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## ***Search Engine Optimization (SEO)***

### ***Or - Tag Your It (or not...)***

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process by which the volume and quality of traffic to a web site from search engines via "natural" ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results is "optimized" through the organization and incorporation of specific data into a web site. Through various studies it has been proven that, the earlier a site is presented in the search results, or the higher (closer to the top of the list) it "ranks", the more searchers will visit that particular site. SEO can also target different kinds of search, including video and image search, local business search, and industry-specific vertical search engines.

SEO must be considered a key element as companies and organizations develop a marketing strategy for increasing their site traffic and relevance. SEO considers how search algorithms work and what people search for. SEO efforts may involve a site's coding, presentation, and structure, as well as fixing problems that could prevent search engine indexing programs from fully indexing (or spidering) a site. Other, more noticeable efforts may include adding unique content to a site such as key words or words "tagged" to images, ensuring that content is easily indexed by search engine robots or (search-bots), thus making the site more visually stimulating and easy to find. Much as Spam has become the dirty word in E-mail Broadcasting, techniques known as "Black Hat" or spamdexing, use methods such as link farms and keyword stuffing that tend to harm search engine user experience. Search engines tend to look for sites that employ these techniques and often times remove their listings.

"SEO" can also refer to "search engine optimizers", a term adopted by a new and growing industry of companies and consultants who carry out optimization projects on behalf of their clients. The term can also refer to employees who perform SEO services in-house. Search engine optimizers may offer SEO as a stand-alone service or as a part of a broader marketing campaign.



Because effective SEO typically requires modifications to a site's source code, SEO tactics should be incorporated into a web site during the design and development phase. The term "search engine friendly" is often used to describe web site designs, menus, content management systems and shopping carts that are easy to optimize.

Unlike paid search, in which marketers buy links through Google, Yahoo, Microsoft and others to improve their ranking or list position, SEO involves tapping into the "free" listings every search engine already incorporates. SEO is like PR for web site listing. Much the same as positioning your company in print with a good review, a press release a call to a reporter or other PR tactic can be used. If you want a good position in search engine results for increased site traffic – SEO is the ticket.

SEO can seem hard. How are you crafting HTML titles? Are you building with a lot of Flash? And some of the guerrilla tactics -- which aren't necessary -- can seem scary. Sure, you could just spend more on paid search -- and if you've got the money, do it. But most searchers are still looking at, and clicking on, the unpaid listings SEO influences. Ignoring SEO is like doing an ad campaign without a PR push alongside.

### ***Brief SEO History***

Webmasters began optimizing sites for search engines in the mid-'90s, as the first search engines were cataloguing the early Web. Initially, all one needed to do was submit a page, or URL, to the various engines which would send a spider to "crawl" that page, extract links to other pages from it, and return information found on the page to be indexed. The process involves a search engine spider downloading a page and storing it on the search engine's own server, where a second program known as an indexer resides. The indexer extracts various information about the page, such as the words it contains and where they are located, as well as any weight for specific words, as well as any and all links the page contains, which are then placed into a scheduler for crawling at a later date. Once site owners started recognizing the value of having their sites



higher in rank and visible in search engine results, the practice of SEO was fully embraced in the web-sphere and continues to grow in new and exciting ways today.

Early versions of search algorithms relied on webmaster-provided information such as the keyword meta-tag, or index files. Meta-tag use provides a guide to page content and is a basic practice still in use today. Unfortunately, like any easily manipulated technology, a few bad apples will raise the cost of entry and some webmasters abused meta tags by including irrelevant keywords to artificially increase page impressions for their client websites and to increase their ad revenue. This was great when “cost per thousand impressions” was the common means of monetizing site content. By relying so much on factors exclusively within a Webmaster's control, early search engines suffered from abuse and ranking manipulation. To provide better results to their users, search engines had to adapt to ensure their “results” pages showed the most relevant search results, rather than unrelated pages stuffed with numerous keywords by unscrupulous webmasters. Search engines responded by developing more complex ranking algorithms, taking into account additional factors that were more difficult for webmasters to manipulate.

### ***Getting Listed***

Leading search engines Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft, use crawlers to find pages for their algorithmic search results. Some search engines, notably Yahoo!, operate a paid submission service that guarantee crawling for either a set fee or cost per click. Such programs usually guarantee inclusion in the database, but do not guarantee specific ranking within the search results. Two major directories, the Yahoo Directory and the Open Directory Project both require manual submission and human editorial review. Google offers Google Sitemaps, for which an XML type feed can be created and submitted for free to ensure that all pages are found, especially pages that aren't discoverable by automatically following links.



### ***Getting Noticed (Click through to you)***

Several eye tracking and heat studies have shown that searchers scan a search results page from top to bottom and left to right looking for a relevant result (these same studies have also proven the standard position for site navigation menus is either top, left or top-flush left). Placement at or near the top of search rankings (results page) therefore increases the number of searchers who will visit a site.

However, more search engine referrals does not guarantee more viewer ship or sales. SEO is not necessarily an appropriate strategy for every website, and other Internet marketing strategies can be much more effective, depending on the site company's goals. A successful Internet or traditional marketing campaign may drive organic search results to pages, but it also may involve the use of paid advertising on search engines and other pages or other methods of marketing a site.

Search Engine Optimization does generate a return on investment. However, search engine algorithms change, and there are no guarantees of continued referrals. Due to this lack of guarantees and certainty, a business that relies heavily on search engine traffic can suffer major losses if the search engines stop sending visitors.

If a company or organization invests heavily in a web site without addressing the necessary search engine optimization they will certainly not experience the benefits of site exposure nor see a quick return on their marketing investment. Sure, you can ignore SEO. But you can bet your competitors won't.

Contact abm design for more information on how your site can be optimized to take advantage of current search engine technology.