

Web Developers guide to optimizing a flash site for Google, Yahoo, and MSN.

Abstract: Flash is the leading web based graphics technology for creating design-focused web sites. Over 90 percent of Internet users can view Flash content with the Flash player already installed in their browsers. Over 800 million people use the Flash player. The Internet is a visual medium, sometimes you need to visually impress your target audience with an interactive Flash presentation. This is great for the user yet causes complications for the search engines spiders.

This guide informs you (the web developer, flash designer, and internet marketer/advertising agencies) of proven methodologies to optimize a new or existing flash site for top rankings in Google, Yahoo, and MSN.

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About Lazworld.com Inc:

Lazworld.com was founded in 1998 and continues offers a suite of powerful proven internet marketing and web development services to help you reach your online goals and improve your ROI. Lazworld.com is one of the oldest and most respected Internet Marketing companies in the world with an impeccable reputation and an extensive list of satisfied clients.

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Introduction

The big myth is that Flash sites cannot get listed in the search engines. The reality is the amount of time and effort it takes to develop a flash site so it will get listed in the search engines is well worth it. While you can pay per click, you can gain a competitive advantage by being found in the organic or free search engine results. This result of implementing techniques in this guide will help websites that use flash maintains a high ranking and top presence for the group of keywords you are targeting.

This guide is broken down into four main sections, each equally important for success with your Flash site.

About Macromedia Search Engine SDK

It is highly recommended that designers and developers implement the Macromedia Search engine SDK into their portfolio. The Macromedia Flash Search Engine SDK 1.0 provides search engines with the means to search and index Macromedia Flash (SWF) movies.

The SDK extracts text and links from a SWF file converting them into an HTML document. This HTML document can be properly optimized for high rankings in the top search engines. The SDK only generates the pages, it does not optimize them. You will have to add Meta Data, Body Text, and Update the Alt Tags on images generated from the SDK.

More information on the Macromedia Search engine SDK

http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/download/search_engine/index.html

Build a Second “HTML” Version of the Flash Site

One of the most reliable solutions for properly getting your flash site listed in the search engines is to have a second version written entirely in HTML. A second HTML version not only impresses the search engine spiders but also provides users on slow internet connections an opportunity to properly view your site.

If you build two versions of your site, you will have to determine which version is the natural default for www.yourcompany.com. While developers and marketers may disagree best results are generated by using an .html index page. If a flash page is used as the main page for the site, make sure you have links pointing to all the main content pages in the html version. The search engine will find these .html pages; Also move any Flash detection scripts on your index page to external call out files, i.e., `<script type="text/javascript" src="../../myscript.js"></script>`

Content in the top section of these html pages is valuable. Before the header you can add a few descriptive lines about the content on those pages. Use a 300+ word optimized

description of your content in your body text the search engines will place a stronger weight for the keywords included in this text. There is no need to put text beyond a keyword and short description in your embedded flash tag.

The choice of building a second site in HTML versus using the Macromedia SDK is clear; always design a distinct and separate static html site to support the flash version.

Keyword Linking Strategy

To get your Flash site listed in Google, Yahoo, and MSN you must develop a large amount of content specific .html pages with embedded Flash files. If you want to be found by more than one or two keywords you will need to think in terms of each page with an embedded Flash file representing one or two keywords.

For example a Flash site with 40 embedded html pages could be used to target between 40 and 80 keywords. The process of developing 40 new pages with embedded flash content will add to the time and development cost so it is critical to map out your content accordingly. Implement your keyword strategy into the naming convention of your new pages. 40 new pages might get placed in 4 new “keyword themed” directories each with 10 pages (or number of pages with related content)

In optimizing Flash sites, the keyword linking strategy is what actually tells the search engine spider or robots what keywords to index. Even on a site with little content, the few hyperlinks that are present can direct the spider or robot to additional pages with more keywords and related links.

Also understand these techniques of keyword linking strategy and you will greatly increase your odds of successfully getting listed in the top of the top search engines.

