eMarketing
The essential guide to digital marketing

4th Edition

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and the Minds of Quirk
What’s inside: Understand how search engine optimisation has grown to be an important marketing tactic. Gain insight into the factors that affect the position of your website in search results pages and how you can go about improving this. Finally explore a case study and consider pros and cons to help you take steps toward practical application.
While at Stanford University, Larry Page and Sergey Brin developed a search engine, called Backrub, which relied on a mathematical algorithm to rank web pages. They founded Google in 1998, which relied on PageRank, hyperlink analysis as well as on-page factors to determine the prominence of a web page. This enabled Google to avoid the same kind of manipulation of on-page factors to determine ranking.

Quoted from Google:

‘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.”’

PageRank was based on the practice of academic citations. The more times an academic paper is cited, the more likely it is to be considered an authority paper on the subject. Page and Brin used a similar theory for their search engine – the more times a web page or website is linked to, the more likely that the community considers that page an authority.

However, ranking highly in search results is vital to websites, so webmasters have adapted their websites as search engines have updated their algorithms to avoid being “gamed”. Today, Google says it uses more than 200 different factors in its algorithm to determine relevance and ranking. None of the major search engines disclose the elements they use to rank pages, but there are many SEO practitioners who spend time analysing patent applications to try to determine what these are.

In 2007, Google released a major change to its search engine results pages. Along with other search engines such as Bing, Google now serves media such as images and video in search results. In addition, realtime results are served for rapidly changing events, while news and social results are also displayed in the search engine results pages. In 2010, both Bing and Google announced that social signals are used in ranking search results.

11.1 introduction

With millions of people performing millions of searches each day to find content on the Internet, it makes sense that marketers want their products to be found by potential consumers. Search engines use closely guarded algorithms to determine the results displayed. However, determining what factors these algorithms take into account has led to a growing practice known as search engine optimisation.

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the practice of optimising a website so as to achieve preferred ranking on the search engine results pages (SERPs). Someone who practices SEO professionally is also known as an SEO (search engine optimiser).

SEO can be split into two distinct camps: white hat SEO and black hat SEO (with, of course, some grey hat-wearers in-between). Black hat SEO refers to trying to game the search engines. These SEOs use dubious means to achieve high rankings, and their websites are occasionally black-listed by the search engines. White hat SEO, on the other hand, refers to working within the parameters set by search engines to optimise a website for better user experience. Search engines want to send users to the website which is most suited to their needs, so white hat SEO should ensure that users can find what they are looking for.

11.2 history

By the mid-90s, webmasters had begun to optimise their sites for search engines due to a growing awareness of the importance of being listed by the various engines. Initially, all a webmaster needed to do was submit the URL of a web page for it to be indexed. Search engines relied on the metadata, information that webmasters inserted in the code of a web page, to determine what a web page was about and to index it appropriately.

Industry analyst Danny Sullivan records that the earliest known use of the term “search engine optimisation” was a spam message posted on Usenet, an online forum or message board, on July 26, 1997.

