

SEO SECRETS REVEALED

Better listings on search engines means more visitors to your site, and ultimately more sales for your business. The holy grail of internet marketing is Search Engine Optimisation – but what exactly is it and how can you make it work for your business?

SEO is all about making changes to the hidden code within the documents that make up your site, as well as in the content of your web pages. The changes enable a search engine to locate your site more easily by finding the relevant information quickly and – hopefully – putting you ahead of the competition.

Small businesses can't afford to ignore SEO – if you're not doing it you can guarantee your competitors are! It isn't rocket science – you just need to understand a few basic rules.

The best place to start is by doing your research. Finding the right combination of search terms (the words and phrases your customers might type into their browser) is key. Google's own Adwords tool is useful for this, giving a graded search volume result for each word you type in.

Each page of your site should be targeted for the right two or three keywords. Ideally, you would plan this at the stage of building your site, but if you are already up-and-running it's not too late to tweak the code. Think with your head, not your heart – really try to put yourself in the place of your prospects.

Okay, so you've come up with all the right words for SEO and you need to slot them into your web pages. Where exactly do you put them? Search engines look in various places but the main ones are: meta-tags, page titles, alternate text for images and filenames.

Load these areas with relevant terms in the following ways:

- The meta-tag element is in the head section of your html code. It contains copyright information as well as search terms. Make sure you keep these updated and check, check, check that they are the terms your customers are using when they search for your product or service. How? Ask them!
- When designing your site keep your page titles relevant and properly targeted. Forgot this step? It's not too late – but you will need to update your titles and filenames when you upload your altered pages to keep the site structure consistent.
- Alternative text for images is text that is embedded in the html code for use in the event that an image doesn't load. Many site builders don't bother with this, but as you can see, for the purposes of SEO it is well worth adding.

The last and possibly most important step is to build links from other sites to yours. These are known as incoming links and seriously raise your profile on search engines such as Google. Even one incoming link can have a good effect, but the more you have the higher you go! Get these links by building relationships with other sites (obviously not the competition) and have a reciprocal link for them.

SEO Do's and Don't's

DO create a site-map to help search engines access any pages that are hidden from menus. Google has its own tool to help you do this.

DON'T use spam or repeated words. Search engines will detect this and won't be happy!

DO find out what your competitors are doing by sneaking a look at their html. Right click on any web page and select view source. Look for the meta-tag element to find their key word terms.

DON'T try and do it all at once. A slow rise on a search engine will be a longer lasting one. And beware of those who promise to put at the top of the list immediately – it just doesn't work like that I'm afraid!