

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION AND CLARITY: THE VALUE OF KEYWORDS

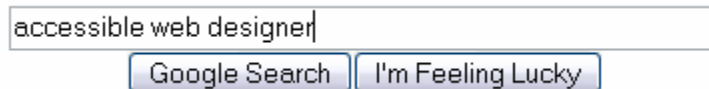
by Gina Badalaty
[Art By Tech Web Design](#)

Search engine optimization (SEO) is critical for web sites that want to rank well in popular engines. There are many techniques involved in SEO, but if I had to pick the single most important factor, I would say that phrases are probably the single most important factor in ranking well, although to be most effective they should be integrated with a series of other techniques. In this report, we'll take a look at what keywords are, and how you can successfully use them to get your site to perform better in search engine rankings.

Please be advised that a successful SEO campaign is, at heart, a marketing campaign, and developing the best keywords to land your company in a good ranking position involves research, thought and testing, like any well-developed marketing process. Spending time and care in this area will help you bring in more business, and is well worth the effort.

What Are Keywords?

Keywords are those words and phrases that are entered into search engines by users to find web sites, like what you see below:



Keywords and keyword phrases need to be sprinkled throughout your site in various ways – through the typed HTML text on your page (that is, your main content), in text navigation, in HTML header tags (specifically, the “h1” and “h2” tags), in file page names, the title tag, and in certain HTML meta tags. (Meta tags are HTML tags that give special information to the browser about your page, and are not viewable to the visitor.) Given the frequency and importance of keywords, they need to be created with thought and research. Let's go step by step and see how you can create the keywords for your homepage and all your web pages.

Developing Keywords: The Homepage

The best way to do this process is in steps. A good starting point is the keyword phrase for your homepage. This phrase will be one of the most important and possibly, one of the most difficult to create. Before beginning, you will need to do some marketing and research homework before developing ANY keyword phrase, but your homepage is most likely to contain the overall position of your company. The first thing you need to do is

to discover your company's niche -- your unique selling position (USP). What is it that makes your firm stand out from the crowd?

You may need to consider what your closest competition is doing. What sets you apart? Customer service? Pricing? Added value? A great thing to do is to develop a specialized niche in your field. Or, you can develop a specialized group of clients that you cater to. You can still offer your full range of services to all your prospects, but the more you can target your business, the more effective all your advertising and marketing becomes.

Once you have a concept, you will need to change it into a searchable keyword phrase. This takes a bit of creativity and a lot of economy. Obviously, it needs to be short and to the point. What do you think users will type in? Think about what words you enter to find competitors' sites. Naturally, you will need to create something unique for your business, and this is where all your work on unique positioning will pay off. Congratulations! You have just developed the keyword phrase for your homepage.

Developing Keywords: The Homepage

Now you will need to create keywords for all your other website pages. A rule of thumb to keep in mind is that every single page is a new doorway to your site and as such, should have an individual theme or concept. These individual concepts will once again need to be processed until they can be turned into effective keywords. More pages mean more ways for people to find you on search engines, so you can't have too many pages BUT you can have too many keywords on one page. Targeting it down to one theme per page will allow you to write more effective copy.

To illustrate the above two points, in my newly launched design, I'm positioning myself as an accessible web designer. That is my homepage keyword phrase. However, in addition to that, I promote and offer search engine optimization, blog development and graphics, to name a few other services. Each of those topics will be finely pigeon-holed, and will have its own relevant theme and keyword phrase for that page. In addition, my overall services will ALSO have a keyword phrase, and will list those terms on it as well. Here is an example where you can see how you can develop more pages to encourage more search engine traffic.

How Do I Know My Keywords Are Effective?

There are several tools you can use. The [Keyword Suggestion Tool](#) is an example one of the better ones, in my opinion. It has also been rated highly by several search engine optimization newsletters and blogs. This tool allows you to enter your keyword phrase will display an average of how many people search the keyword per day, according to two market research firms, Overture and Wordtracker. These firms specialize in this sort of Internet usage tracking.

There are, however, some caveats to using this tool. You may quite logically think that higher numbers of people searching your terms are better, but the fact is the top ranking positions for very general keyword phrases, such as “web design”, go to big companies who can pay for positioning. Getting into those spots is difficult and costly.

