



Do's and Don'ts of Search Engine Optimization

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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO) DOS AND DON'TS

The world of Search Engine Optimization has a colorful past of both good quality techniques and poor quality techniques, also known as Spam. Search Engine Optimizers have been categorized as White Hat or Black Hat. The White Hat techniques embrace a "Best Practices" approach to SEO. They typically work for both the good of the Web site and the good of the Search Engines. Black Hat techniques can actually harm results and devalue a web site.

This Paper will examine the techniques that fall under both sides of Search Engine Optimization. The grey area topics will not be covered. The past few years have seen great achievements in communication between Search Engines and SEOs / Webmasters. This communication has led to a much clearer path for long term successful Natural Search Engine Optimization. For more information and Search Engine Guidelines visit:

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/>

<http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/ysearch/index.html>

<http://search.msn.com/docs/siteowner.aspx>

Keywords

Do: Research and find keywords and phrases that are relevant to the Web site. Use tools such as Yahoo's Search Suggestion tool, Google's sandbox, Microsoft adCenter and adlabs, and Wordtracker.

Do: Write keyword rich articles and content. Newsletters, editorials, reviews, and white papers are good examples.

Do: Find ways to naturally incorporate keywords in the existing Web site copy. Review the existing Web page copy and look for opportunities to enhance it with keywords or expand content with keywords.

Don't: Stuff keywords where they do not belong. Repeated words or words used where they should not be are poor tactics.

Don't: Hide keywords with white on white text. This technique stopped working in early 2000.

Don't: Hide keywords behind objects on the Web site. Use of CSS and other tricks are not recommended.

Don't: Hide keywords with very small text. This strategy stopped being viable shortly after the white on white text.

Don't: Add keywords to the Web site that are unrelated to the Web site for the purpose of driving traffic. While Brittany Spears may drive a lot of traffic as a keyword, it is valueless traffic if the Web site does not have anything to do with Brittany Spears.

Meta Tags

Do: Write short titles with the most important keywords or phrases in them. A good example is "Very Important Keyword Phrase – Company Name". Short and sweet, that very important keyword phrase should be the subject of that Web page.

Do: Write unique titles for each Web page based on the content. Each Web page has the opportunity to rank for valuable keywords and provide more Search Engine Real Estate – the opportunity should not be wasted.

Do: Write short descriptions with keyword or phrases that summarize the Web page. A good example is "At our company we have been in the business of keyword1 and keyword2 for over 50 years."

Do: Write unique descriptions for each Web page based on the content. While every Search Engine does not use the meta description, it can be optimized for the ones that do.

Do: Use the keyword meta tag for only words found on the Web page. Limit the keywords in the meta tag to 12. Using this tag helps the Webmaster organize which keywords should be focused on in the content of each page.

Don't: Stuff meta tags with keywords. This abuse caused the devaluation of meta tags in the first place.

Don't: Repeat the same meta tags on every page of the Web site.

Don't: Use tags other than title, description, and keyword for purposes of optimization. The abstract tag and other creative tags are normally not paid attention to by the Search Engines.

Don't: Have multiple title tags. This does not work and may prevent the proper title from being used.

Don't: Have more than 70 characters in the title.

Don't: Have more than 180 characters in the description.

Don't: Ignore meta tags. There are many differing opinions in the Search Engine Optimization World about the value and use of meta tags. If used properly they can only be a benefit.

Alt tags

Do: Use descriptive keyword rich phrases that describe the picture and the subject matter of the page.

Do: Have the alt tag of the logo be the company name and slogan. IBM's logo on any of their Web pages should have an alt tag of "IBM".

Do: Have the alt tag of products by the product name. A picture of a blue widget should have an alt tag of "blue widget".

Don't: Stuff alt tags with keywords. A picture of a blue widget should not have an alt tag of "blue widget, blue, blue, widget, blue widget, widget, blue widgets".

Don't: Use an alt tag for keywords unrelated to the image or Web page. A picture for a red widget should not have an alt tag of "Brittany Spears".

Content

Do: Write good content with relevant and important keywords in mind. Content is king.

Do: Write articles, newsletters, commentaries, and white papers that include valuable keywords. It is very natural to write about a keyword as the subject matter and rank well because of the focus of the copy.

Do: Add fresh content on a regular basis to the Web site. The more frequently content is added to a Web site, the more frequently Search Engine Spiders visit that Web site.

Don't: Write content that is only for the purpose of a Search Engine.

Don't: Create doorway pages. This is probably the number one poor SEO technique that has been utilized.

Don't: Create machine-generated pages with fake content and inserted keywords. This is a more advanced strategy than doorway pages and is even more likely to get flagged by a Search Engine.

Don't: Repeat content. Search Engine Indexes have passed the 4 billion mark; duplicate content just wastes their resources.

Don't: Put content in jpegs or gifs because it looks better. Content cannot be forsaken for design.

Geo Targeting

Do: Add geocentric terms to keywords to target local areas. A realtor that services Denver should add Denver and other local words to all of their keywords. (Denver realtor, Denver real estate, Denver real estate development, Denver homes for sales)

Do: Add local content per area. Especially when servicing multiple regions, each geocentric focus of the Web site needs locally relevant information.

Don't: Generate pages that are identical except for a city or other geocentric term addition.

Don't: Add geocentric content for areas that are not serviced. A realtor that is not licensed in Florida should not develop content around the Sunshine State to generate leads for Georgia properties.

