
A Guide to

Search Engine Optimisation

by David Flint

of Mobile and Secure Ltd

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <u>Introduction.....</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>SEO is a game.....</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>PPC vs SEO.....</u> | <u>2</u> |
| <u>Preparation.....</u> | <u>3</u> |
| <u>Creating a keywords list.....</u> | <u>3</u> |
| <u>Keyword density.....</u> | <u>4</u> |
| <u>Using keywords.....</u> | <u>5</u> |
| <u>Title tags.....</u> | <u>5</u> |
| <u>Meta tags.....</u> | <u>6</u> |
| <u>The description meta tag.....</u> | <u>6</u> |
| <u>The keywords meta tag.....</u> | <u>7</u> |
| <u>Highlighting tags.....</u> | <u>8</u> |
| <u>Image tags.....</u> | <u>8</u> |
| <u>Links.....</u> | <u>9</u> |
| <u>Web page code validation.....</u> | <u>9</u> |
| <u>Search engine submission.....</u> | <u>10</u> |
| <u>Sitemaps.....</u> | <u>11</u> |
| <u>Robots.txt.....</u> | <u>12</u> |
| <u>Webmaster accounts.....</u> | <u>13</u> |
| <u>Submitting a sitemap to Google.....</u> | <u>13</u> |
| <u>Submitting a sitemap to Bing.....</u> | <u>13</u> |
| <u>Submitting a sitemap to Yahoo.....</u> | <u>14</u> |
| <u>Checking your webmaster accounts.....</u> | <u>14</u> |
| <u>Checking your website indexing.....</u> | <u>14</u> |
| <u>Web directories.....</u> | <u>15</u> |
| <u>The Open Directory Project.....</u> | <u>15</u> |
| <u>Submitting a web site to ODP.....</u> | <u>15</u> |
| <u>Local directories.....</u> | <u>16</u> |
| <u>Getting linked.....</u> | <u>17</u> |
| <u>Link building.....</u> | <u>17</u> |
| <u>Link exchange.....</u> | <u>17</u> |
| <u>One-way links.....</u> | <u>18</u> |
| <u>Link bait.....</u> | <u>18</u> |
| <u>Web directories.....</u> | <u>18</u> |
| <u>Article submission sites.....</u> | <u>19</u> |
| <u>Web forums.....</u> | <u>19</u> |
| <u>Landing pages.....</u> | <u>20</u> |
| <u>Social networks.....</u> | <u>21</u> |
| <u>Facebook.....</u> | <u>21</u> |
| <u>LinkedIn.....</u> | <u>22</u> |
| <u>Twitter.....</u> | <u>22</u> |
| <u>StumbleUpon.....</u> | <u>23</u> |
| <u>Digg.....</u> | <u>23</u> |
| <u>Delicious.....</u> | <u>24</u> |
| <u>Reddit.....</u> | <u>24</u> |
| <u>Analytical tools.....</u> | <u>25</u> |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <u>Checking out the competition.....</u> | <u>26</u> |
| <u>What not to do.....</u> | <u>28</u> |
| <u>Glossary of terms.....</u> | <u>29</u> |
| <u>Appendix 1.....</u> | <u>31</u> |
| <u>Web page optimisation check-list.....</u> | <u>31</u> |
| <u>Appendix 2.....</u> | <u>32</u> |
| <u>Search Engines.....</u> | <u>32</u> |
| <u>Social Networks.....</u> | <u>33</u> |
| <u>Web Directories.....</u> | <u>34</u> |
| <u>Article Submission Sites.....</u> | <u>34</u> |

Introduction

Creating your web site is only half the battle, getting people to visit your web site is the hard part. One of the best ways of making your web site easy to find is to make it search engine friendly.

Search Engine Optimisation, SEO for short, is the art of making a web site search engine friendly. It involves embedding relevant key-words in your web site so that search engines can get a better idea of what your web site is all about. When someone then performs searches using those same keywords, web pages from your site will appear in their search results.

This guide will show you how to create a list of keywords relevant to your site content. It will also tell you how to use your chosen keywords effectively within your web site to make your web site search engine friendly. The overall goal is to raise your web site's placement in the search engine results for your chosen keywords, and to increase targeted traffic to your web site.

In addition, we will also cover ways to promote your web site by using link building : gaining external links from other web sites that point back to your web site in order to raise its profile on the web.

SEO is a game

If I could give one word of advice when it comes to SEO, it would be to think of it as a game. You can spend a long time working on your web site making it more search engine friendly, only to see little in the way of returns for your efforts. Or you could make only one or two minor changes and gain a higher search engine position for your chosen keywords than that of your competition. And then a few days later it all changes again.

There is a reason that SEO professionals like to charge a monthly rate, it's because the SEO game is constantly changing, and what worked one week is not guaranteed to work the next. Your site could be on page one of Google for 50% of your selected keyword combinations one week, only to drop back to page four on Google the week after.

Search engine algorithms are constantly evolving and it pays to keep trying different things to see if they work or not. The keywords meta tags may be used one week, and the next they are completely ignored. `` *alt* tags might be taken into consideration if your site uses a lot of images, or not at all if it only has one or two.

If after applying SEO to your site, your Google listings get worse, undo a couple of your changes and wait again to see if they improve. The trick is to experiment, experiment, experiment, until you find something that works for you. Then, now and again, tweak it to see if you can make gains in terms of both your listing position and targeted traffic.

PPC vs SEO

SEO doesn't really cost you anything other than your time and effort, unless you are paying someone else to do it of course. There is an alternative to SEO if you want to guarantee that your site appears at the top of search engine results for specific keywords, but don't wish to spend the time optimising your site. That alternative is to pay for links.

