. Keep it short (lower than 40 characters) and let the tag have material relevant to the keywords used during search. As an example, if you had stuffed your Company Name as the TITLE tag, it would not help. The visitor that you want to attract is unlikely to be looking for your Company name in the search string. Think creatively as to what keywords people would use if they were looking for goods or services that your site offers.

## ***Keywords and Description***

Two Meta tags that are important are KEYWORDS and DESCRIPTION. You have to be very careful about how these are developed and positioned. Frequency and location of the keyword that is being searched are important criteria that determine relevance and hence page ranking. The search engine would generally consider the page more relevant if the keyword that is being sought is in the TITLE tag or is in the KEYWORDS tag near the top of the page. Similarly if the sought after keyword is found being repeated in the page, it may give the impression that this is a more relevant page and improve ranking.

There is a caveat, though. The above is only a general rule that has been often followed by many search engines, but then there are many variants to it. Several players in the SEO industry have tried to proclaim that this is the gospel truth and hence it has spawned a large number of experts that suggest and resort to keyword stuffing and spamming (repeating long strings of keywords). The result can often be just the opposite. Some search engines penalize pages that have keyword spamming. Some will just ignore these pages. Some engines also do not read Meta tags. The intelligent method today is to stay away from spamming and to use tags judiciously. Blend your technique to attain the right frequency and location, but stay away from any excess or spamming.

You can provide an in-depth list of words and phrases in the KEYWORD Meta tag. These words should have some relevance to the specific page or, at least, to your website. While you can vary the case of the keywords, you'll

want to concentrate on the lower case because over 90% of the searches either use lower case or are conducted on search engines that are not case sensitive.

These keywords should contain variations on the same theme. If your site was about gardening, you could use garden, gardening, home and garden, home gardening, vegetable garden, and herb garden. These are all words that might be used in searches for information that your site might provide. The keywords Meta tag is not intended to replace the actual text on your website. This tag is simply to aid the spider in collecting accurate information about your web pages.

The DESCRIPTION tag is used by search engines like PositionTech for the page summary that is displayed on the results page. This summary is what the visitor will read and decide whether he/she wishes to enter your site. If the description is just full of repeated keywords, it won't do you any good, even if your page is ranked high. You still do not have a visitor. May be you have put off a visitor.

### ***Meta Robots Tag***

This is probably the only other prominent Meta tag. This is a very peculiar tag in the sense that it indicates what web pages should not be indexed by Search Engines. The Robots tag is inserted in between the header tags. An example of the Robots Tag is given below:

```
<HEAD>  
<TITLE>This page should be kept out of Search Engine listings</TITLE>  
<META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX">
```

</HEAD>

By default, a crawler will try to index all your web pages and will try to follow links from one page to another. This can be prevented by using the Robots Tag. Most major search engines support the Meta robots tag. The Meta robots tag also has some extensions offered by particular search engines to prevent indexing of multimedia content.

### **Yes there are more Meta Tags but...**

There are other Meta tags apart from the ones explored above but most of them are simply ignored by almost all search engines.

To sum up, some search engines will give you a boost if you have Meta tags. But don't expect that to necessarily be enough to put you in the top ten. Meta tags are mainly a design element you can tap into, a crutch for helping information-poor pages better be acknowledged by the search engines.

# Research Tools

One needs to choose those keywords that are frequently searched for and which is in high demand, but not being already used by many other websites and competitors, and thus has low competition. There are a number of keyword research tools that can help you find them.

## ***List Of Free Tools***

Here is a large list of research tools for Search Engine Positioning Research:

<http://www.webuildpages.com/tools/?gclid=CKGqtYnZ540CFO6uYAodnimlCg>

NicheBOT Classic allows you to save your searches in your keyword basket.

Even Google Keyword Tool generates potential keywords for your ad campaign and reports their Google statistics, including search performance and seasonal trends. Features of this tool include:

- Sorting the results of your desired keyword search by popularity, past performance history within the AdWords system, cost, and predicted ad position.
- Easy keyword manipulation where you can select a few keywords here and there or add them all at once.
- Searches for keywords present even in any webpage URL specified by your search. It can also expand your keyword search even further to include those pages that are linked to or from the original URL page.
- More keyword results are generated based on regularly updated usage statistics database. This helps you to get new keywords or phrases.

Guidebeam <http://www.guidebeam.com/> is an interesting resource. Type in a phrase and it will suggest a large number of related searches. The numbers generated against each phrase are Guidebeam's estimation of how relevant that phrase is.

