



Branch Out Internet Marketing: Introduction to Search Engine Optimisation

Search engine optimisation (SEO) refers to one of the ways to get your site included in a search engine's results and it is increasingly important. We use the Internet to look for goods, services or information and we trust search engines to deliver traffic to our websites. One third of British businesses bought online during 2003 (Nov 2004, statistics.gov.uk) and the majority of these purchases originated with an online search. As this trend is continuing to grow, we all need to make sure our websites keep up.

Introduction to search engines

1. The key search engines to focus on are: Google, Yahoo! and MSN, closely followed by AskJeeves.
2. Search engines have 2 elements to them. There's the bit we see on the screen and a massive database, which stores details of millions of websites found on the Internet.
3. Some search engines sell the information in their database – and some search engines buy in this data. These relationships are commercial and change frequently. Currently, Google is the largest supplier of results to other engines.
4. Search engines also run keyword advertising, i.e. they display advertising results linked to the word or phrase used by the searcher.
5. Again, some search engines supply advertisements to other search engines. For example, advertisements on Overture (owned by Yahoo!) will be sold to MSN until mid-2006.

How to optimise a website

Done properly, optimisation is complex and should begin before you even start building your website. From the programming language you use, to the web address you choose, you can affect your website's performance.

However, even if you're not starting from scratch you can still improve your optimisation, using our quick tips:

1. Keywords really matter!
 - a. Identify your keywords – get inside the online searcher's head! Try to think of words that someone looking for your products or services might type into a search engine. You might find the free keyword generators on Google (<https://adwords.google.co.uk/select/KeywordSandbox>) and Overture (<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>) helpful.
 - b. Competition for some keywords is high so it might be easier to optimise for less popular but more closely targeted words or phrases.
 - c. Select no more than 5 keywords per page – you can use different ones on different pages
2. Write the metatags for each page on the website, making sure you include your selected keywords for that page:
 - a. Window title – appears in the bar at the top of the browser window
 - b. Meta title – read by search engines
 - c. Meta descriptions – sometimes used by search engines to provide a brief description of your site among their search results
 - d. Meta keywords – include your selected keywords for that page

Beware the metatag myth! Metatags are not synonymous with optimisation. After many years of abuse, many search engines give little weight to metatags alone. You still need them but you must also make sure you also include your selected keywords in the text on the page.

3. Write your H1 titles – the H1 title is the first sentence on each web page and it needs to grab the visitor's attention. It must also include at least one of your selected keywords.
4. Weave keywords into your text and image alt tags. Look at the keywords you've selected for each page and try to make sure you scatter them through the text. Ideally you should use at least 200 words/page to keep search engines happy – but don't forget that this will look like a lot of words to a human visitor. You have two goals:
 - a. To write interesting, readable web copy
 - b. To use enough keywords to convince a search engine that the content of your website is genuine



5. Avoid spam techniques and don't let a trickster rip you off. Basically any technique which attempts to deceive a search engine becomes classed as spam. If you are caught, your website could be blacklisted and your website host may be penalised. It can be hard to spot a spam technique or a rip off but here are some things to be wary of:
 - a. 'Make your site top on 50 search engines'
 - b. 'All the links you've ever wanted – free'
 - c. Hidden text or graphics – make sure all the text on your site is a different colour to the background and never include single pixel images
6. Submit to key search engines. Usually Google, Yahoo and MSN prefer to pick your website up from links on other pages. If you can't get a link from anywhere (ask your website developer to help) then you can submit the website manually.
7. Submit to free directories such as Open Directory Project (www.dmoz.org) and be sure to select the correct category and fill your website description with keywords. Search engines like to find your website by themselves. This usually happens when their 'spiders' or 'crawlers' find a link to your site from a directory
8. Submit to paid directories. Consider this if there are high quality sites which are relevant to your area of business. 24% of top professionals view B2B websites as the most useful source of finding work-related information (Association of Online Publishers, April 2005). However, be aware of the costs and ask yourself how much business you'll need to win to cover the costs.

How can Branch Out Internet Marketing help with search engine optimisation?

Branch Out Internet Marketing offers a flexible service to anyone wanting to optimise their website. This can include:

- Incorporating optimisation techniques into a new website or website redesign
- Removing barriers to search engines from existing websites
- Keyword analysis
- Basic optimisation, including directory registrations and writing metatags and H1
- Writing fully optimised copy for websites
- Implementing linking strategies to increase numbers of high quality, inbound links

To talk to us about your current goals, call **01608 737653** or email: enquiries@branchout-internetmarketing.com and we will be happy to have a **free, no obligations**, discussion about your project.

To receive regular tips and information on ways to improve your e-marketing success, why not sign up for our free monthly newsletter?
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The Old Co-Op, High Street, Hook Norton, Oxfordshire OX15 5NF
Tel: 01608 737653 Email: enquiries@branchout-internetmarketing.com

Registered Company Number: 3827504 VAT Registration: 816 2544 37