

# Complete Guide to Effective Search Engine Optimization

## First Step to SEO – Keyword Research

This is probably the most important step in any SEO activity and I cannot stress enough on its importance. While keyword research and KEI analysis might sound to be too technical for a SEO newbie, the basic idea is very simple. You need to identify your target market and find the keywords that someone might use to search for a site like yours. If you have a good understanding of the business you are in, you would not have a hard time to figure out which are the keywords that your customers might be using to search for you. Pick the main keywords that you can think of and then use the tools like Overture Keyword tool or Wordtracker to find other similar keywords. These tools would also give you the number of searches that were conducted on those keywords during previous month ( hit count ), make a note of those. Once you have got a good number of keywords and their Hit count, search for each of those keywords in Google and note the number of sites competing for each of those keywords ( on the top right side the figure shows up as "1 to 10 of \*\*\*\*\* results" ). Once you have these data with you, you can start to pick up the keywords that you would like to optimize for. You need to look for a few things..

- a) Look for keywords that have good number of hit count and less competition. It is difficult to find keywords that have good hit count yet less competition but it is not impossible, the more extensive your research the more is the possibility for you to find such keywords. In order to measure the balance between keyword competition and hit count Keyword Effectiveness Index is used – check the link to know more about [KEI and how it is calculated \(http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2006/10/seo-for-beginners-how-to-find-right.html \)](http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2006/10/seo-for-beginners-how-to-find-right.html).
- b) Look for keywords that are precisely targeted. For example; if you repair Blue widgets only, it would not make sense for you to optimize your website for "widgets" though that might be having the maximum hit counts. Blue widgets might be moderately good for you but "repair blue widgets" should be the first keyword that you must pick, even though this keyword might have less hit count compared to the previous two.

Fine print: If you are working on a new site don't try to target the main key phrase unless you are in a virgin industry. Try to optimize on 2-3 key phrases that include your main keyword/ key phrase. It would be relatively easy for you to optimize your website for those long key phrases and by the time you have got your site to rank high for those phrases, your site would also automatically improve its ranking on the main key phrase because the main key phrase is included in your 2-3 long key phrases on which you optimized the site.

## On Page Optimization – Site Re-engineering

Once you have finalized on the keywords for which you would like to optimize your website it is time for you to look at your website design and structure. While it is important for the web design to be aesthetically appealing it is also important that the design elements do not make your website a hurdle for the search engine robots. The key points that you must note in regards to on page optimization are:

- a) Site Navigation – This is probably the most important thing for any SEO. Ensure that your site has a well planned navigation that allows your human visitors as well as search engine robots to move through your site easily. Try to use text for site navigation as much as possible and the best

option is to use your keywords as anchor text for your links. If a page has information on use of blue widgets, try to link to it from all pages using the text "use of blue widgets". Using JavaScript or Flash for navigation might help you to create fancy affects but the search engine bots can not read them. So, try to avoid them and if you are really keen on using them then make sure that you provide a text-only alternative navigation for the search engine bots to reach those pages.

- b) Ensure all pages have unique Titles and Meta description tag. The Meta keywords tag has been depreciated however, if you would like to add that it would not harm you for sure. Ensure your Title has got your main keyword in it and makes a meaningful sentence for your human visitors. The description should preferably have your keyword and also provide a concise description of the webpage.
- c) Table Structure – Try to keep your table structure as simple as possible, the more complex your table structures are the more code the search engine spiders will have to wade through to reach your content.
- d) Ensure that all JavaScript and CSS are called in from external files and are not written within the page code.
- e) Images - Add suitable alt attributes to your images; that is the only way search engines can have a feel of your images. Try to name your images with something that describes the image rather than naming them image1.jpg or something similar. You can also make use of the "long desc" tag for your images. (Are you aware , image search can drive huge amount of traffic to your website ? )
- f) While a little bit of flash can liven up the page remember, search engines don't like flash, so try to keep their usage to minimum.
- g) Site Map: If your site navigation is planned properly you will most likely not require a site map for SEO reasons, unless your web site is some 200 pages or more your human visitors are also likely to figure out all pages. However, more as an aid to your human visitors than to the search engines you can maintain a Site Map – that would definitely not harm you. If you are doing a site map, it is advisable that you not just make it a page full of links (a common mistake!) rather organize the links suitably according to the subject and page flow and put in a brief description of what each page contains. Remember, a site map is your way of guiding your visitor through your website.
- h) HTML Validation / CSS validation –This is something that many SEO s might fuss upon, however, this is not really a necessity for search engine optimization. It is definitely good to have your HTML / CSS validated and it does help a lot with accessibility besides adding some vanity value to your website to have those fancy tags on your web pages. I repeat again, they are not necessary for SEO BUT THEY REALLY help to improve website accessibility.
- i) Iframes / Frames – I don't think any modern webmaster would even think of these, but just in case you were impressed by any website using this when you were a kid, just don't think of it again. Iframes/ Frames would not allow the search engine spiders to read your content.
- j) Dynamic URLs with Query Strings – If you have a website with dynamic pages the best option for you would be to rewrite those dynamic URLs into static URLs with some keywords in them. However, if that is not possible, ensure that your URLs have the minimum number of query strings in them. Avoid using "ID" in query strings. If you have a dynamic page on blue widget with the query string <http://www.example.com/products.php?pid=w1234&catid=432> it is much better to have it written as <http://www.example.com/products.php?product=widget&category=blue>

