

# SEO—Search Engine Optimization Bible, Second Edition

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Published by  
**Wiley Publishing, Inc.**  
10475 Crosspoint Boulevard  
Indianapolis, IN 46256  
[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

## Chapter 1: Search Engine Basics

### Overview

#### In This Chapter

- What is a search engine?
- Anatomy of a search engine
- Characteristics of search
- Classifications of search engines
- Putting search engines to work
- Manipulating search engines

What do you do when you need to find some bit of information—a fact, a statistic, a description, a product, or even just a phone number? In most cases, you bring up one of the major search engines and type in the term or phrase that you're looking for and then click through the results, right? Then, like magic, the information you were looking for is right at your fingertips, accessible in a fraction of the time it used to take. But of course search engines weren't always around.

In its infancy, the Internet wasn't what you think of when you use it now. In fact, it was nothing like the web of interconnected sites that has become one of the greatest business facilitators of our time. Instead, what was called the Internet was actually a collection of *FTP (File Transfer Protocol)* sites that users could access to download (or upload) files.

To find a specific file in that collection, users had to navigate through each file. Sure, there were shortcuts. If you knew the right people—that would be the people who knew the exact address of the file you were looking for—you could go straight to the file. That's assuming you knew exactly what you were looking for.

The whole process made finding files on the Internet a difficult, time-consuming exercise in patience; but that was before a student at McGill University in Montreal decided there had to be an easier way. In 1990, Alan Emtage created the first search tool used on the Internet. His creation, an index of files on the Internet, was called Archie.

If you're thinking Archie the comic book character created in 1941, you're a little off track (at least for now). The name Archie was used because the filename Archives was too long. Later, Archie's pals from the comic book series (Veronica and Jughead) came on to the search scene, too, but we'll get to that shortly.

Archie wasn't actually a *search engine* like those that you use today, but at the time it was a program many Internet users were happy to have. The program basically downloaded directory listings for all the files that were stored on *anonymous FTP* sites in a given network of computers. Those listings were then plugged in to a searchable database of web sites.

Archie's search capabilities weren't as fancy as the *natural language capabilities* you find in most common search engines today, but at the time it got the job done. Archie indexed computer files, making them easier to locate.

In 1991, however, another student named Mark McCahill, at the University of Minnesota, realized that if you could search for files on the Internet, then surely you could also search plain text for specific references in the files. Because no such application existed, he created Gopher, a program that indexed the plain-text documents that later became the first web sites on the public Internet.

With the creation of Gopher, there also needed to be programs that could find references within the indexes that Gopher created, and so Archie's pals finally rejoined him. Veronica (Very Easy Rodent-Oriented Net-wide Index to Computerized Archives) and Jughead (Jonzy's Universal Gopher Hierarchy Excavation and Display) were created to search the files that were stored in the Gopher Index System.

Both of these programs worked in essentially the same way, enabling users to search the indexed information by keyword. From there, search as you know it began to mature. The first *real* search engine, in the form that we know search engines today, didn't come into being until 1993. Developed by Matthew Gray, it was called Wandex. Wandex was the first program to both index and search the index of pages on the Web. This technology was the first program to *crawl* the Web, and later became the basis for all search crawlers. After that, search engines took on a life of their own. From 1993 to 1998, the major search engines that you're probably familiar with today were created: Today, search engines are sophisticated programs, many of which enable you to search all manner of files and documents using the same words and phrases you would use in everyday conversations. It's hard to believe that the concept of a search engine is just over 15 years old—especially considering what you can use one to find these days!

- Excite—1993
- Yahoo!—1994
- Web Crawler—1994
- Lycos—1994
- Infoseek—1995
- AltaVista—1995
- Inktomi—1996
- Ask Jeeves—1997
- Google—1997
- MSN Search—1998

## What Is a Search Engine?

Okay, so you know the basic concept of a search engine. Type a word or phrase into a search box and click a button. Wait a few seconds, and references to thousands (or hundreds of thousands) of pages will appear. Then all you have to do is click through those results to find what you want. But what exactly is a search engine, beyond this general concept of “seek and ye shall find”?

It's a little complicated. On the back end, a search engine is a piece of software that uses algorithms to find and collect information about web pages. The information collected is usually keywords or phrases that are possible indicators of what is contained on the web page as a whole, the URL of the page, the code that makes up the page, and links into and out of the page. That information is then indexed and stored in a database.

On the front end, the software has a user interface where users enter a search term—a word or phrase—in an attempt to find specific information. When the user clicks a search button, an algorithm then examines the information stored in the back-end database and retrieves links to web pages that appear to match the search term the user entered.

The process of collecting information about web pages is performed by an agent called a *crawler*, *spider*, or *robot*. The crawler literally looks at every URL on the Web that's not blocked from it and collects key words and phrases on each page, which are then included in the database that powers a search engine. Considering that the number of sites on the Web exceeded 100 million some time ago and is increasing by more than 1.5 million sites each month, that's like your brain cataloging every single word you read, so that when you need to know something, you think of that word and every reference to it comes to mind.

In a word...overwhelming.

### Anatomy of a Search Engine

By now you probably have a fuzzy idea of how a search engine works, but there's much more to it than just the basic overview you've seen so far. In fact, search engines have several parts. Unfortunately, it's rare that you find an explanation describing just how a search engine is made—that's proprietary information that search companies hold very close to their vests—and that information is vitally important to succeeding with search engine optimization (SEO).

#### Query Interface

The query interface is what most people are familiar with, and it's probably what comes to mind when you hear the term “search engine.” The query interface is the page, or user interface, that users see when they navigate to a search engine to enter a search term.

There was a time when the search engine interface looked very much like the Ask.com page shown in Figure 1.1. This interface was a simple page with a search box and a button to activate the search, and not much more.

Today, many search engines on the Web have added much more personalized content in an attempt to capitalize on the real estate available to them. For example, Yahoo! Search, shown in Figure 1.2, is just one of the search services that now enable users to personalize their pages with a free e-mail account, weather information, news, sports, and many other elements designed to make users want to return to that site to conduct their web searches.

One other option users have for customizing the interfaces of their search engines is a capability like the one Google offers. The Google search engine has a customizable interface to which users can add different gadgets. These gadgets enable users to add features to their customized Google search home page that meet their own personal needs or tastes.

Larger View



Figure 1.1: The Ask.com search page shows how most search engine interfaces used to look.

### Larger View

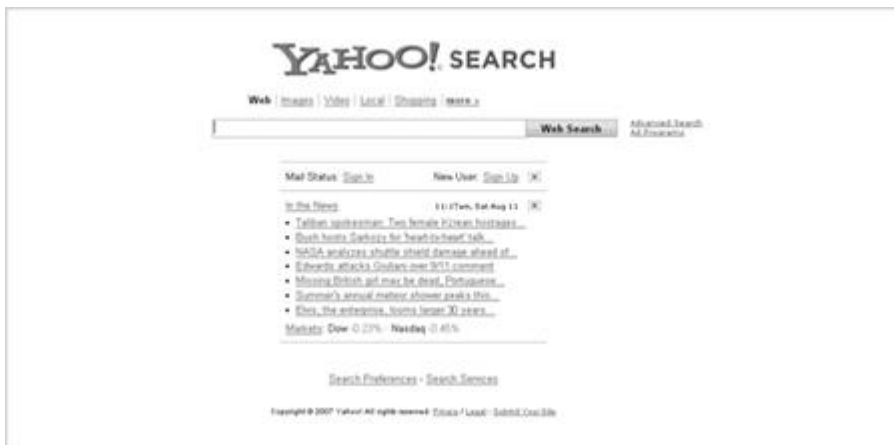


Figure 1.2: Yahoo! Search enables users to make their search page more personal.

Search has even extended onto the desktop. Google and Microsoft both have search capabilities that, when installed on your computer, enable you to search your hard drive for documents and information in the same way you would search the Web. These capabilities aren't of any particular use to you where SEO is concerned, but they do illustrate the prevalence of search and the value that users place on being able to quickly find information using searching capabilities.

When it comes to search engine optimization, Google's user interface offers the most potential for you to reach your target audience, because it does more than just optimize your site for search: If a useful tool or feature is available on your site, you can enable users to have access to this tool or feature through the Application Programming Interface (API) made available by Google. Using the Google API, you can create a gadget that users can install on their Google Desktop, iGoogle page, or Firefox or Chrome browser. This enables you to have your name in front of users on a daily basis.

### Cross-Reference

You can find more information about Google APIs in Appendix A in the section "Optimization for Google."

☞☞ For example, a company called PDF24.org offers a Google gadget that enables users to turn their documents into PDF files right from their Google home page once the gadget has been added. If the point of search engine optimization is ultimately to get your name in front of as many people as possible, as often as possible, then making a gadget available for addition to Google's personalized home page can only further that goal.

### ☞☞ Search Engine Results Pages

☞☞ The other sides of the query interface, and the only other parts of a search engine that's visible to users, are the search engine results pages (SERPs). This is the collection of pages that are returned with search results after a user enters a search term or phrase and clicks the Search button. This is also where you ultimately want to end up; and the higher you are in the search results, the more traffic you can expect to generate from search. Specifically, your goal is to end up on the first page of results—in the top 10 or 20 results that are returned for a given search term or phrase. Getting there can be a mystery, however. We'll decode the clues that lead you to that goal throughout the book, but right now you need to understand a bit about how users see SERPs.

☞☞ Let's start with an understanding of how users view SERPs. Pretend you're the searcher. You go to your favorite search engine—we'll use Google for the purposes of illustration because that's everyone's favorite, isn't it? Type in the term you want to search for and click the Search button. What's the first thing you do when the page appears?

☞☞ Most people begin reading the titles and descriptions of the top results. That's where you hook searchers and entice them to click through the links provided to your web page. But here's the catch: You have to be ranked close enough to the top for searchers to see those results page titles and descriptions and then click through them, which usually means you need to be in the top 10 or 20 results, which translates into the first page or two of results. It's a tough spot to hit.

☞☞ There is no magic bullet or formula that will garner you those rankings every time. Instead, it takes hard work and consistent effort to push your site as high as possible in SERPs. At the risk of sounding repetitive, that's the information you'll find moving forward. There's a lot of it, though, and to truly understand how to land good placement in SERPs, you really need to understand how search engines work. There is much more to them than what users see.

### ☞☞ Crawlers, Spiders, and Robots

☞☞ The query interface and search results pages truly are the only parts of a search engine that the user ever sees. Every other part of the search engine is behind the scenes, out of view of the people who use it every day. That doesn't mean it's not important, however. In fact, what's in the back end is the most important part of the search engine, and it's what determines how you show up in the front end.

Cross-Reference      ☞☞ You can find more in-depth information about crawlers, spiders, and robots in Chapter 18.

☞☞ If you've spent any time on the Internet, you may have heard a little about spiders, crawlers, and robots. These little creatures are programs that literally crawl around the Web, cataloging data so that it can be searched. In the most basic sense, all three programs—crawlers, spiders, and robots—are essentially the same. They all collect information about each and every web URL.

📖📖 This information is then cataloged according to the URL at which they're located and are stored in a database. Then, when a user uses a search engine to locate something on the Web, the references in the database are searched and the search results are returned.

## 📖📖 Databases

📖📖 Every search engine contains or is connected to a system of databases where data about each URL on the Web (collected by crawlers, spiders, or robots) is stored. These databases are massive storage areas that contain multiple data points about each URL.

📖📖 The data might be arranged in any number of different ways and is ranked according to a method of ranking and retrieval that is usually proprietary to the company that owns the search engine.

📖📖 You've probably heard of the method of ranking called PageRank (for Google) or even the more generic term quality scoring. This ranking or scoring determination is one of the most complex and secretive parts of SEO. How those scores are derived, exactly, is a closely guarded secret, in part because search engine companies change the weight of the elements used to arrive at the score according to usage patterns on the Web.

📖📖 The idea is to score pages based on the quality that site visitors derive from the page, not on how well web site designers can manipulate the elements that make up the quality score. For example, there was a time when the keywords that were used to rank a page were one of the most important factors in obtaining a high-quality score.

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## A Little More About PageRank

📖📖 PageRank is one of those mysteries that may never be completely unraveled. Volumes have been written about it, but probably the only two people in the world who understand it completely are Larry Page and Sergey Brin. That's because it was their brainchild.

📖📖 PageRank actually started as part of a research project that Page and Brin were working on at Stanford University. The project involved creating a new search engine that ranked pages in a democratic fashion with a few weights and measures thrown in for accuracy. Hence, the term. (What else would you call a ranking system for web pages that was developed by Larry Page?)

📖📖 The interesting thing about PageRank is that although Page and Brin conceived the idea and created the algorithm that arrives at a PageRank, it didn't belong to them. Stanford University actually owned the patent on the PageRank algorithm until Google purchased the exclusive right to use the algorithm for 1.8 million shares of the company (which were sold in 2005 for \$336 million).

📖📖 PageRank is a method by which web pages are ranked in Google search results. A combination of factors create the actual rank of a web page. Google explains it this way:

📖📖 "PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the Web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages "important."

☞☞☞ In other words, it's a mystery. A page that has more links (with equal votes) might rank lower than a page that has a single link that leads to a “more important” page. The lesson? Create pages for visitors, not for search engines.

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☞☞☞ That's no longer the case. Don't get me wrong. Keywords are still vitally important in web page ranking. However, they're just one of dozens of elements that are taken into consideration, which is why a large portion of Part III of this book is dedicated to using keywords to your advantage. They do have value; and more important, keywords can cause damage if not used properly—but we'll get to that.

### Quality Considerations

☞☞☞ When you're considering the importance of databases, and by extension page quality measurements, in the mix of SEO, it might be helpful to equate it to something more familiar—customer service. What comprises good customer service is not any one thing. It's a conglomeration of different factors—greetings, attitude, helpfulness, and knowledge, just to name a few—that come together to create a pleasant experience. A web page quality score is the same.

☞☞☞ The difference with a quality score is that you're measuring elements of design, rather than actions of an individual. For example, some of the elements that are known to be weighted to develop a quality score are as follows: It's a melding of these and other factors—sometimes very carefully balanced factors—that are used to create the quality score. Exactly how much weight is given to each factor is known only to the mathematicians who create the algorithms that generate the quality score, but one thing is certain: The better quality score your site generates, the better your search engine results will be, which means the more traffic you will have coming from search engines.

☞☞☞ Domain names and URLs

☞☞☞ Page content

☞☞☞ Link structure

☞☞☞ Usability and accessibility

☞☞☞ Meta tags

☞☞☞ Page structure

☞☞☞ Search Algorithms

☞☞☞ All the parts of the search engine are important, but the search algorithm is the cog that makes everything work. It might be more accurate to say that the search algorithm is the foundation on which everything else is built. How a search engine works is based on the search algorithm, which is closely related to the way that data is discovered by the user.

☞☞☞ In very general terms, a search algorithm is a problem-solving procedure that takes a problem, evaluates a number of possible answers, and then returns the solution to that problem. A search algorithm for a search engine takes the problem (the word or phrase being searched for), sifts through a database that contains cataloged keywords and the URLs with which those words are associated, and then returns pages that contain the word or phrase that was searched for, either in the body of the page or in a URL that points to the page.



But it even goes one better than that. The search algorithm returns those results based on the perceived quality of the page, which is expressed in the quality score. How this neat little trick is accomplished varies according to the algorithm that's being used. There are several classifications of search algorithms, and each search engine uses algorithms that are slightly different. That's why a search for one word or phrase will yield different results from different search engines.

Search algorithms are generally divided into three broad categories: on-page algorithms, whole-site algorithms, and off-site algorithms. Each type of algorithm looks at different elements of a web page, yet all three types are generally part of a much larger algorithm.

### On-page Algorithms

Algorithms that measure on-page factors look at the elements of a page that would lead a user to think the page is worth browsing. This includes how keywords are used in content as well as how other words on the page relate. For example, for any given topic, some phrases are common, so if your web site is about beading, an on-page algorithm will determine that by the number of times the term “beading” is used, as well as by the number of related phrases and words that are also used on the page (e.g., wire, patterns, jump rings, string or stringing, etc.).

These word patterns are an indicator that the algorithm results—that beading is the topic of the page—are, in fact, correct. The alternative, no related patterns of words, suggests that keywords were entered randomly on a page, just for their value.

The algorithm will also likely look at the proximity of related words. This is just another element of the pattern that validates the algorithmic results, but these elements also contribute to the quality score of a page.

The on-page algorithm also looks at some elements that human visitors can't see. The back side of a web page contains special content designed specifically for web crawlers. This content is called meta tags. When a crawler examines your web site, it looks at these tags as definitions for what you intend your site to be about. It then weighs that against the other elements of on-site optimization, as well as whole-site and off-site optimization, too.

Cross-Reference  You can find additional information about meta tags in Chapter 7.

### Whole-site Algorithms

If on-site algorithms look at the relationship of words and content on a page, then whole-site algorithms look at the relationship of pages on a site. For example, does the home page content relate to the content on other pages? This is an important factor from a user's viewpoint, because if users come to your site expecting one thing and then click through a link and wind up in completely unrelated territory, they won't be happy.

To ensure that your web site is what it claims to be, the whole-site algorithm looks at the relationship of site elements, such as the architecture of pages, the use of anchor text, and how the pages on your site are linked together. This is one reason why it's best to have separate web sites if you have a site that covers multiple, unrelated topics or subjects.

How your site is architected—that is, how usable it is for a site visitor, based on the topic it appears to be about—is a determining factor in how useful web site visitors find your site. Understand that one of the most important concepts in SEO is how useful site visitors find your web site, and a recurring theme throughout this book is building sites that visitors want to spend time on. Do that and SEO will (usually) fall naturally into place.



## Off-site Algorithms

☞☞☞ I can hear you already. “What does anything that's off my web site have to do with how my web page ranks in SERPs?” The answer is incoming links, which constitute an off-site factor that will affect your page ranking in sometimes dramatic ways. A good incoming link is the equivalent of a vote of confidence for your site, and a high level of confidence from surfers will also help boost your page ranking.

☞☞☞ Notice the emphasis I placed on good incoming link? That's another of those vitally important things you should commit to memory. Good incoming links are those that users willingly provide because they found your site, or a page on your site, useful. These typically are not links that are paid for.

☞☞☞ Let's go back to the concept that creating a site visitors will find useful is your best SEO tool. Good incoming links are how visitors show other visitors (and therefore web crawlers) the value they attach to your site. The number of good incoming links you have is directly proportionate to the amount of confidence and trust that visitors appear to have in your site.

☞☞☞ In summary, the off-site algorithm adds yet another dimension to how the quality of your page is ranked. Like the other algorithms, it's not a stand-alone measurement, but a component of a larger algorithm that tries to extract the true value of the web page or web site.

Cross-Reference      ☞☞☞ You'll find much more detailed information about links and linking strategies in Chapter 15.

## Additional Algorithms

☞☞☞ Phew, that was a lot of information about search algorithms to take in, and we're not done. Within those three main categories of algorithms are many other lesser algorithms that also contribute to the way your web site and web pages are ranked. Some of the most common types of search algorithms include the following: These are only a few of the various types of search algorithms that are used when creating search engines; and frequently more than one type of search algorithm is used, or, as happens in most cases, some proprietary search algorithm is created. The key to maximizing your search engine results is to understand a little about how each search engine you're targeting works. Only when you understand this can you know how to maximize your exposure to meet the search requirements for that search engine.

☞☞☞ List Search: A list-search algorithm searches through specified data looking for a single key. The data is searched in a very linear, list-style method. The result of a list search is usually a single element, which means that searching through billions of web sites could be very time-consuming, but yields a smaller search result.

☞☞☞ Tree Search: Envision a tree. Now examine that tree either from the roots out or from the leaves in. This is how a tree-search algorithm works. The algorithm searches a data set from either the broadest to the most narrow or from the most narrow to the broadest. Data sets are like trees: A single piece of data can branch to many other pieces of data, which is very much how the Web is set up. Tree searches, then, are more useful when conducting searches on the Web, although they are not the only searches that can be successful.

☞☞☞ SQL Search: One of the difficulties with a tree search is that it is conducted in a hierarchical manner, meaning it's conducted from one point to another, according to the ranking of the data

being searched. A SQL (pronounced see-quel) search enables data to be searched in a nonhierarchical manner, which means that data can be searched from any subset of data.

**🔍🔍🔍**Informed Search: An informed-search algorithm looks for a specific answer to a specific problem in a tree-like data set. The informed search, despite its name, is not always the best choice for web searches because of the general nature of the answers being sought. Instead, informed search is better used for specific queries in specific data sets.

**🔍🔍🔍**Adversarial Search: An adversarial-search algorithm looks for all possible solutions to a problem, much like finding all the possible solutions in a game. This algorithm is difficult to use with web searches because the number of possible solutions to a word or phrase search is nearly infinite on the Web.

**🔍🔍🔍**Constraint Satisfaction Search: When you think of searching the Web for a word or phrase, the constraint-satisfaction-search algorithm is most likely to satisfy your need to find something. In this type of search algorithm, the solution is discovered by meeting a set of constraints, and the data set can be searched in a variety of different ways that do not have to be linear. Constraint satisfaction searches can be very useful for searching the Web.

