



## 10 Steps To Effective Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

By Elise Bauer

The single most cost effective web marketing practice is to optimize your web site for search engines.

What does "optimize your web site for search engines" mean? When a person types a search term into Google or Yahoo, for example, the search engine delivers a list of websites, ranked by relevance to the word that was entered.

Your goal as a web marketer is to have your site rank as high as possible when potential clients are searching for services that your website delivers. The higher placed your site is in the search results, the more easy it will be for clients to find your services.

### How Is SEO "Most Cost Effective"?

In contrast to spending money on advertising, PR and direct mail, marketing efforts that try to get potential clients interested in you, optimizing your site for better search results just makes it easier for those already interested in your business to find you. You could potentially see a hundred-fold increase in the traffic to your site by following good SEO principles.

### SEO Matters

A study conducted in 2001 by Jupiter Communications revealed that 42% of respondents indicated that using a search engine was their most common way of finding an online vendor, the vendor's URL taking second place with 23%.

A 2001 study by NPD, comparing search listings to ad banners, found that respondents were 7 times as likely to read a search listing than an ad banner, and 20 times as likely to click on a search listing.

These studies were conducted in 2001. Since then search engines have become even more popular, especially Google. So if you want clients to find your site, you need to show up high in the search results.

You can pay money and buy search terms from the major search engines so that your listing appears prominently on the page when a search is performed using that search term.

But why pay money when you can make simple changes to your site so that your site naturally ranks higher? Anybody can do this, simply and easily, and small sites can rank above large sites if they just follow some basic guidelines.

So, what do you do to optimize your site for search engines? Here are some guidelines:

1. **Use text.** Search engines search text and only text. They cannot understand images, Quicktime movies, fancy Flash, or PDFs. This isn't to say don't use these things on your site, just know that the search engines will ignore them, so if you want to be picked up by a search engine, make sure you are

saying what you need to say in text. Also, search engines pick up frames as separate pages, so if you want your whole page to be indexed, don't use frames.

2. **Determine effective keywords.** This is the most critical step in Search Engine Optimization. Evaluate by looking at how likely a potential client would be to search that keyword. Look at how many sites compete for the keyword, what sites show up when you type the keyword into a search engine, and the quality of those sites. (You can use [Overture's View Bids](#) tool to see what companies are paying for a keyword.) Finally, decide which search terms would be most relevant for your site given its content.
3. **Use keywords in your text.** Once you have selected your keywords, make sure those keywords show up several times in the text of the pages on your site. For example, if you sell ISP web hosting services, make sure those terms – ISP web hosting services - show up in your text on the page you want to rank highly in the search results. Don't overdo it. Don't populate your page with keywords every other word. Search engines have algorithms they use to weed out sites that do this.
4. **Use keywords in the title of your page.** The page title is what appears at the very top of your web browser when you are on that page. It is what appears between the HTML title tags near the top of the HTML source for your page.
5. **Use keywords in the URL of your page.** Start by choosing a domain name that has your most relevant search term in it, if you can. On the individual pages, try to include keywords in the URL. This isn't as important as having keywords in the title, but it can make a difference.
6. **Use keywords in your meta tags.** Meta tags are information inserted into the "head" section of the html of your web pages. They are not displayed on a browser, but can let search engines know how you would like your page described, and what keywords your page contains. Some say it makes a difference to some search engines. Google completely ignores keyword meta tags for page rank, though will use the description meta tag if you have one as the page's description in the search results.
7. **Provide links to other sites.** My colleague Eric Wolfram even suggests posting links to your competitors. Counterintuitive, but correct. The search engines are trying to give the highest rankings to the sites that have the most relevant content. If you are in the business of providing relevant content, you would be linking to other sites with similar content, as a service to your viewers. So Eric says, link to your competitors and you'll show up higher on the search results than they do. And that's what is important.
8. **Provide useful, relevant content, so that other sites link to you.** One of the key ways Google knows that you have good content is by seeing how many other sites link to you. And the best way to have other sites link to you is to have great content. By the way, avoid those link farms that provide links to your site for a fee. If you get listed there, Google will take you out of their search engine for good. They don't like it when people try to scam their system.
9. **Exchange links.** Find other sites for whom it would be mutually beneficial for you to link to each other and see if a link exchange can be arranged.
10. **List your site with search engines.** If you don't proactively list your site eventually the search engines will pick it up. It may take a few weeks or a few months. You can speed up the process by listing your site with the individual search engines. There are pay services that will do this for you, but

it takes a few minutes to do it by yourself, so why waste money? Here are the listing links for the major search engines:

The Open Directory Project (DMOZ)

<http://dmoz.org/add.html>

All The Web

[http://www.alltheweb.com/add\\_url.php](http://www.alltheweb.com/add_url.php)

Google

<http://www.google.com/addurl.html>

MSN

<http://submitit.bcentral.com/msnsubmit.htm>

Yahoo

<http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/>

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