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Top 10 Search Engine Tips for your Website

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Overview:

So you've got your new website up and running? It's looking good; you've got the colour scheme down to a tee, sourced best images and spent hours writing the slickest content possible. Great, but now you realise your website is lacking one thing – people actually reading the thing!

The best looking website in the world is not one bit of use to you if your potential clients/customers are unaware of its presence. This is where search engine marketing/optimisation comes into play.

The vast majority of internet traffic is driven by search engine results. Most users, when looking for a piece of information, service or item will simply go straight to their search engine of choice, type their search term and then select a site from the first one or two pages that are returned.

It is important therefore that you take certain steps to ensure that YOUR site is one of the top sites returned to customers.

What is Search Engine Marketing/Optimisation?

Search Engine Marketing and Search Engine Optimisation are both terms bandied about all over the internet these days. There are hundreds of companies out there offering to elevate your site to Google #1 for a sometimes sizeable fee. Often these companies will employ dubious techniques to gain a fast short-term elevation in search engine rankings such as link farms or keyword stuffing. These techniques are discussed later in this article but D2 Computing Ltd take the ethical approach to optimisation and avoid any techniques along these lines and recommend that you do too. Implementation of 'tricks' such as these can have exactly the opposite affect and leave your site blacklisted by the major engines further along the line.

Search engine algorithms are becoming more intelligent by the day meaning quality content that people actually want to read will win in the end. This is what we concentrate on at D2 Computing, creating quality content that will have your potential clients returning time and time again rather than a site designed to be read by a search robot.

Listed below are 10 tips to increase your search engine ranking. Many of them may seem obvious but it's amazing how often the obvious tips are overlooked and not implemented!

Top 10 Tips to help with Search Engine Placement

1. Fresh, Regular, Good Quality Content

These tips are in no particular with the exception of this one. Forget all the tips and tricks, content is everything.

Regular, frequent, good quality content updates are a must! This is often overlooked, many people put a great deal of effort into writing the initial site and then tend to lapse on the updates side of things.

Add an 'articles' or 'latest news' section to your site and regularly write or encourage your staff to write short relevant pieces to be included. Once a month is not enough! If you check any web server logs you will notice the frequency that search engine spiders will hit a regularly updated site. Not monthly but often several times a day. The search engine spider likes to find new content when it visits and makes a note to check back soon to see if any more updates are available.

If the search engines are visiting your site and notice the same old content week after week, month after month whereas your competitors site is being updated each day with a new relevant industry article you can guess who is going to get preference in the search results!

Also when adding fresh content, check the new item is visible to the search engine spiders. Place a link to it on one of your already indexed pages so the spider will follow and find your updates.

2. Inbound relevant links

Search engines, as well as looking at your own sites content, will rank your site according to how many other well ranked sites contain links pointing to you. A large number of external links to your site from other trusted sites will boost your ranking considerably.

Links should be relevant to your site content and come from a well regarded source. This is where the practise of "link farms" comes into play and should be avoided:

Link Farms: A link farm is any group of web sites that all hyperlink to every other page in the group. Most are created through automated programs and services. A link farm is a form of spamming the index of a search engine (sometimes called spamdexing or spamdexing). This is a technique often employed by less scrupulous optimisation firms who create pages and pages of sites just containing links to hundreds of unrelated sites. It is strongly recommended that you avoid this practise.

How do I get good inbound links?

Good sources of inbound links are forums and blogs, find and participate in a forum relevant to your business. For example, if you sell motorcycle products then join a few rider forums and get involved in the community. Most forums allow you to create a signature for your postings so add the URL to your site and a brief description of what you do. It is important to provide good helpful responses to postings and not just create a post entitled 'Shop at Acme Bike Stuff' blatantly plugging your site. This is seen as spam by forum moderators and will get you banned.

Also talk to your customers and suppliers, it may be that they have their own site and are willing to trade links, these sort of links are relevant and therefore highly ranked, both parties will benefit from the arrangement.

3. Good Keyword Selection

Searches work on the basis of keywords, when a user searches they will often just input a couple of words or short phrase as their search term. It is important to guess correctly what a customer searching for your particular goods or service will use as their search term.

This is where optimisation becomes more scientific – how can you guess what users are searching on and what keywords are right for your particular sites pages and how often should they appear?

When writing your website copy, first have a think about the most popular words associated with your product or service that immediately spring to mind. Write these down as a list.

Type these terms into a major engine such as Google, Yahoo etc and see what comes up near the top. View these top ranked pages to get a feel for why the content of these particular sites is so successful. Look at the distribution of the keyword you typed into the engine across the page.

Also view the META tags of the returned page (Right Click → View Source in Internet Explorer). The META tags will appear towards the top of the code within the <head> tags. It may be useful to view what list of keywords your competitors have chosen to include.

As an example, we are producing a motorcycle clothing store so we produce our list of keywords that spring to mind: 'Helmets, motorcycle gloves, motorcycle leathers' etc.

We put the term 'Helmets' into Google and view the top ranked page. We see that the term 'Helmets' is liberally sprinkled throughout the page in a natural way, not just long strings of text containing the keyword.

Keyword density is important; you want your chosen keywords to appear several times throughout the article but not to appear as if you are spamming that keyword or term. It should appear natural to a human reader.

