

Affiliate Classroom

Volume 2, Number 7
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AffiliateClassroom.com

The journal of affiliate marketing and management best practices

Eye on SEO!

**SEO Lingo
Explained**

**On-Page &
Off-Page
Techniques**

**Web Stats Part 2:
Measure Your
Business**

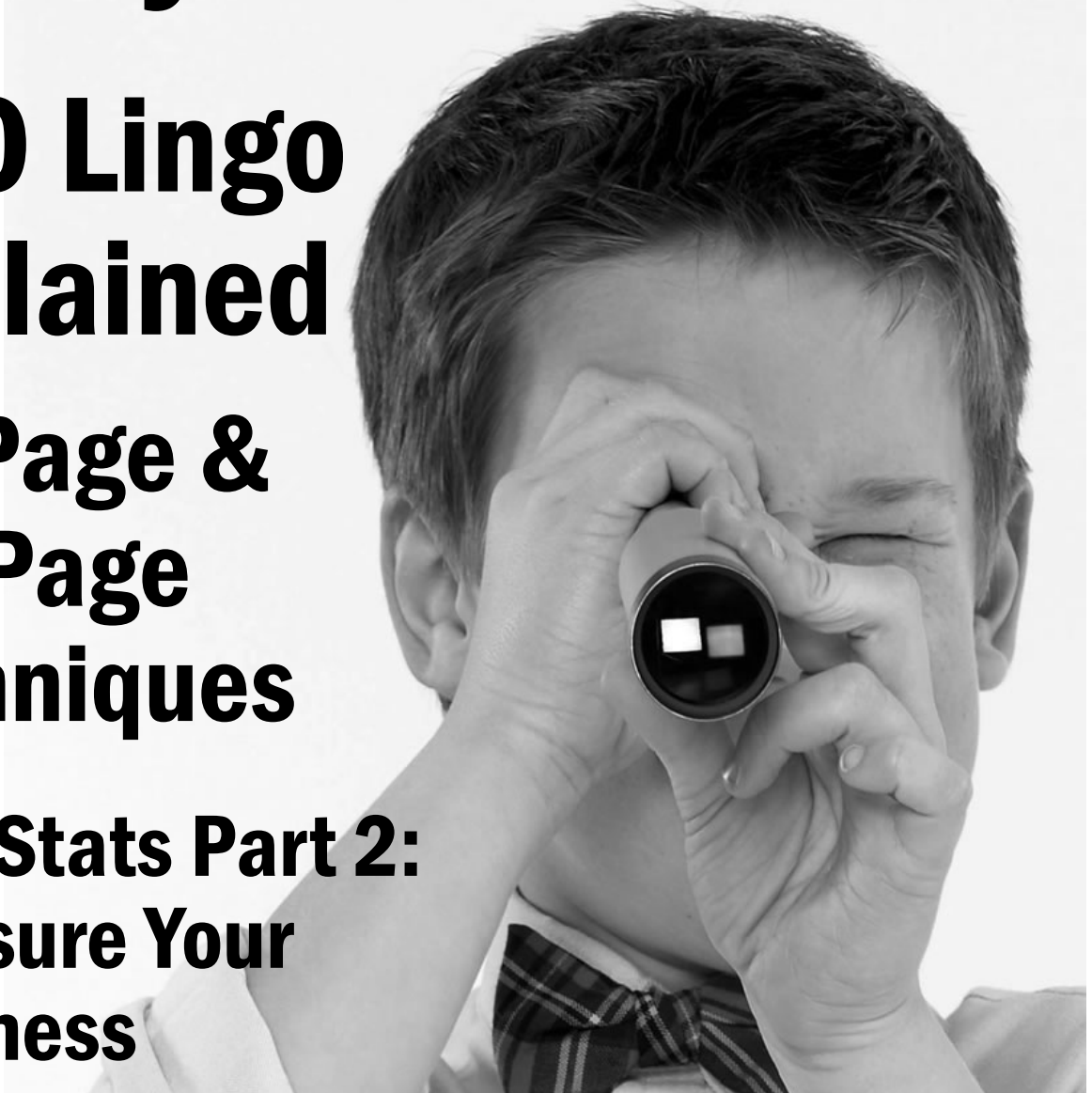


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Top 5 Affiliate Programs



AffiliatePrograms.com

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Featured Program—Super Poker Affiliates

<http://www.affiliateprograms.com/WebsiteRedirect.aspx?lid=SuperPokerAffiliates>

Super Poker Affiliates works with some of the top brands like Texas Calculatem, PokerUsher and several others. A huge incentive you can gain by working with them is being able to give away programs for free. These programs have been created to help the online poker gambler in his play and increase his odds.