### **🔍🔍🔍**Retrieval and Ranking

**🔍🔍🔍**For a web search engine, the retrieval of data is a combination activity of the crawler (or spider or robot), the database, and the search algorithm. These three elements work in concert to retrieve web pages that are related to the word or phrase that a user enters into the search engine's user interface. As noted earlier, how that works can be a proprietary combination of technologies, theories, and coding whizbangery.


**🔍🔍🔍**The really tricky part is the results ranking. Ranking is also what you'll spend the most time and effort trying to affect. Your ranking in a search engine determines how often people see your page, which affects everything from revenue to your advertising budget. Unfortunately, how a search engine ranks your page or pages is a tough science to pin down.


**🔍🔍🔍**The most that you can hope for, in most cases, is to make an educated guess as to how a search engine ranks its results, and then try to tailor your page to meet those results. But keep in mind that although retrieval and ranking are listed as separate subjects here, they're actually part of the search algorithm. The separation is to help you better understand how search engines work.


**🔍🔍🔍**Ranking plays such a large part in search engine optimization that it appears frequently in this book. You'll look at ranking from every possible facet before you reach the last page; but for now, let's look at just what affects ranking. Keep in mind, however, that different search engines use different ranking criteria, so the importance each of these elements plays will vary. Page ranking is a very precise science. As previously mentioned, it's accomplished by assigning a quality score, based on numerous factors, to a web site; and it differs from search engine to search engine. To create the best possible SEO for your site, it's necessary to understand how these page rankings are made for the search engines you plan to target. Those factors can then be taken into consideration and used to your advantage when it is time to create, change, or update the web site that you want to optimize.


**🔍🔍🔍**Location: Location doesn't refer here to the location (as in the URL) of a web page. Instead, it refers to the location of keywords and phrases on a web page. For example, if a user searches for "puppies," some search engines will rank the results according to where on the page the word "puppies" appears. Obviously, the higher the word appears on the page, the higher the rank might


be. Therefore, a web site that contains the word “puppies” in the title tag will likely appear higher than a web site that is about puppies but does not contain the word in the title tag. This means that a web site that's not designed with SEO in mind will likely not rank where you would expect it to rank. The site [www.puppies.com](http://www.puppies.com) is a good example of this. In a recent Google search, it ranked as the fifth item in the results, rather than first, potentially because it does not contain the keyword in the title tag.

 **Frequency:** The frequency with which the search term appears on the page may also affect how a page is ranked in search results. For example, on a page about puppies, one that uses the word five times might be ranked higher than one that uses the word only two or three times. When word frequency became a well-known factor, some web site designers began using hidden words hundreds of times on pages, trying to artificially boost their page rankings. Most search engines now recognize this as keyword spamming and ignore or even refuse to list pages that use this technique.

 **Links:** One of the more recent ranking factors is the type and number of links on a web page. Links that come into the site, links that lead out of the site, and links within the site are all taken into consideration. It would follow, then, that the more links you have on your page or leading to your page, the higher your rank would be, right? Again, it doesn't necessarily work that way. More accurately, the number of relevant links coming into your page, versus the number of relevant links within the page, versus the number of relevant links leading off the page has a bearing on the rank that your page gets in the search results.

 **Click-throughs:** One last element that might determine how your site ranks against others in a search is the number of click-throughs your site has versus click-throughs for other pages that are shown in page rankings. Because a search engine cannot monitor site traffic for every site on the Web, some search engines monitor the number of clicks each search result receives. The rankings may then be repositioned in a future search, based on this interaction with users.

 **Understanding how a search engine ranks a web site is no easy task, and ultimately it ends with some educated guesswork. One way to become educated is to read what others have learned about how specific search engines rank web sites.**

 **In Appendix A, I try to decode the mystery a little by providing some tips and information about the top three search engines—Google, Yahoo!, and MSN. But bear in mind that search engines change constantly based on how Internet users behave online. What's true of search engine ranking today may not be tomorrow. This is evidenced by the value placed on keywords today versus what it was just a few years ago.**

## Characteristics of Search

Understanding how a search engine works helps you to understand how your pages are ranked by the search engine, but how your pages are *found* is another story entirely. That's where the human element comes in. Search means different things to different people. For example, one of my colleagues searches the Internet using the same words and phrases he would use to tell someone about a topic or even using the exact question that he's trying to get answered. It's called *natural language*. Another colleague, however, was trained in search using *Boolean* search techniques. She uses a very different *syntax* when she's creating a search term. Each of these methods returns different search results, even when the same search engines are used.

The characteristics of search refer to how users search the Internet. This can be everything from the *heuristics* they use when creating a search term to the selection the user makes (and the way those selections are made) after the search results are returned. It is interesting to note that more than half of American adults search the Internet every time they go online; and in fact more

people search the Internet than use the yellow pages when they're looking for phone numbers or the locations of local businesses.

This wealth of search engine users is fertile ground for SEO targeting, and the better you understand how and why users use search engines, and exactly how search engines work, the easier it will be to achieve the SEO you're pursuing.

## Classifications of Search Engines

With a decent understanding of how search engines work and how people use those search engines, you can now concentrate on some more detailed information about these engines. For example, you already know that all search engines aren't created equal, but did you know that there are different types, or classifications, of search engines? Search engines can be broken down into three different types (in the broadest of terms): primary, secondary, and targeted.

### Primary Search Engines

A *primary search engine* is the type you think of most often when search engines come to mind. Some index most or all sites on the Web. For example, Yahoo! Google, and MSN are primary (also called major) search engines.

Primary search engines generate the majority of the traffic to your web site, and as such they will be the primary focus of your SEO efforts. Each primary search engine differs slightly from the others. For example, Lycos has been around much longer than Google, yet Google is the most popular search engine on the Web. Why is that? Most likely, it's because people find that Google provides better search results.

The difference between those search results lies in the search algorithm used to create the search engine. Most primary search engines are also more than just search. Additional features such as e-mail, mapping, news, and different types of entertainment applications are also available from most of the primary search engine companies. These elements were added long after the search feature was established as a way to draw increasing numbers of users to the search engine. Although those features don't change the way people search, they might affect which search engine people choose.

#### **Google Overview**

Each of the major search engines differs in some small way. Google is the king of search engines, in part because of the accuracy with which it can pull the results from a search query. Sure, Google offers all kinds of extras like e-mail, a personalized home page, and even productivity applications, but those value-added services are not what made Google popular.

What turned Google into a household word is the accuracy with which the search engine can return search results. This accuracy was developed when the Google designers combined keyword searches with link popularity. The combination of keywords and the popularity of links to those pages yields a higher accuracy rank than just keywords alone. Of course, it also helps that Google places paid advertisements in a separate part of the page, as obvious ads, and not as part of the actual search results.

However, it's important to understand that link popularity and keywords are just two of dozens of different criteria that search engines can use in ranking the relevancy of web pages.

#### **Yahoo! Overview**

Most people know that Yahoo! is a search engine, but it's also a *web directory*, which basically means that it is a list of the different web pages available on the Internet, divided by category and subcategory. In fact, few people know that Yahoo! started as the favorites list of the two young

men who founded it. Through the acquisition of companies like Inktomi, All the Web, AltaVista, and Overture, Yahoo! gradually gained market share as a search engine.

Yahoo!, which at one time used Google to search its directory of links, now ranks pages through a combination of the technologies that it acquired over time. However, Yahoo!'s link-ranking capability is not as accurate as Google's. In addition, Yahoo! has a paid-inclusion program, which some users think tends to skew search results in favor of the highest payer.

### ***MSN Overview***

MSN's search capabilities aren't quite as mature as those of Yahoo! or Google. As a result, MSN has not yet developed the in-depth link analysis capabilities of these other primary search engines. Instead, MSN relies heavily on web site content for ranking purposes. However, this may benefit new web sites that are trying to get listed in search engines.

The link-ranking capabilities of Google and Yahoo! can preclude new web sites from being listed for a period of time after they have been created. This is because (especially where Google is concerned) the quality of the link may be considered during ranking. New links are often ignored until they have been in place for a while.

Because MSN relies heavily on page content, a web site that is tagged properly and contains a good ratio of keywords will be more likely to be listed—and listed sooner—by the MSN search engine. Therefore, though it's not the most popular of search engines, MSN is one of the primaries, and being listed there sooner rather than later will help increase your site traffic.

## **Secondary Search Engines**

*Secondary search engines* are targeted at smaller, more specific audiences, although the search engine's content itself is still general. They don't generate as much traffic as the primary search engines, but they're useful for regional and more narrowly focused searches. Examples of secondary search engines include Lycos, LookSmart, Miva, Ask.com, and Espotting.

Secondary search engines, just like the primary ones, vary in the way they rank search results. Some rely more heavily on keywords, whereas others rely on reciprocal links. Still others might rely on criteria such as meta tags or some proprietary criteria.

Secondary search engines should be included in any SEO plan. Though these search engines might not generate as much traffic as the primary search engines, they will still generate valuable traffic that should not be overlooked. Many users of secondary search engines are users because they have some loyalty to that specific search engine. For example, many former AOL users who have moved on to broadband Internet service providers still use the AOL search engine whenever possible because it's comfortable for them.

## **Targeted Search Engines**

Targeted search engines—sometimes called *topical search engines*—are the most specific of them all. These search engines are very narrowly focused, usually to a general topic, such as medicine or branches of science, travel, sports, and so on. Examples of targeted search engines include CitySearch, Yahoo! Travel, and MusicSearch; and like other types of search engines, ranking criteria vary from one search engine to another.

When considering targeted search engines for SEO purposes, keep in mind that many of these search engines are much more narrowly focused than primary or secondary search engines. Look for the targeted search engines that are relevant to your specific topic (such as pets, sports, locations, and so on).

## Putting Search Engines to Work for You

All this information about search engines has one purpose—to show you how they work so that you can put them to work for you. Throughout this book, you'll find various strategies for optimizing your web site so it appears high in search engine rankings when relevant searches are performed, but this requires that you know how to put search engines to work.

Search engine optimization is essentially the science of designing your web site to maximize your search engine rankings. This means that all of the elements of your web site are created with the goal of obtaining high search engine rankings. Those elements include the following: In addition to these elements, however, you also have to consider things such as keywords, links, HTML, and meta-tagging. Even after you have all the elements of your page optimized for search engine friendliness, there are other things to consider. For example, you can have all the right design elements included in your web pages and still have a relatively low search engine ranking. Factors such as advertising campaigns and update frequency also affect your SEO efforts.

- Entry and exit pages
- Page titles
- Site content
- Graphics
- Web site structure

All of this means that you should understand that the concept of search engine optimization is not based on any single element. Instead, search engine optimization is based on a vast number of elements and strategies. It's also an ongoing process that doesn't end once your web site is live.

SEO is a living, breathing concept of maximizing the traffic that your web site generates, and as such it is a constantly moving target. If you've ever played a game of Whack-a-Mole, you can appreciate how difficult search engine optimization is to nail. In that game, a little mole pops up out of a hole. Your job is to whack the mole on top of the head before it disappears back down the hole and appears in another.

Search engine optimization operates on much the same concept. Search engines are constantly changing, so the methods and strategies used to achieve high search engine rankings must also change. As soon as that little mole pops up in one hole, it disappears and then reappears in another. It's a frustrating game, but given enough time and concentration, you can become very good at it.

## Manipulating Search Engines

There's one more topic to touch on before this chapter is finished. SEO is about manipulating search engines—to an extent. Beyond that, the manipulation becomes something more sinister and you run the risk of having your web site removed from the search engine rankings completely. It's true. It happens.

What exactly can and can't you do? There's a list, and here is part of it.

You can: You can't: These are just basic rules for putting search engines to work for you. There are many more, which you will discover in the coming chapters. As you get started, however, keep these in mind because you'll see them repeatedly throughout the course of this book and any other research that you might be doing on search engine optimization.

- Create a web site that contains meta tags, content, graphics, and keywords that help improve your site ranking.
- Use keywords liberally on your site, so long as they are used in the correct context of your site topic and content.
- Include reciprocal links to your site from others as long as those links are legitimate and relevant.



- Encourage web site traffic through many venues, including keyword advertising, reciprocal links, and marketing campaigns.
- Submit your web site to search engines manually, rather than wait for them to pick up your site in the natural course of cataloging web sites.
- Trick search engines by imbedding hidden keywords in your web site. This is a practice that will very likely get you banned from most search engines.
- Artificially generate links to your site from unrelated sites for the purpose of increasing your ranking based on link analysis. Most search engines have a built-in mechanism that detects this type of deceptive practice.
- Artificially generate traffic to your web site so that it appears more popular than it is. Again, there are safeguards in place to prevent this from happening; and if you trip those safeguards, you could end up on the banned list for many search engines.
- Force your web site to appear in search engine rankings by submitting the site repeatedly for inclusion in the rankings. A good general rule of thumb is that you should submit your site once and then wait at least six weeks before submitting it again. Submitting it repeatedly will, again, only lead to something nasty like being banned from the search engine.
- Expect search engines to automatically rank you at the top of your topic, category, or keyword as soon as the site is picked up. It can take a little time to build the *status* that you need to reach a high search engine ranking. Remember, SEO is a process.

## SEO is Hard Work

Something to remember as you embark on this journey toward SEO is that it is not going to be easy. Just when you think you have it figured out, the search ranking algorithm will change. If you're lucky, the change will only mildly affect your search rankings. However, if you build your site to please search engines, it's more likely that your search rankings will be turned on their head.

That's one reason why it's vitally important that you build your web site with users in mind first, and then search rankings. Ultimately, search engine designers take cues for the changes they may make from the behavior of searchers. Therefore, if you're constantly vigilant and attending to your visitors' needs, your web site won't be as affected by changes in the search engine algorithm.

It's still a lot of work to reach this level of user-friendly design. Some people assume a few tweaks here and there are all they need, but unless your site is very well designed to start with, tweaking just won't cut it. It's more realistic to understand that you'll end up putting dozens of hours into your separate SEO efforts.

## Scheduling SEO Efforts

Because SEO is so much work, a good way to manage it is to schedule daily time into your routine for SEO efforts. Of course, this is after the initial implementation of SEO. Initially, SEO should be done during the build of a new web site, or it can be built into existing sites if they are not new constructions. However, if you're building better SEO into an existing site that's poorly optimized, then be prepared for a major site redesign.

SEO is a holistic approach to improving your search engine rankings. As such, it requires attention to your whole site. It does little good to optimize portions of your site and leave other areas lacking the same attention to detail. If you're going to SEO your site, do it right and make sure you hit all of the elements as you go.

## Chapter 2: The Theory of Long Tail Search



## Overview

### In This Chapter

- What is Long Tail search?
- Long Tail vs. Broad Head
- Working from the bottom up
- Tying it all together

The counterpart to understanding how a search engine works is understanding how searching works. How do users *find* the products and information they are looking for when they go to a search engine? A lot of research has gone into answering that question, but it looks as if it always comes back to the same principles that are used in so many other areas—economics, science, mathematics, and even chaos theory.


As with everything in the universe, searching happens in patterns. Finding happens in patterns, too. Your job, as you optimize your web site, is to recognize and tap into those patterns. Fortunately, many have come before you and left behind information that makes your job much easier.


Let's define a few principles that explain how users search: How do a linguistic principle and two economic principles come together to explain how users search? It's all explained in the theory of *Long Tail search*, which grew from Anderson's article on the Long Tail of economics.

- *Zipf's Law*: Developed by the linguist George Kingsley Zipf, this essentially states that the specificity of any word is inversely proportional to its rank on a frequency table. In other words, a word used often is likely to be a broad, common word, whereas a word used less often is likely to be a narrower, more specific word.
- *Pareto's Principal*: Also known as the 80/20 Rule, this principle holds that for any given event, 80 percent of the results come from 20 percent of the activity. For example, if you subscribe to Pareto's Principle, then you probably believe that 80 percent of the work in any organization is performed by about 20 percent of the employees.
- *The Long Tail*: The Long Tail is a phrase coined by Chris Anderson in an October 2004 article in *Wired* magazine that essentially explained how a small portion of very popular products generate a sizable income; however, a large portion of semipopular products generate small amounts of income that when added together can be equal to or larger than the income generated by the very popular products.

Thoroughly confused? No need to be. This chapter explains Long Tail search in great detail. As with any buzzword, Long Tail is a term that caught the media's attention and has been thrown about until we're all pretty much sick of hearing it. No doubt you've heard the term before, but you may not have a clear idea of exactly what the Long Tail is and how it applies to search.

### What Is Long Tail Search?

 Long Tail wasn't coined to deal specifically with search. Anderson was originally trying to explain the difference between the success of e-commerce stores compared to that of brick-and-mortar stores. His theory was that because of space constraints, brick-and-mortar stores have to justify every item that's put on their shelves. This means the items have to “earn their keep,” so to speak, which in turn means that an item found in a store needs to generate consistently high revenue.

 E-commerce stores aren't beholden to the same rules. Theoretically, an e-commerce store doesn't have to pay for the actual shelf space to stock a store, which should reduce the cost of carrying items. In many cases, nor do e-commerce stores have to physically stock an item in a warehouse somewhere. They can (and very often do) use a method called drop shipping, whereby products are shipped directly from manufacturer to consumer. The e-commerce site is nothing more

than an order-taking system. That reduces the cost of providing a wide selection of items to consumers, which in turn means that e-commerce stores can afford to stock less popular, but still wanted, items.

☞☞☞A commonly quoted example of this concept is a brick-and-mortar bookstore such as Barnes and Noble versus a pure e-commerce store such as Amazon.com. By most estimates, Barnes and Noble stocks an average of 300,000 books, and not all of those books appear in all stores. What all those books do have in common is that they sell a certain number of copies each month. They are items that have proven to be in demand, and therefore they earn the half inch or so that they occupy on the shelf.

☞☞☞Amazon.com stocks millions of books—many of them books that don't sell more than a copy or two each month. Nonetheless, Amazon is still a successful retail business because it costs much less to make those books available to customers. There's no shelf to pay for and not everything you find on the Amazon.com web site is stored in Amazon warehouses, which means Amazon can offer customers books that are less popular or are popular with only a niche segment of the population.

☞☞☞What really makes this concept interesting from both a retailing and a searching aspect is that studies show that around 20 percent of the revenue generated by a retailer is generated by the most popular items—those items that are most searched for and most in demand. The remaining 80 percent of revenue is generated by the less popular niche items that users are searching for.

#### ☞☞☞The Long Tail in Action

☞☞☞The Long Tail, then, is roughly the reverse of Pareto's Principle, which would hold that 20 percent of a company's products generate 80 percent of its sales. (Keep in mind that this is an estimate. The exact ratio of products to sales varies by company. You'll see estimates of everything from 20/80 to 50/50.) The important point of this Long Tail theory is that a large number of niche products can, and do, generate a huge volume of sales. Companies such as eBay prove it.

☞☞☞eBay is a niche product company. Search for products on eBay and you'll find all kinds of very obscure and yet in-demand products. The adage, "One man's junk is another man's treasure," applies, just as it applies to Long Tail search theories, too.

☞☞☞The Long Tail can be represented by a graph, where the vertical axis details the number of a particular product sold, and the horizontal axis illustrates the number of products that sell something each month.

☞☞☞The theory holds that the top-selling item for any given retailer sells nearly twice what the next-ranked item sells, and that each item after that progressively decreases. For example, a sample Long Tail graph for any given retail store might look something like the one shown in Figure 2.1. (How this model relates to search terms is indicated in parentheses on the figure.)

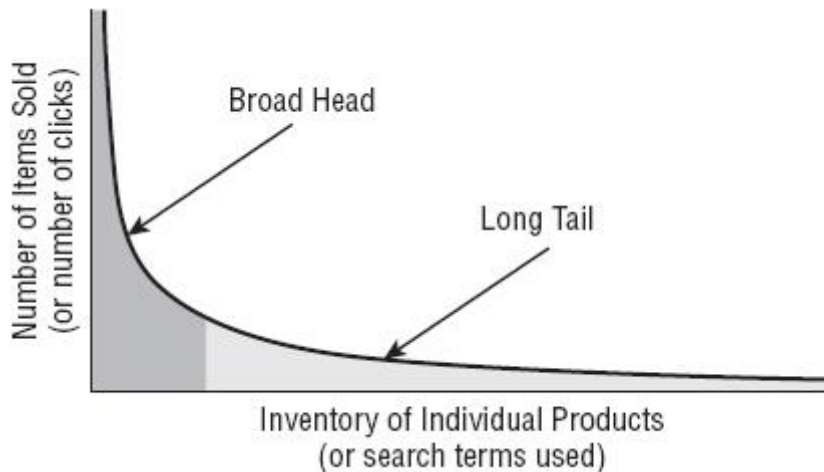


Figure 2.1: The Long Tail of search represents dozens of search terms that each generate a few clicks each month.

Notice the narrow spike at the beginning of the graph (illustrating the number of highly popular items) and the long tail of less popular items from the middle to the end of the graph. For example, consider an electronics store. The items that make up that spike are products such as the Nintendo Wii, the iPod Touch, and other wildly popular products that everyone thinks they must have. (The spike is called the Broad Head, a term that is discussed later in the chapter.)

