SEO Secrets
V1.4

All you need to know to reach the top of

the search engines

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Introduction

If you're like most people, the term "search engine optimization" will mean very little. Either that or it just means expense! But it doesn't have to be that way…

If you feel like you're standing in a dark room handing money to strangers to get you in the search engines, then this e-book is written just for you.

This e-book is written by a business owner for other business owners, CEOs, marketing practitioners, and webmasters. It explains Search Engine Optimization (or SEO) in layperson's terms. It won't make you an expert, but it will give you some insight into what you're spending your money on, what you should be spending your money on, and just as importantly, what you shouldn't.

Why should you believe me? Because I've reached the top of the search engines using the very methods I advocate. Take a look at 'About the Author' on p.7 to learn a little more about me, my background, and my experience.

As you work your way through this e-Book, refer to the Glossary at the end if you're unsure of a particular term. If you have any suggestions or feedback, or would like to be notified of future updates to this book, please email me at glenn@divinewrite.com. (**NOTE:** If you would like to **make a PayPal donation** to ensure that this book remains current, please visit http://www.divinewrite.com/seosecrets.htm .)

About the Author

Glenn Murray is a professional copywriter, specializing in copy for websites, search engines, and print materials. Using the methods described in this e-book, Glenn has achieved a **page 1 worldwide ranking** on Google.com for his website www.divinewrite.com for all of his targeted keywords:

Keyword	Google worldwide rank
copywriter	1
SEO copywriter	1 & 2
website copywriter	1 & 2
website copywriting	1
advertising copywriting	2
advertising copywriter	4

Based in Sydney, Australia, Glenn has **12 years** professional writing experience. Numbered among his clients are some of the world's leading companies including Toyota, Honeywell, Kimberley-Clark, Safe-n-Sound, Doubleday, the Australian Government, Raine & Horne, PMP Limited, Volante, and MYOB.

Glenn has a **Bachelor of Arts** in Linguistics and English Literature, and a **Master of Arts** in International Communication.

Step 1 – Understand what SEO means

Before launching straight into an explanation of SEO, let's talk a bit about search engines.

A little about search engines

Approximately 75%-80% of website traffic comes through search engines. What's more, research shows that most people don't look beyond the first 2 pages of search results. This means if your website doesn't rank in the first 2 pages of the major search engines, it's only receiving 20-30% of its rightful traffic… and revenue. (And remember, being ranked number 1 when you search for your company name or web address doesn't count. You need to rank highly for the words your customers use at search engines.)

Search engine results

The biggest concern for search engine companies like Google and Yahoo is finding content that will bring them more traffic (and thus more advertising revenue). In other words, their results must be relevant. Relevant results makes for a good search engine; irrelevant results makes for a short-lived search engine.

Most search engines these days return two types of results whenever you click Search:

- **Natural/Organic** – The 'real' search results. The results that most users are looking for and which take up most of the window. For most searches, the search engine displays a long list of links to sites with content which is related to the word you searched for. These results are ranked according to how relevant and important they are.

- **Paid** – Pure advertising. This is how the search engines make their money. Advertisers pay the search engines to display their ad whenever someone searches for a word which is related to their product or service. These ads look similar to the natural search results, but are normally labeled "Sponsored Links", and normally take up a smaller portion of the window.

When people use search engines to find content, they normally pay a lot more attention to the natural results than the paid results because they know these results are more relevant (and they know the "Sponsored Links" are simply ads).

When we talk about search engine ranking, we're talking about ranking well in the natural search results. This e-book does not cover "Sponsored Links".

How search engines decide what appears in the natural search results

IMPORTANT: *You cannot pay a search engine in return for a high ranking in the natural results. You can only get a high ranking if your content is seen as relevant by the search engines.*

Search engines identify relevant content for their search results by sending out 'spiders' or 'robots' which 'crawl' (analyze) your site and 'index' (record) its details. Complex algorithms are then employed to determine whether your site is useful and should be included in the search engine's search results.

This is where SEO comes in…

So what is SEO?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. It is the art of making your website relevant and important to the search engines in order to rank highly in their results.

The two main weapons in your arsenal are:

- Keywords (for relevance)

- Links to your site (for importance)

TIP: Think of the search engines as a big election. All the websites in the world are candidates. The copy on your website is your campaign. The links to your website are votes. The more votes (links) a candidate (website) has, the more important it is, and the higher its ranking.

Keywords

Search engines send out 'robots' or 'spiders' to analyze your website. They look at the words you've used to figure out what you do. This tells them when to display your site in their search results.

Keywords are the first thing you need to think about when you start your SEO journey.

Figure out what words your customers are looking for at search engines. These words are known as keywords. The idea is to frequently use these keywords in the copy of your website

and in the HTML code behind the page. As a rule of thumb, the more frequently you use these keywords, the more relevant you'll be considered by the search engines, and the more likely you are to appear in searches for those words.

For more information…

- on choosing keywords, see 'Step 3 – Choose your keywords' on p.14.
- on **using keywords** on your site, see 'Step 4 – Optimize Your Website for Search Engines' on p.18.)

Links to your site

Links to your site tell the search engines how important your site is. They assume that if it's important enough for a lot of other sites to link to, it's important enough for them to display at the top of the rankings.

Links to your site ("backlinks" or "inbound links") are the single most important factor in ranking. The more links you have to your site from other sites, the better your ranking.

For more information…

- on **generating backlinks**, see 'Step 5 – Generate links back to your site' on p.28.

Chapter Summary

- If you have a lot of the right keywords, used in real sentences, distributed realistically throughout your site, and a lot of links from other relevant sites, you stand a good chance of being ranked highly.

Step 2 – Submit your site to Google

As soon as you register your domain name, submit it to Google! Even if you haven't built your site, or thought about your content, submit your domain name to Google. In fact, even if you haven't fully articulated your business plan and marketing plan, submit your domain name to Google.

Don't wait!

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, getting on the search engines has always taken a long time for a new site. Even assuming you do everything right, it takes months before your site is even indexed, and more months before it starts to rank well. As a rule of thumb, never expect to rank highly within 6 months of submitting your site to Google.

The second reason is a recent phenomenon called 'Google Sandbox'. Many SEO experts believe that Google 'sandboxes' new websites. Whenever it detects a new website, it withholds its rightful ranking for a period while it determines whether your site is a genuine, credible, long term site. It does this to discourage the creation of SPAM websites (sites which serve no useful purpose other than to boost the ranking of some other site).

By submitting your domain name to Google as soon as you register it, you're establishing a site history even if the site has no content. By the time you've built your site and developed your content (and written your business and marketing plans), Google will probably see no need to sandbox you.

If you wait until launch day to submit your site, you'll spend a month or two (maybe more) sitting in the sandbox watching potential customers spend their money elsewhere.

How to submit your site to Google

Don't waste money by paying someone else to submit your site to Google. It's easy!

Simply go to http://www.google.com.au/addurl.html, enter your URL (domain name) and a few comments or keywords to describe your site. Then click 'Submit'. That's all there is to it. You only have to do it once, and only for your top level page (i.e. Home page).

Google's robots will then crawl your website the next time they're out and about. Of course, they don't guarantee that you'll be included in their results.

IMPORTANT: As mentioned above, it takes quite a while for your site to appear in the search engines. This is partly because the search engines are big and slow – especially when it comes to new sites. It will take a minimum of 6-8 weeks before your site is indexed.

How to submit your site to other search engines

There are hundreds of search engines on the Internet. It's a lucrative business, after all! But don't panic; studies suggest that the top 11 search engines account for about 90% of web traffic. In other words, if you have the top 11 covered, there's no need to submit to the rest.

What's more, at the time of writing, most of the top 11 don't actually accept submissions. The only ones that do are Google (described above), Yahoo, and MSN. Here's a list of the available submit pages.

- Yahoo – http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html (offers free submission)

- MSN – http://search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx?FORM=WSDD2 (offers free submission)

- Alta Vista – covered by Yahoo submission

- Netscape – covered by Google submission

- Fast / All the Web – covered by Yahoo submission

- Ask Jeeves / Teoma – at date of writing was not accepting new submissions

- Hotbot – at date of writing was not accepting new submissions

- Lycos – at date of writing was not accepting new submissions

- AOL – at date of writing was not accepting new submissions

- Looksmart – at date of writing was not accepting new submissions

TIP: My website http://www.divinewrite.com reached no.1 worldwide on Google.com for my primary keyword, "copywriter", without a dollar being spent on search engine submission. I only ever submitted my site to the engines that offer free submission.

Do I need to submit my site to other search engines?

As a rule, no.

With an estimated 8.8 billion pages indexed (approximately 76% of the Internet), Google is number 1 when it comes to search engines. It's argued that once Google has indexed your

site, the other search engines will follow. Theoretically, you don't actually need to submit your site to Google either because it's always on the lookout for new content and will eventually find your site of its own accord. Google actually states, "Given the large number of sites submitting URLs, it's likely your pages will be found in an automatic crawl before they make it into our index through the URL submission form." ("Google Information for Webmasters" - http://www.google.com.au/webmasters/1.html#A1) Personally, I wouldn't like to take the risk.)

