



A Search Engine Optimization Program
“How To” Guide for Novices
by Art Fyvolent

About the author

Art Fyvolent, owner/principal of IDEAS4, has been active in web site development and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy implementation since 1994. No one in business today has more experience than Art and his IDEAS4 team! IDEAS4 has worked with hundreds of private businesses and nonprofit organizations, located scattered throughout the United States, since the inception of the web phenomenon.

Search Engine Optimization

As the web increases its role in global communication and dominance as a local, national, and international information medium, search engines have become increasingly more important and a critical factor in driving traffic to your site. Whether searching for a product or certain subject information, search engines drive the traffic that can make a site successful, or not.

The criteria by which search engines determine who gets on the first page and who does not has changed dramatically over the years. Originally, just putting keywords in correctly and having a few inbound links and some decent content almost guaranteed you a place on the first two pages. Today however, with increased competition for smaller marketing space, the ability to land on the first page becomes increasingly more difficult.

Interestingly, as more search engine optimization firms are created – firms touting their intimate knowledge of SEO and their “expertise” in landing you and/or your company on the first page – the greater pressure they are putting on the first page. This increased competition of “business as usual” is perpetuating the problem of space allocation, thus creating no net gain for customers.

Unless you have had the opportunity to experience the web evolution over time like the folks at IDEAS4, understand how the search engine algorithms work, AND think out of the box for a way to get there, you will be wasting a large portion of your money just to be “like everyone else.”

The bottom line: SEO is a moving target that requires knowledge of the systems in place and how to best present information in a way that is not only attractive to search engines, but is MORE attractive

than your competitors. While only the founders of Google fully understand how the natural search algorithm works, at IDEAS4, we understand more than other SEO companies.

Debunking the “We’ll Get You on the First Page” Myth

What a crock! Any SEO company that guarantees your placement on the first page of Google consistently over time is blowing smoke. There are no guarantees. In fact, even the smartest SEO people will tell you that only Google knows all the factors involved in getting you on the first page, and they aren’t telling us. The best we can do is have experience in watching and experimenting with different combinations, receive a few leaks from Google every now and then, and read what others say and deciding if it makes sense or not. That’s the truth and don’t believe anything else you hear or read.

SEO Components - Success Factors

Successful SEO program involve a considerable amount of time, either by you, your staff, or an outside third-party provider. Many third-party SEO companies talk in words that you don’t understand and you think they are smart. Don’t buy it. If they can’t explain it in English, don’t buy from them. Get references and find out if they really know what they are doing.

Knowing what is required will give you a knowledge base from which to negotiate the best deal, or to decide whether you can do it yourself with internal resources.

Content is King

Why does Google place one company above another in the rankings? There are perhaps 20 different factors that play into their decision model, but one thing is for certain: Content is king! There is no getting around the fact that without good information on your website, you will never be ranked higher than someone that has good, consistently updated content.

Google wants their customer user experience to be the best it can be. So they will rank a website with good solid unduplicated content higher than others. When I say unduplicated, I mean you can’t just go out and steal content, buy a content generator, or put a bunch of news feeds on your website. You need to generate your own stuff. This is perhaps the most difficult factor in managing websites today. It’s time consuming, expensive and boring, but it’s critically important in your site’s success.

If you have good, industry specific content that a prospective customer will want to learn, gain knowledge from, and otherwise be smarter when they leave, in Google’s eyes, it is better than an e-commerce site that is all about selling stuff and not about educating their customers.

In addition to the critical nature of content on your website, there are a number of other key factors and critical components to build a higher ranking through SEO. Developing and managing these components are the keys to making your site competitive and successful.

Eleven Things You Must Do to your Website

Identify the correct keywords -

What do you want to own in terms of search results? This requires a focused effort to identify those words, that when searched, yield a successful outcome for you and the visitor. Keyword identification plays the MOST IMPORTANT role in identifying your SEO and Pay Per Click (PPC) costs as well. Obviously, the more competitive a keyword, the more time consuming and expensive it will be to gain the results you are looking for over time. This is not easy, and a competent SEO company can help you define and analyze the right keywords for you to use. But it doesn't stop there. Every month, you need to review your keywords, what kind of clicks you are getting and refine and change on an ongoing basis.

