INTERNET MARKETING COURSE

WEEK 4 – SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

HOW TO GAIN FREE TRAFFIC AND EXPOSURE

USING SEARCH ENGINES

BY MARK THOMPSON

Search engine optimization is the active practicing of improving your websites ability to rank in the natural search engine results. Each of the major search engines have a proprietary algorithm that makes up how they rank websites. Even though the algorithm is a close and guarded secret, Internet Marketers have a pretty could idea of how it is made up.

Below, we will walk through the three main elements of the algorithm, which include Domain Attributes, On-Page and Off-Page factors.

DOMAIN ATTRIBUTES

Domain Age

How long your website has been around can play a role in how well you rank organically. That is not to say that a newer website can't rank well, but it definitely will help if your site has been around for at least a few years. The reason that is, is because search engines tend to trust websites that have been around longer, because they have built credibility over the years. Google also has something called the "Google Sandbox" which basically says that for a short period of time (usually 3-6 months) your website will not really rank for any of your primary keywords. This is an introduction period if you will, that allows the search engines to assess your website and its credibility.

Hosting/Server

There are probably thousands of hosting providers out there. Some good, others not so good. This is an area where it is worth it to pay the extra money every month to have a great hosting company with excellent tech support. If you go with one of those hosting companies that charge $5/month, there is a better chance of your site getting hacked, limited support and less hosting options. It's just better to use trusted hosting companies like MediaTemple, GoDaddy or Host Gator who have proven to be great hosting companies.

The server that you host your website on can play a role in your organic rankings. There are really two main types of servers…dedicated and shared. If you are on a shared hosting plan, that just means that your website is hosted on a server and the same IP address as many other websites. A dedicated server is a server that is dedicated strictly to your website and no others. If you decide to put your website on a shared server, know that if a website on the same IP address is doing something unethical or contains explicit content, it can potentially hurt your rankings. It is unlikely, however it is something to be aware of.

Domain Credibility

Search engines will also look at your domain as a whole to see how credible it is. This will include many aspects including domain attributes, on-page optimization, and off-page optimization.

ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

Title Tags

The most important on-page SEO tactic is having keyword rich title tags. Using the keyword research we discussed in Week 2, you will want to add unique title tags for every page, depending on the topic or theme of each page. The title tag is also the hyperlink in the search engine results that people will click to go into your site.
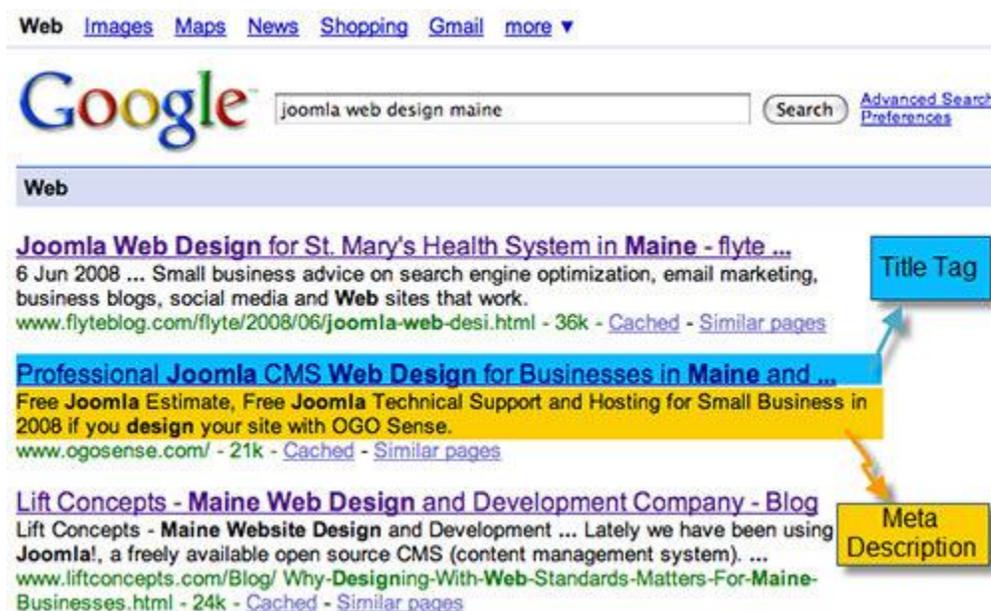
Meta-Description Tags

Your meta description tag, while it should contain the keywords or phrases you are optimizing for, is meant really for the end-user. The main reason is as shown in the graphic above, this gives you a snippet of text that is meant to entice the user to want to click your website.

