

For your departments:

- Economy
- Internet

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Press release

Seven steps to more success on the Internet: How to optimize your domain for search engines.

Search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Lycos are the Internet's Yellow Pages. In the same way that new customers find a shop in the Yellow Pages, Internet users use search engines to find domains. To attract a large number of visitors, a website needs to be at the top of the search results (and not on page 753 where no-one will find it). How do you get a website to the top of the search results?

It doesn't matter whether you're a one person company or a global corporation: these days, you have to have your own website. Yet what the Internet user actually sees on screen is often less impressive: badly arranged navigation and disorganized information often prevent users from finding what they're looking for, and then there are the endless construction sites that redirect users from one page to another. Small user numbers mean a lack of feedback for the provider. This doesn't just cost you in terms of commercial success, it also means you can't adapt the content of your website to what users are actually looking for. All this is both a cause and an effect of a bad rating in search engines.

Poor search engine ratings and the subsequent lack of clients are the result of a bad website design. When companies produce their own pages, they generally don't have enough critical distance to their own products or services or time to invest in the design. But their main disadvantage is that they have too little experience in programming techniques and search engine optimization. Many web designers also lack basic knowledge in this area. This can result in the actual HTML page language being largely suppressed by interactive, moving pictures, which causes the search engines' little information gatherers ("search robots") to skip a website if they don't encounter standard HTML on it. A website's rating in search engines can also be adversely affected if an excessive number of pages are loaded from databases: because different content is presented each time the pages are loaded, they are not recorded by search engines. The widespread use of framed pages ("framesets") presents a further hurdle for many search robots: as robots cannot read framesets correctly, they skip them.

The significance of meta tags – short, invisible descriptions at the beginning of each HTML page about the content, author, language etc. – is similarly not universally understood. Meta tags are more important for many search engines than normal page text. The keywords contained in the page's meta tags facilitate firstly the search via keywords and secondly the classification in the search catalogs. Plus meta tags can also contain details about the page's content that are also displayed in the search results. Can you imagine the potential damage caused by missing or incorrect meta tags?

Instead of applying a few simple basics of web design, people often try to trick their way to a better place in the search results. Common attempts at manipulation include irrelevant and incorrect meta tags, abuse of commentaries, too frequent repetition and improper use of search terms, hidden texts, and redirects to simulate volume that doesn't actually exist. These examples are filtered without mercy by search engines and land pages on the (junk mail) index. A page that is flagged as junk mail can cost you a large number of potential customers.

It's no wonder, then, that half of all domains lie idle, and many websites run aground. But there is a recipe that promises success for creating search engine-compatible websites:

1. Use meaningful titles: Search terms that appear in titles are particularly useful to search engines. Pages with inadequate titles such as "untitled" or "page 5" motivate users to click the page away. So watch out for the titles: they don't just help search engines.
2. Put important things first: The content of the home page and in the first lines of text are particularly significant. Search robots and surfers use these to judge how well a page matches the current search. You should put the core statements of a website on the home page, as many search robots only look at a few pages of the website, and the home page is particularly significant.
3. Use meta tags: Keywords and page content are processed for search robots. This also enables keywords in a specific meta tag to be searched for. Meta tags thus improve the way that information is collected, classified, and assessed.
4. Give text and links meaningful names: A page is rated more highly if the search term is contained in the domain or file name, the title, link, heading, and meta tags such as "Content" or "Keywords." If you use a graphical heading, you should also write it as text to

- make it accessible to search engines. You should also add terms that are similar in meaning and related to the same subject. This increases the number of search terms and ensures that a page appears more frequently in the search results. Using different terms in the page description ("Description" meta tag) increases the chance of a hit from related queries.
5. Put function before design: Well-structured HTML increases the searchability for search robots. Flashing pictures, graphical links or nested frames decrease the number of pages searched. You should also always add alternative text to graphics, as some search engines also read this. Don't use framed pages ("framesets").
 6. Update pages regularly: Search robots visit websites regularly and give newer sites a better rating.
 7. Get your website linked from other pages: Many search engines rate a page as more important the more frequently it is referred to by other pages.

There are many other details beyond these guidelines that optimally equip a website for the search engines' techniques. It's often best, then, to ask an expert. Lüttgau from Bad Vilbel (www.luettgau.com) is a good first port of call for reliable search engine optimization. If you need a web designer at the same time, you're in good hands with Bitpalast in Berlin (www.bitpalast.de). This provider of web services also operates a worldwide data network that delivers search engine-optimized websites faster and more securely to users. Along with other qualified experts, the customer is given more than just an objective assessment of the web content. In addition to quality control, which checks that the texts work and are meaningful, the experts also concentrate on search engine-oriented web design. An external service provider usually has more options in terms of coordinating texts, headings, and links. The time-consuming test queries, target group analysis, and textual work you do yourself on your home-made site can be performed more precisely, and ultimately better, by marketing experts. Professional search engine optimizers are a guarantee to success on the Internet, and they safeguard your investment in a website.

But if you would still like to have a go yourself first and have heeded these guidelines, you have nothing to lose. Try it — with a bit of luck, you may end up on page one of a big search engine in a couple of months. It's certainly worth a try.