There are optimum densities for keywords in your text copy and many tools available to recommend what changes you need to make and where. Contact D2 Computing Ltd for more info on this.

Looking at the page source code we see the following META inclusion:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="motorcycle helmets, motorcycle clothing, motorcycle parts, motorcycle accessories, helmets, clothing, parts, accessories" />
```

So we now have a few more keywords to add to our list!

We can now use a tool to determine how popular these search terms are and find any popular variations on the keywords. Many tools exist to do this but in this example we are going to use the Google Keyword Tool (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>). We type helmets into this to find out what the most popular search terms are based around this word. This returns a large number of search terms used but we see that the top are:

Helmet, helmets, motorcycle helmets, arai helmets, bike helmet, shoei helmets.

So we now know what most people are using as their search so we want all these terms in our helmet section. We will do the same for all other areas of the site. Write at least 200-250 lines of relevant copy on your pages, each with a sprinkling of the chosen keywords.

<p>Quality is King! Remember; whilst keyword choice is important do not compromise the readability and presentation of your site. Overuse of keywords and adding keywords for the sake of it makes for a bad experience for your sites users and may be seen as spam by search engines. Read all the copy you produce from the point of view of a user.</p>
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4. Title & META tags

META tags in your pages can be valuable; they are not a magic solution to placement but should by no means be ignored.

The two most common tags are 'keywords' and 'description'. The 'keywords' tag does not have the relevance it used to have in search engine placement but should still be included. The 'description' tag is more important and should include a good, keyword containing description of your page content. The description tag is often displayed by search engines on their results pages so should be worded wisely to tempt users to click onto your site rather than one of the other results.

Using the example from the previous step, the motorcycle helmet section of our site could contain tags such as:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="motorcycle helmets, bike helmets, arai helmet, shoei helmet, motorbike helmets" />
<meta name="description" content="Great deals on motorcycle helmets. Arai and Shoei bike helmets in stock" />
```

An additional page attribute is the page title. This is also displayed in the search engine results so should be altered for each page on your site to be relevant to the content.

For example our page title here should be something like "Acme Bike Gear – Motorcycle Helmets". All too often the page title is ignored and just left as something like the company name across all pages.

5. Internal Linking

Make sure that search engine robots (and users!) can find all the content you have worked hard to produce. A robot or spider will identify all the links on a page and follow them unless instructed otherwise. Ensure that all your content can be reached and there are no broken strands of the link web that makes up your site.

Use descriptive names for your links for example instead of:

```
<p>Arai helmets, click <a href="Arai-helmets.htm">here</a></p>
```

Use:

```
<p><a href="Arai-helmets.htm">Click here for arai helmets</a></p>
```

i.e. The description of the product is contained within the link itself.

6. Header Tags

When laying out your site copy, use the correct HTML tags to define which parts of your document are headers and titles. For example the HTML tag `<h1>` defines the enclosed text as a top level header and search engine spiders will read the text as such. So if you include the title:

```
<h1>Motorcycle Helmets</h1>
```

In your copy then this is saying "the following text is about..." and any keywords within the header may be given greater prominence than 'ordinary' text.

7. Sitemaps

Sitemaps are normally XML based documents which provide an 'index' of your site to search engines similar to the index of a book. They tell the engines how the link structure of your site works and points them towards any pages that may not ordinarily be found by a search spider. You can even tell the engines how often a page is likely to be updated so the spiders know to visit that area more often. Sitemaps are supported by all the major search engines but view each engines requirements as certain syntax may differ between engines.

Sitemaps are particularly useful if your site:

- Contains dynamically generated content such as online stores or database based catalogues.
- Has a large number of pages that are not well linked to each other meaning a spider may not find the pages by following links

A Sitemap is worthwhile as it reduces the risk of your pages not being indexed due to 'gaps' in your content links. Many sites offer free tools to automatically generate a Sitemap for your site.

8. Use Title and ALT attributes.

Your site images can (and should) contain an ALT tag. This is a piece of text in the HTML code designed to be used in place of the image if it cannot be displayed and 'describe' the image to search engines and the visually impaired. Use this tag! Include a relevant descriptive piece of text such as "Arai RX-7 Corsair Helmet".

Your links can contain a title="" tag and you should also use this to tell search engines what to expect when following the link for example:

```
<p><a href="somepage.htm" title="buy Arai helmets online">Click here for arai helmets</a></p>
```

9. Page File Naming

When creating new pages, choose a relevant name for the page file. Instead of naming the pages 'helmets1.htm', 'helmets2.htm' etc, use names such as 'Arai-Motorcycle-Helmets.htm'.

10. Study your Stats

Most good hosting packages should come with some form of online stats package where a graphical analysis of your website log files can be viewed. These stats can be very useful in determining where your incoming links originate from, what search keywords users are using to reach your site, what the most popular pages on your site are and also show any 404 errors thrown by missing pages or broken links.

All website packages hosted by D2 Computing Ltd include a full statistics package.

Summary

Optimising your site for search engines can be a time consuming and complex task if you follow every single trick listed on various SEO sites. If you run through the tips above you should hopefully see positive results and all are fairly straightforward to implement.

The golden rule is to write your site with your target audience in mind first and foremost – human readers, not search spiders. Don't let optimisation compromise or affect the quality of your site.