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Special Report:

Do-It-Yourself Search Engine Optimization

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Basic Guidelines to prepare your web pages for the search engines

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Introduction

80 percent of web surfers start their journey on a search engine. There are more than eight billion pages indexed by Google alone at this time. While search engines are not (and should not be) the only way to promote your business online, it is one of the most important.

A search engine optimization campaign can be divided in three fundamental stages:

- 1. Choose the right keywords** (keyword optimization)
- 2. Optimize your pages** for your selected keywords (web page optimization),
- 3. Get inbound links** from quality sites related to your topic

In the next few pages, we will outline one approach to complete these three steps, using free tools available on the net.

Keyword Optimization

If you have a small business website, and you want to rank well, don't fall into the trap of thinking that users will necessarily search for your site using your company name. If, for example, you have a website design firm in Dallas, you should try to rank high when somebody searches for "web design dallas", or "web design company dallas". These are called "keywords", and they're the first thing you must define (even before you start designing your website).

The best keywords will be those that are popular search terms among search engine users (terms that people actually search for), and that clearly describe the purpose and the content of your site. They will also have to be keywords that allow your pages to rank high. There is no sense in trying to optimize your pages for super-competitive keywords where you don't stand a chance of ranking well (most one-word keyphrases fall into this category: for example, it would be impossible to rank well for the keyword 'book'). It would still be difficult to rank high for the keyphrase 'cook book'. It would probably be easier to rank well for 'italian cook book' and even easier to rank well for 'northern italian cook book'. The more specific your keyphrase, the easier it will be for your site to rank well. You should therefore target keyphrases with three or more words to significantly improve your chances.

Choosing the wrong keywords can throw off your entire search engine optimization strategy. It will force you to re-work your pages for new keywords and wait for the search engines to re-crawl your site. For this reason, a few hours trying to pick the right keywords is time well spent.

To start, take a look at your pages. Look at them carefully and write down the words and phrases that best define your site. Try to build a list of two or three word phrases. Once you have developed this list of potential keyphrases you are ready for the next step: to analyze the demand and supply for those keyphrases, and choose the best ones (those with good demand and not enough supply).

We will first check the demand for your selected keyphrases using a popular free tool: Overture's Search Term Suggestion Tool:

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

This tool will show you how many people search for those terms in a month's period in [Overture](#) , a popular pay per click search engine. This tool will show you only those searches conducted in Overture, however, the relative popularity of search terms will be very similar in other search engines as well (there are also other more sophisticated tools like [Wordtracker](#) , the tool of choice of most search engine optimization experts).

In addition to telling you if your selected keyphrases are popular search terms, Overture's search term tool will show you other keyphrases that you may not have thought about, which may be even more relevant to your site.

For example, if your first keyphrase was "Italian Restaurant", the Search Term Suggestion Tool will also display other popular related search terms, like: "Gourmet Italian Restaurant", "Northern Italian Restaurant", "Italian Restaurant Pizzeria", "Italian Restaurant Miami", etc. You may also try other keyphrases, for example: "Italian Cuisine", and the Search Tool may come up with more specific keyphrases, like: "Fine Italian Cuisine", "Italian Cuisine Miami", "Northern Italian Cuisine", "Italian Cuisine Fine Dining", "Gourmet Italian Cuisine", etc.

What you have done is to validate and enlarge your pool of popular, in-demand, potential keyphrases for your web page. The next step is to check the supply, or, in

other words, how much competition there is for your selected keywords in the actual search engines.

Having said that, get your list of keyphrases, go to Google (<http://www.google.com>) and type-in each of your keyphrases in the search box. Enter your keyphrases within quotation marks (to filter-out less relevant results), and see how many results each individual query produces, making a note of those with a relatively small number of results (less competition). You will stick with the keyphrase that:

1. Best describes the topic and content of your page
2. Is a popular search term according to Overture's Search Term Suggestion Tool.
3. Generates a relatively small number of results after performing the Google search.

If "Gourmet Italian Restaurant" is the keyphrase that best meets these three criteria, it will become your primary keyphrase. To get even better results, you can choose a second keyphrase to make your page more relevant to an even more specific niche. For example, if your restaurant is in Miami, you can consider "Miami" a second keyphrase (also called a 'qualifier'). Once you have chosen the keyphrases for your main page (homepage) do the same for the other pages on your site.

