



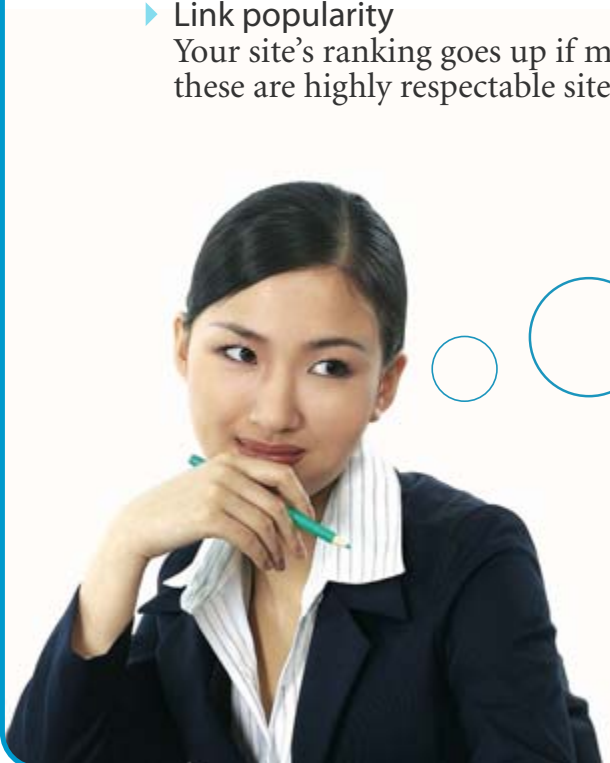
Search Engine Optimization (Part 2)

Welcome back to Part 2 of Search Engine Optimization. In this issue, we explore the other factors that determine how well your site lists on search engines such as Google.

Before we begin, here's a quick recap of last month's discussion.

The 3 pillars of search engine optimization are:

- ▶ **Keywords**
The more relevant keywords you have on your webpage, the more highly rated your site is likely to be.
- ▶ **Site structure**
The easier it is for search engine spiders to 'crawl' your site, the better your site will list.
- ▶ **Link popularity**
Your site's ranking goes up if more sites link to you, especially if these are highly respectable sites.



Site Structure

The way you code your website can determine how easy or difficult it is for spiders (programs written by search engines to automatically search through the content of a site) to search for information within your site. Remember that spiders have limited intelligence, so the simpler the site, the more likely a spider can crawl through it.

In this respect, you may come up against the aspirations of website designers and programmers who want to load in the latest and greatest to add the most glitz and 'coolness' to a site.

Keep it simple: The general advice is to keep a site simple. Below is a listing of some website structure issues to watch out for.

► Frames

Frames are a website construct that allow you to keep a part of your page invariant, even as you navigate through various pages of your site. Frames are typically used for navigation bars. They offer the following advantages:

- Navigation bars can always be seen. Even as the user scrolls down a page, the frame remains in the same position.
- Easy maintenance of the navigation bar. To change the navigation bar in all the webpages, a web administrator just needs to change one file that contains the navigation menu.

However, what you see on the webpage is not what the spider actually sees. To get an idea of what a spider sees, go to the website indicated in the link below.

Example: <http://www.course.com/downloads/sites/ecommerce/>

This is a framed site. Open this site using Internet Explorer, click on 'View' followed by 'Source'.

This action shows you the source code of the webpage, which is what the spiders generally read. You will notice that the source shows minimal information and none of the information on the webpage. This is typical of framed sites. The spider just sees a set of instructions for assembling the page, and not the page content itself. The search engine is therefore unable to catalogue the content on your site.





Another way to gauge what a search engine spider sees is to pass the website address through a keyword analyzer. An example is the tool we introduced in the last issue of Interact! <http://www.ranks.nl/tools/spider.html>

On passing the website address: <http://www.course.com/downloads/sites/ecommerce/> through the keyword analyzer, we get the following report

Page elements							
Title tag : Schneider Perry Electronic Commerce Online Comparison							
Meta Keyword tag :							
Meta Description tag :							
Words found in 0 Headings :							
Words found in 0 Alt tags:							
Words found in 2 Linktexts : Click here Click here							
Words found in 0 Bold text :							
Words found in 0 Italic text :							
Total number of words 33							
word	repeats	density	Prominence	word	repeats	density	Prominence
frames	3	9.09%	27.27	version	2	6.06%	10.61
use	2	6.06%	46.97	here	2 L	6.06%	31.82
for	2	6.06%	37.88	click	2 L	6.06%	34.85
Total 2 word phrases: 2 - Total Repeats : 4				Total 3 word phrases: 0 - Total Repeats : 0			
phrase	repeats	density	Prominence	phrase	repeats	density	Prominence
click here	2 L	12.12 %	34.85	Total 4 word phrases: 0 - Total Repeats : 0			
frames version	2	12.12 %	13.64	phrase	repeats	density	Prominence

Legend: L = Links, Blank = keywords in copy or html code.

You will notice that the content of the visible website is not reflected in this report. Only the page title is reflected. Automated tools are certainly not picking up the webpage content, and if they cannot pick up the content, they won't be able to catalogue the keywords in your website.

