

# Search Engine Optimization

## What's in it for you?

### Introduction

A number of articles and white papers have been written on this topic. Before the days of Google and Web 2.0 there was little attention paid to Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO refers to “optimizing” web sites to rank very high in the results of search engines such as Google, Yahoo and MSN. SEO helps structure your website content so it is easily found and indexed by search engines. In the early days of the Internet Era you could get your site listed on Yahoo or Altavista by merely submitting it. As long as it wasn't too complicated for search engines to understand your site, you could get it listed within 2 to 3 days. But Yahoo and Altavista couldn't keep up with the flood of URL submissions. As web evolved, companies began to embrace the online medium and the potential for using it as a marketing tool.

In the late 1990's something dramatic happened. Google introduced PageRank, a system of ranking Web pages based on their importance and other factors. Google search spiders crawl through the web following links, indexing and categorizing pages based on their content and relevancy. When the search spiders crawl and finds backlinks to your site along the way, each backlink translates to a positive confidence of vote to your site. It indicates popularity or importance of your website to the search engine which ultimately helps place you in the top of the search results. But this is one of the many factors that Google or other search spiders take into account while ranking sites. In order to allow spiders to understand the site content, web masters needed to follow certain rules like using proper keywords, title tags and content in each web page. At this point search became more of an art than a science. People can no longer expect their sites to appear in the top of the search engine results by simply adding their sites to major directories.

### Why is SEO important to you?

The Search Engine market is fragmented, with Google commanding the majority of the market share (over 80%). If there is one search engine that you want to focus on, that would be Google. Microsoft's announced bid for Yahoo on Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 might increase Microsoft's share in the search market, but it still won't be able to challenge Google's dominance in the Internet Search market (at least not in the near future).



**Web Search Market Share and Volume**

(Top Five web search engine's share of searches, volume, and performance)

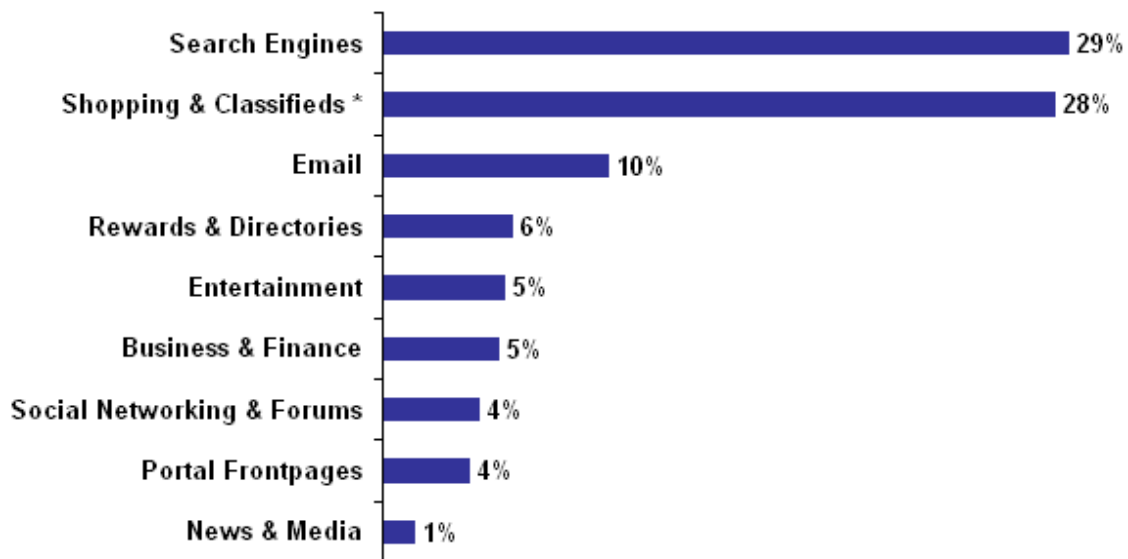


Engine	Market Share			Query Volume (millions)			Volume Change	
	Jan-08	Dec-07	Jan-07	Jan-08	Dec-07	Jan-07	M-O-M	Y-O-Y
Google	68.6%	68.1%	61.9%	5,886	5,563	3,898	5.8%	51.0%
Yahoo!	16.7%	17.0%	22.7%	1,430	1,386	1,426	3.2%	0.3%
MSN/Live	8.7%	9.1%	8.9%	743	746	560	-0.3%	32.7%
Ask	3.7%	3.6%	3.4%	322	298	215	8.0%	49.4%
AOL	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	149	137	101	8.4%	46.7%

Fig 1: Search Engine Landscape (Source:Compete.com)

In late 2007, a survey concluded that over 50% of traffic originated at a search engine. According to a 2007 research report published by eMarketer, over 20% of U.S Internet users use a search engine at least 4-5 times in a day.