The Long Tail theory that Anderson posited for e-commerce works for search behavior too, because what is the Internet but a giant conglomeration of both popular and obscure information and products? An illustration of the Long Tail will help you get the full picture.

For example, a computerized version of Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick* was broken down by word, and each word was ranked according to the number of times it was used in the book. What researchers found was that the word "the" was the most frequently used word, at about 15,000 times.

Of course, the word "the" doesn't tell you anything at all about the content of the book. Conversely, the word "whale," which would seem to be more indicative of the novel's subject, was used only 2,000 times. It ranked twenty-first on the list of words included in the book by frequency.

Translating this example to search, you have to think in terms of keywords. Someone searching for the word "the" in the book would find many instances but not necessarily helpful ones in terms of a search for the book's topic. Switching to the term "whale" would show fewer search results, but better-targeted ones. A user would be able to gather more information from the results returned.

When you're considering keywords for your web site, therefore, you have to look at all the words that are indicative of your chosen topic. When you do, you'll find that only a small percentage of those words appear frequently, and these are usually very broad terms. They'll generate a lot of clicks, but if you concentrate only on them, you could miss out on a sizable number of clicks that are more narrowly focused.

Here's a real-world illustration from a web site for which I create content. Table 2.1 contains a list of search terms that were used to find articles on this site in a given day. The table indicates that the top three terms generated 285 clicks for the site. Those are pretty broad terms.

Dig deeper into the search terms, however, and you'll see that the remaining 29 terms generated almost half as many clicks, totaling 139. Notice, too, that the majority of the terms that have low click rates are very specific—those visitors were looking for something in particular.

Table 2.1: Long Tail Keywords Add Up

[Open table as spreadsheet](#)

Keyword	Number of Clicks
Identity theft	145
Identity theft articles	98
Identity theft statistics	42
Election scams	15
Steps to recover from identity theft	15
Identity theft methods	10
Reporting identity theft	8
Internet identity theft statistics	7
How to report identity theft	7
Ident	5
What is monitoring your credit	5
Top identity theft method	4
Idetit	4
Identity theft.com	4
Id theft	4
Tips for reporting identity theft	3
Lightyear wireless + scam	3
2006 identity theft statistics	3
Do my own credit check	3
How to use stolen identities	3
Email spoofing	3

Keyword	Number of Clicks
Computer spyware	3
Definition of identity theft	3
Identity theft where to begin	3
Where is identity theft the most prevalent	3
How to know identity thief on credit card	3
Identity theft information	3
How identity theft happens	3
Identi	3
Credit card protection	3
Signing president bush identity theft enforcement and restitution act of 2008	3
Dumpster diving identity theft	3

Google is widely known for understanding the intricacies of search better than any other search engine company on the planet. And after studying search patterns, the gurus at Google estimate that about half of all searches through the Google search engine are one of a kind. That equals more than 100 million unique searches each day on Google alone. Add in all the other search engines out there, and the number of unique searches in a day's time is absolutely astronomical.

#### Characteristics of Long Tail Keywords

Long Tail keywords are not actually keywords. They're more key phrases that are very specific; and all Long Tail search queries have a few things in common: How do you know which Long Tail phrases are appropriate for your web site? To know that, you have to understand a little about how people search.

Average 3–5 words in length

Usually not competitive phrases

Usually directly related to a product or specific bit of information

Each phrase generates only a few clicks each month.

People rarely search for random information—they are usually looking for something specific. If you have an idea of what visitors might be searching for, then you know how to target each of those searches, using both broad terms and narrower Long Tail phrases. Here are some bits of information that people use search engines to find: These are pretty general, but if you begin to apply key terms

from your web site topic to these bits of information, then you can see the different ways that you might apply both broad terms and Long Tail key phrases to your SEO efforts.

☞☞☞ Product names

☞☞☞ Product functionality

☞☞☞ Product appeal

☞☞☞ Product quality

☞☞☞ Product usefulness

☞☞☞ Uses of products

☞☞☞ Solutions to problems

☞☞☞ General industry terms

☞☞☞ Specific industry terms

☞☞☞ General terms and geographical locations

☞☞☞ Specific terms and geographical locations

☞☞☞ Clearly, Long Tail keywords can be a very important part of your SEO strategy. They can account for a sizable chunk of the clicks that are generated on your site each day. And that's to say nothing of the value of clicks that result from Long Tail keywords. There's more on that a little later in this chapter.

## Long Tail vs. Broad Head

Going back to applying Long Tail to products rather than search, the items that make up the Long Tail of less popular products are things such as food, cleaning supplies, and some clothing items. These are the products that you actually must have on a weekly basis to survive.

For example, consider your own spending. Think of all the purchases that you make in a given month (we're taking bills out of the equation; it's too painful to think about those every month and they're only loosely classified as products, so worthless to us at the moment). Chances are good that you spend a certain amount of money every month on the essentials that it takes to survive and maintain a household. Those are the items that appear in the Long Tail theory that Anderson posited.

You may also spend a certain amount of your income each month on nonessential items. These are things (like the new iPod Touch) that you don't need but would really like to have. The products that fall into this "want" category are often referred to as being in the *Broad Head*. Now compare the two. Two things should stand out in this comparison. First, it's likely that your spending on the essentials is larger than your spending on the one or two want items that you've been eyeing. Second, you'll re-spend on essentials every month.

Is the picture becoming clearer? Translating this to search, it works about the same way. Searchers are going to search for those big, Broad Head search terms (the ones that are wildly popular) when they're at the beginning of a buying process. But as they narrow their buying process, they'll search for narrower terms—Long Tail search terms. These narrower terms are like the essential items that you pick up at Wal-Mart each week. They're not as popular as the more exciting terms, but people will keep searching for them.

**Cross-Reference** The buying process consists of four phases that potential customers go through, from hearing about a product to purchasing that product. You can learn more about the buying process in Chapter 13.

Here's the best part in all of this: Those searchers who are looking for the less common terms are also looking for more-targeted words and are in a more purchasing state of mind—they've worked through the buying process and are closer to making a purchase, which also means they're closer to reaching whatever goal conversion you've set up for them.

## Working from the Bottom Up

Even though it now seems as if those Long Tail keywords are the most important ones, you shouldn't discount the value of Broad Head words either. When you're considering the keywords and phrases that you want to use to market your web site and to rank in search engines, you should be looking at both Broad Head and Long Tail terms.

The key is how you do it. You have broad, usually very popular terms that everyone is fighting for, and then you have narrow terms that are used by people who are more likely to reach a conversion goal on your site, whether it's to purchase a product or service, to fill out a form that generates a sales lead, or to sign up for a newsletter or other marketing-related service. Knowing this, your instinct is to go to the heart of the matter and shoot for the audience most likely to convert.

In doing so, however, you leave a large part of the audience out completely. The broad-term searchers may not be as likely to reach a conversion goal *right now*, but they might reach that goal in the future, so you also want to bring those searchers to your site. Finding the right balance of broad-term keywords and Long Tail keywords can be a little tricky, though.

So how do you handle it? I say start at the bottom and work your way up. Obviously, you want to generate a lot of traffic as quickly as possible, but you also need to prove that your efforts are working, so you need to reach people who are going to convert quickly. Each Long Tail keyword isn't going to generate a lot of traffic, but it will generate very specific traffic—people who have a goal in mind. Your job is to help them reach that goal. Understand that you're not going to optimize for one type of keyword over another. It's not Long Tail first and then Broad Head—the two really go hand-in-hand. You should focus on optimizing both. Many web site owners begin with the broad keywords that reach the largest audience and come back later to build pages that are more highly targeted.

That method works, albeit slowly. Instead, optimize for the broad terms, but also for the Long Tail terms. That means putting together pages as quickly as possible that target both broad terms and more specific terms. You can use multiple keywords per page, so a progression from broad to narrow on a single page works fine.

For example, if you own a web site that sells electronic gadgets, you'll need pages that target broad keywords such as electronics, cell phones, MP3 players, and whatever other categories of electronics you might offer; but you also need to include much more specific terms, such as iPhone, HTC G1, iPod, Zune, and Sandisk on those same pages.

The solution is to create content that is relevant to the narrower Long Tail keywords. In the process, however, it will be nearly impossible for you to create that content without including references to the Broad Head terms.

For example, the front page of your web site will likely introduce your company, show special offers and featured products, and perhaps have small articles or text-based snippets of information that are targeted to specific products. Each of those broader categories is going to



lead to a page that's progressively more specific with each level of the site into which the user goes. Therefore, the next page might be slightly more detailed and narrow, and the next page more focused still. On each of these pages, you're targeting a couple of sets of keywords. The first will be the broad terms that apply to your site. On your electronics site, a second page might be related to MP3 players. On that page, you could create an article or even a chart that explains to the site visitor what features to look for in an MP3 player.

Each of those features will lead one page deeper to an explanation of the feature that you're highlighting, and from that page you could go even deeper (and narrower) to explain to the visitor what specific uses that feature has. Along the way, though, you'll probably refer to the term "MP3 player" several times on each page, so you're not only creating content that targets the Long Tail keywords and phrases; the same content also targets the broader terms.

It's in this melding of both broad terms and Long Tail terms that you'll find your most powerful keyword mixture.

## **Tying It All Together**

Here's why using both Long Tail and Broad Head keywords works: The Long Tail keywords will likely generate the most traffic for you in the beginning—hence my advice to work from the bottom up. If you optimize your site for those Long Tail words, you should very quickly begin to see results from those efforts.

You're not going to debut your site and generate tons of traffic, no matter how well you optimize it; and Long Tail keywords aren't a magic solution ensuring that you automatically have a ton of converting traffic either. However, competition for Long Tail keywords isn't as tough as it is for the broader ones, so you should begin to see traffic more quickly than if you just target the broader words.

Cost is another consideration. Broad keywords tend to be far more expensive when you're using keyword-targeted ads than the keywords and phrases associated with Long Tail search terms. In fact, it's possible that you'll rank on the first page for some Long Tail words and phrases within a few days (and sometimes even just a few hours) of going live. Because these terms are narrow and more targeted, there's not as much competition. As soon as a search crawler examines your site and adds it to the results database, you should begin to see some kind of ranking. If the Long Tail terms you've selected are well targeted, then the site will likely be fairly high in the rankings. I've seen some web sites create pages that appeared in the top 10 on Google search results for their chosen term within four hours. It's rare, but it does happen.

In addition to your site showing up in rankings for Long Tail terms faster than for broad terms, you should see traffic that's converting at a reasonably steady rate as well. Remember that Long Tail keywords tend to target visitors who are further along in the buying process, which means they're ready to make a commitment. Whether that's to sign up for your site newsletter or actually make a purchase from your site, if you're showing up high enough in search rankings to garner clicks, then it's likely that you're also going to reach goal conversions with those visitors who find you.

Of course, the Broad Head keywords will also generate some traffic. In the beginning, it will be slow; but over time (and that's the key with Broad Head words) the traction that you gain with your Long Tail keywords will contribute to traction for the broader words. Where broad terms with a lot of competition are concerned, numerous factors go into determining search ranking. One of those considerations is how long your web site has been around. Another is how much traffic is generated from other, more targeted searches. And if you've optimized your site well, for both Long Tail and broad terms, then you should begin to see your ranking for those broader words climb too.

Long Tail search terms are not an SEO panacea. Long Tail targeting is a strategy. It works well when done properly, but alone it won't guarantee you top ranking or high conversion rates. Moreover, Long Tail should be just one facet of a well-considered, well-planned, and well-executed SEO plan.

## Chapter 3: Creating an SEO Plan

### Overview

#### In This Chapter

- Understanding why you need SEO
- Setting SEO goals
- Creating your SEO plan
- Understanding organic SEO
- Achieving organic SEO

Before you can even begin to optimize your web site for search engines, you need to have a search engine optimization plan in place. This will help you create SEO goals and keep those goals in focus as the purpose of your site changes, and as the methods for search engine optimization change—and they will change.

Your SEO plan will help you see where you need to concentrate your efforts at any given time. This need will change. In the beginning, you're most likely to be focusing on getting started with SEO, which means you'll be wrestling keyword issues, adding metadata tags, and building content. However, after you've put all of your SEO strategies into place, the focus of your SEO activities should become more focused on maintaining and updating the elements of SEO that help you rank well.

Note that I said your efforts will change, not that they will end. Once you've started SEO, if you plan to continue using it, you'll need to constantly monitor and update your SEO plan, strategies, and activities. There was a time when the only thing you had to worry about was which keywords or links would be most effective for getting your site ranked high in relevant search results. Today, very few search engines focus on a single aspect of search engine optimization. This means that over time, those who focused only on keywords or only on links have found themselves with diminished SEO effectiveness.

Web sites today are—or should be—living organisms. A successful web site grows and changes constantly. From simply adding new content to something as drastic as complete site redesign, a good web site will look different from one year to the next, and sometimes from one month to the next.

Search engines also naturally change and mature, as the technologies and principles that enable SEO and the search engines themselves change. To keep pace, your SEO plan should be considered a dynamic, changing document. Your approach to SEO needs to evolve and change as well, and that's where your SEO plan will help you stay on track.

Using the SEO plan, you can quickly and easily tell where you are and where you need to be with your search engine optimization efforts.

### Understanding Why You Need SEO

Before you can understand the reasons for using SEO, it might be good to have a definition of what SEO—search engine optimization—is. It's probably a safe assumption that if you've picked up this book, you have some understanding of SEO, so I'll keep it simple.

SEO is the science of customizing elements of your web site to achieve the best possible search engine ranking. That's really all there is to search engine optimization, but as simple as it sounds, don't let it fool you. Both internal and external elements of the site affect the way it's ranked in any given search engine, so all of these elements should be taken into consideration. Good SEO can be very difficult to achieve, and great SEO seems pretty well impossible at times.

Why is search engine optimization so important? Think of it this way: If you're standing in a crowd of a few thousand people and someone is looking for you, how will they find you? In a crowd that size, everyone blends together. Now suppose there is a system that separates groups of people. Maybe if you're a woman you're wearing red and if you're a man you're wearing blue. Now anyone looking for you will have to look through only half the people in the crowd. You can further narrow the group of people to be searched by adding additional differentiators until you have a small enough group that a *search query* can be executed and the desired person can be easily found.

Your web site is much like that one person in the huge crowd. In the larger picture your site is nearly invisible, even to the search engines that send crawlers out to catalog the Web. To get your site noticed, both by crawlers and visitors, certain elements must stand out. That's why you need search engine optimization—to help you focus on the *right* elements.

By accident, your site will surely land in a search engine; and it's likely to rank within the first few thousand results without any effort from you. A crawler will eventually find the site and bury it somewhere in the results with every other web site on the same topic. Clearly, that's not good enough. Being ranked on the ninth or tenth page of search results is tantamount to being invisible. To be noticed, your site should be ranked much higher.

Ideally, you want your site to be displayed somewhere on the first two to three pages of results. Most people won't look beyond the third page, if they get even that far. Indeed, it's the sites that land on the first page of results that get the most traffic, and traffic is translated into revenue, which is the ultimate goal of search engine optimization.

To achieve a high position in search results, your site must be more than simply recognizable by a search engine crawler. It must satisfy a set of criteria that not only gets the site cataloged, but can also get it cataloged above most (if not all) of the other sites that fall into that category or topic. This is no easy task.

Some of the criteria by which a search engine crawler determines your site's rank in a set of results include the following: It is estimated that there are at least several hundred other criteria that could also be examined before your site is ranked by a search engine. Some of the preceding criteria also have multiple points of view. For example, when looking at link context, a crawler might take into consideration where the link is located on the page, what text surrounds it, and where it leads to or from.

- Anchor text
- Site popularity
- Link context
- Topical links
- Title tags
- Keywords
- Site language
- Content
- Site maturity

These criteria are also weighed differently. For some search engines, links are more important than site maturity; and for others, links have little importance. These weights and measures are constantly changing, so even trying to guess what is most important at any given time is a pointless exercise. Just as you figure it out, the criteria will shift or change completely.

Many of the elements used in search engine rankings are likely to have some impact on your site ranking, even when you do nothing to improve them. However, without your attention, you're leaving the search ranking of your site to chance. That's like opening a business without putting out a sign. You're sure to get some traffic, but because people don't know you're there, it won't be anything more than the curiosity of passersby.

## Setting SEO Goals

Okay, so you understand how important it is to put time into SEO. How exactly do you go about it? One thing you *don't* do is begin trying to implement SEO strategies without defining some sort of goal you want to accomplish. One of the greatest failings of many SEO plans, like all technology plans, is the lack of a clearly defined goal.

The goal for your SEO plan should be built around your business needs, and it's not something every business requires at the same level. For example, if you run a simple blog, in-depth SEO might be more expensive than it's worth; but if your plans for that blog are to turn it into a brand, then something a little more than the simplest of SEO strategies might be just what you need to build the traffic that begins to establish your brand.

If you have a larger business, say a web site that sells custom-made silk-flower arrangements, one way to increase your business (some estimate by more than 50 percent) is to invest time, money, and considerable effort into optimizing your site for search. Just don't do it without a goal in mind. In the case of a silk-flower web site, one goal might be to increase the amount of traffic your web site receives. Another might be to increase your exposure to potential customers outside your geographic region.

Those are both good reasons to implement an SEO plan. Another reason you might consider investing in SEO is to increase your revenues, which you can do by funneling site visitors through a sales transaction while they are visiting your web site. SEO can help with that, too.

In other words, before you even begin to put together an SEO plan, the first thing you need to do is determine what goal you want to achieve with that plan. Be sure it is a well-articulated and specifically defined goal, too. The more specific it is, the closer you will come to hitting it.

For example, a goal to "increase web-site traffic" is far too broad. Of course you want to increase your web-site traffic. That's the overarching goal of any SEO plan. However, if you change that goal to "increase the number of visitors who complete a transaction of at least \$25," you are much more likely to implement the SEO that will indeed help you reach that goal.

Make sure the goal is specific and attainable. Otherwise, it's very easy to become unfocused with your SEO efforts. In some cases, you can spend all your time chasing SEO and never accomplish anything. As mentioned previously, search engines regularly change the criteria for ranking sites. They started doing this when internal, incoming, and external links became a factor in SEO. Suddenly, every webmaster was rushing to add as many additional links as possible, and often those links were completely unrelated to the site. That led to a sudden and often meaningless rise in page links. It wasn't long before the linking criteria had to be qualified with additional requirements.

Today, link strategies are quite complex and must abide by a set of rules or your web site could be banned from some search engines for what's called *SEO spam*, or the practice of targeting a specific element or criteria of search engine ranking with the intention of becoming one of the highest-ranked sites on the Web. If you establish an SEO goal, however, you're more likely to have a balanced traffic flow, which will improve your search engine ranking naturally.

In addition to well-focused goals, you should also consider how your SEO goals align with your business goals. Business goals should be the overall theme for everything you do with your web site, and if your SEO goals are not created with the intent of furthering those business goals, you'll find that the SEO goals ultimately fail. Make sure that any goal you set for optimizing your site for search is a goal that works well within the parameters that are set by your overall business goals.

Finally, remain flexible at all times. It's fine to set a goal, or even a set of goals, and hold tightly to them. Just don't hold so tightly that the goals get in the way of performing great SEO activities. SEO goals and plans, like any others, must be flexible and grow with your organization. For this reason, it's always a good idea to review your SEO goals and plans periodically—at least every six months, and quarterly is better

## **Creating Your SEO Plan**

Once you have a goal or set of goals in mind for your web site, it's time to create your SEO plan. The SEO plan is the document that you'll use to stay on track as you try to implement SEO strategies on your site.

For many people, the thought of implementing SEO on a web site that includes dozens or even hundreds of pages is overwhelming. It doesn't have to be, though.

## **Picky Details**

As you begin to consider what it is you're doing with SEO, keep something in mind: SEO is all in the details. You may have heard this tired phrase before, but don't discount it because it's no longer completely fresh and “buzzy.” It's still true. SEO, especially organic SEO, is all about the little things you do that make a big difference over time, and sometimes even immediately.

For example, I work on a web site about identity theft, and one of the things I do is create content to help people avoid identity theft or recover from it if they have already been victimized. In the course of taking over this site from the person who worked on it last, I found myself fighting struggling page ranks on various search engines. One thing I did to combat this was some keyword research.

I looked into all the keywords that people were using to find my site, and then I began integrating those keywords into content that people are actually looking for. I still don't rank number one for my most desired keyword (identity theft), but I do rank on the first page for many of the Long Tail keyword phrases that my users search for (such as disaster identity theft, senior identity theft, and vacation identity theft).

It was a minor change in the larger picture. I was already creating content for the site, but by focusing on some of the terms that I learned visitors were using, I improved my web site's search rankings. In at least one case, that improvement happened on the same day!

In other words, don't discount the little things. Even minor details, such as refocusing your keyword efforts or adding the right tags in the right places, can make a major difference in the amount of traffic that your site receives.