These software products are useful for researching how people search the web and then optimizing your own web pages so that more people find your web site.

This is an important step in the SEO exercise. What keywords do you need to emphasize and include? How do you choose the most relevant keywords that will be used by your target audience? Pose yourself the question: What would my target visitor be looking for and for which queries I would like to lure him/her to my site? Imagine those queries, as many of them as you can think. Apply this to all categories of visitors that you are targeting. Then list those queries and formulate your keywords from those.

Let your creativity develop grammar and synonym variants of these keywords. The same would apply to descriptions; however while keywords have to match closely with search strings, descriptions should be drafted to allure the visitor after he has seen your listing. It should tell the visitor that your site is indeed offering him best information or outcome for what he is looking.

Select phrases (at least two words), rather than single words, as there would be too many contenders for single word searches. You are much better off focusing on specific search keywords and using longer phrases.

## **Keyword Density**

Keyword density is an indicator of the number of times the selected keyword appears in the web page. But mind you, keywords shouldn't be over used, but should be just sufficient enough to appear at important places.

If you repeat your keywords with every other word on every line, then your site will probably be rejected as an artificial site or spam site.

Keyword density is always expressed as a percentage of the total word content on a given web page.

Suppose you have 100 words on your webpage (not including HTML code used for writing the web page), and you use a certain keyword for five times in the content. The keyword density on that page is got by simply dividing the total number of keywords, by the total number of words that appear on your web page. So here it is 5 divided by 100 = .05. Because keyword density is a percentage of the total word count on the page, multiply the above by 100, that is  $0.05 \times 100 = 5\%$

The accepted standard for a keyword density is between 3% and 5%, to get recognized by the search engines and you should never exceed it.

Remember, that this rule applies to every page on your site. It also applies to not just to one keyword but also a set of keywords that relates to a different product or service. The keyword density should always be between 3% and 5%.

### **Simple steps to check the density:**

- This tool will help:  
<http://www.webuildpages.com/seo-tools/keyword-density/>
- Copy and paste the content from an individual web page into a word-processing software program like Word or Word Perfect.
- Go to the 'Edit' menu and click 'Select All'. Now go to the 'Tools' menu and select 'Word Count'. Write down the total number of words in the page.
- Now select the 'Find' function on the 'Edit' menu. Go to the 'Replace' tab and type in the keyword you want to find. 'Replace' that word with the same word, so you don't change the text.
- When you complete the replace function, the system will provide a count of the words you replaced. That gives the number of times you have used the keyword in that page.
- Using the total word count for the page and the total number of keywords you can now calculate the keyword density.

The location of keywords on your website is vital. You may have placed keywords at only a few locations but if they are inserted at important positions, your search engine ranking may be boosted. The most important position is the Title of the page. Ensure that your keyword is placed in the Title.

Another proven strategy is to place keywords towards the beginning of the web page. For instance, inserting keywords in page headlines, other subtitles, and introductory paragraphs would certainly help rankings. Avoid using images or tables at the beginning of the page. This will only shove keywords down on the web page, and in turn harm your search engine rankings.

### ***Stemming***

Among other strategies, “stemming” is another important technique for placing keywords. This is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Positioning Meta tags and keywords into web pages for better ranking should not be confused with spamming. Whatever you do, avoid spamming and keyword stuffing. Search Engines have mechanisms that can spot spamming and as a result ignore such web pages. The key is to insert just “enough” keywords into the web page so as to make the content relevant. Keywords have to be consistent with the entire content of the web page. In other words, do not insert non – relevant keywords just for the sake of improving page rankings.

Many webmasters believe that adding more graphics to a web page would make it more attractive. This is a misconception. A web page should be rich with HTML text rather than graphics. This makes the site more relevant as Search Engines can easily scan text.

Search engines often look for variants of words from a stem and this is referred to as stemming. Thus ‘play’ can also lead to a search for ‘plays’ or ‘playing’ or ‘players’. Similarly singular and plural forms of words and case

can lead to different results for some search engines. Some advisers suggest that Capitalization is a better bet in choosing keywords. However, the wiser counsel is that these variants do not make that great a difference and one should prefer lowercase. Most searches are made in lowercase. Moreover, many search engines are not case-sensitive.

### ***What Are The Most Popular Keyword For Your Site?***

You may like to know what are the most popular search words and strings, so that you could choose top keywords related to your own site. Some resources that help in this are discussed here.

