

It's All About Visibility

This chapter looks at the critical tasks for getting your message found on the web. Now that we've discussed how to prepare a clear targeted message using the right words (Chapter 5, "The Audience Is Listening (What Will You Say?)"), we describe how online visibility depends on search engine optimization (SEO) "eat your broccoli" basics, such as lightweight and crawlable website code, targeted content with useful labels, and inlinks.

In addition, you can raise the visibility of your website, products, and services online through online advertising such as paid search advertising, outreach through social websites, and display advertising.

Who Sees What and How

Two different tribes visit your website: people, and entities known as web spiders (or crawlers or robots). People will experience your website differently based on their own characteristics (their visual acuity or impairment), their browser (Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, and so on), and the machine they're using to view your website (a TV, a giant computer monitor, a laptop screen, or a mobile phone). Figure 8.1 shows a page on a website as it appears to website visitors through a browser.

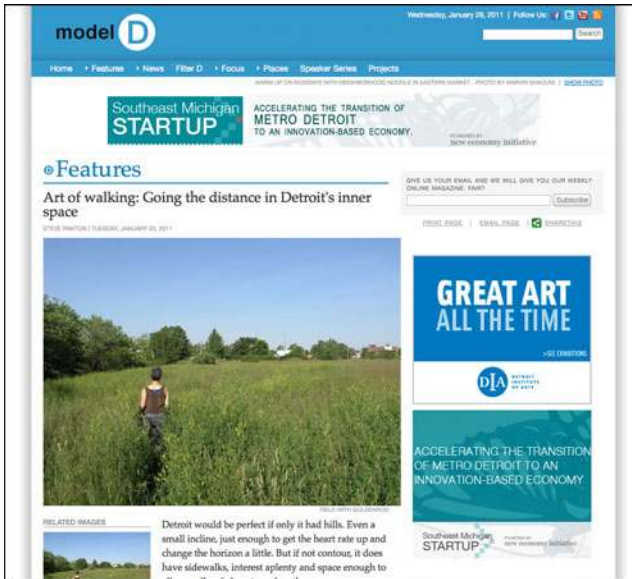


Figure 8.1 Screenshot of a story page on Model D, a web magazine about Detroit, Michigan, www.modeldmedia.com.

What Search Engine Spiders See

The web spiders are computer programs critical to your business because they help people who don't know about your website through your marketing efforts find it through the search engines. The web spiders “crawl” through your website to learn about what it contains and carry information back to the gigantic servers behind the search engines, so that the search engine can provide relevant results to people searching for your product or service. The web spider reads the source code of the web page and linked files.

Generally speaking, web spiders do not see anything beyond basic HTML, so any content on the page that's generated through JavaScript, Flash, or digital images on your website will not be indexed by them.

You can approximate what a spider sees by viewing your website through a screen-reader, like Lynx. Or you can “fetch as Googlebot” from within Google Webmaster Tools. They see the source code shown in Figure 8.2.

```
<h1>Features</h1>
<div id="main-content" class="content-block" >
  <h1 class="featureTitle">Art of walking: Going the distance in Detroit's inner space</h1>
  <div class="byline">
    <span class="author">Steve Panton</span> |
    <span class="date">Tuesday, January 25, 2011</span>
  </div>
</div class="featureHeadhead">

<div class="photoCredit">Field with Goldenrod</div>
```

Figure 8.2 What a web spider sees on this page, its underlying source code. On line 228 of that source code is the headline “Art of walking.”

Web spiders index your content so that they can provide relevant results to search engine users. In this way, web spiders are gatekeepers for finding new visitors for your website. People may click through the search engine result (organic search or paid search) and become a website visitor. Enticing them to do so is your goal!

What Search Engine Visitors See

Because search engine visitors are a potentially huge source of traffic and business for your website, it is important to consider how your website appears in search engine results pages (SERPs). A sample SERP is shown in Figure 8.3.

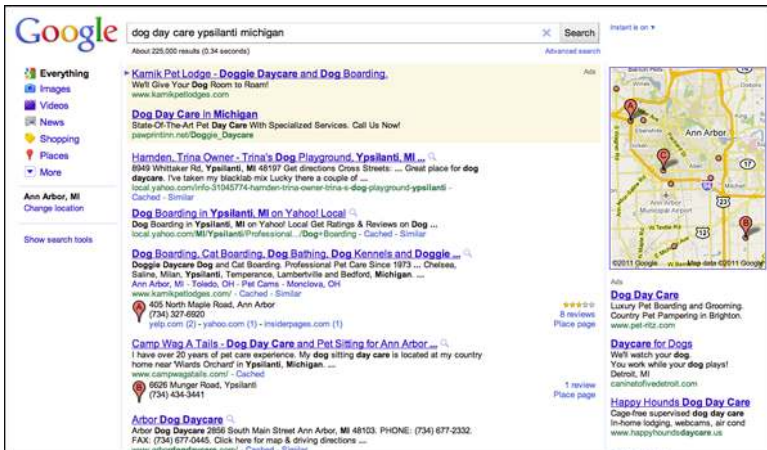


Figure 8.3 SERP for search for “dog day care ypsilanti michigan,” showing the organic results in the main part of the page and paid search ads above the organic results in the shaded box and on the right sidebar.

The search engine results display and blend different content types. They show organic and paid search results, as detailed in Table 8.1. The organic search results contain several types of information; “classic” text results, local search listings, images, videos, news, and even recipes may also appear on organic SERPs, depending on the search keywords.

Table 8.1 Types of Content on SERPs

What	How
Text organic search results (that is, natural search results)	Results are shown from all pages indexed by the search engine crawlers based on the search engine’s determination of which pages are relevant to the search query. The SERP displays the <title> tag and the <meta> description from your website’s code. The <title> tag is linked to your web page.
Google Places listings	Places listings may or may not appear. Their presence depends on whether the search keywords have a local component. These are similar to text search results, but are extended with a physical address and phone number. These listings can be identified easily with the lettered map “pins” adjacent to the address information within the entry on the left column. These pins refer to locations in the map at the upper right.
News, images, videos, real-time results, recipes, books	These may or may not appear, depending on whether these information types match the search keywords. These categories of results are not shown in Figure 8.3. These types of results have a category title (for example, “videos for best smoothie”) that links to a longer search results page. The “everything” search results page shows the top results taken from the longer page. See Figure 8.8 for an example with images in the search results page.
Paid search results (that is, pay per click [PPC] or sponsored search)	Results are shown from the set of advertisers on the user’s query based on the advertiser’s bid for that phrase and the search engine’s determination of relevancy or quality. The paid search ad displays a headline, one or two lines of content depending on where it is placed on the page, and then a website URL. The headline links to the advertiser’s website.

SEO is the process of making a website more visible on the SERP for relevant keyphrases. According to the Pew Research Center, half of all Americans use search engines on a daily basis,¹ so optimizing for organic search can have a huge impact on your overall traffic.

Search engines crawl websites across the Internet to identify which websites to display in response to a search query. Different web crawlers seek out and index

1 Pew Internet & American Life Project, www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/258/report_display.asp.

different types of information. For instance, Google has specific web crawlers for news, images, video, and even mobile websites.

They then assess the content and display the websites that have content matching the words used in the search. At a tactical level, SEO involves making sure that your website is properly configured to allow these crawlers to find your content and easily identify its theme.

The core of SEO is the website content. Search engine crawlers consider what words you use, where they are positioned, and whether they match the terms that people actually use when searching. Google, Yahoo!, and Bing then determine the rank of a website based on their assessment of how relevant it is to the particular goals of the person executing the search.

Writing Web Content for Users and Spiders: On-Site Optimization

So, we know that we need to create information that is visible to both people and search engine spiders so that the web spiders can help the people who do not yet know you find your website. Good news, though. These two audiences need pretty much the same thing: content relevant to keyphrases used for search.

Search engine ranking algorithms on the gigantic servers owned by the search engines match user queries with website results. The algorithms use information that is seen by the website visitor in their indexing and ranking of the website.

However, search engine spiders have a more limited understanding than people and pay attention to information that regular website visitors will not even see: the metadata about the content of the web page. In this section, we discuss on-page optimization for the pages on your website, as either part of your main website or part of a blog associated with your website.

Page-Level SEO Best Practices

A best practice for people and spider satisfaction is to focus each page of your website on a single concept, keyword, keyphrase, or set of related terms. Make the website a great destination to learn more about your topic. If that's the case, you won't be keyword stuffing your page; you just need to use the phrase a few times to explain yourself.

For spiders especially, provide clear and consistent labeling of each page in associated metadata, such as the page's URL, its Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) title, and in structurally important elements of the page, such as header text.

“On-page” SEO is what you need to do on your own website. We also discuss off-page optimization in the “Increase Your Findability via Local Search and Link Building” section, later in this chapter. On-page optimization starts by targeting a single keyword or keyphrase (or occasionally two or more closely related keyphrases) on individual pages of your website.

