

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

On the surface, SEO appears to be a somewhat arcane science. Success is dependent on a combination of many factors. This is further complicated by the fact that search engines have differing methods in order to glean data. Some of the information regarding how search engines work is in the public domain but Google, the most commonly used search engine, keeps its methods secret. This is to reduce abuse of these methods in order to gain high ranking.

The best approach is to cover as many bases as possible to increase the chances of success. Therefore it should be something that is considered when designing a site. Listed below are some tips to help.

► Choose one main keyword per page

Search engines know what a web page is about by looking at the words and phrases that appear most often.

By choosing one main keyword or phrase for each page on your website, you can encourage search engines to associate the page with that phrase.

What you need to do: List all of the search terms that you want to attract visitors with and try to match each one to the most appropriate page on your website.

Example: If you want to attract visitors who search for "blue suede shoes", choose that as the key phrase for the page that has most information about blue suede shoes.

► Use the keyword/phrase on the page

Search engines expect to see a word or phrase make up six to ten per cent of a page. How often the keyword/phrase appears is called your page's keyword density.

If your keyword/phrase appears too often, search engines may consider the page to be spam. Too rarely and the word/phrase doesn't feature highly enough to be associated with the page.

What you need to do: Look for opportunities where you can easily include the keyword/phrase in the page's text. Each time your keyword/phrase can be seen on the page, it counts towards your keyword density. This includes the title and navigation.

When you write the text, remember that it still needs to make sense to the person reading it.

You can calculate your page's keyword density using Word or OpenOffice Writer's word count feature.

Step 1: Highlight everything on your web page and copy it to the clipboard.

Step 2: Paste your web page's content into a blank document in your word processor.

Step 3: Remove any images that have been pasted into the document and perform a word count.

Step 4: Count every instance of your keyword/phrase. A phrase counts as one instance, even though it has more than one word.

Step 5: Divide the page's word count by the number of times your keyword/phrase appears. The number you're left with is your page's keyword density.

Example: If your page has 100 words and "red leather handbags" appears six times, you have a keyword density of 6%.

► Use HTML to emphasise your keywords

Most of us think of HTML as a way to make our web pages look good. However, HTML is really for describing your information.

The purpose of an `<h1>` tag isn't to tell web browsers to use a large, bold font: it's to tell browsers that this is the most important text on your page. Because the text is important, web browsers will display it in a large, bold font; the styling is almost a side-effect.

It's not only web browsers that use HTML tags. Search engines decide which words and phrases are the most important on your page, based on the tags you use.

Which HTML tags are important? Experts identify a number of tags that search engines take notice of, in order of importance:

- `<title>` - this sets the title used in the browser's title bar and ideally, should only include your keyword/phrase but will usually also have your website name **after** the keyword/phrase.
- `<h1>` - should only appear once and ideally feature only your keyword/phrase.
- `<h2>` - ideal to emphasise supporting words that are similar to your keyword/phrase.
- `<h3>`
- `<h4>`
- `` - use to emphasise your keyword/phrase when it appears in your text.

Using these tags will affect the way that web browsers display your website. CSS allows you to change the way that web browsers display them.

What you need to do: Consider how you use HTML tags in your page. Remembering that your design is important and that the page should still make sense to the visitor, you should aim to write your web pages to show search engines which words are most important.

► **Meta tags - extra information for search engines**

Meta tags contain extra information about your web page. By placing them in your HTML, you give search engines another reason to associate your page with your chosen keyword/phrase, without displaying it on the page itself.

The most important meta tags are "keywords" and "description".

***Keywords:** Another opportunity to include your keyword/phrase and any associated words/phrases.

**There is some opinion that search engines have reduced their reliance on using meta keywords to generate search results but there is no harm in including them.*

Description: Often used to describe your web page in search results lists. Also allows you to present your keyword/phrase to the search engine again.

Example:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="red leather handbag, handbags, handbag, leather, red, accessory" />
```

```
<meta name="description" content="Everything you need to know about red leather handbags" />
```

It can also help if the keywords and description appear within the body of the page.

► **Make sure search engines know about your website**

Most search engines look for a file called "robots.txt" in the parent directory of your website. This tells search engines which parts of your site you want them to include in their database.

Read more about "robots.txt" here:

<http://www.thesitewizard.com/archive/robotstxt.shtml>

http://www.outfront.net/tutorials_02/adv_tech/robots.htm

► **Submitting your URL**

You can submit your web site to any number of search engines. They often have a link to enable you to do so. Do not expect immediate results as sometimes it can take up to a month for results to filter through.

Another method for submission is DMOZ, the Open Source Directory, sometimes referred to as the search engines' search engine. Submitted URLs are vetted by humans, which is unique in the web. You will need to find the right category for your site: <http://www.dmoz.org/> Submitting your site does not guarantee listing.

► **Site relevance**

A factor for SEO is the relevance and usefulness of your site to the subject area.

► **Updates**

A site that is regularly updated is more likely to be indexed by search engines. The spiders that crawl through indexing the site will register the changes.

► **Reciprocal links**

These are links from your site to another that also has a link back to yours. The more there are of these, the more your site will be considered part of a community. Spiders can detect if the links are to mirror sites or sites that are not independent. This can be considered abuse and result in your site not being indexed.

► **The <head> of the document**

Try to avoid having a lot of scripts and styles in the head of the document. As a spider crawls through a page it is looking for significant information. If it encounters a lot of script in the head before reaching the body it may leave the page before indexing useful information.

Always try to place scripts and styles in external documents as much as possible and place links to them in the <head>.

► **Also of interest:**

<http://www.seologs.com/seo-tools.html>

Some interesting tools to help with SEO and other site related things