Having said that, it certainly doesn't hurt to submit your site to other search engines (especially if you haven't developed any content for it yet).

Chapter Summary

- Submit your domain name to Google as soon as you register it (even if you haven't built your site yet – or done anything else).

- Although you don't actually need to submit your site to the other search engines, you may as well submit it to Yahoo and MSN, as they offer free (and simple) submissions.

Step 3 – Choose your keywords

The first thing you need to do when you begin chasing a good search engine ranking is decide which words you want to rank well for. This is called performing a keyword analysis.

Keyword analysis involves a bit of research and a good knowledge of your business and the benefits you offer your customers.

There are several websites specifically designed to make keyword analysis easier. Two examples are:

- **Overture's inventory tool** which you can find at http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/. This tool is **free** and **very easy** to use and understand, but it only tells you how many searches have been conducted in the previous month for your keyword (and similar keywords).

- **WordTracker** which you can find at http://www.wordtracker.com. WordTracker is a much more **powerful tool**, but you have to pay to use it (you can subscribe for a day for around **$10**). WordTracker helps you find the most appropriate keyword for your site by telling you what people are really searching for. Here's how it works… You type in a word which summarizes what you do, and it tells you how many times that word has been searched for in the last month. It also tells you how many other websites are using that word as a keyword (i.e. targeting the same customers you are). Based on this information, it rates the word. The 'best' keywords are the ones that a lot of people are searching for but which few websites are targeting. WordTracker even suggests and rates alternative related words.

TIP: When you're using WordTracker, bear in mind that it's just talking about numbers, and numbers don't always tell the whole story. So don't just jump in and use the best rated keywords; you need to consider your own situation. It may be the case that you're forced to select a keyword phrase which is not rated particularly highly. There are two situations in which this might happen:

i. You're in a niche market with relatively few customers searching for the keyword. In this situation, you'll probably find it relatively easy to reach the top of the rankings, but you won't generate a huge volume of traffic when you get there.

    ii.   A lot of your competitors are targeting your keyword (it's hotly contested) but it's the only one you can use. If you target it, you'll just have to work a bit harder on your backlinks in order to rank highly. When there's a lot of competition for a keyword, it's likely that the traffic payoff is good once you reach top.

Single keyword versus keyword phrases

Generally speaking, you're better off targeting phrases, not single words. For most businesses, there's simply too much competition for single keywords.

For instance, if you're in computer sales, your normally wouldn't choose "computers" as your keyword. Go to Google and search for "computers" and you'll see why… There are nearly 200 million results and the top rankings are dominated by the multi-nationals (at the time of writing, Apple and Dell). What's more, research shows that customers are becoming more search-savvy – they're searching for more and more specific strings. They're learning that by being more specific, they find what they're looking for much faster.

So instead of targeting "computers", try to think of a more specific keyword *phrase*. Ask yourself what's unique about your business? Perhaps you sell cheap second hand computers? Then why not use "cheap second hand computers" as your keyword phrase? This way, you'll not only stand a chance in the rankings, you'll also display in much more targeted searches. In other words, a higher percentage of your site's visitors will be people looking to buy cheap second hand computers (as opposed to people after brand new computers, people researching the history of the computer, and people trying to figure out how they can use a computer to bath their dog!).

Develop a keyword strategy

Also, think about developing a keyword strategy. If you start out targeting a very specific keyword phrase as described above, make sure it includes the more generic – hotly contested – single keyword. For example, you'll notice that the keyword phrase above, "cheap second hand computers" includes the single keyword "computers". This way, you're really targeting both at once. As your site's importance (or PageRank) and search engine presence increases, you'll start to rank for the single word as well. In time, you'll start ranking well for "computers" even though you're only actively targeting "cheap second hand computers".

TIP: Google PageRank (PR) is how Google scores a website's importance. It gives all sites a mark out of 10. By downloading the Google Toolbar (from http://toolbar.google.com), you can view the PR of any site you visit.

Plural versus singular keywords

When you're writing your SEO copy, chances are there'll come a time when you'll wonder whether you should target the plural of your keyword or the singular.

e.g. Do I target "tennis shoe" or "tennis shoes"?

To answer this question, the first thing you need to do is find out what your target visitors are actually searching for. If the vast majority are searching for "tennis shoes", then you'd target that, and forget about "tennis shoe".

However, in the real world, things are rarely so black and white. More often than not, the number of searches for each will be similar, and you'll still be left wondering which would be the more effective keyword.

Your next step is to think about why visitors search for one and not the other. It may be that people search for "tennis shoe" when they're researching whether to buy a tennis shoe or a running shoe. On the other hand, people may search for "tennis shoes" when they want to actually buy a pair online. In this case, if you were selling tennis shoes, you'd most likely choose "tennis shoes" as your keyword phrase.

Still no closer to a decision? Maybe you can target both… If the only difference between the singular and the plural is the addition of an "s" or "es" on the end, you can simply target the plural. You'll be targeting the singular in the process. e.g. Target "tennis shoes" and you'll be automatically targeting "tennis shoe" at the same time.

But if your plural is more than the addition of an "s" or "es", never fear. In reality, you can target either and still enjoy a high ranking. Google is smart enough to identify the relationship between plural and singular. It knows that people who search for the plural may still get some value out of sites that target the singular. It's true that - all else being equal - when a user searches for the plural, a site that targets the plural will outrank your site that targets the singular. But you can swing the balance in your favor simply by working harder on the number and quality of your inbound links. e.g. Take, for example, the distinction between "copywriters" and "copywriter". My copywriting website, Divine Write, targets "copywriter", but it still outranks most sites that target "copywriters". That's mostly because I have more inbound links.

Do I need to target exact keyword phrases?

The short answer is no.

The long answer follows…

As soon as you start optimizing your web copy, you'll realise that it's quite difficult to repeat your keyword again and again, without your copy becoming very unfriendly to readers.

This is particularly problematic when you're targeting very specific keyword phrases. For example, for me, targeting "copywriter" is quite easy, but targeting "SEO website copywriter Australia" is a lot more difficult. If my web page has 200 words, my keyword has to appear six times for a keyword density of 3%. That's fine if it's a single word, because there'll still be 194 words of normal copy left. The keyword won't be so noticeable to readers. But if there are four

words in the keyword phrase, there'll only be 176 words left. That would make the keyword phrase a lot more noticeable.

What's more, exact keyword phrases are difficult to incorporate into your copy in a natural way.

Fortunately, however, you don't have to actually target the exact phrase. You can simply target the individual words. So instead of me repeating the exact phrase "SEO website copywriter Australia" six times, I'd simply repeat "SEO" six times, "website" six times, "copywriter" six times, and "Australia" six times. These individual repetitions could appear anywhere on the page.

Using this approach, I can achieve the density I'm after without sacrificing readability.

I will qualify this: it's my understanding that when someone searches for "SEO website copywriter Australia", all things being equal, a website that targets the exact string "SEO website copywriter Australia" will rank higher than a website that targets just the individual words. But when are all things ever equal?

As always, the important thing to remember is that human visitors are more important than search engines. What's more, keyword density is not the be-all-and-end-all of SEO.

Chapter Summary

- Find out what words your customers are searching for and make them your keywords.

- Use keyword phrases instead of single keywords, but develop a long term keyword strategy which will increase your ranking for hotly contested single keywords even as you target your specific keyword phrase.

Step 4 – Optimize Your Website for Search Engines

Once you've figured out what words your customers are using at the search engines, you need to use those words frequently on your site and in the right places – both within your copy and within your HTML code (HTML meta tags). This is a big part of what is known as optimizing your website for search engines. There are also some site structure – or information architecture – and web design considerations (discussed below).

TIP: When you optimize your website for a particular word, you're essentially telling the search engines to include you in the results when people search for that word. (How high up the rankings you appear depends largely on the number of links back to your site there are.)

For more information...

- on **generating backlinks**, see 'Step 5 – Generate links back to your site' on p.28.

Optimizing your web copy

The trick to optimizing your copy is using the most important keywords frequently and in the right places without compromising the readability of your copy. But how do you define "frequently"? And what are the right places? What if you want to target a few different keywords? And for that matter, what should the wordcount of my pages be? Below are a few tips which will help you out.

What should the wordcount of my pages be?

You'll hear a lot about the importance of a lot of content. While I definitely agree that 'content is king', there is no need to write volumes. You can reach the top of the search engines with a page wordcount of between 100-1000. Below 100 is probably too little for the search engines. Above 1000 is definitely too much for your visitors. Certainly don't be intimidated into writing pages and pages of copy for your home page (or any other page where short, succinct copy is required).

