

## Search Engine Optimization Strategy

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Two years ago we wrote a newsletter about search engine optimization ("[Struggling with Search Engines](#)"). This month we begin a two part series on search engine strategies and new advanced [NewfangledCMS](#) search engine optimization tools that will soon be available to NewfangledCMS sites. Some of the terms we'll use in this newsletter were explained in the original newsletter.

This month we describe a search engine strategy we've employed that works very effectively. Additionally, we've provided a few tips for why some sites (especially design firm sites) don't show up at all in search engines.

#### A Quick Review: The Importance of Relevance.

In our original search engine newsletter we discussed how relevance is the most importance factor to good search engine placement. Relevance is always the bottom line when it comes to good search engine performance. Search engines continually change how they work in order to achieve their primary goal - providing relevant search results. One of the challenges of search engine optimization is that search engines continually evolve how they determine relevance. This means that any attempts to "trick" a search engine into thinking a page is relevant, when it is not, will ultimately fail. This is why you should avoid the typical spam emails that offer "guaranteed top placement for \$49.95." Such "black hat" approaches almost always rely on tricks that will ultimately hurt your search engine position.

The good news is, if your site is properly formatted and truly relevant to a given search term, your ranking will actually improve over time. Search engines work for you as they eliminate irrelevant search results. The strategy we are recommending in this newsletter focuses on maximizing the relevance of your existing site's content.

### SEO Copywriting Tips

#### Copywriting for People versus Copywriting for Google

There is a built in tension between writing website copy for people, and writing copy that is sensitive to search engines. Search engines read your pages in a different way and for a different purpose than people do. Trying to balance your choice of words so that content is well written for people, yet seeded with the effective keywords, is always a challenge. For example, when I title one of my newsletters I try and come up with something that will be intriguing to my readers. When I wrote about splash pages I entitled it "Splash is Dead." While this may be a decent title for my audience, it is actually a bad choice for search engines. If you were interested in the subject of website splash pages you would not likely type "splash is dead" into a search engine, rather you would type in something like "website splash pages." Words that make for compelling titles are not likely the words people would use if they were searching for that topic.

The choice of words for a web page's title are the most important, most heavily weighted words that search engines look at when ranking a page. In fact, there are two kinds of titles that search engines look very carefully at: the actual title displayed on the page, as well as the title in the "title tag" that appears in the top of the browser itself. Both these titles are extremely important factors in how search engines determine relevance. One facet of the struggle in designing a site for people verses for search engine optimization is whether to use HTML text for a page's title or to display the text using a graphic that can be typographically controlled.

From a human perspective it would always be preferable to use a well considered, typographically crafted, clear and compelling title for each page. From a search engine perspective, it would always be better to use a strategically determined, explicit, specific, and most commonly used phrase for a title. You would always use HTML text, never a graphic. Additionally, you would always use the exact same

phrase in the "title tag" (that displays on the top of the browser) as you use in the body of the page itself. However, emphasizing search engine parameters, to this degree, would seriously limit the visual appeal and the flow of language used in websites.

### **Examples from Newfangled.com**

On our site we've addressed these issues in a number of different ways. In fact we've made slight adjustments and modified our choices depending on which section you look at. We've written our page titles so that they communicate our vision, process and capabilities most effectively. One consequence of this decision is that the page that demonstrates one of our core capabilities, the simplicity of our content management system, has a title called "Content Management Included." This title does not communicate this subject in the best way for search engines. If we were naming our pages primarily for search engine placement, we would probably call it "free content management system user licenses."

Another example is our pricing page which actually has very good positioning (regularly between 3rd and 5th position in Google on the phrase "web development pricing"). However, we could probably hit number one if we changed our title from "How much is a website?" to "web development pricing." In this case though, we felt that the friendliness and straight forwardness of the title "How much is a website?" was better and worth the slip in position.

In contrast to our leaning toward marketing friendly page titles for most of our site, we decided that in our "applications" section, where we describe our advanced [NewfangledCMS](#) capabilities, we should use carefully chosen phrases for Google. Our email newsletter component is titled "email newsletter system" or "email newsletter software" and is used in the page title (in HTML text), the title tag, and is reiterated in the sub head on the page. These phrases tend to do quite well in Google (albeit somewhat unreliably) landing us between 3rd and 6th position. It's likely that on such a competitive phrase, if we used a graphic rather than text, our page position might slip off the first page of Google.

### **People Should Always Be Preferred Over Search Engines**

Bottom line, website copy and page titles need to work first for the site and those who read it. Secondly, where appropriate, copywriting should be influenced by search engine sensitive key words and phrases, and it should be displayed using HTML text instead of graphics. When it comes down to it, if the site is not well written, well structured, and clear, it won't matter if it is effective with search engines, no one will stick around to read it once they get there.

## **Optimizing Website Content for Search Engines**

### **A New Strategy: Write for People and Search Engines**

Newfangled promotes a strategy in which we don't ultimately have to choose between writing for people or for search engines. While this tension will always exist for the main website, a customized section of a site can be built where content can be re-purposed and written with the opposite emphasis - search engines first, people second.