Alt Tags

Since a search engine is unable to understand what an image or graphic is showing, you can use an alt attribute that will explain to the search engine what the picture is showing. For example, if you post a picture of a red rose, you may want to add an alt tag as "red rose". This can help your images rank well when people do image searches in search engines.

H Tags

Heading tags are headlines or titles that are used in the content area of a web page. Heading tags help the user to quickly scan a web page for the information they are looking for, as well as place emphasis in search engines. That is why it is important you use your primary keywords in the heading tags as well.

Content Optimization

For the actual text on the page, you want to make sure you are using multiple variations of your root keyword/phrase. For example, if your root phrase is "Atlanta Plumber", using variations like "Plumbing Services in Atlanta" or "Professional Commercial Plumber Serving Atlanta" will include your core keywords, while still making it appealing to the end-user.
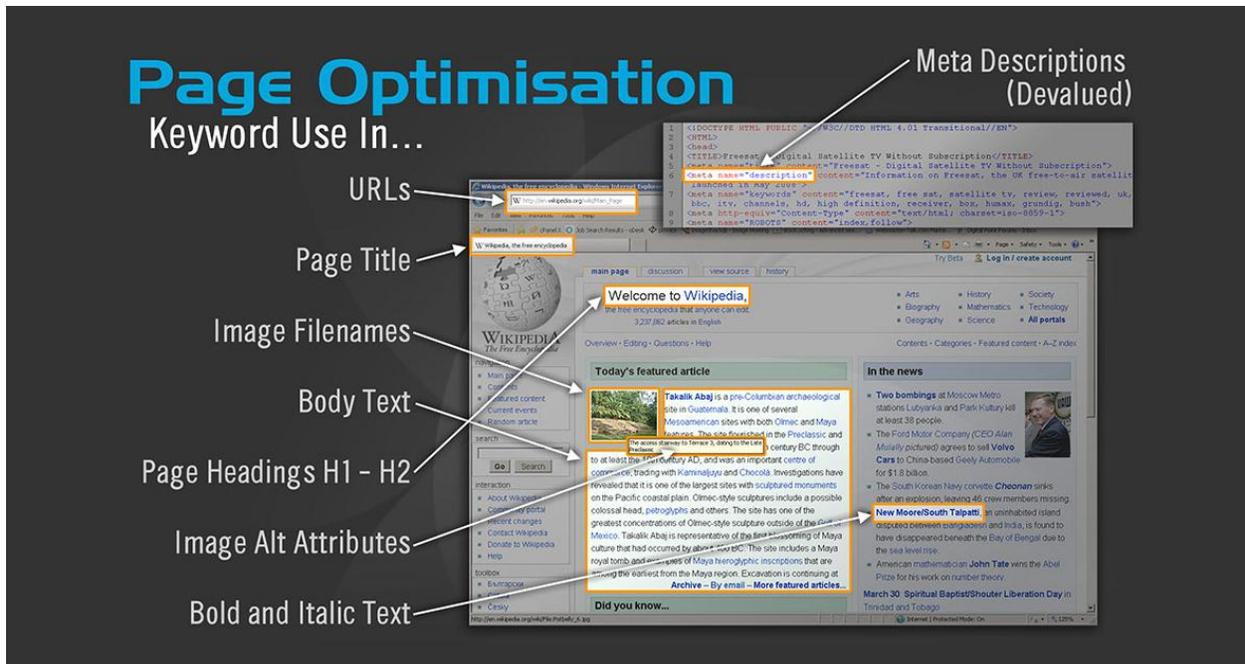
URL Structure

Ideally you want to use short and clean URLs that are as close to the root directory as possible. Adding keywords in the URL can help with optimization, but don't over-due it and stuff keywords in the URL just for the sake of optimization. Also try to use hyphens instead of underscores in your URL naming convention, as search engines recognize hyphens as word separators.

It is always best to use static pages, instead of dynamic pages. Dynamic pages are created on the fly and have various parameters in the URL (ie: ? =%) that make it hard for search engines to index those pages. Static pages are much cleaner, easier to index, and keep the same URL.

This Anatomy of a URL guide from SEOmoz, should give you some additional insights into the structure of a URL .