How many times should I use a keyword?

You don't want to fill every page up with every keyword you're targeting. This simply dilutes your site's relevance and reduces readability. Search engines and visitors alike will object; the search engines will see your site as spam, and visitors to your site will find it hard to read (if not meaningless).

A good rule of thumb is to aim for a site-wide average keyword density of around 2% (measured using LiveKeywordAnalysis - http://www.live-keyword-analysis.com). Density is a measure of frequency in relation to the total wordcount of the page. So if your page has 200 words, and your keyword phrase appears 10 times, its density is 5%.

When you actually try to do this, you'll see that 2% isn't easy to achieve. The easiest way to do it is to be specific. As you write every sentence, ask yourself, "Could I be more specific?" For example, don't just say "our computers" or "our products"; ask yourself if you can get away with saying "our cheap second hand computers". Similarly, don't say things like "with our help"; instead, say "with the help of our cheap second hand computers". Once you get the hang of it, you'll find there are more than enough opportunities to replace a generic term with your keyword phrase.

Obviously, there's a bit of an art to it. Sometimes it ends up just sounding like you're repeating your keyword phrase over and over again. If this happens, you may just need to restructure the sentence or paragraph. Remember, your site reflects the quality of your product or service. If your site is hard to read, people will infer a lot about your offering… Readability is all-important to visitors. And after all, it's the visitors who buy your product or service, not the search engines.

NOTE: You don't need to be paranoid about density. You can have some pages which have a high density, and some which have a low density. What's more, the search engines don't measure density as described above. They're not actually looking for a density of 5% or 3% or 10%. Just use density calculations as a yardstick. A density of 3% will give you a page with plenty of instances of your keyword. If you can't get a density that high without impacting readability, settle for a lower density. The important thing is that you use your keywords more often than any other single word or phrase.

What if I want to target more than one keyword?

It's best to only target one keyword per page. If you try to target more, your keywords will be competing against each other, diluting each other's impact. If you need to target more than one keyword, simply create a page for each.

For example, divide your Second Hand Computers site into separate pages for Macs and PCs, and then segment again into Notebooks, Desktops, etc. This way, you'll be able to incorporate very specific keyword phrases into your copy (e.g. For your Macs page, focus on "cheap second hand macs". For the PCs page, focus on "cheap second hand pcs", etc.)

(See 'Link paths' on p.23 for information on using text links between these pages.)

Where should I use my keywords?

When assessing what your website is about, search engines pay close attention to the words you use in your text links and headings. So make sure your links and headings are keyword rich.

IMPORTANT: Search engines and humans like different things when it comes to links. Search engines like to see your keywords used toward the top of the page. So if you're using keywords in your links, it makes sense that you put the links at the top of the page. Unfortunately, humans tend to find this distracting. And because they start clicking on links before they've finished reading the whole page, they become easily lost and don't grasp the intended message. In most cases, visitors prefer a text link at the bottom of the page.

But there is a **solution**; if you have links within the main body of your copy, simply make them unmarked (i.e. remove the blue font colour and the underlining). To do this, include the following in your CSS file:

```
<style type="text/css">

<!--

a {text-decoration: none;}

-->

</style>
```

Then format the HTML of each link as follows:

As well as providing cheap second hand Macs, we sell high quality cheap second hand pcs.

Using keywords in links

When you link from one page to another, try to use your target keyword as the link text (the part that's normally blue and underlined). For example, on your "Cheap Second Hand Macs" page, you could include a text link to "Cheap Second Hand PCs".

Using keywords in headings

Just as customers rely on headings to scan your site, so to do search engines. This means headings play a big part in how the search engines will index your site. Try to include your keyword phrase in your headings. In fact, think about inserting extra headings just for this purpose. Generally this will also help the readability of the site because it will help customers scan read.

For example, if you have a page detailing the benefits of cheap second hand computers, you could break it up into logical sections with the following headings.

The cost benefits of our cheap second hand computers

The technical benefits of our cheap second hand computers

The support benefits of our cheap second hand computers

Using keywords at the start of the page

Many SEO experts believe that the search engines see words at the start of a page as more representative of what your site is about than words at the end (i.e. prominence). So it's a good idea to make sure you use your keywords toward the start of each page.

Optimizing your HTML code

Within the HTML code behind your page, there are things call 'meta tags'. These are short notes within the header of the code which describe some aspects of your page to the search engines. Although there is some debate over how important meta tags are when it comes to SEO, it's generally agreed that they shouldn't be ignored.

Whether you're building your website yourself, or you're getting a web designer to do it, it's a good idea to understand the basics. There are four main meta tags you need to consider:

Tag name	How it should look in the code	Explanation
Title	`<title>Cheap second hand computers – Widget Computers</title>`	The title is the most important of the meta tags. Try to use your keyword at least once in the title. Also, it's not just important for your ranking; it also has the biggest impact on your Click Thru Rate (CTR). The text you put in the title will appear as the link text in your Google listing – the bit that people will read first and click on. Think of it as an ad headline – the better it is, the more people will click on it. **TIP:** Google only displays 66 characters in the clickable part of your listing. So try to keep your Title text to a max of 66 characters.

Tag name	How it should look in the code	Explanation
Keywords	`<meta name="KEYWORDS" CONTENT="cheap second hand computers" />`	Search engines used to look only at this tag to identify a site's subject material. This is no longer the case, but they still pay some attention.
Description	`<meta name="DESCRIPTION" CONTENT="Cheap second hand computers for sale – keeping your business running efficiently without breaking the bank." />`	The search engines pay some attention to this text when identifying your site's subject material, so make sure you include your keyword at least once in the Description. Also, most search engines use this text as their description of your site (i.e. it's the site snapshot that follows your link in the search results). Make sure it's informative and compelling. Think of it as the copy for an ad. **TIP:** Google only displays about 160 characters including spaces. So keep your Description text to a max of 160 characters.
Alt	`<img src="filename.gif" alt="Cheap second hand computer in use" title="Cheap second hand computer in use">`	The Alt tag is designed to help visually impaired people use the World Wide Web (WWW). They use software to read out loud the content of your website. When the software encounters a picture, it looks for the Alt text to learn what the picture is, then reads that text out loud. The Alt tag is relatively important to search engines because they assume that your pictures have something to do with the subject material of your site. But like the visual aid software, they can't actually see the picture, so they look at the Alt text as well. Try to include your keyword at least once in your Alt text.

You can use the same meta tags on each page, or you can make them unique. It all depends on how many keywords you're targeting. If you're targeting a different keyword in the copy of each page, your meta tags for each page will be unique (i.e. you'll target that page's keyword within these meta tags).

TIP: If you have any high ranking competitors, take a look at the way they've done their meta tags, and follow their lead. You already know they rank highly, so chances are they've done a good job.

Optimizing your site structure

When structuring the information on your website, there are two main aspects you need to consider:

- Multiple keywords

- Link paths

- Site map

Multiple keywords

It's good practice to structure your site around the keywords you want to target (i.e. create a separate page for each keyword).

ℹ For more information…
- on **structuring pages around keywords**, see 'What if I want to target more than one keyword?' on p.19.

Link paths

For search engine spiders, text links are like doorways from page to page and site to site. This means websites are generally better indexed by search engines if their spiders can traverse the entire site using text links. If your site is simple, you can simply link each page to every other page using text links at the bottom of the page. But if your site is complex, this is impractical. Instead, you'll need to create a hierarchical structure and link top to bottom and left to right using text links (assuming this doesn't detract from the usability of your site).
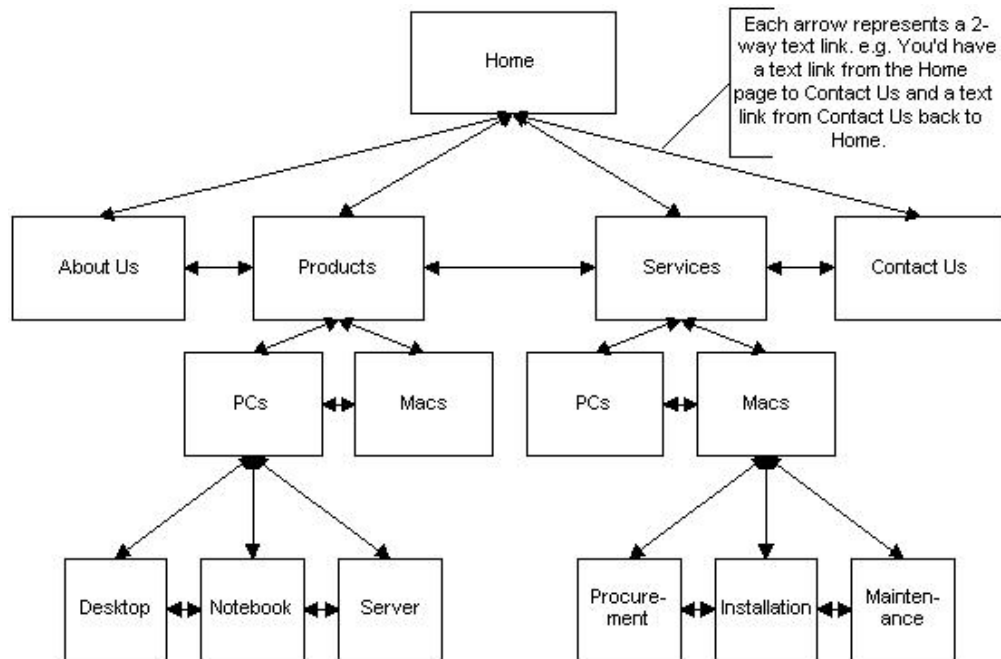
Figure 1   Text Link Path Hierarchy

NOTE: In addition to being kind to search engine spiders, this approach allows you to target one keyword phrase per page.