When a visitor enters your site you offer them a free version of Super Poker Affiliate software. Not only will you earn a minimum CPA of US\$50, but that amount increases with the volume you sell. If you sell the software, they will give you a 25% commission. Learn more about them and see if they are a good fit for you.

Top 5 Programs: June 2007

ZIRH International Affiliate Program

<http://www.affiliateprograms.com/WebsiteRedirect.aspx?lid=ZIRHInternationalAffiliateProgram>

ZIRH has an ever-present strong media presence when it comes to award-winning men's skincare. If you are looking for a program that has brand awareness and is favored by pro athletes and celebrities alike, you need to see what they are all about. By promoting their affiliate program you can earn 12–20% for your work. This is undoubtedly the highest commission rate you can receive in men's skincare and shaving.

Campaigner Email Marketing

<http://www.affiliateprograms.com/WebsiteRedirect.aspx?lid=CampaignerEmailMarketing>

If you are looking for an easy way to conquer email marketing, then you should check out the Campaigner Affiliate program. Campaigner offers \$5 per qualified lead and up to \$60 per subscription sold.

And even better, Campaigner takes care of everything, from billing to email tech support. It's very simple because you just need to provide referrals, then sit back and pocket extra money every month.

Hyperseek PPC Software

<http://www.affiliateprograms.com/WebsiteRedirect.aspx?lid=HyperseekPayPerClickSoftware>

What separates Hyperseek from the competition? The Hyperseek PPC Search Engine offers you unbeatable strength, speed, reliability, and the potential for unlimited growth. They were one of the early pioneers in both Web Directories as well the Pay Per Click Search Engine industry and have just launched their long awaited affiliate program. You can earn 10% commission (\$25–\$495 per sale) and 25% on the second tier for referring affiliates. In addition, you also receive on-time payments, complete access 24/7, and a real-time reporting center with detailed statistics. They also have larger commissions available for high producing affiliates.

IncentaClick

<http://www.affiliateprograms.com/WebsiteRedirect.aspx?lid=AffiliateProgramsIncentaClick>

IncentaClick Media Group is a two-tiered CPA affiliate network that has always focused on performance-based online advertising, email marketing, banner advertising, pay per click, and incentive traffic. Their affiliate programs include free trial, direct sale, lead generation, and rev-share campaigns. Commission is 5% of revenue of referrals for life. Check them out and see what all the fuss is about!

Infusion CRM: Marketing and Sales Software

<http://www.affiliateprograms.com/WebsiteRedirect.aspx?lid=InfusionCRMMarketingandSalesSoftware>

Business professionals are looking for a leg up against their competition, and by giving them access to Infusion's unique software, you can help them do just that. All you have to do is talk and write about Infusion CRM when you communicate with your associates and customers. Commissions range from \$500 to \$1,500 (plus \$30/month ongoing) per sale so making money with them is no problem. Infusion Soft also provides state-of-the-art sales support and makes sure you get your commission checks as soon as your referrals sign up.

Until next time...

Check us out in our AP Weekly Newsletter

(http://www.affiliateprograms.com/industry_newsletter/10-17.htm)

In our newsletter you can find all the latest industry news, tips, and tools.

Communicate with our team of experts through in-depth articles and free online resources. These resources will help you to dramatically increase your knowledge of affiliate marketing. Here is a place where you can receive the guidance and support you need to reach your full potential.

Essential SEO Lingo

A Glossary of SEO Terms You Need to Know

by Mark Thompson

<http://www.income-academy.com>

Why are so many webmasters so afraid of search engine optimization that they spend hundreds, even thousands of dollars on experts to optimize their sites? Frequently these so-called experts have very little expertise, but have been to Amazon and bought a book or, even worse, visited an SEO forum and spent a few hours reading the posts.

SEO isn't black magic – it's just basic common sense and a bit of knowledge. One reason why people do shy away from SEO is that they face a confusing array of TLAs (Three-Letter Acronyms) and strange terms.