## **Prioritizing Pages**

As you begin putting your SEO plan together, the whole task of SEO may seem a little overwhelming. Don't let it get the best of you. Look at SEO in small, bite-size pieces. For example, instead of looking at your site as a whole, look at each page on the site. Prioritize those pages, and then plan your SEO around each page's priority. Taking a single page into consideration helps to eliminate the “everything has to happen right now” issue and makes it



possible for you to create an SEO plan that maximizes your web site's potential in the minimum amount of time.

Top-priority pages should be the ones that your visitors will most naturally gravitate to, such as your home page, or pages that will generate the most traffic or revenue. When prioritizing pages, you're also creating a road map for your marketing efforts. If three of the pages on your site are your top priority, those three will have the lion's share of time, capital, and effort when it comes to SEO and marketing.

## Site Assessment

After you have prioritized your site, you should assess where you stand and where you need to be with your current SEO efforts. Again, assess each page individually, rather than the site as a whole. In SEO, individual pages are equally important (if not more so) than the entire site. All of your efforts are designed to rank one page above all others in search results. Which page is the most important should be determined by your business needs.

Your SEO assessment should be a document that outlines the current standing of the main SEO elements of each page. It should contain columns for the element of the site you're assessing, the current status of that element, what needs to be improved in that element, and the deadline for improvement. It's also helpful to put a check box next to each item, which can be marked when improvements are completed, and a column for follow-up, because SEO is an ongoing process.

The elements that should be considered during an assessment include the following:

You can find an example SEO assessment worksheet in Appendix D.

**Cross-Reference** Use this worksheet to create an accurate assessment of your web site.

- *Site/page Tagging:* The meta tags that are included in the coding of your web site are essential to having that site listed properly in a search engine. Tags to which you should pay specific attention are the title tags and the description tags, because these are the most important to a search engine.
- *Page Content:* How fresh is your content? How relevant is it? How often is it updated? How much content is there? Content is still important when it comes to search results. After all, most people are looking for a specific piece of content, whether it's information or a product. If your content is stale, search engines might eventually begin to ignore your site in favor of a site with fresher content. There are exceptions to this generalization, however, and one exception is when your content is, by nature, very rich but not very dynamic. Because of the usefulness of the content, such a site will probably continue to rank well, but it's a difficult case to determine. In general, fresh content is better.
- *Site Links:* Site links are essential in SEO. Crawlers and spiders look for the links into and out of your site in order to traverse it and collect data on each URL. However, they also look for those links to be *in context*, meaning the link must come from or lead to a site that is relevant to the page being indexed. Broken links tend to be a large problem when it comes to search engine ranking, so ensure that links are still working during the assessment process.
- *Site Map:* Believe it or not, a site map will help your web site be more accurately linked. This is not the ordinary site map that you include to help users quickly navigate through your site. This site map is an XML-based document, at the root of your HTML, that contains information (URL, last updated, relevance to surrounding pages, and so on) about each of the pages within the site. Using this XML site map helps to ensure that even the deep pages within your site are indexed by search engines. If you don't have a site map, you should create one. If you do have one, make sure it's accurate and up to date.

## Finishing the Plan

With the site assessment out of the way, you should have a good idea of what areas need work and what areas are in good shape. Don't assume that the areas that don't currently need work will always be perfect, however. That's not how it works. At the very least, changes to the pages will require changes to the SEO efforts that you're putting forth; at most, they may require that you begin SEO efforts for that page all over again.

You can now take the time to put together all of the information that you've gathered into a cohesive picture of the SEO efforts you should be making. Your SEO plan is more than just a picture of what's there and what's not, however. This is the document that you use to tie everything together: current standing, marketing efforts, capital expenditures, time frames—all of it.

The document should look much like any other plan that you create, such as your business plan, which likely includes an area for background information, marketing information, plans for growing the business, and plans for managing problems that may arise.


An SEO plan is very similar. You'll have your current standings, the goals that you plan to hit, and the marketing efforts that you plan to make for each page (or for the site as a whole). You'll even include the capital expenditures that you anticipate as you implement your SEO plan.

You'll also want to include the strategies you plan to use. Those strategies can include efforts such as submitting your site or pages from your site to directories manually and planning the content you'll use to draw search crawlers, or they can be keyword marketing plans or pay-per-click programs you plan to use. In addition, be sure to include a time line for the testing and implementation of those efforts, as well as for regular follow-ups.

## Follow-up

Follow-up is also an essential part of your SEO plan. Many people assume that they can develop and implement an SEO plan and then forget about it. The truth is, however, that SEO is not just a one-time event. It's an ongoing process that requires testing, monitoring, and often rebuilding.

A good plan for conducting follow-ups is to schedule them quarterly. Some companies choose to follow up and reassess their SEO biannually, but to be truly effective quarterly is much better. Conversely, following up on your SEO efforts too soon is nonproductive. In many cases, it takes at least three months to get a clear picture of how successful your efforts are. Conducting an evaluation before that three-month mark could have you chasing after an elusive SEO goal that doesn't really exist; or worse, it could lead you away from a successful strategy.

-  Give your plan at least three months but no more than six between check-ups. Once you create the habit of reevaluating your SEO efforts on that schedule, it will be much less time consuming than you might assume.

## Understanding Organic SEO

All this talk about planning for SEO is great, but what about *organic SEO*. You don't have to put any efforts into that, do you? Don't go foolin' yourself. Organic SEO is just as much work as any other type of SEO. It's just a slightly different method of creating a site optimized for search ranking, without having to implement any new technologies or spend a lot of time submitting your site to different primary and secondary search engines. In fact, the distinction here is a very general one. Only SEO purists consider *real SEO* as being strictly organic—meaning you use no



fee-based services whatever. Most people are happy with just *plain SEO*, which usually means a combination of organic and fee-based, which is often referred to as SEM, or search engine marketing. It's best if you think of SEO as just SEO; then you don't have to worry about distinctions that aren't really important in optimizing your web site.

The definitions of organic SEO vary a little, depending on whom you talk to. Some SEO experts think it's all about optimizing the content of your web site to catch the attention of the crawlers and spiders that index sites. Others think it's the number of quality links you can generate on your site. Organic SEO is actually a combination of those and other elements, such as site tagging, that will naturally place your web site in search engine rankings. How high in those rankings depends on how well you design your site.

Before you assume that organic SEO is just the solution you've been looking for, however, take a step back. Organic SEO is not an easy way to land in a search engine. Basically, if you put a web site online and spend a little time getting it ready for the world to see, you will have probably achieved some measure of organic SEO without really trying.

That's because your site will probably be listed in some search engine somewhere, without too much time and effort on your part. Elements that naturally occur on a web site—such as the title of the site, the URL, included web links, and even some of the content—will probably land you in a search engine (unless those elements are *black-hat SEO* efforts, in which case the engine could permanently exclude you). The question is *where* in the results will you land? Without attention from you, that might be on page 10,000 of the rankings—not high enough to gain any attention at all.

Organic SEO maximizes those naturally occurring elements, building upon each element to create a site that will naturally fall near the top of the search engine results pages (SERPs). One of the most attractive features of organic SEO is that the methods used to achieve high SERPs rankings are free—other than the time it takes to implement these ideas.

However, there is a trade-off. Achieving organic SEO can take anywhere from three to six months. For web site owners impatient to see results from their SEO efforts, this can seem like an eternity; but it's worth the extra time if the budget is an issue.

## Achieving Organic SEO

Not only can achieving organic SEO take time, it also requires targeting the right elements of your web site. You can spend a lot of time tweaking aspects of your site only to find that it still ranks below the third page of search results. If your attention is focused on the right elements, however, you'll find that organic SEO can be a fairly effective method of achieving a higher search engine ranking.

 Make no mistake, however:

Organic SEO alone is not as effective as organic SEO combined with some form of *pay-per-click* or keyword advertising program. Though organic SEO is good, adding the extra, more costly programs can be what you need to push your site right to the top of the SERPs.

A good first step in search engine optimization is to ensure that the organic elements of your site are as optimized as possible, and then focus on search engine marketing elements such as keyword advertising. Although these elements are covered in detail in future chapters, the following sections look at some of the basics.

## Web Site Content

Web site content is one of the most highly debated elements in search engine optimization, mostly because many rather unethical SEO users have turned to black-hat SEO techniques such as *keyword stuffing* in an attempt to artificially improve search engine ranking. Despite these dishonest approaches to search engine optimization, web site content is still an important part of any web site optimization strategy.

The content on your site is the main draw for visitors. Whether your site sells products or simply provides information about services, what brings visitors to your site are the words on the page. Product descriptions, articles, blog entries, and even advertisements are all scanned by spiders and crawlers as they work to index the Web.

One strategy of these crawlers and spiders is to examine just how the content of your page works with all of the other elements (such as links and meta tags) that are examined. To rank high in a selection of search results, your content must be relevant to those other elements.

Some search engines will delist your page or lower your page rank if the content of your site is not unique. Especially since the advent of blogs, search engines now examine how frequently the page content is updated, and look for content that appears only on your web site. This doesn't mean you can't have static content on your page. For e-commerce sites, the product descriptions may rarely change.

Including other elements on the page, however, such as reviews or product updates, will satisfy a crawler's requirement that content changes regularly. Content is an important part of your site and the ranking of your site in search engine results. To achieve organic SEO, take the time to develop a content plan that not only outlines what should be included on each page of your site, but also how often that content will be updated, and who will do the updates.

One other element you might want to consider when looking at your page content as part of SEO is the keywords that you plan to use. Ideally, your chosen words should appear on the page several times, but as mentioned previously, this is a balancing act that might take some time to accomplish.

**Cross-Reference** Chapter 5 contains additional information about keywords and how to use them to improve your search engine ranking.

As part of your site content, keywords require special attention. In fact, selecting the right keywords is a bit of an art form that takes some time to master. For example, if your web site were dedicated to selling products for show dogs, you might assume that "show dogs" would be a perfect keyword, but selecting the right keywords requires a thorough understanding of your audience and what they *might* be looking for when they visit your web site. In the case of show dogs, people looking for products for show dogs might search for "grooming products," "pedigree training," or just "dog supplies." It could even be something entirely different, such as the name of a product that was featured at the most recent dog show.

Learning which keywords will be most effective for your site requires that you study your audience, but it also requires some trial and error. Try using different keywords each quarter to learn which ones work best.

It's also advised that you use a tracking program such as *Google Analytics* to monitor your web site traffic and track the keywords that most often lead users to your site.

## Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a free web site statistics application that you can use to track your web site traffic. You can access Google Analytics by going to [www.google.com/analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics). You must have a Google user name to access the program.

If you do not have a Google user name, you can create one when you sign up for the application. It's simple. Provide your e-mail address and a password, type the verification word from the graphic provided, and then read the Terms of Service and click "I accept. Create my account."

Once you've created your user name and password, accessing the tracking capabilities of Google is easy. You'll need to copy a snippet of text that Google provides into the coding of your web site. Once you've added the code to your site, it will take a few days for Google to gather enough information to provide reports about it, and as much as two months to gather enough data to give you real insight into your site. But once there is enough data, you'll have access to the keywords that most often lead visitors to your site.

Google Analytics can also be combined with Google's AdWords program to provide paid keyword tracking and information. To learn more about Google Analytics, check out *Google Analytics 2.0* by Mary Tyler and Jerri Ledford (Wiley, 2007). Note that Google Analytics doesn't currently track spiders and crawlers, however, so there may be some limitations to its SEO functionality. Still, if you need a (free) tool to help you examine some of the metrics surrounding your SEO efforts, Google Analytics is a good starting point.

## Internal and External Links

Another element of organic SEO that's just as important as your web site content is the links on your pages. Links can be incoming, outgoing, or internal—and where those links lead or come from is as important as the context in which the links are provided.

When links first became a criteria by which crawlers ranked web sites, many black-hat SEO users rushed to create *link farms*. These were pages full of nothing but web links, some of which led to relevant information and some of which led to sites in no way related to the topic of the web site. It didn't take long for search engine designers and programmers to catch on to these shady practices and change the way that crawlers use links to rank sites.

Today, links must usually be related to the content of the page, and they must link to something relevant to that content. In other words, if your links don't go to or lead in from pages that match the keywords that you're using, they will be of little value to you.

The balance of links that are included on your page is also relevant. Too many links and your site could be considered a link farm. Too few and you'll lose out to sites that have more and better-targeted links.

Your best option when including links on your web site is to link to the pages you are certain are relevant to your site content. Don't include a link unless you're sure it will have value to your visitors, and then take the time to pursue links into your site from them as well.

One other type of link, the *internal link*, is also important. This is a navigational link that leads visitors from one page to another on your site. The navigation of your site (which is what these links are, essentially) should be intuitive, and natural in progression.

You can find more information about links and linking in Chapter 11.

### Cross-Reference

Finally, don't forget to include the site map. Your site map not only makes it easier for crawlers to index every page of your site, but it also makes it easier for users to find their way around in it.

Ideally, users will never have to rely on the site map, but it's nice to include it in the event that they either need it or simply want to click directly to the page they're seeking.

How you design your site map is a matter of preference. Some organizations create site maps that include only the top two levels of pages. Others include maps that go three levels down or deeper. Whatever level of depth you think will be required by the majority of users is how deep your site map should go. Keep in mind, however, that site maps can become just as overwhelming as any other navigational structure if your site contains hundreds of pages. In short, design your site map so it's easy to decipher and takes users to the pages they are seeking without difficulty and confusion.

## User Experience

User experience is a little harder to quantify than other site-ranking elements. It's easy to claim that users will find your site simple to use, that they will find the information or products that they're seeking, or that they will have reason to return to your site. In practice, that's a little more difficult to achieve.

How in the world can a site gain search engine ranking by user experience? It's fairly simple really. Search engines today are smarter than ever. They may not be able to make you a grilled cheese sandwich, but they can certainly keep track of what results users click when they run a search. Those result selections are essential to the organic ranking of your site.

Here's a scenario. Suppose you search for something like health-insurance information. When the search results appear, how do you choose which results to look at? Most users read the small descriptive lines that are included with the search engine ranking and select according to those.

In most cases, the sites that are visited are those sites that are highest in the rankings, but search engines also monitor which sites are actually clicked on, so let's say you search through the results and click a link on the fifth page. Suppose several other people do so as well. That link on the fifth page is going to show more traffic than links that are higher in the results, so smart search engines will move that page higher in the rankings. It may not jump right up to the number one position, but it's entirely possible for the site to move from the fifth page of rankings to the second or third. This is part of the equation used when user experience is taken into consideration.

Another part of that experience might be how quickly the user jumps back to the search page. Maybe when you click that link on the fifth page, you can tell when you hit the site that it's not the page you were looking for, or doesn't contain the information or product that you were looking for. You click the back arrow and you're taken back to the page of search results.

This behavior is called *bounce*, and the rate at which users bounce off your site is an indicator of the site's usability in terms of how relevant it is to what users are searching for. This relates directly to the keywords the user searched, which relates directly to how your site matches those keywords. To maximize the usability of your site, make sure the keywords you choose and the description of your page are as accurate as possible.

It may take some time for you to learn how to make all of these elements work together, especially when it comes to elements such as descriptions and keywords. Be patient, and be willing to experiment with different combinations of words or descriptions until you hit on the ones that send your site rank closer to the top search results. Just remember that this is a process that's more of an art than a science, and it takes time (usually two to three months) to see the most accurate results.

## Site Interactivity

When the Internet first came into being, web sites were all about disclosing information. The only interaction between a web site and a user was the passive reading the user did while on the site. Today, reading is still important, as users search web sites to learn more about products, services, or topics, but there's much more to web sites now than just text on a screen.

We now live in an interactive age, and most of us want and expect to interact with the web sites we visit. That interaction might take the form of a poll, the capability to comment on a blog post, the downloading of a file, or even a game that relates to the site content. No matter what the type of interaction, users expect it, and search crawlers look for it.

Site interactivity is essential to achieving a high SEO ranking. Sure, you can garner a high ranking without interaction, but it won't happen nearly as fast, and the ranking will likely be lower than that of a site that does offer some form of interaction with the user.

Why is interaction so important? Simple. If you can influence a user to interact with your site, you have more of a chance of gaining a *goal conversion*. Goal conversions are the completion of some form of activity designed to gather further information about your user. A goal conversion can be something as simple as enticing users to sign up for a newsletter, or it can be more specific, such as persuading them to make a purchase.

No matter what goal conversion you're seeking, the way to achieve it is through interactivity; and the more frequently users interact with your site, the more likely it is that they will reach that goal conversion page you're monitoring so closely.

Goal conversion is the purpose of many web sites. For example, the target goal conversion for an e-commerce web site might be for the user to make a \$25 purchase. If you can entice a user to purchase from your site—that is, meet the goal conversion—you have more of a chance of getting that user back to your site for a future purchase, to find additional information, or simply to interact with your site again.

All of these are important aspects of your web site's traffic patterns, and search engines look for elements of interactivity to judge the value of your site to users. One goal of search engines is to provide value to users. Those users turn to the search engine for help in finding something specific.

Just as it's important for your site to land high in the search results, it's important for the search engine to provide the information that a user seeks within the first page or two. Making the user happy is one way search companies make their money. Another way is through the fees that advertisers will pay to have their pages ranked high in the search results or their advertisements shown according to the keywords the user was searching by.

In other words, search engine optimization is a two-way street. It's also a business, and search engine companies are always trying to find ways to improve their business. For that reason, these elements, and many others, are an essential part of search engine optimization.

Organic SEO is certainly not easy to achieve, but you can improve your chances dramatically by having a solid SEO plan that outlines both where you are and what needs to be added to your site design or content to make it more visible to users. It also takes a lot of time and effort to create and implement the right SEO plan, but if you use your SEO plan as a stepping-stone, even for organic SEO, you'll stay focused and eventually achieve the search engine ranking that you are working toward.

## Part II: SEO Strategies

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## In This Part

SEO is hard work. It takes much effort to optimize just the right elements of your web site so search engines will not only find you, but will also index your site so that it appears high in search query results. And all that effort must be attended to by you. There are currently no tools that will put all the elements of SEO in place for you.

Instead, you have to build your web site with SEO in mind, choose all the right keywords, and use them in the right places and with the right balance on your site, determine if pay-per-click and paid-inclusion programs are for you, use the right meta tags in the right places, create great content, build and participate in communities, and add all the right links. Sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it?

It is. But don't let the amount of work overwhelm you. Consistent effort and the strategies included in this part of the book will have you working toward your SEO goals in no time. Each of the chapters in this section contains an explanation of how these elements affect SEO, and how you can create and implement strategies to help you leverage that element to reach your SEO goals.

## Chapter 4: Building Your Site for SEO

### Overview

### In This Chapter

- Before you build your site
- Understanding basic web site optimization



- Components of an SEO-friendly site
- Web site structure: hierarchical and interlinked
- Problem pages and work-arounds
- Programming languages and SEO
- Other site design concerns
- Validating your HTML
- After your site is built

Search engine optimization is a collection of strategies that improves the level at which your web site is ranked in the results returned when a user searches for a keyword or phrase.

By now, that's a definition you should be pretty familiar with. What you probably don't know (yet) is how to achieve SEO. You can't do it all at once. Instead, SEO has to happen in stages. If you try to implement too many strategies at one time, two things are going to happen:

SEO is most successful when you concentrate on one effort at a time. A great place to start is on the way your site is built. One of the first things that attracts a search engine crawler is the actual design of your site. Tags, links, navigational structure, and content are just a few of the elements that catch a crawler's attention.

- You won't be able to tell which of your strategies are successful. Implementing one strategy at a time makes it possible for you to pinpoint which strategies are working and which are not.
- When you try to implement too many strategies at one time, your efforts—even the successful ones—could be lost in the shuffle. It's like changing a recipe in multiple ways at once. Even if you like the result, you won't know which addition or deletion made the difference

## Before You Build Your Site

One of the most common misconceptions about SEO is that it is implemented after a web site has been built. It can be, but it's much harder to be successful when your site isn't built on a solid SEO foundation. A better option is to consider SEO before you begin to build your web site, if that's possible. It may not be; but if that's the case, you can still implement SEO strategies in the design of your site—it will just require a lot more work than building it in at the beginning.

## Know Your Target

Before you even start contemplating how to build your web site, you should know in what types of search engines it's most important for your site to be ranked. Search engines are divided into several types beyond the primary, secondary, and targeted search engines that you learned about in Chapter 1. Search engine types are also determined by how information is entered into the index or catalog that's used to return search results. The three types of search engines are as follows: It's important to understand these distinctions because how your site ends up indexed by a search engine may have some bearing on when it is indexed. For example, fully automated search engines that use web crawlers might index your site weeks (or even months) before a human-powered search engine. The reason is obvious: The web crawler is an automated application. The human-powered search engine may actually require that all entries be reviewed for accuracy before a site is included in search results, and that takes time.

- *Crawler-based Engines:* Up until this point, the search engines discussed fall largely into this category. A crawler-based search engine (such as Google) uses an automated software agent (called a *crawler*) to visit, read, and index web sites. All the information collected by the crawler is returned to a central repository—a process called *indexing*. It is from this index that search engine results are pulled. Crawler-based search engines revisit web pages periodically in a time frame determined by the search engine administrator.



