

Crestec White Paper Search Engine Optimization

How to put
search engines
to work
for your business



Winter 2005

*See back page for a
FREE search engine
optimization analysis.*





Every day, internet users make more than 625 million* queries to search engines. Your ranking in search engine results determines how many potential customers will be able to locate your website!

Here is how Crestec Digital can help you improve your website rankings to increase website traffic

Search engines were originally designed to support the internet. Over time, however, they have become as indispensable as the internet itself. Today, having an online communications plan means more than just having a good website. You've got to develop an effective search engine plan, too. Poor placement in search engine results will bury even the most effective website under an avalanche of competing online messages. To cut through this "internet clutter," you've got to use search engines effectively, so that potential customers can find you fast.

Crestec Digital understands the symbiotic relationship between the web and search engines. We know it's impossible to discuss website improvement, or internet marketing, without a basic understanding of the engines that deliver the internet its audience.

We hope the following explanation and background information on search engines will be helpful in starting, or improving your online communications plan.

Anatomy of a search engine

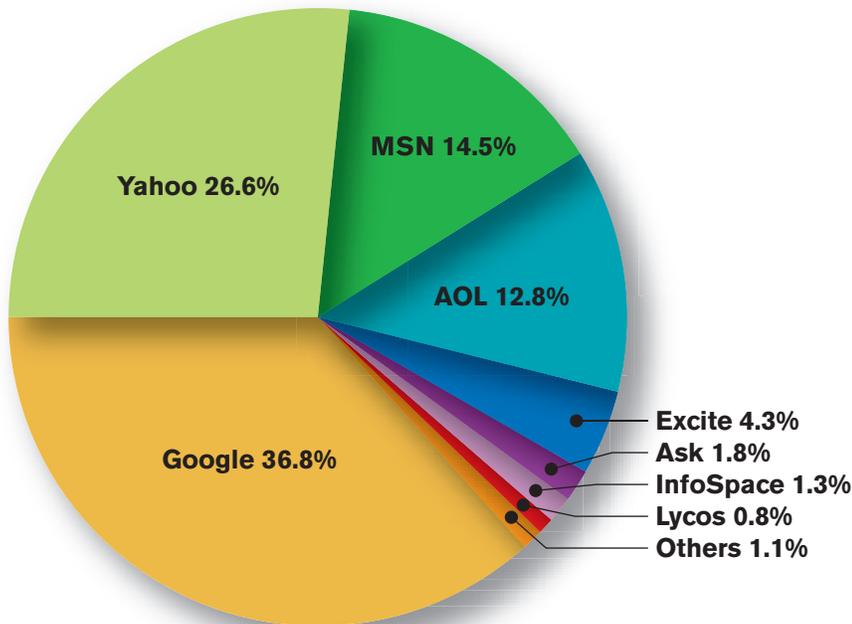
Search engines function as a kind of electronic encyclopedia, indexing information about website content, virtually into infinity. There are millions of websites on the internet and keeping track of this vast, constantly changing medium is a very complex task. To keep up with internet growth and change, the major search engines employ automated programs, known as spiders, (or "bots" as they are known at Google) to research and organize the information on the internet.

The spiders "crawl" through the web, automatically locating URLs, or website addresses, and exploring pages within the sites they discover. They follow links, scan the text of every page, and read various files, tags and codes hidden within the HTML source code. The information they gather determines a site's rank and, ultimately, where it will appear in a search.

In an effort to keep up with the ever-changing internet, search engines are constantly updating the listing data stored at their headquarters, on a monthly, weekly, or sometimes daily basis, as well as the methods used by information-seeking spiders.

* Search Engine Watch.com <http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/article.php/2156461>

The world of search engines



Google has the lion's share of the market, but Yahoo, Microsoft and AOL are significant players, too.

It is important to understand each search engine's methodology if you want to capture high rankings throughout the internet.

SOURCE: Search Engine Watch.com

<http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/article.php/2156431>

Evolution of the search engine

Historically, search engine spiders relied heavily on metatags to determine a website's content. The rapid evolution of the internet, and keyword abuse, led them to expand the criteria used for ranking pages.

Today, they consider a combination of the best search engine strategies, and look at a variety of elements when determining a website's rank. Crestec Digital encourages website owners to become familiar with search engine strategies and incorporate that knowledge into their website designs.

What does this mean to the website owner?

Through extensive research and experience, Crestec Digital has compiled an extensive list of practices to emulate—and avoid—when prepping and developing a website. When followed, these tips yield optimal website rankings, and, consequently, increased website traffic.

Although there are some basic differences between the major search engines—Google, Yahoo! and MSN—the guidelines outlined in this document will increase the chances of getting better rankings with all of them.

