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6. search engine optimisation

What's inside: An **introduction** to SEO, and a brief **history** followed by the **key terms and concepts** you need. In **how it works**, we look at the five main areas of SEO, namely **web site structure**, **key phrase research**, **writing content**, **all important links** and **usage data**. When it comes to SEO, you also need to know **what not to do**. Following all this we have the **tools of the trade**, the **pros and cons** of SEO, and a look at **the bigger picture.**

introduction

With millions of people performing millions of searches each day to find content on the Internet, it makes sense that marketers want their products to be found by potential consumers. Search engines use closely guarded algorithms to determine the results that are displayed. However, determining what factors these algorithms take into account has lead to a growing practice known as search engine optimisation.

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the practice of optimising a web site so as to achieve preferred ranking on the search engine results pages (SERPs). Someone who practices SEO professionally is also known as an SEO (search engine optimiser).

SEO can be split into two distinct camps: white hat SEO and black hat SEO (with some grey hat-wearers in between). Black hat SEO refers to trying to game the search engines. These SEOs use dubious means to achieve high rankings, and their web sites are occasionally black-listed by the search engines. White hat SEO, on the other hand, refers to working within the parameters set by search engines to optimise a web site for better user experience. Search engines want to send users to the web site that is most suited to their needs, so white hat SEO should ensure that users can find what they are looking for.

history

By the mid-90s, webmasters had begun to optimise their sites for search engines due to a growing awareness of the importance of being listed by the various engines. Initially, all a webmaster needed to do was submit the URL of a web page for it to be indexed. Search engines relied on the meta data, information that webmasters inserted in the code of a web page, to determine what a web page was about and to index it appropriately.

Industry analyst Danny Sullivan records that the earliest known use of the term "search engine optimization" was a spam message posted on Usenet, an online forum or message board, on July 26, 1997.

Realising the importance of being ranked highly in search results, webmasters began using the search engine's reliance on meta data to manipulate the ranking for their web sites. To combat this, search engines in turn have developed more complex algorithms including a number of other ranking factors.

While at Stanford University, Larry Page and Sergey Brin developed a search engine, called Backrub, that relied on a mathematical algorithm to rank web pages. They founded Google in 1998, which relied on PageRank, hyperlink analysis as well as on-page factors to determine the prominence of a web page. This enabled Google to avoid the same kind of manipulation of on-page factors to determine ranking.

key terms and concepts

Alt Text This refers to the "alt" attribute for the image HTML tag. It is used in HTML to attribute a text field to an image on a web page, normally with a descriptive function, telling a user what an image is about and displaying the text in instance where the image is unable to load.

Anchor Text The visible, clickable text in a link.

Backlink All the links on other pages that will take the user to a specific web page. Each link to that specific page is known as an inbound/backlink. The number of backlinks influences PageRank so the more backlinks the better - get linking!

Domain Name The name of a web site that distinguishes it from other systems on the World Wide Web.

Heading Tags Heading tags (H1, H2, H3 etc) are standard elements used to define headings and subheadings on a web page. The number indicates the importance, so H1 tags are viewed by the spiders as being more important that the H3 tags. Using target key phrases in your H tags is essential for effective SEO.

Home Page The first page of any web site. The home page gives users a glimpse into what your site is about – very much like the index in a book, or a magazine.

HTML The abbreviation for HyperText Markup Language, read by web browsers. Certain HTML tags are used to structure the information and features within a web page.

Hyperlink A link in a document (electronic) that allows you, once you click on it, to follow the link to the relevant web page.

IP Address The Internet Protocol (IP) address is a exclusive number, which is used to represent every single computer in a network.

Keyword Frequency The number of times a keyword or key phrase appears on a web site.

Keyword Phrase Two or more words that are combined to form a search query - often referred to as keywords. It is usually better to optimise for a phrase rather than a single word.

Keyword Rankings This term refers to where the keywords/phrases targeted by SEO rank amongst the search engines - if your targeted terms do not appear on the first 3 pages, start worrying.