Pay-Per-Click, PPC for short, is where you pay the search engine company to place a link to your site at the top of the search results for your chosen keyword combinations. In Google, for instance, they appear above and to the right of the search results, and are usually labelled **sponsored links**.

While some might find PPC effective - especially if they are selling a lot of products or services from their web site - for individuals and small businesses, PPC can be very expensive, especially as you pay every time someone clicks on your link, regardless of whether that click results in a sale or not.

Now I'm not a fan of PPC as a method of targeting traffic to your web site for two reasons: first, it can be costly. I have found that by spending a little time employing SEO on my own sites, I get better results than my colleagues who use PPC. Secondly, just like advertisements elsewhere on the internet, users have grown used to ignoring them and only clicking on non-PPC links in the search results.

Feel free to give PPC a try, but remember that PPC only works for the search engine that it runs on, whereas SEO works for all.

Preparation

Before beginning to optimise your web site to make it more search engine friendly, you will need to do some preparatory work. The first step is to identify a list of keywords that best describes the content of your web site.

Creating a keywords list

1. Draw up a list of keywords (words and word combinations) that your target customer is likely to use when searching for the product or service that you are offering. For example, if your web site is all about selling lego, you may produce a list that looks something like this: *lego, lego bricks, lego toys, space lego, lego pieces, lego collection, collectors lego, rare lego*
2. If you trade under a company name, you could add this to the list too.
3. Expand the list by adding a few typing errors that people are likely to make: *leho, kego, leog*
4. Then search for more keywords using a tool such as the **Google Keyword Tool**.
 - 4.1. Go to: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>
 - 4.2. Enter one of the keywords that you have already chosen, lego for instance, and then click **Get keyword ideas**. (You may have to enter captcha characters - drawn wavy characters - to verify that you are a real person and not an automated query.)
 - 4.3. The keyword tool will suggest some more words that you may not have thought of. Words that Google thinks may relate to the type of product or service on your web site. Select any keywords that are relevant to your site, and are likely to be popular. Repeat the process using the rest of your keywords. This will give you a list of further keywords, for example: *lego sets, lego models, buy lego, lego set, lego building, lego construction, legos, lego games*
 - 4.4. When thinking about keywords, don't forget to include synonyms (i.e. house/home), split/merged words (lego set/legoset), singular/plurals (lego/legos) and hyphenated words (lego-set).

5. Now sort the keyword list into an order of popularity from left to right. The keywords that you think will bring in more traffic should start first followed by the rest.

For example: *lego, lego toys, lego sets, legos, lego games, lego set, lego bricks, space lego, lego models, buy lego, lego pieces, lego building, lego collection, lego construction, collectors lego, rare lego, leho, kego, leog*

Now you have your keyword list.

Note: Think carefully about your keyword list. Take time to pick the right words. If you pick the wrong keywords you are likely to target the wrong audience!

You need to consider how to use your keywords to their greatest effect. It is time to come up with some strategies.

Keyword density

Aim for 200 to 400 words in the content of each web page on your site. What is required is a page of information that is both useful to the reader and large enough for you to be able to embed a sufficient number of keywords into it, without it being too obvious.

Some web site creators can go overboard with keyword usage and it becomes obvious to search engines (and the reader) that certain keywords are appearing a lot more than would be expected on a web page. The number of times a keyword or keyword combination appears within the text of a web page is known as the keyword density. Aim for a keyword density of somewhere between 0.8% and 2%.

Using keywords

Having created a list of keywords, the next step is to insert them into each of your web pages to optimise them for search engines.

Note: In order to optimise your web pages you will need a basic understanding of HTML. For the purposes of this book we assume that the reader already has a basic understanding of HTML and the concept of HTML elements, known as tags.

Title tags

The HTML `<title>` tag appears immediately after the `<head>` tag in every web page. This is the most important HTML element tag when it comes to keyword optimisation. For each page on your site you need to embed the right keywords in this tag. Aim for a page title that consists of 40 to 60 characters repeating your most relevant keywords for this page at least once, and making sure that your most important keywords are the first words in your title.

Make sure that all keywords in the title also appear within the text of each page at least twice.

As an example, lets say that a particular page on our lego collectors web site sold lego castle sets. Our title would look something like this:

`<title>Lego castle sets buy lego castle sets and other lego models</title>`

If you have built your web site using a site building package - such as **Mr Site**, **WebEden** or **Moonfruit** - you may find yourself restricted on title length. In this case you must make sure that you fit as many keywords as possible in what little space you have, for instance:

`<title>Lego castle model sets – lego castle sets</title>`

You can see here that the word *lego* appears twice as this is our most valuable keyword. However, competition for the word lego on its own will be fierce, so it's best to aim more towards getting a better search engine ranking for *lego castle sets*, where competition is less likely than for lego on its own. This is called aiming for the long tail.

The Long Tail explained: The more popular a keyword is, the more competition there will be for it. For example: competition for the keyword *lawyer* is huge. To get on the first page of any search engine results for lawyer would be very hard indeed. However the more keywords you add, the less competition there will be. So *divorce lawyer* would have less competition than *lawyer*, but it would still have a lot. Whereas *divorce lawyer suffolk* would have much less competition.

There's no point wasting your time and effort competing with a million other web sites for a single popular keyword. All that will do, if you succeed, is bring more traffic to your site when what you really want is *quality* traffic; traffic from people more likely to be interested in divorce lawyers in Suffolk than lawyers in New York or any place else.

So the money is in what they call ***the long tail***. The more combined keywords, the less competition, and the more likely that you will target the type of visitor to your site that is looking for your product or service.

