

Better Business Blogging eCourse

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eMail:5

“Using Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) in your Business Blog”

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USING SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO) IN YOUR BUSINESS BLOG

For many businesses, the internet and the use of Search Engines has totally changed the ways in which their customers find them and, as a consequence, has changed their thinking on how to use the marketing tools available to them to promote themselves and what they offer.

A good ranking for particular keyword phrases in the main Search Engines is key to the success of most company websites. These keyword phrases are the words that people using the Search Engines enter into the 'Search' box and so are ones relevant to your business and that you would like to be found for. Business Blogs are no different - they are in fact a special form of website if you like. So again, they are indexed by Search Engines and need to rank highly when people are searching on the keyword phrases that are relevant to their content.

Fortunately, most blog platforms are already set up in a way which naturally helps them when it comes to Search Engines. In terms of their internal structure, the format is very structured and hence have very clear and organised URL set-ups with internal links that are generally very good primarily because of the Categories and Archives formats. In addition, blogs by their very nature are updated on a regular basis thus providing new content which is what the Search Engines love and the community feel between blogs engenders a lot of linking. Again, this is something which is highly regarded by Search engines in their ranking criteria.

There are, however, ways in which you can add to this base and that is what we will be looking at here.

Why bother with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Right at the start of the process, we looked at whom your Blog was aimed at and whom it was designed to attract. To make sure that as many people as possible find your blog, you need to promote it, a subject which we will be looking at in detail in email 7. One of the methods of achieving this is through ranking highly in the Search Engines which is the method that some 75 - 80% of people use to find new sites on the internet and the main tool that they use for research and information gathering.

How do Search Engines Work?

Search Engines gather information using bots or automated robots which find, register and index pages from websites. Once the pages are indexed, a mathematical formula or algorithm matches the pages to the search terms being used and ranks the pages accordingly. These bots can only see and record text - they don't see images and, as yet, they generally do not see context.

The main Search Engines at the moment are Google, Yahoo and MSN with Google holding the lion's share of the UK market and the largest share in the world market as a whole. These are the ones that we will concentrate on because, when people search

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on the web, these are currently the tools that they most often use. There are also Search Engines which are specifically dedicated to blogs but, in general, they follow the same rules as the principal ones although in SEO terms they also use special Tags which need to be considered.

Just to clarify some of the terms that we will be using, I have indicated some of the main elements on the Blog below.

The image shows a screenshot of a web browser displaying a blog post. Red lines and brackets point to various elements on the page, which are labeled as follows:

- Title Tag:** Points to the browser's title bar, which reads "eMarketing Mark - Tiscall 10.0".
- URL or address of the post or the page:** Points to the address bar, which shows "http://www.emarketingmark.com/".
- Main Title of the Blog:** Points to the large header "eMarketing Mark" in a stylized font.
- Title of the individual post:** Points to the sub-header "Giving direction to your eMarketing".
- Bold Text:** Points to the bolded text "Google AdWords: use 3 stage approach to funnel your target audience".
- Category Names:** Points to the right-hand sidebar menu, which lists categories like "eMarketing (General)", "Search Advertising (PPC)", etc.
- Archives:** Points to the "Archives" section at the bottom right, which lists months from February 2006 to August 2005.

Additional annotations on the left side of the screenshot include:

- A bracket on the left side of the main content area, spanning from the URL to the end of the post title, labeled "Title Tag".
- A bracket on the left side of the main content area, spanning from the URL to the end of the sub-header, labeled "URL or address of the post or the page".
- A bracket on the left side of the main content area, spanning from the sub-header to the end of the sub-header, labeled "Main Title of the Blog".
- A bracket on the left side of the main content area, spanning from the sub-header to the end of the sub-header, labeled "Title of the individual post".

Main Areas of SEO in a Business Blog

There are however things that you can do which help to increase the Search Engine Optimisation of your own Business Blog. The main elements that we will be considering in terms of SEO are:

- a) Domain Name and Blog Name
- b) Writing Content for your Blog
- c) URL or Address of the page
- d) Titles and Title Tags
- e) Categories
- f) Blog Tags (technorati etc.)
- g) Other elements: Headers, use of bold, image tags
- h) Description Metatag
- i) Internal linking
- j) External inbound links

a) Domain Name and the name of your Blog

One of the most effective parts of SEO is something that we addressed at the start and that is the selection of the domain name for your Blog. As was discussed then, Search Engines should be one of the criteria that you consider when deciding what to call your Blog and when selecting the domain name that you use for it.

