



Natural Search Engine Optimization Guide

Introduction

Always remember that we are in a dynamic industry. If you are doing something one week, next week it might change. It's your job to keep on top of search engines as they change and adapt.

Prerequisites

A strong understanding of HTML and the Internet. You should understand the basic purpose of search engine optimization. You should have general knowledge of Internet related terminology such as: JavaScript, Flash, Frames, Search Engines, Links, Browser, etc.

About this Guide

This guide was written by Directory One as an aid in training its optimization staff. However, we have written it in such a way to be helpful to anyone who needs a search engine optimization guide.

As sometimes you will be optimizing a site from scratch and sometimes you will be optimizing a site that is already built, our search engine steps do not necessarily go in order. No site is the same, and every site will require focuses on different aspects of optimization depending on the specific site's limitations and topic.

If you are optimizing for a client, it is VITAL to educate the customer about search engine optimization and the steps you are taking to optimize his site. He will be integral in choosing keywords that are appropriate to his business. And only by understanding his industry will you be able to create targeted leads for his site.

SEO Refresher

What is a search engine? A search engine is a website such as Google on which people can search for other websites on the Internet. Search engines do not include sites manually, but have an automated "search engine spiders" that "crawls" the web through links. If your website has just one link to it, it will eventually be found and indexed in a search engine. [Further Details](#)

What is a directory? A directory is a website often categorized like the yellow pages which allows visitors to find other websites by topic and category. A directory is a website such as DMOZ (or the directory section of Yahoo) that does not have automated programs which crawl the web looking for web pages. Each website included in a directory was submitted by the site's representative and was judged worthy of Inclusion by an actual person. [Further Details](#)

What are natural search engine listings? There are two kinds of search engine listings. Natural and Paid. Paid listings are usually labeled in a separate section such as "sponsored listings." Natural listings are the listings that are not paid for. They are determined by the search engines' algorithms for finding, sorting and ranking pages based on relevancy. Because natural listings are considered "more accurate" by searchers, getting in natural listings is typically preferable to getting in paid listings.

This guide focuses only on how to gain natural listings.

What are pay per clicks? A pay per click (PPC) is a paid listing where the site's owner pays every time the listing is clicked. The fee per click can range anywhere from a penny to several dollars. [Further Details](#)

What is search engine optimization? Search engine optimization is the process of building search engine friendly sites that will be more likely to be highly ranked in the natural listings of search engines. [Further Details](#)

What do search engine spiders see? Graphics are pretty for people, not search engines. Search engines ONLY see text and HTML code.

What can you expect from search engine optimization? You can expect search engine optimization to be a lot of hard work. Once a website is search engine friendly and goes live, it may take 3 days to 3 months for the site to get spidered. After that, it will take several more months for ranks to stabilize. You can expect the site to jump wildly into and out of results for the first several months. If it doesn't, you're lucky. During this time, you should continue to work on the website using the guidelines outlined in this document. Eventually, when the site gains seniority and stability you will begin to see some payoff. You should not expect instant results from search engine optimization, although you will sometimes get lucky and get results sooner rather than later. There is no rhyme or reason to it. You can optimize ten websites using the exact same principles and one site will rank in 2 days and the next in 2 months. Search engines are fickle creatures.

It can sometimes be frustrating when websites are being sluggish about ranking, but keep up your optimization and maintenance and trust that creating quality, search engine friendly sites will pay off.

Don't assume once you've got a site ranking it will stay that way. Constant site upkeep is necessary, especially for more competitive terms. But again, search engines are fickle. You may be ranking well for 10 months on a term without changing the site once, only to be dropped cruelly and completely from that key term for seemingly no reason at all. You can expect search engine optimization to be a full time job of keeping ahead of the competition, keeping up with search engine changes, and keeping the site alive with plenty of fresh content and constantly improving usability standards.



Natural Search Engine Optimization Guide

Step 1: Design & Base Search Engine Compatibility Analysis

A. Check Overall Site Design.

If the site is in Flash or Frames or the site has more dynamically generated pages than static HTML pages, you may want to consider a site redesign.

Search engines simply do better with basic HTML pages. Period. If you have a site in Flash or Frames and redesign is impossible or highly undesirable, you will need to consult an expert optimizer or additional resources outside this guide.