SEO Cheat Sheet: Anatomy of A URL

1 — SEO-FRIENDLY URL

http://store.example.com/topics/subtopic/descriptive-product-name#top

1. Protocol
2. Subdomain
3. Domain
4. Top-Level Domain
5. Folders / Paths
6. Page
7. Named Anchor

Keyword Priority[1]

Observed Google priority of keyword placement:

(1) **Domain**
(2) **Subdomain**
(3) **Folder**
(4) **Path/Page**

[1] SEOmoz correlational data (2009)

SEO Tips for URLs

- Use subdomains carefully. They may be treated as separate entities, splitting domain authority.
- Separate path & page keywords with hyphens ("-").
- Anchors may help engines understand page structure.
- Keyword effectiveness in URLs decreases as URL length and keyword position increases.[1]

2 — OLD DYNAMIC URL

http://www.example.com/index.php?product=1234&sort=price&print=1

1. Protocol
2. Subdomain
3. Domain
4. Top-Level Domain
5. Page / File Name
6. File Extension
7. CGI Parameters

Popular TLDs[2]

.com - commercial
.net - infrastructure
.org - non-profit
.edu - schools
.info - informational
.biz - small business
.name - personal sites

[2] Verisign domain report (2009)

Popular ccTLDs*

.cn - China
.de - Germany
.uk - United Kingdom
.nl - Netherlands
.eu - European Union
.ru - Russian Federation
.ar - Argentina

* ccTLD = Country Code TLD

Popular Extensions

.htm - Static HTML
.html - Static HTML
.php - PHP code
.asp - ASP code
.aspx - ASP.NET
.cfm - ColdFusion
.jsp - Java Code

©2009 SEOmoz · www.seomoz.org · Read SEOmoz. Rank Better.

Load Time (new)

This is a fairly new factor that search engines have taken into consideration into their algorithm. They have added this factor because search engines wanted to reward websites that deliver content to their users as fast as possible. For sites that load slowly, it can ruin the site experience and make a user leave. If you do a Google search for "decreasing page/website load time" you should find plenty of articles on how to help speed up your site.

OFF-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

Inbound Links

An inbound link is a link coming from another site into yours. This can be a link from a blog, forum, wiki, directory, video/image site, or any other website that links to you. The way that search engines value links is similar to a popularity contest. The more votes (or links) you get, the more popular you become.

There are 5 main factors that search engines look at when they analyze a website's inbound links.

- Number of Links
- Relevancy of those Links

- Credibility of the Website Linking to You
- Anchor Text of the Link
- How a Website Links to You

The anchor text of a link are the words that actually hyperlink to your website. Search Engines place more value on links that are keyword-rich and relevant.

Homepage vs Internal Page Links

How you go about building your links between your homepage and internal pages can significantly help your ability to rank for the long-tail. Remember that search engines rank individual pages, not the domain. If all of your inbound links are going to your homepage, that minimizes the chance of your internal pages to rank for the long-tail.

How you Acquire Links?

SEOmoz created an in-depth report that talks about which link building tactics are the most effective for Search Engine Optimization. I highly suggest that everyone reads this report in detail to understand which link building tactics are more effective.

[Effectiveness of Link Building Tactics for SEO](#)

BLACKHAT TACTICS

Using something called "Blackhat SEO", webmasters or marketers are trying to manipulate their site to trick or fool the search engines into giving their website higher search engine rankings. These tactics used to be very popular about 5-7 years ago, but are not nearly as effective anymore because of the evolution of the search engines. Even though these tactics can potentially get your website penalized or banned, it is still important to understand them.

Doorway Pages

Doorway or portal pages are created to improve their rankings in search engines for particular keywords/phrases. These are pages that are specifically designed for search engines only. The idea it to make search engines think that users are seeing one page, when they are actually seeing another.

Cloaking

Blackhat cloaking is a way to serve up a doorway page. It is when a website displays two different sets of content, one for the search engines and another for the user. The idea is to try and trick the search engines by giving them content that is strictly to move up in search rankings. The user however will see something completely different that is more user friendly and easy to read. Based on your IP address, they are able to tell if you a search bot or a actual human.

Duplicate Content

There are a number of ways you can display duplicate content. One way is to copy and paste their content onto tens or even hundreds of pages within their site, specifically to add more pages and content to their site. They could also create a totally new website or microsite that contains the exact content as the original site. People do this to add inbound links to their site as well.

Hidden Text & Links

The idea here is to add hidden links and text that only the search engines can see. Usually a developer will make the text the same color as the background so it is not visible to a user. The text or links usually have keywords or phrases repeating multiple times, in order to try and fool the search engines into thinking your page is more relevant for those keywords.