1. Use multiple flash files with unique content on different html pages; always use clean code on all html pages especially those embedded flash objects.
2. The name of the links to each page is critical to the success your keyword linking strategy.
3. Each flash object should contain a keyword that represents the content of the flash file.
4. Add Meta Data to all html pages. Always use a properly written Meta Tags; Meta title, Meta description, and Meta keyword designed to reinforce your keyword content/links.
5. Use Keyword Specific ALT Tags on Images.
6. On selected pages place the flash objects inside a table adding the keyword to the table element.
7. Link to your internal pages and link to external sites with similar content.
8. Improve your Link Popularity – Submit to relevant directories Generating external links supporting your keyword strategy is important to the success especially in Google, Yahoo, and MSN.

9. For a Flash site to be allowed in Yahoo, it must have a 'skip introduction' feature on its splash/home page. Otherwise the site will not be allowed into Yahoo.

If there are several redirect scripts used to determine what version of Flash the end user has, the redirect scripts can send a red flag to certain search engine spiders. Keep this in mind when using detection pages on a Flash site as it can be a big problem.

We recommend the following for sites designed in Flash:

- Run a spider simulation on your Flash site. The simulator will tell you what's going wrong on your site, what the search engines spiders will see.
- Make some design considerations while building the site, modify the pages to include the traditional HTML elements that the spiders love. Fix your web sites as you are building them, rather than after.
- Make sure all of your pages are linked to each other.
- Use the Macromedia SDK to batch-version your Flash files to make them HTML version. Remember, the pages will not be optimized. SDK will not add important tags needed for effective optimization.
- You can surround your Flash site with optimized framesets, use layering, Z-layer positioning, or set things up for cloaking however Google, Yahoo, and MSN frown upon these tactics.

Warnings:

1. Do not attempt to promote Flash sites by placing them inside of invisible framesets or using invisible layers in Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to present content to the search engines
2. No Cloaking - Cloaking describes the technique of serving a different page to a search engine spider than what a human visitor sees. This technique is abused by spammers for keyword stuffing. Cloaking is a violation of the Terms Of Service of most search engines and could be grounds for banning.

Google & Flash

Google has an algorithm that calculates PR (PageRank) for every site. It's based on the number and quality of the links pointing to your site. If your site is linked from a high PR page, your site's PR will elevate. Google uses a percentage of a site's PR to rank the website in the search results. It looks beyond the volume of links and considers the relevancy of text used to link to your site.

A link from high PR site with link text "Click Here" won't help as much as "Red Can Opener" (if your site's about kitchen supplies). Google PR also considers how many links there are on the page linking to you. Important, high-quality sites receive a higher PageRank, which Google remembers each time it conducts a search. If you master this technique it can produce very good results on google.com for flash sites.

Google Adwords

To reinforce your keyword linking strategy we recommend advertising your flash site for those keyword with Google Adwords, it is a cost effective means to drive targeted traffic to your site. At times, your ranking will improve when you advertise with Google, while we think this is because the link to your site from Google Adwords counts towards your popularity. Google has not confirmed this.

Google does send an automated spider to make sure your site is functional and make sure you are not doing any tricky re-direct, and check spelling. If a Flash site has a 'sniffer page' it can throw the Google spider off track. You can solve this problem by modifying the submitted URL. Do not use a 'sniffer' home page with no content the page simply to determine whether end users have Flash or not and where they should be directed. An empty Flash detection page will cause problems for all search engines.

Google May Change. What works today may not work tomorrow. Google can dig deeper into linking relationships and linking distribution within individual web sites. This takes some of the focus off of web popularity, which may cause quality problems in Google's results pages. This is especially meaningful for Flash Site owners who have an extra burden trying to get their Flash dominant site ranked. Google is not indexing the material inside a Flash movie yet but it reads the words on every linked html page. The key to making a Flash site successful is to employ a linking strategy that redistributes properly organized and labeled links within the sites.

Summary

Don't use a Flash site if you don't have to. If you have to use Flash to deliver your presence, build a Flash version and an HTML version. If you only go with a Flash version you must built a site consisting of embedded flash content in optimized HTML pages.

Utilize a keyword linking strategy with clean code and content specific keywords mix it in with some Google Ad Words, Yahoo, and MSN watch your pages move to the top of the results.

Additional Resources

- <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2008/06/improved-flash-indexing.html>
- http://www.adobe.com/devnet/flashplayer/articles/swf_searchability.html