Each page in the website should target unique phrases that are not already targeted by other pages. In general, the keywords or keyphrases that you choose to target should be ones that a search engine user would type into a search engine.

The core on-page factors are as follows:

- **HTML page title:** Include the exact keyword phrase in the HTML page title. Try to include the most important phrases at the beginning of the HTML page title and, at least, make sure they are within about the first 64 characters.

For punctuation, use a colon, pipe character, or hyphen (: | or -) to separate words or phrases in your HTML page title. Include a space between words so that they do not run up next to each other.

Take advantage of this space to say something unique and useful about each page on the website.

- **Page narrative/content:** Include the exact keyword phrase (and possibly variations) in the body text of the page a few times, while keeping the content meaningful and “human friendly.” Incorporate the target keyphrase into heading tags (particularly the `<h1>` tag) wherever possible.

Note: When you target a particular page with a unique keyphrase, you can still use that phrase in the copy on other pages.

- **Inbound links:** Link to the page from other pages or from your website’s navigation using the keyword phrase (or variations) as the link anchor text.
- **Image alt attributes:** Use descriptive phrases in alt attributes of images and image links, incorporating the target keyphrase where reasonable. `` (image) alt tags are becoming less critical for search engines, but remain important for accessibility for the vision impaired.
- **Page URL:** Incorporate the target keyphrase in the page URL. Use dashes rather than underscores to separate words within the phrase.

Generally, the most important elements for optimization are the HTML title and the anchor text of the links pointing to the page. `<Meta>` descriptions are also included in on-page optimization, although they are not factored into Google rankings.

<Meta> descriptions are used for a website listing's description on a SERP, however, so it is important to have an accurate and enticing <meta> description to engage those reviewing search engine results to click through to your website. If the <meta> description is not filled out, interesting and nonsensical things can happen, as in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4 is a search for one of the four high schools in Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Pioneer. Figure 8.5 is a search for Ann Arbor's Huron High School. Although these two public high schools are in the same school district, they have different content in their search results because Ann Arbor Huron has taken more care of the tagging on its home page.

From the SERP, it appears that Ann Arbor Pioneer lacks a <meta> description, and so Google has substituted some text from the page for the description. Ann Arbor Huron has a <meta> description and therefore has a better description displaying on the SERP.

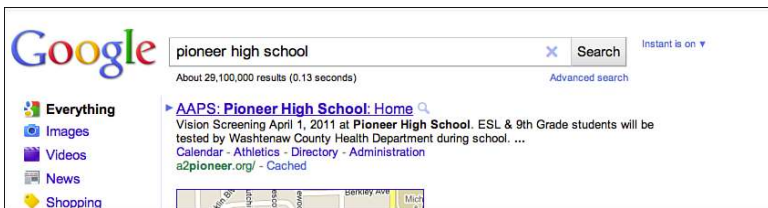


Figure 8.4 A screenshot from a search for Ann Arbor's Pioneer High School.

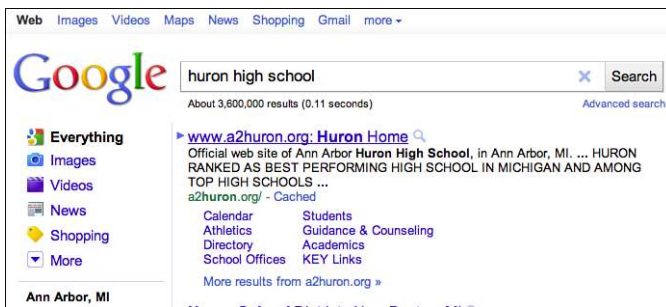


Figure 8.5 A search for Ann Arbor's Huron High School.

Page-Level SEO Guide: An Example

When retouching on-page content to increase its visibility for key terms, we typically go page by page through a website, emphasizing a key target phrase or concept on each page. In Tables 8.2 and 8.3, we detail the current state and recommended updates for a hypothetical puppy training company website, Happy Puppy.

Table 8.2 Proposed HTTP Meta Tag Changes

Tag	Current	Recommended Update
URL	http://www.example.com	
Targets	puppy training	
Title	<title>Home - Happy Puppy</title>	<title>Train your puppy now - First Classes Free - Train your dog with Happy Puppy</title>
Meta	<meta name="description" content="PupCMS - the premiere and secure Content Management System for Puppy Training Companies." />	<meta name="description" content="Puppy training from Happy Puppy allows you to enjoy a well-behaved, happy dog." />
Alt	Missing	http://www.example.com/images/home/start-puppy-training-happy-puppy.gif alt="Start your Puppy Training at Happy Puppy" http://www.example.com/images/learn-more-puppy-training.gif alt="Sign up to Learn More about Puppy Training at Happy Puppy" http://www.example.com/images/trained-puppy-happy.jpg alt="A trained puppy is a happy puppy at Happy Puppy"

Table 8.3 shows the current narrative text on the page and the proposed SEO improvements to the content.

Table 8.3 Proposed Narrative Changes

Current Narrative	New Narrative
Bulleted points saying "First classes free"	"Puppy Training Classes Free"
You will train FAST & EASY with Happy Puppy!	You and your puppy will enjoy training at Happy Puppy! Puppy training is FAST, EASY, & ENJOYABLE at Happy Puppy.
Start your training.	Start your puppy training .

Case Study: Call It What It Is to Increase Findability

In 2008, we consulted with a company that had named its website categories by internal categories rather than by what its target customers were calling its product. They thought of themselves as a real estate company, and they had called their apartments “properties” in the navigation and in the directory structure of their website. Well, their potential customers were not looking for “properties,” they were looking for “apartments.”

Our client made one change to their website navigation, holding the rest of the website relatively static as they were in the midst of a website redesign. They changed the link to this section and the directory holding this section to “apartments” from “properties,” and realized a 10% increase year over year in organic page views within this section as a result. We also built a few links for them during the year in between, but renaming that directory was a least a contributor to that jump in visibility.

Special Considerations: Blogging for SEO Benefit

Blogs definitely increase the search engine-relevant content on your website. They provide a less-formal venue to discuss timely topics and keep your website up to date. For some clients, they can generate as much as two-thirds of the organic visits to the website (see Figure 8.6). The book *Blogging to Drive Business: Create and Maintain Valuable Customer Connections* by Eric Butow and Rebecca Bollwitt (Que Biz-Tech, 2010) provides a thorough overview of the whys and hows of corporate blogging.

After you’ve committed to an editorial schedule, recruited your authors, and set up your blog platform, it’s time to make sure it is optimized for search. Blog posts should have the same level of on-page optimization as a regular website page has, which means making sure whatever blog platform you are using allows the <title> tag, <meta> tag, and <alt> tags to be edited. Many blog platforms, such as WordPress, have SEO-oriented plug-ins to accomplish this.

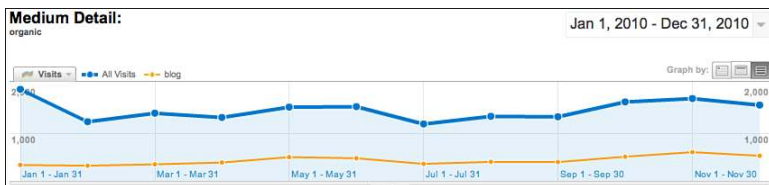


Figure 8.6 A screenshot from Google Analytics showing blog visits (orange) and all visits (blue) to a website. In this case, the blog is generating about one-third of the organic traffic to the website.

Any entry on your blog may be your “front door,” the first experience of someone who has not previously visited your website or knows your company. For this reason, your blog template should include context on your company and prominent calls to action for folks to take the logical next step: learn more, purchase something, or sign up for a newsletter.

Blogging Best Practices

To maximize the SEO effect from your blog posts, make sure you

- **Blog frequently and regularly:** In a survey of Fortune 100 companies in early 2010, the Burson-Marsteller Evidence-Based Communications Group found that 33% of these companies had blogs, and of those that had blogs, they posted an average of seven posts per month.
- **Keep posts succinct** and focused on a single topic.
- **Turn on “human-readable” or “clean” URLs** so that your optimized blog titles get fed into your blog post URLs.
- **Make it clear how the visitor can learn more** or become a contact through prominent calls to action.
- **Use a descriptive title** that emphasizes key terms you are targeting. A blog is a nice place to target variations of your website’s keyword phrases. Use your priority keywords or keyphrases in the beginning of the title to gain the most SEO benefit.
- **Use SEO plug-ins** to allow authors to customize the metadata (<title> tag, <meta> description tag, image alt tags) for pages and page content. Then fill these in! You might want to appoint a separate SEO editor from the writer if this is too detail oriented for the people you have tapped to write blog content.
- **Consider a third-party SEO plug in**, such as Scribe for WordPress (<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/scribe/>), to provide feedback to authors on their posts prepublication.

WHERE TO HOUSE MY BLOG?

