SEO Checklist Worksheet

Overview

With over 80 percent of website traffic coming from search engines, it's no wonder we are often asked the question "How can we get a better position on the search engines?" Still, with all of the attention on Search Engine Optimization (SEO), companies are not investing enough of their marketing effort/budget on SEO. In fact, while most companies consider SEO important to their marketing success, very few are actually doing it (some studies show fewer than 40%), and those who are...not completely.

Search engine optimization (SEO) means ensuring that your web pages are accessible to search engines and structured in ways that help improve the chances they will be found and listed as close to the top of the list as possible. How do you stack up?

Meta Tags: Page Titles, Descriptions, Keywords

When a search engine visits your website it will first look at your Page Title, Description, and Keyword Meta Tags. Before submitting your website to the search engines, pay close attention that your Meta Tags for each page are descriptive and accurately reflect that page's content. While the list of keywords in your Meta Tags were once a key element to optimization, it is now more important to be sure each page includes your keyword, or keyword phrases, up to three times within the page content itself (or at least 3-10% page density). Also, search engines will check for keywords near the top of a web page, such as in the headline or in the first few paragraphs of text of that page. They assume that any page relevant to the topic will mention those words right at the outset. SO, as far as the Meta Tags are considered, the most important are the Page Title and Page Description, so pay close attention to how those are treated in the code of EVERY page.

Content and Structure

First and foremost your site's pages must contain "quality" content. Quality is defined by the degree of usefulness the content has for the expected visitors, comprehensiveness of that content, the direct relation of that page's content to the Meta Tags in the code of that page, and the quantity of content (Websites with fewer than 100 pages are going to have difficulty with top ranking).

Also, don't build your site with frames or extensive use of Flash, as generally these design options are not able to be spidered by the search engines' robots. And while dynamically generated sites using technology such as ASP, Cold Fusion, and PERL, can have a great impact to the site's functionality, they can cause issues for search engine placement because the pages don't actually exist until a visitor triggers the page and a search engine spider doesn't trigger a page when it crawls the code. The other problem is that this type of technology adds question marks into the URL and many spiders can't read a link past the "?" in a link. There are technological ways around this, but it can be tricky. If you're going to use dynamically generated web pages, be sure you've addressed these issues first.

Limit your use of graphic representation of text. Spiders can't index images, so even though graphics help you control the "look" of the text, you will want to avoid using them when representing your keywords on that page.

Finally, the content on your site must also be accurate and updated regularly. As your home page is often the first page to be spidered, be sure to design it to be the page that is updated monthly with new information and news. Also, consider using your

company name as often as possible, rather than the more casual use of "us" and "our." Basically, follow the rule of thumb of always getting specific…not "our products", but "our sales and marketing tools."

Link Strategy

Multiple links from RELEVANT third-party sites to your site are very important for many of the search engines. The search engines do give you points for quality links so linking for linking sake is not the answer here. The major search engines use link analysis for search ranking, which is the process of determining the relative importance of each link pointing to your website and in some cases the context of the link. This is vastly different from earlier days, when search engines factored sheer popularity into their algorithms.

A solid link strategy is essential for top search engine placement, but takes significant time and effort to complete. The first step is to identify the potential sites you want to link from and to set up a place on your site to reciprocate. Then contact those sites and ask them to include you on their site (consider paying for this "sponsorship" and/or bartering for it). When you post links on other sites, remember that text links are important to include alongside logo links and the text of the link should be the keyword or keyword phrase(s) for which you are optimizing.

Finally, be sure to cross link within your own site (use "anchor text" for each link). Many of the robots will follow links from your site to other areas of your site and index those areas. For this reason, add a site map from your home page that is a text-only link outline of your entire site. Again, the text of the link should be the keyword or keyword phrase(s) you are optimizing for.

Submission

The final step to optimization is submitting your site to the search engines and directories. You can do this yourself to the three majors—Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

The bottom line? Search engine optimization is a tedious, but necessary task. And, it can take a few months to see tangible results. Depending on the importance of search engines to your marketing strategy, you may want to consider hiring an expert.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Checklist

√	META TAGS: PAGE TITLES, DESCRIPTIONS, AND KEYWORDS
√	**Page Titles**
☐	Unique page titles for each page.
☐	No more than 5-10 words.
☐	One of your main keywords within the Page title text and no more than 3 main keywords/phrases
NOTE:	*Page titles are important to search engines and are what shows in the visitor's "bookmark" feature of the browser.*
√	**Meta Description Tags**
☐	Meta description tags are compelling and include keywords and phrases for that page (This is what visitors see in the search results).
☐	Meta description tags are 20 to 30 words, start with several strategic keywords and apply to the specific page.
NOTE:	*The tags should be specific and put the most important words first in case the engine stops scanning after the first few words and cuts off part of the description when listing.*

√	CONTENT AND STRUCTURE
☐	Text that is near the top of each page, beginning paragraphs, or headings contains the keywords used for that page.
☐	Site balanced heavier to text than graphics and text as graphics (rather than HTML) are limited or not used. Note: BING likes content-rich pages, at least 300 words of text per page.
☐	Add an ALT = tag for each graphical image on your site. This will also help visitors who turn off graphics when viewing websites
☐	No frames or intros and/or limited use of flash on site. (If this is a must, have a "skip intro" or "view this site in HTML" option
☐	No redirect pages or cloaking (pages, text or links that can be viewed by search engines but not visitors). Redirects, if needed, should be 301 redirects. This tells the SE's that this page has changed URLs. It is meant to be temporary.
☐	If built as ASP, PERL, or COLD FUSION, "?" in URL has been addressed.
☐	Create an XML sitemap file for Google, BING, and Yahoo.
☐	No pages "Under Construction". If needed, use 301 redirect (after 15 or 30 seconds)
☐	No multiple pages, subdomains, or domains with substantially duplicate content.
☐	Utilize the Robots Meta Tag and Robots.txt file to guide the engines. Use the <meta name="robots" content="index,follow"> tag within the header code to indicate you want the robot to index that page and follow the links on that page.
☐	Text links contain relevant keywords for that page whenever possible.

√	LINK STRATEGY
☐	A <u>minimum</u> of 3 links to your site from other RELEVANT websites (links from web pages that are read by your target audience and have title and description tags that reflect their relevance). There is no limit to the number of outbound links you provide, if they are relevant, meaningful and not broken.
☐	Text links are included, in addition to logo links.
☐	Only one URL is used for links.
☐	Site includes cross-links within site. Many of the robots will follow links from your site to other areas of your site and index those areas. For this reason, consider a site map that is a text only link outline of your entire site as well as secondary text navigation.

√	MAINTENANCE: SUBMISSIONS, UPDATED CONTENT, ACCURACY
☐	No Broken Links. Example: 401 not found etc.
☐	Clean, Validated HTML.
☐	All content updated regularly with fresh, original content. New and relevant content is critical in SEO success from Google to BING. If you don't have a content strategy in place, you need one.
☐	Post new press releases immediately upon issue, and give an excerpt on home page.
☐	Refresh schedule for adding new content (minimum weekly). This includes blogs, home pages, and enewsletters. One of this vehicles needs to be fresh and original each week.
☐	Submission to search engines or until indexed. Check if indexed by typing your URL into search box.