



**Catamount Studios**

# Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Marketing: A Primer for Clients

## Introduction

The subject of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is typically one that a business or non-profit organization has heard about, knows it's important but is not really too certain exactly what it entails, other than it's **important** to address in the composition and structure of a web site's design and programming. This publication is intended as a *primer* for our clients to help them understand the basics of SEO and its companion, Search Engine Marketing or SEM. Another term we will introduce is "Social Media Optimization" or SMO which may or may not be significant for you.

The contents of this Primer have been gleaned through our personal research, available publications, interviews with SEO experts and lots of time in trial and error with various SEO strategies. It is not intended as the last word on the subject but rather, to help you, our Client, grasp quickly the rudiments of SEO and its derivatives, SEM and SMO. With this information you can begin to formulate your approach to SEO and how you wish to incorporate it into your web site, web based business or organization.

## Definition

*Search Engine Optimization* is the science of customizing elements of a web site to achieve the best possible search engine ranking. It can also be thought of as a *collection of strategies* that improve the level at which your web site is ranked in the results returned when a user searches for a key word or phrase.

## Why is SEO Important?

One word sums it up - competition. Depending on what study you read, there are as many as 20 billion web pages being indexed at any given time. The major search engines do their best to go through these pages and catalog them so that they can tell you what is on the Net if you use their search engine to seek information or find a web site. With so many websites out there competing for similar phrases it is absolutely critical to ensure you are using every tool at your disposal to aid a potential customer in finding your website.

## SEO: Two Components

SEO has two basic components: *organic* SEO and *paid marketing* efforts. The latter can include pay per click (PPC) efforts, pay for inclusion (PFI), and/or pay per inclusion (PPI) campaigns. *Organic* refers to those aspects of search engine optimization that we do concerning the site itself. These include:

- How the site is built with respect to the use of tags, links, navigation structures and content
- Incorporating SEO friendly programming techniques within the site's pages that facilitate its indexing by web crawlers (search engines, bots, etc.)
- Hosting to include your domain name selection
- Usability factors to include ease of navigation
- The site's content and use of keywords within that content

Without getting too technical, almost every thing a web designer does has an impact on SEO. But before we discuss these elements of web design, it's important for you to understand how search engines work.

### Crawlers, Spiders, Robots, et al

The different search engine companies (Google, Yahoo, MSN, et al) refer to their search engines by different terms, though in the end, they all pretty much do the same thing. For our purposes here we will refer to them collectively by the term *crawler*. Simply understood, a crawler is a web based application that searches the World Wide Web and *indexes* the content of the web sites it encounters. When we say “index” we mean that it reads and captures the textual content of a web site and stores it within its data bases. The key part of this description is the word, *textual*. Crawlers essentially do only one thing: they index text. They do not read or index graphics, animations, or the like. Only text. Consequently, how and where text inputs are placed on a web page becomes very important.

Crawlers perform their work based on their internal algorithms or formulas that they follow in analyzing a page's contents, its links, and navigation. These algorithms are proprietary and are changed quite often in response to the state of the web and what works and does not work to advance SEO. We employ software to analyze your web traffic to note trends, who's visiting your site, and assist you with analyzing your site traffic to determine what is working in the way of SEO and what is not. This can save you SEO advertising dollars.

#### Not All Web Sites Created Equal

You have probably seen some web sites that seemingly are nothing but animation, or are very heavy with it. These are typically authored in Flash, an Adobe application used to author animations. While showy, these sites do not perform well with respect to crawlers because there is little text to be indexed. Some Flash use is OK, but too much of it can hurt a web site in terms of its search engine readability.

Other web sites may look good in a browser but when you look at the source code that generated the page, problems for SEO pop out in the form of poor structure, missing links, code misplaced, lack of meta data and the like, all of which mean again, poor page placement.