Realising the importance of being ranked highly in search results, webmasters began using the search engine’s reliance on metadata to manipulate the ranking for their websites. To combat this, search engines in turn have developed more complex algorithms including a number of other ranking factors.
11.3 key terms and concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>term</th>
<th>definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alt text</td>
<td>This refers to the “alt” attribute for the IMG HTML tag. It is used in HTML to attribute a text field to an image on a web page, normally with a descriptive function, telling a user what an image is about and displaying the text in instance where the image is unable to load.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor text</td>
<td>The visible, clickable text in a link.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backlink</td>
<td>All the links on other pages that will take the user to a specific web page. Each link to that specific page is known as an inbound/backlink. The number of backlinks influences PageRank so the more backlinks the better - get linking!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonical</td>
<td>The canonical version is the definitive version. In SEO, it refers to a definitive URL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain name</td>
<td>The easy to read name used to identify an IP address of a server that distinguishes it from other systems on the World Wide Web: our domain name is quirk.biz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash</td>
<td>A technology used to show video and animation on a website. It can be bandwidth heavy and unfriendly to search engine spiders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heading tags</td>
<td>Heading tags (H1, H2, H3 etc) are standard elements used to define headings and subheadings on a web page. The number indicates the importance, so H1 tags are viewed by the spiders as being more important than the H3 tags. Using target key phrases in your H tags is essential for effective SEO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home page</td>
<td>The first page of any website. The home page gives users a glimpse into what your site is about – very much like the index in a book, or a magazine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertext Markup Language (HTML)</td>
<td>HyperText Markup Language, read by web browsers. Certain HTML tags are used to structure the information and features within a web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperlink</td>
<td>A link in a document [electronic] that allows you, once you click on it, to follow the link to the relevant web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Portal (IP) address</td>
<td>The Internet Protocol (IP) address is an exclusive number, which is used to represent every single computer in a network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyword frequency</td>
<td>The number of times a keyword or key phrase appears on a website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyword phrase</td>
<td>Two or more words that are combined to form a search query - often referred to as keywords. It is usually better to optimise for a phrase rather than a single word.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.4 how it works

Search engines need to help users find what they’re looking for. To make sure they list the best results first, they look for signals of:

- Relevance
- Importance
- Popularity
- Trust
- Authority
SEO, also called organic or natural optimisation, involves optimising websites to achieve high rankings on the search engines for certain selected key phrases.

This is achieved by making changes to the HTML code, content and structure of a website, making it more accessible for search engines, and by extension, easier to find by users. These are also known as on page factors. SEO also involves off page factors – these generally build links to the website. Activities to increase links to a website, including social media and WebPR, are considered off page SEO.

SEO is an extremely effective way of generating new business to a site. It is a continuous process and a way of thinking about how search engines see your website and how users use search engines to find your website. It’s search psychology.

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:

- A search engine friendly website structure
- A well researched list of key phrases
- Content optimised to target those key phrases
- Link popularity
- Usage data

### 11.4.1 Search Engine Friendly Website Structure

Search engines encounter two kinds of obstacles:

- Technical challenges that prevent the search engine spider from accessing content.
- A competitive marketing environment where everyone wants to rank highly.

To ensure search engines can access your content, you must remove technical barriers. Those who wish to achieve the best results must follow best practices. These best practices are outlined in the chapter on Web Development and Design.

The key is to make sure that there are direct, HTML links to each page you want the search engines to index. The most important pages should be accessible directly from the home page of your website.

Thus, the information architecture, or how content is planned and laid out, has important usability and SEO implications. Users want to find what they are looking for quickly and easily, while website owners want search engine spiders to be able to access and index all applicable pages.

There are times when user experience and SEO can be at odds with each other, but usually if you focus on building usable, accessible websites, you have made them search engine friendly as well.

Another technical challenge to search engines is Flash. For the most part, search engines struggle to crawl and index Flash sites. There are some workarounds, but the best approach from an SEO perspective is to avoid building sites or delivering key content in Flash.

The chapter on web development and design delves more deeply into building a search engine friendly website.

### 11.4.2 Well Researched Key Phrases

Key phrases are the very foundation of search. When a user enters a query on a search engine, she uses the words she thinks are relevant to her search. The search engine then returns those pages it believes are most relevant to the words the searcher used.

Search engines have built a sophisticated understanding of semantics and the way we use language. So, if a user searches for “car rental” the search engine will look for pages that are relevant to “car rental” as well as possibly “car hire”, “vehicle hire” and so forth. Search engines have also built up knowledge around common misspellings and synonyms and common related searches, so as to try to return the best results for a user.

Because of this, it is crucial that websites contain content that implements keywords that are likely to be used by their target audience. Websites need to appear when their potential customers are searching for them.

As a website owner, or the marketer for a website, we need to build a list of some of the terms our potential customers are likely to use to find the things we are offering. A large part of keyword research is understanding search psychology. When we build our key phrase or keyword list, we are tapping into the mental process of searchers and putting together the right mix of keywords to target.

