

The Importance of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

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A Web site can give you 24-hour market presence. But first, people have to find your Web site. Most Internet users use "keywords" or "key phrases" to find information. If you've ever used Google or Yahoo! to find something online, then you have used a search engine. Learning to effectively use keywords and phrases can dramatically increase traffic from search engines to your new Top Producer Web site. Optimizing your site for search engines is crucial to getting the type of visibility that inspires consumer confidence. To learn how to get the most out of current search engine technology, we've developed 10 easy to use tips. {mospagebreak title=SEO Overview&heading=Intro}

Search Engine Optimization Overview You can optimize your site by working with the content, code tags and page design. You can also achieve higher search engine rankings by using an optimization service, paying to be included in search engine directories, and/or buying into a pay-per-click service such as Google AdWords. Large search engines - such as Google, Yahoo! and MSN - allow search engine creators an opportunity to have their Web site indexed free of charge. Pay-per-click has the most immediate effect on increasing your web presence, but can also be the most expensive option for driving web site traffic to your site. If you want immediate rankings and have the budget, then consider pay-per-click advertising because it works. Otherwise, you can start your research into search engine optimization with the following collection of tips. {mospagebreak title=First Things First}First Things First

1. Determine Your Target Phrases Many Internet users use a combination of keywords in a keyword phrase when they are using search engines. Keywords are essentially intuitive terms people use to help find what they are looking for online. Think of the targeted words you type into search engines like Google or Yahoo! when looking for information. Keywords can help identify not only what you do, but also where you do it. If you're selling properties in the Greater Fort Myers area, make sure you add these specific keywords. To find out the kind of keywords people are using to solicit Realtors in your area check out keyword tools like wordtracker.com or those offered when you subscribe to Google AdWords or Yahoo! Search Marketing pay-per-click accounts. {mospagebreak title=Nuts and Bolts}The Nuts and Bolts of Optimizing Your Site

2. Use Keywords and Target Phrases

- Embed keyword phrases and different combinations of keywords in page content.
- Use your target phrase throughout your site: in tags, especially in the page title and description tag; in content, especially in the first paragraph of your home page; and in link text.
- Keywords should be found in actual text on the page.
- Use keywords in Web site domain names, page title tag, Meta description tags, Meta keyword tags, image names, image "alt" tags, link text and file names.

3. Make Your Content Count **Make Your Content Information-Rich**

Search engines are text based and search your site for text and descriptive words. You can help your site rank higher by doing a few simple things such as:

- Use a descriptive header at the top of your home page.
- Use information-rich content - text that relates directly to the subject of your page, especially on your home page.
- Experts recommend a minimum of 250 words per page. Headers, Keywords and Bullets
- Make text easy to scan by using descriptive keywords, headers and bullets.
- Repeat keywords and keyword phrases but make sure your copy still "reads well" to human visitors.
- Use keywords and phrases that you have also used in title and Meta tags in page text.
- Use bullets for key points.
- Use a hyphen (-) instead of an underscore (_) in page names. Spelling Counts
- First impressions are lasting impressions. A spelling or grammar mistake can make even a great web site look less great. This may seem obvious, but run a spell check of your text before taking your site live. {mospagebreak title=What Visitors Don't See}What Web Site Visitors Don't See
- 4. Use Internal Coding and Meta Tags** Tag It Make search engines take notice of your web site by using tags. These tags are not visible to the viewer but are recognized by search engines. There are descriptive tags for title tag, Meta description tag, Meta keywords tag, header tags and image alt tags. The title tag is the most important because it shows up in search engine results and search engines place a premium on the keywords on web page titles.
- Include keywords but try to use them in a descriptive "sentence" that will entice readers to click to your site.
- Keep those lines of text to no more than 50 to 80 characters, including spaces.
- Keep non-descriptive words such as "and", "an", "the" to a minimum.
- Use unique descriptive title and description tags for each page.
- Use your most important keywords first and include plural versions; for example, vacation home and vacation homes.
- Don't use keywords repeatedly. It's typically a good idea not to use the same keyword more than once with the exception of the page title. You can sometimes use a keyword twice in titles. Nobody Likes Spam

- Do not use multiple instances of the same tag: this is considered spamming.
 - Don't overdo Meta keywords, include only a couple of alternate spellings, and only use words that appear on your site.
- {mospagebreak title=Linking Up}Linking Up 5. Include Strategic and Relevant Links Identifying Your Links
- Link your web site to other relevant web sites.
 - Include a variety of both internal and external links on your site.
 - Use descriptive link text including keywords.
 - Don't use "click here" for link text. If the item is a mortgage calculator, make sure that the words "mortgage" and "calculator" are keywords used in the link text.
- Getting Others to Link to Your Website
- Link to each page of your site from your home page.
 - Grow your web site organically by creating a "Link to Us" code containing your keywords.
 - Use standard <a href> link commands to format links rather than Java script.
 - Develop strategic reciprocal link partnerships with:
 - other relevant sites directories,
 - specialized portals,
 - and industry association sites.
 - The higher the site ranking of the page that includes your link, the better the search engine result.
- Beyond the Template
- Rather than using a template, create a "Related Links" page.
 - Use descriptive supporting text to add more value to the links.
 - Make sure to keep your links updated.
 - Remove or fix broken links to pages within your site or other web sites.
 - Regularly run a link checker on your web site to identify broken links on your Web site.
- {mospagebreak title=Structural Hints}Structural Hints 6. Use a Shallow Site Structure
- One or two clicks to get more information on a subject is enough. Do not have too many levels of web pages.
 - A good rule of thumb - design your Web site so that visitors can get to any part of your Web site with three clicks or less.
 - Make your structure intuitive. Remember: A clever maze is still a maze!
7. Using Graphics Wisely
- Don't start off your Web site with a large graphic. They can take too long to load.
 - Remember: Clients are looking for information, not art.
 - Use small, optimized graphics that are related to your topic.
 - Make images reinforce the words and messaging of your Web site.
 - Add descriptive alt tags to your images, using a few keywords that describe the image and preferably utilize relevant keywords.
8. The Need for Speed
- Long load times drive users away from your site and deter search engines. Make sure your graphics, PDF and Word files are small in file size.
 - Forget about splash and Flash pages. They take too long to load. Research has proven that visitors' abandonment rate for these types of pages is very high.
 - Design easy-to-use and simple pages.
 - Make sure those simple, well-designed pages are concise, but feature at least 250 words of text. (That seems to be the magic number when it comes to search engine recognition.)
- {mospagebreak title=Optimized? Now What?}Optimized? Now What? Here are a couple of final ideas to increase your website's visibility.
9. Submit Your Website
- Get established search engines to recognize your site in their directories.
 - You can submit your Web site to search engines like Google, Yahoo!, MSN, AOL Search and Ask Jeeves. However, if you get listed on a directory (such as www.dmoz.org) or another Web site that is well ranked on the major search engines or directories, other search engine software crawlers will also find your site. This often works better than submitting your site directly to search engines.
 - Submit your site to well-known search engine optimization services. For a small fee, these companies will review your site, optimize your content, submit your site to search engines, and monitor your site's progress.
10. Keep It Running Well
- Maintaining your site keeps your web site performing well in the online marketplace.
 - Regularly update your web site to keep news and listings fresh.
 - Add new content, especially to your home page, to keep both search engines and potential clients coming back.