A common question is where to host the blog. Should it be at the subdomain blog.example.com? Or should it go in a subdirectory such as example.com/blog?

The answer is, it depends on your goal:

- For SEO purposes, it is better that your blog be a subdirectory on your main domain, because Google thinks of blog.example.com as a different entity than example.com/anything. As a subdirectory, all the inlinks to your blog entries and the rich content will be associated with your domain.
- But, for reputation management, if you want to really own the first SERP, you get another entry or two if you use the subdirectory, as shown in Figure 8.7.

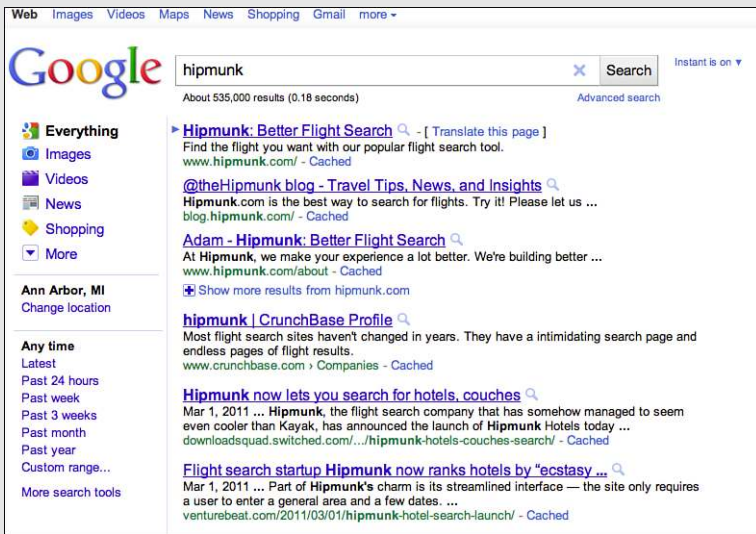


Figure 8.7 The blog subdomain earns travel website Hipmunk an “extra” entry at the top of this SERP, useful for reputation management.

Get Out of Your Own Way: Make Sure Your Content Is Findable

Now that you have the creative messaging planned out, the technical side of SEO is a matter of making sure you don't get in your own way by impeding the search engine spiders from finding your message. It's the “eat your broccoli” basics of web design and development: making sure that you have checked off a bunch of little details on a list.

We start by going back to basics. We outline the mechanics of web pages just enough to understand the requirements for online visibility through the technical side of SEO. Our goal is to provide a working knowledge of the components so that you can have a conversation with your development team about the business requirements for findability online.

A Digression into the Guts of Web Code

You won't need any coding experience for this book, nor for this chapter. But a few of the concepts require a basic understanding of web code to digest the screenshots of actual web code supporting some of the technical discussion.

A web page consists of text and images that can be displayed in a web browser. The browser knows what to display by reading the source code of the page in HTML, which defines the content (words, pictures, videos), its layout, its structure, and format. You might think of HTML like detailed set of instructions for a painting we're asking the browser to draw.

An HTML file is a text file that can be read by a browser (such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome or Safari, to name a few) or by a text editor on your computer, such as Notepad on a PC or TextEdit on a Mac. The text file contains content and tags.

The tags, which start and end with brackets, define structural elements/formatting. Each HTML file has some basic tags wrapping the information: the opening and closing HTML tags and the opening and closing tags defining the `<head>` and `<body>` sections of the file.

In the abstract, here is a basic HTML page:

```
<html>
<head>
  Here are my page descriptors
</head>
<body>
  Here is my page content
</body>
</html>
```

The `<head>` tags contain basic data about the file, called metadata, which is simply data about the data in the file. This includes items such as the character set of the information about the page and some descriptors of the information such as its `<title>` and summary (`<meta>` description). It can contain links to useful things like style sheets in use to format the display of the information, and links to script files in use on the page such as Google Analytics.

The `<body>` tags contain what is shown on the page in the browser, the body copy, links to image files, links to video files, the on-page navigation and so forth. Within

the <body> tags, we can specify a hierarchy of information, from first, second, and third level headlines <h1><h2><h3> on down to bulleted lists and general paragraph text <p>. The body also contains links to other media that will be displayed on the page, such as an image or a YouTube video:

```
<body>
  <h1>Here is my Headline including key target phrases for SEO</h1>
  <p>This is my text. I might use this paragraph to describe a concept that needs an illustration using the target phrases that sounds natural. </p>
  
  <h2>Second level headline</h2>
  <p>More text. And here's a <a href="http://example.com/different-page.html">link to a different page of my website</a>.</p>
</body>
```

WEB CODE IN THE WILD

When viewing a web page in a browser you can always request to view the underlying source code by choosing View Page Source from a right-click menu or the View menu (specifics of where to find this menu item depend on your browser). Websites vary in their complexity. Google's very simple home page, a white page with a search box, has complicated-looking source code, as shown in Figure 8.8.

```
<!doctype html><html><head><meta http-equiv="content-type" content=
b)(var a=new Image,e=google,g=e.lc,f=e.li;a.onerror=(a.onload=(a.on
Toolbelt:})();(function(){var c=google.j;window.onpopstate=function(
if(!window.chrome)window.chrome={};window.chrome.sv=1.00;
window.google.sn="webhp";var i=window.google.timers={};window.googl
)catch(v){}
</script><style id=gstyle>body{margin:0;overflow-y:scroll}#gg<div id=
google.y={};google.x=function(e,g){google.y[e.id]=[e,g];return fals
b(d).replace(/\+/g,"%2B"),"sei=","KJasTc6jF4qERQGUslXICg",h?"&usg="
(function(){try{var d=true,l=false;var m=window.gbar=window.gbar||{
var q={},r={},u=[];v=function(a){return a in q,w=[m],gc=[],uf:[]
n("bmc",a);n("gGC","B");n("gd",w);n("mdd","");n("has",v);n("cri",D);n
var l=function(){for(var a=[],c=0,b;B=E[c];++c){b=document.getElemente
f=e.firstChild,g=document.createElement("li");g.className="c" gmbtc
B=document.createElement("div");t.className="gmbtc";H.className="gb
n("addExtraLink",ga);n("pcm",ha);n("paa",ia);n("qs",F);var ja=[];q.
var N=tvn("l",0),ka=function(a){var c,b;if((c=a.id)&&b="/^gb_{\d+}
(c.className+="{k!=""?" ":"")+i)}}catch(t){G(t)}N=a);n("gsj",ka);n("
var Q=function(){},Q=function(){},T=function(a){var c=new Image,b=R
function ra(a,c){var b=pa,e=a<14?a==7||a==8||a==12?l:d:l;if(e)b=
q.1l+ta;var ua=function(){m.prm&&m.prm()});M("gbd4",ua);var va={g: t
function_mlToken(a,c){try{if(W<1){W++;var b,e,a,f=c||{,g=encodeURIComponent
var X=function(a){return a.length>=2E3},wa=function(a,c){return c};
var S=[],ya=function(a){S[0]=a},za={signed:S,elog:G,base:"https://p
function Aa(){function a(){for(var j;j=g[h++];)if(j[0]==="m")j[1].a
</script></head><body bgcolor=#ffffff text=#000000 link=#0000cc vll
if(google.y)google.y.first=[];if(!google.xjB){google.dsr=[];google
function e(){var a=null;if(window.ActiveXObject){a=new ActiveXObje
false;c.appendChild(d.createTextNode(a));d.body.appendChild(c);d.bo
h:false,a:"Google",u:"",d:false;var a=e();if(a){a.open("GET","/ig/
)});}catch(e){google.ml(e,false,{cause:'defer'})};if(google.med){g
var b,d,e,f;function g(a,c){if(a.removeEventListener){a.removeEvent
h,false)else{k.attachEvent("onload",h);k.attachEvent("onerror",h)}
})();}
</script>
```

Figure 8.8 Just for fun, a screenshot of some of the source for Google.com. This is all formatting code, to control the display of the few elements on the page (in essence, the Google logo and the Search box).

Watch Your Web Technologies

Some ways of creating web pages are better than others for SEO. For instance, some website navigation menus are created with JavaScript. Others with cascading style sheets (CSS). Some are beautiful images of words, whereas others are actual text. Text menus are better for search engine spiders than menus that have pictures of words in them.

Use JavaScript appropriately. Search engine spiders don't execute JavaScript. CSS is better for navigation, but if JavaScript is used, be sure to include `<noscript>` tags for search engine spiders to follow, elaborating on your website's content.

For example, some websites accidentally hide interesting information behind search forms on their website. We had a client who sold used expensive vehicles, and their sales listings listed the vehicle make, model and year, and then had a (Learn More) button that was wrapped in JavaScript with an `onClick` action.

When clicked, it took the visitor to a longer detailed filled page, with specifications and photos, of that vehicle. As far as the search engine spiders knew, that detailed page did not exist. We had them replace the image with a text link so that the crawlers could find and index the page.