Landing Page The page a user reaches when clicking on a paid or organic search engine listing. The pages that have the most success are those that match up as closely as possible with the user's search query.

Link A link is a URL imbedded on a web page. If you click on the link you will be taken to that page.

Link Bait A technique for providing content that attracts links from other web pages.

Localisation The practice of creating a local version of a website, for a different country/language.

Meta Tags Meta tags are there to tell the spiders exactly what the web pages are about. It's important that your Meta tags are optimised for the targeted key phrases. Meta tags are made up of meta titles, descriptions and keywords.

Personalised Search Personalisation means that search results are personalised to, or vary, according to what search engines think a user is actually interested in.

Referrer When a user clicks on a link from one site to another, the site the user left is the referrer. Most browsers log the referrer's URL in referrer strings. This information is vital to determining which queries are being used to find specific sites.

Robot.txt A file written and stored in the root directory of a web site that restricts the search engine spiders from indexing certain pages of the web site.

key terms and concepts continued

URL Uniform (or Universal) Resource Locator. This is a web page's address e.g. http://www.gottaquirk.com.

URL Rewriting Presenting search-friendly URLs without question marks, rewriting them on the server to their standard format suitable for use in querying dynamic content.

Usability Usability is a measure of how easy it is for a user to complete a desired task. Sites with excellent usability fare far better than those that are difficult to use.

From http://www.google.com/technology/:

'PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages "important."'

PageRank was based on the practice of academic citations. The more times an academic paper is cited, the more likely it is an authority paper on the subject. Page and Brin used a similar theory for their search engine – the more times a web page or web site is linked to, the more likely it is that the community considers that page an authority.

Ranking highly in search results is vital to web sites, so webmasters have adapted as search engines have updated their algorithms to avoid being "gamed". Today, Google says it uses more than 200 different factors in its algorithm (which changes over 400 times yearly) to determine relevance and ranking. None of the major search engines disclose the elements they use to rank pages, but there are many SEO practitioners who spend time analysing patent applications to try to determine what these are.

how it works

Search engines need to help users find what they're looking for. To make sure they list the best results first, they look for signals of:

- Relevance
- Importance
- Popularity
- Trust
- Authority

SEO, also called organic or natural optimisation, involves optimising web sites to achieve high rankings on the search engines for certain selected key phrases.

This is achieved by making changes to the HTML code, content and structure of a web site, making it more accessible for search engines, and by extension, easier to find by users. These are also known as **on page factors**. SEO also involves **off page factors** – these generally build links to the web site. Activities to increase links to a web site, including social media and WebPR, are considered off page SEO.

SEO is an extremely effective way of generating new business to a site. It is a continuous process and a way of thinking about how search engines see your web site and how users use search engines to find your web site. It's search psychology.

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:

1. A search engine friendly web site structure
2. A well researched list of key phrases
3. Content optimised to target those key phrases
4. Link popularity
5. Emerging trends

1. search engine friendly web site structure

Search engines encounter two kinds of obstacles:

- Technical challenges that prevent the search engine spider from accessing content
- A competitive marketing environment where everyone wants to rank highly

To ensure that search engines can access your content, you must remove technical barriers. Those who wish to achieve the best results must follow best web dev practices. These best practices are outlined in the chapter on web development and design.

Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz.org says: "The key to ensuring that a site's contents are fully crawlable is to provide direct, HTML links to to each page you want the search engine spiders to index. Remember that if a page cannot be accessed from the home page (where most spiders are likely to start their crawl) it is likely that it will not be indexed by the search engines."

The chapter on web development and design delves more deeply into building a search engine friendly web site.

2. well researched key phrases

Key phrases are the very foundation of search. When a user enters a query on a search engine, she uses the words that she thinks are relevant to her search. The search engine then returns those pages it believes are most relevant to the words the searcher used.

Search engines have built a sophisticated understanding of semantics and the way we use language. So, if a user searches for "car rental" the search engine will look for pages that are relevant to "car rental" as well as possibly "car hire", "vehicle hire" and so forth. Search engines have also built up knowledge around common misspellings and synonyms and common related searches, so as to try to return the best results for a user.