The big list again:

<http://www.webuildpages.com/tools/?gclid=CKGqtYnZ540CFO6uYAodnimlCg>

Place your subject term in Google's External Keyword Tool. The result will be a list of all search terms related to the word you inserted that were most popular at Google. The list is in the order of popularity. Thus you know what most people are looking for. NicheBOT has a fee-based service that lets you do the same based on Meta search engines such as Dogpile and Meta Crawler and many other sources of data. Supplement this effort through the Related Searches feature that is seen in many search engines. Sites such as AltaVista, Yahoo, HotBot and others have this feature. Place your subject or one of the target keywords in the search string on these. From the results page go to the section: "Others searched for" or "Related searches" that is available on many search engines and you will find the other related terms listed there.

# Track Your Search Engine Rankings Like A Bloodhound

Obviously you will want to monitor your investment of time and money in getting high search engine rankings so you can see if it's worth your time and if you need to make any changes. This section will show you how to be a crack search engine analyst.

The effectiveness of your efforts in submitting your pages for listing on search engines can be monitored and evaluated by two methods: spider spotting and URL check.

Spiders from search engines that visit your site and crawl pages leave some unique trace marks in your access log. This can tell you whether a spider has visited or not, what pages they have visited and also the frequency or duration of their visit.

## ***The Best Way To Track***

The best way to identify spider visits is by finding out which visitors asked for the file robots.txt from your site. Only spiders make such a request, as this file is an indication to them to avoid covering the page in question. So the first thing a crawler would do is to check for this file. If you see the access log and analyze it using some convenient software, you would be able to spot all the visits that were initiated with this request. Then one can spot the host name and relate that to major search engines. Host names are

related to the search engine company's name (it is the name of the site that hosts the spider). Another name that is used to identify such visits is the agent or browser names used by respective search engines. Get a list of host names and agent names from available resources (these names tend to change often) and also develop your own intuitive list by searching your access logs for all occurrences of known engine, host or agent names. Concentrate only on the top engines; though you may find several other smaller and less known search engines visiting your site.

Pay attention to not only the total number of visits but to the activity pattern for each of the recent visits to actually judge how many pages they covered. This is a very good way of ensuring if submissions have worked or if other inducements such as links from other sites have worked or not. This also helps you to distinctly evaluate the effectiveness of submission, indexing and page ranking characteristics of your site.

Some examples of hostnames and agent names are as below:

- AltaVista: hostname may have altavista.com within its name; agent is often called Scooter
- Excite host name may have atex or excite.com and agent name is Architextspider.
- PositionTech agent and host names have PositionTech.com and Slurp is often used as the agent name.
- Lycos uses lycos.com within its host name and Lycos Spider is often part of the agent name.

One can use specific search strings in most search engines to find if your URL is included in their index and also to see how many pages are thus

indexed. These search strings have been identified and compiled by some useful resources on SEO.

For searching the pages from your URL in **Google** for example, insert the following search string in Google search:

allinurl: yourcompanyname.com/webmasters/meta.html (this depends on the index pages of your site). In the Yahoo directory use the command u:yourcompanyname.com to find the listings for this URL. There are similar, but specific search strings applicable to each search engine.

Again checking the search engine for your URL is a good way to check what that search engine has indexed. Thus through spider spotting and URL checking you have evaluated and confirmed the effectiveness of your actions on submission and indexing activities.

# Secret Tools To Help Your Achieve & Maintain High SE Rankings

Life is always easier for a person trying to get high rankings in the search engines by making use of technology to automate things and make complicated tasks easy and less time consuming. This section will give you those kind of tools to save you time, money and frustration.

You can't just put your website on the net with right keywords and all the right touches and expect your traffic and ranking will remain constant. As the web is an ever changing landscape, you have to keep track of your own web results like what is happening with the competition and also the best and highest ranked sites. There are many useful tools to help you find out what exactly is happening.