Content management systems (CMSs) provide unique challenges and opportunities for SEO. Many available CMSs have useful SEO plug-ins available to enable search engine best practices.

You should enable these key functions:

- Human-readable URLs. Some CMS systems allow you to automatically create customized URLs based on title, taxonomy, content type, and username. Think carefully, though, about how you want URLs to look to comply with guidelines for including key terms in the page URL.
- Customizable `<meta>` description tags and `<title>` tags.
- Ability to create and update `<alt>` descriptions for images.
- Automatically creating/maintaining a `sitemap.xml` in the root directory, if possible.
- Customizing your `robots.txt` file to point to your `sitemap.xml` if it is not in the root directory.

Take Advantage of Universal Search: Tag Your Media Files with Target Keywords

Media such as images and videos are increasingly included in SERPs. A query for “day care” turns up images on the first page. These include a few still images from

the movie *Daddy Day Care*, a logo for a particular daycare provider (which has the term *day care* in its filename), and an image of blocks with the word *daycare* in its filename (see Figure 8.9).

A query for “learn to knit” turns up video tutorials on Google’s first page. Optimizing your multimedia files for key terms gives your company a chance to appear on page one of Google, even for competitive terms. This is in part because people have not yet turned their full attention to optimizing their media files, which gives those who have done so an edge over their sleeping competition.

Because the spiders understand the content of video and image files less well than the text tagging applied to these files, take advantage of all of the tagging you can. Label your image and video files using a keyword-laden filename, provide relevant and informative `` text describing what is contained in the file, and place the image or video on a page relevant to those terms.

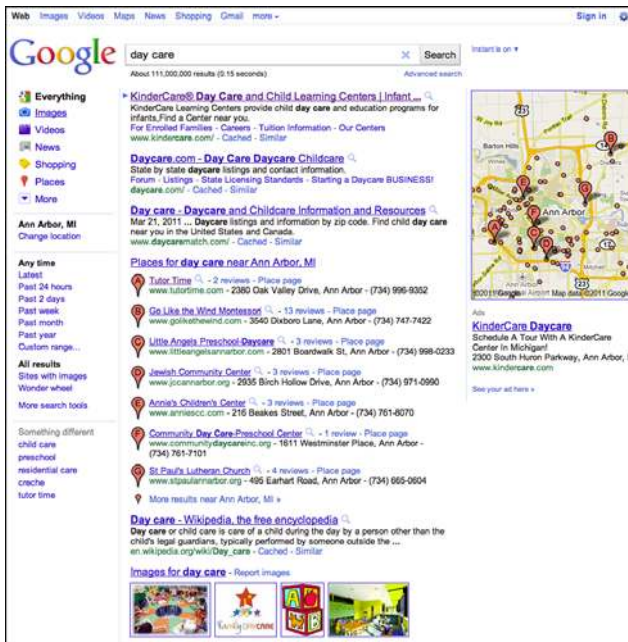


Figure 8.9 Google SERP showing day care images in the middle of the first page of results.

Avoid Using Multimedia for Critical and Unique SEO Content

Web spiders, for the most part, understand what is written out in the web page’s source code. So, the very best place to emphasize key target terms is within the on-page text elements within the `<body>` tag of your HTML file.

The corollary to this rule is do not limit key terms to elements that are invisible or less visible to spiders, such as videos, images, Flash animations, or the cool new multimedia type of the moment. Search engine spiders do not read and index information within image and media files as well as they capture text information; they read text best.

Sometimes, an animation or a video is crucial to communicate a complex topic or to provide a particular experience desired or required by branding or other concerns. If Flash is critical for some reason, consider externalizing the text elements from the Flash SWF in an XML file as described here, or providing alternative text versions for all content contained in Flash files. This substitution, though, will not replace the value of on-page *text* content for SEO, because greater emphasis is placed by the search engines on content on the page.

Similarly, if a video conveys something you would like people to find, make sure you provide appropriate metadata on the video content to help someone find the video. And, if your video will be hosted off site, such as on YouTube, include a call to action within the video itself and within your YouTube profile to entice people to take a next step by calling you, purchasing something from your online store, or whatever action may be relevant.

By all means, use video and Flash animations on your website, just do not make them the sole source for your content. Be sure to incorporate the information within your video or Flash animation into the adjacent text on your website.

Have Fun with Widgets, but Avoid Putting Interesting and Relevant Content Inside Frames

Frames were initially used in web design and development to provide consistent navigation elements across a set of pages. You might remember them, the “page” in your browser was chopped up into many sections, typically the top navigation, and maybe a sidebar on the left, and then a larger content area in the middle/right. Each of those subsections might have had its own scrollbar. The frameset typically had a single URL with changing content based on clicks in the top or left-side frame.

Frames prevented the easy retrieval of content deep within a website, because without a few tricks, it was difficult to link to information in the content section of the frame directly. Better technologies have replaced frames for consistent website navigation, so the era of frames should be over.

Yet, frames seem to be sneaking back into websites in the form of iframes from third-party widgets. Be aware that many widgets offered by third-party websites (including Google Maps, Google Calendar, and some social feed widgets) are iframes and therefore obscure the content they contain from search engine spiders.

For this, we use ourselves as an example. We wanted an easy-to-maintain calendar for our upcoming speaking events on our website, so we used Google Calendar (Figure 8.10). Yet, the titles and dates of these events are not content available to web spiders from our website (Figure 8.11). Note: Since the time these screenshots were captured, we've replaced the calendar widget on our website.

Figure 8.10 This Speaking Engagements list includes details for a couple of our “Donuts and Search Marketing” talks.

```
<h2>Speaking Engagements</h2>
<div class="entry">
  <h3>Upcoming Pure Visibility Events:</h3>
  <iframe src="http://www.google.com/calendar/hosted/purevisibility.com/embed?
showTitle=0&mode=AGENDA&height=500&wkst=1&bgcolor=#23FFFFFF&src=events%
@purevisibility.com&color=#235229A3&ctz=America%2FNew_York" style=" border-width:0 " width="500"
height="500" frameborder="0" scrolling="no"></iframe>
```

Figure 8.11 Yet, the code for the calendar widget is an iframe, and so information a visitor sees is actually not “on the page” for the search engine spider to find.

Widgets can be a nice shortcut to get information from other sources, such as external calendars, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, LinkedIn, or more, onto your website. Just make sure you're not shortchanging your SEO by using them. Check out your own website's widgets. You can tell by inspecting the code. Is the content of the widget written into the source code of the page? Or is it a reference to an external script?

Don't Spread Yourself Too Thin: Consolidate Your Content Power on Your Main Domain

Sometimes corporate marketing departments use microsites to promote temporary events, such as a user conference or as a destination page for an offline marketing campaign. Sometimes these microsites are used to get around restrictive or overwhelmed internal IT departments who cannot create suitable pages within the main website's domain.

Ideally, all your content should be available from your domain, interlinked and providing the web spiders with the complete picture of your offering and communications. If you must build a microsite, consider placing it in a subdirectory on your main domain; so instead of `exampleuserconferencemay2011.com`, make it `example.com/microsites/userconferencemay2011.com`.

Crawler Control: Speak to Your Spiders

Although web spiders try to index as much of a website as possible for a search engine, it is possible to manage and influence these web spider programs. Crawlers look to a specific file on your web server, `robots.txt`, to guide their behavior. Help them get information that they normally would be unable to get, such as any data that is dynamically generated through a query to a database.

Use Robots.txt to Guide Crawler Behavior on Your Website

If you want all of your website to be crawled, you need not bother with a `robots.txt` file. If you want to limit crawler behavior, however, you can share your preferences about which crawlers go where, by providing rules in your `robots.txt` file.

You might want to limit crawler behavior on your website to inhibit crawlers from soaking up too much of your web server's bandwidth (when working on your website they can request lots of files very quickly), but more likely you would do this to influence which of your pages would appear in search results.

The `robots.txt` file is a simple text file with a specific syntax. It starts by identifying which user-agent should be restricted by the rule to follow. You might choose all user-agents with the asterisk character or name a particular user-agent, such as Googlebot. Then, you specify any rules for the crawlers by listing all files or directories where the agent is not allowed.

If you have many PDFs on your website that are printer-friendly versions of content already available on the website as HTML, you might let the robots know not to bother with the PDF files. The motivation for this restriction is that you'd prefer that the HTML pages show up in search results, instead of the PDFs, because opening another program (and the extra delay in loading the PDF) provides a worse user experience.

To disallow all PDF files, you might place them all in a /pdf/ directory and restrict crawler access to that directory on your web server, like this:

```
User agent: *  
Disallow: /pdf/
```

You can find more information about syntax and use cases for the robots.txt file at www.robotstxt.org. You can use Google Webmaster Tools to create and test your robots.txt files.

Keep in mind that simply not allowing access using robots.txt is not sufficient to protect private information. Password protection and a secure https:// connection are minimum requirements for online security.

