

SEO

SEO OPTIMIZATION

I get a lot of questions about optimization (SEO) so thought I'd put together some of my thoughts and experiences in this field.

Keywords are those terms that we type into our favorite search engine to find whatever we are looking for.

Example: "concert tickets" to find those tickets to the concert.

Optimization Philosophy

For a webpage to be found on the search engines, it has to be relevant. That may seem apparent to most optimizers (SEO's) but people have asked me to optimize pages for terms that were not mentioned directly or even alluded to indirectly.

The first thing that you have to consider is that everyone wants to be number one on the top search engine (i.e., Google) for something that relates to their business. For that matter, they wouldn't mind being number one for every keyword and just being the gateway to the Internet. If that were possible then the websites with the most money would always come up first. Even then users would become disgruntled about always finding the same website even when it is totally unrelated. As a result the users would simply jump to a search engine that gave them better results.

Also consider what makes Google so popular? People like Google because they find what they are looking for. The same is true of other search engines but some sites are just not as relevant. Consequently Google goes to great lengths to make sure that users find that relevant site. As it turns out what's good for Google is good for us if we can get our site on the first page of results.

Even if we could get a page listed as number one on Google for a non-relevant keyword search it does us little good as the user is gone in seconds when he sees nothing relevant to his search. Google tracks this behavior and less likely to keep your listing high if no one stays on your website. There are even unscrupulous services that will send you traffic that does nothing more than click your page.

So what really works is that your page should be about something specific that good for your business. If you want people to "buy John's book", for instance, then the page should be mostly about why your book is invaluable to them. Then when someone searches for "buy John's book" then we have a better chance of showing up on the search engine.

The issue with buy "John's book", however, is that it is too general and has over 123,000,000 webpages on Google. If we make the keywords more specific "buy John Hodgeman's book" then we are only competing with 590,000 webpages. The more specific the link the less competition but we have to ask ourselves "Will the customer actually type in our specific keywords".

As consumers, we all want to find the advertized item when we show up at a site. Imagine showing up at a store that advertized "John's book" to find that they don't even carry books. It's no less frustrating to click a link to find it's totally unrelated to our search. In any case, we want to

make our website visitors happy that they found our website. If they are here to buy “John’s book” then we want that prominently displayed and make it easy for them to purchase.

On Page Optimization

Now we know what sort of traffic we want and we want to please the customer when he arrives. Let us start optimizing our page. First and foremost we need our keywords in our title and text. These are the most important areas of on page optimization. While it’s flattering to have our company name in the title, it does us little good unless we are only concerned with users finding our company. If our company is not a major brand it may be unlikely that anyone who hasn’t communicated with us will even to look for our site.

That said we want to sprinkle our keywords throughout our text and title without SPAMMING. There are software tools that will compare your site to the top 10 on your preferred search engine. These tools analyze keyword density or the number of times your keywords appear relative to the total number of words. Table 1 shows a sample analysis of the title.

Table 1 - Title Analysis

Advice for your document title				
Search term: "Search Engine Optimization"				
	Competitors	Your Site	Advice	
Number of keywords:	0 to 1	1	OK	OK
Keyword density:	0% to 60%	30%	OK	OK
Search term: "Search"				
	Competitors	Your Site	Advice	
Number of keywords:	0 to 2	1	OK	OK
Keyword density:	0% to 22%	10%	OK	OK
Search term: "Engine"				
	Competitors	Your Site	Advice	
Number of keywords:	0 to 2	1	OK	OK
Keyword density:	0% to 22%	10%	OK	OK
Search term: "Optimization"				
	Competitors	Your Site	Advice	
Number of keywords:	0 to 1	1	OK	OK
Keyword density:	0% to 20%	10%	OK	OK
Keywords "Search", "Engine" or "Optimization"				
	Competitors	Your Site	Advice	
Number of	0 to 5	3	OK	OK

Advice for your document title

Search term: "Search Engine Optimization"

keywords:

Keyword density: 0% to 20% 10% OK

At this point you may be asking how to change your title. If so, you may need help from Downs Consulting Services or your preferred webmaster. If you are comfortable editing your website then you just need to worry adjust your text in the title header. It should look something like the following.

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<head>
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```
  <title>Projects - Managed Services - SEO - Web Development </title>
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The key here is that your main keywords should be in between the title tags <title>, </title>. You can easily check the title of any web page by viewing the source. Typically browsers allow you to view the title by right clicking – “View Source”.

Next place you need the keywords is on your page so these are easily visible. If you have chosen “buy John Hodgeman's book” as your keywords then that phrase should be on your page and in that order. You may even want in large text or bolded. You may want links that actually go to the page to make the purchase.

Once your keyword density is OK for title and text, there are a number of things you can do to improve your optimization but mostly you want to avoid the pitfalls. There are tricks that worked in the early days of search engines that will potentially get you thrown out of the listing altogether like keyword stuffing and invisible text.

Off Page Otimization

Off page optimization consists of getting other sites to link to your page. Your SEO has limited control with “off page optimization” since it’s up to the other sites as to whether they will link to you or not.

In our example, “buy John Hodgeman's book” it would be nice if big book sites like Amazon and Google would link to us. Since that’s not likely, we will work on getting our name out there at little or no cost. Sites like Facebook will allow you to create a business page for nothing so you might as well take advantage of it. Other sites like <http://local.yahoo.com>, and <http://citysquares.com/> also allow you to publish your information. This approach just takes some time and effort. If it’s more than you want to take on yourself Downs Consulting Services can help you get these set up.

Another thing to consider with links is that you give away some of your “juice” when you link outside your site so be careful with that. There are also bad neighborhoods that you don’t want links from unless that is your business like gambling, jewelry and pharmacy sites.

Mentions on social sites like Twitter and Facebook are nice and it does not hurt make it easy for folks to post your information on those sites.