

10 ESSENTIALS FOR OPTIMIZING YOUR SITE FOR SEARCH ENGINES



Executive Briefing Series

June 2007

By: Jim Smith, YCHANGE International

YCHANGE assists start-up and expanding small businesses with the planning and paperwork needed to get going. YCHANGE has the right people, skills, industry resources, business-planning expertise and track record to help your company achieve its business goals quickly.

Optimizing Your Site for Search Engines

Most of the top search engines and crawlers will find your site without your having to submit it. They will find and index any page on a site that is designed properly to achieve top ranking. So you want to make sure that your site is search engine optimized. This article gives you some of the basics of Search Engine Optimization..

1. Page Title

The crawlers always look first at the Title Tag or the text that displays in the reverse bar of the browser when it lands on a page. The title is also used to describe your page when someone adds it to their "Favorites" or "Bookmarks" lists. So you want to make sure it relates to what you do or how you want people to remember your business. You need unique text describing the unique subject matter of each page since the different pages deal with different material on your site (10 to 15 words, 80 characters maximum).

2. Page Description

Some search engines and crawlers support the meta description tag and look at the text, generally, 200 to 250 characters to index it, although only a smaller portion of this amount may be displayed. Remember that search engines can change how they treat meta tags at any given time. Google, for example, typically ignores the meta description tag and instead will automatically generate its own description for this page based on content from the page that best matches the user query. If your meta description is the best match for the user query, Google may show that in its results. Other search engines may support the meta description tag partially.

3. Keywords

The meta keywords tag allows you to provide additional text for crawler-based search engines to index along with your body copy. Not all of the crawlers support this tag which just reinforces the information in the body copy. Remember, if you don't use the specific words on the page, then just adding them to the meta keywords tag is extremely unlikely to help the page rank. The meta keyword tag is also sometimes used as a way to help your page come up for synonyms or unusual words that don't appear on the page itself.

4. Site Navigation

If at all possible, you should consider a site map with text links to help visitors find what they are looking for and to point the crawlers to all of your internal pages. Try not to use frames as they tend to be difficult for the crawlers and avoid javascript and image map links. Include a static html site map and xml site maps and add a robots.txt page.

5. Page Content

Search engines try to find the best content that describes a keyword or phrase so you need rich content high up on your pages to make it easy for both your visitors and the crawlers. Try to use keywords in H1, H2 and H3 headlines and easy to read text. Include your geographic location so that you can be found easily in local searches. Avoid Flash animation and use images sparingly because the crawlers can read text not Flash and images.

When crawlers find the same content in multiple pages they tend to rank the best page and put the rest into a supplemental index that is never looked at again. Use unique title tags and publish articles first on your own site before you submit them for mass distribution.

6. Optimize Your Code

Crawlers move through your 'code' (your page) looking for your content so you want to have your content as high up the page as possible. Avoid wherever possible javascript and CSS and if not then place them in external files and call them from a single line of code.

7. Domain Stability

Try not to move your domain too often as you appear to the crawlers to be a SPAMMER. Try to stay with the same host and get if at all possible a dedicated IP address so that you don't have to worry about losing the address because one of your sharers did something inappropriate and the address became banned.

8. Links

The number of links pointing to your site helps establish your importance and rank. The quality of these links are even more important than the quantity so try to get back links from quality sites using your keyword text in the links.

9. Competitive Sites

Search your keywords to see your competitive sites and analyze what they are doing. See who links to them and try to understand why. Try getting the same links.

10. Web Analytics

Keep track of the number of unique visitors to your site, Hits are not as important because they just simply denote the number of times a page has been pulled.

Check your statistics frequently and try to understand who is visiting and why.

Jim Smith is CEO of YCHANGE International, a Portland, Oregon, based management consultancy. Jim can be reached at 503-922-0784 or by email at: jsmith@ychange.com.