Keyword Stuffing

Keyword stuffing is exactly what it sounds like. You are trying to stuff as many keywords or phrases onto a page as possible in order to rank higher in search results. Normally developers will hide this text so it is not visible to users.
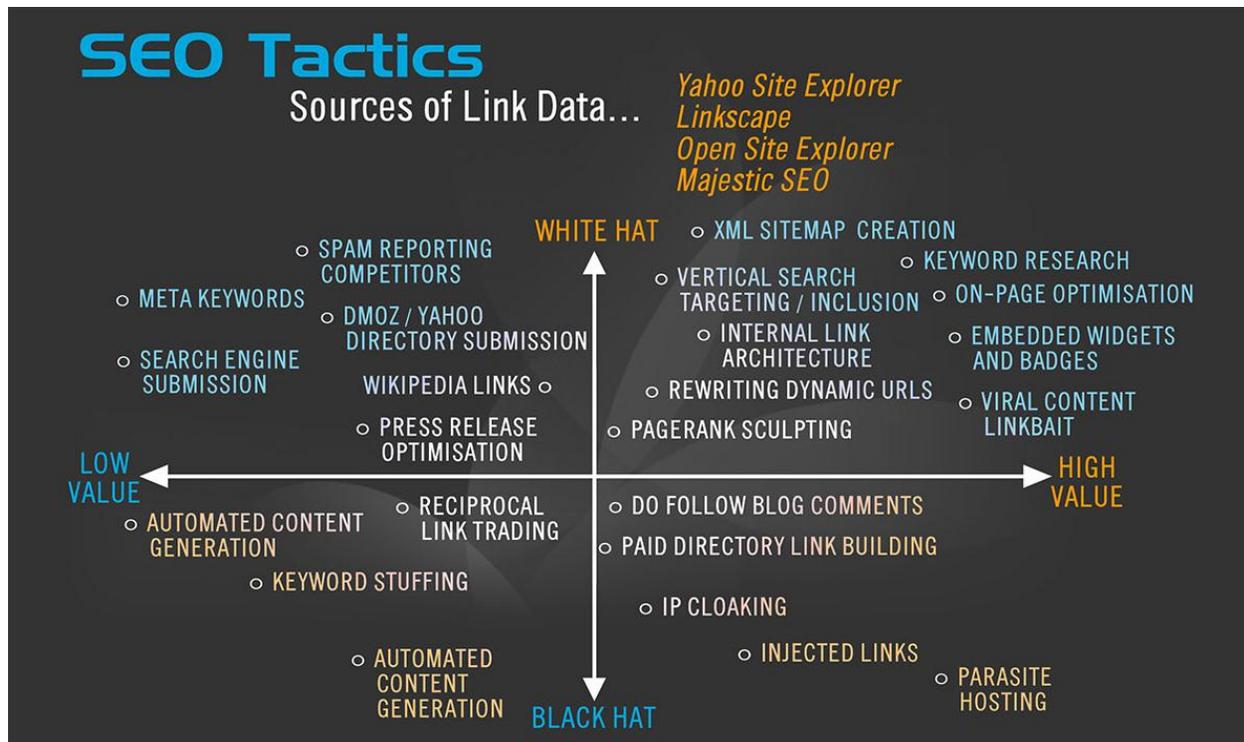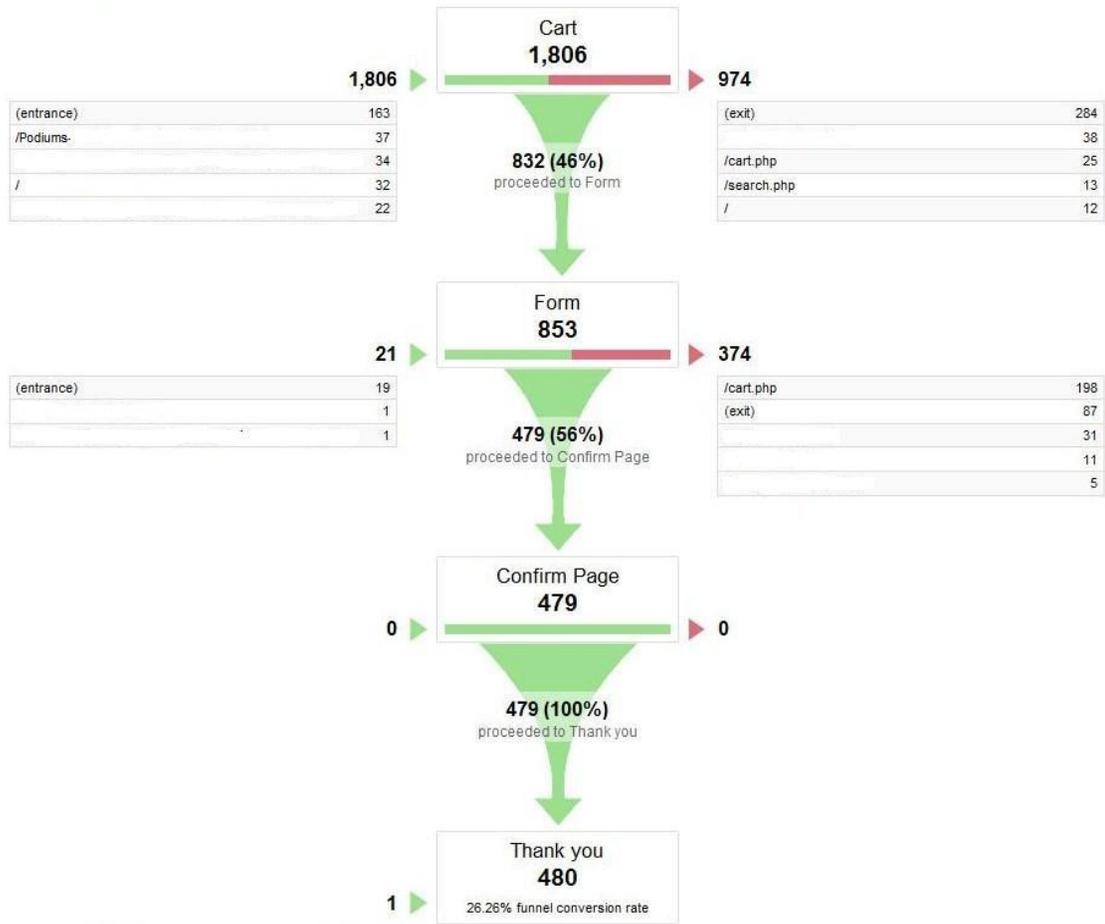
WEBSITE USABILITY

