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**The 11 Deadly Sins of Search Engine Optimization**

**By Jeff Palmer**

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(Common mistakes and misconceptions about search optimization and marketing)

By Jeff Palmer

There is so much misinformation floating through the internet regarding search engine marketing and optimization that it's important to shed some light on a few common errors and misconceptions. The following list highlights some of the most critical issues involved in determining the success or failure of a web site's search engine optimization and marketing strategies.

1. Lack of "Search Friendly" Content.

Every week I review web sites with no real search engine indexable content. Web pages composed mostly of graphics, flash and other bells and whistle are commonly over-looked by the search engines. Search engines determine what content is of value per web page based on the text used on that page. A truly optimized site should contain at least 200 words of keyword-dense text. There is some debate among experts on exactly how many words should be used, but generally 200 words will suffice. As a point of reference this paragraph contains about 200 words. It is equally important for text content to contain keywords that match the page titles. For example, a site selling peanut butter owned by a company called "ACME Foods" might have a title of "Acme Foods, Inc. Wholesale Food Products". We have to consider how many people are likely to search for the term "Acme Foods, Inc. Wholesale Food Products" it is much more likely that people will search for the term "peanut butter". Knowing this, we can say with confidence that it would be a wiser choice to title a page, "Peanut Butter, ACME Foods" and the page content should reflect this same keyword strategy.

2. Insufficient Link Popularity.

Search engines make every attempt to qualify the results which are displayed in search results. One of the ways that they do this is by tracking the number and quality of the incoming links to a web site. A site with a large number of incoming links from quality sites is given a higher ranking in search results. This is an important consideration that is sometimes over-looked by those attempting to market web sites. Services that promise to link your site to thousands of other sites are far from productive; in fact they can sometimes do more harm than good. Most search engines these days consider services like

## The 11 Deadly Sins of Search Engine Optimization

this to be spam, so called "link farming" and often give sites with these types of links a low ranking or drop them all—together from the search results. Incoming links to a site that compliment it and are relevant to the site contents are golden and can greatly boost a site's ranking. Google's page ranking system is a good example. A site with a page rank of 1 if given a link from a site with a page rank of 8 can see its page rank boost to 4! Link popularity is one of the most time consuming and difficult aspects of search engine optimization. It's no wonder that many of the search engines give so much importance to this web site measurement.

### 3. Lack of Keyword Research And Updates

So, you have a web site. Do you know what pages in your web site are generating the most interest? Do you know what terms people are searching for that result in them finding your site? Probably not. Let's use the peanut butter analogy again. You own a web site that sells peanut butter. You spend

some money on paid search advertising, logically; you assume that the key phrase "peanut butter" is a prime candidate to target. What happens? usually one of two things, one, the term peanut butter is such a popular search term that thirty million other web sites are competing for the same key phrase. Two, the term peanut butter is so unpopular that it's unlikely that it's searched for more than once in this lifetime. Proper keyword research can solve these problems. Let's say for the sake of argument that keyword research is performed and that it is determined that a significant number of people are searching for "organic peanut butter". It just so happens that our peanut butter company manufactures a whole line of organic, all natural peanut butter. We have discovered a niche. The right amount of people searching for the specific product that we want to sell. It's the perfect match. So, what must be done to capitalize on our findings? First we optimize our web pages for our target keyword, we change the title, and the content so that they include the term "organic peanut butter", then we scrap all of the paid search advertising that wasn't working and focus on targeting our "organic peanut butter" market. The point is, successful search engine marketing relies on constant research and updates the internet is fluid and evolving. What works today might not work tomorrow, we have to be able to identify strengths and weaknesses in our internet marketing campaigns and must be prepared to research, update and adapt.

### 4. Designing First, Optimizing Later

I have seen this mistake repeated hundreds of times. Even experienced web designers fail to consider the results of design decisions on search optimization until it's too late. What is the point of spending thousands of dollars for a well "designed" web site if nobody ever sees it? Consult a search engine specialist early in the design process. Even if your web site marketing strategy relies heavily on paid search advertising a consultation with a professional optimization expert may expose flaws in your site's layout. Points in the flow of information that tend to cause users to lose interest or become confused may become apparent, better to address these issues early on.

### 5. Relying Too Heavily On Paid Search Advertising

This is a mistake made by Fortune 500 companies and small businesses alike. The fact is that most businesses, small and large aren't getting it right.

The rationale is that since search advertising can be purchased it isn't necessary to focus on search optimization techniques. On the surface this might make some sense, you can buy certain keyword phrases that people are searching for, so why bother optimizing your site for the search engines? For a

## The 11 Deadly Sins of Search Engine Optimization

company with a huge internet advertising budget this means spending huge amounts of money to drive traffic to their sites, when, if their site had been properly optimized from the beginning, these costs might be half as much for the same amount of viewers. For many smaller businesses trying to compete in the internet marketplace simply becomes overwhelming. While paid search advertising is a highly effective means of targeting an audience, organic search optimization greatly increases the chances of success for any web site. Make sure that the site you are advertising is one that people can find easily without the assistance of a paid search campaign.

