Optimization for Search Engines

It is often assumed that to create an online presence for your business, art or personal project, it's sufficient to put up a nice-looking, content-rich website. However, if no visitors come to your site all efforts, time and money spent on it will be in vain. Considering that a great part of your traffic may come from search engines, we have outlined the most important tips to help you make your site easily discoverable on the web.

This tutorial is focused on optimizing your site for organic search results. Maximizing the visibility of your website in organic search results is a continuous process which requires significant involvement and may not bring overnight results. If you need instant results, and have allocated a budget for this, you may want to consider some of the paid search results placement alternatives (such as Google Adwords, adbrite, Microsoft adCenter).

Organic search engine optimization is about understanding which elements search engines look for on a page to help determine its relevance to a given search term and making your pages easily discoverable by these elements for the search terms that relate most closely to your content.

Key factors influencing your page rank in search engines

Search engines store information about an enormous amount of pages they find on the web. The pages
are retrieved by spiders (crawlers) and are then analyzed to see what information is worth indexing (storing). Usually this information is extracted from the titles, headings, the first paragraphs of text content and the meta tags. When you run a search query into a search engine, it displays the best matching pages from the indexed ones, based on a specific page ranking criteria. Different search engines use their own methods of indexing and ranking web pages. Most of them, though, rank web pages based on:

- website popularity
- quality of the website copy
- technical information like meta tags, robots and sitemap files

Quality of website copy

Many website owners start thinking about search engine optimization when their website copy is ready. However, it is exactly the copy that matters when search engines crawl your site. Below are some important tips on writing and structuring your content:

- Make a site with a clear **hierarchy of information and text links**. Every page should be reached from at least one text link.
- Define the **keywords** that your visitors would most likely type to find you and **use them inside your page content.**

How to select the right set of keywords for your site:

o Identify your target audience and select keywords that your target users might use

o The keywords should be specific to your business and location, avoid generic keywords used by lots of popular websites.

o Ensure high density of the keywords - the keyword you want to show up for should be mentioned in the text several times and especially in the first and last paragraph.

o Review the competition for a specific keyword and how many times it was

searched for by using tools, such as [Google Keyword Tool](). Track search volume per region and industry in a defined time frame, using the [Google Insights for Search tool.]()

- **Insert keywords in hyper links,** as search engines consider them containing potentially important content.

- [For your pages use URLs]() **that are related to the page content**. If your site is about painting, you may use URLs, such as painting_oilpaintings.html, painting_graffiti.html, painting_acrylics.html, etc.

- Pay special attention to the content on your **Home** page - a properly structured and optimized Home page will contribute significantly to the indexing of all pages on your site.

  o write a text paragraph on your site objectives, mention your brand, give a brief company presentation.

  o link to the rest pages from your site using [text links]().

- If you are offering products or services on your site, it is recommended to have a **separate page for each product or service.**

- **Use text** instead of images to display important names, content, or links. Search engine crawlers don't recognize text contained in images.

- Always set a 'rollover caption' for [uploaded images](). The rollover image captions are visible for search engines.

- Create a **[Sitemap page]()** listing the most important pages of your site. Link the pages to their URLs. This will both help your visitors to get oriented in your website and will give a straightforward list of links to the search engine crawler. We strongly recommend this approach to users who don't have the option to upload sitemap [static file]().

- Optimize the content of all pages. Keep in mind that search engines return pages as results, not sites. The more optimized each page is, the higher the possibility to be displayed in search results, thus giving a chance to your potential customers to land right on your Product / Service page.

- Make sure you don't have **traffic leak** from old, non-existent pages. If you have previously had a site, and it was indexed by search engines, make sure all traffic to those obsolete pages is directed to your new site by [setting your Home page as your 'not found' page.]()

- Update frequently - keeping your content fresh and up-to-date is important for search engine optimization.

Have in mind that search engines may penalize a website that features duplicate content and as a result exclude it from search engine results. Pay attention to the following practices to prevent this:

- Use only **unique content** on your web pages - do not copy-paste content from other sites. If you're not sure how original your content is, use [Copyscape]() to check.

