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SEO For MSN

By Dave Davies

This is article one of a four part series on optimizing your website for the "Big Three". Part two will focus on Yahoo!, Part three will focus on Google and part four of this series will explain how to perform SEO on your website to attain high rankings across all three major engines. We are beginning with MSN as rankings are generally faster attained on this engine and thus it is a good place to begin, especially if you have a new site that is likely still in the sandbox on Google or are just at the beginning stages of link building.

Like all of the major search engines, MSN builds their index of sites using spiders to crawl the web finding new and changed information. This information is then processed by the MSN servers using complex algorithms to determine which sites are most relevant to the search query entered. This may seem like an extraordinarily complex process and it is however the resulting environment is simple: all search engine algorithms are mathematical and thus, there is a fixed set of rules and factors which, if addressed correctly, will result in a high ranking. In short, because it's math we have the benefit of knowing that if we take action x and action y we will get result z.

The Rules For MSN

Assuming that you are following the right rules, the results you can achieve on MSN can be fast and solid. MSN does not apply the same types of aging delays that the other two engines do and thus, when you change your content the change in results can be realized as quickly as they reindex your site and as quickly as your incoming links get picked. This differs greatly from Google and Yahoo! in that those two engines age both domains and links requiring a longer period of time before the full effects of your efforts are realized.

As an additional note on MSN, users of MSN are 48% more likely to purchase a product or service online than the average Internet user according to a comScore Media report.

So what are the rules for MSN that can help us get top rankings? As with all the major engines, there are two fundamental areas that need to be addressed to attain top rankings. The first is the onsite factors, the second is the offsite. Because they are fundamentally different we will address them

separately.

Onsite SEO Factors

The problem with writing an article about the onsite factors is that by the time many of you read this some of the weight these factors hold and the optimal levels noted may well be out-of-date. Thus, rather than listing overly-specific-and-sure-to-change factors we will focus on how to know what the factors are, how to get a handle on what you need to adjust and by how much, and how to predict what will be coming down the road. And so we'll begin:

How To Know What The Factors Are:

Unfortunately there's no one over at MSN Search calling us up weekly to let us know what the specifics of their algorithm are, we have to figure it out for ourselves with research, reading and playing with test

sites. From all of this there is only one conclusion that an SEO can make: the details matter. When we're discussing onsite factors this includes:

the content of the page including keyword density

the internal linking structure of the site (how the pages of your site are linked together)

the number of pages in your site and the relevancy of those pages to your main topic and phrases

the use of titles, heading tags and special formats

There are a number of lower weight factors however the ones noted above, if addressed correctly, will have very significant results on your rankings if the offsite factors noted below are also addressed.

Page Content:

The content of your page must be perfect. What I mean by this is that the content must appeal to both the search engines and the algorithms. In order to write properly for the visitors you must be able to write clearly and in language that is both appealing and understandable to your target market. While there is much debate about whether the keyword density of your page is important I am certainly one who believes that it is. It only makes sense that a part of the algorithm takes into account the use of the keywords on your page. Unfortunately the optimal keyword density changes slightly with each algorithm update and also by site type and field. For this reason it would be virtually impossible for me to give you a density that will work today and forevermore. For this reason you will need a keyword density analysis tool which you will want to run on your own site as well as the sites in the top 10 to assess what the optimal density is at this time. You may notice a variation in the densities of the top 10. This is due to the other factors including offsite which can give extra weight to even a poorly optimized site. I recommend getting your site to a keyword density close to the higher-end of the top 10 but not excessive. Traditionally this percentage will fall somewhere near 3.5 to 4% for MSN.

Internal Linking Structure:

The way your pages link together tells the search engines what the page is about and also allows them to easily (or not–so–easily) work their way to your internal pages. If your site has an image or script–based navigation it is important to also use text links either in your content, in a footer, or both. The text links are easy to follow for a spider and perhaps more importantly, the text links allow you the opportunity to tell the spiders what a specific page is about through the anchor text and, in the case of footers, allows you to add in more instances of the targeted phrases outside of your general content area.

The Number Of Pages & Their Relevancy:

MSN wants to please their visitors. For this reason they want to insure that highest likelihood that a searcher will find what they need once they get to your site. For this reason a larger site with unified content will rank higher than a smaller site or a site with varying content topics. (note: this assumes that all else is equal in regards to the other ranking factors)

When you are optimizing your site for MSN be sure to take some time to build quality content. Do a search on your major competitors to see how large their sites are, over time you will want to build yours

to the same range through general content creation or the addition of a blog or forum to your site.

Titles, Heading Tags & Special Formats:

Titles are the single most important piece of code on your entire web page for two reasons. The first is that it holds a very high level of weight in the algorithm. The second reason is that it is your window to the world. When someone runs a search the results will generally show your page title in the search results. This means that a human visitor has to be drawn to click on your title or rankings your site is a futile effort (this isn't about bragging rights, it's about return on investment).