- *Human-powered Engines:* Human-powered search engines rely on people to submit the information that is indexed and later returned as search results. Sometimes human-powered search engines are called *directories*. Yahoo! is a good example of what, at one time, was a human-powered search engine. Yahoo! started as a favorites list belonging to two people who needed an easier way to share their favorite web sites. Over time, Yahoo! took on a life of its own. It's no longer completely human controlled. Newer search engines such as Mahalo ([www.mahalo.com](http://www.mahalo.com)) and Cuil ([www.cuil.com](http://www.cuil.com)) are entirely human powered, however, and this is creating a buzz on the Web. Human-powered search engines add an element of personalization to search that fits in with the current social nature of the Web.
- *Hybrid Engines:* A hybrid search engine, as you might guess, is not entirely populated by a web crawler or by human submission. It is a combination of the two. In a hybrid engine, people can manually submit their web sites for inclusion in search results, but there is also a web crawler that monitors the Web for sites to include. Many search engines today fall into the hybrid category to at least some degree. Although the majority are populated mostly by crawlers, others offer some method by which people can enter their web site information.

In any case, the accuracy of search engine results varies according to the search query that is used. For example, entries in a human-powered search engine might be more technically accurate, but the search query that is used will determine whether the desired results are returned.

**Cross-Reference** More information about how search queries affect the results that are returned can be found in the section “Understanding Heuristics” in Chapter 5.

## Page Elements

Another facet of SEO to consider before you build your web site is the elements needed to ensure that your site is properly indexed by a search engine. Each search engine places different importance on different page elements. For example, Google is a very keyword-driven search engine, but it also looks at site popularity and the tags and links on any given page.

How well your site performs in a search engine is determined by how the elements of your page meet the engine's search criteria. Every search engine looks for the following main criteria:

- Text (meaning keywords)
- Tags—both HTML and meta tags
- Links
- Popularity

### **Text**

Text is one of the most important elements of any web site. Of particular importance are the keywords within the text on a page, where those keywords appear, and how often they appear. This is why keyword marketing has become such a large industry in a relatively short time. Your keywords make all the difference when a search engine indexes your site and then serves it up in search results.

Keywords must match the words and phrases that potential visitors will use when searching for your site (or for the topic or product that's listed on your site). To ensure that your keywords are effective, you'll need to spend some time learning which keywords work best for your site. That means doing keyword research (which you learn more about in Chapter 5) and testing the keywords that you do select to see how effective they really are.

### **Tags**

In search engine optimization, two kinds of tags are important on your web site: *meta tags* and *HTML tags*. Technically, meta tags are HTML tags; they just appear in very specific places. The two most important meta tags are the keyword tag and the description tag.

The keyword tag occurs at the point where you list the keywords that apply to your web site. A keyword tag on a search engine optimization page might look something like this:

[Larger View](#)

```
<meta name="keywords" content="SEO, search engine optimization, page rank">
```

The description tag provides a short description of your page. Such a tag for the search engine optimization page might look like this:

```
<meta name="description" content="The ultimate guide to search engine optimization!">
```

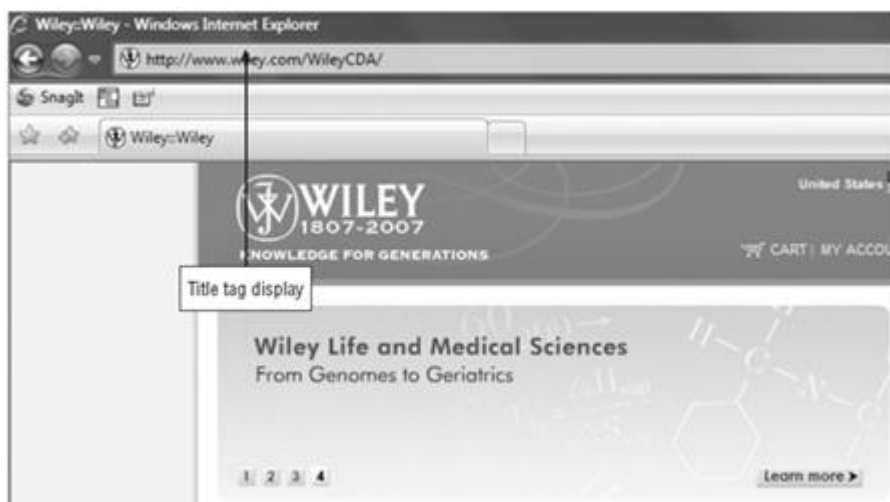
Not all search engines take meta tags into consideration because in the past, these tags have been overloaded with keywords that were irrelevant or inaccurate. For that reason, your site should use both meta tags and other HTML tags. Some of the other HTML tags that you should include on your web site are the *title tag*, the top (or H1) *heading tags*, and the *anchor tags*.

The title tag is the tag that's used in the title of your web site. This tag will appear like the following:

```
<Title>Your Title Here</Title>
```

Once you've tagged your site with a title tag, when a user pulls the site up, the title that you entered will appear in the *reverse bar* at the very top of the page if the user is using an Internet Explorer (IE) browser earlier than IE7. In IE7 and the Firefox browser or Google Chrome, the title will appear on the browser tab, as shown in Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, respectively.

[Larger View](#)



**Figure 4.1:** In IE 7 browsers, the HTML title tag you entered will appear on the browser tab.

[Larger View](#)



**Figure 4.2:** The Firefox browser shows the title tag in the browser tabs.

[Larger View](#)



**Figure 4.3:** The Google Chrome browser shows the title tag in the current tab. Note there is no reverse bar in Chrome.

High-level headings (H1s) are also important when a crawler examines your web site. Your keywords should appear in your H1 headings and in the HTML tags you use to create those headings. An H1 tag might look like this:

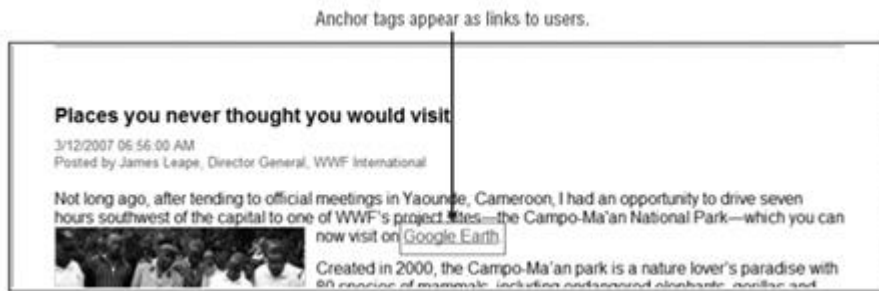
```
<h1>High-Level Heading</h1>
```

Anchor tags, also called *anchor text*, are used to create links to other pages. An anchor tag can point users to another web page, a file on the Web, or even an image or sound file. You're probably most familiar with the anchor tags used to create links to other web sites. Here's what an anchor tag might look like:

```
<a href="http://www.targetwebsite.com/">Text for link</a>
```

Figure 4.4 illustrates how that link might appear to users as they navigate a web page.

[Larger View](#)



**Figure 4.4:** The anchor tag is used to create links to other pages, files, or images on the Web.

A *link tag* is combined with the anchor tag. That link can be text-based, and that text is where search engine optimization comes into play. How many times have you seen a web site that includes text with underlined words, all of which are related to the topic covered on the site? Those links are tagged for optimization. When a search engine crawler examines your web pages, it will look for links like the one shown in the figure.

What's important about anchor text is that it enables you to get double mileage from your keywords. When a search engine crawler reads the anchor text on your site, it sees the links that are embedded in the text. Those links tell the crawler what your site is all about, so if you're using your keywords in your anchor text (and you should be), then you're going to be hitting both the keyword ranking and the anchor text ranking for the keywords that you've selected.

Of course, there are always exceptions. In fact, everything in SEO has exceptions, and with anchor text the exception is that you can overoptimize your site, which might cause search engines to reduce your ranking or even block you from the search results altogether. Overoptimization occurs when all the anchor text on your web site is exactly the same as your keywords, but there is no variation or use of related terminology in the anchor text.

The other half of anchor text is the links that are actually embedded in the keywords and phrases used on the web page. Those links are equally as important as the text to which they are anchored. The crawler will follow the links as part of crawling your site. If they lead to related web sites, your ranking will be higher than if the links lead to completely unrelated web sites.

These links can also lead to other pages within your own web site, as you may have seen anchor text in blog entries do. The blog writer uses anchor text, containing keywords, to link back to previous posts or articles elsewhere on the site.

One other place that you may find anchor text is in your site map. Naming your pages using keywords when possible helps improve your site rankings. Then to have those page names (which are keywords) on your *site map* is another way to boost your rankings, and thus your traffic. A site map (which is covered in more detail later in this chapter) is a representation of your site with each page listed as a name linked to that page.

Anchor text seems completely unrelated to keywords, but in fact it's very closely related. When used properly in combination with your keywords, your anchor text can help you achieve a much higher search engine ranking.

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### Avoiding the Minefield of Google Bombs

Sometimes web site owners intentionally include only a word or a phrase in all their anchor text with the specific intent of making the page linked from rank high in Google search results. It's usually an obscure word or phrase and enables them to say they rank number one for whatever topic that site covers. It also has malicious undertones. This is called *Google bombing* or

sometimes *link bombing*. (Link bombing became a viable term because it works with other search engines too.)

Google bombs are typically used in political attacks. For example, the first Google bomb created caused the phrase “more evil than Satan himself” to return Microsoft as the number one search result. Another incident, in which a specific slur directed at George Bush returned the store for George Bush merchandise, was seen during the 2004 presidential election.

Originally, Google ignored the problem, stating that Google bombs weren't a high priority and that it didn't want to compromise the integrity of the search engine, but eventually Google relented and changed the algorithm. Google bombs can still be used today—both for political purposes and for advancement of personal web sites—but it requires the enlistment of a community of bloggers and web site owners who are willing to use whatever obscure phrase is chosen and link it to the specified web site.

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### **Links**

To be of value, the links on your web pages must be related to the content of the page, and they must be active links to real web sites. *Broken links* can lower your search engine ranking. Links have always been an important factor in how web sites rank on the Web, but the abuse of linking that we see so often today started just a few years ago, about the time that Google became the big name in search.

When links became a ranking criterion, many black-hat SEOs began building *link farms*, which are sites that are nothing more than pages full of links designed to gain high search engine rankings.

It didn't take long for search engine administrators to figure out this sneaky optimization trick, so they changed the criteria by which links are ranked. Now link farms are fairly ineffective, but links on your web site are still important. Links show an interactivity with the community (other sites on the Web), which points to the legitimacy of your web site. Links aren't the only, or even the highest, ranking criteria, but they are important all the same.

**Cross-Reference** You'll find a complete explanation of links, linking, and how links affect your SEO in Chapter 15.

### **Popularity**

One other consideration, even before you build your site, is the site's popularity. Many search engines include a criterion for the number of times users click on web sites that are returned in search results. The more often the site is selected from the search results, the higher in the ranking it climbs.

For you, that means you should begin building the popularity of your site even before it goes live. Begin building buzz about the site through advertisements, info-torials, and even newsletters or other e-mail announcements. Then redouble those efforts as soon as the site goes live to the public. *Social media*—services such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace—are another way to build buzz about a site, but there's a fine art to working within the community structure of social media. You can find more about the intricacies of using social media in SEO in Chapter 20.

Sometimes, SEO can seem like a conundrum. You optimize your web site for search engines in order to build popularity, but your ranking in the search engine can be determined by how popular your site is. There is no magic formula to help you solve the riddle of which comes first, popularity or SEO, so both have to happen together. The one certainty is that it requires time and consistent effort to draw visitors to your site.

### **Other Criteria to Consider**

In addition to those four main elements you should plan to include on your site, there are a few others. For example, the *body text* on your web site will be examined by the crawler that indexes your site. Body text should contain enough keywords to gain the attention of the crawler, but not so many that it seems like the site is being stuffed with such words.

*Alternative tags* for pictures and links are also important. These are the tags that might appear as a brief description of a picture or graphic on a web site that fails to display properly. The alternative tags—called *alt tags*—display a text description of the graphic or picture, so that even if the actual image doesn't appear, there's some explanation of what should be there. Alt tags are a good place to include additional keywords.

Most users will never see your alt tags. They appear to screen readers that persons with sight disabilities may use, and they appear when a graphic image won't load on a page. Sometimes this is a problem with the visitor's Internet service; other times visitors intentionally turn off images to enable web pages to load faster.

Yet even if the majority of your visitors don't see these tags, crawlers do—and the alt tag provides you with an additional place to use keywords that are important for establishing the subject of your web site, as well as for boosting your site's recognition for those keywords.

## **Understanding Web Site Optimization**

Web site optimization is all about creating a site that is discoverable by search engines and search directories. It sounds simple enough, but there are many aspects of site optimization to consider, and not all of them are about the keywords, links, or HTML tagging of your site.

### **Does Hosting Matter?**

This question comes up frequently when a company or individual is designing a web site. Does it matter who hosts your site? The answer is no, but that's not to say that domain hosting is unimportant. Elements of the hosting have a major impact on how your site ranks in search results.

One of the biggest issues that you'll face with domain hosting is the location of your hosting company. If you're in the United States and you purchase a domain that is hosted on a server in England, your search engine rankings will suffer. Geographically, search engine crawlers will read your site as being contradictory to your location. Because many search engines serve up results with some element of geographical location included, this contradiction could be enough to affect your ranking.

The length of time for which you register your domain name could also affect your search engine ranking. Many hackers use *throw-away domains*, domain names that are registered for no more than a year, because they usually don't even get to use the domain for a full year before they are shut down. In fact, the typical malicious web site is online for less than four months, and usually for no more than a couple of weeks to a month. For this reason, some search engines have implemented ranking criteria that give priority to domains registered for longer periods. A longer registration also shows a commitment to maintaining the web site.

### **Domain-naming Tips**

The question of what to name a web site is always a big one. When selecting a name, most people think in terms of their business name, personal name, or a word or phrase that has meaning for them. What they often don't consider is how that name will work for the site's SEO. Does the name have anything at all to do with the site, or is it completely unrelated?



Have you ever wondered why a company might be willing to pay millions of dollars for a domain name? The domain name `business.com` was purchased for \$7.5 million in 1999 and was recently thought to be valued at more than \$300 million. `Casino.com` went for \$5.5 million and `worldwideweb.com` sold for \$3.5 million. What's so important about a name?

### **Choosing the Right Site Name**

Where SEO is concerned, the name of your web site is as important as many of the other SEO elements that you need to consider. Try this test. Use your favorite search engine to search for a topic, perhaps "asphalt-paving business." When your search results are returned, look at the top five results. Most of the time, a web site containing those words will be returned in those top five results, and it will often be in the number one slot.

In other words, if your company name is ABC Company but your business is selling nutmeg graters, consider purchasing the domain name `NutmegGraters.com`, instead of `ABC Company.com`. ABC Company may not get you in the top of search rankings, but the very specific nature of your product probably will; and both the content of your site and your domain name will attract crawlers in the way you want. Using a domain name containing a keyword from your content usually improves your site ranking.

A few more things that you should keep in mind when you're determining your domain name include the following:

- Keep the name as short as possible. Too many characters in a name mean increased potential for misspellings. It also means that your site address will be much harder for users to remember unless it's something really startling.
- Avoid dashes, underscores, and other meaningless characters. If the domain name that you want is taken, don't just add a random number or piece of punctuation to the name in order to "get close." Close doesn't count here. Instead, try to find another word that's relevant and possibly included in the list of keywords you'll be using. For example, instead of purchasing `www.yourwebsite2.com`, try something like `www.yoursitesubject.com`.
- Opt for a `.com` name whenever possible. There are a lot of domain extensions to choose from, such as `info`, `biz`, `us`, `tv`, `names`, and `jobs`, but if the `.com` version of your chosen domain name is available, that's always the best choice. Users tend to think in terms of `.com`, and any other extension will be harder for them to remember. `Com` names also tend to receive higher rankings in search engines than web sites using other extensions, so if your competition has `www.yoursite.com` and you choose to use `www.yoursite.biz`, chances are good that the competition will rank higher in search results than you.

Try this: Choose a random term and then use your favorite search engines to search for that term. Looking only at the top one or two pages of search results, how many of those sites have an extension other than `.com`? If you do see extensions other than `.com`, they're likely to be `.org`, `.net`, `.gov`, or `.edu`—and you probably won't see many of those. That's how prevalent `.com` is, and it illustrates why you should try to use it whenever possible.

### **Considering URL Structures**

One more thing to think about as you're choosing your domain name is how URLs will be structured as you begin to put your site together. Some URLs are very long and seem completely random. For example, take a look at any given product page URL for `Amazon.com`. If you copy and paste that URL into a document, it could be two or three lines long, and it won't mean a thing to *you* after the `Amazon.com` part.

Ever notice how `Amazon.com` product pages rarely (if ever) seem to turn up in search rankings? That's because the pages are dynamic, and a URL that exists on Amazon today may not exist there tomorrow. *Dynamic URLs* change. Often. And for a variety of reasons. Sometimes dynamic URLs are used on product pages, but they can also be used when content is drawn from a database on a visitor-by-visitor basis or when visitor tracking information is included in the URL.



Typically, search crawlers can't effectively crawl sites that have dynamic URLs because the crawler can't trigger the dynamic URL the way a user does. One way to deal with dynamic URLs is to use a program that rewrites them.

*URL rewriting* is a common practice in SEO, especially since Google stated that it can't effectively crawl dynamic URLs. Unfortunately, even URL rewriting comes with a set of drawbacks. For example, because even a rewritten dynamic URL tends to be very long, they often wrap—or become two lines—in error messages or when used in blog posts or forums. The result is sometimes an incomplete URL that can't be followed.

URL rewriting also introduces the possibility for errors, especially if the rewriting is done manually in the coding for a web page.

A better option is to use *static URLs*. Static URLs remain the same all the time. You can see static URLs all over the Web. Even blog posts have a temporary dynamic URL, but then once the post goes into archives, the URL becomes static and doesn't change again. It helps to more effectively rank web pages that change temporarily and then become permanent.

Another advantage of static URLs is that, when used, these URLs can contain keywords that are meaningful not only to search crawlers, but also to the people who visit your web site. Static URLs are easier to read. They usually contain mostly words, with few numbers, and they never include randomly generated identifiers.

As you're putting your site together, consider how it's going to grow and how you'll be naming the pages that you add to it. Part of that consideration is entirely site design and will be determined by the programming language that you use to create your site; but much of it involves forethought about how such matters will be handled. Discuss with your web site designer how you would like to have the URL structure handled. The designer will know how to ensure that your URLs are as usable as the rest of your site.

Again, it's important to realize that domain naming is only one facet of SEO strategy. It won't make or break your SEO, but it can have some effect. Therefore, take the time to think about the name you plan to register for your site and then how you plan to structure your URLs as your site grows.

If you can use a name that not only reaches your audience, but also lands you a little higher in search results and makes it easier to create useful URL structures, then by all means purchase it; but if no name really seems to work in the SEO strategy for your site, don't get discouraged. You can make up for any domain-naming issues by implementing solid keyword strategies, tagging strategies, and other elements of SEO. Do try to keep your URL structure simple, though, even when your domain name might not be your first choice.

## **Understanding Usability**

Usability. It means different things to different web site designers. It's also been at the top of every user's requirements list since the Web became part of daily life. When users click through to your web site from a search results page, they want the site to work for them. That means they want to be able to find what they're looking for, to navigate from place to place, and to be able to load pages quickly, without any difficulties.

Web site users are impatient. They don't like to wait for pages to load, they don't want to deal with *Flash* graphics or *JavaScript* and they don't want to be lost. These are all elements of usability—how the user navigates through and uses your web site. And yes, usability has an impact on SEO, especially from the perspective of your site links and loading times.

When a search engine crawler comes to your site, it crawls through the site looking at keywords, links, contextual clues, meta and HTML tags, and a whole host of other elements. The crawler

moves from page to page, indexing what it finds for inclusion in search results; but if that crawler reaches the first page and can't get past the fancy Flash you've created, or if it gets into the site and finds links that don't work or that lead to unexpected locations, it will recognize this and make note of it in the indexed site data. That can damage your search engine rankings.

### **Navigation Knowledge**

When you consider web site navigation, there are two types: *internal navigation* and *external navigation*. Internal navigation involves the links that move users from one page to another on your site. External navigation refers to links that take users away from your page. In order for your navigation to be SEO-friendly, you have to use both types of navigation carefully.

Look at a number of different high-ranking web sites. How is the navigation of those sites designed? In most cases, you'll find that the top sites have a left-hand navigation bar that's often text based, and some have a button-based navigation bar across the top of the page. Few have only buttons down the left side, and all of them have text links somewhere in the landing page.

The reason why the navigation structure for many sites looks the same is because this plan works. Having a text-based navigation bar on the left works for SEO because it enables you to use anchor tags with the keywords you're using for the site. It also enables crawlers to move from one page to another with ease.

Buttons are harder for crawlers to navigate, and depending on the code in which those buttons are designed, they might be completely invisible to the crawler. That's why many companies that put button-based links at the top of the page also include a text-based navigation bar on the left. The crawler can still move from page to page, but the user is happy with the design of the site.

