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Search Engine Optimization

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Keywords and Meta Tags for Top Search Engine Placement

Meta tags are embedded descriptions in your website's HTML (Hyper-text markup language) code. Think of them as tiny electronic bar codes which contain critical information about your website. Search engines scan these codes to find out what information is on your website, and where your website may be found. Websites with meta tags have a much better chance of being listed on search engines - and listed higher in the rankings - than websites with no meta tags.

Use meta-tags on EVERY page of your website. For the meta tags to be effective and consistently attract search engines, the meta tags must be placed on each and every page of your website no matter how many you have.

Two Important Meta Tags: Keywords and Description

Use meta tags on every page of your web site.

There are several meta tags, but the most important for search engine indexing are the description and keywords tags. The description tag returns a **description** of the page in place of the summary the search engine would normally create. The keywords tag provides **keywords** for the search engine to relate with your page. These allow the search engines to easily index your page using the keywords you specifically tell it, along with a description of the site that you create.

For a site concerning the meaning of magic you see might see the following. You use the keywords attribute to tell the search engines which keywords to use, like this:

    <META NAME ="keywords" CONTENT="magic, black arts, warlock, witch, magician, powers, unknown">

Using the META description attribute, you add your own description for your page:

    <META NAME="description" CONTENT="This site is dedicated to the study of magic and all forms of the black arts.">

Make sure that you use several of your keywords in your description.

Why Have Them?

About 80% of web users find websites using search engines, and the key way search engines find these sites is through their meta tags. Meta tags provide a useful way to control your summary in some, not all, search engines. Having meta tags will allows you to receive higher rankings on many search engines. Higher search engine placement results in higher site traffic and more customers.

Do not think you can spike the keywords by using the same word repeated over and over, as most search engines have refined their search techniques to ignore such spam.

A Practical Example

If you sell baseball cards on your e-commerce site you will want your site to be listed on search engines when people search baseball, sports card trading, and baseball cards. Assume you have a page without meta tags. Your site will not be listed very high if a search engine looks for baseball cards. Unless your key words are listed many times throughout your home page, meta tags are the way to get a high search engine listing. The title of the site is not enough to earn a high search engine placement. Let us call the site BASEBALL CARDS ONLINE and the description of the site is, "selling baseball cards online". An example of some keywords for the site would be, "baseball, cards, baseball cards".

Meta tags are an easy way to increase the chances of getting a higher search engine placement.

The meta tags go inside the header tags, so that everything looks like this:

```
<HEAD>
<TITLE>BASEBALL CARDS ONLINE</TITLE>
<META name="keywords" content="baseball, cards, baseball cards, ">
<META name="description" content="Selling baseball cards online">
</HEAD>
```

The description matches what is in the description tag. That's what the description meta-tag does; it lets you control the description that appears in a search result. The keywords meta tag gives your page a chance to come up if someone types in any of the words listed. For example, someone might enter "baseball cards," which will

match with one of the keywords in the tag. Without that tag, there would be no chance at all, unless "baseball cards" appeared a number of times throughout the web page. Meta tags are an easy way to increase the chances of getting a higher search engine placement.

How to Get Meta Tags

You do not have to be an Internet guru to generate meta tags for your website. There are a number of sites online that will do this for you. For example, WebIgnite.com (www.web-ignite.com) provides a service that creates custom meta tags based on your web page title, a description of your site, and keywords related to your online business.

Top Ten Search Engine Placement

What Does it Mean?

Top Ten Search Engine Placement means that your website will be listed as one of the top 10 sites that most closely matches the search request made by the user. Each search platform will use its own particular searching criteria to compile their top 10 list of websites.

Why Have a Top Ten Placement?

People will not generally look past the first 10 sites listed on a search engine; therefore, a Top Ten Placement will increase the number of potential customers that visit your site. Users want results as quickly as possible and if your site is not in the top ten there is a good chance they will never find it. A Top Ten Placement will increase the visibility of your site, ensuring more hits.

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Search Platforms Differences

Each search platform utilizes unique search criteria to determine the top 10 sites. For example: AltaVista (a search engine) uses crawlers (robot programs) that continually scour the Internet for information on your topic. While Google (another engine) uses a system based on software called Page Rank which looks at the number of links to a particular website, while Directhit measures the number of times a web page is visited. Each platform will return a search with a completely

different list of top ten sites. No two search platforms are the same. Having a Top Ten Placement on one site does not mean it will show up on all of them. Because of the different methods of ranking sites it is near impossible to have a Top Ten Placement on numerous search platforms at any one given time. It is a better idea to tailor your site to meet search criteria for a small number of search platforms.

Ways to Increase Your Chances of Getting a Top Ten Placement

Having a focused website is essential.

To help distinguish the focus of your site you should choose keyword phrases that describe your theme and include your keyword phrases throughout your site. Include them in the page title, the description and the keywords meta tag.

