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Search Engine Tips

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Search Engine Tips

Optimising your Web pages for the search engines...

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Note

These search engine tips work for me and other internet marketers of my acquaintance. But it is different for everyone, depending on what your key priorities are, which particular search engines you want to target and who you are trying to attract. And, don't forget, search engines are changing their rules all the time - so you have to stay on the ball and keep a regular eye on them.

If your website is to be visible on the Internet, your number one priority is to get your site listed on the major search engines - AltaVista, Google, HotBot, etc. This is because the vast majority of people use search engines when they want to find things on the Internet. They type in one or more keywords and the search engine returns a list of pages related to those keywords. Therefore, if your website is listed on the search engines, and enough people enter keywords related to the content of your site, you stand to get quite a few visitors.

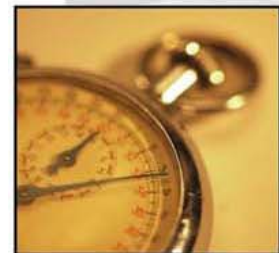
That's the theory. But, in practise, this will only be the case if your site comes up on the **first few pages of search results**. If you are further down the list, you won't generate significant levels of traffic. People just don't click through page after page of search results.

The search engines use "spiders" or "bots" to visit web sites, follow links, and index what they find. They are aware that some web sites abuse search engines to lure visitors in, so getting good search engine ratings can feel like a **battle of wits**. Never use misleading keywords, and be careful not to risk legal action for "passing off" by using the brand names of competitors in your keywords.

Designing your web site to be search engine friendly

If your web pages aren't there when the search engine visits, they won't get indexed. This can be a particular problem with dynamically-generated pages, which are created afresh for each visitor. Even if the search engine spider sees a page, that page may not be available or suitable for the next visitor.

If you use frames, although most (though not all) search engines will index your pages, you have to put the keywords and description meta tags in the frameset page, not just the pages containing the content.



Optimising Your Web Pages

To score high in the search results, you need to **optimise your web pages for the search engines**. This involves carefully choosing a **title**, **description**, and a list of **keywords** for each of your pages.

First let's look at the **title**. When you view a web page, the title appears in white writing in the blue bar that spans the top of the browser window. More importantly, your title also appears as a **hotlink on the search results pages**. Clicking on it takes the web surfer to your website. Because of this, you need to treat your title like you would a **headline in a classified ad**. It's a call to action. So make it as compelling as possible. Pique the web surfer's interest. That way - presuming your offer is relevant to them - they'll either click to your site straight away or take time to read the description of your website that appears beneath the title and then (hopefully) click on to your site. Don't go mad, though. Keep your title to a maximum of 60 characters, or it will be truncated.

Creating A "Killer" Title

Besides alerting your customers to your offer, a carefully chosen title can also get you **better placement on the search engines**. What you need to do is place as many keywords as possible in your title (while still keeping it a readable sentence). If you happen to be a computer hardware and software retailer, for example, you might construct a title along the following lines:

Z-Bytes - top name PCs, software and games - low prices!

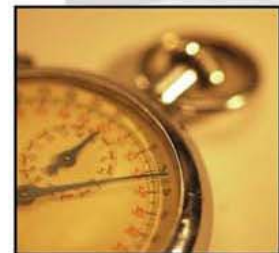
(The keywords are "PCs", "software", "games" and "low prices").

It is also worth making the first word of your title **begin with the letter "A"**. This is because some web directories list entries alphabetically. If your company name doesn't happen to begin with "A", just use your imagination to re-jig things. In the case of "Z-Bytes", for instance, we could say something like:

Amazing prices on PCs, software and games! Z-Bytes!

Meta Tags

Another key element that helps with scoring high in search results are "meta tags". These are HTML tags (or sections of code) that are invisible to the web surfer, but can be read by search engines. The two most important meta tags are the "**description**" and "**keywords**" tags. Search engines use the description tag to generate the description of your site seen on search results pages (just below the title). And they read the keyword tag to categorise your site. Then when someone runs a search using any of your keywords, your site will (hopefully) come up in the list of search results.