Because of this, it is crucial that web sites contain content with keywords that are likely to be used by their target audience. Web sites need to appear when their potential customers are searching for them.

As a web site owner, or the marketer for a web site, we need to build a list of some of the terms our potential customers are likely to use to find the things we are offering. A big part of keyword research is understanding search psychology. When we build our key phrase or keyword list, we are tapping into the mental process of searchers and putting together the right mix of keywords to target.

There are four things to consider when choosing a keyword:

- **Search volume**
How many searchers are using that phrase to find what they want? For example, there is an estimated monthly search volume of over 2 million for the keyword "hotel", but an estimated 385 searches per month for a keyword like "Cape Town waterfront hotel".

- **Competition**
How many other web sites out there are targeting that same phrase? For example, Google finds over 795,000,000 results for "hotel" but only 1,350 for "Cape Town Waterfront Hotel".

- **Propensity to convert**
What is the likelihood that the searcher using that key phrase is going to convert on your site? A conversion is a desired action taken by the visitor to your web site.

Related to propensity to convert, is the relevance of the selected term to what you are offering. If you are selling rooms at a hotel at the V&A Waterfront, which of the two terms ("hotel" and "Cape Town Waterfront hotel") do you think will lead to more conversions?

- **Value per conversion**
What is the average value per prospect attracted by the keyword? Depending on the nature of your web site, the average value per lead varies. Using the hotel example again, consider these two terms:

"luxury Cape Town hotel" and "budget Cape Town hotel"

Both are terms used by someone looking to book a hotel in Cape Town, but it is likely that someone looking for a luxury hotel is intending to spend more. That means that particular lead has a higher value, particularly if you have a hotel booking web site that offers a range of accommodation.

keyword research

How do you know where to start on building your keyword list? It requires a little thought, and a fair amount of research using tools which are readily available to help you both grow and refine your list of keywords.

Brainstorm
Think about the words you would use to describe your business, and about the questions or needs of your customers that it fulfils. How would someone ask for what you are offering? Consider synonyms and misspellings as well.

Bear in mind that people might not ask for your services in the same way you describe them. You might sell "herbal infusions" whereas most people would ask for "herbal teas", although some might request a "tisane".

If you are selling Tamagotchis, remember that the spelling can be tough to recall, and you might need to consider common misspellings like "tumagochi" or "tamagochi".

Survey customers and look at your web site referral logs
Look to see what terms customers are already using to find you, and add those to your list. If they are already sending you some traffic, it is worth seeing if you can increase that traffic.

Use keyword research tools
There are several tools available for keyword discovery, and some of them are free! Some tools will scan your web site and suggest keywords based on your current content. Most will let you enter keywords, and will then return suggestions based on past research data with:

- Similar keywords
- Common keywords used with that keyword
- Common misspellings
- Frequency of the keywords in search queries
- Industry related keywords
- Keywords that are sending traffic to your competitors
- How many other sites are targeting your keywords

See **Tools of the Trade** for some tools that you can use.

Bearing in mind the factors that make a good keyword, you need to aim for the right mix of keywords. Low volume terms, with low levels of competition may be a good way

> **note**
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> **Misspellings are important, but when you are selling something, consider what the misspelling tells you about the traffic you are getting. With everything, analyse your traffic to assess for quality.**

to get traffic in the short term, but don't be scared off by high-levels of competition in the high-value, high-volume areas. It might take longer to get there, but once there, the revenue can make it all worthwhile.

It is a good idea to create a spreadsheet of the list of keywords, where you can also store information relevant to that keyword.

Keyword or phrase	Search volume	Competition	Propensity to Convert	Value of Lead
Hotel	3,870	90%	2%	$18
Luxury hotels	345	80%	35%	$35

This will help you to choose the right keywords to target. These lists should be created for the whole web site, and then can be broken down for each page you want to optimise.

3. optimising content for key phrases

Once keywords and phrases are selected, we need to ensure that the site contains content to target those key phrases. We must ensure that the content is properly structured and that it sends signals of relevance. Content is the most important part of your web site. We must create relevant, targeted content aiming at our selected key phrases.