Meta tags

Meta tags are hidden from web site visitors but are still important when optimising your web site. There are two meta tags that we are concerned with when optimising web pages. These are the ***description*** and ***keyword*** meta tags. Feel free to use other meta tags in your HTML pages, but place them after the description and keywords entries, as these are the ones that search engine rate in terms of importance.

The description meta tag

The description ***<meta>*** tag appears directly below the ***<title>*** tag. The contents of this tag are used by search engines like Google to display a summary of the web page content in the search engine results, below the link to your web page. If there is no description tag present, then it takes a selection of text from your web page to use as the description. This might not be ideal, because the summary text displayed by the search engine is what the end user will read, and therefore use to decide whether to click on the link to your web page.

So think of your description tag as the advertising blurb for each web page. What do you want to say about that particular web page to a potential visitor? Write something here that will make them want to click on that link.

So for our lego castle sets page, you could write a description like this:

Lego castle sets. We sell the biggest collection of lego castle sets in Suffolk. Our collection of lego castle sets are sourced from all over the world. We also offer individual lego set pieces and lego models to complement your castle set collections.

Once you are happy with the wording of your description, add it to your web page HTML code immediately under the title tag as follows:

```
<meta name="description" content="Lego castle sets. We sell the biggest collection of lego castle sets in Suffolk. Our collection of lego castle sets are sourced from all over the world. We also offer individual lego set pieces and lego models to complement your castle set collections.">
```

Note: Aim for about 250 characters in your description and make sure that the content attribute comes after the name attribute, and not before.

The keywords meta tag

Immediately after the description meta tag should be the keywords meta tag. This is a list of keywords from the keyword list you created earlier in the preparation section. Chose the keywords that best describe the content on the current web page, and aim for a list of around 10 to 12 keywords. If only a few from your list describe the content, pad out your keywords with:

- plurals (i.e. legos, lego models)
- split-words
- joined words (i.e. lego sets, legosets)
- typos (i.e. leho).

Make sure the words in your keywords list always appear at least once in the web page content. Search engines are programmed to look for this. If they cannot find any meta keywords repeated in the actual page text, it may think you are trying to trick it.

Here is an example of our meta keywords tag:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="lego castles,lego castle set,lego castle sets,lego model,lego models,buy lego,lego collection,lego sets,lego toys,legos,lego bricks,leho">
```

Highlighting tags

The next set of tags to embed keywords into are those that form part of the page content, but stand-out in some way. These include header tags like `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>` etc; style tags like bold ``, italic `<i>`, and underlined `<u>`; and bullet list tags ``.

1. Place as many keywords as possible within these tags, as and when they appear on each web page. Don't go overboard. You want to strike a balance between the readability of the content and the usage of the keywords. Don't spam your reader with the same keywords over and over again.
2. Lastly, make sure that your keywords are used throughout the page. Either in the paragraph `<p>` tags or anywhere else that content appears between the `<body>` tags. Search engines look for repeats of the keywords used in the keywords meta tag at least once within the actual page content. So make sure you put them there!

Image tags

Images on web sites help the reader understand the content better (and improve the look) but they don't help search engines understand what the web page is about. Words, even keywords, embedded in images are of no use to a search engine if it cannot read them. So if you have a picture of a lego castle set and you want to let a search engine know that it is a picture of a lego castle set, you have to tell it.

There are two ways of doing this:

- Use keywords in the file name of the image. For instance: [lego-castle-set.jpg](#)
- Use the optional alt attribute in the `` tag.

The image alt attribute was originally designed for web browsers that were unable to display an image. In place of the image it would display the text from within the alt tag instead. Some search engines use the text in the image alt tag to work out what the image is about, so it's a good opportunity for you to embed more keywords in your web page.

Example: ``

Note: Use hyphens rather than underscores as a word separator in file and directory names. Search engines treat hyphens as a space, but they treat underscores as underscores. So an image search for **lego castle set** would return an image with hyphens in its file name, but not one with underscores.

Links

There's information on how to establish links later under the heading: Getting linked. In this section we discuss the format of links and how to embed keywords in the links on your web pages.

Most web site creators use simple links like **click here** or **next page** or **back**. These links don't really tell the search engine anything about the page to which they link to, or how relevant these links are to the current page's content.

If, on the other hand, your links were to contain the same, or similar, keywords to those on your web page, search engines would know that the links were relevant and it would lend more weight to the web page's ranking in the search engine database.

In a similar way to embedding keywords in image tags, there are two ways to embed keywords into the links on your web page:

- The link name itself
- The link anchor text that the visitor sees.

Here is an example of a web site paragraph with a keyword-loaded link:

```
<p>If you would like to see more of our lego castle sets, check out our <a href="red-lego-castle-sets.html">Red Lego Castle Sets</a> page.</p>
```

Notice that the link name contains the keywords *Red Lego Castle Sets* as does the actual linked page "*red-lego-castle-sets.html*".

If you cannot or do not wish to change the names of your links (i.e. they are already linked to externally, or are already in a search engine database) then at least make sure that the link anchor text on the web page contains your keywords.

Web page code validation

When you have finished embedding your keywords into your web pages, it is always a good idea to check that your web page validates. By this I mean that there are no HTML/XHTML coding errors.

There are plenty of tools and web sites offering free web page validation so it makes sense to use these services. Personally, I use the **HTML Validator** add-on for the Mozilla Firefox web browser, which is available from:

<https://addons.mozilla.org/ga-IE/firefox/addon/249>

Search engine submission

Having optimised your web pages, the next step is to get them indexed by the major search engines.

In the past the easiest way to do this was to go to each search engine and find their ***add a url*** or ***suggest a url*** page. Today, however, this rarely works.

The fastest way to get your web site indexed (added to the search engine database) is to link to it from a web page that is already indexed. Then, the next time a search engine revisits that web page, it sees the link to your web site, follows it, and hopefully adds your site to its database.

If you'd rather not wait, the next best thing is to submit a sitemap to each search engine via a search engine webmaster account.

Note: Appendix 2 contains a list of the major search engines. You can submit your web site to each one manually, but this is probably a waste of time as most are just copies of bigger search engines such as Google and Bing.

Sitemaps

A sitemap is an XML text file with details of every page on your web site that you would like a search engine to add to its database. A format for sitemaps can be found at <http://www.sitemaps.org/>

Create the sitemap, name it *sitemap.xml* and store it in the root directory of your web site where your main page is located (i.e. index.html).

There are many optional tags that you can use in your sitemaps, but it's best to keep it simple by just listing each web page that you would like the search engine to index, along with a priority score telling the search engine how important that web page is compared to other pages on your site, 1.0 being very important.

Here is an example sitemap:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<urlset
  xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9"
  xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
  xsi:schemaLocation="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9
    http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9/sitemap.xsd">
<url>
  <loc>http://www.mywebsite.com/</loc>
  <priority>1.0</priority>
</url>
<url>
  <loc>http://www.mywebsite.com/about.html</loc>
  <priority>0.5</priority>
</url>
<url>
  <loc>http://www.mywebsite.com/main-lego-catalogue.html</loc>
  <priority>1.0</priority>
</url>
<url>
  <loc>http://www.mywebsite.com/blue-lego-castle-sets.html</loc>
  <priority>1.0</priority>
</url>
<url>
  <loc>http://www.mywebsite.com/red-leg-castle-sets.html</loc>
  <priority>1.0</priority>
</url>
</urlset>
```

Robots.txt

Another text file that every web site creator should include is the **robots.txt** file. This file also lives in the root directory of your web site. The job of robots.txt is to tell automated web crawlers, such as search engine *searchbots* what they can and cannot look at on your web site. This is useful if you want to avoid having your images folder, or any other such content, indexed. It is also useful for telling search engines where your sitemap file is located.

Here is an example of a robots.txt file:

```
User-agent: *  
Disallow: /images  
Disallow: /scripts  
Disallow: /css  
sitemap: http://www.mywebsite.com/sitemap.xml
```

This example says that it is ok for web crawlers to look at everything on this site except whatever is in the images, scripts and css directories, and that the sitemap is located at <http://www.mywebsite.com/sitemap.xml>

Webmaster accounts

If you want to hasten the pick up of your sitemap and the indexing of your web site, you can set up a webmaster account with each of the major search engines, and then manually submit your sitemap location each of those search engines.

Submitting a sitemap to Google

To submit a sitemap to Google:

1. Go to the Google Webmaster Tools page: (<http://www.google.co.uk/webmasters/>) and create a new account. If you already have an account, just log in.
2. Once logged in, add your site to your webmaster account by clicking the **Add a site** button, enter your site web address, i.e. <http://www.mysite.com> and click continue.
3. You will need to verify that you are the owner of the web site by adding an extra Meta tag to your site's index file, or by uploading a html file that Google creates for you.
4. Once your site is verified, click on the site name and select **Site configuration** from the navigation menu on the left of the screen, then select **Sitemaps** and click the **Submit a Sitemap** button. Enter the location of your sitemap i.e. <http://www.mysite.com/sitemap.xml>

Google will then schedule your sitemap submission for indexing.

Submitting a sitemap to Bing

To submit a sitemap to Microsoft Bing:

1. Go to the Bing Webmaster Centre page (<http://www.bing.com/webmaster>) and use your Live ID username and password to sign in. If you do not have a **Live ID** account you can use the **Sign Up** option on the left of the screen.
2. Once logged in click the **Add a site** button and add both your web site address and sitemap address and press **Submit**.
3. You will be asked to verify that you are the owner of the submitted web site just like you were with Google. Once verified your sitemap will be scheduled for crawling. Check back at a later date to confirm that your sitemap has been crawled.

Submitting a sitemap to Yahoo

To submit a sitemap to Yahoo:

1. Go to the Yahoo Site Explorer page (<http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/>) and sign in using your Yahoo ID. If you do not have a Yahoo ID you can create one using the **Sign Up** link.
2. Once logged in you can enter your web site address and click the **Add My Site** button to submit your web site address. Similar to both Google and Bing, you will be requested to verify that you are the owner of this web site. Once verified you can Explore your web site and submit a sitemap by selecting **Feeds** from the navigation menu on the left and entering sitemap.xml after your address, selecting **web site feed** from the drop-down list and then clicking the **Add Feed** button.

Checking your webmaster accounts

After a few days, check back with each of your webmaster accounts to see if your sitemap has been read and indexed. If it hasn't, leave it for a few days before resubmitting.

Checking your website indexing

To check if Google, Bing and Yahoo has indexed all your web pages, perform a search for **site: www.mysite.com**. This will return every page in each database for your domain. Are any pages missing? If there are, check your sitemap and resubmit it via your webmaster account for each search engine that has pages missing.

Note: Yahoo is one of the hardest search engines to get indexed in. Even if you do get in, very few find that every page on their web site gets indexed. Of course Yahoo will offer a better service if you pay them, but these days Google is the search engine of choice for most people, so why pay for something that is not as good as something else that is free?