The next step is optimize your pages for your selected keywords.

Web Page Optimization

Once you have chosen your keyphrases, you need to optimize your pages for those keyphrases. You do that by positioning your keyphrases in strategic locations within your page. What follows is a checklist of tips and steps you can follow to optimize your page:

- **Keyphrases in the web page title:**
 - Create a descriptive title for your page: Your web page title is very important because search engines will display it as link text in the search results. The title must include your main keyphrases.

- If you want to use your company name in your page title, unless you are a big company like Microsoft or Coca Cola don't start your page title with the name of your company. Start with your keyphrases.
 - Keep your keyphrase together. Don't split the words.
 - Make the title short (8 words or less).
- **Keyphrases in your Keyword Meta Tag:** Search engines rarely use the Keyword Meta Tags any more (Google ignores them). However, place a list of your main and secondary keywords in the Keyword Meta Tag of your pages, just in case search engines decide to use them again.
- **Keyphrases in your Description Meta Tag:** The Description Meta Tag is still important, since some search engines use them to go with the results link. As its name implies, the Description Meta Tag must describe your site. Remember to:
 - Use your keyphrases (main and secondary) in your Description Meta Tag.
 - Make your description concise and professional. Avoid using hype.
 - Make it short (25 words or less).
 - Keep your keyphrases together.
- **Keyphrases in the body of your page:** It is important to use your keyphrases heavily on your page, since this will help the search engines determine what your page is about, and its relevance to your chosen keywords:
 - Use your keyphrases several times, and place them as close to the top of the page as possible.
 - Place your keyphrases between Header Tags (H1, H2 or H3) in the first two paragraphs of your page.
 - Place your keyphrases in bold type phase at least once.
 - Repeat your keyphrases often to increase your keyphrase density. Repeating your keyphrases between 5 to 10 times for every 100 words in your page is considered effective and not excessive. You must also take into account your visitors: they should be able to read your page fluently and effortlessly and the text must not sound

awkward. (Remember that ultimately it is your readers who will decide if your page is worth the time they spend on it).

- If you use a left navigation bar, the search engine will read it before the body of your page. Make sure you include your most important keywords there, too.

- **Other Web Page Design Considerations:**

- You must make your page easy to navigate by the search engines. Search engines heavily favor text over graphics, and HTML over other editing formats.
- Use text heavily. Avoid placing text in graphic format since the search engines won't be able to read it.
- Avoid frames. Search engines have trouble following them, and they may index only the framed content page and not the navigation frame.
- Avoid Flash and JavaScript: search engines don't follow either one very well. If you use Flash, make an HTML version of your site available to your readers and the search engines. If you use a JavaScript navigation menu, include an alternate text menu at the bottom of the page, so it can be followed by the search engines.
- Create a Site Map that includes all the pages in your site, and place a link to it from your homepage. When the search engine follows your site map link, it will find and index all the pages in your site!
- Make sure that all your internal pages link to your homepage.
- Don't try to describe all your products or services in one page. It will confuse the search engine and dilute your page's relevance. Instead, create different very focused pages, each with its own content and keyphrases, and optimize them too.

Creating Content Rich, Keyword-Focused Pages

Internal pages can significantly boost traffic to your site. More often than not, efforts are concentrated only on getting people to visit the home page. This is a mistake. Content rich, keyword focused internal pages are easier to optimize and have an excellent probability of pulling in abundant and

relevant web traffic.

The best way to use internal pages to draw in traffic is to **split your content** among several very focused pages. For example, if you run a site about cars and you are writing a review of three different car models, don't write a lengthy review covering the three cars in one single web page.

Instead, write three separate reviews in three different web pages, and optimize each page for each individual car model. You will have to repeat the model name frequently in the page copy, and include it in the page's title and meta tags.

Some websites lend themselves naturally to this approach, for example, content sites that run a lot of articles. My own internet marketing website (<http://www.theinternetdigest.net>) is a case in point, as some of my articles drive more search engine traffic than the homepage itself. Each of my articles covers a separate topic, and is written in its own, well optimized internal web page.