Build content that matches those keywords -

The key factor that Google and other engines access is what they describe as "relative content," the differentiator for websites. This dates back many years when Google decided that building their successful business model required search results be helpful to its customer/visitors and determined content analysis was the key to driving their business. Websites that have relative content for the searcher show up higher than websites that are just "selling" something.

Content management and refresh frequency -

Gone are the days when you could build a website and sit back and watch the traffic flow in. In an effort to once again improve the search results and overall customer experience, and eliminate old or outdated information or dead links, updating the content frequently is critically important. That's why you see things like blogs and other content related elements playing a larger role in websites.

Inbound links, or "link popularity" -

Another factor Google considers important as a way to judge whether a site is "worthy" of their consideration, is to determine how many other sites were linking to it. Initially, most SEO companies just went out and threw up thousands of links in what are called "link farms" all over the web and claimed victory. Well, as you can imagine, Google again changed their metrics. Today, in addition to measuring the number of links, they also measure the quality of the source of those links. This is one key differentiator between what IDEAS4 does, and what many of our competitors do.

URLs and keyword URLs -

Another factor given consideration is the actual domain name you use, and whether it includes one or more of the keywords you are seeking. Additionally, the .com vs .net and .org also makes a difference today. In addition, if you have more than one domain pointing to your main domain, you lose points for your natural search as Google assumes you are trying to trick it and discounts those names.

A Pay Per Click (PPC) campaign in place-

If you think search engines separate the results of the natural search from their PPC revenue stream, think again. We have seen first hand when you have a PPC campaign in place, your rankings will improve. Stop the PPC campaign, and your rankings drop.

Other factors -

There are a number of other factors that are important to include in your SEO strategy that are “Standard Operating Procedure” for well-prepared websites. These factors include:

Developing a website site map, one page on your website, linked from your home page footer that displays links to all of the pages on your website. The site map makes it easy for Google and other engines to locate and crawl all your pages quickly and easily.

Submission to all key engines (Google, Yahoo, DMOZ, etc) - You need to make sure you visit all the top search engines and find the link to “submit your site” to their engine. This will ensure that the crawler bots will visit your site (make sure everything else is in place before you do so your ranking will be higher.)

Age of the domain name and years registered - If you have a new domain name that you recently registered and have it registered for only a year or two, the search engines consider you a “newcomer” and will value your site lower than a site that is 10 years old and is registered for 10 years. They figure an older site with a commitment to a long-term registration will have more value to their audience. This is one of the key ranking factors for your site.

URL naming conventions - There has been much talk about the use of the “?” in a url page name, meaning the website uses a database to display pages. Some of the smart SEO people I know insist that using .html and published pages without the “?” ranks higher than other pages. Most Content Management Systems publish pages on the fly generated instantly from the database. This limits the search engines ability to crawl the pages. Make sure you have a CMS that actually publishes pages and does not generate them on the fly.

Business location - When you perform a search, you have probably seen a list of 10 businesses that show up next to a Google map and wondered how they got there and you did not. Here’s the secret: Google lists businesses from the center of the city outward. If you are in a suburb, you have little chance of being included on that list. The best solution is to change your online business address to a post office box downtown. That way, you are considered in the center city and have a much better chance of being listed on the first page next to the Google map.

Generating (Quality) Traffic

Anyone can generate double or triple the traffic to a website - that is not hard to do. But what you really want is increases in qualified traffic. Success of any SEO campaign is judged primarily on these three facts: (1) Are you generating more web traffic, (2) Is that traffic of high enough quality that a contact is made from the website and, (3) Is the contact is a “qualified lead?”

Doing the hard work up front in keyword analysis, review of your website design and its functionality, and interviewing key company executives and staff to really understand the type of prospects who generate the best revenue, is what ultimately leads to better search engine results.

In addition to increasing the quality of the traffic, you must also increase the quality of your website branding, design and functionality to match or exceed your competitors' sites. If the traffic comes in and they do not like what they see or read, you have wasted resources and time.

SEO is not a one or two month hit 'n run program. It is a constantly evolving process that needs monitoring on a monthly basis to ensure quality results. It may take up to a year or more for your rankings to start moving up closer to the first page.

