

# Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Process

Before beginning a search engine optimization (SEO) project, it is important to understand the process involved in an effective SEO campaign. To that end, we break the process down into the five steps shown below and describe the activities involved in each of these steps.

One word on search engine optimization in general first, though. SEO does not start and finish with these steps and the initial work that we do. In order to have ongoing success, it is important to continually monitor results and build meaningful content into the site. I read recently this idea perfectly described by John Tawadros in a newsletter dated May 3, 2007, "it [search engine optimization] is inherently iterative. In short, it is a process, not a project."

1. **Keyword Research**
2. **Reporting & Goal Setting**
3. **Page Optimization and Content Development**
4. **Link Building**
5. **Follow Up Reporting and Analysis**



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## Keyword Research

Keyword phrase research involves identifying a group of keyword phrases that will be used in optimization. This step is critical and requires a considerable amount of time to find a good set of phrases that offer a balanced combination of two important factors: high usage by searchers and relatively low competition within the search engines.

Determining the most used phrase that contains your targeted keyword(s) is relatively easy. Online tools allow you to enter a particular keyword or words and will return all the ways in which that word(s) was used by searchers in the last month and in what volume. However, the most used phrase(s) is also likely the one with the greatest competition within the search results and may, therefore, not be where you would want to devote your optimization efforts. A more effective approach is to find a set of phrases (10 is a nice round number) that are heavily used by searchers but somewhat less competitive in terms of the total number of search results.

For example, assume you own a business that leases apartments in a particular metropolitan area, "Big City." Your apartments are only located in one metro area, so you are not going to select general terms such as "apartments;" you are only interested in those searchers seeking an apartment in your city. The logical place to start is with the name of your city and the word "apartments." You may find that the most used phrase is "big city apartments." However, when you do sample searches in Google and Yahoo for that phrase you realize that the competition for that phrase is steep. If you go back to your findings

from the keyword tool, you might find that a phrase such as "apartments in big city" is still heavily used by searchers but is far less competitive. Those phrases are the ones you will then target in the next step, site optimization.

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## **Reporting & Goal Setting**

After establishing your list of targeted keyword phrases, it is important to understand what the subject site's starting position is within the search engines. Doing so ensures that you know the specific areas that need work and provides a baseline against which to gauge the subsequent campaign's success.

Access to site traffic information is very important. These statistics show how searchers are finding and interacting with the subject site, e.g., which search engines, what keyword phrases are being used, bounce rates, most popular content, etc. Understanding the site's traffic level and the source of its referrals can also be a critical tool in making other online marketing decisions - which paid directory links/listings to continue and which to abandon for more effective options.

After developing a complete picture of the site's starting position, goals are set for the SEO plan. These goals are measurable (one big advantage of SEO over other advertising options) and tied to the specific business objectives of the site. In the ongoing progress of reporting and follow up, progress towards the plan's goals are analyzed and reported. Adjustments to the SEO plan can be made according to the findings of these progress reports.

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## **Page Optimization and Content Development**

Page optimization and content development are critical to search engine success. Content is king in search engine optimization. The search engines love text; high volume, high-quality content related to your business will serve you in a couple of important ways.

First, a site loaded with high-quality content of interest to site users will give them a reason to stay and a reason to come back. After all, the reason they came to your site was to find information. Second, you will receive the added benefit of serving up exactly what the search engines want - content. Search engines will have more information to store about your business and products; that information will translate directly into the ranking they give your site for related keyword phrases. For more information on content development and specific ideas about ways to expand your site's content, read our newsletter article, Content is King.

