

Search engine optimisation: are you being found?

What searches are you being found in? James Bragg from Beaver Design explains how search engine optimisation helps you stand out on a crowded web



If you've not visited a particular website before, how are you supposed to find it? Navigating the huge library of websites out there relies on us using search engines to find the things we are looking for. How your website is listed on search engines will have a huge effect on how many visitors get to your site. The higher up you rank in search results, the more likely it is that people will find and visit you. You might rank high for a search on your company name, but what if people do a search for the products you sell? Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of getting your site to rank as highly as possible for the searches which are relevant to you.

Google is king

The most widely used search engine in the world is Google, with around 60% of all searches performed through it. Other search engines include Yahoo, MSN, Ask and AOL, each sharing a portion of the remaining 40% of searches.

Google's clever technology trawls through the web, recording and indexing everything onto its servers. It uses this regularly updated index (rather than the actual live web) to provide the search results we see. Exactly how the Google technology works is a trade secret, but a basic principle is: the better

Google can "read" a website, the better it can index it, which in turn means better ranking.

The frequent use of "keywords" is important to help search engines understand what a page is about. For example, if your search term is "tulips", then pages which have the word "tulips" on them frequently will appear most relevant.

Web pages have "document head information" which is not displayed when a visitor is browsing a website, instead being hidden within the website code. Within this information, web developers add detail to help search engines understand what a page is about, helping with higher rankings. The next thing to think about is your website structure.

Are your keywords (for example: "tulips", "florist", "Hertfordshire") in the page titles and URLs? And how are the pages linked together on your site? Links are not only used by visitors; designing a logical and simple structure will also help search engines index your site better.

We are not alone

Once Google has trawled through the internet and indexed everything it can find, it processes and "ranks" the pages. By having a near complete index of the internet (it can take a few weeks to update), Google looks at how websites are linked together.

Websites which have a large number of incoming links, from websites with high rankings, generally appear higher in a list themselves. It's a complicated equation and one of Google's top trade secrets. In reality, there's quite a lot to getting this right for your site.

Years ago, people exploited loop-holes to rank higher. These days search engines are quick to stop and even penalise this kind of activity. Good SEO goes hand-in-hand with comprehensive and well designed website creation. Make sure you are making the most of your website with some search engine optimisation.

◆ For more information, take a look at www.beaver-design.com/seo.

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