Submitting your site to the search engines

Once your site is designed and optimized, it is ready to get indexed by the search engines. One way to do it is to submit your site. However, strange as it may sound, submitting your pages is probably not your best option. Talking about its indexing process, Google, the world's largest search engine says:

"We add thousands of new sites to our index each time we crawl the Web, but if you like, you may submit your URL as well. Submission is not necessary and does not guarantee inclusion in our index. Given the large number of sites submitting URLs, it's likely your pages will be found in an automatic crawl before they make it into our index through the URL submission form."

Most search engines follow a similar process to add pages to their index. What this means is that you must try to get links to your page from other pages. As the search engines crawl those pages, they will find the links to your page, and will automatically add it to their index.

The best way, at least in my personal experience, to make search engines find your page for the first time is to write an article on your area of expertise and submit it to popular article syndication sites like <http://www.goarticles.com>, <http://www.articlecity.com> or <http://www.ideamarketers.com> . These sites post articles so that online publishers can pick them up and use it for free provided that they include a small snippet of text (called resource box) with the author's credits at the end of the article. Your resource box is a small paragraph about yourself, written by you, which contains a link to your homepage.

In a matter of days, your article will show up in websites and ezines across the web. As the search engines crawl those sites, they will find the link to your page in your resource box, and will add your page to their index.

Another way is to list your page in a web directory. Directories are lists of links administered by humans, who manually review and approve each submission. Good directories are crawled often by the search engines. The drawback is that most good directories nowadays charge a fee for listing your site quickly, or may take time to review and approve submissions. That is why I prefer the article approach as explained before.

If you still want to submit your site to the search engines, there is nothing wrong with that. I recommend that you stick with the main search engines (Google, Yahoo and MSN) and submit your site manually. Forget those services that claim to submit your site to thousands of search engines. It is only not necessary, but it can even be dangerous, since most of these services use automatic submission programs, which are usually against the search engines' submission policies (search engines may think that you are trying to spam them, and may penalize or refuse to add your site).

To manually submit your site to the main search engines, you can go to:

Google: <http://www.google.com/addurl.html>

Yahoo! Search: <http://submit.search.yahoo.com/>

MSN Search: <http://search.msn.com/addurl.asp>

Site Maps: Let Search Engines Find All Your Pages

One of the most common questions I am asked is if it is necessary to submit all the pages in a website to have them indexed by the search engines. Fortunately, the answer is no. You can have all your pages indexed automatically by following this easy technique: **create a Site Map** (a list of links to all the pages in your site) and link to it directly from your homepage.

How Will A Site Map Help Me?

Since search engines find pages by "crawling" the web, listing links to all your pages in a site map and linking to it directly from your homepage will give the search engines easy access to all your pages. Once the search engine finds your homepage, it will find the link to your site map, follow it, and find all your pages. For more effectiveness, place your Site Map in your root directory (where your index page is located).

How can I check if my pages have been indexed?

Each search engine has an advance search feature that allows you to list all web pages that belong to a site. For example, to check what pages of your site have been picked-up and indexed by Google's, go to www.google.com and type this in the search box:

site:yourdomain.com

You should then get a list of all your pages listed with Google. If all or most of your pages show up, this means that your site map has done its job. If you don't see most of your pages, have patience: it may just mean that the search engine hasn't crawled your main page since you added your site map link. Depending on the frequency with which the search engine crawl your homepage, it may take a few days or weeks for your site map (and your other pages) to be picked up.

Getting Inbound Links: The Key to Search Engine Success

Link Building and Pagerank™

Search engines rely heavily on links from other web pages to rank pages. This is understandable, since if search engines were to rely only on web page copy, it would be too easy to manipulate results. Inbound links from quality sites are more difficult to get and take time. Precisely for this reason, they carry significant weight.

Google's Pagerank™ search algorithm heavily favors inbound links. Other search engines, although they have their own algorithms, also place significant importance to inbound links.