## On Page Optimization – Content

If this is not the first article that you are reading about how to do SEO, you must have already come across the phrase “Content is King” umpteen number of times – TRUE, but it is you who make the king and decide how the king is perceived by the onlookers (read: human visitors & search engine bots) While developing your website content remember the following:

- a) It is human visitors who give you business not the bots, so ensure that the content you write is pleasing to your human audience.
- b) Your content should have optimum presence of keyword and key phrase. Don't go by those numerous “keyword density checker” tools available on the web, just ensure that your content is sensible when read and yet it contains your keywords.
- c) Remember, there is no ideal “keyword density” for SEO, it all depends on the industry standard (what your competitor's are doing), the amount of total content on your page and most importantly what looks natural.
- d) Never focus on more than two keywords while doing the content for a webpage.
- e) Content Structuring – This point could probably have gone into the Site Re-engineering section but I thought I would put it here. It is important for SEO that you follow the document formatting standards while presenting your content on the web. HTML has already defined certain tags and their usage in content formatting; you just need to play by the rules. H1 for main heading, H2 for sub heading, h3 for sub-sub heading and this way you can go up to H6. Other SEO s might call me crazy to write about H6 tag because we all know that H4-H6 would not fetch you any SEO benefit ( I doubt if there is any benefit with H3 as well ), however that is the way it should be. If you are formatting your content with the proper heading tags and other necessary tags it is going to be easy on your users to read as well as the search engine bots are likely to love your content.
- f) Don't use duplicate content. Forget about copying content from competitor websites (you can be in big time legal trouble), don't even copy your own content from one page to the other. Each page must have their unique content.

Fine Print: Ensure your keywords are included in your headings, but again, NATURALLY, don't just squeeze them. If writing is not your forte, take help from a professional content writer. You can read [more on web content writing here \(http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2007/07/web-content-writing-characteristics-of.html\)](http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2007/07/web-content-writing-characteristics-of.html).

## Search Engine Submission

You DON'T NEED TO DO IT ! Yes, if you have been wondering over those too good offers that promises “submission to 349 search engines for just \$19.99” don't again think of it. Understand the following points and you will know what I mean:

- a) Can you name more than 10 search engines at one go? If you have not even heard of 10 search engines where are these guys going to find 349? And who do you think is going to search in them to find your website? All the search engine traffic that anyone gets is through the top 3-4 search engines and you DON'T need to submit to them.
- b) Search engine bots can follow links from other websites to your website and index your website; they DO NOT require you to submit your website. All you need to do to get your website in the search engine's index is to

build a good website and get some links from well indexed websites pointing to your website. So build links!

## Link Building

If content is referred to as king, the link game should be referred to as the power of democracy. Today, links play a major role in most search engine algorithms and the links to your website can actually be the deciding factor for your website's ranking. Links to your website from other websites are considered as votes by those websites for your website and the more number of votes your website gets the more importance it gets from the search engines. However, you must understand that it is not just a number game; the quality of links also plays a major role on how the search engines treat your website. The basic factors that you should consider while getting a link for your website are:

- a) It is always better to get links from websites that are related to your website's subject.
- b) Try to have your keywords in the anchor text in all links. If you are optimizing your website targeting a specific keyword on the page try to get all inbound links to that page with that specific keyword as anchor text. Ideally each of your pages should target different keywords and so the anchor text for inbound links to different pages should also be different. This coordination between on page optimization and off page optimization effort is a key factor and the better you streamline these two processes the faster are you likely to see success.
- c) Google Page Rank (PR) can be one of the factors that you can use to judge the quality of links. BUT, PR should not be the only criteria that you look for while finding links for your website.