- Don't create pages with content similar to the content of other pages from your site.

- Don't use multiple domains for the same site, as search engines consider each domain a separate copy of the content. We'd recommend setting up the site only under 'www.yourdomain.com' and applying a 301 redirection of 'yourdomain.com' to 'www.yourdomain.com'.

Meta data: title, keywords, description

Along with your page content, search engines also go through a number of meta tags to find information for your site. Improving them may significantly increase your page rank.

1. Site Title. The site title is the first and most visible information displayed for each search

result entry, and therefore should describe precisely and concisely what the site is about. Tips on creating a good site title:

- Include some of the keywords you already identified.
- Limit the title to 5 - 8 words (the text after that will be cut).
- Try to remove all unnecessary words like 'and', 'the', 'a', etc.
- Do not repeat keywords.

To change the site title, click **Control Panel** option on top right in your website Admin and select **Site Properties.**

2. Keywords. Keywords inserted in the meta tag area of your site do not play such an important
role as they used to. However, some search engines still use this meta info when indexing web pages. Review the keyword list compiled above and follow these rules to pick keywords for each page:

- Use various keywords.
- For each page choose keywords that directly relate to the page content.
- The more important keywords should be filed first.

You may enter the keywords for each page inside Page properties administration panel. Site keywords are defined in Site Properties administration panel. If no page keywords are defined - the page will use the site keywords.

3. Description. The description is usually a one-sentence summary of what your site or page is
about. The description should be compact (30-40 words) and informative. If the page has no description, the site description will be displayed as page description. If no site description is provided, the search engine will display as description part of your website content.

To add description to your pages and site, use the Page properties and Site Properties administration panels.

SEO-related files

SEO-related files should reside in the root folder of your site and are used by search engine spiders during the crawling of your site.

1. 'sitemap.xml' file. This file represents the page architecture of your site and speeds up the search engine indexing of all pages throughout your site. We'd recommend you to re-generate and re-submit a new sitemap to search engines whenever you apply major changes to your site.

2. 'robots.txt' file. This file tells crawlers which directories can or cannot be crawled. Uploading such a file can also serve as an invitation for search spiders to index every page in your site.

How to insert a robot.txt file in your site:

2.1. Open a text editor, such as Notepad and write these lines:

- If all pages should be crawled:

User-agent: *
Disallow:

- If you don't want some of your pages to be crawled, exclude them by adding their URLs:

User-agent: *
Disallow: /painting_acrylics.html
Disallow: /painting_graffiti.html

2.2. Save the file as 'robots.txt'

2.3. Upload it as a static file in Control Panel > Site Properties > Special Features > Show

Options > Site Static Files.

Link references from other websites

The more and more popular sites link to your website, the higher your page ranks. Being
linked is not enough, the quality of the sites linking to yours is what matters. If you gather inbound links from sites which already have a lot of inbound links, you'll be likely to increase your own page rank. Try to get high-traffic, popular sites with high page rank add a link to your site. Make sure the text linking to your site contains the keywords for which you want to rank higher. For instance, if the link contains 'hair loss prevention' you'll rank higher for this phrase. Here are some tips on how to get more links back to your site:

• Get links from web sites in your industry field - the websites of partner companies, suppliers, clients, etc.

• Promote your site in online forums, blogs, social networking and bookmarking sites (such as mashable, del.icio.us, furl, facebook).

• Post actively in popular forums or blogs where your target audience might be posting, and include the URL of your website in your signature. If your comments contain useful information, and you're a regular user, it's very likely that you will generate traffic from these users.

• Write a useful and interesting article on a topic that relates to a product or service you are offering. Put a link to your website somewhere inside the content (but do not abuse). Submit your article in sites allowing for free article submissions (to find such sites simply type 'submit free article' in Google). When these websites are crawled the link to your website will be captured.

• Utilize social media press releases to announce your latest activities. Make sure to include a link back to your website. Streamline the press releases submission by using online services such as PRWeb, BusinessWire, Marketwire. Include options for online bookmarking and news sharing (such as digg, reddit). Publicize every one, two months. To see all existing links to your website just type in Google 'link:mysite.com'.

