

# **SEO - the Basics**

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## Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – Where to Start

Design your website first and foremost for your visitors. Design and content are the top priorities. The website has to be easy for your visitors to understand and navigate. The page should be easy to scan (most people will not read it all) and the major component of every page should be the text.

Don't use crazy color schemes that are hard on the eyes or add fancy add-ons because they seem "cool" as many people won't want or like them. Be careful who you'll alienate. Remember the easiest pages to read have white or light backgrounds and dark text. People are very visual, so pictures are good, but make sure you have optimized them to load quickly. And do not rely too heavily on pictures – as text is necessary for search engines as well had for the visually handicapped. Today, also, many are using hand-held, text only browsers. You want to be accessible to as many people as possible no matter what device they use to reach you.

A "clean" website will be accessible to multiple browsers and will be handicap accessible. It will not use JavaScript menus and is better without using a template<sup>1</sup> than using one. It will use no (or very little) flash, sound, movies, marquees/scrolling text. Avoid using a site with "session id's" in the urls. These are killers to the search engine spiders.

A page laid out in headline – paragraph, headline – bullet points – headline – picture – etc – will be easy to read. Keep paragraphs short and highlight or bold occasional words to aid in people scanning/skimming your pages.

After the basic design, with text and pictures, is complete, go back through each page and make sure that you know exactly what each page is emphasizing. Remember that search engines simply want to find the best and most relevant pages for the terms that people use them to search for. It is your job to present those pages to the search engines.

## The Basics

Following are some of the basics for you to follow for each website page:

1. Do **research FIRST** for what keyword/keyword phrases are being used to search for what your website will cover.
2. **Title Tag:** Use your #1 keyword phrase for each page at the start of the Title Tag. Title tags are best if not wordy and should never be longer than the space allowed for them. If you feel you have to use your business name, use it at the end. For example if your website is about porcelain dolls and is called The Doll Shop – here's an appropriate title tag: Porcelain Dolls from The Doll Shop. Remember – this tag is what will be saved to someone's computer if they bookmark you – so they need to see right away what it is when they're looking at their bookmarks.
3. **Meta Description:** This should be a short advertisement for this page of the website – again start with your best keyword phrase for the page but now you can include some other information. The idea here is to entice people with this. Using the above doll store for example purposes a possible description would be: Find your collectible porcelain doll for sale including fairy and baby dolls. Add to your porcelain doll collection today with these and all the dolls available from The Doll Shop.
4. **Meta Keywords:** These are no longer used by most search engines. But, since some still might use them, fill them in. Remember, only list keywords/phrases that you are using on this page.
5. **Headlines** on your pages: Like the title – these headlines will let your customer (and the search engines) quickly know what the page is about. It's best if you use the h tags when entering headlines, so that the search engines can recognize that this is a headline. A headline is just that. It is not a sentence. It is not wordy. A good headline for the Doll Store would be Collectible Porcelain Dolls.
6. **Text on pages:** Make sure that the keyword/keyword phrases for the page are being used on the page. Do not spam them. Do not force them. Make the copy feel natural, never forced. If you aren't sure, try reading your text out loud and see how it sounds to you. If you cringe, you've overdone the keywords.
  - a. **Spelling** is important. Use a spell checker.
  - b. **Grammar** is important. If need be, get other people to read and check your text for you.
  - c. **Bulleted lists** are good
  - d. **Highlight/Bold** words
  - e. Use **anchor text** to link to interior pages from page text.