Web directories

Search engines are not the only online web site databases, there are also web directories. These range from large global databases to local directories that cover a specific geographical area. Unlike search engines they do not allow you to search for content, so keywords are not important. Instead they allow you to submit your web site address to their database under a particular topic, so anyone searching for that topic, lets say *childrens toys*, is presented with a list of relevant web sites including that of your own.

The Open Directory Project

The biggest and most popular web directory service is **The Open Directory Project** (<http://www.dmoz.org>). This directory is exported to many smaller directories throughout the world, so getting your web address in this directory is a big plus as it means that when someone searches for the topic under which your web site is listed, your web site address may appear several times in the search results for each directory it appears in.

Submitting a web site to ODP

To submit your web site to The ODP go to www.dmoz.org and start browsing for a topic that is relevant to your site content. For our lego example, there are several choices such as Games, Kids and Teens , Recreation, or Shopping.

Which one do we chose? If you are not sure you can type Lego into the search box and perform a search. Here you will see a list of suggested topics for Lego. As you can only submit a site to this directory once, you need to chose wisely.

If for instance, your site is a retail business, you might decide on *Shopping: Toys and Games: Construction: Lego*, so click that link and check the sites already listed. Are they similar to your site?

To submit your site to the chosen topic:

1. click the **Suggest URL** link at the top of the current page. Read the submission policy, when you understand it and are happy with it. Enter your site URL, i.e: <http://www.mysite.com> and select **Regular**.
2. Give your site a good title like *Lego Castle Emporium* and a good description to bring in those visitors such as the one we used earlier *Lego castle sets. We sell the biggest collection of lego castle sets in Suffolk. Our collection of lego castle sets are sourced from all over the world. We also offer individual lego set pieces and lego models to complement your castle set collections.*

3. Then enter your contact email address, complete the verification process and click the submit button.

It can take several weeks or more before your web site appears in the ODP directory, but it is well worth doing.

Local directories

As well as large directories like ODP, there are smaller directories that you can submit your web site to. These directories tend to be information repositories or yellow pages clones for businesses located within a specific area.

As an example, if you took your top keywords and performed a Google search for those keywords with your town name, and maybe your county name, appended to the end, you will be presented with a list of web pages that match your criteria. As you work through each page of results you will come across several links to sites which are obviously web directories.

Most of these directories will let you add your web site address and business information for free. It is worth doing as these sites can send potential customers your way as well as improve your search engine ranking.

One of my favourite web directories is Free Index (<http://www.freeindex.co.uk>).

Getting linked

Link building

While optimising the content of your web pages is a great first step in SEO, to get a really high ranking in a search engine database, you will also need **backlinks**. Backlinks are links from external web sites that link back to web pages on your web site.

Think of these backlinks as votes for how important your web site is. The more backlinks you have, the more important a search engine will think your site is.

Not all links are created equal. Some links have a higher value than others based on the popularity of the site linking to you, or the relevance of that sites content to that of your own.

Link exchange

A popular way to gain backlinks is by **link exchange**. This is where you ask another site with content similar to yours, but not in competition, to link to a page on your site in return for a link from yours to theirs.

Link exchange is a great way for new sites to start gaining backlinks quickly. However, take care not to go mad with link exchanges. Aim for a few new links each month, and not all to the same page. If you suddenly receive 100 new links overnight, a search engine will get suspicious. Take your time and aim to build quality backlinks.

It pays to check back with the sites you are exchanging links with periodically to confirm that they are continuing to link back to you. You may come across the odd site that will link to you for a short period of time, then remove the link in the hope that you will not notice, while you continue to link to them. If this is the case, remove your link to their site.

Also check if any backlinks are hidden in frames or scripts or using the **rel=nofollow** attribute as this tells search engines to ignore the link.

Encourage the owners of any web sites you are exchanging links with to create the links using plain HTML, even going so far as to supply the HTML code yourself, either in an email or on a **link to us** page on your web site. Make sure that you escape the < and > angled bracket characters on your **link to us** page so that people can cut and paste the HTML code.

One-way links

The best backlinks to your site are one-way links. These are links that come in but are not reciprocated with a return link back to the originating site.

There are several ways to get these backlinks. I'm going to briefly cover some of them.

Link bait

Link bait is a term that means web content that is so useful or interesting that people can't stop linking to it or passing it around.

To create link bait you have to create a page that features content that is bound to appeal to your target audience. Something that makes them want to pass it on to friends, bookmark it, link to it and keep coming back for more. Maybe a useful chart, picture or downloadable content. Or even a free tool or a *how to* guide.

I subscribe to various RSS feeds from sites hosting similar content to one of my own. I can see in these feeds that the same question is being asked over and over again about which product out of the X available would look good with Y. Everyone was giving their own opinion each time the question was asked, but no one had bothered to create one page with all of the X products shown together with details comparing them to each other. I am currently working on this very page, and when it is finished I will be using the link to this page to answer all future occurrences of this very question, and hopefully gaining a lot of free one-way backlinks for my trouble.

Web directories

Think of a web directory as a virtual yellow pages. There are all sorts of web directories out there, covering all topics, industries and geographical regions. Some are free to list in, others have tiered membership levels.

Web directories are a useful way to distribute information about your web site, business, product or service and associate it with a particular industry or geographical location, or both.

Adding your web site to web directories is a good idea for two very good reasons. First, you can target a specific audience. Second, most web directories are indexed by search engines, which means links to your web site are more likely to appear more than once in the search results.

A list of web directories appears in Appendix 2.

Article submission sites

Another type of web directory is one that hosts articles rather than links. They work by accepting articles from authors and distributing them for free. In return for the articles, authors can include information about themselves and their business or service, together with a link back to their own site. Popular articles can drive people to your web site in search of more of the same type of information.