If you fully understand the following few sentences, then you should be doing your own SEO; and if you don't, you will by the end of this article.

"I sorted out my meta tags and waited for the next Google dance. Luckily for me, my PR increased. I'm not quite sure if it was due to the algo changes or having anchor text and reciprocal links in place. But overall my white hat techniques seem to be paying off and my ranking has increased."

If that paragraph leaves you dazed and confused, don't worry. Just keep this handy SEO glossary handy. It will help you decipher not just that pesky paragraph, but anything the "experts" in the forums throw your way.

Essential SEO Glossary

Agent Name: The name of the search engine spider/bot that has visited your site. You can find these by looking at your traffic stats in your control panel. You'll see names like Yahoo slurp, Goolgebot and MSNmediabot. This shows you that the search engines have found your site. If you don't see any visits from them, then you'll need to try some further SEO techniques such as getting backlinks and ensuring that your site is search engine friendly.

Algorithm: The mathematical formula that search engines use to calculate what your ranking position should be in their index. Often referred to as just "algo," it is a complicated formula that takes into account on-page and off-page factors.

Alt Text: Short for "alternative text," it is used with an image and has a number of purposes. Primarily it is a placeholder for an image, so that if the image is slow to load or not shown, there will be an indicator of the content. You should ensure that all your images have corresponding alt text.

Anchor Text: The text part of any link, and of vital importance to any SEO efforts. Instead of a link being displayed as http://www.mylink.com/blue_widgets.html, using anchor text will

allow the same link to be displayed as "Blue Widgets." The search engines will then index the page based on this keyword. Using the relevant keywords in all links should be a priority when optimizing a page; however, it is equally important to vary the anchor text and avoid using the same keywords all the time.

Backlink: A link from one site that points to another. When getting backlinks, always ask the person linking to you to use anchor text.

Black Hat: The use of unscrupulous methods to optimize a website. Discovery of these methods being used will often lead to a site being de-indexed.

Cloaking: One of the most popular black hat methods, in which the visitor to the site is shown a page optimized to their search request, while the search engine spiders see a completely different set of pages designed to rank well.

Cross Linking: The process of linking multiple sites together.

De-listing/De-indexing: If search engines detect that you are using unscrupulous methods to get your site ranked, or if they regard your site as "spammy," then they will remove your site from their index and it will no longer appear when users search for it.

Dead Link: A link that leads to a 404 error page. When a page no longer exists or a site is down, the browser will display a 404 "page cannot be found" error. It is good practice to regularly check your site's links to ensure that they are all live and remove any dead links.

Doorway Page/Gateway Page/Entry Page: A method once used to enable a site to rank well for a variety of keywords. It was frowned upon by the search engines and is no longer useful, as the search engines now base much of their algorithms on linking strategies. These should be avoided at all costs.

Dynamic Content: A page using dynamic content will change that content depending on what search phrase is used. The pages use scripting languages such as PHP combined with a database to display a number of variables. You often find dynamic pages used to display hotel or restaurant listings. Dynamic pages can often be easily identified as they use variables in the URLs, such as "?id=hotels+chicago." These variables can often cause problems for search engines and should be avoided or modified by use of the .htaccess file.

Frames: An HTML technique that will allow you to display two distinct pages within one web page. It can cause problems for search engines and should be avoided if at all possible. If frames are used then each page should be included separately in the site map.

Header/Headings: Headers are defined in HTML by the use of <h1>, <h2>, or <h3> tags. Search engines generally give extra weight to any keywords found within a heading tag, so it is important to ensure that your main keywords appear with the heading tags on your site.

Header Tag: Not to be confused with heading tags used within the main content area of a site, the header tag appears at the top of a page and contains information about the page such as title description and keywords. The header area is denoted by the use of the <head> and </head> tags. Particular attention should be paid to getting the correct content within this area.

Hidden Text: Hidden text is another old SEO method that should be avoided at all costs. It involves the hiding of text on a page so that only search engines can see it. For example, placing a whole list of keywords using white text on a white background would be visible only to a search engine spider and not a human visitor. Using such methods is a quick way to get your site banned.

Inbound Link: A clickable link to one site from another. Such links are a major part of a search engine's algorithm, and you should attempt to build up as many links as possible over a period of time. Try to avoid the rapid growth of inbound links, and try to develop them as naturally as possible.