As an example, when I did research for Art By Tech’s 2004 design, it was important for me to get local positioning in as large an area as possible. However, when I tried using the terms “Pennsylvania web design” or even “Philadelphia web design”, I was left in much too large a group at the time to compete effectively. In other words, too many people were searching those terms for me to rank well. However, when I narrowed the field down to my particular area, “Poconos web design”, I was able to rank #1 on Google, because it was not as popular a search term, but it was a term that got searched on a daily basis. If you see 1-5 people searching your customized term per day, and you can generate statistics like that for every one of your pages, think about how much more traffic you are bringing to your site if you can rank on the first page of the major search engines.

How Do I Integrate Keywords Into My Site?

It is very critical to use keywords in your HTML copy. (This is the main body of text content on your web page.) One of the most important things to do is to create the right balance of “keyword density”. Once you have a keyword phrase peppered throughout your copy and various tags, search engines robots “spider”, or grab, your page’s content. How often the keywords appear and what percentage of total words on the page is called keyword density. The more they appear in your body, the better your ranking.

Here is how it works: If your phrase appears five times for every 100 words, your keyword density is 5%. It is often recommended to go for a keyword density rating of 5-7%, but obviously it is just as important to write logical, non-redundant copy for your main content. How, then, can this be achieved?

It’s important to remember that ANY HTML text on your page is considered spiderable copy. If you use the keywords for a particular page in text items such as text navigation, headings above the content, footer areas such as copyright, sidebars, and so on, it will help a great deal. (Keep in mind that having text navigation somewhere on the page is not only good for search engine rankings if it’s keyword optimized, but also benefits visually impaired visitors.) For example, you may want to put snippets of testimonials from customers that contain the keyword on the page. Another good idea is to use linked content. If you can link to a relevant article or source that contains the keyword in its title, you will also be contributing to good keyword density. (Note: be sure you have permission to use links and sources from others.)

Be sure that your page title contains keywords. A common mistake that many firms make is to use their company name in the page title and use that title on every page. This

is only useful in terms of search engine rankings if you are a known brand, such as Nike. Remember that the words placed in the title need to be searchable keyword terms.

Keywords should be placed in other places as well, such as file names, page titles, and, as mentioned earlier, certain HTML tags (meta description tag, meta keywords tag, h1 and h2 tags, and the alt property of image tags). If you are not familiar with HTML, your designer will know where these go.

Keywords are best picked up be integrated into “static” pages. Static pages are those which are coded directly in HTML, rather than pages that are pulled from a database or contain strictly image files such as Flash. If you have pages that are dynamically created, or a site developed completely with Flash, special care and techniques may need to be implemented by your developer to avoid being missed by the search engines, depending on such variables as programming language used or whether there is HTML on a page that contains Flash. You should always speak with your web design firm about your concerns. If possible and practical, we do recommend creating static pages.

Are There Any Practices To Avoid?

There are unethical search engine tactics, and practicing these can get you permanently banned from popular engines – it is normally a very difficult process to get reinstated. The basic philosophy with ethical keyword practices is that all text, including keywords, should have a logical reason to be on the page. Such text should be visible in a browser. White text that is placed on a white background is an example of unethical search engine tactics. Other tactics include “stuffing” meta keyword tags with redundant phrases and illogical use of the image tag’s “alt” property. “Alt” property should logically describe the image being used. Keep your site from appearing on any banned list by avoiding these techniques.

Where Can I Learn More?

Some of the information that I learned here today, along with my own trial and error, came as a result of a larger SEO formula that I learned during an e-mail course I took at [GNC Web Creations](#). I have no affiliation, but I do highly recommend it, if you can take the high volume of email and participation required. The site owner also publishes several e-books with all the search engine lessons from her course. I highly recommend both the course and the e-book, “SEO Techniques Step by Step”; they are well worth the time and money.

I also learned some great tips at [Search Engine Marketing Blog: Key Words](#). This blog is much more technical, so you may want to look into once you truly understand the process of keyword optimization for search engines.

Effective and targeted keyword selection and usage can quickly help your site rank well in search engines. By designing for and accessibility and using my knowledge of keyword placement, I enabled the previous design of my own website to rank #1 in Google for both Poconos web design and Poconos web designer. As you can see, it's well worth the effort. I hope this article has helped you take some beginning steps in marketing your website effectively to search engines.