Get
Found

Pocket
Guide to
SEO

BY

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Quick reference for SEO terms and phrases:

HITS are counted every time a visitor loads a page on your site. A visitor can make several hits in a single visit.

KEYWORD DENSITY refers to the number of times a keyword or phrase appears in relation to the total word count.

KEYWORD STUFFING is when keywords or phrases have been arbitrarily stuck in content, in meta tags, and anywhere else in an effort to rank higher for certain terms.

PAGERANK is Google's rating of the importance of a web page on a scale from 0 to 10, with a higher value indicating a more popular page. It's based on the quantity and quality of inbound links to a site.

SEARCH RANKING is informal phrase meaning where you land when users search for specific keywords you're targeting on your site

SITEMAP is an XML outline of your site indexed by Google to help it find all the pages of content available.

SEO comes in three flavors. Some better than others:

Search engine **optimization**	Search engine **exaggeration**	Search engine **deception**
Ensuring that your code and content is appropriately organized and easy for search engines to interpret accurately.	Reinforcing your desired keywords through frequent repetition, hidden keywords, etc.	Creating content, pages, etc., that aren't intended for human consumption, but are instead designed only to pull in search engine traffic.

The Gritty Stuff

SEO means that you've accurately portrayed your website's content through **clean code***, **well-written content***, and **well-organized web sites***.

All of these practices will not only help your readers better understand your site, they'll also help search engines index and interpret your site well, which in turn leads to better rankings.

* CLEAN CODE By using clean code, you can remove potential barriers to correct search engine interpretation of a page's content. XHTML/CSS-based development allows you to significantly reduce the size and complexity of page code, and the use of semantic/structural code allows the search engines to accurately understand the relationships between pieces of content on a page.

* GOOD WRITING Well-written content is meant for people, not search engines. Because the engines are attempting to determine what is useful to readers, the best way to make them happy in the long run is to create content that actually is useful to readers. Place important information toward the top (always a good practice for a skim-happy audience), use descriptive headings to help readers break page content into easy-to-understand chunks, and choose words wisely to ensure that readers will understand you.

* GOOD STRUCTURE A well-structured site is divided into clear content areas, with adequate linking between areas to ensure that users can find their way. Use site maps to help users get a bird's eye view of the site, and make sure that your URLs are friendly and descriptive. (An extension of this principle of organization and "findability" is to ensure that other relevant sites link to yours.)

Focus On The Users, Not The Search Engines

User-centered (as opposed to engine-centered) SEO will never go out of style. Google has an army of scientists analyzing ways to determine the quality of web site content, and the most effective long-term method for looking relevant to their algorithms is simply to *be relevant*.

Focus on: Relevance

Search Engine Exaggeration

This is where things start to get a bit shady. Once you realize how search engines work, there's a great temptation to give them what they want by pumping up the keywords in your text, adding hidden keywords on your pages, etc.

The problem with this approach is that search engines know people do this, and they're continually working on ways to identify and eliminate it. Remember "meta tags"? Site owners used to pump these full of keywords in order to get more search traffic, until the search engines caught on and dramatically reduced their importance in the ranking process.

If you build your site around the idea that you can throw on some cologne instead of taking a shower, you can only get so far before every realizes you're just posing.

How often have you searched for something, and then clicked through on the top results only to find a junk page crammed with keywords but little useful content? Did you stick around? Did you buy anything?

It's an issue of quality vs. quantity. You might be able to increase your hits, but you'll receive a lower percentage of conversions because your pages don't match the expectations held by users clicking through from search engines.

Search Engine Deception

It's easy to be lured into the trap of flat-out lying to search engines. This is the realm of link farms, content generators, gateway pages, blog comment spam, and other practices that ignore users' needs (i.e., relevant, well-organized content) and instead focus on doing whatever it takes to get people in the door.

The most significant problem with these techniques is that search engines are becoming increasingly adept in their attempts to detect them, and violating the terms set out by the engines can (and often does) result in sites being severely penalized in their rankings, or in the worst cases, becoming blacklisted (a search engine's way of removing your site from search results entirely).

Because search engines are constantly updating their ranking criteria, what works today may bite you in the butt tomorrow. Be very wary of practices that exploit current search engine weakness, particularly if your business depends on your website, because you never know when they're going to find out and come after you.

Beyond Optimization

The time, effort, and money spent on search engine optimization (particularly of the exaggerating or deceptive kind) can often be put to better use by working on improving the quality, content, and structure of the website itself.

It's not difficult to rank quite highly for your desired keywords, and to do so with very little traditional optimization. The big secret is to simply provide your users with what they're looking for in an understandable manner. Be straight forward, label things clearly, etc. This form of SEO is not only the most effective kind, it's also the easiest and least expensive.

QUICK TIP:

Focus on keywords and phrases your customers actually use (i.e., avoid industry terms). No one will be able to find you if you're using flowery terms the average searcher isn't familiar with.

Putting SEO To Work

The added benefit of a content-centered approach is that your readers can tell the difference. The clean, well-written content, attractive designs, and intuitive interfaces help you stand out to users clicking through from search result pages. They stick around, read about you, and often contact you because you actually have what they're looking for.

Your mileage may vary, of course. There are a lot of people making good money using deceptive SEO practices, and there will always be people looking to exploit search engine weaknesses.

It takes a lot of time and effort to "stay ahead of the law" with deceptive SEO, however, long-term approaches to SEO requires much less ongoing maintenance (and associated cost)—and frankly, it's much more fun!

Top SEO Resources

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION STARTER GUIDE:
http://forty.cc/n

GOOGLE ADWORDS KEYWORD TOOL:
http://forty.cc/o

SEO BOOK: http://forty.cc/p

AUTHORITY LABS: http://forty.cc/q

WEBSITE GRADER: http://forty.cc/r

GOOGLE SEARCH-BASED KEYWORD TOOL:
http://forty.cc/s

MICROSOFT ADCENTER LABS: http://forty.cc/t

KEYWORD SPY: See what your competitors are
targeting and compare rankings http://forty.cc/u

For Best Results, Keep It Up!

Ongoing SEO is relatively simple and can be done by anyone. Here is a list of tips to assure your site stays on top of search results and relevant to your visitors:

1. **Add content often** — this can be in the form of blog posts, news updates, even just adding new pages to existing sections. Search engines like fresh content!

2. **Check your keyword density of newly added content** — the rule of thumb for keyword density is 5-20%, depending on your topic. Most well-written content will already abide by this rule, but double check using http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword-density/.

(3) **Title your new content using keywords and keyphrases** — just make sure to adequately describe the content that's being added to your site regularly and you should be all set.

(4) **Ask for links to your page wherever you can** — Have a friend that's mentioned you in a blog post? Make sure they've linked to your site. Easy as that!

(5) **Linking to other pages on your own site?** Make sure you use keywords and phrases as your anchor text. Instead of "click here," make sure it describes what the link is pointing at.

(6) **Adding images to your new content?** Make sure you have alt tags with your keywords and phrases in them.

(7) **Make sure you mention singular and plurals of your keywords and phrases where appropriate.**

Need Help?

As always, if you ever need someone else to make sure your SEO is up to par, feel free to get in touch with us at info@fortyagency.com.

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