

Creating "Search Engine Friendly" Web Pages

Audience

When creating a Web site, you should consider the following audience categories:

1. End users/target audience

Of first priority, the Web site must speak to those who are visiting it. Web site design, organization, layout, and content (text) must be created with you audience in mind. In general, people visiting your site either know you or don't know you.

Visitors who know you will most likely get to the site with a bookmark or by typing your address into a Web browser.

Visitors who don't know you will find you by manual referral (e.g. by hearing about you and then typing your address into a Web browser), with a referral link (e.g. from another Web site), or via a search engine result.

Visitors from search engines can be broken-up into two groups:

- a. New visitors - people searching for products and or services who have never been to the site. This group is very important with regard to Search Engine Marketing. Keywords reflecting your products and services will capture this audience.
- b. Referral clients - people who have heard of you through advertising or word of mouth. As far as copywriting goes, this group is similar to the first group. For search engines, you want to be found for keywords specific to your company name and for trade names.

2. Automated search engine robots (a.k.a. spiders or crawlers)

Web site pages must be addressed from the viewpoint of search engine robots that will "crawl" the site, indexing content and code by keyword phrases present. This determines your ranking in regular search results for relevant keywords.

3. Search engine editors

Web page content must be written with search engine editors in mind.

- a. Major search engine directory editors – The major directories (Yahoo!, LookSmart, and Open Directory) are extremely important. A suggested title and description is submitted for approval. The editors of these directories will evaluate the site to determine if the submitted title and description are accurate. Of particular importance is the home page content. In general, you want your most important two or three keywords prevalent in the submitted listing and on the site.
- b. Paid placement search engine editors – Once the site is complete, targeted keyword phrases can be "bought," ensuring top search engine placement. These paid listings (that appear above regular search results) send the user directly to the page relevant to the keyword phrase utilized. The editors at the paid placement search engines will deny a listing if the page content is not relevant to the keyword phrase.

Every Page is a Doorway into the Site

When designing the site and copywriting, always keep in mind that each individual page is an entryway into the site. Search engines rank and display *pages* in search results. Many visitors will get to the site through a page other than the home page. Navigation must be such that someone can easily find their way "out of the weeds" to information they want.

Getting a Page to Rank Well

For search engine marketing, it is a good practice to treat each page as a "mini site" about one or two main keyword phrases. This "mini site" then is linked to other "mini sites" with the same navigation and look and feel. Keywords on other pages are different, but related.

In the end, each page should be about one subject, or topic. This topic will have a few keyword phrases associated with it that are commonly typed into search engines. When writing copy for a page, a good rule of thumb is "if you change the subject, change the page."

Page content and code should include these keywords in specific areas, with end user message the first priority.

Keyword Placement

For search engines, the most important placements for keywords, in order of priority, are:

1. **Page Title** – This is HTML code that is visible at the top of the browser window. Also, the title is the text that appears when someone bookmarks the page. It provides a brief description of what the page is about – it should include the page’s main keywords, and should very nearly resemble the main heading on the page. For search engines, the page title is the most important information for ranking a page. Normally, the page title is displayed as the title of a search engine result listing.
2. **Link text** – When linking to another page, the “clickable” text is extremely important to search engines. The link text should include the keyword(s) for the page that you are linking to. The text surrounding the link is also important. Additionally, utilize the "link title" text to include keywords (e.g.: `Search Engine Optimization`). Link title text will be displayed when the link is moused-over.
3. **Headings** – Paragraph headings (which are a special tag in HTML) should include keywords wherever possible. Bigger headings have more relevance. It is a good habit to duplicate the Page Title in a big (H1) heading at the top of the page. Smaller headings (H2,H3,etc.) have less relevance, but are still important. Follow-on paragraphs should also have keywords, where possible – this is good place to use keyword phrase variations. In general, start each paragraph off with a heading.
4. **Paragraph content** – Sprinkle the keyword phrases liberally throughout copy. Rule of thumb – as much as possible without making it sound “stupid.” When possible, **bold** keyword phrases in paragraph copy. The content in the first paragraph is most important – it should closely approximate the Meta description (below).
5. **Image “Alt” text** – Alternative, or “Alt” text is text visible when an image is moused over. It’s designed for people who have images turned off, so they know what the image is about. It’s also important to those surfing via handhelds that don’t display images. Some search engines place more relevance on this text. Alt tags are not part of page text.
6. **Meta Description** – This is a narrative description of what the page is about – it is seen only by search engines. In general, it should approximate the page’s first

“intro” paragraph. The Meta description is sometimes used by search engines to help determine page rank, so it should be rich with the page's relevant keywords. Additionally, the Meta description, in some search results, is the descriptive text displayed under the page title. So, a succinct, eye-catching message describing the page is important.

7. **Meta Keywords** – This is a list of keywords relevant to the page seen only by search engines. Meta keywords are not part of page text. Although the importance of keywords has greatly diminished over the last couple of years, they may play a part in determining page rank if they strongly support the page content. So, **be very selective** when adding words to this tag. Don't waste time calculating density and meeting Meta keyword character specifications. Just focus on backing up the actual content on the page, or using synonyms and misspellings.
8. **URL** – File names of your pages and your URL can be extremely helpful if they incorporate keywords.
9. **Visitors and link popularity** – the number of visitors to your site is taken into account by some search engines. This is very much a chicken-and-egg situation and it can be hard to break into the loop if this is considered. Some also factor in the number of other sites that link to yours (link popularity). The presumption is that if a lot of other sites link to you, you must provide useful, respected information.