According to Internet Measurement firm, Hitwise, Search Engines were the highest sources of traffic during the peak Christmas shopping season, representing 57% of total traffic. Google alone was responsible for 18% of the total traffic, followed by Yahoo with 6%.



\* Excludes Rewards &amp; Directories

Fig 2: Sources of upstream traffic to the Hitwise Retail Index (Source:Hitwise)

The above figure highlights the importance of SEO as a potential marketing tool in attracting visitors to your site.



## How do you implement SEO?

### Analyze your current state

Before you start your SEO implementation, it is a good practice to analyze current state of your site content. Evaluate your goals and priorities. Determine your plan of attack. After you implement a solution do not expect immediate results. Don't be tempted to go straight for a Pay Per Click (PPC) campaign such as Google AdWords or Yahoo Small Business marketing to promote your site. As I pointed in the Introduction section, what determines your site's placement involves more than one factor.

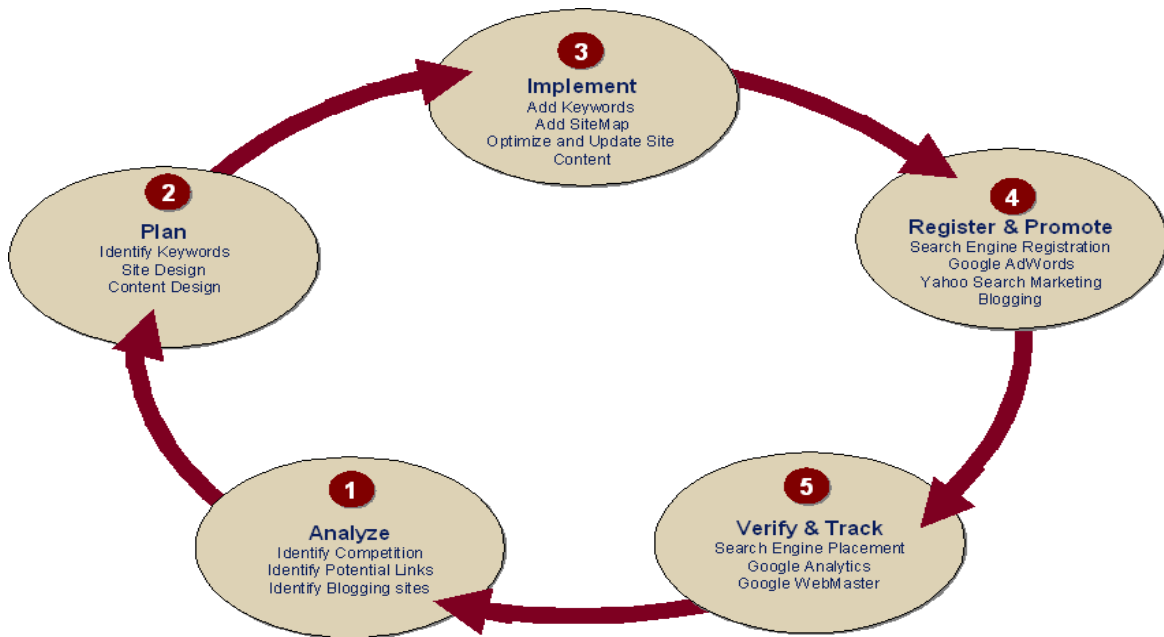


Fig3: SEO Implementation Lifecycle  
(Source: Seosolutions.biz)

### Why links matter

PageRank is a value that Google gives to a page based on the number of links pointing to your site. So how do you get other sites to link (or backlink) to your site? You can try the following methods:

- **Register** with major search engines (Yahoo, OpenDirectory, MSN)
- **Send press releases** about your product or idea that generates free links
- **Hire an expert** to write something positive about your product and publish in an industry newsletter, magazine or a local newspaper
- **Ask** to be a featured or sponsored client in a major portal site





- **Ask** employees to mention you and your products
- **Enlist** in a local library's site
- **Make** reciprocal link requests
- **Mention** your site in major Blogging sites, Yahoo Answers and Google Groups
- **Respond** to blogs or queries in Yahoo Answers (just don't over-do it)
- **Syndicate** your content through external RSS feeds to different sites
- **Use** announcement sites like URLwire.com to announce your site
- **Consider** ad campaigns through Google AdWords

## ***Re-engineer your site content***

Here are a few basic things you can do to clean up your site and make it Search Engine friendly.

### **1. Site Hierarchy and text links**

Most sites employ DHTML, Flash, Frames and other fancy objects to enhance the end user's experience. While these objects are great to captivate the users attention, Google and other search engines can't understand them and will have trouble interpreting them while crawling your sites. Google introduced the concept of Sitemap a while ago that enables Google to discover your site, structure and diagnose any potential problems. Sitemap is especially important if your site has a lot of dynamic content, is brand new, has a lot of archived pages that are not linked well.