Perhaps focusing on Google's Pagerank™ system will best help explain how links can help your page's rankings in search engines: When page A links to page B, part of page A's PageRank™ (Google's measure of web page importance) trickles down to page B, increasing page B's PageRank™. The more links to your page from important pages related to your subject you can get, the more important your page will become.

Goggle PageRank™ 101

PageRank™ (PR from now on) is a grade (on a scale from one to ten) that Google gives a page after performing a series of elaborate calculations (Google's PageRank™ algorithm) that take into account the page's content, and the number and quality of pages linking to it.

In a nutshell, the more inbound links a web page has, coming from pages that (a) have a high PR **and** (b) feature similar or complementary content, the higher its PR will be. It is very important that the content of the linking page be closely related to your page's copy for best results. A link from a high PR 'soccer' page to a 'dog grooming' page is unlikely to result in any significant PR benefit for the dog grooming page. On the other hand, a link to a real estate agent's page from a mortgage broker's page will be considered an important link from the PR perspective.

The closer a web page gets to a PR of 10, the higher its importance. A PageRank of 4 or 5 is considered good. Very few pages attain a PR of 10 (among those few are Yahoo! and Google itself, although PR is not constant and can change over time). Although nobody knows for a fact, it is widely believed that PageRank is determined using a logarithmic grading scale instead of a linear one. What this means in layman's terms is that it is much more difficult to move from a PR 6 to a PR 7, than it is to move from a PR 1 to a PR 2. (For more insights on how PageRank works read <http://www.theinternetdigest.net/articles/google-pagerank.html> . To read Google's explanation of PageRank™ go to <http://www.google.com/technology/index.html>.)

To be able to see the PageRank™ of a web page, you have to download the **Google toolbar**, a free plug-in that works with your web browser. The Google toolbar provides you with a PageRank™ indicator (green bar) that automatically shows you the PageRank™ of the page you are viewing (a yellow textbox that spells out the page's PR will pop up automatically when you place your cursor over the green PR bar):

To download the Google Toolbar go to <http://www.google.com/toolbar.html>.

To learn all about the Google Toolbar go to: <http://toolbar.google.com/help.html>

(**Note:** There are indications that the importance of links from high Pagerank pages has diminished lately, given the fact that link exchanges and link buying or renting schemes have become commonplace. Instead, Google seems to favor links developed naturally (w/o reciprocal links), preferably over a long period of time and from many different locations. If in the past a few links from high PR pages were likely to give you a boost, nowadays a high number of links with lower PR pages, developed over time, seems to matter more).

Getting listed in quality directories

Since good directories use qualified human editors who choose listed sites very carefully using strict criteria, and place them in tightly focused categories, they are given significant weight in search engine algorithms. In other words, if a link to your page is found by search engines in a quality directory, your page will receive a boost. Therefore, listing your pages in quality directories is very important. The two biggest directories are Yahoo! (\$299/year listing fee) and DMOZ (free, but

listing your site can take months). In between, there are many smaller, high quality directories that charge reasonable listing fees. They should be an important part of your link building program.

Get listed in Yahoo!: Submissions to Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>) are no longer free for commercial sites. Your commercial site can be reviewed in about a week for a fee of \$299, although inclusion in the directory is not guaranteed. However, if you do get accepted, the \$299 fee will be due every year if you want your site to continue to be listed). A link from Yahoo's directory is still one of the best links you can get, and it is worth the money you spend in it. To learn how to submit your site to the Yahoo! directory, go to this page:
<http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/>

Get listed in DMOZ: DMOZ, also known as The Open Directory Project <http://www.dmoz.org> is the world's largest directory. It is maintained by voluntary editors who review your site prior to inclusion. Being listed in this directory is important because it is used by Google and America Online to build their directories. Getting listed is free, but it may take a few weeks or even months to get listed, which can be a bit frustrating. However, you must take the time to submit your site and follow the submission guidelines, which are pretty strict. To learn how to submit your site to the Open Directory Project, go to this page:
<http://dmoz.org/add.html>

Other Good Directories:

Zeal: <http://www.zeal.com>

GoGuides: <http://www.goguides.org>

Wow Directory: <http://www.wowdirectory.com>

Joe Ant: <http://www.joeant.com>

BlueFind: <http://www.bluefind.com>

About.com: <http://www.about.com>

Exchanging Links

Exchanging links is another good way to get inbound links, provided that you do it with reputable sites with a topic related to your site, and if listing the sites of your link partners will help your visitors.