The mini-site

OK, so you have a great product or service, but you have a domain name that does not have anything close to a keyword in your domain. For Google, BobsTrafficCones.com will come up higher in a search for traffic cones than BobsTrafficCalming.com. What do you do?

Enter the mini-site. Mini sites are content only website about one specific keyword on your list. This content-rich site must contain content that is unique and updated on a regular basis - monthly or at least quarterly. This information resource is just what Google is looking for to give their users a good experience and benefits your business as well.

All the same rules listed above apply here as well, Meta tags, title tags, domain age, etc.

Now your goal is to go out and find domain names that match your keyword to use for each mini-site. As a rule of thumb, .com's are better than anything else, but if they are not available, use what you can find or decide to pay for a keyword domain. An entire industry has sprung up buying and selling keyword domains, so if you are in a competitive field, medical, real estate, etc, your domains might be expensive. But to get around it, be creative in your approach. If Bobstrafficones.com is not available, try bobs-traffic-cones.com -or .net or .info. Find a way to get your keyword in the domain name; this is critically important.

Next build your mini-sites. You can build them by hand, use blog software, find a mini-site generating system - whatever. Remember, you are going to need to update the content from time to time, so ease of use with minimal time investment is an increasing important factor. Keep the design simple and easy to navigate; this is not about great design, it's about content - content - content.

Now for the kicker....

On each page, design an ad for your business that links back to your main site. Put it somewhere obvious but not too many times. That way anyone interested in your services will be able to find you -

and no one else. Plus, because the site has great content, your main site will begin to rank higher because your inbound link from the mini-site is a high quality link. See how all that works?

One thing to keep in mind as you build this - and it's important - is place your mini-sites with a domain host that is not the same as your website. At some point Google will figure out that the mini-site is something you built and will discount the links. Use a cheap hosting service like godaddy or other \$5 a month host. Don't pay any more because all you need is a place to park your site. You will use low bandwidth because it will mostly be text files. And you don't need e-mail accounts or other add on services the hosting company will try to sell you.

Tracking and Monitoring

We use Google Analytics and other site traffic management tools to evaluate website traffic and flow and a web-based traffic analysis system called Web-Stat which monitors and tracks traffic as well. At IDEAS4, we use both because Google's reporting, both on its PPC and Analytics, has not always been 100 percent honest and accurate.

You should be monitoring traffic and continually make refinements to keywords, landing pages, site content, Meta data and more to continually improve search results over time.

Things to check off as you build your website

Below is a checklist of the things you must have on your website to be "perfect."

Top 11 Positive Factors

1. Keyword use in title tag
2. Anchor text of inbound link
3. Global link popularity of site
4. Age of site
5. Link popularity within the site's internal link structure
6. Topical relevance of inbound links to site
7. Link popularity of site in topical community
8. Keyword use in body text
9. Global link popularity of linking
10. Topical relationship of linking
11. Rate of new inbound links to site

$$\text{GoogScore} = (\text{Keyword Usage Score} * 0.3) + (\text{Domain Strength} * 0.25) + (\text{Inbound Link Score} * 0.25) + (\text{User Data} * 0.1) + (\text{Content Quality Score} * 0.1) + (\text{Manual Boosts}) - (\text{Automated \& Manual Penalties})$$

KW Usage Factors:

- Keyword in the title tag
- Keyword in header tags

- Keyword in document text
- Keyword in internal links pointing to the page
- Keyword in domain and/or URL

Domain Strength

- Registration history
- Domain age
- Strength of links pointing to the domain
- Topical neighborhood of domain based on inlinks & outlinks
- Historical use & links pattern to domain

Inbound Link Score

- Age of links
- Quality of domains sending links
- Quality of pages sending links
- Anchor text of links
- Link quantity/weight metric (Pagerank or a variation)
- Subject matter of linking pages/sites

User Data

- Historical CTR to page in SERPs
- Time users spend on page
- Search requests for URL/domain
- Historical visits/use of URL/domain by users GG can monitor (toolbar, wifi, analytics, etc.)

Content Quality Score

- Potentially given by hand for popular queries/pages
- Provided by Google raters
- Machine-algos for rating text quality/readability/etc.