In addition to content development, other important optimization tactics include:

- **Page Titles** - Make sure that your site's page titles say something other than just your company name or "welcome." Ideally, they need to lead off with your targeted phrase for that page and then follow with your company name.
- **Text-Based Navigation** - Search engines cannot read images. If your site's navigation system is done with images (most are), you will need a text-based navigation system that the search engines can follow to ensure that all the important service and product-related sub-pages of your site are indexed by the search engines.
- **Prominence of Targeted Keyword Phrases** - It is not enough to have your keyword phrase(s) somewhere on the web page, the placement and prominence given to them also affects your search engine placement. For example, leading off the site's first paragraph with your keyword phrase gives it more weight than burying it half way down the page in the middle of a paragraph. Also, using larger font sizes and bolding the text can emphasize its importance and positively effect the page's ranking for that phrase.
- **Site Map** - Developing a site map that includes a well-organized list of links to all the important pages of your site and includes a text link to the site map on your home page is the ideal way to make sure that all the site's pages are indexed by the search engines when they visit the subject site.
- **ALT and META data** - These are tags not seen by the site's users; they are embedded in the site's html code. ALT tags refer to the text that describes an image -- words that you see pop up as you mouse over some images. In optimizing your company's name, an ALT tag placed behind the image of your company's logo is ideal. Meta tags (there are both description tags as well as keyword tags) are lines of code included in the uppermost section of your site's code. They communicate the page's subject matter and relevancy to the search engines. Further, the short description of your site included in some search results is pulled from the meta description tag of the home page and should, therefore, be used to the site's advantage.
- **Clean up the Code** - Navigation rollover scripts, other JavaScript-based code, and all CSS scripts should be taken out of the code of each page and put into external files to which each page of the site is referenced. Doing this has several advantages, but one of the most compelling is that your site's keywords and content all move up, up, up in the code, communicating their importance to the search engines and boosting your site's relevancy ratings. In other words, this can boost your search engine rankings by improving the code to text ratio of the page. This is a simple and relatively inexpensive thing to do, depending on the total number of pages in your site.

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## Link Building

**Maximize Quality Link Popularity** - Link Popularity is the term given to the number of other sites linking to yours. You can check your link popularity with the free tool available on this site (it also allows you to

compare your link popularity to up to two competitors): <http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/>. Make a list of related businesses with whom you have a relationship, as well as professional organizations, vendors or suppliers that may agree to place a link to your site on theirs. Email your contact in those organizations requesting the link. Each new link to your site increases the likelihood of both the search engines' spiders running across your site as well as searchers looking for services or products like yours. A word of caution: free for all links sites and other low quality sites of that nature are of no use and can, in fact, detract from your progress with penalties from the search engines. Do not waste your time on such sites; stick to respectable, high quality sites in related businesses or industries.

Please see the following related articles for more information on link building and SEO.

- [What is Dandelion Marketing?](#)
- [Add Social Media Icons to Your Site's Content](#)
- [How to Build Your Site's Link Popularity](#)
- [Online Press Releases](#)

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## Follow Up Reporting and Analysis

The same reporting done in the initial phase of the campaign is done again at regular intervals, post-optimization. Rankings, site traffic and other key metrics can then be compared to pre-optimization levels, giving measurable results to the SEO campaign. The specific metrics used in an SEO plan will depend on the goals of that site.

### IMPORTANT NOTES:

**Time Frame** - It can take a while for the search engines to index a site and the rankings to change for that site. For some search engines, the lag time between the work and seeing results can be as long as six months. Clients need to be patient and have realistic expectations regarding the time frame involved with organic (the natural, non paid results) search engine rankings. If the business need for increased search engine prominence is greater than can be met with optimization alone, I recommend adding a pay-per-click (PPC) campaign to the marketing mix to bridge the time. PPC campaigns such as Google's AdWords can be set up in a matter of days, allowing for immediate results.

**Content Development** - The SEO work we perform includes minor non-substantive changes to the site's existing content/text, emphasizing the targeted keyword phrases. We make recommendations on new content; the writing of any new substantive content is the responsibility of the client. We then take your words and make our non-substantive changes to it, in order to maximize its effectiveness. If you do not want us to make these minor changes to the site's text, please let us know.

To contact us with a specific question, [please click here](#).