B. Double Check for Search Engine Compatibility with the Lynx Viewer.

Go to the [Delorie Lynx Viewer](#) and view your page. This is how search engines see your web page. If the site is navigable, basically clean and understandable, has plenty of good text and can be seen in the Delorie Viewer, that's a good sign. If it *can't* be seen, there's a good chance that search engines won't be able to view the page either.

DEFINITIONS

Flash - Software designed by Macromedia to help create websites. It has awesome graphics and is generally murder for search engine optimization (although newer versions of the product claim to be more search engine friendly). To see examples of what a Flash site looks like, see the [Macromedia website](#) show case.

Frames - A website technique used by programmers so that each section of a website is actually a separate, sometimes scrollable region and each region is located in a separate file. Frames are generally considered obsolete, cause numerous design and SEO problems, and since the advent of SSIs, serve no real purpose. [This website](#) is in frames.

The Delorie Viewer Shows What a Search Engine Sees:

To a Search Engine....	
A Flash Site Looks Like This	A Frames Site Looks Like This
[entry_top.gif] [entry_logo.gif] [flash_enter2.gif] [html_enter.gif] [get_flash.gif]	FRAME: left_wnd FRAME: top_wnd FRAME: main_wnd
If you see either of these things...or worse <i>nothing</i> with the Delorie Viewer, this is not good.	

C. Hosting.

Make sure the site has a static IP. The benefit to having a static IP, is its yours and yours alone. Apposed to having a dynamic IP where you share one IP with many others.

D. Domain Name.

Do not try to capture the keywords in the domain name. Dashes and double dashes are just tacky, and they could indicate over-optimization to search engines. Choose a catchy, professional, easy to remember domain name. [Further Details](#)

E. Cut Your File Size.

The smaller the better. For search engines and for people. Under 80K to 100K is what most people can manage, but if you can get it under 10K or 15K that is even better.

Step 2: Keyword Analysis

A. Brainstorm.

Consider first what goals you have for the site. Under what search terms would you like to appear? What products or services do you plan to sell on your website? Are you doing business in one geographical area or will you do nationwide or global business? What are some of the different terms people use for your products or services? Brainstorm about the different ways people would search for your product or service in a search engine. If you are optimizing for a customer, ask him what he wants to rank under, but direct him away from key phrases that are extremely broad. Take notes. A brainstorming list for a site that sells pet insurance in Atlanta could look something like this:

dog insurance cat insurance animal insurance animal health plans georgia pet plans atlanta cat insurance best dog health plans pet health insurance dog health care insurance cat medical insurance pet care insurance pet insurance quote affordable dog insurance

B. Use Keyword Analysis Tools.

Add to your list by using the available keyword analysis tools:

[Overture Keyword Suggestion Tool](#)

[Wordtracker](#)

[Google Sandbox](#)

[7Search](#)

For examples of live searches visit:

[Ask Jeeves Keyhole](#)

[Froogle](#)

[MetaSpy](#)

C. Competitive & Market Analysis.

Take notes on the following:

- 1.** Go down your list and type in your most promising-looking keywords into Google or Yahoo. If your competition is showing up in the first pages, you'll probably want to rank under those keywords too. If you competition *isn't*, that is also good to know, because you could capture a new keyword or phrase that they didn't think about. Think of it like this: if you're opening up a new McDonald's you'll want to know where the Burger Kings are. If there's a thriving Burger King, chances are its a good spot to be. On the other hand, if there's a new neighborhood, with no hamburger joint, you'll definitely want to be the first one.
- 2.** Talk to friends and non-optimizers. Ask them what they would type into a search engine to find the service or product. There is no substitute for asking real people. Some figures estimate that as many as 80% of searches are unique search queries, not the oftsearched-for terms that show up in the the keyword Tools.
- 3.** Look at your competitors. Consider what they have optimized for.