1. A tool which you can use to test your own website links or other websites for broken links:

<http://www.dead-links.com/>

2. With this tool you can check search engines for the number of back links to your URL i.e. other web pages linking to your site:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/backlinks/>

3. It sometimes becomes important to know where the servers of your hosting company are physically located. Because, some search engines like Google have the ability to filter search results based on their physical location called geotargeting. This could be used to determine why your site

is showing in only a certain country. This link can also be used to research the country location of a particular competitor's website:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/website-country/>

4. In order to track the location of the visitor or a customer to your website:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/geovisitors/>

5. In order to check the Yahoo! web ranking of your's or your competitor's website use :

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/webrank/>

6. Here is a link to check the web ranking of a website using a Mac or Apple computer:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/Page Rank-mac/>

7. You need a Google AdSense account for using this. This link provides you with charts and reports which will help you analyze traffic, clicks, and results from your AdSense advertising

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/adsense-charts/>

8. If you have an AdSense account, you can analyze your website address or another website address to see what Google ads will be displayed when the customer selects certain website names or keywords:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/adsense-sandbox/>

9. This link will take you to a cooperative advertising network where you can join to display and share your ads with other website owners:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/ad-network/>

10. You can add the Search Functionality on your website which uses Google. This works only if your site is listed in the Google Index.

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/search/>

11. Here are some links to free website counters which you can use on your website to track your traffic and hits:

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/counter/>

<http://www.amazingcounters.com/?ref=gad033>

<http://www.cyber-counter.com/signup.php>

[http://www.statcounter.com/free\\_hit\\_counter.html](http://www.statcounter.com/free_hit_counter.html)

<http://www.free-counters.net/>

However, [Google Analytics](#) is Free but also will provide you with an amazing array of stats on your site traffic.

The use of automatic Submit tools for the major search engines and directories may not be desirable. If you submit to some search engines incorrectly your pages could actually be deleted permanently from their index or directory. At the same time, you may find manual submissions too time consuming. Experts have suggested that you use software that submits pages as if you were doing it by hand. TopDog, Web Position Gold and Submit Wolf Pro are good choices. Some others are: CommandoPro Submission Software, Add Web Site Promoter, VSE Be Found (Mac), Submission 2000.

Be very careful in selecting the company or service that you hire for search engine optimization, if you do not wish to do it yourself. Beware of those

who promise top engine rankings through the use of Meta tags or by building doorway pages or using link farms or cloaked pages (submitting pages that are different from the actual live pages). If the firm tells you that you need to improve content, position keywords carefully, and seek quality reciprocal links, perhaps that is an indication of a good firm to work with.

# How To Find Out How Much Money Your Investment Is Yielding

It's a fact that you can't measure what you aren't analyzing. This section shows you how to judge your return on investment so that you can tell if your investment of time, money and dedication to your rankings is worth all of the effort you've been putting forth.

We have looked at various strategies and options related to search engine optimization. The key determinant that you have to use to formulate your own strategies would be to ascertain the ROI from your plan. There seem to be a surfeit of techniques, suggestions and tips for SEO. How do you separate the wheat from the chaff? Moreover, the importance of each option is closely linked to your own objective, and consequently your budget in terms of management time and expenditure. How do you measure ROI?

Americans conduct an estimated 790 million searches per week, according to research from ComScore Media Metrix. The Yankee Group reports that only 20 percent of U.S. companies tracking their search referrals are measuring performance beyond the initial click-through to the web site. This is very low. The key to a successful search engine marketing strategy is constant testing, revising and optimizing based on metrics. In order to maximize your return on investment, you must measure the performance beyond click-through—by measuring the complete interaction of your visitors with your site from acquisition to conversion to retention.

Search engine marketing is similar to advertising and other marketing campaigns. The marketing people would be interested in knowing the results of any campaign and most often the result is desired in terms of increase in company revenues. Name recognition, brand image creation and other outcomes are important; however the bottom line is sales.

ROI should be able to determine your website's conversion rate in terms of the ability to persuade your visitors to take the action that you desire them to take. At the same time, the success in terms of increase in sales depends on several other factors such as the competitiveness and value in your product or service offerings and the quality of your website to induce the visitor to take action. The search engine marketing effort is to bring the right targeted visitor, and bring the visitor to the right section at the right time. Converting such a targeted visitor to a customer is not within the ambit of SEO.

How does search engine optimization compare with other options for online advertising and promotion? Jupiter Research predicts that by 2006 the spending on E mail marketing shall be \$ 9.4 billion, whereas the spending on online advertisements shall be \$ 15.6 billion, and that on digital marketing initiatives such as campaigns, promotions, sweepstakes, coupons etc. shall be around \$ 19.3 billion. Forrester predicts that total online advertising spend should be \$ 42 billion by 2005 a significant 9.5% of total ad spending.