Whether you are contemplating the design of a new site, or making alterations to an existing one, you can benefit from Crestec Digital's advice. By merely making some adjustments to your keywords, basic website structure, or other features, you can optimize your website to attract search engines' attention, which in turn increases web visibility.



The following tips illustrate some major stumbling blocks to avoid so that your website will be just a click away from your customer!

Problems, by design

Design or set-up problems can severely impede a website's ability to get picked up by search engines. Please read on to see how the following handicaps to success can be remedied.

Frames impair spider contact

Although a framed website may be aesthetically attractive, it is not so appealing to the search engine spider that is programmed to see keywords, tags and URLs. The spider's ability to read tags can be impaired on a framed web page because spiders see each frame as a separate page, even though all the frames on a given page share a single URL. The spider records the URL, reads the content in the first frame, and then moves on to the next URL, disregarding content in the other frames on the page. Consequently, a lot of content isn't indexed by the spider.

Crestec Digital recommends excluding frames from websites in the works. If a site was already created with frames, we suggest either redesigning the site, or, if that isn't a possibility, using a no-frames tag within your frameset to ensure easy access to all of your site content for the spiders.

Dynamic URLs not so fruitful

Dynamic URLs, which are most commonly used on database-driven sites, are also problematic. Most search engines will not list dynamic URLs, because their addresses include certain programming symbols, such as the question mark, ampersand, percentage, plus, equal or dollar sign. And because pages are assigned URLs dynamically as they are served, the spider cannot search for static page URLs.

Crestec Digital recommends submitting non-dynamic URLs to search engines. If this isn't an option, we suggest altering the URL so that it is search engine readable. This can be done with the use of a number of programs, including Apache Server, Active Server Pages-Exception Digital Enterprise Solutions and ColdFusion.

Other problem areas

Sites that use Flash, image maps or JavaScript for navigation can also inhibit spiders from adequately exploring a site. Crestec Digital suggests righting this drawback through the addition of standard HTML links to the site.

The Adobe Acrobat® PDF format has become an increasingly popular way to store documents on websites. Important documents stored as PDFs can be indexed by the search engines by adding title, subject and keyword tags to the file.

On a more positive note...



Now that we've had a look at some techniques that don't facilitate easy search engine indexing, we'd like to share some important search-enhancing tips we've picked up along the way.

Keyword phrases are key

Because they are used throughout the optimization process, and enable sites to get listed accurately with the search engines, keywords are among the most important website elements. They must be carefully chosen for each individual page within a site.

Crestec Digital suggests thinking like the targeted customer, and being very specific by using keyword phrases, instead of just words. These may seem like two concepts, but they actually work hand in hand.

For example, someone that is in the business of catering children's parties should emphasize "children's parties" as well as "catering" in their code. By being more specific, their listing will also be specialized and, it is hoped, will rank at the top of their unique niche. This will enhance the quality of visitors, and help the business professional, and their ideal customer, find each other.

As with any aspect of business, it is always advisable to note what the competition is doing. This can be easily done by visiting a competitor's site, clicking on view, and either "Page Source" or "Source." Special attention should be paid to the keywords they have included in their metatags.

Tipping the scales with title tags

A title tag, in keeping with its name, is the first thing a surfer sees when the results of a search are displayed on the search engine's results page. Most engines and directories place a high level of importance on keywords in the title tag, making it the single most important factor to consider when optimizing web pages.

Successful title tags include one or two keyword phrases, resemble a descriptive sentence, and entice the browser to click through. It is important to avoid an overabundance of keywords, however, because this can be interpreted as spamming the search engines, and lead to blacklisting.

As with keywords, each individual page should be treated as a separate entity, with its own title tag.

The right copy

In a competitive online environment, it is most important to have goods behind your shop window. Once customers have searched, and clicked through a title, they need to be informed, educated, and, ideally, entertained by page copy, which is the actual text a visitor reads.

Not surprisingly, the search engine's spiders also read page copy for content. Website owners should strive to make their page copy spider friendly, by ensuring copy reads left to right, top to bottom, and that their most pertinent text is included in the first 25 words on the page.



Each page should include keyword phrases, and at least 200 words of logical, readable copy. Features, such as how-to articles, tips or tutorials, are recommended, because they increase popularity with search engines, while also attracting others to link to the site.

While all the page copy should be different, website owners should establish a one-word theme that describes the overall site, and use that on every page.

Optimizing metatags

Metatags were originally created to help search engines find out important information about sites, and were the sole determinant of website rankings. Today, they are much less prominent, but the meta keywords and meta description tags still play a role in ranking.

