



# SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION: THE FUNDAMENTALS

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# Search Engine Optimization: The Fundamentals

## Introduction

All marketing campaigns share at least one common objective – increased brand awareness. To many business owners SEO is no more than a buzzword that internet marketing executives toss around in conversation. However, the reality is Search Engine Optimization (SEO) often plays a crucial role in a firm’s internet marketing strategy. This white paper will touch on the following elements:

- What Is SEO? (The simple explanation!)
- On-Site Search Engine Optimization Components
- Off-Site Search Engine Optimization Components
- Why Is SEO Important For Your Business?

## What Is Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

The most basic definition of search engine optimization defines it as the process of enhancing your website’s organic (unpaid) search engine ranking for target keywords and phrases. When someone enters a search term, the search engine’s job is to sort through all of the websites on the internet and rank them according to their perceived relevance to the user and their search query. Effective search engine optimization is then, in essence, the process of positioning your website as an expert in your industry in order for search engines to perceive your site as the most relevant and useful to the searcher. To quote Google executive Amit Singhal, “Our site quality algorithms are aimed at helping people find high-quality sites by reducing the rankings of low quality content”. While there is much debate over the precise methodology for optimizing your site for search, there are numerous techniques that are widely considered to be both ethical and effective. These on and off site techniques are briefly explained in the following sections.

## On-Site Search Engine Optimization Components

The overall umbrella of search engine optimization can be further broken down into on and off site practices. Simply stated, effective SEO requires work done to the website itself in addition to extensive promotional work elsewhere on the internet. The following list offers a basic description of the most common elements of on-site search engine optimization.

- **Web Copy:** The importance of having keyword rich website copy cannot be overstated. Using your target keywords throughout the site helps search engines determine your site's areas of expertise, and using them often helps search engines recognize the importance of them to your company's message. However, there are websites with good SEO copy and there is SEO copy on a website. Do not abuse and overuse your keywords to the point that it is recognizable by the average viewer. After all, all the work you are doing aims to drive traffic to the site – if the site is displeasing to your viewer, your work is meaningless.
- **Page Title Optimization:** The page title is a string of text technically defined by the contents of the <Title> element in the <Head> section of your HTML code. Simply stated, the page title is the title visible on the top of your browser window and is shown as the headline in search results. Optimizing your page title is important because it tells search engines (and searchers!) what the content on your web page is about. Think of your page title as a “virtual business card”.
- **XML Sitemap:** The XML sitemap is one way web developers and SEO specialists update search engines on a website's structure. Sitemaps also define the various URLs of a website and provide additional information to search engines such as when and how often the site is updated. The sitemap makes it easier for a search engine to quickly decipher the important aspects of a website, allowing for more appropriate placement in search results for relevant terms.
- **Meta Tag Optimization:** Meta tags are the information inserted into the <Head> area of your HTML, along with the page titles (see above). Essentially, the Meta description tag is another way to influence what you would like the search engines to know about you. Meta information is more often seen by search engine crawlers than human visitors, but does sometimes appear as a description of your site in search results.
- **Robot.txt:** In order to decipher the information in web pages, search engines utilize crawlers and robots to scour the internet and index the information they have found. A robot.txt file instructs these crawlers on which aspects of your website are important, and which are not. It is also important to note the location of the robot.txt file, as search engine crawlers will not search the entire site for it. The file must be placed in the main directory in order to be properly utilized.
- **URL Optimization:** Fairly straight forward, search engines can more efficiently index the information on your website if the URLs contained in it are “pretty”, or clean and descriptive of the page.
  - Example of a non optimized URL:  
[www.gopeerless.com/index.php?pageID=4&categoryID=42&](http://www.gopeerless.com/index.php?pageID=4&categoryID=42&)
  - Example of an optimized (pretty) URL: [www.gopeerless.com/internetmarketing](http://www.gopeerless.com/internetmarketing)

## Off-Site (Promotional) Search Engine Optimization Components

The other piece of the Search Engine Optimization pie is the off-site, or promotional aspect of the SEO campaign. Like its name states, the off-site campaign has less to do with the technical components of the site, but rather its perceived authority elsewhere on the internet. Unlike the on-site techniques, off-site SEO is an ongoing process with work consistently being completed on behalf of a website. If you have ever noticed that SEO/Internet Marketing Agencies structure their pricing around a monthly fee, now you know why. Here, we focus on two key off-site elements.

- **Link Building:** While there is often debate on the most effective SEO practices, every SEO specialist will undoubtedly stress the importance of links to your site from other websites. We talk about the 'authority' of a website as an expert in its field, but we can also liken search engines to a high school popularity contest. It is important that people like you – the more sites that link to your site, the more popular you are and the more relevance you hold in the eyes of the search engines. Additionally, the quality (or 'popularity') of your friends matters as well. Would you rather get a nod of confidence from 100 people that no one respects, or 10 people that are highly regarded (high 'page ranks')? If you are a website, the answer is 10 highly regarded sites; Quality is king. There are many methods to build quality backlinks to your website, but for the sake of simplicity we will only discuss one - article submission.
- **Article Submission:** Used correctly and consistently, article submission can be one of the most effective methods of Search Engine Optimization. With this technique, we are referring to the creation of educational articles that are relevant to your industry and having them submitted to various online directories. These articles are generally informative, and upwards of 500 words (with your keywords present, of course!). There are two main objectives to article submission: backlinks and authority. As previously mentioned, having quality websites link back to your site is seen as a vote of confidence in the eyes of search engines. Every time an article is submitted to a directory, a backlink to your site is created. The other benefit, authority, comes from the act of publishing the article. In its most simplistic form, publishing informational articles on relevant topics and providing valuable information to potential readers helps to establish the website owner as an industry expert. When someone enters a search term, it is the search engine's job to break through the noise and present the most relevant experts to their users -- be that expert.

## Why Is SEO Important For Your Business?

The truth is that a strong internet presence is more important now than ever, and will only continue to become more important over time. Whether you are a nationwide brand that caters to a target audience millions strong or a local business with a niche market, it is absolutely crucial that you are front and center when your potential customers come looking for you. This system of marketing, called inbound marketing, is rapidly becoming the methodology of choice for marketers around the world. Why? Because it generates qualified leads that come to you! People searching the internet are already looking for you, even if they don't know it. Your job is now to make sure you distinguish your site from the competition and make yourself readily visible. How important is it to have a strong and professional SEO strategy? Consider the fact that 42% of all searchers click on the top-ranked result, 8% click on the second, and the results continue to diminish after that. 62% of all search engine clicks happen on the first page! Furthermore, when executed correctly, roughly 40% of SEO campaigns achieve a return on investment (ROI) in excess of 500 percent! SEO is not just a buzzword, but rather a viable tool for businesses of all types to establish their presence on the internet while efficiently generating qualified inbound leads.

*Interested in learning more about executing a professional and effective Search Engine Optimization campaign for your business? Contact Peerless Media Group to schedule your free consultation and learn how you can utilize SEO as part of an integrated marketing solution.*

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