



More Info: Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

More information than you felt like reading at the moment

People want easy answers. When it comes to search engines, they are sorely disappointed.

The only easy answer is that there is no easy answer. If you have a bit of tolerance for technical detail and jargon, read on.

The realm of search engines is extremely complicated, and you can throw a lot of money into a black hole if you listen to the spammers who claim to be able to guarantee placement, and who claim they can register your site with thousands of search engines.

The main problem is that each search engine rates and indexes pages differently, all using a complex algorithm that computes keyword frequency (in the body of your page, in your domain, in your page title, in your meta tag keywords, in the alt tags on your images, in the comment tags of your page, etc.), link volume (how many sites link to yours), the results of past searches, traffic volume, human-based indexing, etc.

People want easy answers.

When it comes to search engines, they are most often sorely disappointed.

Another part of the problem is that the engines are constantly changing how they index and rank sites--they're constantly in battle with porn sites and other spammers who try to convince the engines to bring up their porn or used-car site when a searcher types in "meatloaf recipes."

If you try to get too aggressive with your optimization (by loading up your meta tags with keywords or hiding keywords in white text on a white background at the bottom of your page), you run the risk of getting blacklisted by some of the search engines--they despise anything resembling spam.

So you have to know what you're doing. On the other hand, "knowing" what you're doing can be a dangerous thing--a 20-hour effort (or \$5000 outsourced effort) at massaging keywords and page titles and alt tags and third-party links and comment tags and doorway pages might move you from Result # 232 to Result # 142 on a Google search.

Where, exactly, did that get you?

Of course, for some business models the ROI offered by SEO (and other meaningful acronyms) supports an aggressive approach, at which point a relationship with a legitimate SEO provider may be warranted. Because improving your search engine performance can be done.

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Background: Search Engine Myths

Myth #1: "We can GUARANTEE search engine results."

Despite what anybody says, there are no guarantees. You can certainly purchase preferred listings, but don't think you'll never get outbid. The main problem is that each search engine rates and indexes pages differently, each using a complex—and different—algorithm that computes keyword frequency (in the body of your page, in your domain, in your page title, in your meta tag keywords, in the alt tags on your images, in the comment tags of your page, etc.), link volume (how many sites link to yours), link relevancy (how long users stay on your site after clicking through to it from a search engine results page), the results of past searches, traffic volume, human-based indexing, etc.

Another part of the problem is that the engines are constantly changing how they index and rank sites—they're constantly in battle with porn sites and other spammers who try to convince the engines to bring up their porn or used-car site when a searcher types in anything from "meatloaf recipes" to "astrophysics."

Myth #2: "We'll register your site with 10,000 search engines."

Okay, technically not a myth (though I'd be hard-pressed to believe that 10,000 search engines actually exist), but about 15 search engines run 95% of the searches conducted on the world wide web. Are you really going to spend money worrying about the other 5%?

Myth #3: Re-registering your site with search engines regularly is the best way to assure results.

Getting aggressive with search engine companies is a great way to irritate them. Don't forget that logging and indexing sites costs them time and money. If you're badgering them on a weekly basis, you (and the thousands of other web site owners who do this) are increasing their cost of doing business, and potentially negatively impacting the accuracy of their databases. Not a good idea.

They DO have the power to zap your site from their database.

Myth #4: Placement can happen quickly.

Search engines rely on a number of different processes for logging and indexing sites—some electronically, some manually (with actual humans doing the verification). Just like anything else, these processes take time, and with literally millions of web pages cluttering the world wide web, the registration and optimization process can take months. Some of the engines will even tell you to wait up to eight months before expecting results.

Myth #5: Optimization is easy—all you have to worry about are keywords, meta tags, and page titles.

Few, if any, search engines these days rely solely on keywords and meta tags as placement criteria.