Heading tags are used to specify significant portions of content. The most commonly used is the H1 tag though there are obviously others (or they wouldn't bother numbering them would they). The H1 tag is given a significant amount of weight in the algorithm provided that it is not abused through overuse (it should only be used once per page). Try to keep your headings short–and–sweet. They're there to tell your visitor what the page is about, not your whole site.

Special formats are, for the purpose of this article, and text formatting that distinguishes a set of characters or words apart from the others. This includes such things as, anchor text, bold, italic, different font colors, etc. When you set content apart using special formats MSN will read this as a part of your content that you want to draw attention to and which you obviously want your visitors to see. This will increase the weight of that content. Now don't go making all your keyword bold or the such, simply make sure to use special formats properly. Inline text links (links in the body content of your page) is a great way to increase the weight of specific text while actually helping your visitor by providing easy paths to pages they may be interested in.

Offsite SEO Factors

With MSN, the offsite factors are much simpler to deal with than either Google or Yahoo! MSN will give you full credit for a link the day they pick it up so link building, while time consuming, is rewarded much quicker on MSN. When dealing with MSN and offsite SEO there are two main factors we must consider when finding links:

Relevancy. The site must be relevant to yours to hold any real weight.

Quality is better than quantity. Because PageRank is Google-specific we can't use it as the grading tool for MSN however upon visiting a website it's generally fairly clear whether we're visiting a good site or not. Spending extra time to find quality is well rewarded. Also, finding one-way links as opposed to reciprocal links is becoming increasingly important and I'd recommend utilizing both in your link building strategies.

You will have to begin your offsite optimization by running link checks on your competitors to see what you're up against. This is also a good place to start for potential link partners though those of you using a tool such as Total Optimizer Pro or PR Prowler will find it far faster and more effective to use these tools.

Conclusion

This entire article may seem fairly simplistic and there's a reason for that, what we've noted above is a list of the more important areas however to save you frustration and me from receiving hundreds of

emails a few months from now noting that the keyword densities don't work, etc. I've tried to keep it general. Below you'll find a list of recommended resources. These are tools and SEO resources to help keep you updated and on top of the rankings.

Next week we will be covering Yahoo!

Resources

Total Optimizer Pro (

<http://www.totaloptimizer.com/>

) – A keyword density and backlink analysis tool.

This tool breaks down a variety of onsite and offsite factors giving you a full snapshot of how the top 10 got their positions.

Microsoft Press Room (

<http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/newsroom/msn/default.msp>

) – Read the

latest press releases from Microsoft. This may not give you the algorithm but it will tell you the direction they're going. Understand this and you'll be better equipped to deal with changes down the road.

SearchEngineWatch's MSN Forums (

<http://forums.searchenginewatch.com/forumdisplay.php?f=8>

) –

Read the latest news, feedback and discussions on the SearchEngineWatch forums. A great way to keep updated but beware, not everyone in there is a qualified opinion.

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). Beanstalk provides guaranteed search engine positioning and SEO

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) to clients from around the

world. If you're more interested in doing it yourself please visit our SEO news blog (

<http://www.beanstalk-inc.com/blog/>

) to keep updated on the latest goings-on in the search engine

world.

SEO – Search Engine Optimization You Can Do

By J. Ratliff

SEO – Search Engine Optimization You Can Do by J. Ratliff

We all know what SEO is, and it seems like it has kind of an "executive" sound to it doesn't it? The truth is, thousands of webmasters spend millions of dollars every year on SEO services. Now, I am not discounting the importance of these services.

Indeed, SEO is very important not only to the big website portals, but to your website as well.

SEO For MSN

However, I do believe that a lot of the people who spend thousands annually, do so without needing to. I have done SEO work on a dozen websites for businesses, and about 20 of my own. My secret? It's all in the software.

If you have not checked out this software, I highly recommend it.

Internet Business Promoter

(IBP) for

short. I use it everyday, not only for my websites, but also for any SEO work I do.

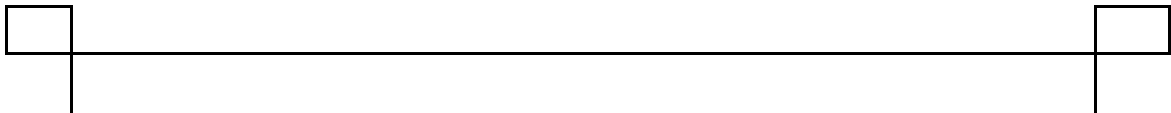
It does cost around \$200, but it is worth every penny plus some.

Save money and do your own SEO work.

J. Ratliff is a webmaster, part time SEO guru, and affiliate guru. He has achieved certified SEO status from ExpertExam.



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