Think of these articles as marketing tools. Write a really useful informative article on a subject matter that is relevant to your site content, then include information about who you are and what you do or offer, together with a backlink to your own web site.

Appendix 2 contains a list of popular article submission sites.

Web forums

Web forums are another great way to create backlinks yourself, and to get others to generate backlinks, by offering help and advice for free.

Make sure that you pick forums that discuss the product or service that you offer so that the people following links to your site from the forum represent your target audience.

Web forums are also a great resource for learning more about your area of business and the industry itself. You can contribute to on-going discussions about relevant topics, pick up tips and ideas on ways to improve your own products and services, and build a reputation as an expert in your chosen field.

When using forums, make sure that you set up your user profile and signature so that they include information about you and your web site, with at least one backlink.

Note: When I was working on a hobby web site, I joined the most popular forum I could find relevant to my site content. I started contributing to any on-going discussions that I felt I could add value to, and as I gained more knowledge and experience I discovered that my site was getting a huge amount of traffic from the forum. At the time of writing that forum now represents the second biggest source of traffic to my site. Users of the forum have even started to put links to my site on other forums and on their own web sites.

Landing pages

Landing pages have two aims, to attract visitors and to reduce bounce rate.

Bounce rate is the rate at which a user arrives and leaves your web site. A high bounce rate indicates that users arrive at a page at your site, then leave without checking out any of your other web pages.

Any page on your web site can be a landing page, it doesn't have to be the main page. It can be any page with great content that leads the visitor into the rest of the site, possibly resulting in them emailing you or buying something, or even clicking on an advert.

Think of landing pages as keyword optimised web pages containing link bait and useful content to lure potential customers. The more landing pages your site has, the better.

Social networks

Another method of gaining traffic to your site is to use social networking sites. In essence you sign up for an account at a social network site, fill in some basic information about yourself and maybe your interests, then configure the look of your account to match that of the web site you are promoting, be sure to add a link back to your site.

You can get a list of popular social networks in Appendix 2. Here I am only going to mention a handful of social networking sites/tools that I have found useful in promoting web sites and increasing traffic.

Please note that using social networking sites and tools to promote your own web site, is frowned upon by some and even considered to be unsociable. Personally I find striking a balance between self promotion and social networking is the way to go. As an example, I like to use **Facebook** to keep in touch with friends and family as well as to promote both my business and hobby sites. I use **LinkedIn** to stay in touch with former colleagues and business associates and to promote my business. I use **Twitter** and **StumbleUpon** to talk about and recommend things I find useful and interesting, as well as to promote the content on my own web sites. This way I get the best of both worlds. I get to do self promotion and have access to useful networking tools.

If you do decide to use any of the following social networks yourself, don't forget you can gauge which ones are working best for you by checking for any incoming links from these sites using a traffic monitoring tool.

Facebook

Facebook is a popular site which allows people to connect with and maintain friendships with acquaintances from both the past and present. While primarily a social networking tool, it is also a great way of letting people know about your web sites. You can add your web site address to your personal information page and post links to your web site content on your **Wall**, but a better way to promote your site is to give it its own public Facebook page.

To do this go to <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php> and sign up for a free Facebook account. Select the appropriate category for your site and enter the name of your web site or business. Complete the authorisation and account set-up process.

Once created, you can customise your account to suit. You can add photos and information about your site, content, products, RSS feeds, you name it. Just be sure to add a link back to your site!

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social networking tool aimed at career professionals. Imagine LinkedIn as your virtual Rolodex. You can stay connected to every work colleague, manager, client or supplier that you have ever worked with, as long as they are on LinkedIn that is.

Sign up for a free account and start building your profile. You can add as much information as you wish, from personal details to everything that is written on your CV.

Most people use LinkedIn as a networking tool to find skilled individuals through a contact of a contact, or to advertise their availability for work or details of their own business.

To promote your web site on LinkedIn, add its web address to **Websites** in your profile. You can add up to three web sites to your LinkedIn account.

Twitter

Twitter is a virtual short messaging system. Unlike texting on your mobile, you write short messages of up to 140 characters which can be read by anyone that follows you or anyone that searches the Twitter database for keywords that are contained within your messages.

To start using Twitter sign up for an account and chose a suitable username. For example [legocastleshop](#) would be a good name for our example shop, which would give us the URL <http://twitter.com/legocastleshop>.

Next set up your profile making sure that you get some good keywords in your **Bio**. This is a text summary of what you are all about. So something like [Collector and seller of all things relating to lego castles, whether sets, models, kits or pieces](#) would be ideal.

To gain followers you will have to follow others and write interesting messages. To tell you how to do this would take another eBook, so I will recommend instead that you do a search on-line for articles on **how to gain twitter followers**.

StumbleUpon

StumbleUpon is a great tool for finding new web sites that might interest you. After creating an account and setting your preferences you can **manage your interests**, meaning you can select topics that you are interested in. Once you have saved your selections you can press the **Stumble** button in order to be taken to random sites that match your chosen topics.

You will need to install the browser add-on in order to promote your own web site's pages using StumbleUpon. (There are several add-ons available depending on your browser type, but I personally prefer the StumbleUpon add-on for Firefox <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/138>).

Once you have your browser add-on installed log into StumbleUpon and go to a web page on your own web site that you wish to promote and press the **I like it!** button on the StumbleUpon toolbar. Select whether the web page is ok for someone to view from work, add some tags (keywords) and a description of the content that this web page contains.

From your StumbleUpon account you can see feedback from other people that have visited your web pages using StumbleUpon.

Digg

Digg is a place where people recommend web pages to each other by posting the link and a description of the content. If the description is interesting enough Digg users will click on the link and check out the web page. If they like what they see they digg it. The higher the amount of diggs you get, the more traffic you will receive.