Using Sitemaps to Expose Content Behind Firewalls and Within Databases

Websites that contain either content behind a firewall or large amounts of database-related content that can be retrieved only by filling out a web form often face serious SEO challenges. It is very likely in a Google-driven world that visitors will search on terms that can be surfaced on a website only through a database search, or that is not directly available without a login. But those very searches can be tremendously valuable to drive traffic to a website.

The solution to both problems is the use of the Extensible Markup Language (XML) sitemap, which explicitly surfaces pages of content that can be used to guide web spiders unable to manage the complexities of firewalls or database forms. You can find information about the sitemap.xml protocol at the official website: <http://sitemaps.org/protocol.php>. This excellent website provides you with both the protocol details and its history.

We recommend this as your starting point. The next step is to prepare your own sitemap, by hand coding it if you are ambitious, using a plug-in for your CMS, or using a third-party spider to locate the pages and then editing the results. You can generate a basic sitemap for your website using this free tool: www.xml-sitemaps.com. Google Webmaster Central also provides thorough documentation on the use of XML sitemaps.

Managing Database-Driven Content Through Sitemap.xml

The essential function of sitemap.xml in database-driven environments is to explicitly surface page results that normally would be delivered through a database search. The only technical requirement in this model is that the database-driven search be returned to the browser using explicit uniform resource identifier (URI) parameters that also can be placed into the sitemap.xml file to regenerate the results of this search for the search engine spiders.

Here's an anonymized example from a client's `sitemap.xml` file, where the URI for a map search in East Green Bush, New York, includes the following parameters:

```
start_city=East+Greenbush&start_state=NY&start_zip=12061
```

This URI needs to be included in the `<loc>` parameter for the XML entry so that the page can be resolved by web spiders examining the sitemap.

The following is an example from the website's `sitemap.xml` file to instruct the spiders to find this URI-parameter pages that would normally be delivered after a form-based database search. It shows the specific URI for the Greenbush location within the tags of the `sitemap.xml` format:

```
<url>
<loc>http://www.example.com/locate/start_city=East+Greenbush&start
_state=NY&start_zip=12061</loc>
<priority>0.3</priority>
</url>
```

Managing Searches for Content Hidden by a Firewall

Content behind a firewall is a different challenge. Even if a website's content is behind a firewall, the content may still be a candidate for search. The goal of a sitemap in this situation is to create "landing pages" that effectively tell the visitor a website is capable of delivering this content but that it requires a login to do so.

The implementation of this from the sitemap's perspective is similar to database-driven page results. The website developer must then generate these pages, either dynamically or otherwise, that act as a call to action to the visitor to enroll for the service that is hidden behind the firewall.

Implementing Your Sitemap.xml

Bring any content on your website behind filters or search queries to the surface by populating your `sitemap.xml` with a parameter-based URI that leads directly to the content.

1. Create an XML sitemap (`sitemap.xml`) that includes a full list of eligible uniform resource locators (URLs) that return content behind filters or web forms.
2. Place the `sitemap.xml` into the root directory of your website. If you can't place the `sitemap.xml` file into the root directory, point to its location in the `robots.txt` file.
3. Double-check your page count within Google Webmaster Tools to ensure Google's spiders count the same number of pages you expect.

4. Update the `sitemap.xml` as new information is added by appending additional lines to the `sitemap.xml` document for new available results.

You can use the `robots.txt` file to tell the web spiders where to find your `sitemap.xml` file. Simply add this line to your `robots.txt` file:

```
Sitemap: http://www.example.com/sitemap.xml
```

Your development team may be able to automate the process of building and updating your `sitemap.xml` behind the scenes, as part of your deployment process.

Submit These Files to Google Webmaster Tools

Let Google know about your `robots.txt` and `sitemap.xml` files by submitting their location within your Google Webmaster Tools account. Submit your `sitemap.xml` file under Sitemaps and your `robots.txt` file under Crawler access, shown in Figure 8.12.

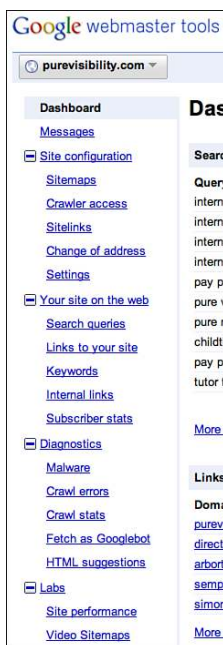


Figure 8.12 Google Webmaster Tools sidebar, available at <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home?hl=en>.

Technical Requirements: Canonical URLs

You'll have noticed that there are several ways to type a URL:

- <http://www.example.com>

- <http://www.example.com/>
- www.example.com
- www.example.com/
- example.com
- example.com/

These should be entirely synonymous, but are sometimes treated differently by web servers. We've encountered many websites where the URL that is not preceded by "www." returns a 505 Page Not Found error. Yikes!

Ideally, all these variants of your URL would redirect to each other. You can set your preference for with or without the "www." subdomain for Google in your Google Webmaster Tools dashboard, as shown in Figure 8.13. However, you also want to review your web server settings to handle URLs with and without a trailing slash.

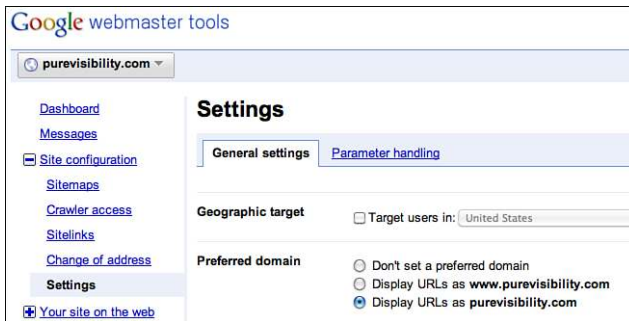


Figure 8.13 You can set your preference for "www." or not in Google results, using the Google Webmaster Tools settings.

Advanced Canonical URLs Database-driven websites have some other potential issues for web crawlers. If you can get to the same item in very different ways through searches or categories on a larger database driven website, and if the searches or categories are reflected in the URL, your website may have a factorial set of URL possibilities.

For instance, if you can get to a particular leash (the Frisky Freddie leash) on the Happy Puppy website a couple of different ways, perhaps by browsing within the leashes category (arriving at example.com/leash.php?item=frisky-freddie) and by browsing within the small dog accessories (arriving at example.com/small-dog-accessories.php?item=frisky-freddie&category=leashes).

This duplication of content across multiple retrieval methods causes issues for a couple of important reasons:

- **Slowed web server response times:** The web server would be crawling your website and attempting to access all of the unique filenames. Having it access the same information through different URL paths could put unnecessary demands on your web server and potentially slow response times for actual shoppers on your website.

After it reads the content, Google would then realize it's a duplication and ignore the "extra" copies, picking one of the copies from its list. So, you wouldn't benefit from "extra entries" in the index for your extra pages.

- **Valuable inlinks may be squandered:** People would link to your content across the set of possible URLs. Yet, Google, having discarded the extra copies of your information in its index, would only use inlinks to the indexed URL. Therefore, inlinks to nonindexed URLs are wasted.

You could construct your website so that each item of content cannot be accessed by multiple URLs. You might use robots.txt to suppress certain categories or directories in your website if they contain duplicates. But the best way to preserve the value of your inlinks is to tell Google which is the correct (canonical) URL for the information served in multiple places.

To do so, you would add a `rel="canonical"` tag in the header of the page's HTML indicating which URL is to be used. For the Happy Puppy example, it might look like this:

```
<link rel="canonical"
href="http://www.example.com/leash.php?item=frisky-freddie" />
```

For more information about specifying canonical URLs for database driven websites, see <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2009/02/specify-your-canonical.html>.

AN EXERCISE TO SEE WHAT GOOGLE SEES

Google Webmaster Tools is a useful resource where Google shows you how it sees your website. Take a peek at what Google knows about your website by first verifying you deserve access to this information. Next, look into the Fetch as Googlebot tool in the Labs menu. You might be surprised by a gap between what you experience on your page and what Googlebot actually sees.

You can find more information at www.google.com/support/webmasters/?hl=en. See Figure 8.14 for what "Fetch as Googlebot" returns in the Webmaster Tools dashboard.

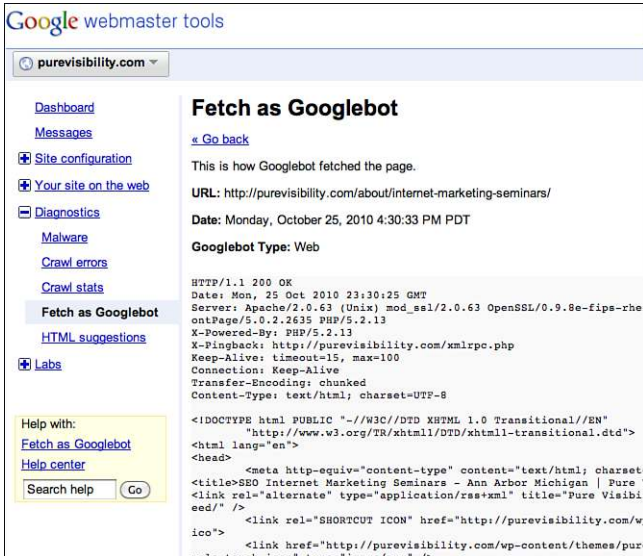


Figure 8.14 “Fetch as Googlebot” results in Google Webmaster Tools.

