



Introduction

Search engine optimization is an important part of building a website or blog. It's not enough to create content and put in online. You have to actively work to make your site visible in the search engines.

Search engine developers claim they want to list quality content naturally, but their algorithms favor highly specific circumstances that websites can't hope to comply with naturally.

While optimizing for very competitive keywords requires hundreds of different specific tweaks that only qualified experts understand, it is possible for a beginner to rank well for less competitive keywords quickly and easily by using just a few simple techniques.

This guide is going to give you the basics you need to get your site ready for search engines. You'll learn the most important tactics for getting your site to the top of search engines and getting the most traffic possible.

So let's get started.

Over-Optimization

Before we get started, there is one very important thing you should know. It is possible to optimize a page too well. As I mentioned before, search engines want to index natural pages – those put up for the explicit purpose of providing quality content rather than attracting traffic for monetization purposes.

If the algorithm believes you are using any type of tricks to achieve higher rankings, it could hit your site with an over-optimization penalty. This could make your site drop in rankings, or even fall out of the SERPs altogether.

For this reason, it's important not to overdo things. I'll mention ways to avoid over-optimizing your site in later sections, as it applies to each specific tactic.

For now, just realize that you can't overdo things. Don't spend a great deal of time trying to perfect every little thing, because you could actually hurt your rankings more than you help them. Remember, things need to seem as natural as possible.

Backlinks & Anchor Text

One of the most important elements in today's search engine environment is the procurement of quality links to your site – also known as backlinks.

Each link to your site acts like a “vote” for the quality of your site. For a while, Google and other search engines used backlinks as a way to judge the quality and usefulness of a particular web page. The theory was that people wouldn't link to crappy pages.

Of course, once SEO experts figured out the importance of links, people started using various methods to manipulate their rankings by getting hundreds, or thousands of links to their pages. This diluted the effectiveness of backlinks as a way to establish site quality, but search engines still use links as one of many determining factors.

Although backlinks don't work quite as well as they once did, it is still vital to get links to your pages. For one thing, links help search engines find your content. For another thing, quality links do still make a difference to your rankings.

There are a few important things to consider regarding backlinks:

1. Choose quality over quantity. One backlink from a high quality page in your niche is worth fifty links from junky pages that have nothing to do with your topic.
2. Build backlinks over time. Do not attempt to get hundreds of links to a brand new page overnight. This doesn't look natural. Instead, build only a few the first day, then slowly add more and more each day.
3. Always go for quality links that are on-topic. If you have a website about gardening, don't spam a bunch of sites about golf and horses.
4. Never buy links. Google bans people for this!
5. Never stop adding links, even if you get to the number one spot for your main keyword. If you do, someone will probably quickly outrank you.

Anchor Text

Anchor text is the text used to link to a web page. It is one of the most important components in SEO, because search engines give anchor text considerable weight.

When you create a link on an HTML page, it looks something like this:

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<a href=http://www.linkurl.com>Anchor Text</a>
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In that link, “Anchor Text” is the text used to link to the page. You want to ensure that you use keywords in your anchor text whenever possible. Think of it this way. If you wanted to link to a page about feeding German Shepherds, what do you think you would name the link? You’d probably name it “Feeding German Shepherds” or something similar, right? Search engines know this.

Of course, anchor text offers a huge opportunity for over-optimization. Not everyone would link to the same page in exactly the same way. Thus, it is important to make your backlinks look as natural as possible by varying the text you use for your anchor text.

Choose about five different phrases that fit well with your page’s theme. Use your main keyword phrase most often, but use the other phrases fairly often in order to keep things as natural as possible.

Keywords

Keywords are an important part of the optimization process. Although keyword research isn't quite as critical as it once was, because of changes in the way search engines rank content, it's still important to make sure you have the right keywords on your pages.

Search engines are slowly moving away from looking at specific keywords to looking at overall content and theme. For example, a site about German Shepherds might rank for "police dogs", simply because many police dogs are German Shepherds.

You can do keyword research with the Google Keyword Tool:

<http://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Look for keywords that have a decent number of searches per month – at least 300. Otherwise, there won't be enough traffic to make it worthwhile to spend time optimizing.

Check each keyword in Google in quotes to be sure there isn't too much competition. Ideally, concentrate on low competition keywords first, and gradually work up to more competitive ones.

Title Tag

Your title tag is one of the most important elements of on-page SEO. The title tag is in the head of your HTML document, and it is enclosed in title tags.

It looks like this:

```
<title>Your Page Title</title>
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Most people use only their main keyword phrase as their title, but I advise against this, because it can potentially lead to an over-optimization penalty. Instead, use your main keyword phrase, plus a few additional words.

Remember, your title will show up as the clickable text in your search engine listing, so you have the opportunity to make your title really stand out by adding additional words.

Instead of: Golf Swing Tips

Try: Top Golf Swing Tips from Pro Golfers

Keyword Density

A long time ago, all one had to do to rank well in the search engines was to spam their keywords twenty or thirty times in a single page. That's not true, anymore.

In fact, if you put your keywords into your content too many times, you could get penalized or even banned.

Don't worry about keyword density. Just add your main keyword once near the beginning of your article and once more at the end. Then, only add that keyword whenever it is necessary for the flow of the article.

Most importantly, write naturally. Never add a keyword just for SEO purposes. Write your articles without regard to keyword use. Even if you never include the keyword in the body, having it in the title and anchor text will often still boost you onto the first page of Google.

It's even okay to insert words into a keyword phrase if you need to. For example, if you find a keyword like "reviews golf clubs", you can change it to "reviews of golf clubs" or even "reviews of the top golf clubs" without messing with your SEO.

Content Length & Quality

Quality content is more important than ever before. A few years ago, you could rank well with a quick 200-word blog post. These days, it is significantly more difficult to rank with shorter content.

Search engines are favoring longer content, and their algorithms are “smarter” than ever before. According to buzz, they can detect proper grammar use, duplicate content, overall theme, and more.

This means you must create the highest quality content. Do not use spun garbage. Do not duplicate content. In fact, don't even rewrite an article you found elsewhere unless you add additional information, because it is rumored that Google can tell whether an article is unique even if it has been rewritten to pass CopyScape and other plagiarism checkers.

Also, make sure you create longer content. Stop posting 300 word articles just to bulk up your site, and post quality, longer articles. Make sure your articles are at least 400 words, preferably 600 or longer. Try to add something unique to each one, because you don't want to have exactly the same information as another article. Unique, well-written content is vital.