Keyword Density: This is a measure of how many times a keyword appears on a page in relation to all the other words. A keyword density of between 1% and 3% is ideal. So for every 100 words on a page, the keyword should only appear between one and three times.

Keyword Domain Name: This refers to the use of keywords in a domain name. If done in moderation, it is a perfectly valid SEO technique and should be used wherever possible. However it can be overused – especially with the use of lots of hyphens. For a site about red or blue widgets, the domain name redandbluewidgets.com would be perfect; but the domain name the-best-cheap-red-widgets-and-blue-widgets-for-sale.com could be seen as bad by the search engines.

Keyword Stuffing/Keyword Spamming: The repeating of lots of keywords in the meta tags. This process is frowned upon by the search engines and you should only use the keywords that relate to the page within the meta tags.

Link Popularity: Link popularity is a major factor in all search engine rankings. Search engines take into account the number of links going to a site as well as the quality of the links to determine a site ranking within the index.

Meta Tags: Meta tags are no longer as important as they once were, and many search engines now ignore them to some extent. The tags are placed within the <head></head> tags of a site and provide details of keywords and a brief description of the site.

Page Rank: Also known as PR, it's a method used by Google to indicate the importance of a site. All sites are ranked from 0 to 10, and the higher the page rank a site has, the greater the importance that links from that site are deemed to carry.

Ranking: Is the position of your websites within the search engine indexes for a particular keyword. When all is said and done ranking is what it all comes down to and is what every webmaster should be striving for. The better your ranking the more visitors you get and the more income your site will make.

Reciprocal Link: A link from one site to another that is then reciprocated by a link from that site to the original site. Reciprocal links carry less importance with the search engines and should be avoided if possible. A standard reciprocal link is one in which site A links to site B and site B links back to site A. It is preferable to get a three-way link in which site A links to site B and site B links to Site C, which is also owned by the person who owns site A. As with all links, links from sites in the same subject carry more weight.

Referrer: The referrer is the page from which a visitor came to your site. Your server will capture lots of important information about the referrer, such as keywords used if it was a search engine or the link followed. Analysis of the server logs can then help to improve your site's optimization.

Robots.txt: If you wish to control which parts of your site a search engine spider indexes, you can use a robots.txt file to prevent the spider from indexing certain parts. Not all spiders will follow it, but it can be a useful tool if parts of your site are not ready for indexing.

Spamming: This refers not to bulk emails for Viagra, but rather to the process of trying to manipulate the search engines to rank your sites well. Getting caught spamming the search engines will usually result in your site being de-indexed.

Spider/Bot/Robot: These are what the search engines use to index your site. They work by following and recording links and taking note of what the page is about.

White Hat: A reference to proper SEO methods that are approved by the search engines. Using these methods increases your chances of your site being permanently indexed in the search engines.

About the Author

Mark Thompson spent many years working in IT consultancy in London. Following a re-evaluation of his goals and lifestyle in 2004 he sold everything he couldn't fit into the family car and moved to rural Spain where he now pursues a variety of online ventures.

See: <http://www.income-academy.com>

10 Essential On-Page SEO Techniques

by Kathy Jackson

Many people spend a great deal of time on search engine optimization. They do this in order to boost the search engine ranking for their websites, so that they might enjoy natural search traffic.

There are numerous on-page SEO techniques that you could, and should, use. However, some of those techniques are absolutely essential, even if you don't have a great deal of interest in SEO. Below is a description of ten of the most important on-page SEO techniques, and how you should use them.

Search engines don't spider pages with messy code because they cannot correctly read the code. This, of course, results in not getting listed in the search engines.

1 - Clean HTML Code

Search engines prefer tidy houses. In this instance, your website is your house. Simply put, search engines don't spider pages with messy code because they cannot correctly read the code. This, of course, results in not getting listed in the search engines.

You can use an HTML validator to ensure that your web pages comply with the latest HTML standards. A good validator will show you what and where the mistakes are, so that you can get them fixed easily.

You can find free HTML validators on the Internet, and most HTML editors also have a built-in validator. You can also use the web-based validator provided by the [W3C](http://validator.w3.org/) at <http://validator.w3.org/>. Don't assume that just because you are using a template, merely checking that template is enough. Complete the HTML page, and check each and every page as you go. Remember – not doing this can mean not getting spidered at all!