Note: It's best to use Digg with your own web site periodically when you have some interesting content on your site that you wish to promote. If the web site becomes too popular on Digg two things can happen. The first is that your traffic level exceeds your current providers allowances and you may receive a large bill depending on your account type. The second is known as the **digg affect**. This is where you get so much traffic that your hosting company can not handle it and so they take your site off-line. So use Digg carefully!

To set-up a Digg account go to <http://www.digg.com> and click the **Join Digg** link and follow the sign-up steps and set up your account preferences.

To submit a web page to Digg go to the **Submit New** link, enter the URL, chose the media type and continue.

Delicious

Delicious is a social bookmarking web site. It offers the ability to store your bookmarks on-line, allowing you to access them from any computer, and allowing others to access them as well.

After signing up for an account, add a link to your web site by entering the web address into the URL field. Delicious will automatically pick up the title for that page. Feel free to edit the title tag to make your link more appealing. Make sure that you include detailed information about your link in the notes field. The **notes** field is like your description meta tag, its purpose is to tell people what the link is about.

The **tags** field is similar to the keywords meta tag in that it associates your link with the keywords that you enter here. Separate each tag with a space character.

Do not tick the **do not share** box as the aim here is to promote your site!

Finally, click the **Save** button to add your bookmark to your bookmarks page in your Delicious account. You can then check back here periodically to see if anyone else has added your site to their bookmarks.

Reddit

Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com>) is a link voting system. Users submit links of anything on the internet that they find interesting and other users can look at the link and vote on whether they find the content interesting or not.

This is a great way to get others looking at any great content on your web site such as an interesting article or maybe a product promotion.

Analytical tools

A great way to find out how your SEO techniques are doing is to use a web analytics tool. Your chosen hosting company may provide one already. If not, you can always use **Google Analytics** (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>).

Google Analytics requires you to install a snippet of web code at the bottom of each of your sites web pages. Each time a visitor to your site looks at a web page, data is collected such as how they found your web site, what keywords they used in a search engine to arrive at your site, what browser they are using, etc. A lot of really useful information is collected and provided to you in detailed form allowing you to gauge the amount of traffic you are getting, and to determine ways to improve your site and to optimise your current SEO and content.

Checking out the competition

It's time to take a look at your competition. Remember that SEO is a game, and in any game there are competitors. If you are lucky and have a niche product or market then you might not have many, or any competition at all (for now). For the rest of us it's far more likely that there will be quite a few sites competing with us for the same keywords and keyword combinations.

1. Starting with Google – you can later repeat these steps with the other search engines if you wish - search for all your most important keywords and keyword combinations and note the position and page that they come in on. It helps if you use a spreadsheet to record your findings. Your aim in SEO is to get on the first page of any search results, preferably near the top of that page.
2. Identify your top keywords and keyword combinations that are not on the first page, and then select one of your competitors pages that is on the first page, and that you would like to rank higher than.

Choosing number one is not always a good idea if they are a government site, a large organisation or a well-known international company as they will have a huge amount of links to them making it hard for an independent site to beat. So chose a competitor that you know you can beat. Remember, your aim is to get on the first page. Being number one is a bonus, but not a must.

3. Click your competitors link and visit their web page. When loaded, click **View** and then **Page Source** from your browser menu. You should now be looking at the source code for the web page that is ranking higher than you.

What we will do next is count the amount of occurrences of your keywords and keyword combinations that appear on this page.

To search a page's source code for keywords press **Ctrl+F** for find and step through each occurrence, counting each one as you go. You can purchase software to do this for you, but I find the low-tech solutions work just as well.

Below is a table representing a (fictitious) example for *lego castle*.

| <i>Keyword(s)</i> | <i>Competitors site</i> | <i>Our site</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| lego castle | 4 | 1 |
| lego | 18 | 30 |
| castle | 10 | 43 |

As you can see, we score higher for occurrences of the two keywords on their own, but lower for when they are together. This shows that Google is giving more weight to the combined keywords, so that is where we have to beat the competition, by at least one.

4. Optimise your page to beat the competition.

Look at your competitors page source more closely. Where do the keywords appear? Make notes on their locations as your aim is to at least match them, then beat them, without seeming too obvious that that is what you are doing.

Note: In SEO you score highly if the keywords are together, even higher if they are in your **<title>** tags, and **even higher** if they are the first words in your **<title>** tags.

So for our competitor's site we've identified that we need to do better on the combined keywords, so we need to note where **lego castles** appears on the competitors page as follows:

- 1 occurrence in the **<title>** tag, but not the first words in that tag
- 0 occurrences in the **<meta>** tags
- 1 occurrence in a **<h1>** header tag
- 2 occurrences in links.

So to beat the competitor our aim is to have something like:

- 1 occurrence in the **<title>** tag, as the first two words in that tag
- 1 occurrence in the **<meta>** **description** tag
- 1 occurrence in the **<meta>** **keywords** tag
- 1 occurrence in a **<h1>** header tag
- 2 or more occurrences in links
- 2 or more occurrences in the page content.

Once you have made the changes to your web page, upload them to your web site and wait for the search engine to pick up the changes and update its index.

With any luck your site should now be on the first page and at least one position above your competitor's link. If not, check that the search engine has picked up your changes by checking its cache (under your link in the search results). If it has, check to see if your competitors site has changed, then work through the steps again.

Remember that SEO is a game, and like all games you have to keep playing to win. Remember also that a competitor may not be ranking higher than your site based on content alone, but rather because they have more incoming links than you do. Work on your link-building as well as your content optimisation in order to beat the competition.