The other elements that appear on nearly every page are text-based links within the content of the page. Again, those links are usually created with anchor tags that include the keywords the site is using to build site ranking. This is an effective way to gain site ranking. The crawler comes into the site, examines the linking system, examines the content of the page, compares these items, and finds that the links are relevant to the content, which is relevant to the keywords. That's how your ranking is determined. Every element works together.

Take the time to design a navigational structure that's not only comfortable for your users, but also crawler-friendly. If it can't always be perfect for the crawlers, make sure it's perfect for users. Again, SEO is influenced by many different factors, but return visits from users are the ultimate goal. This may mean that you have to test your site structure and navigation with a user group and change it a few times before you find a method that works both for returning users and for the crawlers that help to bring you new users. Do those tests. That's the only way you'll learn what works.

### **Usability Considerations**

It's not always possible to please both your site users and the crawlers that determine your page ranking. It is possible, however, to work around problems. Of course, the needs of users come first because once you get them to your site you want them to come back. On the Internet, it's extremely easy for users to surf away from your site and never look back—and returning visits can make or break your site. The catch is that in order to build returning visitors, you have to build new visitors, which is the purpose of SEO. That means you need search engines to take notice of your site.

When it seems that users' preferences are contrary to crawlers' preferences, there is a solution: a *site map*. There are two types of which you should be aware. A basic site map is an overview of the navigational structure of your web site. It's usually text based, and it's nothing more than an overview that includes links to all the pages on your web site. Crawlers love site maps. You should, too.

A site map enables you to outline the navigational structure of your web site, down to the second or third level of depth, using text-based links that should include anchors and keywords. An example of a site map for the [Work.com](http://www.work.com) web site is shown in Figure 4.5.

[Larger View](#)



**Figure 4.5:** A site map enables you to include links to all of your pages, two to three levels deep, that include keywords and anchor tags.

When a site map exists on your web page, a search engine crawler can locate the map and then crawl all the pages that are linked from it. All those pages are then included in the search engine index and will appear on search engine results pages. Where they appear on those SERPs is determined by how well the SEO is done for each individual page.

A second type of site map, the *XML site map*, is different from what you think of as a site map in both form and function. An XML site map is a file that lists all the URLs for a web site. This file is usually not seen by site visitors, only by the crawlers that index your site. Chapter 18 offers more specifics on XML site maps.

## Components of an SEO-Friendly Page

Building an SEO-friendly web site doesn't happen by accident. It requires an understanding of what elements search engines examine and how those elements affect your ranking. It also requires including as many of those elements as possible on your site. It does little good to have all the right meta tags in place if you have no content and no links on your page.

It's easy to get caught up in the details of SEO and forget the simplest web-design principles—principles that play a large part in your search engine rankings. Having all the right keywords in the right places in your tags and titles won't do you much good if the content on your page is nonexistent or completely unreachable by a search engine crawler.

## Understanding Entry and Exit Pages

The entry and exit pages are the first and last pages of your web site that a user sees. It's important to understand that an entry page isn't necessarily the home page on your web site. It can be any other page where a user lands, either by clicking through search engine results, by

clicking a link from another web site or a piece of marketing material, or by bookmarking or typing directly into the address bar of a browser.

Entry pages are important in SEO because they are the first page users see—the electronic equivalent of a first impression. The typical web site is actually several small, connected sites. Your company web site might contain hubs, or central points, for several different topics. For example, if your site represents a pet store, then you'll have hubs within it for dogs, cats, birds, fish, and maybe exotic animals. Each hub will have a main page—which will likely be your entry page for that section—and several additional pages leading from that central page to other pages containing relevant content, products, or information about specific topics.

Understanding which of your pages are likely entry pages helps you to optimize those pages for search engine crawlers. Using the pet-store example, if your home page and all the hub pages are properly Search Engine Optimized, you potentially could be ranked at or near the top of five different sets of search results. When you add additional entry pages deeper in your web site structure (that is, a dog-training section to the hub for dogs), you've increased the number of times you can potentially end up at the top of search engine rankings.

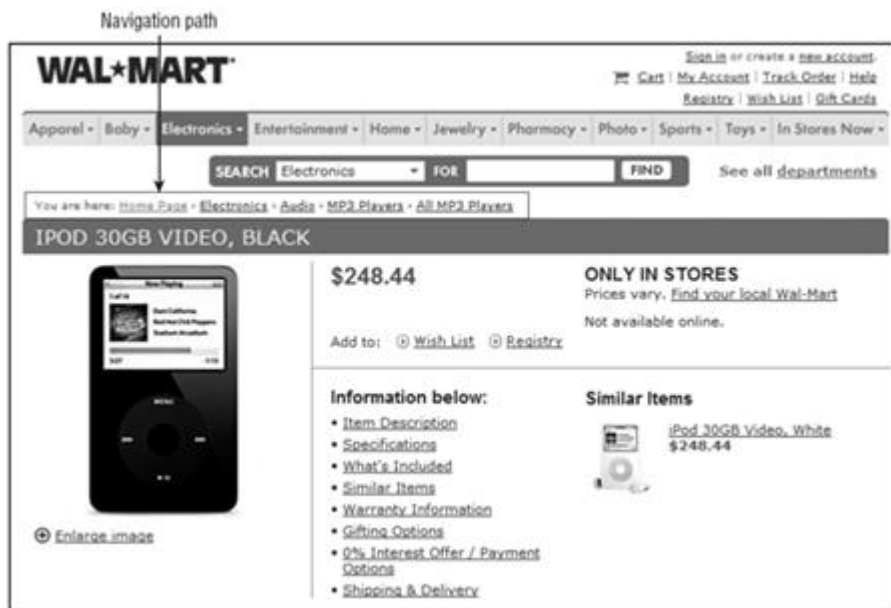
Because entry pages are important in the structure of your web site, you want to monitor those pages using a web site analytics program to ensure they are working the way you expect them to work. A good analytics program, such as Google Analytics, will show you your top entry and exit pages.

Exit pages are those from which users leave your site, either by clicking through an exiting link, selecting a bookmark, or typing a different web address into their browser address bar. Exit pages have two purposes. The first is to drive users from their entry pages to a desired exit page. This is called the *path* that users travel through your site. A typical path might look something like this: In this example, Home is the entry page and Receipt is the exit page. By looking at this navigational path, you can tell how users travel through your page and where they fall off the page; but there's an added benefit to understanding the navigational path of your users. When you know how users travel through your site, you can leave what's called a *bread-crumbs trail* for them. That's a navigational indicator on the web site that enables them to quickly see where they are on your site, as shown in Figure 4.6. This is the navigation path shown on the Wal-Mart web site. You can quickly see where in the navigational structure of the site you're located.

- SERP ⇒ Home ⇒ Women's Clothing ⇒ Product Pages ⇒ Shopping Cart ⇒ Checkout ⇒ Receipt

The bread-crumbs trail not only helps users return to a previous page in the navigational path; it also makes it easier for a web crawler to fully examine your site. Because crawlers follow every link on your page, this is an internal link structure that leads crawlers to individual pages that you want included in search engine results.

[Larger View](#)



**Figure 4.6:** The navigational path can be shown on each web page in the path to help users quickly see where they are located on the site.

### Choosing an Analytics Program

An important element in any SEO plan is analytics—the method by which you monitor the effectiveness of your web site. Analytics are the metrics that show you how pages, links, keywords, and other elements of your web site are performing. If your web host hasn't provided you with an analytics program, find one. Not having an analytics program is like walking around in the dark, hoping you won't bump into a wall.

Many web site owners shy away from analytics packages because they believe them to be complicated and expensive. However, they don't always have to be. You can find a good analytics program that's not only easy to use, but also inexpensive or even free; but use caution about making ease and low cost the deciding factors when selecting an analytics program.

The program will give you the power to see and control how your web site performs against your goals and expectations. You want it to show you everything you need to know, so here are some considerations when you're evaluating analytics programs: Many analytics programs are available. Google Analytics, AW Stats, JayFlowers, ClickTracks, and dozens of others all offer something different at a different price tag. If *free* is what you can afford, don't assume you'll get a terrible package. Google Analytics is one of the free packages available, and it's an excellent program, based on what used to be the Urchin Analytics package (which was quite costly). Other programs cost anywhere from \$30 to \$300 a month, depending on the capabilities you're purchasing.

- What reports are included in the tools you're examining, and how will you use those reports?
- How do you gather the information used to create the metrics you need?
- How often are your reports updated?
- How much training is necessary to understand your application and the reports provided?
- Do you get software installation or is the product provided strictly as a web-based service?
- What is the *total cost of ownership*?
- What types of support are available?
- What is the typical contract length?



Cost is not the most important factor, however. Ultimately, your main consideration should be how the analytics package can help you improve your business.

---

## Using Powerful Titles

Page titles are one of the most important elements of site optimization. When a crawler examines your site, the first elements it looks at are the page titles; and when your site is ranked in search results, page titles are again one of the top elements considered. Therefore, when you create your web site, you need great page titles.

Consider several key factors when coming up with your page titles:

**Note** The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has determined that the outside length of a page title should be no more than 64 characters. Search engines vary in regard to the size of title that's indexed. Using 64 characters or less is an accepted practice that still leaves your page titles cut off in search engines that index only up to 40 or 50 characters. For this reason, staying at or below the 40-character length is a smarter strategy within your SEO efforts.

All of your page titles should be indicated with the title tag when you code your web site. The title tag isn't difficult to use. Here's an example of such a tag:

```
<title>A Descriptive Web Site Title</title>
```

If your page titles aren't tagged properly, you may as well not be using them, so take the time to ensure that your page titles are short, descriptive, and tagged into your web site code. By using title tags, you increase the chances that your web site will be ranked high within search engine results.

- Unless you're Microsoft, don't use your company name in the page title. A better choice is to use a descriptive keyword or phrase that tells users exactly what's on the page. This helps to ensure that your search engine rankings are accurate.
- Try to limit page titles to less than 50 characters, including spaces. Some search engines index only up to 50 characters; others might index as many as 150. Regardless, maintaining shorter page titles forces you to be precise in the titles that you choose and ensures that your page title will never be cut off in the search results.
- Don't repeat keywords in your title tags. Repetition can occasionally come across as spam when a crawler is examining your site, so avoid that in your title if possible, and never duplicate words just to gain a crawler's attention. It could well get your site excluded from search engine listings.
- Consider adding special characters at the beginning and end of your title to improve noticeability. Parentheses (()), arrows (<<>>), asterisks (\*\*\*\*), and special symbols such as ££££ can help draw a user's attention to your page title. These special characters and symbols don't usually add to or detract from your SEO efforts, but they do serve to call attention to your site title.
- Include a call to action in your title. There's an adage that goes something like, "You'll never sell a thing if you don't ask for the sale." That's true on the Web too. If you want your users to do something, you have to ask them.

## Creating Great Content

Web site content is another element of an SEO-friendly site that you should spend plenty of time contemplating and completing. Fortunately, there are ways to create web site content that will make search crawlers love you.

Great content starts with the right keywords and phrases. Select no more than three keywords or phrases to include in the content on any one of your web pages. Why only three? Wouldn't more keywords and phrases ensure that search engines take notice of your site?

Actually, when you use too many keywords in your content, you face two problems. First, the effectiveness of your keywords will be reduced by the number of different ones you're using. Choose two or three for each page of your site and stick with those.

Second, you may be delisted or ignored because a search engine sees your SEO efforts as *keyword stuffing*. It's a serious problem, and search engine crawlers will exclude your site or pages from indexes if they contain too many keywords.

After you have the two or three keywords or phrases that you plan to focus on, you need to actually use those keywords in the page content. Many people assume that the more frequently you use the words, the higher your search engine ranking will be. Again, that's not necessarily true. Just as using too many different keywords can cause a crawler to exclude you from a search engine index, overusing the same word will also cause crawlers to consider that as keyword stuffing. Again, you run the risk of having your site excluded from search indexes.

The term used to describe the number of times a keyword is used on a page is *keyword density*. For most search engines, allowed keyword density is relatively low. Google is very strict about ranking sites that have a keyword density of 5 to 7 percent; much lower or much higher and your ranking is seriously affected or completely lost. Yahoo!, MSN, and other search engines allow keyword densities of about 5 percent. Going over that mark could cause your site to be excluded from search results.

Keyword density is an important factor in your web site design, and is covered in more depth in Chapter 5; but there are other content concerns, too. Did you know that the freshness and focus of your content also affects how high your web site ranks? One reason why many companies began using *blogs* on their web sites was because blogs are updated frequently and they're highly focused on a specific topic. This gives search engines new, relevant content to crawl.

Consider implementing a content strategy that includes regularly adding more focused content or expanding your content offerings. It doesn't have to be a blog, but news links on the front page of the site, regularly changing articles, or some other type of changing content will help gain the attention of a search engine crawler. Don't just set these elements up and leave them, however. You also have to ensure regular updates and keep the links included in the content active. Broken links are another crawler pet peeve. Unfortunately, with *dynamic content* links will occasionally break. Make sure you're checking this element of your content on a regular basis and set up some kind of user-feedback loop so broken links can be reported to your *webmaster*.

Finally, when you're creating your web site content, consider interactive forums. If you're adding articles to your site, give users a forum in which they can respond to the article, or a comments section. This leads to more frequent updates of your content, which search crawlers love. In short, forums provide users with an ongoing, interactive relationship with your web site, and give an extra boost to your search engine ranking.

## Maximizing Graphics

Images or graphics on your web site are essential. They're also basically ignored by search engines, so what's the point of putting them on your site? There's a good reason that has nothing to do with SEO. Without images, your page is just boring text. You're not going to be happy with using plain text instead of that cool, new logo you had designed for your company, and neither are your users. They want to see pictures.

If images are a must on a web site, then there should be a way to use those images to increase your web site traffic or to at least improve your site ranking. And there is.

One technique that will help your SEO make use of graphics on your site is to tag those graphics with *alt tags* inside the *img tags*. The alt tags are the HTML tags used to display alternative text



when a graphic is present. An alt tag should be a short, descriptive phrase about the image, which includes the keywords used on that page when possible.

The img tags are the tags used to code the images that appear on your web site. Here's an example of what an img tag, with an included alt tag, should look like:

```

```

Here's how that tag breaks down: `` is your alternative text tag. The alternative text tag is where your keywords should be included if at all possible.

You want to tag your images as part of your SEO strategy for two reasons. First, crawlers cannot index images for a search engine (with an exception, which is covered shortly). The crawler “sees” the image and moves on to the text on the page. Therefore, something needs to take the place of that image, so the crawler can index it. That's what the alternative text does. If this text includes your keywords, and the image is near text that also includes the keywords, then you add credibility to your site in the logic of the crawler.

The second reason you want to tag your images as part of your SEO strategy is to take advantage of image-based search engines, such as Google Images. These image-based search engines are relatively new, but they shouldn't be undervalued. Just as a search engine can find and index your site for users searching the Web, image-based search engines find and index your images. Then, when users perform a search for a specific keyword or phrase, your image is also ranked, along with the text on the pages.

Image searches are gaining popularity, so crawlers like the one Google uses for its Google Images search engine will gain momentum, and image searches will add to the amount of web site traffic that your SEO strategies help to build. Conversely, while not discounting the value of images, don't overuse them on your web pages either. As with any element of a web page, too much of a good thing is not good.

## **Problem Pages and Work-Arounds**

No matter how much time and consideration you put into your SEO strategy, some elements of your web site will require special consideration. Certain sites—such as portals—need a different approach than a standard web site might require. How you deal with these issues will have an impact on the effectiveness of your SEO efforts.

### **Painful Portals**

The use of portals—web sites that are designed to funnel users to other web sites and content—as a search engine placement tool is a hotly debated topic. Many experts will start throwing around the word “spam” when the subject of SEO and portals comes up; and there have been serious problems with portals that are nothing more than search engine spam. In the past, portals have certainly been used as an easy link-building tool offering nothing more than regurgitated information. Sometimes the information is vaguely reworded, but it's the still the same information.

Search engine operators have long been aware of this tactic and have made every effort to hinder its usefulness by looking for duplicate content, interlinking strategies, and other similar indicators. Using these techniques, search engines have managed to reduce the usefulness of portal web sites as SEO spam mechanisms.

However, because search engine operators need to be cautious about portals that are nothing more than SEO spam, if your site is a portal, then optimizing it will be a little harder. As with all web site design, the best objective for your site, even for a portal, is to help your visitors achieve a desired result, whether that's purchasing a product, signing up for a newsletter, or finding desired information. If you make using your site easy and relevant, your site visitors will stay on your site longer, view more pages, and return to your site in the future. Portals help you reach these goals by acting as excellent tools for consolidating information into smaller, more manageable sources of information that users find easier to use and digest.

Too often, people optimizing web sites focus on the spiders and forget about the visitors. The sites you are developing have to appeal to the visitors and provide them with the information they're looking for, or all you will have at the end of the day are hosting bills and low conversion rates. Portal web sites enable you to create a series of information resources that provide full information on any given topic, while structuring a network of information covering a much larger scope.

Though the visitor is of significant importance when building a web site, the site itself is of primary significance, too. There's no point in creating a beautiful web site if no one's going to see it, and portals are a fantastic tool for increasing your online visibility and search engine exposure, for a wide variety of reasons.

Perhaps the most significant of these reasons is the increase in keywords that you can use in portal promotion. Rather than have one web site with which to target a broad range of keywords, portals enable you to have many web sites, each of which can have its own set of keywords. For example, instead of trying to put "deer hunting" and "saltwater fishing" on the same page, you can create a hunting portal that enables you to have separate sites for deer hunting, saltwater fishing, and any other type of hunting activity you'd like to include.

On one page it's much easier to target the two key phrases "deer season" and "Mississippi hunting license" than it is to target two key phrases like "deer season" and "marlin fishing." Targeting incompatible keywords or phrases—that is, keywords or phrases that aren't related to a larger topic—makes it harder to have both readable, relevant content and reach the keywords that you need to use.

There are other advantages to creating web portals as well. Having a portal enables you to have multiple home pages, which gives you the opportunity to create sites that consistently appear in a top ranking. You also have more sites to include in your other SEO strategies and more places to include keywords. However, there is a fine line between a useful portal and one that causes search engines to turn away without listing your portal on SERPs.

**Warning** Don't link all your sites to all the others within your portal using some link-farm footer at the bottom of every page. You may not even want to link all of them to the others on a site map or links page. Instead, interlink them in an intelligent way. When you want to lead visitors to another site in the portal, or when you want those users to be able to choose which site is most useful to them, you can create intelligent links that have value for the site user. This value translates into better rankings for your web site.

As with most issues in web design, keep it user-friendly and attractive. If you have any concerns that the actions you're taking with your site or the design methods that you're using could lead to negative results for the SEO of your site, don't use them. If you have a feeling that a strategy won't work, it probably won't, and you're wasting your time if you use a design you're not comfortable with.

## Fussy Frames

Some web site designs require the use of *frames*. Frames are sections of a web site, with each section constituting an entity separate from the other portions of the page. Because the frames

on a site represent separate URLs, they often create display issues for users whose browsers don't support frames, and for search crawlers that encounter the frames and can't index sites where the frame is the navigational structure.

You have a couple of options when frames are essential to the design of your web site. The first is to include an alternative to the framed site. This requires the use of the `noframes` tag. This tag directs the user's browser to display the site without the framed navigational system. Users may see a stripped-down version of your site, but at least they can still see it. When a search crawler encounters a site made with frames, the `noframes` tag enables it to index the alternative site. It's important to realize, however, that when you use the `noframes` tag, you need to load the code for an entire web page between the *opening tag* and *closing tag*.

**Warning** When you're creating a `noframes` tag for a framed site, the content of the `noframes` tags should be exactly identical to the frame set. If it's not, a search crawler could consider it spam, and then your site would be penalized or even delisted.

Another issue with frames is that search engines often display an internal page on your site in response to a search query, but if this internal page does not contain a link to your home page or some form of navigation menu, users are stuck on that page and cannot navigate through your site. That means the search crawler is also stuck in that same spot. As a result, the crawler might not index your site.

The solution, of course, is to place on the page a link that leads to your home page. In this link, include the attribute `TARGET = "_top"`. This prevents your site from becoming nested within your own frames, which locks users on the page they landed on from the search results. It also makes it possible for crawlers to efficiently crawl your site without getting stuck.

That link back to your home page will probably look something like this:

```
<a href="index.html" TARGET = "_top">Return to Home Page</a>
```

Frames are difficult, but not impossible, to get around when you're putting SEO strategies into place. It's a good idea to avoid them, but they won't keep you completely out of search engine rankings. You just have to use a different approach to reach those high rankings you desire.

## Cranky Cookies

*Cookies* are one of those irritating facts of life on the Internet. Users want web sites tailored to them, and cookies are one way companies have found to do that. When users enter a site and customize some feature of it, a small piece of code—the cookie—is placed on the user's hard drive. Then, when the user returns to the site in the future, that cookie can be accessed and the user's preferences executed.

When cookies work properly, they're an excellent tool for web designers. When they don't work as they should, problems arise. The main issue with cookies is that some browsers allow users to set how cookies will be delivered to them; and some *source code* prompts the user to be asked before a cookie is accepted. When this happens, the search engine crawler is effectively stopped in its tracks, and it doesn't pick back up where it stopped once the cookies are delivered. In addition, any navigation that requires cookies prevents a crawler from indexing the pages.