There are four things to consider when choosing a keyword:

- **Search volume**
  How many searchers are using that phrase to find what they want? For example, there is an estimated monthly search volume of over 338 billion for the keyword “hotel”, but an estimated 6600 searches per month for a keyword like “Cape Town Waterfront hotel”.

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**Keyword or key phrase?**

Key phrases are made up of keywords, but you can get away with referring to a key phrase as keywords.
Brainstorm

Think about the words you would use to describe your business, and about the questions or needs of your customers that it fulfills. How would someone ask for what you are offering? Consider synonyms and misspellings as well.

Bear in mind that people might not ask for your services in the same way you describe them. You might sell “herbal infusions” whereas most people would ask for “herbal teas”, although some might request a “tisane”.

If you are selling Tamagotchis, remember that the spelling can be tough to recall, and you might need to consider common misspellings like “tumagochi” or “tamagochi”.

Figure 11.2 People commonly spell certain terms incorrectly.

Survey customers and look at your website referral logs

Look to see what terms customers are already using to find you, and add those to your list. If they are already sending you some traffic, it is worth seeing if you can increase that traffic.

Use keyword research tools

There are several tools available for keyword discovery, and some of them are free! Some tools will scan your website and suggest keywords based on your current content. Most will let you enter keywords, and will then return suggestions based on past research data with:

- Similar keywords.
- Common keywords used with that keyword.
- Common misspellings.
- Frequency of the keywords in search queries.
- Industry related keywords.
- Keywords that are sending traffic to your competitors.
- How many sites are targeting your keywords.

See Tools of the Trade for some tools that you can use.

Bearing in mind the factors that make a good keyword, you need to aim for the right mix of keywords. Low volume terms, with low levels of competition may be a good way to get traffic in the short term, but don’t be scared off by high-

Figure 11.1 As of July 2011, there are 6600 searches per month for the keyword "Cape Town Waterfront hotel".

- Competition
How many other websites out there are targeting that same phrase? For example, Google finds over 2 630 000 000 results for "hotel" but only 37 100 000 for "Cape Town Waterfront Hotel".

- Propensity to convert
What is the likelihood that the searcher using that key phrase is going to convert on your site? A conversion is a desired action taken by the visitor to your website.

Related to propensity to convert is the relevance of the selected term to what you are offering. If you are selling rooms at a hotel at the V&A Waterfront, which of the two terms (“hotel” and "Cape Town Waterfront hotel") do you think will lead to more conversions?

- Value per lead
What is the average value per prospect attracted by the keyword? Depending on the nature of your website, the average value per lead varies. Using the hotel example again, consider these two terms:

"luxury Cape Town hotel" and "budget Cape Town hotel"

Both are terms used by someone looking to book a hotel in Cape Town, but it is likely that someone looking for a luxury hotel is intending to spend more. That means that particular lead has a higher value, particularly if you have a hotel booking website that offers a range of accommodation.

Keyword Research

How do you know where to start on building your keyword list? It requires a little thought, and a fair amount of research using tools which are readily available to help you both grow and refine your list of keywords.
levels of competition in the high-value, high-volume areas. It might take longer to get there, but once there, the revenue can make it all worthwhile.

It is a good idea to create a spreadsheet of the list of keywords, where you can also store information relevant to that keyword.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword or phrase</th>
<th>Search volume</th>
<th>Competition</th>
<th>Propensity to Convert</th>
<th>Value of Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>3,870</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>$18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxury hotels</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11.3 One should maintain a spreadsheet of the factors that will inform the best choice of keywords to target.**

This will help you to choose the right keywords to target. These lists should be created for the whole website, and then can be broken down for each page you want to optimise.

### 11.4.3 Optimising Content for Key Phrases

Once keywords and phrases are selected, we need to ensure the site contains content to target those key phrases. We must ensure that the content is properly structured and that it sends signals of relevance. Content is the most important part of your website. We must create relevant, targeted content aiming at our selected key phrases.