D. Create Final Key phrase Lists.

Use the popularity (demand) numbers provided by Overture and Wordtracker, the keyword notes you have taken so far, and some common sense to break down your brainstorming keyword list into three lists:

List 1. Pay Per Click Section. These words and terms will give you great, targeted traffic, but are too competitive for starters. For example, if you sell books, trying to rank on the first page under the search term "books" with an Overture demand of some 3.5 million would set you against Amazon.com and Barnes&Nobles.com. Sorry, it's not going to happen. You can't get it. No way. No how. When you *become* Amazon or Barnes&Nobles, your site is several years old, and you have cultivated a several hundred page site with incredible content, then you can think about going for those spots. In the mean time, consider these more competitive search terms as additions to your Pay Per Click campaign.

List 2. 10-30 Primary Search Engine Optimization Terms. These are targeted search terms that will not pit you against the big guys, but will give you a great conversion rate. That is, people looking for these terms are looking for *exactly* what you do in one of your niche areas. You'll want to include some of the search terms with mid and low popularities in the Overture and Wordtracker databases and some highly niche terms. For example you may include terms here like: "houston world war two veteran clubs," or "white house spoon collectibles." It may be true that there are very few people searching for these terms, but if someone *does* search for that term (and that is what you do) you are sure to make a sale. Obviously, you will want to mix highly niche terms with broader terms that have a mid to high search rate. But again, don't waste your time going for the *really* big terms yet.

List 3. Secondary Search Engine Optimization Terms. These are terms that might not be your first priority, but you can begin targeting these when your site grows and gets a little bigger.

We will be using the second list for your initial natural search engine optimization campaign described in the rest of this document.

Step 3: Content Analysis

Websites should be content rich, the keywords strewn throughout the text. At the same time, there is no reason to go overboard. Search engines will penalize a site for overoptimization of any kind, including excessive keyword density.

A. Plan For Extensive Content.

Create a plan to have at least 100 pages of extensive, quality content within one year of your start date. This means real, quality content, not the same content rewritten 100 times.

B. Check Content Length.

The text on any one page should be greater than the HTML code on that page when you look at the page's HTML source. If not, you need more quality text. Although sometimes pages need to be short from a usability standpoint, make sure you have several (at least 1/2) of your pages at optimal search engine length of **350 to 700** words.

C. Keyword Density Analysis.

Use the following tools to check and analyze keyword density.

<http://www.keyworddensity.com/>

<http://www.keywordcount.com>

<http://www.searchengineworld.com/cgi-bin/kwda.cgi>

<http://www.ranks.nl/tools/spider.html>

Your keyword density on any page should not exceed **8%**.

D. Keyword Proximity.

You will also want to take into account keyword proximity. You will not want to repeat you *exact* key phrases over and over again.. Include your exact key phrase in the *title, description and keyword tag, <h1> tag, anchor text, and in the first sentence of the first paragraph*. Use the following tool to check and analyze keyword proximity:

<http://www.ranks.nl/cgi-bin/ranksnl/spider/proximity.cgi>

E. Keyword Themes and Categorization.

Map out each word as "individual page" or "site theme." Search engines look at site themes, so the keywords should be scattered throughout the text on the website (if they do not already appear). However, on smaller, very targeted search phrases it is often a good idea to devote a whole page centered around that key phrase. At this point you will want to categorize each key phrase you have chosen as "site theme" or "individual page." These will be the terms that you believe will bring you the most targeted traffic. This does *not* mean that you will not have individual pages focused toward the site themes nor does it mean that you should not sprinkle keywords tagged for "individual pages" liberally throughout the site. This is for general guidelines and optimization organization.

F. Keyword Mapping.

After you have labeled each keyword as *individual* or *site theme*, you should map each page to a particular keyword or phrase that seems suited to that page. This does NOT mean that you should put that key phrase only on that page, nor that you should include no other key phrases on that page, this is *only a general focus* for each page. Your top level pages (home page, links off of main navigation) should always be focused on your site themes. Here is an example of a key phrase list as it may look for the pet insurance example:

Key phrase	Site or Individual	Focused Page
dog insurance	Site Theme	Dog Insurance Page
cat insurance	Site Theme	Cat Insurance Page
animal insurance	Individual Page	Terms and Conditions Page
animal health plans	Individual Page	Health Care Plan Page
georgia pet plans	Individual Page	About Us Page
atlanta cat insurance	Individual Page	Local Insurance Pet Care
best dog health plans	Individual Page	Compare and Contrast
pet health insurance	Site Theme	Home Page
dog health care insurance	Individual Page	Dog Insurance Prices
cat medical insurance	Individual Page	Cat Insurance Prices
pet care insurance	NA not right for site	NA
pet insurance quote	Individual Page	Contact Us Page
affordable dog insurance	Individual Page	FAQ

From now on we will use the term "Focus Key phrase" to mean a keyword or phrase chosen as the focus for that web page.