To overcome this issue, you must code cookies to ensure that the source code is not designed to query the user before the cookie is delivered.

## Programming Languages and SEO

One aspect of web site design you might not think of when planning your SEO strategy is the programming language used to develop the site. Programming languages all behave a little differently. For example, HTML and PHP use completely different protocols to accomplish the visuals you see when you open a web page. (When most people think of web site programming, they think in terms of HTML.) In reality, many other languages are also used for coding web pages—and those languages may require differing SEO strategies.

### JavaScript

JavaScript is a programming language that enables web designers to create dynamic content. However, it's not necessarily SEO-friendly. In fact, JavaScript often completely halts a crawler from indexing a web site, and when that happens the result is lower search engine rankings or complete exclusion from ranking.

To overcome this, many web designers *externalize* any JavaScript that's included on the web site. Externalizing the JavaScript means that it is actually run from an external location, such as a file on your web server. To externalize your JavaScript: This is just one of the solutions you can use to prevent JavaScript from becoming a problem for your SEO efforts. There are many others, and depending on your needs you should explore some of them.

**Note** Sometimes people use JavaScript as a means to hide content or links from a search engine. However, search crawlers can read JavaScript, and most can even follow the links that are in JavaScript, so if you try to hide content or links behind JavaScript, you run the risk of having your site labeled as search engine spam. There's more information about search engine spam in [Chapter 17](#).

1. Copy the code, beginning at the starting tags, and paste it into a Notepad file.
2. Save the Notepad file as `filename.js`.
3. Upload the file to your web server.
4. Create a reference on your web page to the external JavaScript code. The reference should be placed where the JavaScript will appear, and might look like this: 

```
<script language="JavaScript" type="text/javascript" src="filename.js"></script>
```

### Flash

Flash is another of those technologies that some users absolutely hate. That's because Flash, though very cool, is resource intensive. It causes pages to load slower, and users are often stuck on an opening Flash page and can't move forward until the Flash has finished executing. When you're in a hurry, which is almost always, it's a frustrating situation to deal with.

Flash is also a nightmare when it comes to SEO. A Flash page can stop a web crawler in its tracks, and once it is stopped, the crawler won't resume indexing the site. Instead, it will simply move on to the next web site on its list.

The easiest way to avoid Flash problems is to simply not use it. If, despite Flash's difficulties with search rankings, your organization needs to use it, then you can code the Flash in HTML and an option can be added to test for the ability to see Flash before it is executed. Note, however, that there's some debate about whether or not this is an acceptable SEO practice, so before you implement this type of strategy in an effort to improve your SEO effectiveness, take the time to research the method.

### Dynamic ASP

Most of the sites you'll encounter on the Web are *static web pages*. These sites don't change beyond any regular updates by a webmaster. Conversely, *dynamic web pages* are web pages

that are created on the fly according to preferences that users specify in a form or menu. These sites can be created using a variety of different programming technologies, including *dynamic ASP*. The problem with these sites is that they don't technically exist until the user creates them. Because a web crawler can't make the selections that build these pages, most dynamic web pages aren't indexed in search engines.

There are ways around this, however. Dynamic URLs can be converted to static URLs with the right coding. It's also possible to use *paid inclusion services* to index dynamic pages down to a predefined number of levels (or number of selections, if you're considering the site from the user's perspective).

Dynamic ASP, like many of the other languages used to create web sites, carries with it a unique set of characteristics. But that doesn't mean SEO is impossible for those pages. It does mean that the approach used for the SEO of static pages needs to be modified. It's an easy enough task, and a quick search of the Internet will almost always provide the programming code you need to achieve SEO.

## PHP

Search engine crawlers being what they are—preprogrammed applications—there's a limit to what they can index. PHP is another programming language that falls outside the boundaries of normal web site coding. Search engine crawlers see PHP as another obstacle if it is not properly executed.

*Properly executed* means that PHP needs to be used with search engines in mind. For example, PHP naturally stops or slows search engine crawlers, but with some attention and a solid understanding of PHP and SEO, it's possible to code pages that work.

One thing that works well with PHP is designing the code to look like HTML. It requires an experienced *code jockey*, but it can be done. And once the code has been disguised, the PHP site can be crawled and indexed so that it is returned in search results.

## Other Design Concerns

You're likely to encounter numerous problems with SEO when designing your web site. Some are easy to overcome, others can be quite difficult. And still others aren't problems you have to overcome per se, but issues you need to be aware of or you risk being ignored by search engine crawlers.

Among the tactics that might seem okay to some, but actually aren't, are the so-called *black-hat* SEO techniques. These are practices that are implemented with a single goal in mind: increasing search engine rankings, no matter how inappropriate they might be. Some companies deliberately use such techniques when creating web sites, even if the results that are returned have absolutely nothing to do with the search terms users entered.

## Domain Cloaking

On the surface, *domain cloaking* sounds like a great idea. The concept is to show users a pretty web site that meets their needs, while at the same time showing search engines a highly optimized page that probably would be almost useless to users. In other words, it's a slimy trick to gain search engine ranking while providing users with a nice site to look at.

It starts with *content cloaking*, which is accomplished by creating web site code that can detect and differentiate a crawler from a site user. When the crawler enters the site, it is redirected to another web site that has been optimized for high search engine results. The problem with trying to gain higher search results this way is that many search engines can now spot it. As soon as



they find that a web page uses such a cloaking method, the page is delisted from the search index and not included in the results.

Many unscrupulous SEO administrators will use this tactic on throw-away sites. They know the site won't be around for long anyway (usually because of some illegal activity), so they use domain cloaking to garner as much web site traffic as possible before the site is taken down or delisted.

## Duplicating Content

When you're putting together a web site, the content for that site often presents one of the greatest challenges, especially if it is a site that includes hundreds of pages. Many people opt to purchase bits of content, or even *scrape* content from other web sites to help populate their own. These shortcuts can cause real issues with search engines.

Suppose your web site is about some form of marketing. It's very easy to surf around the Web and find hundreds (or even thousands) of web sites from which you can pull free, permission-granted content to include on your web site. The problem is that every other person or company creating a web site could be doing the same thing. The result? A single article on a topic appears on hundreds of web sites—and users don't find anything new when they search for that topic and every site has the same article.

To help combat this type of content generation, some search engines now include as part of their search algorithm a method to measure the *freshness* of site content. If a crawler examines your site and finds that much of your content is also on hundreds of other web sites, you run the risk of either ranking low or being delisted from the search engine's indexing database.

Some search engines now look for four types of duplicate content:

- *Highly Distributed Articles*: These are the free articles that seem to appear on every single web site about a given topic. This content has usually been provided by a marketing-savvy entrepreneur as a way to gain attention for his or her project or passion. But no matter how valuable the information, if it appears on hundreds of sites, it will be deemed duplicate and reduce your chances of being listed high in the search result rankings.
- *Product Descriptions for E-commerce Stores*: The product descriptions included on nearly all web pages are not included in search engine results. Product descriptions can be very small, and depending on how many products you're offering, there could be thousands of them. Crawlers are designed to skip over most product descriptions. Otherwise, a crawler might never be able to work completely through your site.
- *Duplicate Web Pages*: It's pointless for a user to click through a search result only to find that your web pages have been shared with everyone else. These duplicate pages gum up the works and reduce the level at which your pages end up in the search results.
- *Content that has been Scraped from Numerous Other Sites*: *Content scraping* is the practice of pulling content from other web sites and repackaging it so that it looks like your own content. Although scraped content may look different from the original, it is still duplicate content, and many search engines will leave you completely out of the search index, and hence the search results.

## Hidden Pages

One last SEO issue concerns the damage to your SEO strategy that *hidden pages* can inflict. These are pages in your web site that are visible only to a search crawler. Hidden pages can also lead to issues such as hidden keywords and hidden links. Because keywords and links help to boost your search rankings, many people try to capitalize on this by hiding them within the body of a web page, sometimes in a font color that perfectly matches the site background.



There's no way to beat the detection of hidden pages. If you have a web site and it contains hidden pages, it's just a matter of time before the crawler figures out that the content is part of a hidden SEO strategy; and once that's determined by the crawler, your site ranking will drop drastically.

## 404 Error Pages

One problem that visitors may encounter is broken links that don't lead to their intended target. Instead, these links take the user to a worthless page that usually contains a message such as “*error 404*” Not very descriptive, is it? When users encounter an error that they don't understand, it simply adds to the frustration of being blocked from going where you want to go.

Error pages happen: links break, pages become outdated, and—especially if you're linking to a search engine results page—people type incorrect URLs into their browsers all the time. It's what you do about these issues that will determine whether your user heads off to another site or surfs back to your site in an effort to locate what they were looking for.

No one wants their site visitors to encounter an error page, but sometimes you can't help it. For those times when it does happen, you want the page to be as useful as possible to your visitors. Adding elements that tell the visitor more about what happened and what their options are is the best way to accomplish that. That “error 404 page unavailable” message doesn't give them anything to work from.

Instead, you can use your error page to provide a list of links that are similar to what the user was trying to reach in the first place. Or you can offer a search box that enables users to search for information similar to what was on the page that they couldn't reach. The worst thing you can do is nothing.

Give your visitors options that are designed to keep them on your web site. And one more thing: Don't overwhelm them. An error page should look like an error page, even if it's more useful than the simple “this page doesn't exist” error; but it should also be simple. However, don't make your error pages look like the rest of the site. You might assume that providing users with your site's usual look and feel and navigational structure is the best way to ensure that they don't leave, but that's not the case. When you don't distinguish an error page from the rest of your site, two things can happen.

First, users get confused. The error page looks like the rest of your site, so it's not immediately recognized as an error. Second, the navigational or link structure that you include on the page might not work properly, which translates to even more frustration for the visitor.

When designing error pages, your best option is to keep it simple and make it useful. Do that and you will likely ensure that your visitors stay on your site. At the same time, you're providing useful information that can be loaded with keywords and other SEO elements. The result is the best of both worlds: managing search engines while impressing your visitors with the usefulness of your site.

## Validating Your HTML

HTML code is a pretty straightforward programming language. However, like any language, a document written in HTML can contain a lot of meaningless garbage that doesn't seem to interfere with the message but leaves the document less than pristine. In fact, if your web site designer leaves a snippet of trash in your HTML code because it didn't overtly affect the site and the designer didn't want to take time cleaning it up, it could spell disaster for your SEO.

With HTML there's a lot behind the scenes that site visitors don't see. There are the tags and elements that must be there for users, of course, and then there are the tags and elements that

aren't ever visible, so whether they are there or not doesn't seem to matter—but of course it does.

When you recognize that a search engine crawler looks at text, and that HTML is a type of text, then your HTML begins to take on new meaning. If your site contains something that shouldn't be there, visitors may not see it but search crawlers will, and it could affect the quality score of your site.

Because HTML can be manipulated on the back end, a set of guidelines and best practices has been developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). These guidelines and best practices were created to help web designers use HTML in the most efficient and effective manner. Unfortunately, the designers don't always pay attention, and sometimes the HTML of a site can be littered with unneeded elements that affect your search engine rankings.

The best thing to do is validate your HTML, or check to ensure that it complies with W3C standards. You could do that manually, by going through every single line of code in your web site, but that would take a very long time when you consider that some web sites contain millions of lines of code.

Instead, you can use a tool such as the free HTML Validator (<http://validator.w3.org/>) that the W3C makes available to examine (or validate) your HTML to ensure that it adheres to the W3C guidelines. To use this tool, just enter the URL of your web site, and the validator will run a diagnostic on the site and return the results to you. You can then use that information to ensure that your site is free of the clutter that turns crawlers off.

## **After Your Site Is Built**

Building the right site to help maximize your SEO efforts is a difficult task; and when you're finished, the work doesn't end. As mentioned earlier, SEO is an ongoing strategy, not a technology that you can implement and forget. You need to spend time reviewing your practices, examining results, and making adjustments where necessary. If this ongoing maintenance is ignored, then your SEO efforts up to this point will quickly become time that would have been better spent standing on the street with a sign around your neck advertising your web site. That might be more effective than outdated SEO.

## **Beware of Content Thieves**

Maintenance of your SEO strategies is also essential to helping you find problems that might be completely unrelated to SEO. For example, SEO strategies can help you locate content thieves. One such strategy is tagging your web site. Some people (including black-hat SEOs) take snippets of content from your site to use on their own. If you tag your content cleverly, you can use some very distinctive tags, which will help you quickly locate content that has been stolen.

Another way in which SEO helps you to locate stolen content is through tracking. Presumably, if you're executing SEO strategies, then you're also monitoring your site metrics with a program such as Google Analytics. Watching the metrics used by one of those analytics programs can help you locate content thieves. For example, if you look at your incoming links on one of these programs, you might find that people are coming to your site from a completely unexpected location. If that's the case, you can follow the link back to that site to find out why. A site using stolen content is easy to find using this method. Many services are available that will help you track your web site content. Those services are covered in more depth in Chapter 12.

Tagging works well for finding content thieves, and you can also use domain cloaking to thwart automatic content scrapers. Recall that this is a process by which your web site appears to be located somewhere other than where it actually is. This is accomplished using an HTML frameset that redirects traffic from one URL to another. For example, if your web site address is

[www.you.somewhere.com](http://www.you.somewhere.com), you can use domain cloaking to have your site appear to be [www.yourbusiness.com](http://www.yourbusiness.com).

As you learned earlier in this chapter, a problem with using domain cloaking is that it can confuse a search engine crawler, because the same content appears to be on two pages, although it's only one page that redirects. Another problem is that some search engine crawlers can't read the frameset that's used to redirect the user, which means your site may end up not being ranked at all. Domain cloaking is a tactic that should be used only in special cases—namely, where content is truly unique and could possibly affect your SEO rankings (or that of someone who might steal it) in a dramatic way.

## Dealing with Updates and Site Changes

One last problem you may encounter after you've initially set up your SEO strategies is the updates and changes that your site will undergo. Web site owners often think that once the SEO is in place, it's always in place and they don't have to think about it again. That attitude can lead to a very unpleasant surprise.

When your site changes, especially when there are content updates or changes to the site structure, links can be broken, tags may be changed, and any number of other small details may be overlooked. When this happens, the result can be a reduced ranking for your site. Site crawlers look at everything, from your tags to your links, and based on what they see, your ranking could fluctuate from day to day. If what the crawler sees indicates that your site has changed in a negative way, the site's ranking will be negatively affected.

As you know, many factors affect the way your site is ranked in a search engine. You've seen an overview of a lot of them in this chapter, and you'll see them all again in more depth in future chapters. Realize that SEO is not a simple undertaking. It is a complex, time-consuming strategy for improving your business. Without attention to all of the details, you could be wasting your time. Plan to invest the time needed to ensure that your search engine optimization efforts aren't wasted

## Chapter 5: Keywords and Your Web Site

### Overview

### In This Chapter


- The importance of keywords
- Understanding heuristics
- Picking the right keywords
- What's the right keyword density?
- Taking advantage of organic keywords
- Avoiding keyword stuffing
- More about keyword optimization

Keywords. That's a term you hear associated with search engine optimization all the time. In fact, it's very rare that you hear anything about SEO in which keywords aren't involved some way; so what's so special about keywords?

Simply put, keywords are those words used to catalog, index, and find your web site; but of course, it's not nearly as simple as it sounds. There is a fine science to finding and using the right keywords on your web site to improve your site's ranking. In fact, an entire industry has been built around keywords and their usage. Consultants spend countless hours finding and applying the right keywords for their customers, and those who design web sites with SEO in mind also agonize over choosing just the right ones.

Using popular—and effective—keywords on your web site will help to ensure that it is visible in the search engine results, rather than be buried under thousands of other web site results. There are keyword research tools that can help you find the exact keywords to use for your site and therefore for your search engine optimization. Understanding the use of keywords—where to find them, which ones to use, and the best ways to use them—enables you to have a highly visible and successful web site.

## Secondary Search Engines

 The listings allowed in secondary search engines and directories can be general or specific. This list doesn't differentiate the search engines from the directories, and they aren't separated by types of listings, but there's still a pretty comprehensive list here, so you should be able to find enough places to list your site to keep you busy for quite some time.

 AlltheWeb: [www.alltheweb.com](http://www.alltheweb.com) (same index as Yahoo)

 AltaVista: [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com) (same index as Yahoo!)

 Simpli: [www.simpli.com](http://www.simpli.com)

 Slider: [www.slider.com](http://www.slider.com)

 Miva: [www.miva.com/us](http://www.miva.com/us)

 Search123: [www.search123.com](http://www.search123.com)

 All the Internet: [www.alltheinternet.com](http://www.alltheinternet.com)

 Windows Live Search: [www.live.com](http://www.live.com)

 MySearch: [www.mysearch.com](http://www.mysearch.com)

 Alexa: [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)

 HotBot: [www.hotbot.com](http://www.hotbot.com)

 Netscape: [www.netscape.com](http://www.netscape.com)


 Wisenut: [www.wisenut.com](http://www.wisenut.com)

 Lycos: [www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com)

 Findtarget: [www.findtarget.com](http://www.findtarget.com)


 Towersearch: [www.towersearch.com](http://www.towersearch.com)


 Entireweb: [www.entireweb.com](http://www.entireweb.com)

 LiveSearching.com: [www.livesearching.com](http://www.livesearching.com)

 Scrub the Web: [www.scrubtheweb.com](http://www.scrubtheweb.com)

 SearchHippo: [www.searchhippo.com](http://www.searchhippo.com)

 ExactSeek.com: [www.exactseek.com](http://www.exactseek.com)

 Information.com: [www.information.com](http://www.information.com)

 123World: [www.123world.com](http://www.123world.com)

  Jayde: [www.jayde.com](http://www.jayde.com)

  LinkMaster: [www.linkmaster.com](http://www.linkmaster.com)

  Qango: [www.qango.com](http://www.qango.com)

  Xoron: <http://xoron.com>

  ZenSearch: [www.zensearch.com](http://www.zensearch.com)

  1800Miti.com: [www.1800miti.com](http://www.1800miti.com)

  Aesop: [www.aesop.com](http://www.aesop.com)

  AXXASEARCH: [www.axxasearch.com](http://www.axxasearch.com)

  Claymont: [www.claymont.com](http://www.claymont.com)

  Cozy Cabin: [www.cozycabin.com](http://www.cozycabin.com)

  Infotiger: [www.infotiger.com](http://www.infotiger.com)

  WhatUSeek: [www.whatuseek.com](http://www.whatuseek.com)

  Where2Go: [www.where2go.com](http://www.where2go.com)

  Genius Find: [www.geniusfind.com](http://www.geniusfind.com)

  01 Web Directory: [www.01webdirectory.com](http://www.01webdirectory.com)

  Yeandi: [www.yeandi.com](http://www.yeandi.com)

  So Much: [www.somuch.com](http://www.somuch.com)

  Wow Directory: [www.wowdirectory.com](http://www.wowdirectory.com)

  Business.com: [www.business.com](http://www.business.com)

  Gimpsy: [www.gimpsy.com](http://www.gimpsy.com)

  Go Guides: [www.goguides.org](http://www.goguides.org)

  JoeAnt: [www.joeant.com](http://www.joeant.com)

  Skaffe: [www.skaffe.com](http://www.skaffe.com)

  Web-Beacon: [www.web-beacon.com](http://www.web-beacon.com)

  Beaucoup!: [www.beaucoup.com](http://www.beaucoup.com)

  Complete Planet: <http://aip.completeplanet.com>

  AlltheBizz.com: [www.allthebizz.com](http://www.allthebizz.com)

  Find Hound: [www.findhound.com](http://www.findhound.com)

  BizWeb: [www.bizweb.com](http://www.bizweb.com)


  Directory Archives: [www.directoryarchives.com](http://www.directoryarchives.com)

  Mavicanet: [www.mavicanet.com](http://www.mavicanet.com)

 [Re-QUEST dot Net™: www.re-quest.net](http://www.re-quest.net)

 [SuperSeek: www.superseek.org](http://www.superseek.org)


 [Web World Index: www.webworldindex.com](http://www.webworldindex.com)

 [Bigall.com: www.bigall.com](http://www.bigall.com)


 [International Business Directory: www.internationalbusinessdirectory.com](http://www.internationalbusinessdirectory.com)


 [Cipinet: http://directory.cipinet.com](http://directory.cipinet.com)

 [America's Best: www.americasbest.com](http://www.americasbest.com)

 [LCN2000.com: www.lcn2000.com](http://www.lcn2000.com)

 [At Home Business Portal: www.athomebusinessportal.com](http://www.athomebusinessportal.com)

 [BizWeb.com: www.bizweb.com](http://www.bizweb.com)

 [BamInfo.com: www.baminfo.com](http://www.baminfo.com)

 [Christ Engine: http://christengine.com](http://christengine.com)

 [Among Stars: http://amongstars.com](http://amongstars.com)

 [Family Friendly Sites: http://familyfriendlysites.com](http://familyfriendlysites.com)

 [InCrawler: www.incrawler.com](http://www.incrawler.com)

 [SplashDirectory: www.splashdirectory.com](http://www.splashdirectory.com)


 [Kahuki: www.kahuki.com](http://www.kahuki.com)

 [Greenstalk www.greenstalk.com](http://www.greenstalk.com)

 [Clush: www.clush.com](http://www.clush.com)

 [ALS Links: www.alslinks.com](http://www.alslinks.com)

 [Octopedia: www.octopedia.com](http://www.octopedia.com)

 [InfoListings Direct www.info-listings.com](http://www.info-listings.com)

 [Zorg-Directory: www.zorg-directory.com](http://www.zorg-directory.com)

 [DMOZ Zilla Direc www.dmozzilla.com](http://www.dmozzilla.com)

 [MostPopularSites.www.mostpopularsites.net](http://www.mostpopularsites.net)

 [World Site Index: www.worldsiteindex.com](http://www.worldsiteindex.com)

 [DataSpear: www.dataspear.com](http://www.dataspear.com)

 [Top Web Director www.twd.in](http://www.twd.in)

## Meta Search Engines

Meta search engines are those that search search engines. This listing of meta search engines will point you in the direction of the most frequently used ones. You can't submit your site to most



meta search engines. Instead, in order for your site to appear in these rankings, it must appear in the top listings in several other search engines.