These are some steps you can follow for a successful link exchange campaign:

1. Create a Links page on your site, where you can place links to all the sites that link to you. Make sure to provide clear instructions on how to link to you, including the exact HTML code you want your link partners to use. My suggestion is to turn that "Links" page into a high-quality, specialized topical directory. The reason is that "Links" pages are not very well regarded by search engines, especially if they are just a random, unorganized collection of links, with no description and little relation to each other. Good directories, on the other hand are especially important to search engines. When you link to your links page, use the word 'Directory' in the anchor text.
2. Download the Google toolbar: The Google toolbar displays the **PageRank™** of every page you visit (if a page is related to the topic of your site and has a high Page Rank, it is a good candidate to exchange links).
3. Go to the major search engines and search for your target keywords (the words you think people will use to find sites like yours). Click on each of the results and see if the site:
 - a. Is **complementary** (non-competitive) with your site
 - b. Has a **good PageRank**
 - c. Has a **links page**.If it does, put it on your list of selected sites.
4. Write to the webmasters of the selected sites and ask them for a link exchange, following these guidelines:
 - a. Place a link to them on your own site **before** contacting them.
 - b. Start your letter by explaining the nature of your site, how does it relate to theirs, and how both would benefit from the exchange.
 - c. Give them the URL of your links page, so they can see their link and make sure that their link information is OK. The fact that they see their link on your site will make them more inclined to reciprocate.
 - d. Give them the exact HTML code that they should use to link to you. By all means, include your main keywords in the link text. For example, if you own a pet supplies store called Petmart, and assuming that your main keywords are "pet supply store", it is better to make the link text: Petmart - The Pet Supply Super Store, instead of just Petmart.
5. Keep track of what you're doing: maintain a spreadsheet where you can write down the name of each target site, their webmaster's email address, their URL, the URL of their links page, the date you first contacted them, and the date when they finally placed the link to your site. If you don't see your link after a couple of weeks, send them a reminder. If you don't get a

response in another week, remove the link you originally placed on your site and move on.

Another way to find suitable link partners is by finding out who is linking to your competitors. You can use a free tool like the one in http://www.bcentral.com/products/link_finder.asp . Just type the URL of your competitor and you will get a list of sites that link to them. Write to the webmasters of those sites and ask for a link.

Submitting articles:

Pages ago, I mentioned writing articles as the best way to get your site indexed by the search engines. It is also one of the best ways to promote your website and get hundreds of quality links to your page. It will also help you develop credibility and establish yourself as an expert. There are a few things to take into account to maximize the effectiveness of your articles, for the search engines and your readers alike:

- Your article should be short and to the point. It must act as a free sample that entices your reader to go to your website for more.
- Articles that list tips to solve problems are especially attractive and will get published more.
- Write in easy to understand "layman's" terms.
- Whenever possible, write from personal experience. People love to hear other people's experiences (how did they do it?). This approach also tends to hold their attention longer.
- Be extra-careful to avoid spelling and grammatical errors. They will make you lose credibility and may be a reason for not publishing it.
- Don't make your article sound like a sales pitch; offer honest, value-adding advice.
- Don't include links to your affiliate programs in the body of your article. It will make your advice seem biased and most ezine editors will not consider it for publication.
- Finally, don't forget the most important part: include a link to your website in your your resource box.

Renting links

Many high Pagerank™ websites rent text links to other pages. These links are really a form of advertising, although their main objective is not necessarily to generate traffic but to pass along Pagerank™. Links from pages with Pagerank™ of 7 and higher can cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars a month. Links from pages with Pagerank™ of 5 and 6 are also very well regarded and less expensive. Google is catching up to the practice of selling and renting links and is taking measures to discourage it (read this article about what has come to be known as Google's Sandbox Effect: <http://www.theinternetdigest.net/articles/google-sandbox-effect.html> . I do not recommend renting links from unknown services with the intention of pumping up your Pagerank™. Purchasing or renting links from well known publications where a link to your site can provide value to the publication's readers (on-topic advertising) is OK.