Register your website on search engines.

The vast majority of web users use only 20 or 30 engines at the very most, and the key is to register your website on these top, high-traffic websites. This can be done through resources such as INeedHits.com (www.ineedhits.com). You should re-register your website every two or three months, unless otherwise instructed by the search engine service.

Get other websites to link to yours

Site maintenance is essential if you want to keep your much-desired Top Ten Placement.

The more links that link to your site, the better. You'll receive more visitors, get higher rankings on the search engines, and also increase your credibility. The simplest way to develop links is to find complementary websites to your own, link to them, and then request that they link to you. Complementary sites could include those of customers, suppliers, industry associations, trade publications, or industry e-zines.

Register your website in an e-marketplace.

e-Marketplaces are online exchanges where many buyers and sellers from all over the world meet to share information, compare prices, and do business in a specific industry or sector. Many e-marketplaces provide free online business directories in which companies offering a product or service may register. Register your website in geographic directories. Geographic directories spotlight companies in a specific

geographic area, say, a city, county, state. Locally focused, these directories are an excellent way to spread the word on your organization, especially among customers in your area.

Publish an email newsletter.

A great way to keep in touch with those who have visited your site, provide updates about your organization and new products, and even sell advertising is to publish your own online newsletter

Site maintenance is essential if you want to keep your much-desired Top Ten Placement.

Not only do search platforms change their search methods periodically, the number of websites (many could be similar to yours) is also growing exponentially every day. To combat this you or your Webmaster must keep abreast of the changing search engine criteria and tailor the site to match these criteria.

Keep in mind that many search platforms charge for a Top Ten Placement.

There are many search engines that do not charge to register your site, but an equal number that do. Sites like Yahoo and LookSmart will charge you to register. Costs depend on the different sites.

Pitfalls and Drawbacks

Top Ten Placement is not necessarily as good as it sounds. Having your site come back in the top ten is an advantage, but the cost of maintaining your site to consistently have a Top Ten Placement may not be worth the benefits received. To ensure Top Ten Placement week after week requires constant site maintenance by you or your Webmaster. Constant maintenance might not be enough to get a Top Ten Placement. Even with all the effort and money it takes to get a Top Ten Placement, within months or even weeks your site could easily end up not being listed in the same position.

As more and more e-commerce websites come online, price becomes less of a factor in determining where to shop. For websites to stay afloat they have to offer excellent prices; this is a given. It is the extras, like customer service, that will decide if companies are profitable in their online ventures.

Ninety percent of online shoppers consider good customer service to be critical when choosing a web merchant. The three most critical components to solid reactive services are a well-staffed, responsive service organization; a simple return process; and easy order tracking. Customer service is key to consumer loyalty. Three-fourths of online purchasers reported that they are very likely to make additional purchases from the sites where they received excellent customer service.

"If online shopping is to continue the promise of convenience, merchants will need to pay close attention to building return policies that are customer friendly," said Paul Bates, VP of Information Products Group for BizRate.com. "Online buyers tell us every day that the key to winning their loyalty is the level and quality of customer support."

17 percent of online shoppers have indicated that their return experience(s) at a specific online shopping site negatively impacted the likelihood of them shopping at that specific company's stores or catalogs. Return policies are paramount for customers when choosing a website. Making returns easy could mean the difference between a life-long customer and someone who not only does not shop at your site but also tells others not too.

Return Statistics

Leading products returned:

- Clothing (27%)
- Computer software (20%)
- Books (15 %)

Action taken on returned products:

- Refunds (59%)
- Exchanges (27%)
- Credit at an offline or online store (11%)

- 92% of online shoppers would be most likely not do business with online merchants who charge a service fee to return a product to their physical store
- 94% of returns were mailed back to the online retailer instead of returned to an offline store

Reasons for Returns

Reasons for Returning Online Purchases Among Respondents that Have Ever Returned a product :

Product not what I expected	40%
Product broken/damaged	31%
Product quality not as expected	31%
Right product shipped, but wrong characteristics	27%
Wrong product shipped	26%
Decided that I simply did not want product	19%
Arrived too late	17%
Received only part of an order	7%

Multiple responses accepted.
Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

E-Tail Return Problems

The three biggest problems associated with returning online purchases:

1. Being charged for return postage
2. Returning an online purchase requires a trip to the post office
3. Being forced to return products to a physical store

Sixty-two percent of consumers said they would prefer to return products by mail instead of traveling to the brick-and-mortar store.

Unfavourable return policies can actually drive potential customers away:

1. Inability to receive credit on a credit or debit card
2. A time limit to return products that is "too short"

Components of return policies online buyers consider most important:

1. Can the product to be returned by mail
2. Can a product be exchanged for another item

Sixty-two percent of consumers would rather return products by mail than travel to a brick-and-mortar store.