Site map

You should also use a site map to link all of your pages together. A site map is a single page which contains a list of text links to every page in the site (and every page contains a text link back to the site map). Think of your site map as being at the center of a spider-web.

> **TIP:** Site maps are used by both search engine spiders and human visitors, so remember to make it user-friendly. Try using bolding and indenting to represent your site hierarchy. See http://www.divinewrite.com/site.htm for an example.

Optimizing your web construction

Search engine spiders and robots don't see websites the way you and I do. They require your site to be designed a particular way. If you don't observe a few rules of thumb, you can severely hamper your search engine presence.

Following is a list of the main things you need to be aware of. There are quite a few more, but these are the most important ones. This list will be most useful if your web designer hasn't had

a lot of experience with SEO. If you engage an experienced SEO web designer, they'll already know all the issues (far more than are listed here).

Do's…

- Design your site in HTML – i.e. HTML based copy and headings and text based links at the base of each page as per existing site

- Use static URLs

- Use standard rollovers and/or CSS formatting for navigation menu

- Create a robots.txt file. This file is used to inform the search engine spider which pages on a site should not be indexed (check out http://www.123promotion.co.uk/tools/robotstxtgenerator.php for an automated one).

- Alternatively, you can do a similar thing by placing tags in the header section of your HTML for search engine robots/spiders to read. These tags are as follows:

    o `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="ALL" />` tells the spiders to crawl and index your entire site

    o `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NONE" />` tells the spiders not to index anything.

    o `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX,FOLLOW" />` says don't index this particular page, but follow its links to other pages (e.g. for use on secure or private pages).

    o `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="INDEX,NOFOLLOW" />` says to index the page but not follow its links.

- Create a 404 error handling page, and place a sitemap on the 404 page.

- Use absolute links (not relative links).

Don'ts…

- Don't embed your copy within a graphic

- Don't use frames

- Don't use internal JavaScript or Flash

- Don't use "&id=" as a parameter if you want maximal Googlebot crawlage (many sites use "&id=" with session IDs that Googlebot usually avoids urls with that parameter)

Redesigning an existing site

If you're redesigning an existing site, make sure you pay close attention to your file structure. If you move one of your pages from one directory to another, its address will change.

E.g. If you move your "Cheap Second Hand Macs" page (CheapSecondHandMacs.htm) from …Pages\Products to …\Pages\Products\Macs, its address will change from http://www.MadeUpWidgetComputers.com/pages/products/CheapSecondHandMacs.htm to http://www.MadeUpWidgetComputers.com/pages/products/Macs/CheapSecondHandMacs.htm. This change will mean that any links to the page from other websites will no longer work. It is vital that you do not let this happen. Remember, backlinks are the key to a high ranking.

There are two solutions to this problem: i) Don't change your directory structure; or ii) If you DO change your directory structure, make sure you do 301 redirects from the old pages to the new ones. (Your web designer will know what you're talking about when you instruct them to use 301 redirects.)

Also, if your site already has a decent ranking (or you've worked hard on your meta tags and you're happy with them), make sure your web designer doesn't change your meta tags.

Paying an SEO company to optimize your site

If you decide to pay an SEO company to optimize your site for you, always ask them exactly what they will be doing. Ask them what keywords they will be targeting, and how will target them. There are no secret methods, so if they can't or won't tell you, DO NOT engage them. There are also some companies which will make grand claims about top 10 rankings in a week, but don't specify which keywords you will rank highly for. Instead of ranking highly for the words that your customers are searching for, you end up ranking highly for extremely obscure, meaningless keyword phrases like, "red brochure book printing in Jamaica".

Also, always be clear in your own mind on exactly what you're paying for. Remember that there are two parts to obtaining a high ranking: optimizing your site, and generating links back to your site. Always get your SEO company to explain exactly which part(s) they will do for you, and how they plan to do it.

Chapter Summary

- Use your keyword frequently, but not too frequently. Go for a site-wide average keyword density of around 2%.

- Only target one keyword per page (unless there is very little competition for your keywords).

- If you need to target more than one keyword, create a new page for each.

- Use keywords in links and headings.

- Try to use keywords more often at the start of the page than at the end.

- Use your keywords in the Title, Description, Keywords, and Alt meta tags.

- Structure your site around your keywords.

- Ensure spiders can traverse your entire site via text links.

- Create a text based site map which links to every page (and which every page links to) via text links.

- If your web designer is not an SEO expert, make sure you provide them with some optimization rules.

Step 5 – Generate links back to your site

Links are the single most important aspect of SEO. Generally speaking, the more links you have back to your site, the higher your ranking will be.

Of course, nothing is ever that simple. There are links, and there are links. Before launching into a discussion about the best ways to generate links, let's first discuss what kind of links you should be trying to generate.

When deciding whether to display your site in its search results, a search engine looks to see if you're part of a credible network of related sites. This means that the ideal kind of links are those that:

- come from relevant sites (sites which use the same keywords);

- come from important sites (have a high ranking);

- include your keyword as part of the visible link text;

- include varying link text (not the same link text each time); and

- come from a page that links to few other sites.

When a search engine sees a link which satisfies most or all of these conditions, it says, "Hey, this site must be credible and important, because others in the same industry are pointing to it."

How do I generate lots of ideal links?

There are many possible ways to generate links. Some are dubious (like auto-generation software, and sites set up by webmasters simply to host links to their other sites) and I won't be discussing them here. Others, like those discussed below, are legitimate.

NOTE: Link generation is an ongoing (often tedious) task. You need to be dedicated and systematic. In other words, you need a strategy. Take a look through the link generation alternatives discussed below to see what suits you best. Then put your thinking cap on and get

creative. It's a new and very exciting field; there are undoubtedly many undiscovered ways to generate links. This chapter is just a starting point.

Add your site to DMOZ & Yahoo Directories

The first thing you should do is add a link in the following two directories:

- **DMOZ Open Directory Project** (http://www.dmoz.com/add.html) – "…the largest, most comprehensive human-edited directory of the Web. It is constructed and maintained by a vast, global community of volunteer editors." DMOZ does not charge for submissions. **NOTE:** This is the same as the Google Directory.

- **Yahoo Directory** (https://ecom.yahoo.com/dir/submit/intro/) – Yahoo charges for submissions (at the time of writing, the submission fee was USD$299).

The search engines regularly crawl these directories in search of new links, and they value these links quite highly (largely because the directories are human-edited).

Check where your competitors' links are coming from

Next, check who is linking to your high ranking competitors. This method takes a long time, but you'll be surprised where some of their links come from. To check on the links of your competitors:

STEP 1) Go to Google and search for your keyword.

STEP 2) Make a note of the top 5 competitors who appear (write down their domain name).

STEP 3) Return to Google and search for the first domain name in the list (i.e. type "www.competitorsdomainname.com" in the search field).

STEP 4) Google will then display a screen which says, "Google can show you the following information for this URL:" At the bottom of the list of option is "Find web pages that contain the term "www.competitorsdomainname.com"". Click on this option.

STEP 5) Google will display all the pages it can find that link to your competitor's website. (**TIP:** If there are many results, bookmark the search results page as this process will take a long time – possibly months.)

STEP 6) Visit each page (TIP: Right click on the first result and select "Open in New Window". By opening a separate window to see the page, you won't lose your search results page.)

STEP 7) Try think of a way to get a link to your website on the same page (TIP: Avoid sending them an email as webmaster receive a lot of SPAM and your email will likely go unnoticed. Try calling them instead.)

STEP 8) Repeat for each of your top 5 ranking competitors.

TIP: In the list of results, the sites which appear high up in the list of results are likely to have a higher Google PageRank (PR – see Glossary) than the sites which appear toward the end of the list. You should be more interested in obtaining links to sites with a high PR (assuming they're also relevant).

Article PR - Write and submit articles for Internet publication

Next, write articles and do some article PR! I've always found this to be the best way to generate inbound links. Write helpful articles and let publishers of newsletters and ezines use them for free – on the proviso that they link back to your site.

