

# Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

---

SEO is mainly to help search engines understand what a website is about. But it also concentrates the mind of the content or copywriter of the site. Search engines are getting more clever by the day. SEO is actually becoming less essential in the page coding to what it was only a year or so ago. SEO is now all about making what the site visitor can read to be to the point, relevant to that page and quick to understand.

## How does one do this?

Use a keyword tool or program to discover what search word phrases are being used that are relevant to your website content. Search for 'keyword suggestion tool' in Google. Do not be tempted to make up phrases which you assume are being used, but actually are not being used.

If you do think of a phrase that might be relevant to a page on your site, a quick way of checking if it is being used is to go into Google. Start typing your phrase into the search box. As you type Google will make suggestions. Did it suggest what you were going to type? If yes then use it. If you get to the end of typing your phrase and it has not come up with a suggestion, then do not use it. It will usually put your phrase in the suggestion box once you have finished typing, which is not what you want. It should 'suggest' before you finish typing. If it makes a suggestion which is not what you were going to type in, but is perfectly correct, then use that suggestion.

Keywords should always be a phrase of 3 to 7 words. Single words are completely useless as they are far too generic. The more accurate your phrase to your page content, the more likely your page will get listed for that phrase. The resultant visitor will find what they are looking for quickly. They are therefore more likely to use your website. As an example:

Bed and breakfast accommodation – a 4 word phrase. Good? No it could be anywhere in the world.

Minehead bed and breakfast – a 4 word phrase. Good? Yes because it can only be for that accommodation in Minehead.

Search engines are clever enough to work out that 'Minehead bed and breakfast' is the same as 'bed and breakfast in Minehead'.

Always use 'and' never '&' (ampersand) as an ampersand is converted into html code.

## Using a keyword suggestion tool

The more relevant your keyword phrases are to your site, the better quality experience your site visitor will get. They are more likely to 'bookmark' your site and use your site.

The longer your keyword phrase is, the more specific it will be. This means there are fewer sites using this exact phrase so if that phrase is used, your site is likely to show on page 1. But you may argue that if it is so specific, it is unlikely to be used. This is why you check to see if it is being used. Remember, you can get position 1 on any search engine if you use a keyword phrase that is only used by your site. But what good is that if no-one is using that phrase in their searches?

Some tools give you an estimate of how many times it has been used in the last month. You want to be using the keyword phrases that have LOW numbers, from 10 to 500 pm maximum. Anything over that is too generic so you have less chance of getting on to the first page of the results.

### **How many keyword phrases to each website page?**

Website pages need to be specific and concentrate on one subject. So you should only ever use one or a maximum of two keyword phrases. Make sure you do not then over-use these keywords. This is called keyword-stuffing and is a quick way of getting search engines to ignore your website.

Likewise, making them invisible to the human eye by matching the text to the background does not fool search engines as they can see the code. Instead use synonyms of your keywords as this makes much better reading than repeating keyword phrases. Write for your customer, not a search engine.

### **Where do I use these phrases?**

You should concentrate on the top-level pages, so the main ones along the top of the navigation bar.

The key page of any website is the home page (eg 'index.htm'). The headline should be one of your 'master' keyword phrases. Then the first five words of the first sentence in the first paragraph should include a second keyword phrase. Don't be tempted to use other main keyword phrases that would work better on another dedicated page for that phrase. Write your body text in short sentences of 10-15 words each. Use no more than 5 sentences to a paragraph. Never use capitalisation or italics and rarely use bolding. Use sub-subheads (in other words subheads further down between paragraphs) to make it easy to skim through to find what one wants to know quickly. Consider using bullet points if appropriate.

The Title Tag in the 'header code' of every page is very important and should describe the very essence of that page with a 'master' keyword phrase or two. Keep it short.

Meta Description again needs your main keywords for that page within text that is understood by people. If it is well written search engines will use it as a short description of your site in their listings. If it is not well written the search engines are more likely to pick some text from within the content of the page. Try not repeating word for word the text on the page. Say it slightly differently and within about 20-25 words.

Meta Keywords can be misused and are now unimportant. Because they have been so misused search engines now ignore them, so you can enter your two most relevant keyword phrases in there, separated by commas. But do not pile in all your keyword phrases in the hope the search engines will then list you for all those phrases. It will not happen. Overuse of keyword phrases is called 'spamming the search engines'. This is a quick way of never getting listed.