Crestec Digital advises that metatags should include three to four of the strongest keyword phrases that have been used throughout the site, at the beginning of the description, so they won't be cut off by shorter search engine listings. These phrases should be followed by an accurate, but attractive, content description of the page that encourages browsers to click.

Pluralize keywords and include misspellings

Although Crestec Digital always encourages accuracy, it can be useful from a search standpoint, to include popular misspellings of keywords. This goes along with thinking like the customer, and what words they might be using to search.

To that end, plurals of important keywords, as well as geographic-specific keywords, should also be included, when applicable, and placed in order of importance. Remember, the search engine pulls keywords in the order that they appear.

Website designers should refrain from using commas so words can be mixed and matched, and place tags above Javascript so spiders don't have too far to crawl.

Optimizing images via "ALT" attribute

They say a picture speaks a thousand words. But when it comes to images, the spiders are blind. They can read text, but not image files. So, it makes sense to give each image file a descriptive name, such as a short caption, that describes what it is. When you do that, the spider will understand the image file's content and respond accordingly.

Got links?

If you don't, you should. Studies show that some search engines give a boost to websites that can show a large number of inbound links. And, sites with poor stats can even improve visitation by choosing the right link partner.

Crestec Digital suggests dedicating a separate, themed page to live on the site and reciprocal links that will be meaningful to the visitor. Be careful to include links only to sites with valuable information for your customers. Nobody wants to waste time linking to sites that don't add value to their online session. The links page should be checked frequently for currency, and to ensure reciprocal partners link to your site within two weeks.

Text hyperlinks as search advantage

Even text hyperlinks have possibilities. Crestec Digital suggests including keyword phrases within the hyperlink itself for the best visibility. If this can't be done, keyword phrases should immediately follow the hyperlink in the text.

Heads up on heading tags

Although they aren't used that much anymore, heading tags can still benefit listings. Because of its position as a heading, it is assumed that relevant information would be contained within these tags. It is important, once again, to include the most powerful keyword phrases within the heading tags.

Go right to the source to expedite your listing

Once you've fully optimized your site, you will be particularly eager to get picked up by the search engines.

Crestec Digital suggests avoiding the services that claim to work with all search engines. Instead, website owners should follow search engine-specific guidelines, and submit their pages directly to their preferred search engine.



It pays to advertise

Optimization can make your website friendlier to the search engine spiders. However, you can also take a more active approach and advertise right on the search engines themselves. For a reasonable fee, search engines will post a short message and link to you right on the search result page for the keywords you specify. That way, regardless of the actual ranking your site receives in search results, your message will still appear prominently on the page when customers search for your products or services.

Expect to pay a set-up fee to start, and then a “click-through” charge for each visitor who clicks on the link to your site. Charges can range anywhere from five cents to one hundred dollars per click through, and there are many different programs available for companies with different needs. Crestec Digital offers consulting services to help you develop an advertising program that works for your company.

Some things to remember about consultants

There are a number of companies that can help you develop a better strategy for handling search engines. It's important to remember the following things when selecting a search engine strategy consultant.

- Make sure they have a track record. Find out what sites they've worked on, and how well these sites perform.
- Remember that each search engine relies on different technology, and no single solution works equally well for all search engines.
- Ask about the consulting firm's code of ethics.
- Beware of consultants that guarantee a certain ranking. The truth of the matter is that while you can make it easier for search engines to find and index you, the ranking you get is up to the search engine itself, and no one else.



Crestec Digital can provide you with a free search engine optimization analysis. We will report back to you the detailed steps you should take to improve your ranking—at no cost or obligation to you.

For more information on this free offer, please contact Jim Gowen at Crestec Digital Inc., at 856.778.3480, extension 229, or j.gowen@crestec.com.

Take advantage of our free offer to analyze your website

Crestec Digital uses the techniques described in this paper—and many more—as standard procedures in website design. We strive to bring our extensive and evolving knowledge of search engine technology to every project we undertake.

We would like to offer your business the benefit of all our experience with a free, no-obligation offer. Just let us know your website URL, and we will conduct a free search engine optimization analysis. We will report back to you with a detailed list of the steps you should take to make your site more friendly to search engines. Search engine optimization is a complex topic, and there are a lot of steps involved in improving search engine rankings. Take advantage of our free offer and get started right away.

About Crestec Digital

Crestec Digital Inc. provides web and e-commerce solutions, as well as database publishing and web-based marketing services, to regional clients and to Crestec's global customer base. Crestec Digital is a division of Crestec Company, Ltd., of Hamamatsu, Japan, a global network of companies with 20 years of experience in content management and document engineering.

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