Web Site Architecture

Do: Use well formed HTML. HTML validators can be used to verify code.

Do: Use keywords in page names relevant to their content. A page named SEO-Dos-and-Donts.html is better than page17.html.

Do: Use keywords in subfolder names that relate to the subject matter of the division.

[Http://www.domain.com/SEOWhitePapers/](http://www.domain.com/SEOWhitePapers/) is better than <http://www.domain.com/wpfolder/>.

Do: Minimize use of subfolders of subfolders. The less complicated the structure of the Web site, the more likely it is to be thoroughly crawled and indexed.

Do: If using variables in URLs, keep them simple.
?category=search is better than
?catid=1&subcatid=15&lastpage=whitepaper.

Do: If using variables in URLs, use keywords where applicable.

Do: Link keywords and phrases within the content to other relevant pages within the site.

Do: This technique provides strategic crawling information for Search Engines while utilizing keyword links.

Do: Have every page of the Web site accessible through a link somewhere else. Orphaned pages may not be found by Search Engines.

Don't: Use Flash for an entire Web site – it is minimally indexable by a Search Engine.

Don't: Use Frames.

Don't: Have all Java navigation. Java is difficult to index and links may not be followed.

Don't: Use cloaking (serving one page to a Search Engine and another to a user)

Robots.txt

Do: Use a Robots.txt file. Add parts of the Web site that should not be crawled to it.

Do: If not using robots.txt, use the robots meta tag only for noindex, nofollow.

Don't: Use bad syntax, it could hinder crawling. Google Sitemaps provides a free robots.txt checker.

Domain names

Do: Use keywords as part of the domain name where possible.

Do: Purchase other domain extensions to protect the brand. Buy the .net, .org, .us, and other extensions so competitors do not.

Do: Use 301 redirects on non-essential domains. A 301 tells a Search Engine that the site or page has been permanently moved. This is the approved technique by the Search Engines and should transfer and link value.

Don't: Point multiple domains to the same IP. Domain.com and domain.net should not point to the same content without a redirect.

Don't: Duplicate content between domain names.

Don't: Try to create a false network of domains. Steer clear of strategies that involve building micro sites for the purpose of building links, PageRank, and results in the Search Engines.

Don't: Use sneaky Java or other technology based redirects. They may fool spiders, but are easily identifiable by a manual site review.

Search Engine Submissions

Do: Submit by hand once to the major Search Engines.

Do: Use the Google Sitemaps Program to register the Web site.

Do: Use Yahoo's urllist.txt option for large or dynamic Web sites. This file is just a simple text file of all the urls within a domain. It can be submitted through Yahoo's Site Explorer.

Don't: Use automated submission program – they are more likely to cause problems.

Don't: Submit every Web page individually to a Search Engine. Urls are better when discovered by a spider.

Don't: Keep submitting regularly to a Search Engine.

DIRECTORY SUBMISSIONS

Do: Submit to the Open Directory Project

(<http://www.dmoz.org>).

Pay for a Yahoo Directory listings (<http://directory.yahoo.com>).

Do: Pay for a Best of the Web listing (<http://www.botw.org>).

Do: Research other categories that the Web site may fit into. Submit subfolders and subdomains of a Web site if the content is unique enough.

Do: Submit to other valuable directories, especially: industry related, niche, and vertical.

Don't: Submit to directories that are unrelated to the Web site.

Don't: Submit domains that do not have unique content.

Don't: Submit to directories that are suspect as pure link farms. They are usually recognizable by silly domain names and no real purpose other than links.

LINK DEVELOPMENT

Do: Look for industry related authority Web sites to acquire links from. Judging what makes a Web site an authority is more of an art than a science.

Do: Purchase links for traffic benefits. All Web traffic does not come from Search Engines. A paid link from the Denver Post may drive a very qualified stream of visitors to the Denver Realty Web site.

Do: Use multiple sets of keywords and phrases for anchor text on external links.

Do: Link to authority Web sites near other internal links. A link to this White Paper may be near an outgoing link to Webmasterworld.com.

Do: Document link development progress and commit to regular time investment intervals for further growth.

Don't: Buy links for the sole purpose of manipulating PageRank.

Don't: Participate in free for all link exchanges or link farms.

Don't: Participate in Comment Spam (a technique that dynamically inserts links on Web pages with a comment section)

Don't: Participate in Guestbook Spam (a technique that dynamically inserts links on Web pages with a guestbook section)

BLOGS

Do: Create a Blog related to the Web site as a new communication channel. The free blog Web sites, such as Blogger.com, have automated syndication tools.

Do: Add new content at regular intervals.

Do: Add keyword rich content and links to the posts. The Denver realtor posting about a new real estate listing should link back to the listing on their Web site.

Don't: Use the Blog solely for keywords and links. Splogs (spam blogs) do not provide value to the blogging community.

The main risks of using bad or black hat techniques are Web site penalties. These penalties can range from short-term loss of positions to permanent domain bans in search engine indexes. Loss of a good domain to a penalty outweighs any benefit that utilizing a short term "SEO don't" may provide.

The aforementioned dos and don'ts of SEO present a guide to a successful Natural Search Engine Optimization project. These dos and don'ts are not set in stone and may be fluid depending on new guidelines from the Search Engines and possible malicious exploits. For the most part everything mentioned above has been stable for the last few years. Be a white hat optimizer or hire a white hat Search Optimization Company to ensure a positive future for the Web site.