

Simple Search Engine Optimization - (It Starts with the Code)

By J.C. Hurst

Having a proper code architecture is vital to the search engine marketing of a Website.

Simply put, designing an awesome content rich website is not enough. Yes, the site needs to be placed in front of as many potential visitors as possible. There are countless Search Engine Optimization and Placement companies that offer search engine placement services. Unfortunately, many of them focus primarily on search engine submission and keyword tactics while overlooking the most crucial element involving search engine optimization, the ability of your pages to communicate well with the search engines.

It all begins with proper code structure. This article explains how search engines work and how anyone can optimize their website for better search engine placement.

*Note - You don't need to be a Web developer to utilize optimization techniques on an existing Website. Most optimizations can be made by simply changing the location of a few lines of script or adding a word here or there. Create an optimized HTML page and save it to your hard drive and you'll have a template prepared for future projects.

One of the main rules in a ranking algorithm, often referred to as a "crawler" or "spider", involves the location and frequency of keywords on a web page.

Search engines will also check to see if the search keywords appear near the top of a web page, such as in the head section or within the first few paragraphs of text in the body section. They assume that any page relevant to the topic will mention those keywords right from the beginning.

Frequency is the other major factor in how search engines determine relevancy. A search engine will analyze how often keywords appear in relation to other words in a web page. Pages that contain a keyword with a higher frequency are often deemed more relevant than other web pages.

Search engines may also penalize pages or exclude them from their cache all together if they detect search engine "spamming." An example of this is when a word is repeated hundreds of times on a page in an attempt to increase the frequency and to move the page higher in the listings. Search engines watch for common spamming methods in a variety of ways, including following-up on complaints from search engine users.

The following "on the page" optimization techniques will greatly improve an existing Website's ability to communicate well with the search engines:

JavaScript

It doesn't matter for what purpose you utilize JavaScript, (drop-down menus, pop-ups, etc.), place the script at the end of the HEAD section or place it in a separate file altogether that is "included" on your page. This will move the important content closer to the beginning of the page and will improve the keyword location.



Make sure that the Title tag is the first tag in the HEAD section of your page.

It needs to be placed before all other tags, otherwise search engines will overlook it which will have a negative impact on your rankings.

Make sure that your Title tag does not contain "stop" words.

Words like "and, on, a, the, for, to, about, are, that, were, by, of" and other auxiliary words are too common and search engine algorithms don't take them into consideration. By using a stop word in your Title tag, you will damage your rankings.

Your keyword should be as close to the beginning of the Title tag as possible.

Move your keyword closer to the beginning of your Title to emphasize its importance and to greatly improve its prominence.

META name="keywords" content="less is more".

Choose your keywords carefully, (6-10 max.), and place them in order of importance in this tag. Too many keywords in this tag will take away from the importance, relevance and position of every word in the tag.

Does your page contain enough text?

Pages that contain mostly FLASH or other ephemeral web-based applications often contain little or no text because the text is contained inside of the application, not on the page itself. This can make a page completely transparent to search engines. Each page should contain at least 150 words of visible text within the BODY section.

Are any of your keywords in bold?

When you utilize a bold font on a particular keyword or keyword phrase that is located in the BODY section, you are telling the search engines that you place a high level of importance on them. Therefore the search engines will consider those words or phrases to be more important than those in regular font.

Make sure that H1 tags contain keywords.

H1 or heading tags are very important to search engines. Place keywords and keyword phrases within heading tags.

Make sure that ALT= tags contain keywords.

The ALT= tags at the end of image links should contain keywords and keyword phrases.

Is your keyword present in the URL?

If your URL points to an established and high-ranked web page, do not alter your URL. However, this factor is worth considering when you create new pages / Websites. Search engines are favorable towards keywords in the

URL. Just remember to use them sensibly and not to abuse them. When optimizing a page for a key phrase, separate the keywords in the URL with a hyphen, (web-site.html), or with an underscore, (web_site.html). Don't write them in one word. The search engines will understand it only as a single word.

"Off the page" criteria.

Over the years crawler-based search engines have had plenty of experience with webmasters who consistently rewrite their web pages in an attempt to gain better rankings. Some determined webmasters may even attempt to "reverse engineer" the location/frequency systems utilized by a particular search engine. Because of this, in addition to location/frequency methods all major search engines now utilize "off the page" ranking criteria. Webmasters can't easily influence these factors.

Primary among off the page criteria is link analysis. By analyzing how pages link to one another, a search engine algorithm can determine the topic of the page itself - whether or not the page is "important", (thus deserving of a ranking boost).

In addition, sophisticated techniques are used to screen out attempts by webmasters to build "artificial" links that are designed to boost their rankings.

Another off the page factor is click-through measurement. A search engine may monitor what results a search engine user receives after a particular search and what clicks are made by that user. Eventually the search engine will drop high-ranking pages that aren't attracting clicks, while promoting lower-ranking pages that do. Just as with link analysis, systems are utilized to compensate for fake links generated by over zealous webmasters.

Give these simple optimization techniques a try and I think that you will be pleased with the results.

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