



17 Ways to Pump Up Your SEO

Tips to Help You Reach the Top in Search Results

By Drew Zagorski
March 26, 2009

Getting your SEO - search engine optimization - right can go a long way in helping you sustain and grow your business, especially during tough economic times. It's a fact that people are using search engines as their first step in finding goods and services, and comparing service providers and vendors. Yes, referrals play a role, but it's also a fact that the vast majority of people who are referred to a business will Google it before making the move to contact them.

The bottom line is this: if you're not doing everything you can to optimize your web presence (and that includes your social network pages) you could be chop-blocking the success of your business in a big way.

In search results, there are sponsored/paid placements (typically displayed on top and in the right channel), local results and organic results. (Respond to the [LeftBrainRightBrain Marketing LinkedIn Poll](#) on Google search results.) Many searchers look to the organic results first, so ensuring you have a high organic placement is critical. A recent Jupiter Research study found that 68% of search engine users *click on* listings that make the first page of results, and 82% don't go beyond the first three pages when reviewing results. The study also found that 39% of searchers consider companies who are featured among the top natural search results to be leaders in their field. That's huge.

So getting to the first three pages of results, and ideally the first page itself, requires solid keyword research and meta tags that are dialed in to that research.

For keywords, Google Insights for Search, which allows you to compare search volume patterns by category, geographic region, etc., and Google AdWords Keyword Tool, will give you great information about the keywords you're considering.

And one more thing about keywords... a February 2009 study by Hitwise found that more users are performing long-tail searches—with a 10% year-over-year increase for queries averaging 5+ words in length and a 22% increase in searches that include 8+ words.

So, people are using longer strings in their searches and search engines are getting smarter about delivering results for them.

With the keyword research foundation laid, here are 17 ways to pump up your SEO:

1. Dial in your title and description tags: Title tag - Lead with one or two important keywords, NOT your business name (unless it's keyword rich itself). Search engines only read the first 65-70 characters, spaces included. Description tag - You've got about 165-170 characters (spaces included) for this tag. Make it a keyword rich marketing message. With both of these, the closer those keywords are to the beginning, the more weight they'll carry.

2. Dial in page content and body copy: Google is trending away from placing relevance on navigational links, sidebars, headers and footers, so it's more important than ever to make sure your keywords are woven into your copy. Be deliberate about creating text anchors and contextual links, which are rising in relevance.

3. Leave the stuffing for the turkey: Avoid keyword stuffing. It can potentially get you penalized by the search engines. Use search terms in a relevant context.

4. Use keywords as links: Get away from using phrases such as "click here" or "learn more" to link visitors to other content. Use keywords as links to tell the reader and search engine what the page you're linking to is about.

5. Don't bury the key stuff: Architect your site so that the most important and relevant pages are only a click away from your home page. Also, consider highlighting featured content on your home page. (See www.lbrbmarketing.com and see the Latest Grey Matter as an example.)

6. Make sure you have an XML site map: Many hosting companies have a feature that allows you to auto generate this file and there are several free tools available online (just Google "free XML site map generator"). An XML site map file lists all the important URLs on your site so search engines can more easily navigate it. Just be sure to update it whenever you add or edit pages.



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7. Avoid being dinged for duplicate content:

Canonical tags (see <http://searchengineland.com/canonical-tag-16537>) are a new tool to help you avoid the problem of duplicate content. Canonical tags let search engines know which versions of your pages are definitive, so that you're not penalized for duplicate content.

8. Blend well: The use of video, news and image results is becoming more relevant for search engines. Searchers are becoming more and more apt to click on news, image, and video search results when they appear in blended search, according to a recent Jupiter Research study performed in conjunction with iProspect.

Here's how to blend well:

- ☛ Optimize your news, image, or video to attain its own search rank.
- ☛ Press releases and other news content should include the appropriate keywords and be one click away from your homepage, if not directly on your homepage.
- ☛ Images can also be added to your news postings to capture more interest.
- ☛ Optimize images and video by including keywords in the image file name.
- ☛ Post your videos to YouTube (they're owned by Google, so you can do the math there), and when you do incorporate keywords into their titles and descriptions.

(By the way, Tad Newberry of Big Ya Productions has a killer offer to produce 2 30-second videos for less than \$300. You can contact Tad for more details at bigya@comcast.net.)

9. Get blogged: OK - not everyone has the time to manage a fully interactive blog. But regardless, blogging needs to be part of your strategy. A few tacks you can take here:

- ☛ Create your own blog, make it highly interactive and be a part of it.

- ☛ Create your blog, but not so interactive. Post your content and let readers comment while you go about your business.
- ☛ Participate in other blogs. Find a couple that are relevant to your business, and comment regularly.

Whichever way you go, be sure to use keywords in your postings and always provide your business name and URL.

10. Paid placements: Getting your name in as many places of relevance as you can will always help you. As mentioned earlier, organic listings tend to get the most attention (at least at this point in time) so it's where you should put most of yours, but if you can afford to do a sponsored link with an adwords campaign, it's something you should consider. The fact is that if someone sees you in a sponsored link, then down in the organics, your odds of being clicked through to go up. That said, I'm still a big believer in winning with a purely organic campaign. * * *

11. Link wisely: Getting as many reciprocal links as possible is not in your best interest. Getting relevant links is. Don't accept a colleague's request to place a reciprocal link on your site simply because you know them. Make sure the sites you're linking with are relevant. Search engines are more sophisticated, determining rank in part through the quality and context of each link and penalizing sites that participate in link farms or that create irrelevant links pages.

12. Bait the hook: Create link bait. Link bait is quality content that visitors will find so useful they'll want to link to it from their sites.

13. Charity begins at home: Share your content freely and make it easy for people to share it. There are many free tools for creating bookmarks, buttons and widgets that enable the sharing of content. My favorite is <http://www.addthis.com/>.

14. Socialize and drive: Promote new content in all of your social networks. Use the tools they offer to let people know you've just added something new, and include (if space permits) the URL for the content.

15. Plug 'em: Be free with your plugs. If you find good content somewhere or use content as reference



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material, let your visitors know about that and link to your sources. This creates high relevance links for both you and the source, which is good for you both. And let the source know about it. They may want to point to the content you reference them in.

16. Feed your blog: If you do have a blog, a requirement is to have an RSS feed for it. This will enable you to have a listing in Google Blog Search, so your blog will gain rank and boost your blended search results. RSS feeds also allow your headlines and direct links to your content to be syndicated to other Web sites and reach a larger audience. To speed up the process you can also submit your RSS feed to designated feed search engines, such as Feedster.

17. Make cameos: A final tip on blogs if you don't have the time to manage one yourself. Find a blog you like and that's relevant and submit content to the owner as a guest writer.

Winning the SEO game is a critical component to securing the long term success of your business. That's simply the world we live in. It's quickly becoming a 'need to have' rather than a 'nice to have.' The tips we've shared here will put you well on the way to getting to the top!

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