People who publish ezines and newsletters are always hungry for quality content. And there are many websites out there dedicated to giving them just that. If you submit a well written, relevant, helpful article to one of those sites, you can have thousands of newsletter publishers ready to snap it up. Then you just sit back and watch the links multiply!

TIP: The article PR method is beneficial in other ways too. Readers of your article will see that you know what you're talking about, and because you're published, they'll see you as an authority. You'll find web traffic and requests for quotes increase after every article.

Here's how article PR works…

STEP 1) You're an expert in your field so you possess knowledge that other people want.

STEP 2) You write a helpful article – sharing your hard-earned knowledge and expertise (without compromising your income stream).

STEP 3) You submit your article to recognized and highly trafficked "Article Submit" sites on the World Wide Web.

STEP 4) Publishers of online newsletters, ezines, etc. gather content from these sites for free.

STEP 5) Helpful, well written articles are snapped up by thousands of publishers from all around the world in virtually every industry.

STEP 6) The only condition is that they must publish the article with a functioning link to your site.

STEP 7) If 300 people publish your article, you get 300 links back to your site. And the best part is that every link is relevant (and you even get to choose the link text!)

Article PR FAQs

Below are some FAQs that will help you write your articles and manage your article PR campaign.

Q) What should I write about?
A) Write about what you know. Make sure it's related to your business (so you can use the keywords you want to rank for) and helpful (so it gets published). For example, if you're a manufacturer of industrial plastics, you might write an article - or series of articles - on how best to handle Teflon tubing prior to installation. Once you get thinking about it, you'll probably find there are hundreds of articles you could write that are helpful. You may even have some of them partly written already in your instruction manuals or installation guides, etc. Another good idea is to think of all the questions you get asked by customers and potential customers. These questions show you what people are interested in. If you write an article answering every one of these questions, you'll get published, and you'll also show yourself to be a credible expert. (You may even cut down phone support time!)

Q) How long should my article be?
A) The best articles are only as long as they need to be. Keep it short and sweet – there's nothing wrong with a 400 word article. By the same token, if you need 1500 words to say all you need to say, that's fine as well (but I'd still be thinking about how to break that into three parts and get three times as many links!).

Q) How often to submit?
A) Whenever you write an article.

Q) What kind of writing should I use?
A) Simply write in a style that your audience will be comfortable with. If they're from the old school, don't write like I am. Don't use contractions, don't end sentences with prepositions, and don't start sentences with "and" or "but". But if they're not old school, just use conversational English. In fact, the more of yourself you include in the article, the more engaging it will be. The key is to make it readable.

Q) Should I focus on keywords?
A) Yes! Yes! Yes! Optimize your articles just as you optimize your website. (In fact, as you'll probably post the articles on your website, you're really are writing for your website, anyway.) If possible, turn a few keywords into links back to your site. And always try to include keywords in the headline and byline of your article. And don't worry about being seen as Spam; if your article provides good quality information and guidance, it won't be seen as spam by the search engines even when it's keyword-rich.

Q) Do I need to vary the byline?
A) There is some evidence to suggest that the search engines prefer varied link text in links back to your site (otherwise they may view the links as artificially generated - i.e. SPAM). Therefore, it's probably a good idea to vary at least the link text of your byline (without departing from your keywords).

Q) Should I always use the byline to link to my home page or should I also link to other pages?
A) Link back to whatever page matches the keywords used in your article. If your website only targets one keyword, simply link back to your home page.

Q) Where should I submit my article?
A) There are hundreds, if not thousands, of article submission sites and article distribution lists on the World Wide Web. Too many to include here. Do a search for "article submit" and just find the ones that are most applicable to your industry and offer the most subscribers.

Q) How long does it take to submit a single article?
A) It all depends on how many sites you submit it to. I allow a full day to submit a single article to the 50+ submission sites in my list. Admittedly I've been doing it for a while, so I'm fairly fast at it, but it's not a difficult task. Once you've done it a couple of times, you'll have it down to a fine art. You just have to work hard and efficiently when you do it.

Q) Who will publish my article?
A) Generally people publish pre-written articles because they want "eyes on paper". In other words, they want to generate traffic to their site. Helpful articles are one way of doing that because they're keyword-rich and they enhance the publisher's search engine ranking. Expert, helpful articles also make the publisher seem like a credible authority on a particular subject. And, of course, they develop customer loyalty. There are hundreds of thousands (maybe even millions) of companies publishing online newsletters, ezines, and article pages. No matter what your industry, you're bound to find quite a few who are interested in what you have to say. In fact, once a few publishers recognize you as a good source of content, they keep coming back looking for more (and even email you asking if you can send them directly).

Q) How will I know when my article has been published?
A) As one of the conditions of publication, you can request that the publisher notifies you when they use your article. Of course, most don't bother to do this, so it's a good idea to set up a Google Alert (http://www.google.com/alerts) which notifies you when your URL has been published on a web page. Google doesn't pick them all up, but it picks up a lot. Whenever you receive an alert, you can visit the page to make sure the article is unchanged and the link back to your site is functioning.

Q) How much cross-publication of a single article is acceptable?
A) It doesn't matter. I have some articles that have been published on many different websites (probably hundreds). These articles still get good coverage on reputable sites with good PR.

Q) Will the publisher change my article?
A) No, generally not. Changing articles is just extra work. In fact, that's why publishers like good articles and consistent content providers – because that means they don't have to do any extra work. I've had my articles published thousands of times, and don't recall a single instance of an article being changed without my permission. If you're worried about it, you can include an instruction not to change the article in your conditions of publication.

Q) Should I post my article on my website?
A) Yes! Articles are solid, keyword-rich content. Search engines and visitors alike love them. Add a new page for every article, and link to each from a top level articles page (see http://www.divinewrite.com/articles.htm for a working example).

Q) Can I get an SEO copywriter to do my article PR?
A) Yes. Any SEO copywriter should be able to write keyword rich articles and submit them to a number of high traffic article submission sites.

Q) What kind of information would I need to supply an SEO copywriter to write my article?
A) You'd need to tell your SEO copywriter something like, "We want to write an article which helps people install Teflon tubing. The kinds of people who'd be doing it are... They'd be doing it because... The benefits of our tubing are... The difficulties they'd face are... Here are the key steps to successful installation..." Using this information, your SEO copywriter should be able to put together a very readable article which would be bound to get published.

Q) Will my reputation suffer if my article appears on a dubious site?
A) It shouldn't. Most dubious sites will either be unrelated or have very low traffic. If the site is unrelated, the publisher won't go to the effort of publishing your article and/or your target market won't see it. If it's related but has very low traffic, very few people will see your article there anyway. And besides, even if your article appears on a dubious site, it probably won't be changed because – dubious or not – publishers don't create extra work for themselves. So your original presentation, content, and intent will be unaffected. Write a good article, and it always reflects well on you, no matter where it's published.

Q) How long will it take for my ranking to increase?
A) There are no guarantees in SEO. It all takes time. For a start, the search engines can take up to 2 months to update their index of pages. And a single inbound link generally won't have much impact. Depending on how much competition you're facing for keywords, and where the links are coming from, 100 inbound links may not make much of a difference. (Links from high PageRank sites are more beneficial to your ranking. So don't expect anything to happen too quickly. But if you're dedicated, and you're prepared to write and submit quite a few articles, you'll definitely see results within a few months.

Submit your site to local and industry directories

Another marginally useful method of generating links is to submit your site to online local directories and industry directories. There are many websites which function purely as directories. They contain thousands of links to other sites. Some of these are very good (such as DMOZ and Yahoo discussed on p.29.), but most are of questionable value. There are several reasons for this:

1. **Most directories are unrelated** to the subject material of your website (and remember, ideal links come from related websites).

2. **Many directories will charge** you for a listing (it's only worth paying if the website is related and has a high PR).

3. **Most directories contain thousands of links**. Every page can have hundreds of links to other sites. As mentioned above, it's best if your link appears on a page with few (if any) links to other pages.

4. **Most directories are not very good**. Directories are about money; they either charge you to add a listing or they sell advertising space (or both). They can be a great income source for their owners, and this makes them a very inviting business idea. As a result, thousands of new directories are popping up every year, and very few of them are any good.

Keep your eye out for directories that are relevant and/or have a high ranking or PR. Also keep your eye out for directories which might bring you useful traffic (e.g. local business directories). But don't spend too much time doing it. Your time would be far better spent writing and submitting articles.

TIP: If you really feel the need to add your site to directories, take a look at http://www.webproworld.com/viewtopic.php?t=21900&sid=aea99f48670ee336f2b922c79983e394 for a very comprehensive and regularly updated list of directories that accept links.