OK, let's look at how to optimise your pages using the description and keywords tags:

Description

After the title (which is your headline), the description is your next chance to **hook web surfers and bring them to your site**. That's why it's wise to treat the description meta tag like the content of a classified ad. For example, here's the kind of meta tag copy our fictional Z-Bytes might use (written in HTML):

```
<META NAME="description" CONTENT="Z-bytes offer a  
big range of computer hardware and software -  
PCs, laptops, printers, software games - all at  
low prices!">
```

As with the titles of your web pages, make your description tags keyword rich and descriptive. Also, try and keep them to 150 characters or less.

Keywords

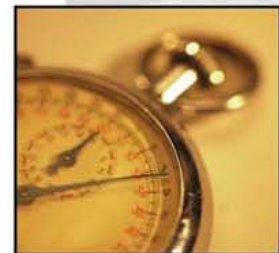
You don't need advertising skills to sort out the keywords meta tag, but you do need to create a list of the most likely keywords people might use when conducting a search for the kind of products or services you offer. Spend *a lot of time* on this - remember people don't know your business as well as you do and so might not use the most obvious keywords, and may spell some words incorrectly.

Here's what Z-Byte's keywords might look like (again in HTML):

```
<META NAME="Keywords" CONTENT="personal computers  
pcs computer sales laptops hardware software  
microsoft games playstation nintendo sony cds  
dvds apple hewlett packard hp epson printers  
digital keyboards monitors intel z-bytes england  
uk">
```

Note that I haven't used any commas to separate keywords. Most books offering advice on optimising websites tell you to insert commas between keywords. Check out the websites of successful internet marketers, however, and you'll see they often don't use commas. You may get a better listing without. This could be because people nowadays usually search using *keyword phrases*, rather than single words. If you break up "viral, marketing" with a comma, for instance, the search engines may read it as two separate words - and your site possibly won't come up when anyone runs "viral marketing" as a search term. Leave out the commas and you could rank better on certain search result pages.

Don't repeat keywords too many times. If you use the same word more than three times, some search engines will remove that page (or even your whole site) from their listings.



Lastly, it's best not to make your list of keywords more than 800 characters long - some search engines ignore words after that.

Page Content

Now that you've done all the hard work, I'd better tell you the bad news - some search engines (like Google) ignore meta tags altogether and analyse your web pages by looking for keywords within the content of your pages, and rate them by how many other sites link to your pages. Therefore, it is vitally important that the material on your page is relevant and related to your keywords.

Here are some page content tips:

- Add a brief introduction to the top of each web page - make it similar to your "description" meta tag.
- Use standard HTML heading styles, and make sure your keywords are in those headings.
- Make sure your most important keywords are used at regular intervals on your web pages (using an individual and highly targeted set of keywords for each page). But don't put a long list of keywords in the text of any of your pages. Search engines consider this to be "spamming", and will automatically prevent your page (and possibly even your site) from being listed again.



Plain Words – The Big Picture

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- Documentation Managers
- Copy Writers
- Project Managers
- Project Coordinators
- Instructional Designers
- Bid & Proposal Writers
- Web Content Developers
- Knowledge Managers

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- Designing & Writing Help Systems
- Writing Winning Bids & Proposals
- Writing Effective Letters & Emails
- Designing & Writing Technical Documents
- Indexing On-line & Printed Material
- Estimating & Planning Technical Documents
- Writing for the Web



Bids Consultancy & Training

Bidworker, a division of Plain Words, is dedicated to providing bids consultancy and training. Writing, editing and formatting of bids and proposals. 'How to Write Winning Bids and Proposals' training course. Plain Words own **bid**worker™ software to automate much of the process of compiling proposals.

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Giovanni Calamida, European Patent Office

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