Posting in forums and weblogs

Since forums and weblogs offer plenty of fresh content, search engine spiders tend to crawl them often. If you are a prolific contributor to these types of site and use a signature file with a link to your page, having many entries may give you a relevance boost with the search engines (however, since it is becoming common practice to spam forums and weblogs with junk posts this may change in the future).

Getting unsolicited links

The **unsolicited link** (also called **natural link**) is the most valuable link, and the most difficult to get. It occurs when you have content that is so remarkable that people feel compelled to link to you. You will most likely get unsolicited links when you post original ideas, voice strong opinions, serve a specific niche very well, or offer something of value for free (for example a useful online tool). An example of a site that has achieved high Pagerank™ mostly on unsolicited links is Jakob Nielsen's site (<http://www.useit.com>). The 'guru' of web usability has an extremely plain and unattractive site from the graphic standpoint, however, his great content and original ideas have compelled so many people to link to it that it is one of the world's most visited sites.

Link Anchor Text and Search Engine Behavior

As important as getting a large number of quality inbound links is to have the right wording on those links (the link anchor text). Search engines are paying a great deal of attention to the anchor text of the links pointing to your site.

To give you an example of how important link anchor text is, let's suppose that you run a web design site, and that you want it to rank very high with the search engines for the search term "**web design**". If you had 100 links pointing to your homepage, and the anchor text of all of them said "**click here**", they wouldn't tell the search engines a whole lot about your site. The search engines will have to rely on your page copy or the copy of the page linking to you to try to find out if your page is relevant to web design.

However, if instead of "**click here**", the anchor text on those links said "**web design**", the search engines will assume that your site is an authority on web design, and will most likely give your site a higher ranking for that keyphrase.

Another proof that search engines pay a lot of attention to the link anchor text is the fact that most companies rank very high when the search term is their company name (since a company's name is normally the most popular anchor text used to link to it).

You must take every opportunity to **influence the anchor text** used to link to your pages. Your anchor text should always include your preferred keywords. While you won't be able to influence the anchor text used by people who spontaneously link to you, there are other instances in which you do have control, for example, when you list your site in directories or exchange links.

Final Words

Search Engine behavior is always changing, as their algorithms try to catch up with the latest optimization tips and tricks. The best way to keep up to date with the search engines is to rely on the ongoing work of the best experts in the field. These will be search marketing professionals that understand how search engines work and who recommend sound strategies (not spam or dirty tricks) that will give you the best results long term. Probably the most comprehensive write up about search

engine optimization is Aaron Wall's [SEO BOOK](#) . This ebook is a must-have resource for beginning and expert internet marketers alike. It will take you through the history of search engines, their inner workings, the way they rank web pages today, and the trends that will shape their future behavior. Aside from that, the SEOBOOK comes with the extra benefit of free updates for life. Being search engine optimization such a dynamic field, an SEO book with free lifetime updates by one of the most reknown experts in the industry is an invaluable companion in your internet marketing journey.

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Search Engine Optimization Resources



[The SEO Book](#): The industry standard **#1 ranked** SEO Book. Author Aaron Wall tells you everything you need to know about **Search Engine Optimization**. Covers all major search engines, not just Google. This eBook comes with **free updates** for life so you can rest assured that you will always be current with the latest search engine developments. Highly recommended.

[[More Information](#)]

[The Nitty Gritty of Search Engine Optimization](#) (by Jill Whalen) This special report in ebook form is probably the most thorough guide on how to write for the search engines. Making sure that your main keywords are well represented in your page copy without sacrificing readability is not always easy, but this special report shows you how to do it.

[The Link Building Basics E-Guide](#): (by Larry Sullivan) ONLY \$25.00! Your Personal Guide to understanding and finding links to improve your Link Popularity.

[Search Engine Visibility](#) (by Shari Thurow) Most web developers/designers build a site first and worry about "searchability" later, which is a costly mistake. This book will teach you how to design a site primarily for your visitors, while making it easy to find in the search engines. Forwarded by Danny Sullivan, from Search Engine Watch.