

# Introduction to Search Engine Optimisation

There are a great many myths and a lot of mystery around how to get your site well ranked. This introduction is intended to explain web-search issues in plain language, and to describe what the mellon factory can offer to help you get the highest possible page position on web search results.

## Introduction

Customers searching for a business by name will typically find it immediately, unless the business name is very generic. The central challenge in improving search rankings is usually to reach customers who are looking to buy the product or service the company offers, but who do not specifically search for the company by name.

Comprehensive search engine optimisation (SEO) of a website is multi-faceted. There is no single trick or secret formula. The core principle to remember is that expert search providers such as Google very much want their users to find excellent sites which really match their search aims. Create such a site, and Google will, with a modicum of help and encouragement, tend to deliver results which do justice at least to the strength of the underlying business proposition. Thus, sophisticated SEO can involve some elements of the analysis a regular business consultant would bring: there's little to gain in ranking high in a search which very few people outside your company are actually making. This is in fact a notorious issue exploited by those cold-callers who promise a rapid top ranking.

A site's search visibility never changes overnight without pay-per-click advertising, or short-term cheating which leads to a long-term exclusion. Even with pay-per-click, Google Adwords literally charge a poor site more than a good one for customer click-throughs, because they factor into the overall 'value' they place on that click the quality of result which Google delivers to its user.

## Search Engine Rankings

Search engines use a huge range of factors to determine their rankings. They do this because there has been a long history of 'gaming' or 'spamming' search engines, to dishonestly manipulate their results. Search engine operators have been forced to develop sophisticated models to discern high-quality sites from low-quality or dishonest sites which try to appear trustworthy to the search engine. These methods work well, so the best way to be well ranked in the long term is to deliver a genuine high-quality site *which positively facilitates the scrutiny which the search engine will put it through before deciding to trust it.*

## Off-Site Influences

Significant improvements can be made to a site's search engine rankings by influencing how other sites relate to it. If the site is linked to by major, long-established, trustworthy sites, it will in turn inherit 'credibility' from those links, and rise in the rankings. It must be stressed that quality is what matters in these links: one link from the Apple or BBC homepage (no, I can't arrange it) would work miracles. Links from family and friends will make little difference (unless they are C.E.O.s of Fortune 500 companies), and links from disreputable sites may erode your credibility. Of course, *outgoing* links, even to the most major and reputable sites, won't have the same influence.

## Website Optimisation

Most websites will require optimisation in visible ways (such as adjusting the copy which visitors read) and in invisible ways (such as changing the code which shapes the page, to make it as readable by search engines as it is by humans).

A search engine doesn't care about logos or colours. It ignores even the most funky animations. If your page includes a graphic with writing on it, Google et al. will be blind to that writing. If your menus are built from pictures, they may go unseen. If several pages of your site have the same titles or duplicated text, the search engine may struggle to tell one page from the other even if the colours and pictures on those pages are as different as night and day.

The text which the engine can see needs not only to be relevant to your business but ideally to be relevant *only* to a business such as yours, in a way your customers will be able to figure out and search for. The site should still be written in normal, natural, appealing prose - don't mistake this as advice to pack your site with awkward lists of keywords!

## Search Engine Submissions

A web search doesn't directly search the internet. Rather it searches an index of the internet which the search provider has compiled. If your site isn't in the index, it won't be found.

Although most websites get indexed eventually, (because Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft all use automated 'spiders' to explore the net) this can take a surprisingly long time: its quite possible for a new site not to be 'spidered' for a year after launch. Manually submitting the site for indexing can substantially speed up this process, especially if the site appears high-quality and trustworthy when it is indexed.

## How We Can Help

We know how to address search engine issues decisively and effectively. We'll look at the corporate aims and opportunities related to the web presence and audit these against what it currently delivers. We'll examine how the site or sites actually look to a search engine, how well it fits your target market's search habits and how the web presence compares to those of competitors. Solutions can be adapted to suit a range of timescales, and different approaches combined to suit client needs. The only 'instant' solution is paid advertising, but in the longer term a more 'organic' approach to a well-considered quality web presence is the most efficient and effective foundation even for many advertising-led campaigns.