#### The Catamount Approach

At Catamount Studios, we weave SEO into our web designs from the very beginning. We start by writing clean, efficient code that is *W3C validated*. By that, we mean that the code we write for web pages conforms to the programming standards of the World Wide Web Consortium that establishes standards for how web pages are to be coded. As a result of this approach our web sites are viewable in all the major web browsers without glitches and they are easily indexed by all the major search engines.

All of these organic SEO techniques are built into every Catamount Studios authored site at no extra charge to the client. We approach organic SEO as a **best practice** in an industry that is still relatively young with new approaches to web site construction emerging every year. For example, some of the scripting code used on the web in our sites did not even exist as recently as five years ago. Bottom line: your site will contain the most current approach to SEO from a design and programming standpoint at no additional charge to you.

### Working with You to Advance SEO for Your Site

Our design and programming efforts however, are only part of the SEO equation. Other factors that influence your site's search engine placement include the domain name (shorter is better), the keywords that are developed to go with the site and listing the site in the directories of the major search engines.

#### Keywords

Keywords are terms or phrases that a web viewer will enter as search criteria in the search engine's Search window on a browser when seeking to find a site of interest to them. If you sell window coverings, terms like “window coverings,” “shutters,” “blinds,” “Roman blinds,” “faux wood blinds” and so on could be possible keywords for your site. We can help

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you create these keywords through the use of keyword generators as it relates to your product or site specific content. At Catamount we employ keyword density analysis tools to help our clients determine the best keywords to use for their site and related products or information.

### Content

We will aid you in the development of page copy to insure that it contains keywords that relate to your site and the actual keywords that have been developed for that page. Including keywords in your page copy is another vital component of SEO. Most SEO experts advise that probably the single most significant contributor to good organic SEO results comes from having solid content that is well written, grammatically correct and contains your keywords for that page and its subject matter.

### Directory Listings

Each of the major search engines have directories. Listing your web site with the major search engine directories<sup>1</sup> facilitates the search engine optimization process. We offer this service for a nominal cost.

### Page and Site Linking

Inbound and outbound links can advance your site's page rank or placement in search results. We will advise you on how to obtain inbound links and how to add outbound links that do not detract from your site's performance or competitiveness.

## Search Engine Marketing

The other component as noted earlier in SEO is search engine marketing or SEM. It involves paying for different web marketing services designed to advance your site's placement in search results. You can buy placement in the form of advertising for your site; purchase inclusion of your site in any related keyword search; pay per click-through to your site's home page; and other means. The table below provides a quick guide but is not meant to be all inclusive of the process.<sup>2</sup>

### Approaches to Paid Web Marketing<sup>3</sup>

Methodology	Description	Agency	Remarks
Paid Inclusion, Pay for Inclusion (PFI)	A strategy that requires you to pay a search engine to include your site in its index rankings. Where it falls out in those rankings is not guaranteed.	AskJeeves, AlltheWeb, Yahoo!, EntireWeb	Costs \$25-\$50 per year and and up depending on the service.

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<sup>1</sup> These include the Open Directory Project, Google, Yahoo!, GoGuides, MSN, and SearchSight.

<sup>2</sup> Andre Savoie, President of [WSI](#) , Web Post, 10/15/2008

<sup>3</sup> SEO: Search Engine Optimization Bible, pg 220.

Methodology	Description	Agency	Remarks
Pay-per-Inclusion (PPI), Pay for inclusion per click	A strategy that requires you to pay a search engine to include your site in its index and rankings. Your placement in those rankings is not guaranteed.	LookSmart, Yahoo!	Flat rate set-up fee and then \$.20-\$.50 per click.
Paid Directory Review	Paying a directory to review your web site listing faster than it would ordinarily be reviewed. The review usually happens in 2-4 days, but does not guarantee your inclusion or placement.	Yahoo!, AlltheWeb	Flat fee, usually \$30-\$75 but can be higher depending on the the directory.
Pay for Placement, Paid Placement, Pay per Click (PPC)	Requires that you pay for the placement of your web page in search results. This guarantees that you appear at a certain spot in search results.	AltaVista, Yahoo!,AOL Search, MSN Live Search, Google, FindWhat	Some search engines charge a flat fee for setup. After set up fee, there is usually a per-click fee ranging from \$.05 per click to \$0.50 or more per click depending on the topic and position.
XML Inclusion, Trusted Feed	Used for large sites, usually with 500 or more pages. This strategy allows RSS feeds to search engines so that regularly changing content is indexed.	AltaVista, Kanoodle, Google, Yahoo!	Usually requires a flat fee for setup and then a per click fee for \$.25 to \$.50. Google doesn't charge a fee however.