Look for link partners

Probably the most well known method of generating links is to look for link partners. This is done in a variety of ways:

- ask customers to link to your site (possibly in return for a link to theirs)

- ask suppliers to link to your site (possibly in return for a link to theirs)

- look for relevant high ranking sites and ask them to link to you (possibly in return for a link to theirs)

- buy SEO software which locates high ranking sites and automatically emails their owners asking them to link to you (possibly in return for a link to theirs)

Interestingly, looking for link partners tends to be the least effective method of increasing your search engine ranking because:

1. It's normally done via email and, unfortunately, **webmasters of high ranking sites receive many link partner requests each day** (not to mention hundreds of other SPAM emails). They're normally automated and irrelevant. As a result, most email-initiated link partner requests are deleted.

2. Most link partner requests are sent by webmasters of low PR sites to webmasters of high PR sites. Although the link would be very beneficial to the low PR site, it **wouldn't help the high PR site** at all (and may in fact hinder their ranking).

3. Even if you offer a reciprocal link (a link back to their website), most webmasters of high PR sites will not be interested because it's **extra work**. What's more, they won't want to **obscure the purpose of their site** with hundreds of links (relevant or not, they don't want to look like a directory to their customers).

TIP: If you decide to manually look for link partners, one way of assessing a site's importance is to look at their Google PageRank (PR). PR is how Google scores importance. It gives all sites a mark out of 10. Any site with a PR of 4 or above is generally considered a worthy link partner. By downloading the Google Toolbar (from http://toolbar.google.com), you can view the PR of any site you visit.

How long will it take?

A long time!

It's impossible to say how much time you'll need to spend generating links, but you can be sure it'll be a while no matter which method of link generation you use. You just have to keep at it until you have achieved a high ranking. Even then, you'll still need to dedicate some ongoing time to the task, otherwise your ranking will drop.

Is it possible to generate links too fast?

Yes, it's possible. But using the methods outlined above, it's *extremely* unlikely.

The search engines don't like to see links generated too fast. For instance, if you had 100 links to your site yesterday, but you have 2100 today, the search engines will assume you've done something a little shady, and 'sandbox' your links (i.e. delay their full impact) until it establishes their validity. You may even be penalized more harshly than this.

That's why it's not a good idea to set up multiple independent websites all containing dozens of links back to your main site. This would get you lots of links very quickly, but it might also see you blacklisted!

Paying an SEO company to generate links for you

Generating links takes a long time and involves a lot of work. Like any other form of promotion, it requires investment - either in time or money. If you decide to outsource the task of generating links, be careful. There are some companies which generate links to a domain of their own, and pass the value of these links on to your site. This does NOT result in a permanent increase in the ranking of your site. These companies charge a monthly fee, and so long as you pay the fee, your site may rank highly. But as soon as you stop paying their fee (e.g. you find another SEO company that you prefer), your site's ranking will drop back to where it was when you started out. Effectively, they hold you to ransom.

Don't get caught out! When you're researching SEO companies to generate links for you, ALWAYS ask them how they will do it. If they can't or won't tell you, DO NOT engage them. If they tell you but you are unable to completely understand, DO NOT engage them (there are no link generation methods which are too complex for the layperson to understand when explained properly).

Also, always be clear in your own mind on exactly what you're paying for. Remember that there are two parts to obtaining a high ranking: optimizing your site, and generating links back to your site. Always get your SEO company to explain exactly which part(s) they will do for you, and how they plan to do it.

Chapter Summary

- Generally speaking, the more links you have back to your site, the higher your ranking will be.

- Some links are better than others.

- Don't use auto-link-generation software

- Don't set up websites simply to host links to your main site

- Add your site to DMOZ & Yahoo Directories

- Check where your competitors' links are coming from

- Write and submit articles for Internet publication

- Submit your site to local and industry directories

- Look for link partners (but don't spend too much time on it)

- Link generation takes a long time no matter how you do it!

Step 6 – Monitor your progress

Now that you've done the lion's share of the hard work, you can 'sit back' and observe the results of your handiwork. It's very important that you monitor your progress. Keep an eye on how many links you're generating, where they're coming from, and the overall impact on your ranking.

Monitor how many links you're generating

It's important to monitor how many links you're generating because you can cross-reference that information against improvements in ranking to estimate how much effort your SEO push is going to take. e.g. If you generate 300 links and your site goes from number 150 to number 15, you know that you should be topping the rankings before too long. If, on the other hand, your ranking has only marginally increased, you know you need to work a lot harder.

You can monitor how many links you're generating in a number of ways:

- Search Google for "www.yourdomainname.com". Google will then display a screen which says, "Google can show you the following information for this URL:" At the bottom of the list of option is "Find web pages that contain the term "www.yourdomainname.com"". Click on this option. Google will display all the pages it can find that have "www.yourdomainname.com" on one of their pages. Normally this indicates a link to your site. (**TIP:** Bookmark the search results page so you can perform this search quickly and easily as you will probably find yourself doing it quite often.)

- Go to http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/ and type in your domain name. This tool itemizes your links by search engine (i.e. tells you how many links each search engine has found) and also provides graphical trends.

- Go to http://www.alexa.com and type in your domain name, then click 'Sites Linking in' from the left of the page. (**TIP:** Alexa can also be used to track your ranking metrics.)

TIP: You'll notice that each of these tools return different figures. Don't worry about this. Just pick a tool and stick with it – this way you're always comparing apples with apples.

Monitor who's linking to your site

Always keep track of who's linking to your site. Apart from simply being interesting, it will give you some idea of who is interested in your site and your material, you can assess their importance (PR), and also more accurately target their needs with future link generation tactics.

Probably the easiest way to track who's linking to your site is to set up a Google Monitor at http://www.google.com/alerts. Google alerts notify you when your URL has been published on a web page. Google doesn't pick them all up, but it picks up a lot.

TIP: Whenever you receive an alert, you can visit the page to make sure the article in unchanged and the link back to your site is functioning.

Monitor your ranking

Obviously you should be monitoring your ranking to ensure that your hard work is not wasted (and to adapt your SEO and link generation strategy as needed).

Manually

You can check your ranking manually simply by doing a search for your keyword at the appropriate search engine.

TIP: If you prefer to check manually, make sure you bookmark the search results page as you'll probably find yourself performing this search fairly frequently. Don't perform it too frequently, though, as this can impact the perceived desirability of your keywords (and it is argued that Google takes exception to repeated searches of this type).

Automatically

You can check all the major search engines (AOL, Google, HotBot, MSN, Netscape, Yahoo/Fast/AltaVista) at once using MarketLeap's verification tool http://www.marketleap.com/verify/default.htm. NOTE: This tool returns a page number (e.g. it will tell you your site appears on page 2 of Yahoo).

There are plenty of other tools out there that you can use to monitor your ranking, such as CleverStat's Free Monitor for Google (see http://www.cleverstat.com/google-monitor-query.htm). Shop around until you find the tool that suits you best. The important thing to

remember is that you don't have to pay anything for a rank monitoring tool as there are plenty of free ones on offer.

Chapter Summary

- Monitor how many links you have and cross-reference that information against improvements in ranking to estimate how much effort your SEO push is going to take.

- Monitor who is linking to your site to more accurately adapt future link generation tactics.

- Monitor your ranking and adapt your SEO and link generation strategy as needed.

Conclusion

Search Engine Optimization is not a black art; it's a science. There are defined rules and proven methodologies. And although there's a lot more to it than can be contained in a book of this size, you shouldn't need any more than what you've just read to obtain a high ranking in the search engines.

But there's no denying that it's hard work and takes a long time. Whatever you do, don't rush into it. Make sure you understand the fundamentals, then take some time to plan your approach.

In other words, SEO strategy must be part of your marketing plan alongside traditional promotional activities such as print, radio, and TV. Just as importantly, it must be part of your marketing *budget*. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that the search engines are free advertising. They're not! Companies like Google and Yahoo may not accept payment for a high ranking, but that doesn't mean it comes for free. Someone has to do the work to get you there. Whether you spend the time to do it yourself, or you engage an expert to do it for you, SEO requires a serious investment.

But the spoils are well worth it. Research suggests that being number 1 in Google means twice as much traffic as being number 2. Imagine how much difference it would make to *your* web traffic…

Frequently Asked Questions

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a foreign field to a lot of people. Rarely does a day go by when I don't get asked a few questions on the subject. So I've decided to post this FAQ article in the hopes that it will help people understand the basics, and make them a little more comfortable with the whole domain.

Q: Why are search engines important to me?

A: 85% of all website traffic is driven by search engines. The only online activity more popular than search is email. 79.2% of US users don't go to page 2 of search results. 42% of users click on the no.1 result. For the under-40 age-group, the Internet will become the most used media in the next 2-3 years.

Q: How do search engines decide on their rankings?

A: IMPORTANT: You cannot pay a search engine in return for a high ranking in the natural results. You can only get a high ranking if your content is seen as relevant by the search engines.