Step one of SEO is driving targeted traffic to your website. Step two is converting those users once they get to your site. Giving an engaging user experience will help to increase your conversion rate and bring in more leads/sales. An outstanding user experience involves a simple and easy-to-use site structure. Having a clean design, a consistent layout, and high-quality content, will make it easy for users to find what they are looking for.

Tips for Great Usability

- Use Headlines to Breakup Content Sections
- Make the Text Easy to Scan
- Use Consistent Navigations, Color Schemes and Layouts
- Make All Pages Accessible Within Two Clicks
- Make Things Obviously for the User
- Explain Processes and Concepts Using Graphics/Imaginary

Conversion Optimization

When a user visits a website, they want to find what they are looking for fast and efficiently. It is important to have a site that is built for leads and/or sales. Even if you drive all of the traffic in the world to your site, it doesn't matter if it is not set to convert. Using call to actions, special offers, lead generation forms, eye-capturing headlines, and easy to find contact information can be the difference between a visitor and a customer.

Cart — 1,806

	1,806			974	
(entrance)	163		(exit)		284
/Podiums-	37				38
	34		/cart.php		25
/	32		/search.php		13
	22		/		12

832 (46%)
proceeded to Form

Form — 853

	21			374	
(entrance)	19		/cart.php		198
	1		(exit)		87
	1				31
					11
					5

479 (56%)
proceeded to Confirm Page

Confirm Page — 479

	0		0

479 (100%)
proceeded to Thank you

Thank you — 480

1	26.26% funnel conversion rate

Recommended Testing Software

Google Website Optimizer: The Website Optimizer tool is a free product from Google that allows you to perform A/B and Multi-variant tests on your web pages. It is meant to help increase your conversion rates by improving the quality of your landing pages by testing different elements on your page.

ClickTale: ClickTale provides usability testing software that will allow you to actually see a user's browser session and visitor heatmaps to help improve user experience and conversion rates. This is an awesome tool for anyone who is looking to test landing pages!

UP NEXT: WEEK 5 – CONTENT CREATION

If you guys have any questions about the information explained in the 4th week, please feel free to e-mail your questions at mark@stayonsearch.com and I will get back you as soon as I can.

Please try to ask only questions specific to the week you are on. Try not to skip ahead and ask questions about things we will cover in later weeks.

See you in 7 days for Week 5!

Mark Thompson

- StayOnSearch.com