Search Engine Optimization Techniques

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of search engine optimization (SEO) or "natural ranking" maintenance of a website in order to effectively build traffic and long term value for a website. A great deal of traffic can be brought to a site by search engine marketing (SEM) strategies and other paid inclusion techniques, but it is important to focus on natural ranking to bring traffic to a site. The following sections cover beneficial topics, rules, recommendations and how to effectively use the meta data on your Web Content Management System (WCMS) website.

Search engine optimization is the ability to influence search engines so they know or think that a website is important enough to rank high on certain keywords. Ranking high on specific keywords will generate more visitors. Whether the purpose of your website it is to entertain, inform, or sell a product, the more visitors you get to the site the better you are at achieving success. A high-ranking in a search engine's natural (un-paid) results gets you the best type of visitors. These visitors are already interested in the keyword your site ranks high on. The higher your position the more people will click on the link to your website.

How does it work?

Meta search engines or "spiders" read the content of your website by the use of robots. These robots index the content of a page and put parts of it in a database. They follow links and try to index your entire website. More advanced meta-search engines also add information to the database records for your website when it encounters links to your website. The more information it collects about websites the more difficult the search algorithms can be.

Each time someone types a keyword into a search engine, that engine applies its own unique algorithm to calculate the relevance of each page in its index to that particular search. It then returns a list of results sorted in descending order of relevance. Although search engine ranking algorithms differ, they generally use a combination of the following factors, placing varying weights on the importance of each of them: [i]

- Keyword in title tag
- Titles on each page
- Keyword placement in meta data (description, keyword)
- Keyword density and placement within body text
- Density of unique relevant content on your site
- Number of relevant links to your site and the popularity of those sites (back links)
- Number of relevant links within your site
- Page popularity (a measure of unique and repeat visits to each page)

Which Search Engines Should You Pay Attention To?

The search market has seen some consolidation and competition amongst the smaller players but one engine has remained on top in the US and worldwide, Google. At approximately 66% of search traffic, Google remains the engine the rest are catching up to. It's worth noting the growth of Facebook and Baidu as popular search engines and as their advertising platforms mature, they may warrant higher levels of investment in the future. Regardless of your resources, putting all of your "eggs" in the Google search "basket" is going to yield the best return on your PPC investment because that is arguably still where the majority of searchers go.

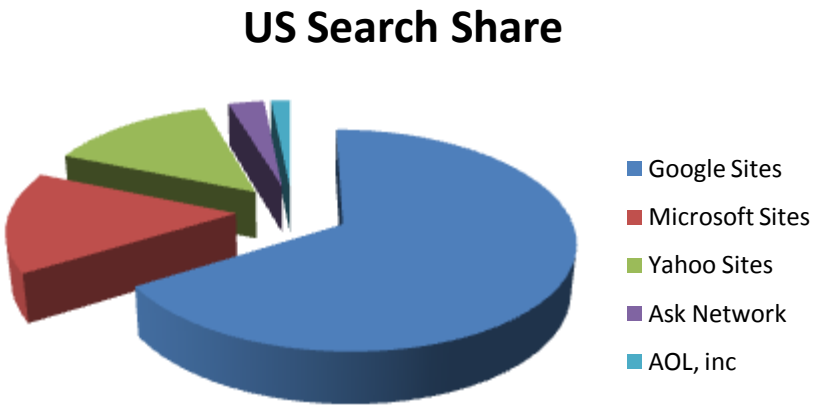


Figure 1 –January 2012 US Search Engine Market Share[1]

Search Engine Optimization Guidelines

Although search engine algorithms differ, they generally use a combination of the following factors. With the WCMS website, several SEO techniques are easy to accomplish.