Submitting your site to search engines and directories

Although search engine crawlers may find your site through some existing link to it (which is better for your website), you could help them and shorten the time for your web site to appear in search results by submitting your site URL.

1. Submit your site URL to **the major search engines** like Google, Yahoo! Search, Live Search, Alexa. If you have a registered custom domain, use the domain name when submitting your site. Keep in mind that the longer your domain is registered for, the more likely it is to get better placement in search results.

2. Submit your site URL to major **directories.** Most directories are associated with a search engine, so once you get listed in a directory it will take about 2 weeks to be indexed by the partner search engine as well. We'd recommend listing your site at least in Yahoo Directory and The Open Directory.

3. If you are targeting local users, get listed in popular **local search engines or local directories** related to your business. You may also place a business listing in Google and have your business displayed in Google Maps search results whenever a local search for your business activity is performed.

Monitoring and analyzing your traffic and user behavior

Even if you have applied all the proper search engine optimization tips, it might take about 2-3 weeks before search engines crawl and index your site. Until then, get acquainted with several traffic statistics tools that will help you monitor and analyze the behavior of your site visitors and adjust your site strategy accordingly:

1. Site Statistics tool will let you monitor the hits to your site and pages on a daily and monthly basis, as well as the sites referring visitors to you.

2. Google Analytics (GA) is a free statistics tool that gets easily integrated into your site using the HTML snippet. The interface provides detailed dashboard-type information and in-depth reports on the behavior of your site visitors such as the time visitors spend on each page from your site, referrers, search engine queries your visitors used to find you, links they clicked, the last page they visit before leaving your site, etc. To integrate GA in your site:

- signup for an account at http://www.google.com/analytics/
- you'll be provided with a piece of code which will track activity on your pages.
- copy the code and paste it in an HTML snippet, added at the top area of your site right next to the logo.
- make sure you preview a confirmation in your account that the code can generate data from your site.

3. Google Webmaster Tools (GWT) provide information on your pages visibility in Google, with detailed reports on your site links, the search queries through which your users arrive at your site, etc. Inside the interface you may also upload a sitemap. Google webmaster interface requires verification of your site before you may view your site statistics. To get verified by follow these steps:

- in your GWT account click the 'Verify' button located next to the URL of your site
- select 'Upload an HTML file' verification method from the dropdown menu - you'll preview a verification code, similar to 'google54f624018e376838.html'
- in your site create a new page and set the code as its title omitting the last '.html' string.
- in your GWT account click the 'Verify' button.

Retaining and increasing your traffic

After you get indexed by search engines you will slowly start getting more and more traffic from them. Your position on the search results pages will depend on how successfully you have identified your target audience and followed the outlined tips. Using any of the listed traffic statistic tools may help you identify the weak pages in your site, understand the geographic location of your site visitors, see which topics and pages attract them most, etc. Based on this information you may optimize your page content using Google Website Optimizer, may restructure your navigation, so that important but less visited pages are referred from your Home page, may analyze your exit pages and revise the information that has resulted in most exits from the site.

In addition, you should try to keep your existing visitors coming back to the site often by offering them regular content updates, news, promotions, featured stories / products, weekly contests and so on. Here are a few ideas you may try:

1. Identify a topic your site visitors are interested in and have them subscribe for weekly / monthly updates to it using the Newsletter functionality.

2. Add a News section to your Home page and have it frequently updated.

3. Start you own blog and comment on events you attended, interesting articles you read, other people's blog posts and anything else that your site visitors might want to read about. Put an

excerpt from the blog (the latest 1-2 posts e.g) on your Home page using an [RSS feed digest](#).

4. Setup a [forum](#) discussing topics related to your sphere. If the forum will discuss products / services you are offering, make sure you respond to any forum inquiries promptly. Invite your site visitors to review the forum for answers to specific queries they have. [Enable RSS feed](#), so users may receive forum updates without visiting your site.

Remember that once you get a high rank in search engines you should work persistently on maintaining it. Your competitors are also working hard on getting higher in search results, and should you stop optimizing and improving your site, you might find yourself out of the race.