Content already has several roles to play on your site:
- It provides information to visitors.
- It must engage with them.
- It must convince them to do what you want.

Now it must also send signals of relevance to search engines. You need to use the keywords on the content page in a way that search engines will pick up, and users will understand.

Each web page should be optimised for two to three key phrases: the primary key phrase, the secondary and the tertiary. A page can be optimised for up to five key phrases, but it is better to have more niche pages than fewer unfocused pages.

Here are some guidelines:
1. **Title tag:** use the key phrase in the title, and as close to the beginning as possible.
2. **H1 header tag:** use the key phrase in the header tag, and as much as possible in the other H tags.

3. **Body content:** use the key phrase at least three times, more if there is a lot of content and it makes sense. Aim for about 350 words of content, but don't overdo it! That could look like spam to the search engines.
4. **Bold:** use <strong> tags around the keyword at least once.
5. **Alt tag for an image:** use it at least once to describe an image on the page.
6. **URL:** use a URL rewrite so that it appears in the URL of the page.
7. **Meta description:** use it at least once in the meta description of the page. It should entice users to click through to your site from the SERP.
8. **Meta tags:** use the keywords in the meta tags to provide context to the search engines.
9. **Link anchor text** to another page: don't use it when linking to another page on your site. The anchor text describes the page being linked to, and so could dilute the relevance of the page you are linking from.
10. **Domain name:** if possible, use the key phrase in your domain name, although favour usability or memorable domain names.

optimising images
Images should also be optimised with the relevant keywords. Search engines cannot see images, so rely on the way that an image is described to determine what the image is about. Screen readers also read out the image descriptions, which can help visually impaired readers to make sense of a web site. Lastly, images are sometimes also shown on the SERPs, and of course one can also search images using most of the major search engines.

Title: Handmade bags for quirky, one of a kind style

H1 Header tag: Customised Handmade Bags to Suit Your Style

Body Copy: Here, descriptive and compelling copy about how handmade bags will make anyone a style maven, what the benefits are to the community that make the bags, and how distinctive handmade bags will make the owner feel. Text should be written in a logical, easy to follow fashion. You could also highlight the designers of handmade bags, and how their personality shows in their work.

Alt Attribute for Photo: Distinctive Handmade Bags in Many Colours.

URL: http://www.domain.com/handmade-bags

Page targeting the phrase "handmade bags".

Just as an image can help emphasise the content on a page to a visitor to that page, they can also help search engines in ranking pages, provided they are labelled correctly.

Here are some ways to optimise images with key phrases for SEO:
- Use descriptive filenames.
- Use specific ALT tags and Title attributes for the images.
- Meta information can be supplied in the image file. Make sure this information is relevant.
- Use descriptive captions, and keep relevant copy close to the relevant image.
- Make sure the header tags and images are relevant to each other.

SEO is both a science and an art. Focussing on writing quality content while sticking to a few guidelines when it comes to tags and URLs is the best way to ensure results. Remember, you want search engines to rank you highly for your content, but you also want to ensure that the content is a pleasure to read.

Adding fresh content which carries brand values regularly to your site will also encourage the search engines to crawl your site more frequently.

Use your web site and its pages to establish and reinforce themes. Information can always be arranged in some kind of hierarchical structure. Just as a single page can have a heading and then get broken down into sub-headings, a large web site can have main themes that get broken down into sub-themes. Search engines will see these themes and recognise you as a web site with rich content.

4. link popularity

Links are a vital part of how the Internet works. The purpose of a link is to allow a user to go from one web page to another. Search engines, doing their best to mimic the behaviour of humans, also follow links.

Besides allowing search engine spiders to find web sites, links are also a way of validating relevance and indicating importance. When one page links to another, it is as if that page is voting or vouching for the destination page. Generally, the more votes a web site receives, the more trusted it becomes, the more important it is deemed, and the better it will rank on search engines.