Increase Your Findability via Link Building

Search engine rankings take into account how your content is regarded by others. Google’s algorithm includes the number and quality of links to your website. So, write content that is linkworthy (sometimes that means writing something attention grabbing or sharing data that others may need to make a point) and cultivate inlinks directly.

Link building is a real art in the modern SEO world, largely because links guide the way that web spiders think about and organize their taxonomy of your website. Link building is specialized, steady work. It involves developing relationships with other websites, cultivating linking opportunities, and developing tools to promote the website’s marketing message.

External linking is probably the most important factor for getting ranked for competitive terms. Credibility is based on how many websites link to your website, especially if those websites are authoritative sources that are related to the content of your website.

Get links to your website from other websites including directories, related websites, and industry resources. Try to get links from those other websites with anchor text containing keywords relevant to your website.

Popular places from which to build inlinks include the following:

- List in major general pay directories: the Yahoo! Directory, Business.com, BOTW.org.
- Find highly related pay directories for your niche. Although Google is making an effort not to count paid links toward rankings, this can bring direct traffic, and probably still counts a bit toward rankings if it isn't obvious the link was paid for.
- List in free directories.
- Do searches for websites with information about related companies and request links from them.
- Seek relevant blogs where you can contribute a guest blog, offer the same opportunity back. When you blog elsewhere, if it fits, provide valuable and relevant information in keyword-rich inlinks to your website. Just don't be heavy-handed.
- Use memberships in organizations to get links.
- Syndicate articles that link back to the website with keywords.
- Look up links to competing websites by using tools like Yahoo! Site Explorer (search linkdomain:competitorsdomainhere.com in Yahoo!). Request links from websites that linked to your competition.
- Use existing business relationships to solicit links.
- Viral strategies, such as videos, interesting widgets, and so on.
- Use press releases and links to speaking engagements.

How to Approach Website Owners for Links

After you've found a website that has relevant content and some authority, prepare a message to the website's owner outlining how your information may be valuable to the website's audience. Request an inlink, ideally with some relevant phrases in the anchor text.

If your website is about puppy training, ask for the link to read "puppy training" not www.example.com. The easiest way to get keyword links like this is from business partners who already trust you and may be willing to help you define how they portray you on their website.

Increase Your Findability: Claim and Maintain Your Local Business Listings

Search is becoming more personal and more local. Traffic from local searches (for example, from Google Places and local.yahoo.com in web analytics) has increased dramatically for our clients over the past years. Search behavior is changing; searchers are typing in search queries with ZIP codes or city, state modifiers to get targeted results (for example, “handyman services, ann arbor, mi” or “maid service 48103”).

In addition, search engines like Google are using information about the IP address of the visitor to serve up local results even for general queries. For instance, this search from Ann Arbor serves up local pet care facilities for the general query “pet care” as shown in Figure 8.15.

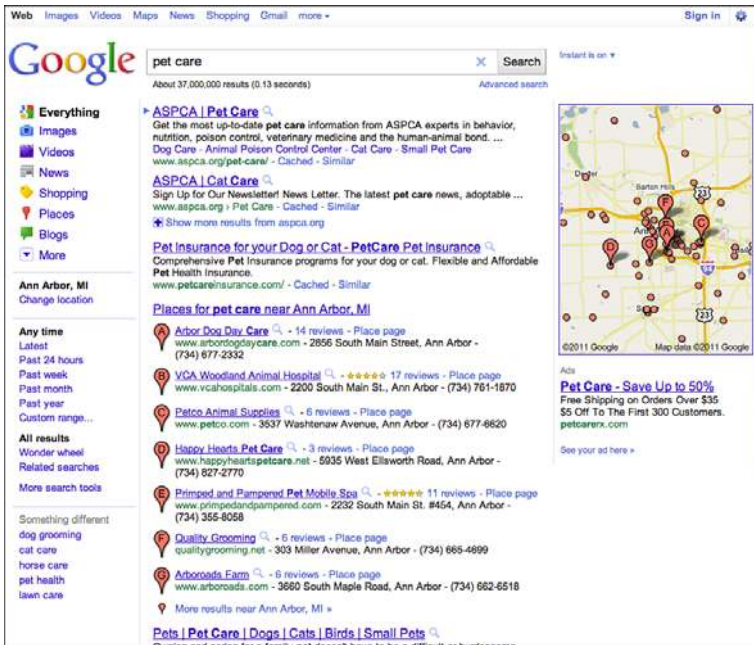


Figure 8.15 Google SERP showing local listings.

When Google launched Universal Search and began including Google Places results within the search results content, local directory listings became more visible and more important than ever. Managing this information for a single location can be tough and companies with extended networks of store or office locations have that same challenge hundreds of times over.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Ensure the completeness of your listings in Google Places, local.yahoo.com, the Bing local listing center, and directories such as InsiderPages that come up when you search your business name.

Follow the instructions on each website to claim and populate your results with a full description, relevant categories, and all applicable fields. Augment your listings with videos, images, hours of operation, and payment types accepted, as apply.

- Keep your listings current; update with new additions, address changes, or closed locations.
- Submit consistent and complete information to the directories that feed into Google and Yahoo! listings such as Internet yellow pages directories, infoUSA, and other local directories. This can be done via bulk upload through third-party vendors such as Localeze or Universal Business Listings.

Monitoring, Responding to, and Encouraging Reviews Online

After you review your listing in Google Places, you're going to see (or note missing) online reviews of your business. At the same time you may be asking how you can increase your ranking visibility. These two questions are related. Local search rankings are influenced by several factors, including the same relevancy algorithm used to rank natural search listings.

An additional factor seems to be the number of online reviews. Google Places listings display reviews provided to Google directly, but they also pull in reviews from other review websites such as Yelp.com, ApartmentRatings.com, and InsiderPages.com, to name a few. Definitely encourage happy customers to post a review of your product or service online; it will become part of your online presence and benefit you by sharing a good story about your business with searchers and may just increase your visibility by increasing your rank in local searches.

You might also need to address negative comments with delicacy and resolve their root cause if possible. The Air Force has developed a great decision tree to guide responding to online negativity (see Figure 8.16). It takes into account the context and provides clear instructions for how to address the review: Be honest about who you are, cite your sources, respond in a way that reflects well on your business and yourself.

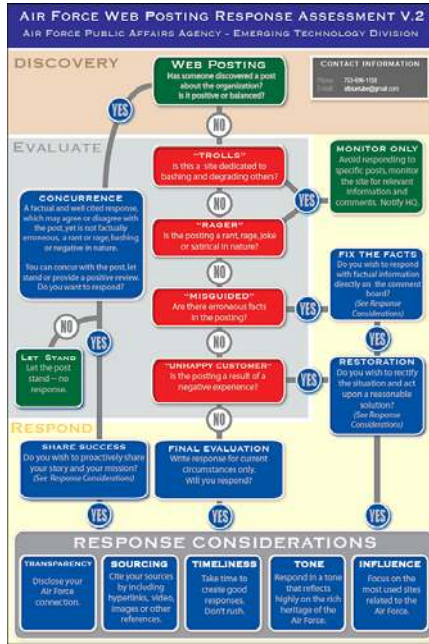


Figure 8.16 The Air Force’s Web Posting Response Decision Tree, available from www.globalnerdy.com/2008/12/30/the-air-forces-rules-of-engagement-for-blogging/.

Advanced Visibility Strategies: Going Social

Everyone is talking about Facebook, Twitter, and social strategies. Potential customers consider mentions on social websites as impartial reviews by people like them (people they can trust), so these websites provide “social-proof” needed in purchase decisions. For this reason, you should definitely pay attention to social mentions of your business brand name and your trademarks.

Since the launch of Google+, Google no longer indexes Tweets in a real-time way. Yet items posted to Twitter and Facebook can be quite public (depending on your settings) and public posts are searchable. The spiders are certainly crawling these websites often, with real-time results for many queries.