Costs in search engine marketing include the cost of optimization services as well as the paid inclusion and pay per click programs. Typically the cost of optimization for a small to mid-sized site through a firm may run from a few thousand dollars to over \$ 50000 for a large site. If you do it in-house

consider around four person months' work plus around two person months of maintenance time over the ensuing six months.

How do you compare costs per click or costs per thousand impressions for search engine optimization vis-à-vis other forms of advertising? PwC report that the effective cost per thousand impressions or views (CPM) for an online ad is around \$ 3.50 for a general site (though it could be higher at \$ 10 to \$ 100 for other specialized sites) compared to \$ 19 for newspaper ads and \$ 16 for Prime-time TV.

The CPM for search engines is certainly higher, but then it leads to targeted impressions. Thus it is important to look at targeting and conversion rates, not just CPM. Click through rates for ad banners, in general, can be as low as 0.4 to 0.5%. Conversion rates would show you what percentage of visitors actually resulted in business. As discussed below, this may be easier done in e-commerce sites.

Cost per click for important keywords at Yahoo could be as high as \$ 0.50 to \$ 5 or \$ 10. The average bid reported according to one source is \$0.73 per click (for Yahoo). Thus this is already lower than the cost per visitor for online ad banners. Yahoo can only cater to a small percentage of search traffic, while Google, Yahoo and others comprise the larger portion; thus it can be said with certainty that SEO is the most cost effective ROI generator.

## Hybrid PPC & SEO Tactics

This section meant to show you how to combine the power of pay per click search engines with your organic search engine optimization in order to achieve the highest possible rankings from your effort.

It is crucial that you optimize your performance with both Paid programs as well as free listings. Search engine marketing is like playing 3-D chess—it is complex and multi-dimensional. To win, the marketer must not only select the right keywords and align them with content that matches the user's query target, but also select the right search vehicle for each keyword.

The marketer must weigh the value of long-term results gained from organic search listings against the short-term returns of paid advertising. In most cases, the right answer is to have a balance of both.

It is a misconception that free listings do not generate traffic. In fact, the top 2 free listings receive more than 50% of the clicks. This is too high a number to ignore. You would be missing out on important traffic if you completely ignore free search engines. On the other hand, paid listing bring you focused traffic.

This again supports the fact that a balance of both kinds of listings is extremely vital for successful Search Engine Marketing.

## ***ROI Tracking Tools***

There are several tracking tools that measure the traffic coming to your website and that can identify what search engines and what keywords have brought that traffic. Moreover tracking tools can also tell you what the visitor has done online, including page visits, time spent, actions taken (relevant for e-commerce sites or query/contact forms) and so on. You will have to find your survey methodologies to relate the traffic history to the revenue results. Some of these are mentioned below:

### **DoubleClick's DART**

<http://www.doubleclick.com/us/advertisers/adserving/dart5/>

DoubleClick's DART paid placement and advertising ROI tracking tool generates web-based reports on cost per click, number of clicks, overall media cost, conversion rates, gross sales, return on investment (ROI), and net profit. Such tools are suited to online merchant sites.

### **WebTrends from NetIQ**

<http://www.netiq.com>

Offers server-based software to determine how many visitors are coming to the Web site, where they're coming from, what they're doing on the Web site, and which search engines are sending the most traffic, along with which phrases drive the most traffic from each search engine.

## **HitBox from WebSideStory**

<http://www.websidestory.com/>

It uses a different data collection method, by enabling site owners to add code to their site. It tracks the same type of information that the WebTrends product does.

**This is another useful measuring and tracking tool.**

[GOOGLE ANALYTICS – Free and Fantastic](#)

## Resource Summary

The final section of this guide focuses on some of the most popular and effective tools as well as resources for the Search Engine Marketer. We discussed earlier, the importance of using various software for all aspects of Search Engine Marketing. This section lists out some of the very useful software tools.

It also highlights a few comprehensive sources for Search Engine News and Information.

The Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization (SEMPO) was formed recently with the objective of increasing awareness and promoting the value of Search Engine Marketing Services. This is this biggest organization in its field comprising of more than 300 reputed Search Engine Marketing firms.

**SEMPO's mission** is to not only increase understanding of Search Engine Marketing amongst marketers but also to provide core educational materials about tools, vendors, consultants, programs and successful search engine marketing campaigns.

SEMPO represents the common interests of more than 300 search engine marketing professionals and provides them with a credible voice in the marketplace. To achieve its objectives, SEMPO will demonstrate how search engine marketing programs have become important components of the marketing mix.