► Flash

Flash is a nice way to add animation to a site while keeping filesize reasonably small. However like framed sites, spiders generally cannot read the code in flash files.

Take the example of the flash site: <http://mixlogistics.com/>

If you run it through the keyword analyzer, you get the following results

Total number of words 85							
word	repeats	density	Prominence	word	repeats	density	Prominence
music	7 T,D,K	8.24%	69.08	mixlogistics *	5 T,D	5.88%	69.88
electronic	4 T,K	4.71%	71.18	dance	4 T,K	4.71%	68.82
site	3	3.53%	25.49	for	2	2.35%	47.65
edm	2 K	2.35%	57.65	jackson	2 K	2.35%	65.88
brad	2 K	2.35%	67.06				

Total 2 word phrases: 6 - Total Repeats : 14				Total 3 word phrases: 3 - Total Repeats : 7			
phrase	repeats	density	Prominence	phrase	repeats	density	Prominence
dance music	3 T	7.06 %	67.45	electronic dance music	3 T	10.59 %	68.63
electronic dance	3 T	7.06 %	68.63	mixlogistics electronic dance	2 T	7.06 %	82.35
brad jackson	2 K	4.71 %	67.06	the music of	2 D	7.06 %	71.18
mixlogistics electronic	2 T	4.71 %	82.35				
music of	2 D	4.71 %	70.00	Total 4 word phrases: 1 - Total Repeats : 2			
the music	2 D	4.71 %	71.18	phrase	repeats	density	Prominence
				mixlogistics electronic dance music	2 T	9.41 %	82.35

Legend: T = Title Tag, D = Meta Description, K = Meta Keywords

Quite a few keywords are displayed, but these are almost entirely from the meta data tags (title, meta descriptions, meta keywords). Meta data tags are non-visible code in a html page used to describe a page (see *Interact!* Issue 7 for details). None of the words found in the flash animation are displayed here.

Key Lesson: Meta Data can help

In the above example, you not only see the limitation of a Flash site, but also what you might be able to do to mitigate some of its limitations by being vigilant about filling up the meta data. It is not a perfect solution, but it is better than nothing.

► Dynamic Site

Dynamic sites are frequently used to extract large quantities of information from a database for display on a webpage. It is a highly economical and effective approach. Even if you have hundreds of pages to display, all you need to do is code up a page to extract the data depending on what the visitor has specified.

This becomes clearer if you look at a dynamic page like the one below.

http://www.togoparts.com/marketplace/list_ads.php?page_id=2&cid=3&adtype=&country=

This is a listing of bikes for sale on a popular biking website.

This complicated url actually consists of 2 parts:

- The actual webpage: http://www.togoparts.com/marketplace/list_ads.php
- And a parameter telling the page what data to extract from the database: [?page_id=2&cid=3&adtype=&country=](http://www.togoparts.com/marketplace/list_ads.php?page_id=2&cid=3&adtype=&country=)

Take a look at all other pages, you will notice they all have the same structure. The actual webpage http://www.togoparts.com/marketplace/list_ads.php does not change, only the parameter changes.

Herein lies the problem. Many search engines will catalogue this as only one page, instead of tens of pages. It will also miss out on the links that directs the visitor to the detail pages. Hundreds of pages are catalogued as one single page in the search engine.

Key Lesson: Decisions are a compromise

So why do people build sites like this? The alternative would be to present the pages as static webpages. But the development and maintenance overhead of hundreds even thousand of pages is just too large to make the effort worthwhile. A compromise has to be made. In this case search engine optimization was sacrificed in favour of ease of maintenance.

▶ Javascripts

Javascript technology is commonly used to make a webpage more interactive via animation, such as dropdown menus and rollover menus. It can also be used to put some intelligence into the webpage e.g. calculators, question & answers etc. Properly used, they are a good way to improve website usability.

However search engine spiders can find it difficult to identify links encoded within javascript menus. While it does not prevent the spider from identifying the information on a page, it can restrict the spider's ability to follow the hyperlinks and crawling through the rest of your website.

This problem is commonly solved by putting simple text links at appropriate places. The most common approach is to replicate the menu bar at the bottom of a webpage using text links as shown in the example below.



This usually solves the problems created by javascript menus.

Links

Unlike the above topic on website structure, links are a relatively simple subject. The greater the number of sites linking to your site, the more highly rated your site is (Note: It is NOT number of links from your site to other sites). It is as simple as that.

Key Lesson: Get Listed on Authoritative Sites

Get your site listed on highly respected sites. Such sites include industry association sites, government and statutory board sites, web directories such as Yahoo!, and highly rated commercial sites that provide complimentary products.

A Word of Caution

Search engine optimization is a hygiene factor. Just because you implement its principles does not guarantee you a good position on a search engine listing. But not applying them almost guarantees that you will not list well. Competition for top spot is keen, and large sites with lots of content have a natural advantage.

If you are a small site and have not been able to achieve good ranking even with your best efforts, there is an alternative – search engine marketing or purchasing keywords. This strategy enables you to list your site as highly as you want – for a price.

We will cover this interesting and increasingly important topic in the next issue of Interact!

Till then, keep well, and keep on marketing.

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