G. Keyword Input.

Once you have mapped each page to a keyword, make sure that that keyword appears a few times on that page. Again a **5% to 8%** density is enough. You do not have to go overboard. Bret Tabke suggests you include the keyword "...once in a heading [that means inside an <H1></H1> tag]...once in bold, once in italic, once high on the page, and hit the density between 5 and 20% (don't fret about it)." This is a good rule of thumb. There are also additional steps to individualizing a key term for a page "behind the scenes." These steps appear in the META tags section.

Step 4: Site Structure. File and Directory Organization.

A. Anchor Text Optimization.

Anchor text is another word for link text. Whenever possible, links that point to your site should contain the words you have chosen for your site theme. Hence a link from your happy customer that reads "[Pet Insurance ASTYTrust](#)" is better than a link that reads "Pet Insurance [ASTYTrust](#)." This principal can be used within the site as well. For in-site links, you will want the link from page A to page B to contain the keyword or phrase you have chosen as a focus for page B. Hence, using the Keyword Mapping for the Pet Insurance site above, a link from the Homepage to the Dog Insurance Page, should read [dog nsurance](#) rather than [canine services](#).

B. File Names. Use keywords in your file names for pages and images without going overboard. Use hyphens between the words, not underscores. So, for example, you might name the Dog Insurance Page, dog-insurance.html, and a you may name a picture of a dog on the page, healthy-dog.jpg.

C. Directory and Site Structure. For larger sites, you will want to create an intuitive directory structure with optimization in mind. If you have several pages on dogs and their insurance packages specifics, create a new directory called "dogs" and put all of the dog-related files in there. You probably wouldn't want to call the directory dog-insurance if your page is dog-insurance.html, because then your file path would be: "/doginsurance/ dog-insurance.html" and that's going a little overboard. But /dogs/doginsurance. html" would be acceptable.

Step 5: Code Tweaking

Back-end optimization, particularly of META tags, can be incredibly overrated, and many people falsely claim it to be the *only* search engine process, but it is still very important to helping a site rank well in search results.

A. Declare the Document Type.

The first line of your code should declare your document type. There are different document declarations depending on the document type, but for regular HTML pages, typically this line will work:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/html4/loose.dtd">
```

B. META NAME Tags.

Directly after the document type there are four META NAME tags that should be included within the "HEAD" section of the web page. The HEAD section is not seen by website visitors and is used only for informational purposes by search engine spiders. The formatting for the elements will appear as so:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/html4/loose.dtd">
<html>
<head>
<title>your title goes here</title>
<meta name="description" content="your description goes here.">
<meta name="keywords" content="your keywords go here">
<meta name="robots" content="your robots direction goes here">
</head>
<body>
The content of your web page goes here.
</body>
</html>
```

Here is a breakdown of the four META tags that you should include:

1. Title:

The title tag of each page should include the keywords and phrases you have chosen as a focus for that page. On the dog insurance page, you may title the page something like "Dog Insurance by ASTYTrust" or "Dog Insurance Plans and Benefits." The tag looks like:

```
<title>Dog Insurance by ASTYTrust</title>
```

Title Tags should be no longer than **90** characters and should include the focus key phrase for that page only once.

2. Description:

Each description should be tailored to the page and include the keywords and phrases you have chosen as a focus for that page. The description tag could look like this:

```
<meta name="description" content="Provides details and plan specifics for ASTYTrust
dog insurance: quality, dependable pet insurance for an affordable price.">
```

Description Tags should be no longer than **40** words and should include the focus key phrase for that page _____.

