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## Keyword Spiders & Crawlers

Your company has a website. Great, you need one. Unfortunately, having a website is not enough. You also need to drive traffic to it and the line from *Field of Dreams* is most certainly not true in the online world of 2010. If you build it, they will not come—unless they know about it.

While there are many ways to attract visitors to a website, ranging from e-mail marketing to viral YouTube videos and Super Bowl ads, there is one method that offers a steady stream of traffic. Getting your website URL ranked “above the fold” (high enough that the user does not have to scroll to see it) on the front page of the major search engines (Bing and Google) for your relevant keywords is the single most cost-effective way to attract website visitors. Converting those visitors into qualified leads, and ultimately customers, will be the subject of future articles.

Search engine optimization, or SEO for short, is the practice of optimizing your website, its code, content, and the links to it from other websites, for the benefit of the software, called “spiders,” that search engines use to assess your site’s relevance to a certain keyword or phrase.

Despite what you might conclude if you have ever tried to make sense of the SEO landscape (by which I mean what it is, how it works, what software and tools are available, what companies offer SEO services and, of those, which are legit and which are scams), the fundamentals of SEO are fairly basic. Simple enough that before you pursue any form of paid traffic generation, be sure you have addressed them. You may be surprised by your results.

Consider these areas first in your pursuit of that immensely valuable, if sometimes elusive, front page ranking for your most important keywords:

- Choosing the Right Keywords
- Setting Title and Meta Tags
- Producing Relevant Content
- Acquiring Backlinks

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT KEYWORDS

How do you know if you are targeting the right keywords? In the property management business, the keywords “property management” are obvious—to you and everyone else in the property management industry. Therein lies the problem. The more popular or valuable a keyword, the harder it will be to achieve favorable rankings. That does not mean you should not be focusing on “property management,” but it does mean you need to go beyond that phrase. There are two ways to tackle this problem of “crowded” keywords and cut through the noise: geographic keywords and what are called “long tail” keywords. Geographic keywords are just that—keywords that relate to geography. If your company offers property management services in Boston, including “Greenville” in the list of keywords you are targeting will effectively reduce the number of websites that you are competing against from all of those that relate to “property management” to just those that relate to “property management” and “greenville.” The latter is a *much* smaller group and, as a result, you will have a better chance of climbing to the top of the search rankings for this particular search.

Long tail keywords are those that, in and of themselves, will not drive large numbers of traffic to your site because they are searched less frequently. The key here is that when you rank highly for enough of them, the one or two visits a month you get from each start to add up. Let’s take that example of a property management company in Boston again. Some good long tail keyword phrases in this case might be “upstate property management,” “downtown greenville property management,” “greenville rental income management services,” etc. Again, the idea is that while you might only get a few visits each month from someone searching for these less obvious keyword phrases, but get enough of them and sooner or later you are talking about meaningful numbers.

### TITLE AND META TAGS

Behind your webpages are instructions called HTML tags that control the display of your pages. The initial

page codes convey information to web browsers and search engine spiders. The Meta tag content is not seen by your site's visitors, but the Title tag is. The contents of the Title tag are typically rendered in the browser's title bar and used as the display text when you create a bookmark for a page.

### **Title Tag**

The Title tag is crucial as it is used by search engines, along with other criteria, in determining how to rank your site and is very often used when displaying your site in search results. Be sure to include your most important keyword(s) in your site's Title tag and be aware that search engines limit the number of characters they will make use of. Google and Ask.com use the first 69 characters of your Title tag (including spaces), Bing uses 65 and Yahoo uses 72.

### **Keywords Meta Tag**

This tag allows you to explicitly list the keywords that relate to your site. Sounds great, right? Well, the reality is that most search engine spiders completely ignore this tag because, traditionally, it has been abused to "game the system." In the early days of SEO, webmasters would often list popular keywords that had no actual relation to the content on their website in the hopes of being ranked highly for those keywords. Having said all that, this tag is useful to some search engines, particularly if you are precise about only listing keywords that also appear in your site's content.

### **Description Meta Tag**

This meta tag is fairly important. Most search engines will use it to learn about your site's content and will factor it in when determining your rankings. Many also use it, along with the Title tag, when they display your site in their search results. Ideally, your Description tag should be direct and concise. Use those keywords again and keep the length to 25 to 30 words, or, more specifically, around 150 characters at most.

### **RELEVANT CONTENT**

At the end of the day, your site's content will have the greatest impact on your search engine rankings. A website rich in topical content will be viewed by search engines as highly relevant with regard to that topic. In producing content for your website, there are a few things to pay particular attention to:

#### **Page Titles**

Search engines place a high degree of importance on the placement of keywords in page titles. Using our previous example, a page titled "Offering Property Management Services in the Greenville Area" will serve you better than one simply titled "Services."

### **Content Headings**

Properly designed webpages use HTML tags to impart meaning to content headers. The H1 tag implies greater importance and hierarchical prominence over an H2 tag and so on. Search engines treat keywords wrapped in HTML header tags as a strong indicator of that page's content, in addition to the frequency of keywords in the page's actual content.

### **Keyword Density**

This is the ratio of keywords on a page to the total number of words. Too low a ratio and the search engines will not regard that page as being a good source of material on your target keywords. Too many and they will penalize you for blatantly "stuffing" your page with keywords. All search engines have a different "sweet spot" in terms of keyword density, but a five percent ratio is a good target.

### **Other Considerations**

Beside keyword density, the frequency, proximity and prominence of keywords also matter. Frequency is a measure of how many times the keyword appears in a page, the most frequently occurring word having the highest frequency. Proximity refers to how close together keywords appear, and prominence refers to how close to the top of the page a keyword appears. Too much emphasis on frequency, proximity and prominence makes it difficult to write clear, concise content that human visitors will appreciate. While it is useful to understand these factors, it is best not to dwell too much on them as the marginal benefit of high frequency, prominence and proximity is far outweighed by the more important goal of writing good content that people want to read. Very often, the juice ain't worth the squeeze.

### **BACKLINKS**

When most people think about optimizing their website for search engine rankings, they think about their website. Ironically, it is what other websites do, or do not, that can make the difference between a top ten ranking and Internet obscurity.

One of the biggest factors that determine your search engine ranking is how many other websites link to yours, what anchor text they are using in those links (ideally your keywords), and their site's ranking on the keywords you are targeting. Links to your site from other sites are called backlinks and you want them—lots of them. There is no silver bullet when it comes to getting other sites to link to yours, but creating quality content that people want to link to is one effective approach, albeit one that takes time and effort. Put in the time and effort and before long you will end up with more backlinks over time. 🏠

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