**Pay-Per-Click Marketing**

The SEO Bible defines Pay-per-Click marketing as an advertising method that allows you to buy search engine placement by bidding on keywords or phrases.<sup>4</sup> In one type, you pay a fee for an actual search engine results placement. The more you pay, the higher in the returned results your page will rank. Another approach is more along true advertising lines. This type involves bidding on keywords or phrases that appear in, or are associated with text advertisements. Google (Google AdWords) is probably the main supplier of this service.

A Product pay-per-Click program is an online comparison shopping engine or price comparison engine that requires the participating company to regularly feed its updated price list. A Product PPC program focuses specifically on products, so you bid on placement of your product advertisements.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> SEO: Search Engine Optimization Bible, pg. 75

<sup>5</sup> SEO: Search Engine Optimization Bible, pg. 78

## **Which Form of SEO is best for Your Site?**

The most widely held view is that some combination of PPC and organic keywords is the best approach to SEO. Again to cite the SEO Bible: *All search engines make a distinction between PPC and organic SEO. PPC doesn't help your organic rankings. Only those activities like tagging your web site properly, using keyword placement properly and including great content on your site will help you on the organic side. PPC is a search marketing strategy.*<sup>6</sup>

If your business is exclusively web based, that is, you are essentially dependent on the web for your customers or clients, then some form of PPC or paid marketing would seem to be a necessity to advance your business. Which approach to take is very much up to you and your web advertising budget. PPC campaigns can be controlled financially, that is, you can set limits with the PPC company on how much you are willing to spend each month for their services. This is an important proviso to avoid runaway PPC costs as it is possible for some unscrupulous individuals to defraud your efforts by clicking on your ad link with no interest or intention of using your services but just to run up your advertising costs via PPC.

Catamount Studios can offer assistance and advice with respect to PPC campaigns. We have SEO and SEM experts available to consult with clients who can help you develop a PPC advertising program. This is a fee based consultation service. Our rates are modest however, in comparison with other companies offering SEM services.

## **Social-Media Optimization**

With the fairly recent advent of sites like FaceBook, MySpace and You-Tube along with the astronomical rise of blogs on the Internet, social media sites where people connect with friends. Social media are web contents generated by social networkings. A group of people publish a work or works that are distributed to another group, or several groups of people.

When we use the term social-media optimization, we are referring to using social media to spread the news about your web site. It's through this participation that and optimization that your site is distributed and that's what brings more and new visitors to your site. Social-media connections can also be thought of as a form of *viral marketing*. Just like the flu bug among people, news of your site and its contents can be spread in a viral manner along social networks. This form of optimization may or may not be for you or your business. It takes time to develop, much more so than PPC marketing approaches. Catamount Studios staff can also advise you on how to best use Social-media Optimization to advance your web based business and web site.

## **SEO in Closing**

SEO is an ongoing effort, a work in progress for any web site. It is a vital part of every business on the web or should be. It takes the active involvement of the site owner to review his or her web statistics, number of visitors, conversion rates and the like to be effective however.

We can and will offer our services to aid you in this process whether its through employing best practices in the design of your site, helping you choose effective keywords, or listing your site in directories all the way to managing your search engine marketing efforts on an ongoing basis.

As you consider who you choose to build your site, we hope this information will be helpful. We believe that using a company that offers a full range of SEO services along with website design, programming and development just makes good business sense.

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<sup>6</sup> SEO: Search Engine Optimization Bible, pg. 80