3. Keywords:

The keyword tag is not that important, but for some reason it's the first thing that amateur optimizers lock on to. Search engines hardly glance at it, but even so, it doesn't exactly *hurt*. A keyword tag should be longer than **700 characters**. You should not repeat any *word* more than **3 times**, and you should *not* repeat key phrases. There is some debate as to whether you should separate the keywords with commas, so that is up to you. The keyword tag is formatted as so:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="dog insurance, pet insurance, dog health care, animal health plans">
```

4. Robots Tag:

Unless you want the search engine spiders to do something other than spider your page and follow all your links, your robots tag should look like this:

```
<meta name="robots" content="all"> or <meta name="robots" content="index,follow">
```

C. META-EQUIV Tags.

The following two lines can be included in your head tag assuming you have a regular HTML page in English with a typical character set (from a typical American keyboard). They are included in the invisible header sent to a requesting agent by the page and make your code more professional. They may or may not help with search engine optimization:

```
<META http-equiv="content-type" CONTENT="text/html; charset=utf-8">  
<META http-equiv="content-language" content="en">
```

D. Alt Text.

Images have ALT text for people who have non-graphics browsers or for people who are visually challenged and must use a talking browser. Use your focused keywords or key phrases once (*if applicable*) in the ALT text of your images. But again, don't go overboard.

E. Validate Your Home Page.

Validate your homepage at: <http://validator.w3.org/>. It's actually better to validate *every* page, but validation can be *extremely* time consuming. You could easily spend half an hour to an hour validating each page. Therefore, for starters validate only the homepage. If you are building a site from the ground up it is important that you validate the site template BEFORE you start pasting in all your content or you will make the same HTML mistakes over and over again, and it will be much harder to clean up later. There are many many tips to help in validation. Ask a senior search engine optimizer if (when) you run into problems.

F. Clean Up Your Code.

Minimize your HTML code. The less, the simpler and the easier to read the better. Search engines have to go through all that junk too. Cut things like duplicate tags when you only need them once. And *externalize* your JavaScript's and other scripts by placing them in a separate file and then using one liners in your code to call them. A brief guide on how to do this can be found here:

<http://www.pageresource.com/jscript/jxtern.htm>.

Step 6: Linking

A. Inbound Links.

In general the more links you have coming into your site from outside websites, the better. That being said, you could spend at eternity getting a million incoming links that only counted .000001% towards your site's ranking. Links from pages that a) already have a lot of links and/or b) are completely irrelevant to your site's content do not count very much towards your site's ranking in search engines.

The best quality link is from a page that

a) is highly related to your content

b) has few outbound links

c) has high Google PageRank (you can view Google PageRank by downloading the Google toolbar at <http://www.toolbar.google.com/>).

d) is from an authority, quality site in your industry.

HOWEVER pages that have a **high number** of outbound links but are still highly related to your content, such as directories can still have a very good effect on your link popularity.

Therefore, you will want to spend your time acquiring *quality* inbound links. There are several ways to do this:

- Create a great site with great content and other sites will naturally link to you.
- Request links from other related sites. You can do this through email or telephone, but half the time you'll get a telemarketer's response. And who wants endless rejection?
- Establish actual relationships with other people in your industry (your supplier, your industry certification source, your wholesale retailers, your contract laborers, etc.) and ask for links back from their sites. Actively participating in forums is a good way to meet more people and make more friends in the industry that can later become link friends.
- Make news. Write industry-related articles that you allow other people to put on their site in return for a back-link or write press releases and distribute them to free or paid press release services that will distribute your news and links across the web.
- Get into directories (see Step 7).

B. Outbound Links.

Your outbound links should link to quality, authoritative sites. Link outward when appropriate and choose wisely using keywords in your anchor text. Search engines care who you link to, and they *do* assume "birds of a feather flock together." So don't link to just anyone, and don't swap links with just anyone who asks.

C. On Site Links.

If you have great content, it should be easy to link well within your site. If you have a page about dog insurance prices, and another on the dog insurance policies and another on the dog insurance pros and cons, and another on dog insurance resources link between them within your content using your keywords in your anchor text. This not only helps your visitors, but helps search engines to see a "quality grouping" of related content.

