



ASPAC CONSULTING GROUP

Marketing Consultants

ABN 57 279 943 512

A simple introduction to Search Engine Optimisation

The definition of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) published by SEOMoz is a good starting point. They define it as follows:

SEO is the active practice of optimising a web site by improving internal and external aspects in order to increase the traffic the site receives from search engines.

Regardless of how well a site is constructed, the site has to be found and most visitors use search engines to look for websites containing the key words and phrases of importance to them. SEO can deliver exceptional benefits because research shows that less than 40% of the people who use search engines are able to distinguish between sites that have paid for high rankings versus those that rate highly due to excellence. Actually, the best way to boost site traffic is to balance advertising with natural or 'organic' search engine rankings. The term natural search means the merit and relevance of the keywords rather than the amount of money paid to the search engine for rankings.

The importance of keywords and phrases

Search engines use "spiders" or "bots" to crawl through the content of websites and the results are indexed in databases that are interrogated when a search query occurs. Because queries can be imprecise, there may be considerable variations in the number of hits and the order in which they occur. It is an essential task of SEO to build keywords and phrases into the web site that cover all contingencies including commonly misspelled words, so that the desired result occurs even if the query is literally incorrect. Site navigation is also important because the spiders can only crawl where the site allows them to do so. This means that if your web designer has got carried away with Flash, wonderful "twirly" introduction screens, the key information can be hidden. The same applies to logins, drop-down menus and other bits of code where the spiders cannot find them. These comments certainly reflect the view of the author that website development is a job for information management specialists, not graphic designers.

The all-important site content

The quality and originality of your content will ultimately mean success or failure of your Internet marketing venture. If your visitor has found your site through a keyword search, it is now critical that the information provided matches their needs in a relevant manner. Otherwise, your visitor will probably leave immediately and look at an alternative site listed in the search results. The underlying principle of good content writing is to know the characteristics and needs of your target audience so that your values and benefits may be communicated in terms they will understand and relate to immediately. The text must be well written, grammatically correct and should be displayed in a format likely to appeal to your specific audience. Too many small business owners fancy themselves as copywriters or think that a family member can do the job. This is very dubious logic and if

there is any doubt, it will pay to use a professional. The cost is small relative to the potential benefits. The same applies to how the information is structured. Business owners are usually so familiar with what the business does, they may not anticipate how much and in what sequence the potential buyer might want the information. A professional developer will structure the information, moving from general to detail with clear navigation.

Link Building

Page titles, content descriptions, code validity, metatags and many more aspects of website development are fundamental "must haves" but even these elements are not as important as SEO Link Building. This is the way a search engines decides how relevant and popular your site is, by looking at the number of other sites that link to you, the type of content and the importance of the third party site itself. The ideal links are those that have similar content but will not drain your own site traffic. One-way inward links are far more important than complementary two-way links, but either is better than none. Non-commercial links can work well as long as they are relevant, so web resources, market information and even humour can work well, especially if it helps to turn your site into an effective "portal" to information in your category. More information on all of these topics is readily available on the Internet and they include free link-building tools, forums and tutorials.

The author of this article is the Director of ASPAC Consulting, specialists in Information Management