Links help send signals of trust. Signals of trust can only come from a third party source. Few people will trust someone who says, "Don't worry you can trust me" unless someone else, who is already trusted says, "Don't worry, I know him well. You can trust him". It is the same with links and search engines. Trusted sites can transfer trust to unknown sites via links.

Links help to validate relevance. Text links, by their very nature, contain text (thank you, Captain Obvious). The text that makes up the link can help validate relevance. A link like "Cape Town hotel" sends the message that, "You can trust that the destination site is relevant to the term 'Cape Town hotel'." If the destination web page has already used content to send a signal of relevance, the link simply validates that signal.

what does a link look like?

Here is the HTML code for a link:

Anchor Text

http://www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm is the page that the link leads to.
Anchor Text is the text that forms the link.

The link sends a signal that the target URL is important for the subject used in the anchor text.

There is a lot more information that can be included in this anatomy, such as instructions telling the search engine not to follow the link, or instructions to the browser as to whether the link should open in a new window or not.

Anchor Text

rel="nofollow" can be included in links when you don't want to vouch for the target URL. Search engines do not count nofollow links for ranking purposes. It was initially introduced by Google to try to combat comment spam.

Not all links are created equal

Of course, not all links are equal. Some sites are more trusted than others. So if they are more trusted, then links from those sites are worth more. Likewise, some sites are more relevant than others to specific terms. The more relevant a site, the more value is transferred by the link. Well known and established news sites, government sites (.gov) and university domains (.ac) are examples of sites from which links can carry more weighting.

Search algorithms also consider relationships between linked sites. By analysing various things, the engines try to determine if the links are natural links, or if they are manipulative, artificial links created solely for ranking purposes. Manipulated links are worth very little compared to natural links and may lead to a drop in search engine rankings.

The search engine algorithm will also determine the relevancy of the referring web site to the site being linked to. The more relevant the sites are to each other, the better.

how does a web site get more links?

With links playing such a vital role in search engine rankings and traffic for a web site, everyone wants more of them. The more relevant the referring web site is to your web site, the better the link. There are certainly dubious means to generating links, most of which can actually result in being penalised by the search engines. However, here are some ways that ethical and honest web site owners and marketers (and that's what you are) go about increasing links to their web sites:

Writing excellent, valuable content that others want to read

If people find your site useful, they are more likely to link to it. It is not necessary, nor possible, to try to write content that will appeal to the whole Internet population. Focus on being the best in the industry you are in, and in providing value to the members of that community. Make sure that value content is themed around your key phrases.

Create tools and documents that others want to use

Interview experts in your field, and host those interviews on your web site. Think outside the box for quirky, relevant items that people will link to. Calculators are popular tools, and we don't just mean the ones that add two and two together. If you have a web site selling diet books, for example, create a tool that helps users calculate their BMI and target weight.

Games

Creating a game that people want to play is a great way to generate links. Make sure that the theme of the game is based on the key phrases for your web site, so that when others talk about and link to the game, they are using your key phrases!

Software and widgets

Widgets, browser extensions and other useful software that users love to use all help to generate links for a web site. Quirk, has released a Firefox extension called SearchStatus that is exceptionally useful to the SEO community and is downloaded thousands of time each month. Each time someone mentions this SEO tool, they link to Quirk.

WebPR

In the chapter on WebPR you'll learn how taking PR online can provide valuable links to your content. This involves writing content relevant to your industry and then distributing that content.

Competitor analysis

Find out who is linking to your competitors, and which non-competing sites are ranking highly for your key phrases. Use this information to identify sites to target for link requests.

Using Yahoo! search, the following search operators can be used to find these links and web sites:

- Linkdomain:url.com
- Link:http://www.url.com/page.html
- Linkdomain:url.com word
- Linkdomain:url.com –term
- Linkdomain:url.com -site:url.com

With all link building tactics, make sure that you use your key phrases when communicating. You will be telling people how to link to you, and ensuring that search engines notice your authority.

5. emerging trends

SEO is a constantly evolving activity. As the search engine algorithms become more sophisticated, they assess web sites in more complex ways to arrive at suitable search results. There are significant changes on the horizon in how search engines will index and present their results.These changes are aligned with a goal of sorting through the exponentially increasing amounts of data available on the web and giving users better and more targeted search results, which they will find useful.

