How to Help Search Engines Find Your Site

BY JAMES A. MARTIN

ACCORDING TO AN oft-quoted 2006 study by Web-usability expert Jakob Nielsen, 93 percent of Web users don't look beyond the first page of search results. "Even though the specific percentages are a few years old," Nielsen wrote recently in an e-mail, "the general conclusion definitely still holds."

With odds like that, it's no wonder every business wants its site in the top ten results for relevant queries. Using legitimate, "white-hat" search engine optimization (SEO) techniques, a small business can greatly improve its chances.

1. Determine Priorities
First, develop measurable goals and priorities, and plan to revise them periodically. Which products or services are most important to promote? What do you want your site visitors to do, buy, or learn?

Next, decide how to measure success. Google Analytics (find.pcworld.com/64273), for example, reveals which keywords visitors used, and much more.

2. Research Keywords
Often, a business doesn't describe its products or services the same way its clients do. A research tool can help you choose the best terms for SEO. With the free Google AdWords Keyword Tool (find.pcworld.com/64274), you can gauge how often keywords are searched, and how competitive a term is. The tool was designed to help marketers choose keywords for Google pay-per-click ads; but it's useful for general, organic keyword research, as well.

Some site managers employ the Keyword Effectiveness Index (KEI), which assigns a score based on the number of times a keyword has been searched and the number of Web pages containing it (see find.pcworld.com/64275 for details). Many paid tools offer KEI and other analytics that the Google tool lacks.

3. Use Keywords Judiciously
Overusing or abusing keywords can cause search engines to ignore you. Here are some tips for applying them effectively.

- Optimize each page for a particular keyword (and its synonyms). When the entire context of a page is on a single subject, search engines are more likely to see that page as relevant to its topic.
- Use keywords in the page's HTML title tag. Don't exceed 65 characters, including spaces and punctuation.
- Add keywords to the page's HTML h1 and h2 headings, and use the keywords several times in the body copy—the earlier, the better.
- Create a keyword-rich link elsewhere on your site to each optimized page. For example, for a page about résumé writing services, add a link to it from another page and use the term résumé writing services (not click here) in the link text.
- Add keywords to your site's URLs whenever possible, as opposed to using generic, meaningless URLs such as www.domain.com/page_id-58.

4. Create 'Linkbait'
Editorial endorsements of your product or service from someone else, such as a high-profile blogger, can be SEO gold—especially when they include a keyword-rich link to
a relevant page on your company's site.

- Make sure your pages have provocative, newsworthy, or extremely useful content—otherwise known as "link-bait." Spread the word about a new blog post, page, or article via social networks. (Search engines love blogs. If you aren't blogging, you should be.)
- Write an informative press release about your product or service. Include a keyword-rich link to a relevant page on your site, and post the release on public-relations sites. Contact influential reporters and bloggers directly, too.
- When other sites agree to link to yours, suggest the keyword that you'd like them to use in the link text.

5. Make Your Website Search Engine Friendly

Search engine "bots" primarily index text and follow links. If your site has lots of Flash, Ajax, and other nontext material, you're making things difficult for the bots. You can still do a few things to improve your site's "findability," though. Google's Webmaster guidelines (find.pcworld.com/64276) offer suggestions, including the following tips.

- Use a text browser, such as Lynx, to get a sense of how most search engine bots see your site. Or try pasting a URL into the Lynx viewer (find.pcworld.com/64277) to find out how the page would look when viewed with Lynx.
- Make sure that your site doesn't have duplicate content or multiple URLs pointing to the same page.
- Create an XML sitemap and submit it to the search engines so that their bots have a list of the URLs on your site that you want them to index.

Keep Going

It's important to set aside time, ideally every week, to review your Google Analytics, fine-tune your keywords, and look for link opportunities. But the rewards of SEO can be considerable—and it's a safe bet that your competitors are doing the same things. (For a few more tips, see the online version of this article at find.pcworld.com/64289.)

NET WORK

MICHAEL SCALISI

WSUS 3.0 SP2: Easy Patch Management

MICROSOFT HAS released Windows Server Update Service 3.0 SP2 as a means to centrally download updates and control how they deploy to the computers on your network. WSUS also offers reporting features to give you a snapshot of computers' status. If your network is big enough to have a server and use Active Directory, it can benefit from using WSUS.

The prerequisites are a server running Windows Server 2003 SP1 or greater, IIS 6.0 or greater, Net 2.0 framework, and Report Viewer 2008 Redistributable 2008. If you run SQL server 2005 SP2 or greater, you can use that; otherwise the Windows Internal Database will install automatically. Consult the WSUS 3.0 SP2 release notes (find.pcworld.com/84282) for detailed requirements.

Installation and Configuration

Download the appropriate version (32-bit or 64-bit) of WSUS and run the setup. If you're upgrading from an unsupported database, WSUS 3.0 SP2 will migrate it to the Windows Internal Database. During installation, you'll need to specify an uncompressed NTFS partition with at least 6GB free. After installing the software on a server, you can run the installation on your desktop PC for remote management.

WSUS then launches a configuration wizard, allowing you to specify what languages you use, what products you want updates for, and what types of updates are synchronized. By default, only critical updates, definitions, and security updates are selected. I recommend choosing All Classifications, since updates don't deploy unless you approve them anyway.

Next, you should configure your clients to use the WSUS server via Group Policy (find.pcworld.com/84283). Using the Group Policy Management Console, create a new policy and link it to the appropriate Organizational Unit. Right-click on the policy, select edit, browse to Computer Configuration-Policies-Administrative Templates-Windows Components-Windows Update, and modify the following items:

Specify intranet Microsoft update service location: Click Enable and type the URL for your server (for example, http://yourWSUSserver) in the two fields that appear.

No auto-restart with logged on users for scheduled automatic updates: Enabling this is optional, but recommended. Users get irate when their PCs restart without their consent.

Enable client-side targeting: Another option. You can use the WSUS client for grouping computers (see below), but you can also specify them here.

Creating Groups, Setting Up Auto-Approval Rules

Groups are useful when you want different computers (such as office PCs versus servers) to have updates applied differently. Open the WSUS management tool. Expand Computers, right-click Unassigned Computers, and pick Add Computer Group. You can then add systems by right-clicking them in Unassigned Computers, selecting Change Membership, and putting a check next to your desired group (or groups).

You can approve updates automatically, too. In the management tool, pick Options-Automatic Approvals. The Default Automatic Approval Rule approves all critical and security updates for all computers. It's a great default, and it may be all you need.