However, the benefits of links from social websites like Twitter or Facebook to your corporate website are only indirect for SEO. The social websites like Twitter and Facebook explicitly put nofollow tags onto user supplied links, so these confer no direct SEO benefit at all (see Figure 8.17).

```

490 <span class="entry-content">Our book on Metrics
Driven Internet Marketing. This time with a link. <a
href="http://amzn.to/gOTTqE" class="tweet-url web" rel="nofollow"
target="_blank">http://amzn.to/gOTTqE</a></span>
491 </span>
492 <span class="meta entry-meta" data="{}">
<a class="entry-date" rel="bookmark"
href="http://twitter.com/dunrie/status/56006321367040000">
494 <span class="published timestamp" data="{time:'Thu Apr 07
14:52:02 +0000 2011'}">7:52 AM Apr 7th</span></a>
495 <span>via <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/"
rel="nofollow">LinkedIn</a></span>

```

Figure 8.17 Source code of a personal Twitter page, showing the *nofollow* tag automatically attached to tweets.

Some have argued that the spiders might notice your link being mentioned by others on these websites and may index your website more quickly or pay more attention to your website because of its popularity in social websites. Possibly. What getting social will do is get your message in front of visitors to these social websites, which is a benefit in itself, as people are spending more time on these websites than search results pages, according to a study by comScore and ValueClick Media.

However, because search results pages are shown to people when they're looking for products and services rather than looking to chat with their friends or build a shed on Farmville, we recommend social strategies be pursued alongside, but not at the expense of, SEO and paid search advertising.

Extending Your Reach with Paid Search Advertising

It's funny. Whenever I share that I work in Internet marketing, people tell me that they never, ever click those sponsored search listings. I always laugh. Someone definitely is clicking the ads. From a spot check of clients in our portfolio, we see paid search advertising to bring them from 25% to 85% of their website traffic.

Paid search typically brings a higher proportion of new visitors to the website who are searching on more general terms related to their products or services, and paid search visitors buy things and raise their hands to become sales leads. It's worth testing.

Because the advertiser only pays for people who take a particular action, typically paying for a click on the ad to the advertiser's website, paid search advertising is the most targeted and trackable advertising around. It can be used to complement and extend SEO.

Setting up and optimizing your own paid search advertising is a book unto itself. In this section, we hit the highlights and include a few definitions to give you a working vocabulary to have the next conversations with your internal or external paid search management team.

Paid search ads are typically text ads, which makes them easy to build and update. They are paid for on a cost-per-action basis, typically cost per click, where the advertiser pays for clicks on the ad.

There are two types of paid search ads: ads that are shown on SERPs, and contextual ads that are shown alongside web content on a publisher's website. Figure 8.1 shows contextual ads, known in AdWords as the display network. Display network ads can either be text ads or media ads, such as images or display ads.

Search Engines as Paid Search Vendors

There are many paid search ad vendors. Google AdWords delivers the greatest clickthrough (and therefore has the greatest reach). The combination of Yahoo! Search Marketing (YSM) and Microsoft adCenter is second, at less than 30% of the searches. Ask Network and AOL trail in this market.

Table 8.4 shows comScore's March 2011 U.S. search engine rankings for paid search services.

Table 8.4 Search Engine Paid Search Rankings

Paid Search Vendor	Market Share
Google	65%
MSN AdCenter (Yahoo! and Bing)	28%
Ask Network	3%
AOL	2%

Facebook also offers ads, and they most closely mimic Google content or display network advertising. We've experimented with Facebook ads, matching to target audiences by demographic characteristics, including geographic location, but haven't found them to be as successful in terms of driving traffic, or close to the cost-per-lead efficiency of AdWords. Perhaps this will improve over time.

The drawback to choosing a smaller (less-expensive) vendor rather than Google is that they don't drive as much traffic, some don't have adequate safeguards against click fraud, and you may spend more time managing the campaign because of the less robust toolset.

Google AdWords (and its associated tools) is the market leader in this space.

Effective Paid Search Management

There are several paid search management tools or automated services available for a spectrum of use cases, from ReachLocal for basic management and reporting, through Clickable.com for more sophisticated bid management, to more powerful and comprehensive solutions like Omniture.

We've experimented with homegrown and commercially available bid management system and have always reverted back to human management of paid search. We simply have never found a better way than optimization by a talented analyst.

And, regardless of what you turn to eventually, human and automated paid search management follow the same general outline. So, following this framework should be useful if you do it by hand or in bulk via a third-party dashboard.

In the first phase of implementing paid search, you spend a lot of effort up front on keywords, ad groups, bid management, and ad copy management. As time goes on, you identify which ads and keywords work best for you, and therefore landing page management and conversion rates become more important.

Managing paid search campaigns involves five basic steps:

1. Choose appropriate profit-driven goals. See “Which Metrics Matter Most” in Chapter 3, “Building a Metrics-Driven Practice.”
2. Define your market:
 - Target the right audience (or persona). See Chapter 5 for more details.
 - Set campaign region, time period, and so on.
 - Generate keywords and define ad groups with closely related, tightly themed keywords.
3. Qualify your market. Write targeted ads featuring your keywords to interest potential website visitors.
4. Convert your visitors into customers by create goal-driven landing pages with clear calls to action. Target your keywords directly and focus on user goals.
5. Repeat and refine. Revisit the campaign to determine which ads, which keyphrases are the best performers.



Tip

Improving the performance of a paid search effort requires accurate tracking of campaigns and comparison of clickthrough rates, costs per click, conversion rates, and the costs per conversion.

Define Your Market

Start with your profile of your ideal customer. If you serve your customers or clients through local storefronts, you don't want to advertise where you have no brick and mortar stores. If your product is only licensed in certain states or certain countries, limit your advertising to where it is legal to sell it.

If your product has prohibitively high shipping costs to certain regions of the country, you might want to focus your advertising on areas that result in sales. This kind of targeting is available within Google AdWords; you can set the language, geography, and schedule for advertising.

You also need to know the language your potential customers are using to find your service, covered in Chapter 5. After you've built a large set of keywords, group them into themes so that you can write paid search ads and set bids at the group level rather than for individual keywords.

Keyword Research Here's the approach we take to tackle a new keyword research project:

1. Look through your website and identify major themes.
2. Research the competition for your root terms.
3. Use a keyword research tool to generate variations from your list of core terms.
4. Choose the right set of keywords.

Choosing the right keywords is extremely important. Although it might initially seem advantageous to show up on ultra-broad terms for wider exposure, extremely generic terms are often costly, and less relevant than more specific "long tail" keywords.

For example, if you sell sweaters, you will probably get a better return on your investment if you advertise on keywords specific to the *types* of sweaters you sell (red wool sweaters, cashmere sweaters, and so on) than broad terms (clothing, sweaters).

Why? Because the user has already told the search engine that they are looking for exactly what you are selling. These long tail terms also tend to have a lower cost-per-click minimum bid than higher-volume terms, and also have higher quality scores.

The key to finding the right keywords is to test and refine them over time. Although specific, long tail keywords often perform best, it's certainly worth testing a variety of different keywords and then making decisions to keep or delete the terms based on data. Paid search ads are very easy to track, so you'll be able to pause or delete any terms that aren't successful.

Define Ad Groups After you've identified your keywords to target, organize them into ad groups, or sets of related keywords and keyphrases. You'll find that campaign management becomes easier when working at the group level rather than individual ads.

Why not write just one or two ads for all your keywords? The broader, simpler approach doesn't enable you to write very specific ads for well-focused ad groups. Each ad group is likely to resonate with a different type of user (or persona) for the website, because different people use different keywords when searching online.



Tip

Group your terms according to theme, bids, and common words. While some groupings are readily apparent, others may be more difficult to identify.

Ask yourself what types of ads you can write that best describe the keyword in question. You'll start to see more groups when you look at it from the other direction.

In general, *smaller ad groups are better.*

Qualify Your Market with Specific Ad Copy

You've seen search results pages; the ads are sometimes shown above the natural search results in the main column, and then down the right-side column. A Google AdWords ad has a few components: a title (up to 25 characters), two description lines (35 characters each), and a display URL, as shown in Figure 8.18.

On the back end, we also prepare a destination URL which is on the same website as the display URL but is typically a page more relevant to the user's query. In this example, the page might show only AT&T phones.



Figure 8.18 Sample AdWords paid search ad from MobileKarma, a vendor of refurbished used cell phones.

Ads make sure the right people in your market are getting to your website and that they are properly prepared when they get there.

Good ad copy

- States a benefit
- Has a call to action

- Gives a reason to act
- Uses a relevant landing page both in the display URL and for the destination URL
- Tempts or engages search engine users

Your team should be evaluating ad copy variants and then testing to find out for which ads have the highest clickthrough rates.

Mechanics of Paid Search Optimization: Quality Scores The AdWords Quality Score encapsulates a few parts of paid search optimization activity:

- The fit of the keyword or keyphrases
- The fit of the ad
- The fit of the landing page to the user's query

The first two items are within the “qualify your visitors” stage of paid search optimization. The last falls into “convert your visitors into customers” and is about their experience on your website.

An AdWords Quality Score is a numeric index given to keywords or ad groups that characterizes the quality of an ad. The goal behind the scoring system is a good one; search engines look to provide a good user experience, so that their ads are helpful and relevant, rather than distracting and annoying.

