



## Roadmap Series

Issue 2

# Search Engine Optimization: The Basics

Prepared by Steve Devries, Treehouse SEM

2-12-09

# Search Engine Optimization

Produced by Steve Devries, Treehouse SEM

## Why SEO?

Search engines provide the majority of traffic to websites across the Internet, regardless of website focus. Therefore, if your site cannot be properly located and indexed by the leading search engines, you are missing out on the best opportunity to drive targeted visitors and potential revenue.

## What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization or SEO, is the process by which pages are improved to increase their organic search engine rankings. This is done by assessing what the individual search engines are looking for and providing that. The outcome of an SEO Campaign is to create high organic rankings for the keywords/phrases for which the client is indeed an authority. This will ultimately create an increase in targeted traffic.

A good SEO campaign includes the following three aspects:

- Keyword Analysis
- Onsite Optimization
- Offsite Optimization

**Keyword analysis** is the process by which you analyze and select keywords based on traffic, competition, and relevance. If you are not selecting the proper keywords, then the rest of the optimization is really a lost cause. The text and theme of the site needs to revolve around these keywords and very much define how the site appears to both users and search engines.

**Onsite optimization** deals with changes made to the site itself. This involves making changes to the text content, architecture of the site, HTML code, and page layout. This is the most commonly understood aspect of SEO, but only accounts for about 40% of a site's rankings. This is where your keywords are placed throughout the code to show the search engines what your site is about.

**Offsite optimization** deals with changes made outside the scope of the site. This mainly involves increasing the quantity and quality of inbound links to the site. Approximately 60% of Google's current ranking algorithm is based on inbound linking. Your goal is to maximize the site's exposure on the Web and get as many sites as possible to link back to your site.

## What is a good keyword and what is not?

This is the ultimate question we have to ask ourselves when judging keywords. There are many variables you have to take into account when selecting exactly what keywords your site will be optimized for.

Use the following criteria to determine the viability of a keyword:

- The estimated amount of searches for the keyword in a 24 hour period
- The number of sites competing for the keyword
- The quality of the sites competing for the keyword
- The ability of the site to support the keyword
- Relevance between keywords
- The target audience of the site

Keep in mind that your number one goal is to accurately depict what the site is about through the keywords (and the eventual text content). If your site is not properly described by the keywords then either the site is targeted wrong or you've selected the wrong keywords.

Search engines like sites that are targeted to a specific topic. If a site is spread too thin as far as topic goes, then it will be much harder to appear as an authority for any one topic. Search engines do favor large sites, but generally it is better to have a smaller targeted site than a larger broad site that is about many topics.

## Roadmap Series

Issue 2



## Roadmap Series

Issue 2



It's not uncommon to discover site theme issues when doing keyword selection. Oftentimes, it leads to a reassessment of the site as a whole (which is a positive). In this way, general marketing, user experience, and SEO overlap. If you do not feel your site is targeted towards the correct keywords and themes, it is important that you retarget the site and its content prior to optimization. You should understand your audience, the purpose of your site, and its themes before even starting an SEO initiative.

It is also common for sites to get caught up in industry jargon. You have to look at your keywords as your target audience would. If you're targeting the general consumer and you use lots of industry jargon, then you cannot expect much of a return on investment.

Another thing to watch out for is overly generic keywords. If you are attempting to optimize your site for keywords that can mean many other things, you are bringing in a whole lot of new competition.

So, we have a small list now of what to avoid.

- Keywords that are not relevant to each other
- Keywords that do not fit the theme of the site
- Industry jargon if it is not applicable to the audience
- Keywords that are too generic / overly competitive

## META Headers

Optimizing the META header is the first and easiest step in onsite optimization. There are four main areas that you should be concerned with:

- Title
- Description
- Keywords
- Robots

Depending on the keyword selection, the Title should be made up of the first two keywords. This provides high density and prominence for both keywords instead of using it all on one. Of course, the Title should make sense and be descriptive of the page.

The Description borrows the same idea, but expands on it a little. It is ideal to include both the primary and secondary keyword in a short sentence describing the page.

The Keywords field is simply a list of the keywords separated by commas with no spaces in between.

The Robots tags tell the search engine spiders what to do with the page.

## Links

*"Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at considerably more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; for example, it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages 'important.'"*

*-Quote from Google's website*

Link popularity is one of the most important factors search engines use in determining where you will rank in the search engine results (SERPs) for your keywords and phrases, as it helps them to determine how important or popular your site is and what its reputation is. Link building, as part of the offsite optimization process, is the process of finding related/relevant websites and receiving a link from them to you. Natural linking occurs when a site has good content that others will link to without being asked. But to get these links, people have to know about you. It is a catch 22. Building links has become pretty sophisticated over the last couple of years. Today you need a mixture of links from many sources including articles, press releases, social media, blogs, directories and others.

## To learn more:

Keep an eye out for some exciting new SEO related products and services from [WebAssist](#).

# Search Engine Optimization: The Basics

## About WebAssist

WebAssist helps you build better websites faster by offering software, solutions, and training needed to succeed on the web. WebAssist.com hosts a thriving community of over 300,000 designers, developers, and business owners. WebAssist's partners include Adobe, Microsoft, and PayPal.

## About Treehouse SEM

TreeHouse SEM exists to bring expanded visibility to client websites through ethical search engine optimization techniques and good user experience. We have built a tried and true methodology that abides by all search engine guidelines and provides effective, long-lasting results. Our methodology revolves around improving client sites instead of simply implementing workarounds. A professional SEO company that is in the business of improving sites has clients that receive the maximum amount of value from campaigns.

## Roadmap Series

Issue 2



WebAssist.com Corporation  
8899 University Center Lane  
San Diego, CA 92122  
USA  
[www.webassist.com](http://www.webassist.com)