There are three strong emerging trends for SEO:

- Localisation
- Personalised Search
- Usage data

These three trends are making optimising web sites for search engines even more complex.

localisation and personalisation

The first two trends revolve around how the search engines are trying to accommodate the geographic and personal preferences of a user, so as to present them with the best contextual results. By localising, the search engines are presenting information in the language and geographic context of the user.

In personalising search, the search engines are trying to align with what they have determined would be more appropriate for that specific user. Personalised search targets users preferences on two bases: explicitly and implicity.

Explicit personalised search is based on an interpretation, by the search engines , of data and information the users provide directly to search engines, such as location, age langauage and gender.

Implicit personalised search is based on data and information search engines gather by analysing users' behaviour. So search engines will track the pages they frequently visit or how they use certain sites – such as Gmail or bookmarking sites. Based on this, the search engines will predict what a user is probably interested in and tailor the results it presents to that user accordingly.

Surveys suggest that users are generally in favour of personalisation and are willing to trade personal information to benefit from better quality results from the search engines. Large search engines, like Google, are even offering end-users the opportunity to tell them what results they like – through the launch of user feedback mechanisms such as Google Search Wiki (launched in 2008).This kind of functionality allows the user to tell search engines what results they like or don't like and would like to see (or not) again.

To optimise a site properly, factors like personalisation and localisation need to be taken into account and the site needs to be honed to:
* adapt to how the search engines will measure and index them; and
* how users will expect to be presented with contextualised information.

usage data

Search engines want their results to be highly relevant to web users to make sure that web users keep returning to the search engine for future searches. And the best way to establish relevance to users – how they use web sites, of course!

Usage data is the most effective way of judging the true relevancy and value of a web site. For example, if users arrive on a web site and go back immediately, chances are it wasn't relevant to their query in the first place. However, if a user repeatedly visits a web site and spends a long time on the site, chances are it is extremely relevant. When it comes to search engines, relevant valuable sites get promoted, irrelevant sites get demoted.

how do search engines access this data?

Search engines use cookies to maintain a history of a user's search activity. This will include keywords used, and web sites visited from the search engine. Search engines gather data on the click through rate of results, and on bounce rates.

Most search engines also provide other services, all of which can be used to gather data relevant to search. For Google, some examples include:
* Google AdWords
* Google AdSense
* Google Analytics
* Google Web Site Optimizer
* Google Checkout
* Google Toolbar

As of 2008, this is a very new area of SEO. It no doubt plays a part in search engine rankings, and that contribution is set to grow.

So, what does this mean for SEO? When it comes to a web site, it must:
* Be valuable enough to attract both visitors and links naturally
* Retain visitors and make sure they return to the web site
* Convert visitors

what not to do

Black hat SEO refers to practices which attempt to game the search engines. Should a search engine uncover a web site that is using unethical practices to achieve search engine rankings, it is likely to remove that web site from its index.

Google publishes guidelines for webmasters, available through Google's Webmaster Central (www.google.com/webmasters). As well as outlining best practice principles, Google has supplied the following list of don'ts:
* Avoid hidden text or hidden links.
* Don't use cloaking or sneaky redirects.
* Don't send automated queries to Google.
* Don't load pages with irrelevant keywords.
* Don't create multiple pages, subdomains, or domains with substantially duplicate content.
* Don't create pages with malicious behavior, such as phishing or installing viruses, trojans, or other badware.
* Avoid "doorway" pages created just for search engines, or other "cookie cutter" approaches such as affiliate programs with little or no original content.
* If your site participates in an affiliate program, make sure that your site adds value. Provide unique and relevant content that gives users a reason to visit your site first.

The bottom line: design web sites for users first and foremost, and don't try to trick the search engines.

> **note**
>
> **In 2006, Google found that the BMW Germany web site bmw.de was using a JavaScript URL redirect to send search engine spiders and web visitors to different pages, with different content. It was removed from the Google index until the webmaster had ensured that the web site met Google's guidelines.**

tools of the trade

There are a number of tools available to assist with SEO. Some are made available by search engines, and some are developed by agencies and individuals who specialise in SEO. Most are available for free.