If you search for “flights to florida” and a search engine returns advertisements for wool socks, those ads and their landing pages are irrelevant to your search. However, if the search engine serves ads for different airlines, those are likely highly relevant ads.

Many factors go into a quality score calculation, but most of the weight is on the clickthrough rate (CTR) in the search network, and the relationship between keywords on both the ad copy and landing page. Quality scores range from 1 to 10, with 10 being an extremely high quality score. We see good campaigns with quality scores in the 7s and 8s.

Quality score can influence ad position and the cost-per-click price. The following formula is used to determine ad position:

Bid x Quality score

Therefore, the higher your quality score, the less money you have to pay to rank in a higher position.

The best way to achieve a high quality score is to optimize your account to ensure that each of your ad groups has highly descriptive ads that match closely to the ad groups' keyword list. You should also have a landing page that is relevant to the keywords, rather than simply leading users to your home page.

Convert Your Visitors into Customers

Finally, make sure your money is well spent by giving your paid search visitors relevant, useful, and compelling information when they land on your website. After all, you've paid to get them there, why disappoint them? This is covered in more depth in the "Designing Your Landing Pages" and "Optimizing Your Landing Pages" sections in Chapter 6, "Putting It All Together and Selling Online."

Revisit, Refine, and Refresh Your Campaigns

Managing a paid search advertising program takes vigilance and attention to detail. It can be improved by eliminating words that do not produce good leads, testing and refining ad copy and landing pages, and keeping in sync with your website's and your customer's seasonal concerns.

COMMON ADWORDS PITFALLS

We've all clicked ads that lead nowhere or that make you feel like you've been subject to a bait-and-switch scheme. Avoid wasting your money and frustrating the visitors you're paying to get by avoiding these gotchas:

- Insufficient tracking. Don't forget to track visits and conversions with your web analytics and conversion tracking through the paid search program.
- Poor global targeting. Showing ads globally using eastern standard time, so the ads only show in Australia during the night. See more on global paid search in the section "Basic Mechanics for Global Paid Search Configuration" in Chapter 10, "Special Considerations for International Organizations."
- Focusing too heavily on your brand/trademark terms rather than general terms. Folks who are searching on your brand name already know how to find you. Make sure you're visible for folks who don't yet know your name.
- Bringing folks to your home page, where they'll have to hunt for content relevant to their query, or might just leave. Instead, place them deep into your website on a page relevant to their query.

- Taking folks to a page that doesn't reference the reason they clicked the ad. For instance, if they click an ad offering a whitepaper to help them reduce their puppy-training woes, but land on a page without a whitepaper, you will have frustrated your visitor.
- Being diffuse and wasting ad clicks in the display network. Start first in the AdWords search network and learn what is successful for you there before branching out into other paid search vendors (such as adCenter, which powers sponsored search on Yahoo! and Bing) and before experimenting with Google's display network.
- Managing the search network and the display network as if they were one and the same. The search network shows ads on searches, while the display network shows ads next to content. In the search network, CTR can affect your quality score and therefore your costs. CTR is not relevant to quality score in the display network, so the two campaigns can be managed very differently.
- Assuming all visitors are equal. Eventually, you might decide that certain terms deserve higher bids than others because of the quality and type of leads they produce.

Advanced Visibility Strategies: Display Advertising

We are all familiar with display ads (also known as banner ads). They can be intrusive, covering the content of an interesting article on an online news website, and visually noisy, blinking or animated and otherwise distracting you from your goal on the website. The dislike of banners by some web surfers is such that there are browser plug-ins (such as Safari Adblock, Firefox Adblock Plus, Adblock for Chrome, Adblock IE) to suppress banners and show only the “real” content of a web page.

However, these ads are ubiquitous on websites that publish content, such as the websites of newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, as well as portal websites such as Yahoo.com and WebMD.com, and niche websites that offer free services such as flight tracker websites (for example, www.flightaware.com).

Display ads are critical to funding many useful websites that provide free or low-cost content and need a way to pay for writers, coders, designers, and server space. As an advertiser, these ads extend your reach beyond search engines, and typically reach users at an earlier stage of the buying process than paid search ads.

If you are a content provider online, you may accept advertising directly from individual advertisers or through an ad network that brokers transactions in bulk. Ad networks include Google AdSense (the network where Google AdWords advertisers appear when they sign up for the display network and Yahoo's Right Media Network). Ad networks also include publishers themselves, such as Fox Audience Network.

There are two main distinctions between paid search and display ads. Paid search ads are typically (but not always) text ads, whereas display ads are typically media files such as animated GIFs, Flash SWFs, or video formats. Paid search ads are almost always paid per click (therefore the acronym PPC, for pay per click) to the advertiser's website.

A display ad can be paid for in many ways, including cost per click. Another common way to pay is cost per impression or CPM, cost per 1,000 impressions, with the *M* denoting the Roman numeral for 1,000. A third way available on some networks is cost per acquisition, where users pay for a designer action on their website, such as a purchase or completing a contact form. This distinction is key. With banner ads, the advertiser may be paying for clicks or actions such as leads or purchases, but is often just paying for visibility. With paid search, the advertiser is almost always paying for the action of a click.

Therefore, banner ads are typically used in consideration campaigns, where an advertiser is looking to familiarize or reinforce the website visitor with its brand. Most businesses in the early stages of search engine marketing do not need to bother with consideration or branding campaigns. This is an advanced strategy, which should be tested only after all the other tactics in this chapter are producing good results and your team has extra bandwidth and advertising funds for experimenting.

A recent study by comScore shows that the proportion of people who click display ads online has decreased from 32% in 2007 to 16% in 2009,² and according to Doubleclick the percentage of display ad impressions that were clicked in 2009 ranged from 0.06% for financial services ads to 0.15% for automobile advertising.³ These ads do not often result in website visits. So, showing your ads to a targeted subset is critical.

2 See Figure 2 in www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Presentations_Whitepapers/2010/When_Money_Moves_to_Digital_Where_Should_It_Go.

3 See Figure 10 in http://static.googleusercontent.com/external_content/untrusted_dlcp/www.google.com/en/us/doubleclick/pdfs/DoubleClick-07-2010-DoubleClick-Benchmarks-Report-2009-Year-in-Review-US.pdf.

The Best Ways to Target Display Ads

Advertisers can place display ads via several options, including the following:

- **Contextual ads:** The ad is shown next to content that matches certain keywords defined by the advertiser.
- **Audience targeting:** The ad is shown to consumers matching a particular criterion, such as demographic characteristics.
- **Retargeted ads:** The ad is shown only to people who have previously visited your website.

A 2010 comScore study using data from 2 million consumers, 1 million of whom were in the United States, found that retargeted display advertising resulted in the best outcomes, measured by visits to the advertiser's website and follow on searches of the advertiser's trademark terms. Audience and contextual ads showed about half of the lift of retargeted ads, according to the comScore and ValueClick Media study.⁴

Google AdWords offers retargeted and contextual ads through its display network. Given that we recommend starting out with an AdWords paid search campaign before moving to display, testing display ads through Google's display network is a great starting point.

You can work with your graphic designer to build the ad creative, work within their available marketplace of designers, or use standard templates in the AdWords interface. And then, after the ads are up and running, AdWords reports the display campaign within the reporting structure you are already using from AdWords, using the same units and your already established goals. (See Chapter 3 for more information about choosing goals and setting them up for measurement.) If display ad campaigns garner leads or sales at the same rate or better than your text ads, you might want to consider expanding this campaign and looking at vendors other than Google.

⁴ See Figure 8 in www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Presentations_Whitepapers/2010/When_Money_Moves_to_Digital_Where_Should_It_Go.

Summary

After you've invested in building a website, make sure it will be found through creating content, not hiding that content from web crawlers, and ensuring that you reach out to relevant directories and websites to build inlinks into your website.

You can also increase your visibility through social media outreach, targeted paid search, and display advertising.

- **Create targeted on-page content** for your website visitors and web spiders.
 - Use keyphrases in your URLs, on-page copy, and page tags such as the `<title>` tag, `` image alt tags.
 - Tag media files with relevant target terms.
 - If you use a content management system, allow your content creators to modify page tags and media tags to make the content findable on your target search terms.
- **Maintain your local business listings** to ensure your business shows for local searches.
 - Encourage people to leave positive reviews on review websites such as Google and Yelp.
 - Constructively engage with negative reviews.
- **Build quality inlinks to your website** to increase your authority to web spiders and visitors alike.
- **Build out a targeted paid search campaign** in the AdWords search network, landing visitors on appropriate pages with clear next steps for them to take. After you have success in the search network on Google, consider extending your paid search to contextual advertising in the AdWords display network and other paid search vendors such as Microsoft adCenter.
- **Consider social outreach and display ads** as extensions of your existing visibility strategy, not as substitutes for good on-page optimization and content creation.

After you're done making your content findable, new visitors might arrive on *any* page of your website. So, don't neglect to place clear calls to action on every page of your website, including blog pages.

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