DogPile: [www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com)

MetaCrawler: [www.metacrawler.com/info.metac](http://www.metacrawler.com/info.metac)

Kanoodle: [www.kanoodle.com](http://www.kanoodle.com)

7MetaSearch: <http://7metasearch.com>

Ixquick: [www.ixquick.com](http://www.ixquick.com)

iZito.com: [www.izito.com](http://www.izito.com)

Vivisimo: <http://vivisimo.com>

kartOO: [www.kartoo.com](http://www.kartoo.com)

Mamma: [www.mamma.com](http://www.mamma.com)

SurfWax: [www.surfwax.com](http://www.surfwax.com)

Clusty: <http://clusty.com>

CurryGuide.com: <http://web.curryguide.com>

Excite: [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)

Fazzle: [www.fazzle.com](http://www.fazzle.com)

Gimenei: <http://gimenei.com>

IceRocket: [www.icerocket.com](http://www.icerocket.com)

Info.com: [www.info.com](http://www.info.com)

InfoGrid: [www.infogrid.com](http://www.infogrid.com)

Jux2: [www.jux2.com](http://www.jux2.com)

metaEureka: [www.metaeureka.com](http://www.metaeureka.com)

Turbo10: <http://turbo10.com>

WebCrawler: [www.webcrawler.com](http://www.webcrawler.com)

Cuil: <http://www.cuil.com>

Mahalo: [www.mahalo.com](http://www.mahalo.com)

Zuula Search: [www.zuula.com](http://www.zuula.com)

## Keyword Tools

You could spend half your life and most of your budget trying to figure out which keywords will work best for your site, for your content, and for your search engine rankings. Tools, like the ones listed here, will make optimizing those keywords at least a little easier.

Google Keyword Tool: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Google Search-Based Keyword Tool: [www.google.com/sktool/#](http://www.google.com/sktool/#)

WordTracker: <http://freekeywords.wordtracker.com>

SEO Book Keyword Suggestion Tool: <http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword>

Submit Express Keyword Suggestion Tool: [www.submitexpress.com/keytracker.php](http://www.submitexpress.com/keytracker.php)

Global Promoter Keyword Suggestion Tool: [www.globalpromoter.com/seo-tools/keyword-suggestion-tool.cfm](http://www.globalpromoter.com/seo-tools/keyword-suggestion-tool.cfm)

BRL Keyword Suggestion Tool: [www.build-reciprocal-links.com/keyword-suggestion](http://www.build-reciprocal-links.com/keyword-suggestion)

Trellian: Search Word Suggestion Tool: [www.keyworddiscovery.com/search.html](http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/search.html)

Microsoft adCenter Labs Keyword Research Tools: <http://adlab.msn.com/Keyword-Research.aspx>

Keyword Intelligence: [www.keywordintelligence.com](http://www.keywordintelligence.com)

The Permutator: [www.boxersoftware.com/thepermutator.htm](http://www.boxersoftware.com/thepermutator.htm)

Keyword Typo Generator: <http://tools.seobook.com/spelling/keywords-typos.cgi>

SEMPhonic: <http://semphonic.com>

Digital Point Solution Search Engine Ranking Tools: [www.digitalpoint.com/tools/keywords](http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/keywords)

Keyword Density Analyzer: [www.keyworddensity.com](http://www.keyworddensity.com)

Search Engine Ranking Report: [www.top25web.com/cgi-bin/report.cgi](http://www.top25web.com/cgi-bin/report.cgi)

Web Site Keyword Suggestions: [www.webconfs.com/website-keyword-suggestions.php](http://www.webconfs.com/website-keyword-suggestions.php)

Keyword Discovery: [www.keyworddiscovery.com](http://www.keyworddiscovery.com)

SEO Research Labs: [www.seoresearchlabs.com](http://www.seoresearchlabs.com)

SEM Rush: [www.semrush.com](http://www.semrush.com)

Keyword Density: <http://tools.davidnaylor.co.uk/keyworddensity>

## Content Resources

Because content is such an important part of your web site (and your web site optimization), you'll need to know where to find it. The links in this section not only take you to content providers, but also to content syndicators and other content tools that will have the text on your page working overtime to keep visitors on your site.

ArticleDashboard: [www.articledashboard.com](http://www.articledashboard.com)

Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org>

Ezine Articles: <http://ezinearticles.com>

FreeSticky: [www.freesticky.com/stickyweb](http://www.freesticky.com/stickyweb)

GoArticles.com: [www.goarticles.com](http://www.goarticles.com)

IdeaMarketers.com: [www.ideamarketers.com](http://www.ideamarketers.com)

World Wide Information Outlet: <http://certificate.net>

AbleStable Syndication: <http://www.ablestable.com/resources/library/articles.html>

FeatureWell.com: [www.featurewell.com](http://www.featurewell.com)

MagPortal: [www.magportal.com](http://www.magportal.com)

Moreover: [www.moreover.com](http://www.moreover.com)

OSKAR Consulting: [www.electroniccontent.com](http://www.electroniccontent.com)

Pages: [www.pagesmag.com](http://www.pagesmag.com)

Uclick: <http://content.uclick.com>

YellowBrix: [www.yellowbrix.com](http://www.yellowbrix.com)

Hot Product News: [www.hotproductnews.com](http://www.hotproductnews.com)

Internet News Bureau: [www.internetnewsbureau.com](http://www.internetnewsbureau.com)

M2 Communications: [www.m2.com/m2/web/page.php/home](http://www.m2.com/m2/web/page.php/home)

OnlinePressReleases.com: [www.onlinepressreleases.com/onlinepr/index.shtml](http://www.onlinepressreleases.com/onlinepr/index.shtml)

PR Newswire: <http://prnewswire.com>

PR Web: [www.prweb.com](http://www.prweb.com)

USANews: [www.usanews.net](http://www.usanews.net)

Google Knol: <http://knol.google.com>

CopyScape: [www.copyscape.com](http://www.copyscape.com)

DupeCop: [www.dupecop.com](http://www.dupecop.com)

## **RSS Feeds and Applications**

In today's world of constantly changing content, RSS feeds and applications can contribute to your site optimization by keeping your content in front of prospective customers at all times. The content resources included here will help you set up all of the RSS options that your site needs.

Feedster: [www.feedster.com](http://www.feedster.com)

LockerGnome: [www.lockergnome.com](http://www.lockergnome.com)

NewsGator: [www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com)

NewsKnowledge.com: [www.newsknowledge.com/home.html](http://www.newsknowledge.com/home.html)

Syndic8: [www.syndic8.com](http://www.syndic8.com)

Freshmeat: <http://freshmeat.net>

SourceForge.net: <http://sourceforge.net>

Technorati: <http://technorati.com>

BlogDigger: [www.blogdigger.com](http://www.blogdigger.com)

IceRocket: [www.icerocket.com](http://www.icerocket.com)

Google Reader: [www.reader.google.com](http://www.reader.google.com)

BlogPulse: [www.blogpulse.com](http://www.blogpulse.com)

Bloglines: [www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com)

Sphere: [www.sphere.com](http://www.sphere.com)

## Search Engine Marketing Resources and Articles

We could talk about SEO and SEM for hours and still not cover all there is to know about it. That's why it's good for you to immerse yourself in the culture of SEO. That way, you can keep up with what's going on in the industry and changes that might be made to the way SEO and SEM are achieved most effectively.

Search Engine Watch: <http://searchenginewatch.com>

Pandia: [www.pandia.com](http://www.pandia.com)

HighRankings.com: [www.highrankings.com](http://www.highrankings.com)

Search Engine Spider Simulator: [www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php](http://www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php)

WebCEO: [www.webceo.com](http://www.webceo.com)

Search Engine Simulator: [www.delorie.com/web/ses.cgi](http://www.delorie.com/web/ses.cgi)

Measuring Up: [www.measuring-up.com/seo-reference/seo-resources.html](http://www.measuring-up.com/seo-reference/seo-resources.html)

ClickTracks: [www.clicktracks.com](http://www.clicktracks.com)

Similar Page Checker: [www.webconfs.com/similar-page-checker.php](http://www.webconfs.com/similar-page-checker.php)

Search Engine Saturation Tool: [www.marketleap.com/siteindex/default.htm](http://www.marketleap.com/siteindex/default.htm)

Internet Marketing Tools: [www.webuildpages.com/tools/internet-marketing-page.htm](http://www.webuildpages.com/tools/internet-marketing-page.htm)

Meta Keyword Tool: [www.apogee-web-consulting.com/tools/keyword\\_tool.php](http://www.apogee-web-consulting.com/tools/keyword_tool.php)

Advanced Meta Tag Generator: [www.optimization-services.com/meta.asp?id=4](http://www.optimization-services.com/meta.asp?id=4)

Meta Tag Generator: [www.searchbliss.com/free\\_scripts\\_metatag.htm](http://www.searchbliss.com/free_scripts_metatag.htm)

Search Engine Spider Simulator: [www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php](http://www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php)

Webmaster World: [www.webmasterworld.com](http://www.webmasterworld.com)

SEO Roundtable: [www.seroundtable.com](http://www.seroundtable.com)

SEO for Firefox: <http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/seo-for-firefox.html>

SpyFu: [www.spyfu.com](http://www.spyfu.com)

Compete.com: [www.compete.com](http://www.compete.com)

Caphyon Advanced Web Ranking: [www.advancedwebranking.com](http://www.advancedwebranking.com)

SoloSEO: [www.soloseo.com](http://www.soloseo.com)

SEM Check: <http://semcheck.com>

SEO Digger: <http://seodigger.com>

SEO Quake: [www.seoquake.com](http://www.seoquake.com)

SEO Automatic: [www.seoautomatic.com/app](http://www.seoautomatic.com/app)

Google Webmaster Tools: [www.google.com/webmasters](http://www.google.com/webmasters)

Latitude: [www.latitudegroup.com](http://www.latitudegroup.com)

## Registration Services and Programs

After looking at that huge list of search engines and directories at the beginning of this appendix, submitting your site to all of them might seem like an overwhelming task. If it does, the links in this section will take you to services and programs that can help automate your submission and registration processes.

AddPro: [www.addpro.com](http://www.addpro.com)

Ineedhits: [www.ineedhits.com](http://www.ineedhits.com)

Dynamic Submission: [www.dynamicsubmission.com](http://www.dynamicsubmission.com)

Web Position: [www.webposition.com](http://www.webposition.com)

Submit Wolf: [www.submitwolf.net](http://www.submitwolf.net)

Directory Submission Tool: [www.123promotion.co.uk/directorymanager](http://www.123promotion.co.uk/directorymanager)

URL Rewriting Tool: [www.webconfs.com/url-rewriting-tool.php](http://www.webconfs.com/url-rewriting-tool.php)

## Link Resources and Software

Links are nearly as important as the content on your site, so you'll need some additional tools to help you stay connected with your linking strategies, and to help you gather links to your site or push links out from your site.

LinkPopularity.com: [www.linkpopularity.com](http://www.linkpopularity.com)

MarketLeap: [www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/default.htm](http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/default.htm)

AntsSoft Link Popularity Checker: [www.antssoft.com/linksurvey/index.htm](http://www.antssoft.com/linksurvey/index.htm)

Xenu's Link Sleuth: <http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>

Link Alarm: [www.linkalarm.com](http://www.linkalarm.com)

Backlink Anchor Text Checker: [www.webconfs.com/anchor-text-analysis.php](http://www.webconfs.com/anchor-text-analysis.php)

Backlink Builder: [www.webconfs.com/backlink-builder.php](http://www.webconfs.com/backlink-builder.php)

Backlink Summary Tool: [www.webconfs.com/backlink-summary.php](http://www.webconfs.com/backlink-summary.php)

Reciprocal Link Checker: [www.webconfs.com/reciprocal-link-checker.php](http://www.webconfs.com/reciprocal-link-checker.php)

Broken Link Checker: [www.dead-links.com](http://www.dead-links.com)

Reciprocal Link Spider: [www.recip-links.com](http://www.recip-links.com)

Site Link Analyzer: [www.seochat.com/seo-tools/site-link-analyzer](http://www.seochat.com/seo-tools/site-link-analyzer)

Link Appeal: [www.webmaster-toolkit.com/link-appeal.shtml](http://www.webmaster-toolkit.com/link-appeal.shtml)

Link Popularity Check: <http://uptimebot.com/sql/one.php>

Robots Txt Generator: [www.mcanerin.com/en/search-engine/robots-txt.asp](http://www.mcanerin.com/en/search-engine/robots-txt.asp)

Robots.txt Syntax Checker: [www.sxw.org.uk/computing/robots/check.html](http://www.sxw.org.uk/computing/robots/check.html)

Link Harvester: <http://tools.seobook.com/link-harvester>

Backlink Watch: [www.backlinkwatch.com](http://www.backlinkwatch.com)

SEO Link Analysis: <http://yoast.com/seo-tools/link-analysis>

LinkScape: [www.seomoz.org/linkscape](http://www.seomoz.org/linkscape)

## Pay-per-Click

Pay-per-click (PPC) will likely be a large part of your marketing efforts for your site. PPC goes hand in hand with SEO, so the links in this section should help you find all of the PPC tools that you need. There are even some PPC services included in these listings.

Miva: [www.miva.com](http://www.miva.com)

Enhance Interactive: [www.enhance.com](http://www.enhance.com)

EPilot: [www.epilot.com](http://www.epilot.com)

PayPerClickSearchEngines.com: [www.payperclicksearchengines.com](http://www.payperclicksearchengines.com)

7Search: <http://7search.com>

SearchFeed: [www.searchfeed.com](http://www.searchfeed.com)

Yahoo! Search Marketing: <http://sem.smallbusiness.yahoo.com/searchenginemarketing>

Google AdWords: <https://adwords.google.com>

## Social-Media Tools

Social media is the next major shift in SEO that's happening right now. Web 2.0 is all about the social nature of the Internet, and if you don't tap into that social aspect, the SEO on your site will quickly be out of date. Using social-media tools, however, you can get a jump-start on your social-media strategy.



Social Tagging Tool: [www.topsemtips.com/tools/sociable](http://www.topsemtips.com/tools/sociable)

Del.icio.us: <http://del.icio.us>

Digg: [www.digg.com](http://www.digg.com)

Furl: [www.furl.net](http://www.furl.net)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

MySpace: [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

Propeller: [www.propeller.com](http://www.propeller.com)

StumbleUpon: [www.stumbleupon.com](http://www.stumbleupon.com)

Reddit: [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)

Newsvine: [www.newsvine.com](http://www.newsvine.com)

Fark: [www.fark.com](http://www.fark.com)

Clipmarks: <http://clipmarks.com>

Shoutwire: <http://shoutwire.com>

Social Bookmark Wordpress Plug-In: [www.twistermc.com/blog/social-bookmark-plugin](http://www.twistermc.com/blog/social-bookmark-plugin)

Smogger Social Media Blog: <http://smogger.wordpress.com>

Micro Persuasion: [www.micropersuasion.com](http://www.micropersuasion.com)

Social Media Optimization: <http://social-media-optimization.com>

SMO Mashup: [www.smomashup.com](http://www.smomashup.com)

## Mobile Optimization Tools

Right in line with social-media optimization is optimizing your web site for the mobile Web. With iPhones the current mobile phone of choice, and in many cases the Internet device of choice, reaching visitors through the mobile Web is becoming more and more important in your SEO efforts. These resources will help you start or improve your Mobile SEO efforts.

Google Mobile Proxy: [www.google.com/gwt/n](http://www.google.com/gwt/n)

Mobile Search Marketing Guide: [www.mobilesearchmarketing.com/guide.php](http://www.mobilesearchmarketing.com/guide.php)

Palm OS Emulator: [www.tucows.com/preview/261443](http://www.tucows.com/preview/261443)

Windows Mobile 2003 Pocket PC Development:  
[www.microsoft.com/Downloads/details.aspx?familyid=57265402-47A8-4CE4-9AA7-5FE85B95DE72](http://www.microsoft.com/Downloads/details.aspx?familyid=57265402-47A8-4CE4-9AA7-5FE85B95DE72)

Windows Mobile 2003 Smartphone Emulator:  
[www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=8fe677fa7-3a6a-4265-b8eb-61a628ecd462](http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=8fe677fa7-3a6a-4265-b8eb-61a628ecd462)

Google Mobile: [www.google.com/xhtml](http://www.google.com/xhtml)

Yahoo! Mobile: <http://mobile.yahoo.com/onestream>

Technorati Mobile: <http://m.technorati.com>

Google Mobile Sitemaps: [www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/topic.py?topic=8493&hl=en](http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/topic.py?topic=8493&hl=en)

Yahoo! Submit a Mobile Site: <http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/mobilesubmit>

Website Accessibility Initiative: [www.w3.org/wai](http://www.w3.org/wai)

## Appendix D: Worksheets

### Overview

#### In This Appendix

- SEO Plan
- SEO Checklist
- Four Phases of the Buying Process Worksheet
- Keyword Worksheet
- PPC Keyword Worksheet
- Keyword Checklist
- Keyword Performance Worksheet
- A/B Testing Worksheet
- PPC Competition Worksheet
- Link-Tracking Worksheet
- Rank-Tracking Worksheet

#### SEO Plan

[➔ Open table as spreadsheet](#)

Goals and Strategies	Notes
Primary goal	
Secondary goal	
Secondary goal	
Secondary goal	
Description of marketing strategy	
Who are your best customers and why?	
Who is your competition? (Include URLs)	
What's the geographic scope of your marketing?	

**Goals and Strategies****Notes**

Web Site Design

Corporate history, news, PR, or current events?

Executive bios?

Product and service information?

Customer support/live help?

Online requests for information or contact forms?

Membership-only content?

Contact information?

Forums?

Educational materials?

Links or resources?

Archived content?

Unique title tags on each page?

Meta keyword tags?

Meta description tags?

Headers?

Alt tags?

Anchor text?

Links and linking strategies?

Keyword density? (Suggested 3–7 percent)

Keyword Considerations

Keyword brainstorming

Initial keyword list

Keyword research

Pay-per-click strategies

Content Considerations

Well written and reader friendly?

Keywords included in body text?

Keywords included in titles?

Goals and Strategies	Notes
Keywords included in directories?	
Keywords included in file names?	
Keywords contained in images? (Should be avoided)	
Keyword variation?	

## SEO Checklist

### Current State

Check your rank in the major search engines.

Don't overuse or misuse rank-checking automation.

If it works, don't "fix" it unless the fix will improve your SEO efforts.

Keep your site fresh and persuasive.

### Keyword Research

Use your visitors' words, not just your own.

Focus on phrases.

What key phrases are most popular?

What relevant key phrases have less competition?

### Web Site Design

Is your site visually attractive?

Is your site's topic apparent at first glance?

Are your filenames based on relevant keywords?

Try to avoid frames. If you can't or don't want to, use appropriate workarounds.

Include a site-map page.

Include a `robots.txt` file.

Avoid delays and dead ends.

### Write Clean Code

Put your indexable content as early as possible in the source code.

Put heavy JavaScript and CSS code in external files.

Include spider-friendly navigation.

## **Make Use of Tags and Attributes**

Title tag

Description meta tag

Keywords meta tag

Alt tags

Headlines and headers

Keyword-based links

Table summary tags

## **SEO-Approved Content**

Create unique content.

Make content as effective as possible.

Examine and adjust keyword density.

Avoid invisible text.

Avoid very tiny text.

Optimize your entire site.

Optimize your interior pages.

Give each page its own focus.

## **Manual Submissions**

Submit to search engines and directories.

Know what your submission software does before you begin to use it.

Do not oversubmit.

Do you have a site map?

## **Linking Strategies**

Cultivate quality links.

Avoid garbage links.

Offer accurate, enticing descriptions.

Ask for key-phrase or keyword discount.

Allow return links sparingly.

Links from third parties?

## **Conversions**

Improved sales conversion often outweighs improved SEO performance.

## **Chapter 8: The Display Network**