

Website SEO

Search Engine Optimisation

Once a website has been developed it needs to be promoted to the entire internet. Most people use search engines to search for sites which contain the words or content that is entered into the search criteria and will very rarely look beyond the second page of results returned.

For a website to be most effective with search engines it would need to be returned in the “Top 10” result listings with the ultimate position being number 1. The process of fine tuning a website so that a search engine will rank it in the top 10 is called Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and involves a number of criteria that search engines consider when giving a ranking weight to a particular website.

In all of this the key element of the internet ethos needs to be kept in mind and is reflected in the Google search engine motto; “Do No Evil”, in other words, common sense, honesty and fair play are your best allies in getting a high search engine ranking for your website.

Why the Top 10?

Human nature dictates that most of us do not like waiting for what we are looking for and as the internet is made up of literally thousands of websites we are loathed to wade through a mountain of possibilities. The nature of the internet and the way it is used also dictates that if a satisfactory result is not returned in the first 10 results, most people will either re-enter a different search criteria or they may (rarely) look at the next 10 results, few if ever look any further.

Even though not every site can occupy the number 1 position or even stay in the top 10 for any given period a lot can be done to monitor a site’s ranking and make adjustments accordingly so it’s optimal positioning can be held for as long as possible.

How is My Site Assessed?

Each search engine has it’s own unique method of determining a ranking for a website. Most search engines use mathematical algorithms to automatically assess a website looking for certain criteria that adds “weight” towards a site’s privilege to be awarded the top position. Although in the past the infamous “keywords” meta tag was very much the primary method of assessing position ranking, this has moved to a lesser importance in favour of other criteria.

META TAGS

Your website should have the “Keywords” and “Description” meta tags, both with applicable content. The Description tag content is the first text returned by a search engine as the short descriptive paragraph in the results list. The description content should reflect as many key search words as possible placed in a “left first” priority in the paragraph. The Keywords tag content should contain all the key words that prospective visitors would use to search for your site. This list should

be kept at around 20-30 words and should closely represent the actual content found on the web page. If words in the list are not found on the page, some search engines will penalise the site for “trying too hard”.

KEY WORDS & SITE CONTENT

A web page needs to contain the relevant content that is to be searched for. For obvious reasons, if your web page doesn't have the words that people are searching for you just won't be found. Identified key words should saturate your page as much as possible and be included in image alt text, in link destinations, in page names, everywhere that you can legitimately put the key words without compromising text grammar and sentence flow. For best results the home page should have up to 300 words of text.

Text that is graphical can not be read by search engines so words that are included in graphics do not count towards your key word saturation, only pure text is read by search engines. Graphics can however have the key words attached to them via the alt attribute. Keep in mind that the web is about fair play and that if you try too hard or try to “fool” a search engine you may be penalised for it and get a lower ranking. Keep it fair and use common sense.

SITE DESIGN

How a site is put together literally has an affect on SEO. Search engines read the web page text in a top-down/left-right priority. The text they read however is the source code for the page and although visually the page may display some text at the top of the page, it may be the last on the source code page. Good web design creates source code that has key text optimised towards the top or start of the source code and lesser important code towards the end. The use of “frames” in a site's design makes it difficult for search engines to find site content so these should be avoided if possible.

EXTERNAL LINKS

The number of links that exist on the internet that link BACK to your site will help in gaining a good ranking. Increasing this link network involves contacting your industry peers and partners and arranging for a link to be added to their site pointing back to yours. They may want a reciprocal arrangement so be prepared to offer the same on your site. Search engines count the number of links and use these to make an assessment as to how active you are in internet business. A site with no external links will be regarded as a business that may have ceased to trade. Submitting your site to FFA (Free For All) lists may work against you and many are black-banned by search engines.

SITE LONGEVITY

The length of time that your web site has been exposed on the internet gives you an advantage over new sites. The longer you have been around the more favour you are shown by search engines simply because you get rewarded for how long you have been trading online.

“FRESHNESS”

A site may have been around for a long time but if it's content is old and has become “stale” then it will start to fall in its ranking. Longevity helps promote a site only if it is kept up to date and fresh. One of the worst things you can have on a site is a “last updated” text that shows an old date. Search

engines read the time stamp on the files of a web site and determine when the file was last uploaded or changed.

My Recent Changes Have Made no Difference!

The sheer size of the internet means that it takes time for search engines to visit each site, make an assessment and move on to the next. This is called a “crawl”. Currently a web crawl can take up to 2 or three weeks and with some lag time in between, this means that sometimes up to 90 days can go by before the next search engine update. If you made changes to your site just after a crawl then those changes may not affect your site ranking for more than a couple of months, hence SEO can take some time and calls for a lot of patience. Often the process of monitoring your ranking, making site adjustments and assessing the result can mean a period of up to 12 months before a satisfactory result is achieved.

Standing Out in the Crowd and Being Found

Search engines only return a list of sites that match the words potential visitors are entering to find what they are looking for. Key words that are often misspelled can work against you if you are not aware of them and it may mean changing your site to reflect the common spelling used rather than the one you want people to use. Changing your strategy to meet the requirements of your target market is a wise business move.

Some businesses just drown in a sea of results returned by search engines and because they are competing with other sites that have been around longer than they have there is simply little chance of getting the edge on them. This is when you really need to think marketing with questions like, “What makes my product or service unique and makes customers choose it above a competitor’s?” if you find that your product is not unique enough and the key words used on your site are not unique enough then you need to create a unique identity. This may mean a change in product or product name. It may mean marketing a brand or catch phrase rather than a product range. Once you have found a unique identity to market, then make your web site reflect that with it’s content.

In a Nut Shell

Many web sites look good and ought to do well but just can’t get anywhere with search engine ranking. A lot of sites are put together by business owners or family members however suffer from a poor listing in search engines, if they get listed at all. Professional web development includes all the factors that affect a site’s ranking and at ETS we aim to help you be aware of the business marketing decisions that need to be made and create new sites that are optimised for the best possible ranking the first time they are listed. We help you monitor a site over time and in most cases a “Top 10” result can be achieved.

If you have a business website, then make it work hard for you.



Technology Systems