The name of your Blog will appear in the Title Tag of each of your posts and as such is useful from an SEO point of view - where possible it should contain your main keyword for the subject matter of the Blog. Equally, the Domain Name will of course form part of the URL or address of every post and every page that you create. For this reason, again from an SEO perspective, this would ideally contain the main keyword or keywords as well.

b) Writing Content for your Blog

It is important to note that while Search Engines are very important tools for locating your blog and its content, optimising the content to help to attract them cannot be done at the expense of the quality of your posts. If the post appears stilted and comes across as purely keyword focused text, then you will quickly lose your readers and so all of your efforts in creating and running your Blog will have been in vain.

Rule of thumb: if when you read the post it seems stilted and unnatural to you, then the chances are it will to others. So change it.

In a Business Blog, each post will naturally deal with a certain topic or area, and so the content of the article is likely to be focused already. Focused content is important in a website and even more so in a Blog. The reason for this is that the content of an individual post is used in the creation of a number of different pages, all different and all indexed by the Search Engines. Exactly how many will vary according to the blog software that you are using and the number of categories that

your post is associated with but, if we take Wordpress or TypePad as examples, then you have:

- the individual page (with permalink) of the post itself
- the front page which displays the last x number of posts
- the category page or pages that the post belongs to (often 2 or 3)
- the archive page (usually held monthly)

You therefore have the content and keywords that the posts contains contributing to at least 4 to 5 different indexed pages.

So make sure that you use your keywords appropriately during the text by keeping the content focused - where it is possible to refer to the main subject matter by name rather than using “it” or “they” then do so, and put them in context.

As a word of caution, do not get hung up about this and go over the top with your efforts - it is not necessary to optimise all your posts. The natural structure of the Blog will bring out associations and keyword rich pages for you. So, while it is beneficial and will add to the SEO of your Blog, you would be well advised to spend the majority of your time on the quality of the writing, then do some additional work to bring out your main keywords. However, above all, keep the interests of your readers as your first priority.

c) URL or Address of the page

The address of the page, or its URL, is given weight in terms of the Search Engines according to the domain, folders and post name that it contains. So, while it should not be too long, where you have the possibility of including your primary and your secondary keywords then you should do so.

Most of the elements that make up the URL are, however, decided through other elements that you have already put in place but it is appropriate to bring them together here for the sake of clarity. Hopefully, you will have set up the **Permalink** of your individual posts as shown in email 1 so that you are able to benefit from these. If we take the example given there, then an example of a descriptive URL for a post will be

www.betterbusinessblogging.com/small-business-marketing/seminars-which-work/

|
Domain Name with site
primary keyword

|
Category Name with category
keywords included

|
Post title with relevant
keywords

Therefore, each element adds weight as you go along. The Domain Name will have been selected right at the start and then you will also have decided what categories

you wish to use to hold your posts. Finally the title of your individual post will generate the final element of the page URL.

d) Titles and Title Tags

The Title and the Title Tag are two different elements but need to be dealt with together because, in a Blog, they are usually inextricably linked.

- The **Title** is the name that you have given to your post and which appears as the heading above the content of your post.
- The **Title Tag** is one of the key elements of SEO and is a part of code which is hidden itself but creates a name which appears in two places: one is in the blue bar at the top of your browser; and secondly, it is the first line of what appears on the Search Engine Results page, and forms the link that you click on to reach the page on your blog or website.

They are linked in a Blog because the title that you give to a post will not only appear as part of the permalink (if correctly set up) but it will also automatically appear as the Title Tag together with the name of your Blog. So your aim when creating your Title is to try to include the keyword or keyword phrase for the post so that it is descriptive for your readers, creates a good permalink and gets an influential Title Tag as well.

Extra Hint: most Blog systems have a default format for the Title Tag which often consists of the name of the Blog followed by the Title of the post. Because you only have a certain number of words which Search Engines register in the Title Tag (generally accepted as between 8 and 10 words) and because more weight is given to those appearing earlier in the phrase, it is beneficial to change this default format. If possible, have the Title of the Post first followed by the name of the Blog, thus giving the keywords in your Title additional weight.

This means that in Better Business Blogging, for a post which is called “Educational Marketing to reach your clients”, the Title Tag would become:

Educational Marketing to reach your Clients @ Better Business Blogging

Rather than the default which would be:

Better Business Blogging >> Educational Marketing to reach your Clients

e) Categories

The names of the categories are important: one because they are likely to appear on all of your pages and so in themselves add relevant on page content to what is indexed by the Search Engines. Secondly, as we have seen, in certain set-ups of the permalink, the category name will be included which will help add these keywords into the mix.

When you set up your *Categories*, make the description short and to the point. It will help visitors to identify the type of posts that they may be interested in and, in addition, this will form part of the address (or URL) of this page for the benefit of Search Engines. Therefore if your Category is called “Small Business Marketing” then this will form part of the URL address for the category containing all posts relating to “Small Business Marketing” - very beneficial!

