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Optimizing Your Website's Design For Search Engines

By Andrey Milyan

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It is a well known fact that big search engines like Google are paying the most attention to the links that point back to your website. However, that does not mean that your website design does not matter. You should take a break from looking for link partners and invest some time in optimizing your website's design; it will pay of in the long run. Below you will find some tips on how to optimize your layout in order for search engine spiders to crawl your website correctly.

Use of images in search engine optimization process.

The most important thing to understand about search engines' spiders is that they can only read text. That means that whatever text you have inside the image will not be read by any spider. Of course, website without images will be boring to look at but be careful not to put important text inside the image. It is relatively easy to surround your body text with images to make it look as if the text is part of an image without hurting your search engine ranking chances. Discuss these things with your web designer.

Create meta tags.

Creating meta tags is the next step toward successful search engine optimization. Meta tags are designed to give search engine spider in idea about your website before it actually crawls the body of the page itself. Meta data gives the spider title of your page, short description and the keywords that are relevant to that page. Notice that the word "page" is used here; spiders look at each page of your website separately. Here are some examples and explanations on meta tags:

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TITLE – that's the title of your page. Do not make it too long and don't try to put too many keywords in it. Never the less, you should have 1–2 of your major keywords in the title.

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DESCRIPTION – that's the description of your page. It should be 1–2 sentences and should make sense because search engines like Google use it when displaying your listing, along with title tag.

KEYWORDS – that's the keywords that relate to your website. Make sure you put keywords that have been used in the body of your page. If you put keywords that are nowhere to be found on your page some search engines might penalize for it and filter out your website.

Use style sheets.

Today using style sheets or CSS is a common practice but you still better make sure your website is

using one. Style sheets help you clean up your code and remove font tags that might cause problems with spiders. In the past webmasters filled pages with tons of keywords in the tiny font size and therefore search engines started to penalize for it. Using CSS ensures that all text is of the same size as well as spider is concerned; visually all fonts will look different. Now webmasters are even building the whole sites on CSS.

Image alt tags.

Image alt tags are an important part of your website optimization. Image alt tag contains text that you see when moving your mouse over the image. It is also the text that is used to describe an image if your website's visitor has images disabled. Because search engine spiders can't read text inside the image, it reads alt tag as a way to understand what the image is about. It seems that search engines are not penalizing for stuffing alt tags with keywords but be careful not to overdue it. Here is how it looks:

H tags.

H tags or headings have been known to increase website ranking for a while now. But is it really so? We have strong reasons to believe that h tags (mostly H1 tag) do not get you better ranking. They are, however, a great way to organize content of your page so it is not very surprising that some webmaster still think they can bring better ranking. Also, using keywords in H tags will increase your keyword density. So by increasing your keyword density and organizing your content, you can actually get better ranking but it is not thanks to h tags. There are a lot of website owners that complain that H tags are difficult to work with. Our advice to this is: "Don't use them if you have no place to put them or if you don't have much content to organize." There are plenty of high ranking websites that don't use H tags at all.

Your website's navigation.

Make sure it's crawlable. People often build a website but soon realize that search engine spider does not go any farther then index page. Even though you have links to most of your pages from the home page spiders might still have difficulty indexing your pages. There are several reasons why this happens:

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Your website is using JavaScript navigation menu. If you have drop down menus in your navigation then it is surely designed in JavaScript. JavaScript is not crawlable by search engine spiders, therefore spider cannot index your other pages. There are several ways to fix this problem. Try adding simple text links to your major pages at the bottom of your home page so that spider can move through your website easier. Another way to solve the problem is to create a site map and connect it to your home page with text link. This will drastically improve spider's ability to spider your website.

Your website is using Flash navigation menu. While images can at least be linked to other pages, Flash navigation is not crawlable at all. Use the same solutions that were mentioned in number one. Check your meta tags. It is possible that you are using robots tag which might be blocking the spider. Make sure that if you have one either remove it (you don't really need it, spiders will still index and then follow to other pages on your website) or put INDEX, FOLLOW inside the tag. It should look like this:

Site Map.

Site map is a very useful thing for an website. It can benefit your website in several ways. First, it will make your website much easier to index; as a general rule search engine spiders index pages much faster when you have a site map. Site map is absolutely necessary if your website is using JavaScript or Flash navigation and you don't want to get rid of it.

Site map will also help your visitors navigate your website. Some of the pages they might be looking for a berried deep in your navigation structure and site map makes them much more accessible for everyone.

In you site map you should simply place text links to all of your pages; you can organize them however you want, even group them if you like. In the link anchor text use keywords that are relative to that page, it will help spiders identify them correctly.

None

META Tags Explained and How To Use Them For Ranking

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The META tags are used to provide extra information about a web page. There was once a time where a good search engine ranking could be achieved by simply changing the value of the META tags. However these days are long gone. Nowadays the META Tags are decreasing in importance in the eyes of the search engines who are using more sophisticated methods of ranking pages (namely link popularity, optimized anchor text).

There are many different types of META tags but the one that can affect ranking are the Keywords META tag and the Description META tag.

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Keywords META tag:

This tag contains keywords relevant to a page. In the past search engines referenced this to determine how to rank a particular page. However many people started to abuse this and stuffed the tag with keywords that were not relevant to the content of the page. This confused search engines and subsequently returned weaker search results. To combat this less and less emphasis has been placed on the Keywords META tag. However this does not mean that it is entirely useless. Here are some reasons to still include it:

- * Some search engines still use it

Although most search engines do not use the tag there are undoubtedly still some that do. For this reason place around 15–20 keywords relevant to your site or page into the tag. Do not attempt to cheat the search engines by repeating keywords as this is considered spamming and they may look unfavourably on this.

- * Account for misspellings of keyphrases

People can misspell certain keyphrases that you may be optimizing for so it is common to place these misspellings into the Keywords META tag. This allows you to rank in search engine results for misspellings without having to represent them on the actual content of your page.

Description META tag:

In the past this tag was used to specify the text that would appear in search engine results alongside the link to your site. Keywords could be placed into this text to influence ranking. However it was abused similar to the Keywords META tag and has befallen the same fate, meaning it is not as useful as it once was. Some search engines do not display it in their results (most notably Google, which retrieves the text from content on your page) and do not use it to rank a site. Having said that some search engines do still use it so again it is a mistake to ignore it completely.

Descriptions placed into this tag should, strangely enough, be very descriptive of the page or site they

reside in. Include a few relevant keywords/keyphrases that you are optimizing for in the description and try to limit its length to 25–30 words. Also try to use no more than two sentences.

Summary:

Although not as important as they once were, the META tags can still influence a search engine when it comes to deciding whether your web page is relevant or not.

Keywords META tag:

15–20 keywords, include misspellings of keywords/keyphrases

Description META tag:

Include keywords/keyphrases, 25–30 words, no more than two sentences.

Frank Kilkelly is a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Expert and Webmaster at www.natural-aging.com, a complete search engine optimization resource. The highlight of the site is an www.natural-aging.com for discussion of the latest techniques and tips to improve the ranking of your web site.



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