2 - Proper Use of Keywords in Alt Tags

In your HTML code, you will see numerous alt tags. These are attached to graphics, hyperlinks, tables, and more. It is important to include your keywords in these tags.

In the past, webmasters used these alt tags so that the text used within the tags would appear even if the graphic or link did not. This was the case when there were so many compatibility problems between browsers.

Today, the alt tag is used to improve the SEO of a web page. Search engine spiders look at alt tags to see what they say. Ideally, yours will contain your keyword phrase, or your main

keyword – not just a spam-type listing of all of your keywords. You absolutely do not want to spam your keywords in your alt tags – or anywhere else on your page. Furthermore, you want to be sure that the keywords you are using in the alt tags correspond with the keywords that are used in the content on that page.

Many SEO experts have deemed the use of keywords in alt tags ineffective these days, because this technique has been excessively abused with the use of spamming keywords. However, because using the alt tags plays into clean, compliant navigation, it is still an important aspect of SEO.

Today's search engines not only read very well, but also are adept at figuring out what a user means when they type terms into a search box.

3 - Proper Use of Keywords throughout the Content

After you have carefully selected your keywords, subkeywords, and keyword phrases, you will of course be using them throughout the text on your pages. There is a right way and a wrong way to use keywords in content, however.

Keep your content to between 400 and 650 words in length. If it is shorter than that, the search engines won't see it as relevant; if it is too long, the search engines will have a harder time determining which keywords to focus on.

Use your keywords about 2 percent of the time. Thus, for a 650-word page, the keyword or keyword phrases should appear about 13 times. Don't overuse your keywords, and make sure that the content "sounds" natural when you read it aloud.

4 - Proper Use of the Title Tag

The title tag is located between the <head></head> tag of your HTML page. The text that you write in that tag will be displayed at the top of the browser window when that page is being viewed. Because the search engine spiders see the title tag first, it is extremely important.

Your main keyword should be the very first thing you put inside the title tag. Secondary keywords should follow the main keyword, and you should avoid using all capital letters. It is fine to use punctuation in the title tag.

5 - Clean Navigation

You want visitors to find their way around your site easily – and the search engines want that as well. Ideally, you should consider using CSS style sheets to set up your navigation, if for nothing else.

Next, use a logical sequence for your navigation, depending on what the topic of your site is. Start with broad categories, and work your way in. For example, your main page may have a navigational link for "Medicine." Clicking on that link should take the user to a page with more specific links, such as alternative medicine or Western medicine, and from there, a

breakdown of medications that your site discusses.

6 - Content for Human Consumption, Not Just Search Engines

At one time, webmasters constructed pages with text that was meant as fodder for search engines, but did little for human consumption. Today, this is not advised.

You will find that you do better in the search engines if your text reads naturally. For example, you don't want to use terms like "medicine alternative"; you would, however, use the term "alternative medicine." Today's search engines not only read very well, but also are adept at figuring out what a user means when they type terms into a search box. If someone used "medicine alternative," the search engine would be able to understand that he/she is looking for information regarding alternative medicine.

7 - Internal Text Links

Much has been made of reciprocal linking and one-way links from important sites (often called "authority sites"). This is really an off-page SEO method which can be useful for initial indexing and viral marketing. But as far as on-page linking, what you do need a great deal of is internal links.

Even though the search engines are placing less importance on the number of inbound links that you have – unless they are important inbound links – search engine spiders still love links. Proper internal linking allows search engines spiders to find and ultimately index every single page on your site. Be sure that you link to every page on your site, and

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not just in your navigational menus but in your content. This also gives you the opportunity to use your keyword more, in the alt tags.

Even though the search engines are placing less importance on the number of inbound links that you have, they do still love links. You do this with internal linking, meaning that you link to different pages on your site in your content.

8 - Heading Tags and Bold Text

The <H1> and <H2> tags get special attention from the search engines. These are used to make heading and subheading text bigger and bolder than other text. It is important not only to use these tags (don't overdo it), but also to use your keywords or keyword phrases in these tags.

Make sure that you use descriptive text below your header text, and also use the bold tag for keywords throughout your page. Bullet points are also favored by the search engines.