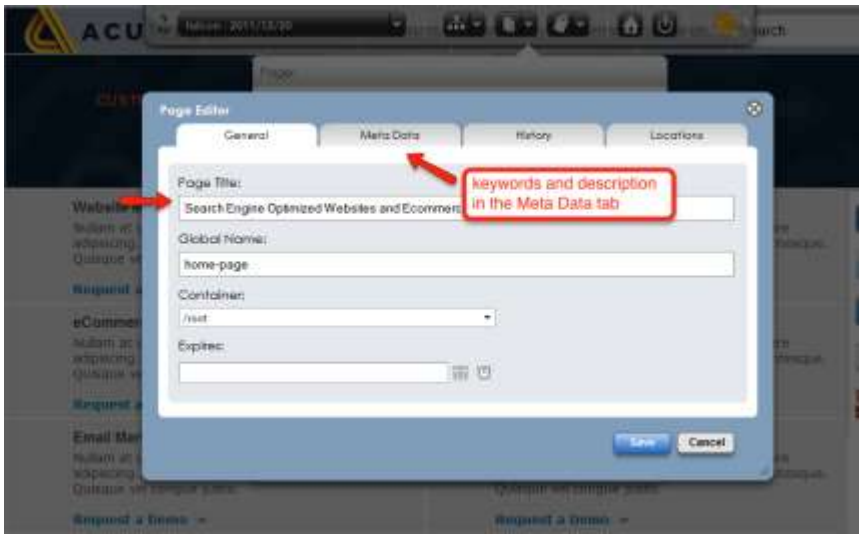
1. **Strong Titles on Each Page**
    a. Proper titles are extremely important because they tell search engines and potential clients what your site is about and what you have to offer.
        i. They are generally weighed high by the search engines ranking algorithms
        ii. Be very specific to a particular product or service on the page
        iii. Use descriptive keywords

2. **Title Tags in Meta Data**
    a. Your website's title is what comes up at the top of the internet browser.
        i. Keywords should appear at the start of the page's title tag
        ii. Say what you mean
        iii. Be specific
        iv. Put the most relevant information first
        v. Don't use ambiguous words
        vi. Don't be clever or catchy

3. **Keywords in Meta Data**
    a. The list of keywords you choose for each page is extremely important.
        i. Have the most relevant keywords listed first
        ii. Have derivatives listed second
        iii. Populate the meta data with relevant keywords that provide good representation of your company
        iv. Don't go over 30-35 keywords
        v. Use 1-4 keywords per phrase (ie, popcorn, popcorn poppers, popcorn popper machines)
        vi. Use plural or singular

4. **Descriptions in Meta Data**
    a. Search engines may display the content of the description tag as the site description on the search results page. This brief description of your site's content gives the searcher important information they need to determine your site's value. If there's no META description to display, most search engines pull the first few lines of text from the site's content and display it on the results page.

The image below shows you where to insert the meta data of your WCMS website. You simply go to the info tab in the upper right hand corner and insert the title, relevant keywords and descriptions.



5. **Alt Tags**
    a. Alt tags are another important part of natural ranking. Adding alt tags can increase your ranking if used properly. When applying alt tags, it is important that your alt tags are a good representation of the image it's representing. An alt tag should be associated with a particular product and should be a complete sentence.

6. **Keywords in Copy**
    a. In order for a page to rank highly for a given term, it is beneficial that the term appear in plain text. Search engines read the actual text of the page and look for keywords in order to understand the page's content. Many search engines also give increased weighting for words found near the top of each document.

7. **Link Popularity**
    a. Link popularity gives search engines a useful means of determining which pages are good for particular topics. The key is understanding that link analysis is not about getting lots of links from anywhere. Instead, you want links from good web pages that are related to the topics you want to be found for.

8. **Friendly URL's**
    a. This is automatically accomplished with our WCMS sites.
    b. Most search engines will NOT follow links in a site generated by a database containing characters ?, =, &, %, + and $
    c. Have keywords appear in URL's

Important Vocabulary

Alt tags - The text that is provided for graphics on a web page that displays as small rectangular boxes of text when you place your cursor over an image in your web browser. Every graphic that is placed on a web page supports this tag that can contain a descriptive title about what the picture is about. The alt tag for a picture is important for people who have images disabled on the page and for those who are visually impaired and use screen readers to view the web pages.

Keyword - A word or phrase that a search engine visitor uses to search for pages of interest. An important part of search engine optimization (SEO) is determining the keywords that a visitor who would be interested in a particular site might use to try to find that site.

Meta tags – The term meta data means "data about data". Meta tags on web pages are HTML tags that give information about the page to which they are attached. These tags are often left untouched when websites are created or usually forgotten and not well maintained. The meta tags are used by the search engines when indexing, cataloging web pages, and by the web browser to display information about a page.

Spider - A computer program that follows links on websites and scans documents and adds them to an index. Each search engine has its own spider that "crawls" the web to find and index content. These programs are very fast and efficient but have limited time and resources so they can be sensitive to how you put your website together. Use of frames, flash programming, or just plain sloppy HTML can dramatically effect how well a spider will index and rank your site.

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[1] (February 9, 2012) comScore Releases January 2012 U.S. Search Engine Rankings. *comScore.* Retrieved February 10, 2012, from http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2012/2/comScore_Releases_January_2012_U.S._Search_Engine_Rankings