

The Best Possible Search

Optimizing Your Website for Search Engines

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In my last article, we discussed different ways to market your website, including organic optimization; link development; sponsored ads (Pay-per-Click); E-media (banner ads, video ads, etc); blogging; social media; and offline push to web (TV, radio, print, business collateral). When faced with the desire to grow your business it can be difficult to decide where to start. I recommend beginning with organic optimization.

Search Terms

Often called search engine optimization (SEO), organic optimization is the act of modifying elements of a website to gain improved visibility by, and on, major search engines. This includes how the site is coded and structured, as well as the content and images on the site. Properly implemented, SEO will make your site "search engine friendly."

A full SEO effort may also include other elements in our list, such as link development, blogging and social media. These help SEO by building perceived popularity on the web. A simple, but not all inclusive, example would be if site A has 100 links pointing to it, while site B has 1,200—site B will likely rank higher in the organic listings of the search engines. Starting with the basics, we need to be sure you are focused on the right search terms for your site. You can start with your own website, but it also helps to go through competitor sites to see which terms they are using.

Start building a list based on your business focus. Some terms will be obvious, like "glass replacement" or "shower door," but you'll need to also

look for the long-tail terms such as "commercial glass replacement" or "install glass shower door enclosure." If the website has only 20 pages, but your list has 300 search terms, you'll need to do some heavy cutting on the search term list, or plan for new pages for your site. You only want to focus on 1-2 search terms per page.

Page Titles

With a list of terms to work from, you can now optimize the site's page titles. Optimized page titles should include two things: accurate description of the content of the page and one or two search terms found within the content of the page (from the search term list).

This may not be as easy as it sounds. It helps to have a visual layout of your site hierarchy. Sometimes called a visible sitemap, this allows you to see how the pages of the site connect to one another, and what their respective topics are. Each page should cover its own topic, which allows targeted optimization of page titles. If a site has multiple pages using the same search term within the content, these pages will need to be re-written with targeted terms focused on each page.

Keep each title within 60 characters or less, and use overlapped terms when possible.

Page Content and Links

With titles created and optimized, look for ways to optimize the content of the site. There's no proven scientific ratio for how often a search term should show up on a page; however, experience has shown that stating a term 2-4 times within approximately

250 words is usually sufficient. Then increase the visibility of the term through hyperlinks, page navigation and other on-page elements.

For example, if you are optimizing a page for the term "replacement window," include a page header that simply says "Replacement Windows." If you have the capability, add a breadcrumb to the page that will give an additional placement of the term. Also, look for opportunities to link to specific product or education pages that are closely related to the "replacement window" topic. Finally, depending on the navigation structure of the site, you'll want to be sure that the link that points to this page says "replacement window" across the site. Typically, I would recommend navigation be along the left of the site, be text-based (no image buttons) and be consistent throughout the site. There are numerous other elements to consider when optimizing your site, including: code errors; W3C code compliance; code language variances (HTML vs. PHP vs. ASP, etc); URL naming convention; inter-page linking; relative link optimization; footer navigation; and site map optimization. However, optimized titles, content and page links should be your initial focus, as they will put your site well on its way to being search engine friendly.