9 - Meta Tags Still Matter

You will hear that meta tags don't really matter anymore. This information is absolutely wrong – meta tags do matter indeed! The meta tag appears in the <head></head> tag of your HTML code, after the <title> tag. Two parts of the meta tag deserve particular attention – the description meta tag and the keywords meta tag.

The description meta tag is the information that users will see in the search engine results. This description should, of course, contain your main keyword, and possibly some secondary keywords, and it should look like this:

```
<meta name="description" content="[Insert content here]">
```

For content, use a descriptive paragraph of what users will find at your website, including keywords and secondary keywords. Make sure that the grammar, punctuation, and spelling are correct.

The keyword meta tag contains your keywords, and it is vital that you not spam your keywords here. Just use each of your relevant keywords or phrases once in the keyword meta tag, which looks like this:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="[Your keywords]">
```

The keywords you insert should be separated by commas. You don't need 50 keywords; 10–15 will do.

10 - Include a Site Map

Site maps serve two purposes. First, they make it easy for your visitors to find content on your site, and second, they enable search engines to spider your site much faster. When the spider arrives, they will read the first page of your site and then start looking at the navigational links. They will visit each link, and when they find the site map, they will then start visiting and indexing each link on that site map.

It is a good idea to have more than links on your site map. Try to include short paragraphs of description text for each link, which of course should contain your keywords.

Creating a site map isn't difficult at all. In fact, Google has made it quite easy. You can get started with Google site maps, and other webmaster tools at <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/>.

Use These Tips Wisely

These ten tips will easily help you get started with on-page SEO. Above all, make absolutely sure that you never use any techniques that search engines would consider "black hat," or cheating. Search engines hate cheaters! If you are caught using black hat techniques for SEO, such as spamming keywords or using hidden text, the search engines won't index your site at all. In fact, it can get your domain banned from the search engines, for life.

You can watch your website statistics to see when the search engine spiders visit. You will then be able to gauge the effectiveness of your SEO efforts by waiting a few days and seeing if you've risen through the ranks. If not, you can put more effort into your SEO. But if you have, congratulations! You are on your way to becoming an SEO guru!

About the Author

Kathy Jackson is a Texas Rancher and freelance writer. She is also a contributing author for several farm and ranch publications. Internet marketing is one of Kathy's burning interests and she is just "tickled pink" to write for AC Magazine and Anik Singal, her marketing hero. On the Affiliate Classroom Blog (<http://blog.affiliateclassroom.com/>), you will find several articles by Kathy on various aspects of affiliate marketing.

Going “Off-Page” with Your SEO Efforts

by Matt Van Atta

In a sense, affiliate marketing works like a domino effect – first, traffic goes to your website; then, traffic reads about your product(s); then, traffic proceeds from your site to the merchant’s site; then traffic buys the product(s); and then, cha-ching, baby! But in order to enact that effect, you have to push the first domino.

Establishing a high place in the search engine rankings for your website is arguably the most important thing you can do to push that domino. That’s why search engine optimization (SEO) is an essential part of any manual of affiliate marketing. And that’s why it’s important to craft your website around the keywords that are most prominent in the minds of your target audience.

Think of SEO as similar to driving an SUV. SUVs are popular among people who stick to driving on pavement, but in order to see what an SUV can “really do,” you have to take it off-road, where the terrain is less certain. If you want to see what your website can do in the search engine rankings, you have to take it “off-page.”

However, adjusting your page content, your title and meta tags, and other components of your website – known as “on-page” SEO – is not always enough.

Off-page SEO – techniques to achieve better search engine rankings for your website without even touching the website content itself – is just as important, if not more so. The main difference between on-page and off-page SEO is one of control – you have less control over the effects of off-page techniques than you do over on-page techniques.

Think of SEO as similar to driving an SUV. SUVs are popular among people who stick to driving on pavement, but in order to see what an SUV can “really do,” you have to take it off-road, where the terrain is less certain. If you want to see what your website can do in the search engine rankings, you have to take it “off-page.” What follows are a few off-page SEO techniques that you should consider.

You Post My Link, I’ll Post Yours

Perhaps the most common, and simplest, off-page SEO technique is the **reciprocal link**. This technique involves a swapping of links between you and the owner of another website. The idea behind this is as follows: the more links to your website that are found on other websites, the more popular your website appears to be, and so the greater the attention the search engines will pay to your website.