Content already has several roles to play on your site:

- It provides information to visitors.
- It must engage with them.
- It must convince them to do what you want.

Now it must also send signals of relevance to search engines. You need to use the keywords on the content page in a way that search engines will pick up, and users will understand.

Each web page should be optimised for two to three key phrases: the primary key phrase, the secondary and the tertiary. A page can be optimised for up to five key phrases, but it is better to have more niche pages than fewer unfocused pages.

Here are some guidelines:

1. **Title tag**: use the key phrase in the title and as close to the beginning as possible.
2. **H1 header tag**: use the key phrase in the header tag, and as much as possible in the other H tags.
3. **Body content**: use the key phrase at least three times, more if there is a lot of content and it makes sense to. You should aim for about 350 words of content. But don’t overdo it! That could look like spam to the search engines.
4. **Bold**: use `<strong>` tags around the keyword at least once.
5. **URL**: use a URL rewrite so that it appears in the URL of the page.
6. **Meta description**: use it at least once in the meta description of the page. It should entice users to clickthrough to your site from the SERP.
7. **Link anchor text**: try to ensure that the keyword is used in the anchor text of the pages linking to you.
8. **Domain name**: if possible, use the key phrase in your domain name.

### Optimising media

Images and video should also be optimised with the relevant keywords. Search engines cannot see images or view videos, so rely on the way that media is described to determine what it is about. Screen readers also read out these descriptions, which can help visually impaired readers to make sense of a website. Lastly, media such as images and video are sometimes also shown on the SERPs. Proper optimisation can give a brand more ownership of the SERP real estate, and can also be used effectively to target competitive terms.

Just as an image or video can help emphasise the content on a page to a visitor to that page, they can also help search engines in ranking pages, provided they are labelled correctly.

Here are some ways to optimise media with key phrases for SEO:

- Use descriptive filenames.
- Use specific ALT tags and Title attributes for images.
- Meta information can be supplied in the image or video file. Make sure this information is relevant.
- Use descriptive captions, and keep relevant copy close to the relevant media.
- Make sure the header tags and images are relevant to each other.
- For video, consider converting the script to text and making this available to search engines. YouTube offers an autocaptioning service that makes this easier to do.
Besides allowing search engine spiders to find websites, links are a way of validating relevance and indicating importance. When one page links to another it is as if that page is voting or vouching for the destination page. Generally, the more votes a website receives, the more trusted it becomes, the more important it is deemed, and the better it will rank on search engines.

Links help send signals of trust.
Signals of trust can only come from a third-party source. Few people will trust someone who says, “Don’t worry you can trust me” unless someone else, who is already trusted says, “Don’t worry, I know him well. You can trust him”. It is the same with links and search engines. Trusted sites can transfer trust to unknown sites via links.

Links help to validate relevance.
Text links, by their very nature, contain text (thank you, Captain Obvious). The text that makes up the link can help validate relevance. A link like “Cape Town hotel” sends the message that, “You can trust that the destination site is relevant to the term ‘Cape Town hotel’.” If the destination web page has already used content to send a signal of relevance, the link simply validates that signal.

What does a link look like?
Here is the HTML code for a link:

```html
<a href="http://www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm">Anchor Text</a>
```

http://www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm is the page that the link leads to. You should make sure that you are linking to a relevant page in your site, and not just to the home page.

Anchor Text is the text that forms the link. This is the text that you want to contain the key phrase that you are targeting.

The link sends a signal that the target URL is important for the subject used in the anchor text.

