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Getting Honest With The Search Engines

By Daria Goetsch

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I spend a lot of time reading newsletters and forum postings about Search Engine Marketing. More often than not, people are asking about methods used to improve Search Engine rankings: what works, what doesn't, and what will get you in trouble.

Search Engine*:

A program that searches documents for specified keywords and returns a list of the documents where the keywords were found.

Algorithm*:

A formula or set of steps for solving a particular problem.

Frankly, no one can predict what will happen from day to day with the Search Engines. Only the Search Engine companies themselves know if the algorithms will change from one day to the next. Even the Search Engine rules change from month to month, sometimes daily. Think of the changes that have happened since pay for inclusion and pay-per-click have taken over the market for Search Engine results.

It seems so simple to try and comply with the Search Engine rules. Even though optimization adds to the basic content of a site and source code, there are ways to approach this without stepping over the line.

We personally do not use the methods mentioned below (methods to avoid, methods to be wary of) in order to play it the absolute safest way, using a long term plan in providing you optimum ranking in the Search Engines.

Methods to avoid

Keyword stuffing. "Stuffing" keywords into places where keywords don't belong, such as comment tags, image ALT tags where the keywords have nothing to do with the specific image

Getting Honest With The Search Engines

Invisible text. Text color the same as background color

Automated submissions. Using automated tools to deliver huge numbers of pages to submission pages of Search Engines

Submissions to "thousands" of Search Engines. A waste of time, since the major Search Engines/Directories drive the majority of the traffic to websites

FFA (free for all) links. Link popularity is good, but only when the links are relevant; a link from a page of random links is not worth nearly as much as a link from a site that is relevant to your site

Search Engine Marketing companies hosting your pages on their server. The marketing company

"owns" your pages, and if you decide you want to move them, you may have a hard time wresting them away. (This is not always the case with marketing companies that also provide hosting, but you need to carefully choose when using this option.)

Methods to be wary of

Cloaking

Doorway pages

Maintenance programs

Cloaking*:

Also known as stealth, a technique used by some Web sites to deliver one page to a Search Engine for indexing while serving an entirely different page to everyone else.

Cloaking is very difficult to do correctly, if you do not have an expert providing this service you could well be banned by the Search Engines. There are ways for this to be done that are accepted by some Search Engines. In general, cloaking is not always accepted by the Search Engine rules and can be a gamble unless you are certain your service provider knows what they are doing. Check credentials and get referrals from people who have used their services.

Doorway page**:

A page made specifically to rank well in Search Engines for particular keywords, serving as an entry point through which visitors pass to the main content.

Doorway pages are not accepted as they used to be by the Search Engines. A carefully crafted doorway page done by hand is entirely different from an automated doorway page generated by software. A few well-designed pages are a far cry from mass generated automated pages sent in large numbers through the Search Engine submission page, which are often considered as spam. Again, check credentials and get referrals from people who have used their services.

Maintenance programs

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There are times when a page drops from the Search Engine listings or you re–design the page which might give you a reason to re–submit the page to the Search Engine. Re–submitting your pages every month is not always necessary. Having a log stats program in place will help you see which pages are still listed, along with a monthly ranking report. If you have these tools you should be able to see if any of your pages have changed. Be wary of people who consistently re–submit your pages, since re–submission can sometimes cause your pages to be dropped if they are already listed in the database.

My own experience with a very large website I did Search Engine marketing for, showed that the older (longer) the pages were in the Search Engine results, the better for link popularity and ranking. Of course, paid inclusion can give you more security in having your web pages stabilized in the Search Engine results.

A good maintenance plan will include providing a ranking report, tweaking keywords in your source code as needed for a monthly/six month/yearly fee and may also include log stats so you can see

where your traffic is coming from and what keywords your visitors are using to visit your website.

Methods that work

Good content

Content is one of the most important items you need for your website. Once visitors arrive, you need to keep them there. Adding keyword–rich text that makes sense and serves the concept of the web page improves your ranking and keeps your visitors interested. The more text, the better for Search Engine spiders when they index a website.

Good navigation

There is nothing worse than arriving at a website and having difficulty understanding where to go for the information you are seeking. Have easy to use, clearly marked navigation so your visitors click through instead of click–away in frustration. Search Engine spiders (robots) index text and links; having good navigation is important to the indexing of your web pages.

Title/META tags

Individualized Title and META tags for each of your important web pages gives you the best chance for optimum success in ranking. Title tags are necessary for Search Engine ranking, in particular with Google's Search Engine. META tags have decreased in importance, but are worth using for clarity and search results. The META description is still used by some Search Engines as the default text indexed by Search Engine spiders for the search results. The keyword tag is the least important but is still used by some engines. My theory is, you never know when the rules of the Search Engines will change, or a new engine will want them, so take the time to include these tags in all your web pages.

Link popularity

Getting Honest With The Search Engines

Links from other popular websites back to your website are one way of increasing your site's popularity. Finding websites with similar content (but not your competitors) and high link popularity, then trading links to be posted on each site, is one way of increasing your site popularity. Good content is vitally important because visitors who stay longer while visiting a website help measure the popularity of the site in the Search Engines.

Paid Inclusion

Paying a one-time fee or (as is most recently the case) a yearly renewable subscription fee to be included in the Search Engine results. Directories also use this style of service to accept submissions. Paid inclusion does not guarantee that you will be listed with the Search Engine or Directory, but gives a shorter time-line of acceptance if they do.

PPC (Pay-Per-Click)

Overture is the most popular PPC engine. You bid an amount per keyword phrase to get the highest ranking in the Overture search results compared to your competitors.

Google AdWords Select

Google AdWords is a program that uses your chosen keywords in an ad in the Google Search Engine results in order to promote click-throughs.

Log Stats programs

Having a log stats program is very helpful in tracking your visitors, finding which keywords they are searching on to enter your website, tracking which pages they leave from and much more. Analog is a good free log stats program. WebTrends is a popular paid logs program used by many businesses.

Free submissions take patience

After paying for inclusion, try submitting to some of the secondary Search Engines and directories. Long before Google was a household word, I thought it might become popular and submitted the company website. It certainly paid off a year later when Google became the best of the upcoming Search Engines.

Another avenue to venture down are specialty directories. As the web grows larger over time, specialty directories (also known as vertical portals or "vortals") focused on your business area may help you get more link popularity and your company name out to the public.

Stay Honest

Stay honest, create good content and do your homework when hiring for services.

Using affordable Search Engine Marketing services you will add to your audience exposure on the

Getting Honest With The Search Engines

web. In this way you will always be ahead of the game and hopefully, ahead of your competitors.

*definitions supplied from Webopedia website: <http://www.webopedia.com/>

**definition supplied from Marketing Terms.com website: <http://www.marketingterms.com/>

When you are ready to put your website to work for you, it's time to contact us.

Search Innovation

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JOIN YOUR SEARCH ENGINES NOW

By Knut R. Enebakk

JOIN YOUR SEARCH ENGINES NOW by Knut R. Enebakk

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None



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