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Optimizing Online Catalog Copy for the Search Engines

By Karon Thackston

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It only makes sense. You have an e-commerce catalog site. You want lots of visitors to come to your site and buy. The best (and most cost-effective) way to do that is with great search engine placement. However, search engines are text machines, and most catalogs don't have a lot of text, so herein lies the problem.

The obvious answer is that you need more copy on each page. However, the pictures of your products are just as important as the copy, so they can't be removed to make more space. That doesn't leave a lot of room in the product description area, does it? Maybe not, but who said all the copy had to go in the description area? Who said you have to create a site the same way a paper catalog is created?

Sometimes we view our site's pages with a very narrow vision. This causes us to have an "it's always been done that way" mentality. While direct mail catalogs may be sorely limited on space and require short sections of copywriting, Web pages have infinite room for copy.

Your Home Page

Most often, online catalogs have a home page that is almost exclusively graphic. There may be short blips of copywriting here and there, but not much. Since your home page is the most important page to have optimized for the engines, you'll want to include a minimum of 200 words of SEO copywriting there. Don't panic... it doesn't have to all be in one place.

You can create a short section of keyword-rich body copy as an introduction to the site. Then, under a graphic of your new spring additions, include some SEO copy explaining why your visitors will just *have* to have these products. You can then add a sentence or two of copy under the graphics in your sidebar. Lastly, give the highlights of your customer-service program or money-back guarantee and an invitation to click further into the site to shop around, and you're all done.

Obviously, where the copy goes is dependent on your site's layout, but you get the idea. Spread the copywriting around. You don't have to put it all in one lump in the middle of the page.

Category Pages

What traditionally happens with online catalogs is that you click from the home page to a "category" page. That category page usually just has links on it to other individual product pages plus perhaps a picture or two. That's a shame because category pages are another perfect place for SEO copy.

Since keyphrases are often highly descriptive of products (i.e., crew neck sweaters, six-disc CD players, etc.), they work wonderfully on category pages. Because category pages are selective (they only show products within a certain category), they are exceptional arenas for SEO copywriting.

Let's say you have a catalog site that deals with interior design accessories for the home. One

category might be Tiffany lamps. Because the phrase Tiffany lamps is also a wonderful keyphrase, its inclusion in the category page copy comes quite naturally. This means you can create SEO copywriting for the top or middle of the page (just a short paragraph or two) and also write blips of copy for each product description. For example:

=====
The Tiffany Lamp – A Timeless Masterpiece
=====

Tiffany lamps have long been considered icons of style. While certain characteristics are constant (that's what makes a Tiffany lamp a Tiffany lamp), there is also tremendous variety. From Tiffany lamps for your floor to those made to adorn your ceilings, you'll find one reflective of your own personal taste and style.

Next you could list all the individual products (floor Tiffany lamps, ceiling Tiffany lamps, desk Tiffany lamps, etc.) and give brief, keyword-rich descriptions of each one.

Product Descriptions

When you get to the product description level, you'll want to include enticing, keyword-rich copy with each listing. However, you'll also want to include more text on each product page.

Consider that most people shopping online don't have the benefit of being able to touch, feel, smell, taste, or see the actual products. Use the lack of human senses to develop more descriptive information for your visitors.

You might also want to include any technical information you have for your products on the same product description page. Contrary to Internet myth, people don't mind scrolling one bit *IF* there is information they want to see on other parts of the page.

By reconsidering your catalog–copywriting techniques when it comes to the Web, you can get your e–commerce catalog ranked highly in the search engines. It just takes a little open–mindedness and a willingness to break free from the ways of the past. When you do, more customers and higher sales levels are bound to follow.

by Karon Thackston © 2004

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copy that impresses the engines and your visitors at

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Simple Joint Ventures Make Small Niche Sites big bucks!

By Jeff Lugeanbeal

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My friend has a website that has been online for 3 years, and each year he nets six figures.

His site is a niche site selling mostly collectible christmas ornaments. His site shows up number one at google, msn, yahoo, and a few smaller search engines for some specific keywords.

Yet his site gets very little traffic from the search engines. Why? Because there isn't much demand for his keywords on google or the other SE's even though he is number one.

So how does he get traffic and earn money?

Simple: He maintains his site for the few that find it with the search engines, making him a few hundred bucks a month, but the rest of his traffic comes from offline promotion.

His simple offline promotions are mailing a nice color catalog to his online customers.

His other potential customers come from a joint venture with a couple of jewelry stores. He simply obtains customer addresses from a few jewelry store owners and mails the catalog out. In return, the jewelry store owners get mentioned in his catalog and their websites are listed. No revenue is shared.

So you can see that the majority of his traffic and sales are from simple offline marketing because there aren't many people searching for his product directly from their computers. He has to place a catalog in their hands to get customers.

It's really that simple for him. Just imagine if you have a #1 listing in google for a high demand keyword. Tons of traffic to your site, and your simple job is to presell the customer and close the sale!

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