### **External links**

Make sure all external links, away from the website, open in a new window. The code to do this is target="\_blank". Depending on how you update the content of the site, using a dedicated program such as Dreamweaver or a CMS system such as a Wordpress site, will determine how you tell a link to open in a new window.

## Images

Use relevant pictures to the text they are next to. Use quality pictures, not family snaps. But websites actually don't need high resolution pictures because screens cannot show that quality, so they only need to be 72dpi for a website. This has the advantage that they will load quickly in a browser. Make sure you add the 'alt' text which should be a keyword phrase relevant to the picture and to the text it is within. Search engines cannot see pictures but can read the alt-text.

## Blogs

Write blogs about things that are relevant to your business. Sometimes these will include things which are timely. But also consider blogs which are 'evergreen', so are relevant to your business in a year's time. Blogs need to be interesting to the reader, informative, helpful, include suitable pictures and have a human element to them. They should be between 600 and 1600 words long, so up to 7 minutes reading time. Include links back to the relevant pages on your website or other relevant websites if yours does not cover the subject. Blogs also help keep your website content fresh which search engines love.

Repost your blogs by putting them on your Facebook page, Tweet them and add to [www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com) or [www.scoop.it](http://www.scoop.it) where they may be shared and get you more followers.

## Social media

As with blogs, social media is an opportunity for new content and links back to relevant pages on your own website. If you have social media accounts, make sure you link to them from your website, ideally with the relevant icons.

## Links

Your website needs to be part of the world wide web. To help towards this you need links, both inwards and outwards. Each link is a thread in the web. The first thread is from where your site is hosted to your site. If you had no links then your site would be hanging 'by a thread'! It will never be found by anyone let alone a search engine. Only those who knew the website domain name would find it.

Outward links must be relevant to your site content and should open in a new window, so your site is still in a browser tab to easily go back to. Don't be tempted to link to your friends site that has nothing to do with your type of business, and vice versa. Irrelevant links can do more harm than good – it is not a numbers game, it's all about relevance.

Internal links can help people find their way around your site, so include hyperlinks within the text that is relevant to the page you are linking to.

## How long does it take for all this to work?

Search engine spiders come around at least every 6 weeks per engine. It can be more often than that. After I have optimised a site, which is another way of saying SEO, I have known the site to jump on to page 1 by the following day and the other extreme was 8 weeks. I was clearly lucky the spider came around within hours of me updating one website. I do not think that telling search engines that you have updated a site is going to make the slightest difference to when the spider visits. I never tell them, I simply let the spiders come and visit.

## Does the domain name have an influence on the listings?

It used to. But now some url's are so complex and yet they get listed. So if the content is good, relevant and easy to read and understand, then the search engines will give the site a good rating.

Search engines want to be sure the sites they are listing are up to standard, relevant for the searches being made and likely to stay around. So you will find that your site may start off on page 8 and slowly come forwards to page 2. It will then finally get to page 1 as confidence and traffic volume to your site give confidence to the search engines. It is down to patience and good content. You cannot influence search engines and if you try it will be to your peril.

## Responsive design

At the end of April 2015 Google stated it would favour a responsive designed site over a similar standard designed site. If you are having a new site designed, make sure it is built with a responsive design. This means it can tell what monitor it is showing on and adjust itself so it keeps user-friendly wherever it is being viewed.

Standard designed sites will still work on different screen sizes but will need scrolling which can be annoying. Be aware though that a responsive designed site may cost 3 or more times as much as a standard designed site, as there is quite a bit more work involved.

## In a nutshell

- Choose your keyword phrases carefully
- Don't use phrases that are not being searched on
- Don't over-use your phrases on each page
- Find phrases that are relevant to your page
- Write body copy that is snappy, sharp and to the point
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs
- Use sub heads to break up the text for easy skimming
- Use the best photos you can get. Get a professional to take internal photos.
- Build a new site with responsive design
- Don't expect your website to do all your marketing for you – it needs other support.

## And finally...

Use great photos that tell the story of that page quickly. Top tip: Once you have that wow photo, then crop it effectively, add a touch of saturation and also increase the contrast. You will be surprised at how much more effective it looks.

## SEO Spam

Be very wary of emails and phone calls saying that they have looked at your website and could improve its search engine positions. Simply ask them what search phrase they used. I can safely bet they will not know or it will not be a relevant phrase.

**Bryan Cath**

**Visit Exmoor web manager**

**01271 883131**