- f. **Unique content** is VITAL. If you cannot write copy that is unique and will work well for your site, this is the place to spend the money to get it done right.
  - g. **Do NOT use provided copy:** If you are selling products – do not use the copy provided by your supplier, but write your own content – again it should be UNIQUE.
7. **Do not spam** in any of the elements. In other words, don't use keywords inappropriately in the title, meta, on the page, etc. Do not try to “fool the search engines in anyway.
8. Start a **blog** and keep it up-to-date. If you can't keep it going daily – don't do it.
9. **Join other forums, blogs,** etc in your websites related field where you can use your expertise, even if you can't directly link to your website. Become a member of the community.
10. **Linking:** There are 3 major types of linking: One-way, Reciprocal, and Paid Links

- a. **One-way links:** These are the most valuable links you can have to your website. This means someone has found your site worthwhile enough to give it a vote of confidence from their own website/blog/forum, etc. If you are able to put the link in a blog or forum, make sure you use the best possible anchor text in doing so. For example in the doll store – good anchor text could be either Porcelain dolls or collectible porcelain dolls.

Placing links to authority sites and sites you feel will be worthwhile to your customers is good for your site. And having a site that others will feel is worthwhile to link to you is VITAL for your site.

Linking, to be valuable to search engines, should be TEXT links. Banner links are valuable for advertising, but not for rating. A link within the text on a site (like in a blog or newsletter or paragraph), using good anchor text, is the goal for a good link.

- b. **Reciprocal Linking:** Reciprocal links happen when you and someone else agree to exchange links to each other. Some search engines are no longer giving credit (or giving much reduced credit) to this type of linking.<sup>2</sup> While they are still helping with some search engines, it could still be worthwhile to do reciprocal linking, but keep your eyes on what the future in linking will bring.
- c. **Paid links:** A paid link is simply one that you pay to have on a site. These are usually text links (a site may sell space on their site.) Use these if you feel you will get visitors to come to your site and purchase or do

what your website is looking for. Do not use these for help with search engine ranking.

11. **Link Baiting:** This is the most important factor today in linking. Link baiting is creating your website and its content so that others WANT to link to you. This means finding a niche, product, idea, etc that will create the excitement or interest that causes others to look to you/for you. For example, offer something free that might entice others to send their own traffic to you. Become an authority on something in your field that brings those natural links to you. For example, maybe that doll site could become an authority on the history of porcelain dolls, or the repair of porcelain dolls. Do so in such a manner that people come to those pages for that information – then they use the doll stores navigation to find their products.

Link baiting is a viral marketing method that doesn't have to cost any money. But it will take time to come up with an appropriate idea for your website. And it can't be something that can be found everywhere else on the web. Or if it is prevalent, you have to have a unique twist on it – something that will make people come to you, not the others.

## **More SEO**

One page cannot be properly optimized for more than 2 or 3 keyword phrases. Ideally, 1-2 maximum will be the best. So, having various pages that are optimized properly will be the key to making or breaking most businesses. (There are exceptions – when a business is really targeted to the point that a single page might be all it needs – if it can get the proper traffic to that page.)

Keywords and keyword phrases need to be carefully selected. If the porcelain doll site tries to compete for the term dolls – it might take a long time to get anywhere near the results it could get for collectible porcelain dolls. Use the phrases that will bring the targeted visitors and will have less competition, while you slowly move up for the more general terms.

Also, remember – most people do not purchase the first time they visit a website. In fact, it normally takes 8 or MORE searches before someone clicks to purchase. And during this time, they may use different search phrases. One time they might search for porcelain dolls, another time collectible porcelain dolls, yet another it might be unique porcelain dolls. The more time your name appears when they search, the better the chance that when they are ready to buy, your site will be the one they purchase from (if your site is user-friendly, easily navigable and welcoming to them). People generally start with more broad terms, then continue narrowing their searches down to more specific terms, though. So, if you aren't showing up in the broad terms, you might later show up in the specific search and have exactly what the person has been looking for. Now, it's vital that your site be ready for the searcher.

## Footer

<sup>1</sup> - Tim Mayer with Yahoo and Matt Cutts of Google agree that template based websites may not rank as well to the search engines because they will appear alike to the crawlers. *From the 2007 Las Vegas PubCon.*

<sup>2</sup> - Matt Cutts has stated to NOT LINK EXCHANGE. *From the 2007 Las Vegas PubCon*