

More pointers for a good search engine listing

The Title meta tag:

To start with, let's take a look at your website's Title meta tag (you can find yours by opening your site, clicking View, then Source - the meta tags are placed between the HEAD delineations). The Title is one of the most important tags insofar as search engine listings are concerned. This is the one that appears as the first line of your listing. As such, it should contain the keywords and key phrases that people would key into a search engine in order to find your products and services.

Given this, if you are, say, in the plumbing business, there really is little point in coining a title that says: "Welcome to Sid Smith's website". Why? Because only your very dear friends and relatives will key in Sid Smith + Plumber in order to find you; and only then because you have asked them to do so. Unless you have already established yourself as the Sid Smith who is a household name throughout the world for great plumbing expertise, then your site is going to stay where it belongs - in search engine limbo.

Yes, your site may very well appear on Page 1 of Google for the search term Sid Smith + Plumber, and you may be highly delighted, but who the hell is going to key that in to a search when they are looking for a plumber in a hurry? The answer is: nobody. And you will be a plumber who is receiving no Internet business whatsoever.

Look at it this way, your name may be a dear and treasured possession to you, as mine is to me, but if nobody knows your name, they won't come looking. So here's the essence of it. Your Title meta tag should say in no uncertain terms what you do and how well you do it. It should be unequivocal. Pertinent. Exact. Much better, I feel, to coin a Title that expresses what you do. Like, for instance: Emergency Plumber: The best drain-clearing service in town or your rubbish back!

All of the above applies equally to website operators who use the name of their company in the Title tag and wonder why they are getting no hits. Nobody will search specifically for your company name unless they already know it. And if they already know it, via other publicity you may be running, they will probably have the full URL anyway. So no search is necessary. I never fail to be amazed by the number of people who put their own names and their company names into a Title tag and expect a result. It ain't gonna happen.

Frames, Animated Gifs and Flash:

Let's now talk about a few more bugbears of mine. Websites are still being built with Frames when everybody in the business knows that search engines have difficulty reading Frames. Their algorithms are not capable of properly indexing Frame sites. So a frame-built website instantly throws up an obstacle to the robots that come crawling your site. This also applies to sites that have an abundance of animated gifs. Robots can't read gifs or pics in any form. So they give them a wide berth.

Worse, website designers are still building sites with Flash. Flash is great. Flash is startling. It looks terrific as all those images come cascading in a blizzard of light, shade and colour. The only problem is - guess what? - the robots can't figure it out. They are puzzled, bemused, unable to grasp what is going on. The result is that they go somewhere else, probably to a site where the designer has laid everything out on a simple plate for them.



Until the search engine programmers figure out a way to write algorithms that understand Flash presentations, the simple, no-nonsense, text-based sites will continue to win hands down. And by that I mean they will continue to win good listings. Which is the object of the exercise.

To be fair, however, the great majority of web designers have no abiding interest in search engine optimization. They figure that their job is to build a site that is both attractive and interesting. It is therefore up to the site owner to lay down a few rules when commissioning a build - no Frames, no animated gifs and, above all no Flash.

Is Google really the greatest?

And finally, folks, a word about the search engines themselves.

Everybody wants to get a good listing on Google. To them, Google is the be all and end all and that there really is nowhere else to be. What they tend to overlook is that the so-called lesser engines are equally good at pulling business if they are fed properly.

I have a client who receives 80% of his Internet business (which is substantial) via Yahoo, on which he is No 1 for all four of his search terms. Google does very little for him. Why should that be? It's because, when you get down to it, Yahoo is a consumer-oriented engine and Google is predominantly a commercial or business-to-business engine. And his business is geared to the consumer market.

I know that many seo elitists will take issue with me about the efficacy of this statement. So be it. But I will get my retaliation in first by saying that (a) their argument will have to be damn good to convince me and (b), I don't really care what they say.

It's also worth bearing in mind that MSN, as the third of the big three engines, is a pretty formidable presence. I can assure you, too, that business is good if you are well positioned on MSN. And since this outfit is owned by Microsoft, I can't see Mr Gates playing third-fiddle for very much longer. Search engine-wise, we live in interesting times.

Anyway, if this has been useful, I'd be delighted to hear from you. But if it has seemed to teach you to suck eggs, maybe you'll tell me that also.

About the Author: Pat Quinn is an award-winning UK copywriter who also operates a search engine optimization service. Because it's all in the writing! <http://www.search-engine-mechanics.co.uk>.