The key here is to network with other participants in your niche and examine what they do on their websites. Granted, some of those participants may be competitors of yours, either because they promote products that compete with yours, or they may even promote the same product you do. But chances are that the majority of participants do different things within the niche, and so they serve to complement your efforts rather than oppose them. In any event, it's better to exchange links with people whose website content relates to yours and who do not engage in keyword stuffing or other "spam-like" activities.

Don't turn your back on individuals who meet these criteria but whose sites may not be near the top of the search engine rankings, or who are not considered "gurus" in your niche. You never know when someone who isn't well known now will become a guru within the niche later. And if that happens, you can ride that person's coattails, as his/her increased website exposure will mean increased exposure for your site as well. And who knows – you could become the next guru yourself.

Websites that carry some degree of respect or authority within your niche are another way to boost your search engine rankings. An authority website contains sufficient high-quality content in its area of expertise that people in a particular niche refer to it regularly.

Reciprocal linking has fallen into some disfavor with the search engines, and you should never focus solely on this method. However, if you are just getting started and just want others to hear about your website, this method provides a good starting point. Just make sure that your links go to a variety of important pages on your site, rather than only to your home page.

Contacting the Local Authorities with Article Marketing

Websites that carry some degree of respect or authority within your niche are another way to boost your search engine rankings. An **authority website** contains sufficient high-quality content in its area of expertise that people in a particular niche refer to it regularly. Article directories are the best example of this, such as EzineArticles.com; but other types of websites fit this category. Regardless of subject matter, these are usually large sites, with hundreds of web pages; strong, themed content that is constantly updated; and links that are never broken.

Because of their reputation as authorities, these websites usually rank high with Google and other search engines. Obtain a one-way link to your site from one of these, and your own site's rankings can jump up the charts. However, it's not always as simple as emailing an owner of such a site and saying, "Hey, how about a link to my site?" These sites have earned their reputations as authority sites because they know their stuff about the niche. They won't link to just any "Joe Schmoe" website, because they have reputations, and a revenue source, to uphold.

The best way to get a link to your website from theirs is to show you know your stuff, too. And that means going to the word processor of your choice and starting to write. Prepare at least

one content article related to your niche – ideally, several articles, each applying different keywords, and including backlinks to different pages on your site. Make sure the backlinks you insert in your content are not broken, or your article may not be posted.

Afterwards, send your content to one or more authority sites that function in your niche. If your content is of high quality, authority sites will most likely post them. In turn, content publishers draw content from these authority sites; if your article is selected, it could take on a promotional life of its own with back links spread organically.

Piggyback on a few authority websites with your content, and you'll grow the number of links to your own website – and make the search engines take notice.

It's Bookmarked on My Social Calendar

We're all familiar with bookmarks (aka "favorites" for you aficionados of Internet Explorer), which we store on our computers so that it's easy for us to access our favorite web pages and files. **Social bookmarking** serves in a way as the next level/generation of bookmarks, with the entire Internet serving as the container instead of a single computer.

Moreover, social bookmarking websites enable registered web users to store and organize pages and files on the sites, as well as to vote "up or down" on new entities that are submitted.

These sites, such as del.icio.us, digg, reddit, StumbleUpon, and many others, divide the content into numerous categories, enabling the user to look at what sites are "hot" in their area of interest. It's a way for people of similar interests to interact with one another. And because content is posted daily and "hot content" rises and falls in the sites' own rankings, folks like Google take notice.

Social bookmarking serves in a way as the next level/generation of bookmarks, with the entire Internet serving as the container instead of a single computer.

So how do you get in on this? Find the social bookmarking sites that provide the best possible coverage of your niche, and submit material. It can be the URL for your website, a content article, or anything else that you believe will benefit your target audience.

Social bookmarking sites can be somewhat of a double-edged sword. Once you've submitted material, it's up to the folks who visit the sites to render a verdict on the value of your submission. But, even if those visitors vote down your submission, it at least gives you an idea as to what they are looking for, so you can tailor future materials accordingly.

Press the Flesh Directly via Web 2.0

Submitting content to authority sites and social bookmarking sites are a relatively formal, organized way to spread the word about your site. Another technique, which involves more direct interaction with members of your target audience, is participation in Web 2.0 forums such as blogs and discussion boards.