Creating a Sitemap is pretty simple. You can use a Sitemap generator tool such as the one Google provides. For simpler sites you can create a simple xml file thats lists all the URLs in your site. An example Sitemap XML is outlined below

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.yourdomain.com/</loc>
    <lastmod>2007-03-03</lastmod>
    <changefreq>weekly</changefreq>
    <priority>0.8</priority>
  </url>
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.yourdomain.com/Index.html</loc>
  </url>
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.yourdomain.com/News.html</loc>
  </url>
</urlset>
```

The “lastmod” tag tells Google when the last time that particular page was modified. The “Changefreq” identifies how often a page is likely to change.



Once you created your sitemap, you upload it to your web server's root directory. Use Google's WebMaster tool (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/>) to add your new sitemap. Next time when Google spiders your site, it will index all the URL's it finds in the Sitemap..

To see the specific URLs included in the Google index, do a Google search for site:[yourdomain.com]

## **2. Server Side Dynamic Content**

Many sites use session IDs to track a user's path to the site. If the session IDs vary on each visit, Google and most other search engines simply ignore the page, resulting in it not being indexed.

You can avoid this scenario by doing two things:

- Store session information in a cookie on the user's computer
- If the request is made from a searchbot, you can have your web server serve pages without any session IDs, hence allowing the searchbot to navigate through your site without using any session IDs

## **3. Use Targeted Keywords**

Create a narrow targeted keywords list that you think identifies your site properly. Check Yahoo's Overture ([searchmarketing.yahoo.com](http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com)) or WordTracker ([www.wordtracker.com](http://www.wordtracker.com)) for ideas on selecting keywords. You can find out the effectiveness of your keywords. In WordTracker for instance, you can input your keyword to see how often people have searched for it. It also tells you how often a term is searched and how many pages appear for that term.

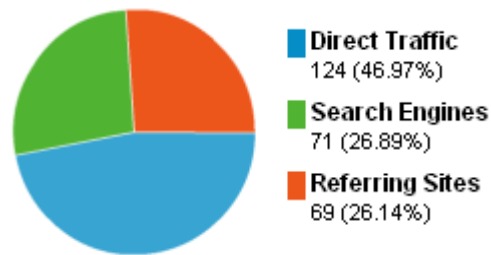
Once you identify the keywords, what do you do with them? One obvious thing to do is to add them inside the Meta Keywords tag. In addition, use the keywords generously throughout your page content. Search Engines love a site with fresh descriptive content filled with keywords. This means constantly updating your site with new, fresh content is vital to your overall SEO strategy.

## **How do you measure?**

Measuring your returns on SEO investments is crucial. But once you made the enhancements to your site, do not expect to see immediate results. It could take anywhere from a month to 3 months to see any significant impact on your traffic numbers (assuming you implemented the right SEO steps).

Use a Business Optimization tool like Omniture or Google Analytics to analyze visitors and traffic source data. On Google Analytics, you find a section on Traffic Sources. It provides insight into how visitors find your site, whether through a) keyword search, b) or backlinks or c) people directly typing the site url. For example, the following chart shows that nearly 27% of traffic originated through a search engine.





If you dig deeper, you can find what keywords people used on the search engines that led them to your site.

Google Analytics also allows you to see other traffic variables such as a) Absolute Unique Visitors, b) Page Views, c) Bounce Rates and d) Average Time Spent. In addition, you can also set conversion goals to determine how many of those leads converted to an effective sale (or some other action you describe), which is a key way to measure ROI. Tracking in helps you evaluate the efforts of your marketing strategy whether it is a PPC campaign, banner ads or natural SEO. Tracking also allows you to gain visibility into your end user's behavior and time spent on each page, which allows you to make a decision on where to place ads.

## Where to go from here?

After you implement the SEO techniques and realized the improvement in your site ranking, you can't expect to sit back and relax. You need to constantly monitor your ranking and your competitor's ranking and take appropriate steps to stay on top of the list. A continuous enhancement to optimization techniques, keywords tuning, site content, blog entries is necessary to keep your site rank higher in the search results. To outdo your competition, you have to keep your content fresh. This will not only bring new visitors to your site, but also keep the visitors returning to your site.

To learn more about [Search Engine Optimization](#) and other topics around Search Marketing, please visit <http://www.seosolutions.biz>

### Some Useful links

Google WebMaster Tools - <http://www.google.com/webmasters>

Google Analytics - <http://www.google.com/analytics>

Google AdWords – <http://adwords.google.com>

Yahoo Search Marketing - <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com>

WordTracker - <http://www.wordtracker.com>

Yahoo Answers - <http://answers.yahoo.com>

