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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO) TIPS

When a potential client discusses ideas for a web design, high search engine rankings normally are included. Even current web site owners who are frustrated with their search engine rankings ask if I can improve them. People want to believe that there is some sort of magical incantation that can raise the search engine rank of their sites. Ranking high in the free (organic) search engine results takes some research, planning, and time. Optimizing web pages for search engines does not improve organic search results overnight or in a week or even a month. Those who tell you otherwise, are flat out lying.

To quickly improve rankings, one can enroll in Google Adwords or Bing Ads and pay a fee for each time a user clicks on the link. An effective PPC (pay per click) marketing strategy is highly recommended. This can be quite costly especially in highly competitive business categories.

A skillful web designer is usually acquainted with the techniques used to optimize web pages for search engines. Make-your-own web site services do this to some degree, but much of it is left up to the web site owner. Web designers who charge a minimal fee usually bypass the time-consuming task of search engine optimization. In my mind, **SEO is part of a web design project.**

Back when I was learning the ropes, one of my clients was enticed by an ad to improve their search engine ranking. The service charged \$99 and all they did was email them a handful of recommendations. The client contacted me to apply these recommendations to the twenty-some web pages of their web site. After discussing the recommendations and ruling out some of them, I spent about 10 hours of volunteer time to complete the task. My benefit from this lesson was to employ some of the techniques suggested and budget additional time to learn more about search engine optimization.

I Build Simple Web Sites For Nice People.

Here Are Some Helpful Tips I Use When Designing A Web Site.

① <TITLE> Tags

TITLE tags tell a browser what text to display in the browser's title bar and tabs. They have always been and remain the most important HTML signal that search engines use to understand what a page is about. Each web page should have a unique **TITLE** tag containing useful keywords. Place it immediately below the **<HEAD>** tag. Instead of using "Home Page" as the title of your web site landing page, try "Business Name | Services Provided or Product Categories Available | City, State." My home page **TITLE** tag is "Jeff Heiser - Custom Web Design | Reading, PA."

② <DESCRIPTION> Tags

Place **DESCRIPTION** tag immediately below the **<TITLE>** tag and create a unique keyworded summary of up to 250 characters (including spaces) describing the contents of the web page.

Note: The **TITLE** and **DESCRIPTION** tags appear on the search results page, so both of these tags should contain text designed to encourage people to visit your web site.

Many searchbots, including Google, overlook **KEYWORD** tags. In the past, this tag was used to stuff a variety of keywords and keyword phrases. Now, searchbots scan the web page's readable text content to figure out what the keywords are.

③ Well-structured navigation system

Each web site should have a well-structured navigation system including bottom-of-page text links, internal links in the body content, and a sitemap page. Don't forget to use keywords and keyword phrases in the links.

④ Readable text content

Each web page should have unique, well-written, readable text content applicable to that web page. Search engines cannot read embedded text in images. Some folks believe that there are tricks experts use to improve search engine rankings. When a client asks about this, I reply, *"Using tricks is engaging in a 'cold war' against Google. They don't react well to it. Sooner or later, Google will plug the exploit. When they do so, they will usually force sites that used the trick to the bottom of search results as a punishment. Do you want that?"*

⑤ Keywords – Keyword phrases

Use keywords and keyword phrases:

- ✓ in the URL, folder names, and filenames including image filenames (separate words using dashes-or-hyphens).
- ✓ **TITLE** tag and **DESCRIPTION** tag as mentioned above.
- ✓ in the first paragraph of the page.
- ✓ in heading tags, especially **<H1>**, **<H2>**, **<H3>**.
- ✓ in bulleted lists, bold text, and italic text.
- ✓ in text links and button text.
- ✓ in **ALT** text for images. (**ALT** text describes the image for search engines and the visually impaired.)
- ✓ multiple times throughout the page, but don't use a keyword or keyword phrase too often. You can avoid over-repetition by using synonyms and semantically related words. Correct spelling, grammar, and vocabulary mistakes. Make your content unique and high quality.

⑥ Well-structured web pages

Search engines like simple well-structured pages with minimal advertisements and external CSS and SCRIPT files. Visitors like well-designed, uncluttered, easy-to-navigate pages so they can quickly find what they want. If the page is too cluttered or it takes too long to load, the searchbot may just abandon it.

⑦ Mobile-friendly web sites

Because of the popularity of mobile devices, search engines like responsive web sites. (those that display well on all devices.) In fact, Google and Bing **downgrade** the search ranking of a web site that is not mobile friendly when the search is done from a mobile device. A majority of searches are currently done from mobile devices.

⑧ Fast loading web pages

Have you ever waited a long time for a web site to load? Many people abandon a web site if it takes more than 3 second to load. Search engines take note of this as well and **downgrade** slow loading web sites. They want to recommend web sites that result in a positive user experience. Web sites today include a variety of images and plugins to make the user experience more enjoyable. This means more data to download to view a web site. Techniques I use to overcome this issue include optimizing images, minifying files, delay loading of non-critical CSS and scripts, and leverage browser caching.

⑨ **Interlink the web pages**

Cross-linking the web pages ensures that PageRank is shared among the information on the web site. Interlink the pages with contextual links whose anchor text is relevant to the target page. In addition to spreading PageRank over your web site, this technique will also tell Google what the web pages are about.

⑩ **Secure Internet connections**

Google is now encouraging web sites to be HTTPS (encrypted communication between web browser and web server). Many users share personal information via signup forms, contact forms, and purchases. Google will favor an HTTPS web site over one that is not. This is in the initial stage. Although I have not switch over yet, I do recommend this to clients who receive personal information from customers via the web site.

Additional Tips

Add a **FREE business listing** to [Google My Business](#), [Bing Places](#), and [Yellow Pages](#). This will help with local searches. List your address on every page as well as mention your geographical area in your body text and even your TITLE and DESCRIPTION tags. Many searches done from mobile devices will yield local area results.

Do NOT use Frames or Flash. Frames are obsolete and searchbots ignore those pages. Flash is slow to load and cannot be read by the search engines. Any information embedded in a Flash file will not be indexed. In addition, Flash is annoying and may drive visitors away.

Limit the number of ads on the web page. Ads pay for many of the resources we take for granted on the web. No one begrudges a few ads, but some web sites take ads beyond a reasonable level. Google's search algorithm attempts to improve user experience by **downgrading** sites with too many ads.

Conclusion

Search Engine Optimization is a complex venture. Improving your rankings isn't as simple as it used to be. Search ranking algorithms have grown smarter and more sophisticated. Many techniques that used to be acceptable are now considered inappropriate practices — and in some cases, can even earn you a traffic-throttling Google penalty.

There is no magical quick fix to improve organic search results. What is required is a sound strategy which results in a well-structured web page of quality content that provides value to your visitors. Applying the techniques mentioned above puts you soundly on the right track to appeal to search engines.