Google Webmaster Tools
URL: www.google.com/webmasters
Google provides guidelines to webmasters, and tools to help ensure your web site is being indexed.

Quirk SearchStatus
URL: www.quirk.biz/searchstatus

Quirk SearchStatus is a Firefox extension that allows you to view easily key SEO information related to the page you are visiting. As well as linking to Alexa and Compete rankings and a Whois look up, Quirk SearchStatus will highlight keywords on a page and allow you to easily access link reports from each of the major search engines.

Tools from SEOBook.com
URL: tools.seobook.com

SEOBook.com provides a number of tools that assist any SEO. For example, Rank Checker is a Firefox extension that allows you to save a number of keywords and to perform regular searches on them, giving you the ranking of your chosen URL for each keyword in the search engines selected. They also have tools to help with keyword discovery.

Tools from SEOMoz
URL: www.seomoz.org/tools

SEOMoz provides a wealth of articles and forums, as well as excellent SEO tools and guides. Some are free, but become a PRO member to access them all.

Keyword discovery tools
There are a number of tools available, some free and some paid for, to assist with keyword discovery. Some include:
Trellion's Keyword Discovery Tool - www.keyworddiscovery.com
Wordtracker - www.wordtracker.com

Online forums
Webmaster World (www.webmasterworld.com) is frequented by SEOs and webmasters aiming to stay current with latest trends and search engine updates.

Google's Free Search Engine Optimisation Guide
URL: http://www.google.com/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf
Google provides a free starter guides, useful for anyone new to SEO.

Google Insights for Search
URL: www.google.com/insights/search

This provides valuable information about search terms you may want to target for SEO purposes. It also provides regional interest (i.e. by geography) for search terms, which is increasingly important as search engines move towards localisation and personalisation in their search focus.

pros and cons

Optimising a web site for search engines should entail optimising the web site for users. Done properly, it should result in a better user experience, while ensuring that search engines index and rank the web site well.

However, it can be tempting to focus on the technicalities of SEO while forgetting that both robots and humans need to read the same web site. One should not be sacrificed for the other.

Search engines update their algorithms regularly. Each update is an attempt to improve search results, but can result in loss of rankings for some web sites, depending on the update. A contingency plan, such as a prepared PPC campaign, needs to be in place to cope with a sudden drop in rankings.

As with any eMarketing practice, SEO should not be the only focus of eMarketing efforts. It works best when part of a holistic eMarketing strategy.

summary

The average web site receives up to 80% of its new traffic from search engines, highlighting the importance of SEO.

There are two types of search results:
- Organic or natural results
- Paid results

SEO aims to improve a web site's ranking in the organic results.

Search engines use algorithms to rank web pages for signs of:
- Relevance
- Importance
- Popularity
- Trust
- Authority

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:
1. A search engine friendly web site structure
2. A well-researched list of key phrases
3. Content optimised to target those key phrases
4. Link popularity
5. Usage data

the bigger picture

Three major trends are affecting how websites need to be optimised, to get the best indexing results for website in the search engines:

- Localisation
- Personalised search
- Usage data

Search engine optimisation can be influenced and enhanced by most other eMarketing campaigns, and they should all be approached with this in mind.

For example:
PPC campaigns can provide valuable keyword research which can then be fed into the SEO strategy.

Social media marketing and viral marketing can both generate an enormous number of links to a web site. Social media such as blogs can be used to add fresh content regularly to a web site.

Emails sent as part of an email marketing campaign can also be published to web sites, creating fresh content for the site. Search engines love fresh content.

WebPR aims to generate links to a web site. Make sure that these are optimised for search engines.

case study: Yachting Partners International

Founded in 1972, Yachting Partners International (YPI) is one of the world's premier yacht brokerage companies, offering services on everything from yacht chartering, acquisitions and sales to construction and management from their head office in England.