### 6. Not Supporting the Conversion Process

A few weeks ago my wife decided that she wanted to buy some Australian made baby clothes that we can't find here in the states. So being the internet savvy father to be, I decided to have a look on the internet for the particular brand she was interested in. I surf to a search engine and type in the brand name. A few seconds later I'm greeted with a list of web sites that supposedly have what I'm looking for. I click on the first site in the list. I find myself at the site of a clothing importer based out of California. There are links to several categories of clothing, none of which seem to have anything to do with babies, eventually after a lot of searching I find a link on the children's clothing page for infant garments. The infant garments page has a few images of clothing but not the brand I'm looking for. I

look to see if there is way to search for clothing by brand name. There isn't. I look to see if there is a list somewhere on the site of brand names carried by this distributor. There isn't. I look to see if there is a toll free number to call. There isn't. The internet optimization part of my brain is boiling by this point, so to add insult to injury I go back to the children's garments section of the site. I click on a link to purchase a bright green jacket. I'm confronted with a page that is requiring me to fill in a bunch of personal details. Ok, so I fill in the details and click submit. Now I find myself back at the bright green jacket page. Apparently now I'm qualified to purchase something. I click the "check out" button. The web page goes blank. I know that this is the result of bad programming. I know what's going to happen next. "Error 404 page not found". Has this type of thing happened to you? If you have ever tried to purchase something on the internet, I'm sure it has. This is an illustration of a web site that is well ranked in the search engines but has not taken the time to create a site that is designed for its users. I was forced to hunt through the web site to try and find what I was looking for. The flow of information was counter-intuitive. There was no online support. All-in-all the whole site was a joke. I would be surprised to learn that the site in question made any sales at all, ever. There were several points in this online experience that I felt like giving up. In the industry this is known as "abandonment", This is a critical point in what is known as the "conversion process", the act of turning web site viewers into online purchasers. This is an issue that should never be underestimated. In fact it is the number one factor that determines a web site's success or failure. A web site with a million dollar marketing budget and millions of visitors will not succeed unless it serves to understand its user's needs and anticipate its viewer's questions.

### 7. Graphics Used For Text Links.

Web designers often use graphics to represent a link in a web site. There are many reasons for this choice. Unfortunately for web designers, the major internet browsers display web pages in different ways. Since fonts display differently on individual computers and in different browsers, it is a much simpler proposition for designers to create graphic links than it is to attempt to create cross-browser text links. The downside to this work-around is that search engines have no idea if a graphic link

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relates to a specific web page or a link to download the latest Britney Spears MP3. For search engines to understand what a link is truly representing, they need to find words in plain, good old fashioned text. If a web site must use graphics for navigation it is important to include a set of plain text links somewhere on the web page, usually at the bottom of the page.

### 8. Use of Frames.

Search engines have a hard time indexing sites that are created in frames. Framed sites use several html files to display one page. Search engines are often confused by the frames method of creating web sites, usually only indexing the first html file within the frame. Pages that aren't indexed will never show up in search engine results. Also, many people that use the internet regularly for research and purchases, so called "power users", tend to avoid sites built with frames, especially those sites which require the user to scroll content in separate frames. Simply put, frames are bad.

### 9. Splash Pages.

Entry pages that instruct the user to "Enter", usually decorated with a large graphic or a flash animation. The index page of a web site is the one that search engines read first. More often than not the only readable content on this type of page is a link that says, "skip intro" Splash pages lack indexable content, usually contain no links and often contain a "redirect" to the real home page. Search engines do not like redirects, they want the real thing. Avoid splash pages unless you aren't serious about being found by search engines.

### 10. Submitting To 10,000 Search Engines

I sometimes have a difficult time believing that these services are still making money, more importantly that people still think that they work. The fact is that a handful of search engines account for about 90% of all the web traffic generated and the rest comes from people typing in a web site's URL indirectly into their browser's address bar. The amount of viewers generated from these Mega-Search Submittal services is so negligible that it's hardly worth consideration. Don't waste your time or your money.

### 11. Not Clearly Defining Action Points

Another mistake that is repeated quite often is the failure to clearly define what the objectives of a web site are. What are the main goals of a site? Who will the primary audience be? What actions are desired of the site's visitors? If these questions aren't answered prior to designing a site they will reflect a poor user experience in the final result. Action points or calls to action are a terminology handed down from the traditional marketing world. They serve to define a desired action and are often supported by persuasive sales copy. Though the basic concepts are the same as traditional marketing, calls to action can take many different forms on the internet. Often they appear as links or as part of a shopping cart. The nature of a web site determines its type of action point. The most important thing to consider is that without them, viewers have little or no idea what the purpose of your site is. Imagine an infomercial running a half hour long advertisement on television, yet the commentator says nothing during the whole ad, just stands there holding a cardboard box, you are left trying to guess what's inside, the advertisement offers no explanations or means of contacting the company involved. Pointless isn't it? This is exactly what a web site without clearly defined points of action accomplishes; nothing. It's an exercise in futility.

## 7 Deadly Sins of Distributor Web Sites

By Jeff Gilman

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Survey of Distributor Web Sites in the HVACR Industry

Survey shows how web sites DID NOT try to sell. Examples include; few placed featured merchandise in best web page selling space, few offered 'scratch and dent specials', and few provided resources for existing high volume customers. Complete text at [http://www.marketingforidiots.com/distributor\\_web\\_sites.htm](http://www.marketingforidiots.com/distributor_web_sites.htm).

Mr. Gilman has extensive management information systems experience gained in several capacities. He has held the positions of Senior Consultant with KPMG Peat Marwick, performed project management for the U.S. Agency for International Development, and was the Office Automation Project Manager for the Health Care Finance Administration and the Integrated Services Office Automation Architect for Saudi Telecom



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