Search engines identify relevant content for their search results by sending out 'spiders' or 'robots' which 'crawl' (analyze) your site and 'index' (record) its details. Complex algorithms are then employed to determine whether your site is useful and should be included in the search engine's search results.

Q: Can't I just pay for a high ranking?

A: No. The biggest concern for search engine companies like Google and Yahoo is finding content that will bring them more traffic (and thus more advertising revenue). In other words, their results must be relevant. Relevant results makes for a good search engine; irrelevant results makes for a short-lived search engine.

Most search engines these days return two types of results whenever you click Search:
- **Natural/Organic** – The 'real' search results. The results that most users are looking for and which take up most of the window. For most searches, the search engine displays a long list of links to sites with content which is related to the word you searched for. These results are ranked according to how relevant and important they are.

- ▪ **Paid** – Pure advertising. This is how the search engines make their money. Advertisers pay the search engines to display their ad whenever someone searches for a word which is related to their product or service. These ads look similar to the natural search results, but are normally labeled "Sponsored Links", and normally take up a smaller portion of the window.

Q: How do I get a high ranking?

A: There are four main steps:

Step 1 - Use the right words on your website
Step 2 - Get lots of relevant sites to link to yours
Step 3 - Use the right words in those links
Step 4 - Have lots of content on your site & add more regularly

Q: What is search engine optimization (SEO)?

A: Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the art of creating a website which is search engine-friendly. This means:
- ▪ using the right words in your copy
- ▪ using the right words in your HTML code
- ▪ structuring your site properly
- ▪ designing your site properly

For more information on these 4 elements, download our free 'SEO Secrets' eBook from http://www.divinewrite.com/seosecrets.htm .

Many people use SEO to also describe the other ingredient in a high ranking, 'Link Popularity'.

Q: What is link popularity?

A: Think of the search engines as a big election. All the websites in the world are candidates. The links to your website are votes. The more votes (links) a candidate (website) has, the more important it is, and the higher its ranking. Link popularity is all about how many links you have, and how you can get more.

Links to your site tell the search engines how important your site is. They assume that if it's important enough for a lot of other sites to link to, it's important enough for them to display at the top of the rankings. Links are the single most important factor in ranking. Generally speaking, the more links you have to your site from other sites, the better your ranking.

Q: How many links to my site are there?

A: Search Google for "www.yourdomain.com". (Don't search for "link:www.yourdomain.com" as this only returns a subset of the links to your site.) Then on the page that displays next, select "Find web pages that contain the term "www.yourdomain.com" ". When you do it this way, you'll see all the pages that contain your URL. In most cases, the URL will be an active link (or at least it should be... if it's not, you should ask the site owner to make it so). There are also some tools you can use

ℹ **For more information...**

- on **tools**, p.44.

Q: Are some links better than others?

A: Yes! The ideal kind of links are those that:
- come from relevant sites (sites which use the same keywords);
- come from important sites (have a high ranking);
- include your keyword as part of the visible link text;
- include varying link text (not the same link text each time); and
- come from a page that links to few other sites.

When a search engine sees a link which satisfies most or all of these conditions, it says, "Hey, this site must be credible and important, because others in the same industry are pointing to it."

Q: How do I get lots of links back to my site?

A: There are many possible ways to generate links. Some are dubious (like auto-generation software, and sites set up by webmasters simply to host links to their other sites) and I won't be discussing them here. Others, like those discussed below, are legitimate.
- Add your site to DMOZ & Yahoo Directories (and other free directories)
- Check where your competitors' links are coming from
- Article PR - Write and submit articles for Internet publication
- Swap links
- Partner websites
- Pay for links

For more information on these methods, download our free 'SEO Secrets' eBook from http://www.divinewrite.com/seosecrets.htm .

Q: What do you think is the best way to get lots of links?

A: Article PR. Write helpful articles and let other webmasters publish them for free in exchange for a link in the byline. With article PR, you don't have to pay for the link, you determine the content of the page containing the link, you determine the link text, and the link is more or less permanent. A single article can be reprinted hundreds of times, and each time is another link back to your site!

For more information, read http://www.divinewrite.com/seoarticles.htm or visit www.ArticlePR.com .

Q: How do I write a good article PR piece?

A: See http://www.divinewrite.com/seoarticles.htm .

Q: How do I get a high ranking using free reprint content?

A: See http://www.divinewrite.com/Top_Ranking_Free.htm .

Q: How long does it take to get a high search engine ranking?

A: A long time! It's impossible to say how much time you'll need to spend generating links, but you can be sure it'll be a while no matter which method of link generation you use. You just have to keep at it until you have achieved a high ranking. Even then, you'll still need to dedicate some ongoing time to the task, otherwise your ranking will drop.

Q: What is the Google Sandbox, and is it real?

A: The Google Sandbox theory suggest that whenever Google detects a new website, it withholds its rightful ranking for a period while it determines whether your site is a genuine, credible, long term site. It does this to discourage the creation of SPAM websites (sites which serve no useful purpose other than to boost the ranking of some other site).

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence supporting the theory, but there is also a lot discounting it. No one has categorically proven its existence.

Q: What is the Google Dampening Link Filter, and is it real?

A: The Google Dampening Link Filter theory suggests that if Google detects a sudden increase (i.e. many hundreds or thousands) in the number of links back to your site, it may sandbox them for a period (or in fact penalize you by lowering your ranking or blacklisting your site altogether).

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence supporting the theory, but there is also a lot discounting it. No one has categorically proven its existence.

Q: What SEO companies should I be wary of?

A: Be wary of SEO companies that promise or guarantee results in a given timeframe, especially if they won't expand on their methods for generating links back to your site.

Q: What tools can you recommend?

A: There are many very useful tools to help with your SEO. The following are just selection. All tools are free unless otherwise indicated.
  - Backlink checker - http://www.webuildpages.com/neat-o/
  - Backlinks by IP address - http://www.webuildpages.com/cclass/index.php
  - Link Popularity Tool - http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/

- Number of links required to rank - http://www.iblcheck.com/
- Google Alert - http://www.google.com/alerts?hl=en
- Google Sitemaps - http://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps
- Google Sitemap Generator - http://johannesmueller.com/gs/
- Google Toolbar - http://toolbar.google.com/
- Indexed Pages - http://www.webuildpages.com/cache/cachetoolpublic.pl
- Keyword Analysis (Nichebot) - http://www.nichebot.com/
- Keyword Analysis (Overture) - http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/
- Keyword Analysis (WordTracker - Paid) - http://www.wordtracker.com/
- Keyword Difficulty - http://www.seomoz.org/tools/keyword-difficulty-tool.php
- Keyword Identifier - http://www.googlerankings.com/ultimate_seo_tool.php
- Keyword Density Measurement (Simple) - http://www.live-keyword-analysis.com/
- Keyword Density Measurement (Complex) - http://www.gorank.com/analyze.php
- Plagiarized Copy Search - http://www.copyscape.com/
- Traffic Rank - http://www.alexa.com/
- Search Engine Rank - http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/
- SEO Report - http://www.urltrends.com/
- Top 10 sites for a keyword by no of backlinks and age - http://www.webuildpages.com/seo-tools/whoischeck-bykeys.pl
- Top 10 sites for a keyword - http://www.webuildpages.com/cool-seo-tool/
- Spider Simulator - http://tools.summitmedia.co.uk/spider/

Q: I'm confused about all the terms used in SEO, can you help?

A: See 'Glossary of Terms', p.47.

Q: What is keyword analysis?

A: The first thing you need to do when you begin chasing a good search engine ranking is decide which words you want to rank well for. This is called performing a keyword analysis. Keyword analysis involves a bit of research and a good knowledge of your business and the benefits you offer your customers.

For more information, download our free 'SEO Secrets' eBook from http://www.divinewrite.com/seosecrets.htm .

Q: Do I need to submit my site to the search engines?

A: Theoretically, no. But I wouldn't risk not doing it - especially as it's free. As soon as you register your domain name, submit it to Google! Even if you haven't built your site, or thought about your content, submit your domain name to Google. In fact, even if you haven't fully articulated your business plan and marketing plan, submit your domain name to Google.

For more information, download our free 'SEO Secrets' eBook from http://www.divinewrite.com/seosecrets.htm .

Q: Should I submit my site to the search engines more than once?

A: No need. Although some of the search engines allow you to do this, there's really no need.

Q: What are directories and should I submit my site to them?

A: Directories are websites (or web pages) which simply list lots of website and give a quick description of the website. Some are free and some require you to pay for a listing. Free directories are useful because you get a free link. However, the links aren't worth that much. Paid directories can be good if they're relevant, but they can cost a lot in the long term, so choose wisely.

One essential directories for any website is the DMOZ Open Directory Project.