The yacht business is extremely competitive, whether online or offline. The YPI website needed to stand out from the crowd and be recognised as the authority on yachting and charter holidays. To ensure that this was possible, the keyword strategy matched these objectives and give YPI prominence on the SERPs.

The SEO strategy dictated a need for high traffic terms rather than niche, long tail phrases. This would ensure that YPI was top of sight for important searches. During the keyword research phase, primary keywords were allocated to the key themes up for optimisation. Secondary and tertiary keywords represented the supporting terms and any relevant synonyms.

Before optimisation, the YPI site didn't have many of the required elements for a **successful SEO campaign**. The technical considerations, essential to a site's success, work hand in hand with traditional, keyword and theme-focused SEO efforts.

The technical considerations that first needed to be addressed included:

Meta Data
The creation of descriptive and unique Meta Descriptions that included keyword dense copy helped reflect the content found on each page while also issuing a call to action for the user on the SERPs.

Title Tags
The title tags were optimised to contain keywords that were specific, and unique to the optimised pages. Used as links on SERPs, the tags were now both keyword rich and enticing.

Header tags
The HTML header tags, with their new keywords, put emphasis on themes by using properly styled and valid HTML markup.

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Validity

Ensuring valid markups enabled the site to be viewed across various web browsers and operating systems, while also allowing search engine spiders to easily navigate and index the site and determine the relevance of the content.

Canonicalisation

This was implemented to ensure that if a user types in, or clicks on a link directing to http://ypi.co.uk that they will be redirected to the correct URL, http://www.ypi.co.uk. This is important to avoid losing out on traffic and 'link juice'.

404 Error Pages

A customised error page provided an enhanced usability perspective. This assisted users who came upon an error page as a result of clicking on a broken link or who had found the site through a page that was still indexed but no longer existent.

Sitemap

Updated and optimised HTML and XML sitemaps were added to the YPI website for seamless navigation by humans or search engine robots.

JavaScript

JavaScript elements added enhanced functionality to the site (that is not present in standard HTML).

Link building, WebPR and PPC

WebPR, link building articles and an additional PPC campaign helped to focus the complete Search Engine Marketing (SEM) package.

The results that occurred after these changes were implemented really speak for themselves. During the initial stages of the optimisation, the Yachting Partners International website had only a handful of inbound links and indexed pages, but currently has **1350 pages indexed** by Google, 7830 indexed by MSN and 1688 by Yahoo! HTML and XML sitemaps have been implemented to assist with search engine indexing.

Yachting Partners International - www.ypi.co.uk

case study questions

1. When it comes to SEO, why should technical considerations be addressed first?
2. What is the importance of optimised header and title tags?
3. How do sitemaps help to increase the number of pages indexed by the search engines?

chapter questions

1. Why do links send signals of trust to search engines?
2. Why is better to have more niche pages of content than fewer pages that cover a lot of content?
3. How can analysing the links to a competitor's web site help aid your own link building strategy?
4. Why is it important for search engines to keep updating their algorithms?
5. If meta data are no longer used for ranking purposes, why do they still have an important role in SEO?

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further reading

www.seomoz.org
– SEOMoz.org provides regular articles, guides and blog posts covering all things SEO. As well as sharing insights from their own SEO efforts, there are also vibrant forums where you can learn from others.

www.seobook.com
– Aaron Wall's SEOBook.com provides training and tools for SEO, as well as regular articles and posts.

www.gottaquirk.com
– the blog from the minds of Quirk, who live, eat and breathe all things Internet.

www.webmasterworld.com
– a forum for webmasters, from beginners to those who've been around. A great resource for a budding SEO.

7. PPC advertising

What's inside: An **introduction**, the **key terms and concepts** that you will need, a **history** of paid search. Looking at **how it works**, we consider who does what and the difference between search and content networks. We look at what makes up a PPC advert, and all important keyword matching. We look into various aspects of PPC advertising, and of course **planning and setting up a campaign**. There is a brief overview of **online comparison engines**, the **tools of the trade**, and the **pros and cons** of setting up a campaign. There is a chapter **summary** and checking out **how it all fits together.**