There is a lot more information that can be included in this anatomy, such as instructions telling the search engine not to follow the link, or instructions to the browser as to whether the link should open in a new window or not.

```html
<a href="http://www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm" rel="nofollow">Anchor Text</a>
```

rel="nofollow" can be included in links when you don’t want to vouch for the target URL. Search engines do not count nofollow links for ranking purposes. It was introduced by Google to try to combat comment spam.
Not all links are created equal
Of course, not all links are equal. Some sites are more trusted than others. So if they are more trusted, then links from those sites are worth more. Likewise, some sites are more relevant than others to specific terms. The more relevant a site, the more value is transferred by the link. Well known and established news sites, government sites (.gov) and university domains (.ac) are examples of sites from which links can carry more weighting. SEOMoz.org, among others, provides useful tools which help you to determine the value of links from particular sites.

Search algorithms also consider relationships between linked sites. By analysing various things, the engines try to determine if the links are natural links, or if they are manipulative, artificial links created solely for ranking purposes. Manipulated links are worth very little compared to natural links and may lead to a drop in search engine rankings.

The search engine algorithm will also determine the relevancy of the referring website to the site being linked to. The more relevant the sites are to each other, the better.

How does a website get more links?
With links playing such a vital role in search engine rankings and traffic for a website, everyone wants more of them. The more relevant the referring website is to your website, the better the link. There are certainly dubious means to generating links, most of which can actually result in being penalised by the search engines. However, here are some ways that ethical and honest website owners and marketers (and that’s what you are) go about increasing links to their websites:

Creating excellent, valuable content that others want to read
If people find your site useful, they are more likely to link to it. It is not necessary, nor possible, to try to write content that will appeal to the whole of the Internet population. Focus on being the best in the industry you are in, and in providing value to the members of that community. Make sure that valuable content is themed around your key phrases.

Infographics are visual and graphic representations of data, and are a popular type of content that is useful to users, and can encourage lots of traffic and inbound links.

Create tools and documents that others want to use
Interview experts in your field, and host those interviews on your website. Think outside the box for quirky, relevant items that people will link to. Calculators are popular tools, and we don’t just mean the ones that add two and two together. If you have a website selling diet books, for example, create a tool which helps users calculate their BMI and target weight.

Games
Creating a game that people want to play is a great way to generate links. Make sure that the theme of the game is based on the key phrases for your website, so that when others talk about and link to the game, they are using your key phrases!

Software and widgets
Widgets, browser extensions and other software that users love to use all help to generate links for a website. Quirk has released a Mozilla Firefox extension called SearchStatus that is exceptionally useful to the SEO community. Each time someone mentions this SEO tool, they link to Quirk.
Most search engines also provide other services, all of which can be used to gather data relevant to search. For Google, some examples include:

- Google AdWords
- Google AdSense
- Google Checkout

This is still a relatively new area of SEO. It no doubt plays a part in search engine rankings, and that contribution is set to grow.

Site speed, i.e. the performance of your website, is a contributing factor to ranking in Google. Google intimated the importance of site speed in 2009, and confirmed it as one of over 200 ranking signals in April 2010.

So, what does this mean for SEO? When it comes to a website, it must:

- Be valuable enough to attract both visitors and links naturally.
- Retain visitors and make sure they return to the website.
- Convert visitors.

Social and Search

Social information is playing an ever increasing role in search. Social content, such as Twitter messages or YouTube videos, can appear in the SERPs, and there is a growing indication of social influence on search rankings. Google’s realtime search returns almost exclusively socially shared results.

There are several social factors to consider when it comes to social and search.

1. **Use social media properties to dominate brand SERPs.**

   When someone searches for your brand name, you can use your social media properties to “own” more of the results on that page. Use your brand name when naming Twitter and Flickr profiles, and Facebook and YouTube pages.

2. **Social links are used as signals of relevance.**

   Links from social sites such as Twitter include “rel=nofollow”. However, there is a strong indication that these links are in fact followed by search engines, and are used to determine relevance. If you focus on creating great content on your site and making sure that it is easy to share socially, you should see a result in your SEO efforts.
3. **Personalised results are influenced by your online social network.**
   If you are logged in to a social network while searching (Facebook for Bing, or logged in to Google with your Gmail Google Account), you could see results from or influenced by your social circle. In Bing, for instance, results can include indications of what your friends have previously liked or shared via Facebook. On Google, you might be more likely to see your friend’s blog for relevant searches.