Glossary of Terms

AdWords
See 'Sponsored Links'.

algorithm
A complex mathematical formula used by search engines to assess the relevance and importance of websites and rank them accordingly in their search results. These algorithms are kept tightly under wraps as they are the key to the objectivity of search engines (i.e. the algorithm ensures relevant results, and relevant results bring more users, which in turn brings more advertising revenue).

article PR
The submitting of free reprint articles to many article submission sites and article distribution lists in order to increase your website's search engine ranking and Google PageRank. (In this sense, the "PR" stands for PageRank.) Like traditional public relations, article PR also conveys a sense of authority because your articles are widely published. And because you're proving your expertise and freely dispensing knowledge, your readers will trust you and will be more likely to remain loyal to you. (In this sense, the "PR" stands for Public Relations.)

article distribution lists
User groups (e.g. Yahoo, MSN, Google, Smartgroups, and Topica groups) which accept email submissions of articles in text format, and then distribute these articles via email to all of the members of the group. See also *'article PR'*.

article submission sites
Websites which act as repositories of free reprint articles. Authors visit these sites to submit their articles free of charge, and webmasters visit to find articles to use on their websites free of charge. Article submission sites generate revenue by selling advertising space on their websites. See also *'article PR'*.

backlink
A text link to your website from another website. *See also 'link'.*

copy
The words used on your website.

copywriter
A professional writer who specializes in the writing of advertising copy (compelling, engaging words promoting a particular product or service). *See also 'SEO copywriter' and 'web copywriter'.*

crawl
Google finds pages on the World Wide Web and records their details in its index by sending out 'spiders' or 'robots'. These spiders make their way from page to page and site to site by following text links. To a spider, a text link is like a door.

domain name
The virtual address of your website (normally in the form www.yourbusinessname.com). This is what people will type when they want to visit your site. It is also what you will use as the address in any text links back to your site.

ezine
An electronic magazine. Most publishers of ezines are desperate for content and gladly publish well written, helpful articles and give you full credit as author, including a link to your website.

Flash
A technology used to create animated web pages (and page elements).

free reprint article
An article written by you and made freely available to other webmasters to publish on their websites. See also *'article PR'*.

Google
The search engine with the greatest coverage of the World Wide Web, and which is responsible for most search engine-referred traffic. Of approximately 11.5 billion pages on the World Wide Web, it is estimated that Google has indexed around 8.8 billion. This is one reason why it takes so long to increase your ranking!

Google AdWords
See 'Sponsored Links'.

Google PageRank
How Google scores a website's importance. It gives all sites a mark out of 10. By downloading the Google Toolbar (from http://toolbar.google.com), you can view the PR of any site you visit.

Google Toolbar
A free tool you can download. It becomes part of your browser toolbar. It's most useful features are it's PageRank display (which allows you to view the PR of any site you visit) and it's AutoFill function (when you're filling out an online form, you can click AutoFill, and it enters all the standard information automatically, including Name, Address, Zip code/Postcode, Phone Number, Email Address, Business Name, Credit Card Number (password protected), etc.) Once you've downloaded and installed the toolbar, you may need to set up how you'd like it to look and work by clicking Options (setup is very easy). NOTE: Google does record some information (mostly regarding sites visited).
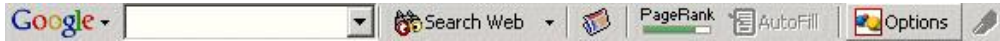
HTML
HTML (HyperText Markup Language) is the coding language used to create much of the information on the World Wide Web. Web browsers read the HTML code and display the page that code describes.

Internet
An interconnected network of computers around the world.

JavaScript
A programming language used to create dynamic website pages (e.g. interactivity).

keyword
A word which your customers search for and which you use frequently on your site in order to be relevant to those searches. This use known as targeting a keyword. Most websites actually target 'keyword phrases' because single keywords are too generic and it is very difficult to rank highly for them.

keyword density
A measure of the frequency of your keyword in relation to the total wordcount of the page. So if your page has 200 words, and your keyword phrase appears 10 times, its density is 5%.

keyword phrase
A phrase which your customers search for and which you use frequently on your site in order to be relevant to those searches.

link
A word or image on a web page which the reader can click to visit another page. There are normally visual cues to indicate to the reader that the word or image is a link.

link path
Using text links to connect a series of page (i.e. page 1 connects to page 2, page 2 connects to page 3, page 3 connects to page 4, and so on). Search engine 'spiders' and 'robots' use text links to jump from page to page as they gather information about it, so it's a good idea to allow them traverse your entire site via text links. (See 'Link paths' on p.23. for further information.)

link partner
A webmaster who is willing to put a link to your website on their website. Quite often link partners engage in reciprocal linking.

link popularity
The number of links to your website. Link popularity is the single most important factor in a high search engine ranking. Webmasters use a number of methods to increase their site's link popularity including article PR, link exchange (link partners / reciprocal linking), link buying, and link directories.

link text
The part of a text link that is visible to the reader. When generating links to your own site, they are most effective (in terms of ranking) if they include your keyword.

meta tag
A short note within the header of the HTML of your web page which describes some aspect of that page. These meta tags are read by the search engines and used to help assess the relevance of a site to a particular search.

natural search results
The 'real' search results. The results that most users are looking for and which take up most of the window. For most searches, the search engine displays a long list of links to sites with content which is related to the word you searched for. These results are ranked according to how relevant and important they are.

organic search results
See 'natural search results'.

PPC (Pay-Per-Click advertising)
See 'Sponsored Links'.

PageRank
See 'Google PageRank'.

rank
Your position in the search results that display when someone searches for a particular word at a search engine.

reciprocal link
A mutual agreement between two webmasters to exchange links (i.e. they both add a link to the other's website on their own website). Most search engines (certainly Google) are sophisticated enough to detect reciprocal linking and they don't view it very favorably because it is clearly a manufactured method of generating links. Websites with reciprocal links risk being penalized.

robot
See 'Spider'.

robots.txt file
A file which is used to inform the search engine spider which pages on a site should not be indexed. This file sits in your site's root directory on the web server. (Alternatively, you can do a similar thing by placing tags in the header section of your HTML for search engine robots/spiders to read. See 'Optimizing your web ' on p.24. for more information.)

Sandbox
Many SEO experts believe that Google 'sandboxes' new websites. Whenever it detects a new website, it withholds its rightful ranking for a period while it determines whether your site is a genuine, credible, long term site. It does this to discourage the creation of SPAM websites

(sites which serve no useful purpose other than to boost the ranking of some other site). Likewise, if Google detects a sudden increase (i.e. many hundreds or thousands) in the number of links back to your site, it may sandbox them for a period (or in fact penalize you by lowering your ranking or blacklisting your site altogether).

SEO

Search Engine Optimization. The art of making your website relevant and important so that it ranks high in the search results for a particular word.

SEO copywriter

A 'copywriter' who is not only proficient at web copy, but also experienced in writing copy which is optimized for search engines (and will therefore help you achieve a better search engine ranking for your website).

search engine

A search engine is an online tool which allows you to search for websites which contain a particular word or phrase. The most well known search engines are Google, Yahoo, and MSN.

site map

A single page which contains a list of text links to every page in the site (and every page contains a text link back to the site map). Think of your site map as being at the center of a spider-web.

SPAM

Generally refers to unwanted and unrequested email sent en-masse to private email addresses. Also used to refer to websites which appear high in search results without having any useful content. The creators of these sites set them up simply to cash in on their high ranking by selling advertising space, links to other sites, or by linking to other sites of their own and thereby increasing the ranking of those sites. The search engines are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and already have very efficient ways to detect SPAM websites and penalize them.

spider

Google finds pages on the World Wide Web and records their details in its index by sending out 'spiders' or 'robots'. These spiders make their way from page to page and site to site by following text links.

Sponsored Links

Paid advertising which displays next to the natural search results. Customers can click on the ad to visit the advertiser's website. This is how the search engines make their money. Advertisers set their ads up to display whenever someone searches for a word which is related to their product or service. These ads look similar to the natural search results, but are normally labeled "Sponsored Links", and normally take up a smaller portion of the window. These ads work on a Pay-Per-Click (PPC) basis (i.e. the advertiser only pays when someone clicks on their ad).

submit

You can submit your domain name to the search engines so that their 'spiders' or 'robots' will

crawl your site. You can also submit articles to 'article submission sites' in order to have them published on the Internet.

text link
A word on a web page which the reader can click to visit another page. Text links are normally blue and underlined. Text links are what 'spiders' or 'robots' use to jump from page to page and website to website.

URL
Uniform Resource Locator. The address of a particular page published on the Internet. Normally in the form http://www.yourbusinessname.com/AWebPage.htm.

web copy
See 'copy'.

web copywriter
A 'copywriter' who understands the unique requirements of writing for an online medium.

webmaster
A person responsible for the management of a particular website.

wordcount
The number of words on a particular web page.

World Wide Web (WWW)
The vast array of documents published on the Internet. It is estimated that the World Wide Web now consists of approximately 11.5 billion pages.

Index