

## What is Search Engine Optimization and Why Do I Need It?

Nearly every internet user finds new web sites using a search engine such as Google, Yahoo, or MSN. You go to their site, type in what you are looking for and usually find it in the top two or three results. What goes on behind the scenes of every internet search involves complex software intelligent enough to figure out which pages are the most relevant to your search. If you are looking to buy a product online, you will search for the product name and typically buy it from a company who comes up near the top of the result list. Search Engine Optimization is the process of figuring out which search phrases, or "key words", potential customers might use to find what you are offering, and then doing whatever is necessary to move to the top of the search results so that these searchers visit your site.

Figuring out what key words to target is a tricky process. If you run a company that sells candy, your first thought might be to target the key word "candy". There are a number of problems with targeting such a general word or phrase. If somebody is logging on to the internet to buy candy, they are just as likely to use a search phrase like "chocolate". The other problem is that if someone searches for "candy", they might simply be looking for recipes or information. Spending money on search engine optimization which results in visits from recipe seekers will not be beneficial to your company or to the searcher. Luckily, there are many tools available, such as Word Tracker, to do proper key word research and determine exactly which phrases are the best to target.

The second part of the search engine optimization process is crafting your site to be near the top of the search results for the phrases you chose. This can be very difficult, as the World Wide Web is full of competing web sites that would like to be higher on the list. There is a wealth of information describing exactly what you can do to have a good shot at being in the top results. I will discuss some of these methods more in depth in future articles. In the meantime, I recommend reading the information at Bruce Clay's web site. It is the best resource on the internet for good, free information on SEO.

### Why do I need Search Engine Optimization?

If you are going to promote your website through standard advertising (i.e. print, TV, or radio), you might not need to invest very heavily in SEO. Most startup companies do not have the budget to promote their site through those mediums. If that is your situation, doing some careful research about SEO can help you access a form of advertising that is nearly free and reaches millions of people interested in exactly what you have to offer. If you have the budget to pay a professional for this service, make sure to investigate very carefully and get examples of their work. If a company offers you a guaranteed top spot on Google, be weary. True SEO professionals will tell you the truth: that getting a high search ranking for a competitive key word phrase will take months of diligent work and planning, and involves many factors that you cannot control due to competition for the elusive top spot.

When you write the copy for your web site, use language that contains your keywords, try to provide information that your visitors will find useful. People are much more likely to buy a product or service from a company that gives some of its expertise for free. It is also important to continually update the information on your site to keep visitors returning to see what new information is available. Hopefully they will make a purchase along the way.