4. **Optimise for social search engines.**
   While Google is the biggest search engine worldwide, YouTube is the second biggest. Even within social properties, users still use search to find the content they are looking for. Content that is housed on these properties should be optimised for the relevant social search engine as well.

**Mobile Search**

As web-enabled mobile devices continue to penetrate more of the market, and become easier to use, mobile search remains a key growth area. Mobile searches tend to be different to desktop searches. They are more navigational in nature (users tend to know where they want to end up), and users are looking for concise, actionable answers.

Mobile search input can also be different to desktop search. As well as typing in search keywords, mobile users can search by voice, using images or scanning barcodes.

As with mobile web development, mobile SEO is a little different to desktop SEO, though the fundamental principles remain. Build usable and accessible sites with great content, and you’ve already come a long way.

Where there are differences in approach for mobile SEO, these are largely due to:
- **Search engines having the ability to deliver precise location-based results to mobile users.**
- **The importance of usability in sites for mobile devices.**
- **Search engines having less data to work with [as compared to traditional web] in terms of site history, traffic, and inbound links.**

The fundamentals of mobile SEO are not so different to those of desktop SEO.

1. **A usable, crawlable site is very important.**
   Build mobile versions of your website that cater for mobile users: simple, easy navigation, and content stripped down to only what is required.

2. **Content is important, and should be formatted for mobile usage.**
   Text and images should be optimised for the mobile experience – so no large file sizes! The metadata still matters: titles and descriptions are what users see in the SERPs.

3. **Links are important, though less important at this time.**
   You should link to your mobile site from your desktop site and vice versa. Submit your mobile site to relevant mobile directories.

4. **Submit a mobile XML sitemap.**
   Mobile specific sitemaps use the same protocols as standard xml sitemaps, with the addition of a mobile tag.

5. **Use the word “mobile” on the mobile website, or use mobile TLDs.**
   Make it explicit to search engines that this is the mobile version of your website, and they are more likely to prioritise it as such.

**Local Search**

Local search refers to search behaviour and results where location matters. Either results returned are local in nature, or results returned can be map-based.

With blended SERPs, map-based results can be returned together with other types of results, depending on the type of search. As search engines continue to become more sophisticated, location can be inferred and still influence the type of results.

For example, a user might search for “plumber london” and the search will know to return results for London plumbers. These might even be returned on a map. However, a user in London might just search for “plumber”. The search can infer from the user’s IP address that the user is in London, and still return results for London plumbers.

For search engines to return location relevant results, they need to know the location of things being searched for! This is often determined by sites which include the name and address of a business. Note that this site might not be yours. Location results are often determined from various review sites, and the results can include some of those reviews.

Search engines also allow businesses to “claim” their location. A business can verify itself through a process with the search engine, and ensure that location information is correct.

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**Note**

You can read more about Mobile SEO in the Mobile Engagement chapter.

**Note**

In 2006, Google found that the BMW Germany website bmw.de was using a JavaScript URL redirect to send search engine spiders and web visitors to different pages, with different content. It was removed from the Google index until the webmaster had ensured that the website met Google’s guidelines.
What Not to Do
Black hat SEO refers to practices which attempt to game the search engines. Should a search engine uncover a website using unethical practices to achieve search engine rankings, it is likely to remove that website from its index.

Google publishes guidelines for webmasters, available through Google's Webmaster Central (www.google.com/webmasters). As well as outlining best practice principles, Google has supplied the following list of don'ts:
• Avoid hidden text or hidden links.
• Don’t use cloaking or sneaky redirects.
• Don’t send automated queries to Google.
• Don’t load pages with irrelevant keywords.
• Don’t create multiple pages, subdomains, or domains with substantially duplicate content.
• Don’t create pages with malicious behaviour, such as phishing or installing viruses, trojans, or other badware.
• Avoid “doorway” pages created just for search engines or other “cookie cutter” approaches such as affiliate programmes with little or no original content.
• If your site participates in an affiliate programme, make sure that your site adds value. Provide unique and relevant content that gives users a reason to visit your site first.
• Avoid link farms and focus on attracting quality, valuable links.