Note: To work out how popular a keyword or keyword combinations are, look at the amount of paid advertising around the search results. For instance, in Google there might be paid links above your search results and to the right. The more adverts, the more popular those keywords are to someone, and the more valuable they are to you if you can get your site on that first page.

What not to do

We've talked mainly about what to do to get your web pages to appear on the first page of search results for your chosen keywords. The following is a list of what not to do.

Do not:

- Put flash intros or pointless animations and multimedia on your web site
- Use images as link buttons or to represent text
- Use **click here** or **next** as your link anchor text
- Use white text on a black background
- Use frames
- Hide content in Javascript or iframes.

Glossary of terms

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Backlink | A link to content on your web site from an external source. |
| Bookmark | A way of recording the address of a web page. |
| Content | The text on your web pages. The more keyword-rich the content, the more chance of the right visitors. |
| Keyword | A word that sums up the content of your web site, what you are offering or selling. Pick the wrong keywords and you target the wrong people. |
| Landing page | A web page designed to entice visitors to a web site with rich content. |
| Links | HTML links in web pages. |
| Optimisation | Placement of the content on the page in the correct way in order to get the most out of your keywords. |
| PPC | Pay-Per-Click: Paid-for link placement in search engine results |
| RSS Feed | An XML page that delivers a feed of updated content from a web site to a specialised RSS feed reader. |
| Sitemap | An XML text file detailing every web page on your web site that you would like a search engine to add to its index. |
| Sponsored links | Another term for PPC links in search engine results. |
| Tag (HTML) | A HTML element is known as a tag. Tags act as indicators informing web browsers how the document is to be presented. |
| The Long Tail | Using a combination of keywords to target a specific audience rather than a larger general one. |
| Web analytic tool | A tool that looks at a web sites traffic data and presents it to the user as a set of configurable metrics. |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Web browser | An application that allows you to view web pages and access the world wide web.. |
| Web code validation | Web code such as HTML, XHTML and CSS must conform to standards as laid out by the W3C. Validators check that a web page's web code is valid and contains no errors. Most web browsers will still show web pages that contain errors, but the web page may not display correctly, or in the same way on every computer. |
| Web forum | A web site dedicated to the discussion of a particular topic. |
| XML | Extensible Mark-up Language. |

Appendix 1

Web page optimisation check-list

<TITLE> tags

- Aim for a title of 40 to 60 characters
- Repeat most important keyword(s) at least once.

<META> tags

- <meta> **description** tag must be directly below <title> close tag
- <meta> **description** tag content must describe what the page is about, and must do so using the right keywords that are also on the page
- <meta> **description** tag should be about 250 characters
- <meta> **keywords** tag should contain keywords relevant for current page
- <meta> **description** tag should have 10 to 12 keywords
- All keywords in <meta> **description** tag should also appear within <body> tags.

<h1>..*<h1>*, , <i>, <u>, tags

- Place as many keywords as possible in highlight tags

 tags

- Use keywords in each image filename, separate words using hyphens
- Use alt tag to describe image using keywords.

<a> tags

- Use keywords in link's anchor text
- Use keywords in link's path name if possible
- Separate words in link path using hyphens.

Appendix 2

Search Engines

| <u>Name</u> | <u>URL</u> |
|------------------|--|
| Amazon A9 | www.a9.com |
| AOL | www.aol.com |
| Ask | www.ask.com |
| Bing | www.bing.com |
| Dogpile | www.dogpile.com |
| Earthlink | www.earthlink.net |
| ExactSeek | www.exactseek.com |
| Google | www.google.com |
| HotBot | www.hotbot.com |
| InfoSpace | www.infospace.com |
| Lycos | www.lycos.com |
| Mamma Metasearch | www.mamma.com |
| Netscape | www.netscape.aol.com |
| WebCrawler | www.webcrawler.com |
| Yahoo | www.yahoo.com |

Social Networks

| <u>Name</u> | <u>URL</u> |
|-------------|--|
| AddThis | www.addthis.com |
| Agglom | www.agglom.com |
| Blellow | www.blellow.com |
| CoRank | www.corank.com |
| Delicious | www.delicious.com |
| Diigo | www.diigo.com |
| Digg | www.Digg.com |
| Facebook | www.facebook.com |
| FARK | www.fark.com |
| Jaiku | www.jaiku.com |
| LinkedIn | www.linkedin.com |
| MySpace | www.myspace.com |
| Reddit | www.reddit.com |
| Spaces | www.home.spaces.live.com |
| StumpleUpon | www.stumbleupon.com |
| Technorati | www.technorati.com |
| Twitter | www.twitter.com |
| URLfan | www.urlfan.com |

Web Directories

| <u>Name</u> | <u>URL</u> |
|------------------------------|--|
| Ask City | www.city.ask.com/city |
| Bing Local Search | www.bing.com/local/YPDefault.aspx |
| BizWiki | www.bizwiki.co.uk |
| Elance | www.elance.com |
| Free Index | www.freeindex.co.uk |
| Google Local Business Center | www.google.com/local/add |
| Google Maps | www.maps.google.co.uk |
| Guru | www.guru.com |
| The best of | www.thebestof.co.uk |
| Yahoo! Local Listings | www.listings.local.yahoo.com |

Article Submission Sites

| <u>Name</u> | <u>URL</u> |
|----------------|--|
| Amazines | www.amazines.com |
| Article City | www.articlecity.com |
| Ezine Articles | www.ezinearticles.com |
| GoArticles | www.goarticles.com |
| HubPages | www.hubpages.com |
| Idea Marketers | www.ideamarketers.com |