D. Check Search Engine Friendliness of Links.

- **Keep links as simple hypertext links whenever possible.** Image links are OK, but they should not be dynamically generated, hidden in JavaScript, Flash files or image maps. If you use any of these techniques, make sure there is a regular text link to that page for search engines to follow somewhere on your site.

Best	OK
Subscribe Simple Text Link	Image Link

- It is generally preferable for your text links to **use your chosen keywords and phrases as anchor text.** Hence [search engine optimization guide](#) is a better link than [click here](#) for our optimization guide. Plus, it looks better from a usability standpoint too.

E. Use a Site Map.

Search engines *do* look for these. A good site map will help the search engine spider to find all of your web pages. If the site does not yet have a site map, create one.

F. Links, Focus Keywords and Site Structure. Your main site themes should appear on your top level pages (and throughout the site), with minis-site themes evolving among sub-pages and well cross-linked. As a very small example, your pet insurance site may be linked like this:



Step 7: Website Registration

Although search engines such as Google will eventually pick you up with their search engine spiders, it doesn't hurt to submit your site to them. With directories, however, you *must* submit your site to be included because they have no automatic "website finding" software. There are both paid for directories and free directories. In both cases, this is the process you should follow to submit to directories:

1. Find the category which most closely matches the website. If several or more categories closely match the website topic, choose the one that has the highest PageRank. (You can view PageRank by downloading the Google Toolbar at <http://www.toolbar.google.com/>.)
2. Read the directory submissions guidelines carefully and follow them *exactly*.
3. Register your site.
4. WRITE IT DOWN. Write the directory you submitted to and the DATE. Don't assume you'll remember everywhere you submitted, because you won't. And because directories don't like people who submit the same site more than once and fill up their queues, you don't want to be submitting to the same directory again and again. Plus, if you don't get in somewhere you will want to go back and check in 6 months to a year and resubmit.

Recommended Free Directories	Recommended Pay Directories
GoGuides.org Dmoz.org JoeAnt.com Jayde.com Gimpsy.com Illumirate.com Webworldindex.com Skaffe.com Websavvy.cc Bizweb.com MavicaNet.com Onemission.com Xoron.com Thedirectorysite.com Netinsert.com Bhanvad.com Somuch.com Web-Beacon.com Yeandi.com WOWDirectory.com	Yahoo.com Business.com sbd.bcentral.com

Topic Specific Directories

Find as many directories as possible that deal with your site's topic specifically and submit. You can find these types of directories by search for: *keyword add url*

Step 8: What NOT to Do

The following "tricks" can get you banned from search engines, and should NOT be used:

- Using hidden text.
- Using doorway pages, cloaking and deceptive redirects (poorly made pages designed only for search engine spiders that the user never sees because the user is redirected to a better, more user-friendly page)
- Automated submissions. Do not use automated software to submit to search engines and directories.
- Keyword stuffing and excessive keyword density. Do not repeat keywords over and over in META tags or in the content.
- Content repetition. Some search engines use a "duplicate content filter." Do not duplicate your content or copy your content from another website (which would, of course, be immoral anyway).
- Joining link farms. Do not include your site in any "linking schemes" or link farms designed only to generate long lists of incoming links.

Step 9: Maintain Your Optimization

A. Check your incoming logs.

If you are getting several referrals for a niche topic. Write more on that topic. Obviously your visitors want *that*. And more of *that* will lead to more quality, targeted hits, which is what the point of search engine optimization is after all.

B. Add content, add more content and add more content.

Stagnant sites tend to lose search engines' interest. If you want to get ranking with the big guys, you've got to keep up. Keep adding *quality* content and articles on your topic. Search engines and visitors both will be more likely to stay around.

C. Validation and HTML.

Continue validating pages and cleaning your HTML starting with your top level pages and moving down.

D. Submissions.

Continue to find and submit to new directories and upkeep paid directories as necessary. Continue to look for appropriate topic specific directories. Check your submission list once every 6 months to a year and resubmit to directories that did not accept you.

E. Linking.

Continue to harvest quality, inbound links using tips outlined in Step 6.

F. Keep up with changes.

Search engines tweak, improve and change their algorithms often. Keep up with the changes

1. Check the following resources often.	2. Subscribe to the following newsletters.
Search Engine Watch Web Master World Pandia Google's Information for Webmasters	Search Day High Rankings Advisor Market Leap Report HTML Writers Guild

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