The bottom line: design websites for users first and foremost, and don’t try to trick the search engines. It will only be a matter of time before they uncover the black hat techniques.

11.5 tools of the trade
There are a number of tools available to assist with SEO. Some are made available by search engines, and some are developed by agencies and individuals who specialise in SEO. Most are available for free.

Google Webmaster Tools
URL: www.google.com/webmasters
Google provides guidelines to webmasters, and tools to help ensure your website is being indexed.

Quirk SearchStatus
URL: www.quirk.biz/searchstatus
Quirk SearchStatus is a Firefox extension that allows you to easily view key SEO information related to the page you are visiting. As well as linking to Alexa and Compete rankings and a Whois look up, Quirk SearchStatus will highlight keywords on a page and allow you to easily access link reports from each of the major search engines.

Tools from SEOBook.com
URL: tools.seobook.com
SEOBook.com provides a number of tools that assist any SEO. For example, Rank Checker is a Firefox extension that allows you to save a number of keywords and to perform regular searches on them, giving you the ranking of your chosen URL for each keyword in the search engines selected. They also have tools to help with keyword discovery.

Keyword discovery tools
There are a number of tools available, some free and some paid for, to assist with keyword discovery. Some include:

Trellian’s Keyword Discovery Tool - www.keyworddiscovery.com
Wordtracker - www.wordtracker.com
Wordtracker Keyword Questions - https://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/keyword-questions/
Microsoft Advertising Intelligence - http://advertising.microsoft.com/small-business/adcenter-downloads/microsoft-advertising-intelligence
Web Seer - http://hint.fm/seer/
SEO PowerSuite Rank Tracker (the trial version only has limited functionality) – http://link-assistant.com

Online forums
Webmaster World (www.webmasterworld.com) is frequented by SEOs and webmasters aiming to stay current with latest trends and search engine updates.

11.6 pros and cons
Optimising a website for search engines should entail optimising the website for users. Done properly, it should result in a better user experience, while ensuring that search engines index and rank the website well.

However, it can be tempting to focus on the technicalities of SEO while forgetting that both robots and humans need to read the same website. One should not be sacrificed for the other.
Search engines update their algorithms regularly. Each update is an attempt to improve search results, but can result in loss of rankings for some websites, depending on the update. A contingency plan, such as a prepared PPC campaign, needs to be in place to cope with a sudden drop in rankings.

As with any digital marketing practice, SEO should not be the only focus of digital marketing efforts. It works best when part of a holistic online marketing strategy.

11.7 summary

The average website receives up to 90% of its traffic from search engines, highlighting the importance of SEO.

There are two types of search results:
• Organic or natural results.
• Paid results.

SEO aims to improve a website’s ranking in the organic results.

Search engines use algorithms to rank web pages for signs of:
• Relevance
• Importance
• Popularity
• Trust
• Authority

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:
1. A search engine friendly website structure.
2. A well-researched list of key phrases.
3. Content optimised to target those key phrases.
4. Link popularity.
5. Usage data.

Growing trends in SEO include the influence of social content on search results, mobile SEO and local search.

11.8 the bigger picture

Search engine optimisation can be influenced and enhanced by most other digital marketing campaigns, and they should all be approached with this in mind.

For example:
PPC campaigns can provide valuable keyword research which can then be fed into the SEO strategy.
Social media marketing and viral marketing can both generate an enormous amount of links to a website.
WebPR aims to generate links to a website. Make sure that these are optimised for search engines.

11.9 case study: City Lofts

City Lofts (www.citylofts.co.uk) has been online for six years, but their website was suffering from some common problems:
• Lack of visibility in search engines.
• Which led to too little traffic.
• Which meant that the website was not producing a return on investment.