Extra Hint: As the Category pages build up, there may be a post (or a couple of posts) which is particularly descriptive or keyword rich which will be pushed down the page (or onto a second/third page) by newer articles. Ideally, you would like to have this at the top of your main category page both for readers and Search Engines so use a "Sticky" to keep it there - this can be achieved in Wordpress with a plug-in like *Adhesive* or is a built in feature with Typepad. Result: your key article (and your main keywords) can be kept at the top of your Category page.

f) Blog Tags

Some of the Blog Search Engines use their own type of “Tags” to categorise the posts and are words which you can add specially to yours. This allows people using these Search Engines to select posts that they are interested in directly rather than through the general ‘Search’ function. Some people believe that this is the direction in which indexing information on the web is likely to go - that remains to be seen, but they certainly have their uses even now.

Probably the best known of the Engines that use these extensively is Technorati, though there are a number of others which offer the same format. It has the additional benefit that these tags will also contain your keywords or ones relate closely to the subject matter of the post which adds to the criteria used by the main Search Engines.

g) Description Metatag

The Description Metatag used to hold more weight than it does currently after large-scale abuse at the start of the Search Engine Optimisation wave. However, it is still worthwhile taking time to include it and it is used by certain Search Engines in their results page.

In Blogs, the Description Metatag is generally standard across most pages because it is built into the template. Even like this, it is still worthwhile including it and you should include keywords in it while giving an overview of what the Blog is trying to achieve.

Extra Hint: by including elements such as the name of the post, the category it is in or perhaps the Blog Tags if you are using them, then you can customise the Metatag to make each page different and specific to the page it relates to, which is how it should be.

h) Others - Headers, Bold and Image Tags

While there are many different elements which could be mentioned, I will limit this to 3 additional ones:

Headers: in code terms this means words that you include with <h1>, <h2>, <h3> etc. tags. In most blog templates, the main title will be included within the <h1> tags and either the Categories or subheadings will be included in <h2>. It is believed that Search Engines give more importance to text within these than to ordinary text.

Bold: making a word or a phrase bold (or indeed in italics) is also considered to be beneficial in highlighting them to Search Engines. However, the benefit is relatively small and so use them sparingly and primarily to highlight elements for your readers, I would suggest.

Image Tags: this is the text that appears when you place your mouse over an image but do not click and is also called an “alt tag”. This is good for accessibility and also gives additional text for the Search Engines - however, again do not abuse this but instead make the words you use both descriptive and relevant.

i) Linking

Links are all important in SEO and, once again, it is a feature which Blogs are naturally excellent at. There are two types of links which are important:

- **Internal Links:** that is to say, links between different pages on your own Blog
- **External Inbound Links:** in other words, links from other Blogs or websites to your own

The internal links are generally created for you within a Blog - links to individual Categories and Archives are automatically created, and the link through to the individual posts is also set up for you from the main pages. For example, on the home page of a Blog (with the exception of a few hosted blog systems), if you click on the title of the post then you will be taken to the individual page of that post where you can then leave a comment.

In addition, you can link to other posts on your own site yourself when you reference them from within a separate post. This helps to show the depth of your blog to your readers and gives them additional help in navigating your Business Blog and locating the information that they are looking for.

Whether they are created for you or are links which you have created yourself, one additional key element to bear in mind is what is called the “**anchor text**”. The anchor text is the word or phrase that you actually click on when you link to the other page and it is considered to be very important by the Search Engines, primarily because it should usually show the main focus of the content of that target page.

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Blogs like Wordpress do a lot of this for you. For example, in the link to the category called “Marketing with Blogs”, the anchor text is automatically the name of the category itself, which of course we have set up to contain our primary keywords, in this case “marketing” and “blogs”. The same with the link to individual posts - as mentioned earlier, this link is made up of the Title of the post, again which we have written to contain our Keywords for that post.

So when you create link yourself, rather than having the link appear as “Click here”, try to incorporate the link into the sentence and include some of the keywords which are relevant to the post you are linking to.

The same is true for Inbound External Links, although of course as they are not on your Blog you do not have control over what other people use in their link. The most normal, however, is that they will include the name of your Blog so if you have included your primary keyword in your Blog’s name then you will get this additional benefit.

What’s next?

As we continue to add to our blog, there may be days when there the subject matter does not come as easily as we might hope. There are techniques and ways to help get over this and continue to develop the blog in the meantime.

This is what we will be looking in the next part of the course.

WORKBOOK ELEMENTS

As a test sheet, if you are looking at the different elements of SEO in your Blog, then you can use this as a template.

Article #1

Article Name

.....

Main Keyword Phrase

.....

Secondary Keyword phrases

.....

.....

Description MetaTag

.....

.....

Blog Tags

.....

.....

.....

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