SEMPO's website can be accessed at <http://www.sempo.org>

We studied a few ROI tracking tools in the earlier section. Listed below are some of the tools that cater to other aspects of Search Engine Marketing.

### **Alexa**

Alexa, an Amazon.com company was founded in 1996 and provides various services ranging from Web Search and Site Stats to a load of other marketing tools for the webmaster.

The site can be accessed at <http://www.alexacom>

### **LinkPopularity.com**

LinkPopularity.com runs a service that lets you know the link popularity of your website with most of the popular Search Engines. This is an extremely useful tool considering the importance of link popularity for Search Engine Marketing.

The site can be accessed at <http://www.linkpopularity.com>

### **Live Keyword Analysis**

This tool as the name suggests analysis your website's keyword density. All you have to do is insert the insert your keywords and the text of your web page and automatically receive feedback about your keyword density.

This tool can be accessed at <http://www.live-keyword-analysis.com>

## **Tools from Marketleap**

Marketleap offers a set of Search Engine Marketing and Analysis tools. These tools also give you critical data necessary to help you improve upon your current search engine marketing efforts.

Some of these are:

- Keyword Verification tools to check whether for a particular keyword your website would be ranked within the top 3 listings of Search Engines
- Search Engine Saturation tools that calculate the number of pages a given search engine has in its index for your website domain
- Link Popularity Check that gives a complete analysis of your link popularity.

The site can be accessed at <http://www.marketleap.com/services/freetools>

## **NetMechanic HTML Code checker**

This tool checks the HTML code on your web pages for errors. Some of its functions include testing links, checking HTML code, rating page load time, and checking spelling.

The site can be accessed at <http://www.netmechanic.com/toolbox/html-code.htm>

## **OptiLink Link Reputation Analyzer**

This tool analyzes your site to a top site for Search Engines. It provides recommendation on how to change the linking structure to improve the ranking of your website.

The tool can be accessed at <http://www.optitext.com/optilink/index.html>

## **PositionPro**

Position Pro™ is a combination of tools providing you the ability to analyze your entire website like a search engine. It helps in finding pages that are acceptable to Search Engines, optimize keywords for content and phrases, and other tools for improving search engine visibility. This is a very useful tool.

The site can be accessed at <http://www.positionpro.com>

## ***Website Management Tools***

Websitemanagementtools.com offers a variety of solutions that analyze how well your website promotion strategy is working and where to focus your website promotion efforts for optimum results.

The tools include website ranking manager tools and robot manager tools and can be accessed at <http://www.websitemanagementtools.com/>

There are many other similar tools available on the Net. A few other tools worth checking out are:

- Robots.txt Validator - <http://www.searchengineworld.com/cgi-bin/robotcheck.cgi>
- Search Engine Optimizer - <http://www.se-optimizer.com/>
- SEM ROI Calculator - <http://www.pageviews.com/calculator.htm>
- SEOTool Set - [http://www.bruceclay.com/web\\_tool.htm](http://www.bruceclay.com/web_tool.htm)
- SiteSnar - <http://www.sitesnare.com/>
- WebPosition Gold - <http://www.webposition.com/>
- WebRank - <http://www.webrank.com/>
- NicheBOT – <http://www.nichebot.com>
- NicheBOT Classic – <http://www.nichebotclassic.com>

### ***Search Engine Information***

- [About.com: Web Search](#)
- [Search Engine Watch](#)
- [Search Engine World](#)
- [Traffick](#)
- [up2speed](#)
- [Indicateur.com](#)
- [Internet Search Engine Database](#)
- [Media Post](#)
- [ClickZ](#)
- [DIRECT and Catalog Age's Search Engine Marketing site](#)
- [Google Dance Monitor](#)
- [Google Zeitgeist](#)
- [RankWrite Roundtable](#)
- [SearchEngineblog.com](#)
- [Search Engine Dictionary](#)

- [Search Engine Guide](#)
- [High Rankings Advisor](#)
- [W3 Search Engines List](#)
- [Web Trends](#)
- [WebMama Journal](#)
- [Yahoo! Buzz Index](#)
- [iMedia](#)
- [NetMechanic Newsletter](#)
- [Pandia Search Central](#)
- [Planet Ocean](#)
- [Search Engine Optimization Tips](#)
- [International Internet Marketing Association](#)
- [World Association of Internet Marketers](#)