



10 Search Engine Optimization Tips

By C. David Gammel

Search engine optimization (SEO) is about improving the position of your web content in natural search results. Natural indicates the results that show up in the main search results list from the search engine's index rather than the paid advertising that usually accompanies it around the edges. High placement in the natural search results is highly desirable because you get the traffic without having to pay for advertising on that specific search.

You should always be careful to focus on improving your own site when exploring search engine optimization. Promises of overnight results from SEO firms often indicate practices, such as link farming, that can lead to your site ultimately being banned from the indexes of the major search engines after an initial big jump. Companies and consultants that primarily focus on improving your own site are more likely to provide long term improvement for your organization.

The following ten tips will help you to improve both the content of your site as well as your placement in natural search engine results.

One: Identify Critical Search Phrases

This is a simple one. You can't measure success unless you know what you are trying to achieve. Spend some time thinking about the search phrases for which you wish to show up. What language does the general population use? It is important to identify where your preferred terms for key concepts differ from how the public use it. Armed with this information you can now proceed to improve your placement.

Two: Publish Content Relevant to Your Key Search Phrases

You would be surprised how often people have no content on their site related to search phrases they indicate are critical to their success. It is like expecting a forest to grow without planting any saplings. You have to have publicly accessible content that is about, and uses words from, your targeted search phrases. Check your site right now for anything related to your most important searches. If you have none, or what you do have doesn't use those key words in the page, you have identified your first course of action!

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Three: Keep Your Pages Focused

Resist the urge to create long pages that cover multiple topics. Having several disparate topics on a single page dilutes the overall impact of that page in search results. Keep pages reasonably focused on a single topic or a set of closely related topics. Break long pages up into multiple pages if necessary. This may be counter to creating usable pages, so you will have to find the right balance given your goals and priorities.

Four: Use Page Titles that Include Your Desired Search Phrases

Every web document should include a title tag. This is not the visible title of a page but one that browsers and search engine spiders use. Google, in particular, will use the text within the title tag when it displays natural search results. Your page title should be relevant to the searches you are trying to attract. The title should also come first and then be followed by your organization name or other standard content so that the most meaningful part will be shown in the search results.

Five: Make Your Design and Templates Search Engine Friendly

Search engine spiders, the programs that go around the web indexing content for the search engines, ignore pretty much

everything but text. If key words on your page (or the entire page!) are embedded in images you will not be indexed effectively. Sites with all of the text in images are effectively blank pages as far as the search spiders are concerned. Your template should also use standards-based markup for design and layout of content. This will make your design easier to manage and your content easier to index.

Six: Allow Deep Linking to Your Content

A number of web sites, under bad advice from their legal counsel, publish terms of use that bar linking to any page on their site other than the home page. So called “deep linking” is actually one of the inherent strengths of the Web and is a key element to improving the search engine placement of your pages. You should permit and encourage linking to any public page on your site in order to maximize the spread of your ideas.

Seven: Enable Easy Sharing of Pages

Building upon number six, provide tools that make it easy for a web site visitor to share your content with others. Some sites provide tools that make it easy to bookmark a page with del.icio.us or share it via Facebook. These simple tools can help

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spread links to your content, which helps improve your search engine placement.

Eight: Think About Next Actions for Your Top Pages

You should think about your goals for the search engine traffic you are trying to attract. What do you want people to do when they browse to your pages via search engine results? Do you want them to buy something? Sign up for a newsletter? Share the page with a friend? Think about what next actions you want those visitors to take and then design the page to facilitate those actions.

Nine: Identify Your Key Performance Indicators

You should develop key performance indicators for your top pages. These metrics should help you to measure how well your site is facilitating those next actions you wish your visitors to take. Establishing and monitoring a handful of KPIs will help you to understand how well your site is performing and the value of your inbound search engine traffic.

Ten: Make SEO Someone's Job

Finally, search engine optimization needs to be someone's responsibility. If not, you may implement the ideas above but not sustain the value of them. An accountable staff person can make sure that you remain focused, evaluate your efforts and constantly improve.

Conclusion: SEO Starts with You

Ultimately, improving your search engine placement starts with you. I encourage you to make copies of this article and give it out to your entire web team or communications staff. Discuss what changes you can make immediately and develop long term plans for further improvement. Take that first step now and the each following action will get easier.

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