Figure 11.8 SEO was considered in the re-build of the City Lofts website.
Planning a rebuild of their website, City Lofts was made aware of the importance of search and SEO and so the design process was tackled from an SEO perspective. The existing situation was analysed in terms of search engine traffic and barriers to search engines. The design mock-ups for the new website were also analysed by an SEO strategist, to make sure that the new website was built for SEO.

From this, an SEO document with instructions for the web designers and developers was written, so that the new website would be built to be search engine friendly. Some of the ways this was achieved were:

- Implementation of a robots.txt file.
- Setting up 301 redirects of the URLs from the old website to the content on the new website.
- Creating an XML sitemap for submission to search engines.
- Improving naming conventions so that URLs are static and well named.
- Using HTML tags that put emphasis on target keywords.

Before the new website was launched, keyword research found targeted keywords for which to optimise the new website. The website copy was then tweaked by an experienced SEO copywriter, and they were implemented in the metadata and HTML tags. Keyword rich anchor text was used for internal links. Along with this, a rigorous linking strategy was undertaken to build links to the new website.

For the first three months after the website was launched, the copy of further web pages was tweaked to target relevant keywords. Ongoing research revealed new keywords to target, and new content and web pages were created to target them. The linking strategy continued to investigate new link building tactics for City Lofts.

While initial SEO is usually regarded as a six month project, positive results were seen within three months. This was possibly due to the domain’s age and accumulated trust. Digital marketing efforts were restricted to SEO, which means that the positive effects of SEO can be measured in isolation.

In summary, the SEO campaign yielded the following results:

- After three months, total traffic from the three major search engines was increased by 65.68%.
- Total website referrals increased by 172.2% over the period.
- Direct traffic to the site increased by 122.4%.
- The number of visitors and repeat visitors showed an increase over the period.

Figure 11.9 There was an overall traffic increase after the City Lofts site re-build.

The considerable overall traffic increase can be attributed to the knock-on effect that SEO has for online brand awareness.

**case study questions**

1. Why do you need to use 301 redirects when launching a new website?
2. Why were new web pages needed to target new content?
3. Why could SEO increase website referrals and direct traffic?

**chapter questions**

1. Why do links send signals of trust to search engines?
2. Why is it better to have more niche pages of content than fewer pages that cover a lot of content?
3. How can analysing the links to a competitor’s website help aid your own link building strategy?
4. Why is it important for search engines to keep updating their algorithms?
5. If metadata are no longer used for ranking purposes, why do they still have an important role in SEO?
11.10 references

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further reading

- www.seomoz.org – SEOMoz.org provides regular articles, guides and blog posts covering all things SEO. As well as sharing insights from their own SEO efforts, there are also vibrant forums where you can learn from others.

- www.seobook.com – Aaron Wall’s SEOBook.com provides training and tools for SEO, as well as regular articles and posts.

- www.gottaquirk.com – the blog from the minds of Quirk, who live, eat and breathe all things Internet.

- www.webmasterworld.com – a forum for webmasters, from beginners to those who’ve been around. A great resource for a budding SEO.
Make your mark with eMarketing

eMarketing: the essential guide to digital marketing is a one-stop resource to kick start your online marketing career, or to give it a much needed boost. Featuring the tools and tactics essential to search engine optimisation, video optimisation, media planning, pay per click advertising, social media, mobile marketing, conversion optimisation, online reputation management and more!

eMarketing: the essential guide to digital marketing comes from over 12 years of practical experience in the world of eMarketing from a leading international digital agency.

Reviews and Comments

“The first thing you should do is obsess about the terms in this book. Vocabulary is the first step to understanding, and if you don’t know what something means, figure it out. Don’t turn the page until you do.”

Seth Godin: Author Purple Cow, Permission Marketing and Linchpin

“If you are a marketer, this is a must have book; if you know a marketer, do him or her a favour and get it for them; if you are just interested in eMarketing and want to expand your general business knowledge, buy two copies - someone will want to borrow this from you.”

Jaco Meiring: Digital - Investec

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