Before I describe it let me disassociate our approach from a similar, inappropriate technique and reiterate a few key principles. Our approach is similar to, but not the same as a practice referred to as "doorway pages." Doorway pages are hidden pages added to a site that are seeded with strategic (and often irrelevant) key words and phrases and point people into the actual site. This technique was abused and is considered spamming to search engines.

The approach we are advocating does not hide search engine specific pages. You can get to a search engine index area by clicking a visible link at the bottom of a site page. Again, the key principle is relevance. Doorway pages were hidden because they were generally irrelevant to the main site. The pages we are creating are simply reiterating a site's actual, relevant content, but in a way that actually helps search engines and search engine users, by titling the content using terms that are more considerate of how people actually search for information.

Let's go back to the previous example about our newsletter on website splash pages called, "Splash is Dead." As I mentioned before, this title is not going to help a search engine user find this article, even though it is highly relevant to the topic of splash pages. Such an article can be set up as a "Search Engine Index" page. In this context it would be given a search engine friendly titled like "website splash pages" both on the page and in the browser title tag - just the way Google likes it.

For every newsletter I write I break it up into smaller linked pages and give each page a targeted, specific keyword. When doing searches with these title phrases, the pages tend to come up quite high in Google. The more pages we post, the more incremental visits we are generating to our site. This approach is actually opposite of search engine spamming. Search engine spamming is the attempt to get people to unrelated or barely related pages by using irrelevant phrases. Our approach starts with absolutely relevant information, but surrounds it with the kind of appropriate information search engines need to properly index and rank the information based on what it truly about. Because this approach respects the search engines effort to return relevant information, and respects the users effort in trying to locate relevant information, there is a high degree of certainty that as search engines change, the performance of these pages will be protected and even improved.

### **Taking the Time to Add These Pages**

It does take an investment of time to create and break up site content into the search engine sensitive pages. However, with the NewfangledCMS, the time is minimized to the necessary "thinking part" of this effort. Creating the pages themselves, in the search engine area, is a simple matter of using the CMS to copy an existing article and paste in the new content. The harder part is thinking through what the best search term would be for the content. We'll pick up this subject in the [next newsletter](#), and we'll preview some really exciting new [search engine optimization and reporting tools](#).

However, if you offer PR services to your clients, this effort is fairly minimal as you will have the ability to make good guesses, since you should already be familiar with the industry terms and trends of your client's information. This approach simply multiplies the results of your current efforts in writing news, press, and marketing materials. As an added benefit (one we'll underscore next month), placing your content into these search engine sensitive pages can concretely demonstrate the value of the content you create for your client.

### **Common Search Engine Problems**

#### **Addendum: Why Doesn't My Page Show Up in Search Engines?**

When I'm marketing Newfangled by making introductory phone calls to advertising agencies and design firms, I usually try to Google the agency's website before calling. If you're one of these agencies, you should know that a good percentage of the time I do not find a site, even when I am looking for it by the agency's exact name. You might want to check this out for yourself. If you are one of those agencies that do not show up in search engines, here are a few reasons why this might be happening:

**Flash** - One of the reasons that many agency sites don't show up in search engines is that many agency sites are built in Flash. Flash is a wonderful technology, allowing for merging of animation, sound, and other interactive elements. There is no question that Flash based sites can be more dynamic than non-Flash sites. However, one major limitation of a Flash based site is that Flash is not read or indexed by search engines. There are a few techniques that if implemented properly can mitigate some of these problems, but even when intentionally addressed, the bulk of the site content will not be indexed by search engines. Without implementing these techniques, a search engine will see absolutely nothing to index, therefore your relevance ranking will be non-existent.

**Splash pages** - Another factor is the high percentage of agency sites that use introductory splash pages. I've referred to the newsletter "[Splash is Dead](#)" a few times already. You might want to review it and decide whether or not the impact of a splash screen is worth losing up to 25% of your visitors and losing the most heavily weighted content pages of your site - your default home page (index page). If you do use a splash screen, you absolutely must make sure that your "skip intro" link is not a part of a Flash animation. Search engines don't see Flash links and so they will never get past the splash screen and therefore none of your site's content will be seen or indexed.

**Resizing browser windows through JavaScript** - Another related problem common to agency websites is the technique of making the index page automatically re-launch a new browser where you control the exact size of the window through JavaScript. Because this technique is terribly abused by certain disreputable sites, most search engines do not follow JavaScript links that pop up new windows. If you use this technique, you are probably keeping search engines out of your website.

**Overuse of graphic text** - Lastly, one of the reasons many agency sites do not do well in search engines is the over use of graphical text. While this is usually to be expected for navigation graphics, and even page titles, to use graphic text for main body copy, which is usually done to more fully control typography, keeps search engines from reading and indexing the content.

**Next month**

As we've alluded, next month we will describe a [NewfangledCMS application](#) that will help maximize and demonstrate your search engine activity throughout a [NewfangledCMS](#) site. We'll also provide a few tips on how you can choose effective key words and phrases for search engine positioning.