



Up-to-the Minute PR & Marketing News

Week of November 3rd

As our "best practices" advice this week we wanted to share some information about Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Everyone talks about it, but it's a challenging topic to get your hands around. If you have a web presence (who doesn't?!), you'll need to become increasingly more knowledgeable with Search Engine Optimization. The article below came from Silicon.com via ZDNet News and it provides an interesting explanation of how to get the most out of your web site. We believe you'll find it useful.

Cheat Sheet: SEO

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By Bethan Jones, Silicon.com  
Posted on ZDNet News:

#### SEO--something to do with aliens and unidentified objects, right?

Hmm, not quite, but crawlers do come into it. Not outer space beings, mind, but bots crawling the World Wide Web. Basically, SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization and it's a process that all businesses with an online presence need to be aware of.

#### I'm listening...

In short, SEO involves manipulating a particular website with a view to increasing its ranking in search engines' results and so increasing its online traffic.

## **And getting to the top is important is it?**

If you want your business to succeed online, then yes, it's vital. Around 90 per cent of people find web resources through a search engine such as Google. The majority of these 90 per cent are not going to look past the top six or seven links--let alone to the next page.

Type 'mobile phone contracts' into Google--670,000 results, give or take. Even if a business offers the best mobile contracts in the world, chances are if the link to its website is hidden on page 57 of 58 pages it's not likely to get a look in.

## **So what affects where a site comes in a search engine's results?**

A 'well-optimized' site involves internal and external factors including the coding, links, structure and presentation of content as well as how efficient the site is at fixing the problems which may hinder a search engine's bot from fully crawling the site.

## **You what...?**

Bust through tech jargon with silicon.com's [Cheat Sheets](#).

## **Wait a minute...bots? Crawling? I'm lost...**

OK, let's take a (simplified) look at how search engines actually work. First an engine's "bots" or "spiders" crawl pages on the web. The web contains billions and billions of pages. These spiders can't crawl all these pages but the ones it does get around are indexed. This index is basically a huge database, which is then searched through when a query is entered into the search engine by a user. All the sites in the index containing the search term will be returned, but the order in which they appear is decided by the complex algorithm carried out by Google, Yahoo!, MSN etc. So to be in with a chance of making it into the top searches it's vital a site makes it as easy as possible for Google et al to index it--and that's where SEO comes in.

## **Right, so it's pretty important, how do you do it?**

The process of SEO is extremely complex and there are so many different ideas on how best to optimize a site that it would be impossible to go into them all here. A simple--and excellent--place to start however is keywords. Keywords are the terms internet users enter into search engines to search for content. Site owners must decide what is it they want to rank highly for, and build keywords around this.

When defining keywords, think who your customers are, what you're selling or want to promote. Search engines look for certain key phrases on a site and use these to index and select sites that best respond to a search query. Once you've built a list of keywords for your business, they must be built into the site to allow the lovely bots to read them and index them in the easiest way.

## **So that sounds pretty easy then, just shove loads and loads of these keywords all over the site and Bob's your uncle?**

Well, no not quite. If you overload a site with certain keywords and phrases then this can be construed as a method of "black hat" SEO known as keyword stuffing.

## **Black hat?**

This basically means "bad SEO." Sneaky ways a website uses to jump to the top of search results. If a site is caught doing this it can be penalized by search engines and even banned altogether.

Other examples of black hat SEO include using hidden text that is not visible to the human eye--white text on a white page, for example--but which can be crawled by bots. A good rule of thumb for deciding whether your methods are ethical or not is by asking the question: is this content beneficial to my website visitors? Google Webmaster gives this advice: "Make pages primarily for users, not for search engines. Don't deceive your users."

## **So I know what not to do, can you give me examples of what to do?**

Aside from good use of keywords, links are also a winner: internal links to other pages within the site, plus having external sites linking to your site is great. The best way to acquire external links? Produce good, unique content that other sites want to link to.

The next step is to ensure search bots and spiders are actually able to successfully crawl your site, which means removing any obstacles they may face. For example, broken links, content hidden too many clicks away from the homepage, accessible content (see the [World Wide Web Consortium guidelines](#)) the amount of uptime/downtime on a site, valid HTML--the list goes on. Basically if a search engine can't access your site's content then it may choose a competitor's over yours when returning search results.

## **I've seen lots of adverts on the web for people saying they are SEOs--what's that then?**

People who refer to themselves as SEOs are Search Engine Optimizers - people who are employed by websites to optimize a site for search engines.

Google Webmaster provides some handy tips for choosing SEOs [here](#).

## **Any more tips?**

Google Webmaster has some [good advice and free resources](#) for optimizing sites for its Googlebot so it's a good a place as any to get started.

## **Quick Links...**

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