One of the most common questions on link building that comes up is how to get links. There are so many answers to it that it would be difficult to cover it in this single article. While I should not avoid the entire question of how to build back links, I would suggest you read this [article on link building \(http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2007/07/free-back-links-how-to-get-links-for.html\)](http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2007/07/free-back-links-how-to-get-links-for.html), when you have some time. . And for a quick wrap up you can keep the following points in mind for link building techniques.

- a) Develop content that people would love to link to. Submit them to social media websites.
- b) Create a RSS feed and submit your feed to feed directories
- c) Article Marketing –Write articles and submit them to article directories. This articles would contain a link back to your website
- d) Press Release – it works almost the same way as Articles. You need to get your PR circulated well.
- e) White papers – You can write white papers and submit them to whit paper repositories.
- f) Link Exchange – the old fashioned system. The search engines are trying to improve their algo to ignore links earned through exchange but this sure does work still now. Disadvantage: Too labour intensive, risk of getting penalized by linking to any bad neighbourhood.
- g) Link Buying - If you got some cash to spare you can try this as well. Search engines are trying to identify and nullify effect of purchased links, so if you are consider this ensure that in no way those links can be identified as purchased links. ( I do not mean to endorse link buying in any way, but if we keep our eyes open, we cannot ignore link buying as a method to obtain links )
- h) Reviews: Submit your website for review in various blogs and websites that offers free review.

- i) Again if you have some cash to spare, you can offer some free utility (some software, WP skins, etc) in return for a link back.

Warning: Always be extremely careful while linking out to any website. Ensure that you are not linking to any bad neighbourhood, any link farm or any site that has been penalized by Google.

## Directory Submissions

Directory Submissions are again an important part of any SEO campaign. This can very well be put into Link Building section but I thought of separating it because of the tremendous impact that some directories have on any website's ranking.

Directories are categorised list of websites with their descriptions and all good quality directories are manually edited to check the quality of websites. It would be beneficial to submit websites to these directories as that would get link backs from the directories and the search engines give more importance to directory links compared to links from regular websites. However, you need to ensure that the directory is of good quality. You can use the following points to judge a directory. A good quality directory

- a) Would never ask for a reciprocal link
- b) Would have human editors and would not offer instant listings
- c) Look at the number of existing websites in it. The more the better.
- d) Try to look up when the directory was established and how old it is. The older the better.
- e) Judge the navigation & URL structure – the better they are the sooner would your links get crawled by search engines.
- f) The home page should have Page Rank. If the inner pages have Page Rank that's better but this should never be a deciding factor.
- g) Paid Directory Listing – Go for these only after you are sure the link is worth paying for. One paid listing that I can recommend right away is Yahoo Directory. Once you are listed there it gives a big boost to your search engine rankings.

DMOZ.org – It would not be more if I say this is the father of all directories. While it is extremely difficult to get listed in DMOZ once you are in, you can sure expect a boost in your Google rankings.

Fine Prints: The key to success in directory submission is to read the rules of the directories and abide by them while submitting. Most directories are human edited and if you don't follow the submission guidelines the editors are sure to pull you off.

SEO is a continuous process and in particular, the process of link building, directory submission and content generation should continue indefinitely. The more you do these the better are your chances to improve the quality of your website and its search engine rankings. One last thing that I must mention is that you must have a way to measure the results of the effort that you put in and here comes the importance of Analytics.

## Web Analytics

Implement a web analytics application on your website to monitor and analyze the traffic that you receive and their sources and track the activities on your website. If your hosting company offers raw server logs you can do this by

analyzing them with some log analyzer tool else you can go for any of the freely available Analytics packages. Unless you are a very big business Google Analytics would easily suffice your analytics need. In case you are having an ecommerce website Google Analytics can also track your ecommerce transactions. You can refer to this article for [how to implement Google Analytics for Ecommerce](http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2007/04/ultimate-guide-to-google-analytics.html) (<http://seo-kolkata.blogspot.com/2007/04/ultimate-guide-to-google-analytics.html> ).

I hope this is of some help to the reader and wish you best of luck in your search engine optimization effort.

Regards  
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