In my article "5 Days to More Free Traffic" (*Affiliate Classroom Magazine*, May 2007), I mention the importance of participating in Web 2.0 forums as a means to drive traffic to your website. The more comments you post on these forums, the greater the number of opportunities to display links to pages on your website.

And because search engines take notice of these forums because of both the quality and the ever-changing nature of their content, it's another way to show how prominent your website is. But participate responsibly; doing nothing but posting your website all over a particular forum is a form of spamming. This maneuver will get you blackballed not only by the forum's participants, but by the search engines as well.

Did I Mention Free Admission?

These are just some of the approaches you can take to enhance your search engine positioning via off-page SEO. Possibly the best part about these techniques is that they do not cost you a dime to use. All you have to do is select the one approach or combination of approaches that best suit your needs, and get started.

Regardless of how you proceed, these techniques will consume a good deal of your time. But the increased rankings your website receives in the search engines will be well worth the time you spend. Good luck, and enjoy your "off-page" experience!

About the Author

Matt Van Atta is a freelance writer and copyeditor for clients in both web-based and print publishing. He has spent many years crafting the written word in both marketing communications and academia, but decided only in the past few years that working at home was better than driving to work, and that a golf course is always better than a cubicle. His definition-oriented posts for affiliate marketing newbies and others can be found on the *Affiliate Classroom* blog.

Measuring Your Business: Web Statistics for Affiliates

Part Two of a Two-Part Series

by Katalin Torok, <http://mktg.idared.net>

In last month's Affiliate Classroom magazine, we covered the very basics of web statistics: how to measure the traffic that your site attracts. After evaluating various web statistics programs, we highlighted the most important metrics you need to pay attention to when evaluating your traffic.

In this second part of the article, we round out those traffic stats with additional numbers that describe your website in order to get a more holistic view of your business. Finally, we move on to business metrics to evaluate the success of your website according to your business goals.

Additional Metrics to Evaluate Your Website

A good statistics package will tell you everything you need to know about your website traffic – the number of visitors, how much time they spend on your site, where they are coming from, what browsers they use, etc.

Monitoring services keep records of your website's performance. Periodically review these and don't hesitate to move hosts if uptime and server response times worsen.

But a lot of important details about your website remain invisible to your analytics program. For example, it won't tell you if your site is unreachable for a little while every day. It won't tell you your link popularity, or how much buzz your site generates on the social web. Fortunately, you can gather all this information using free tools available to any webmaster.

Uptime Monitoring

As an affiliate, you cannot afford an unreachable website. When looking for a web host, reliability – preferably verified by a trustworthy source – should be of highest importance, and there are free tools available for continuous uptime monitoring.

These tools work by trying to reach your website at a given interval, which can range from every five minutes to every hour. They record the time it takes for your website to answer the query. If your website is unavailable at a check, the service notifies you via email or a text message so you can take action. The best solutions work with several checkpoints sprinkled throughout the world, because regional network slowness can impact your results significantly.

Monitoring services keep records of your website's performance. Periodically review these and don't hesitate to move hosts if uptime and server response times worsen.

Take a look at these free monitoring services:

Mon.itor.us – <http://mon.itor.us/>
Host-tracker.com – <http://host-tracker.com/>

If you decide to run a link-building campaign, not only can you track the success of your campaign – you can also check results compared to the periods when you didn't make a conscious effort to attract links.

Backlinks

Backlinks – sites that link to your website – help your search engine rankings. Therefore, it is helpful to look at the number of links you have attracted over time. If you decide to run a link-building campaign, not only can you track the success of your campaign – you can also check results compared to the periods when you didn't make a conscious effort to attract links.

You can type "link:yourdomainname.com" into Google for a quick and simple way to see the backlinks Google finds for your site. However, these may not give you the complete picture. Look around in your referrer stats in your analytics program for new referrers. Keep in mind that while many backlinks can boost your search rankings, it is the good referring sites that actually bring in the quality traffic that results in actual revenue.

Tracking "Buzz"

Before the web turned into "the social web," just about the only option for researching opinions on your website was to search on message boards for messages posted about your site. Like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Thankfully, now that every corner of the web is busy with user-generated content and action, tracking the buzz generated by your site is whole lot easier.

Use blog search engines (Technorati or Google Blog Search, for example) to track blog posts that mention your site. This is more important for certain niches, where unique content is what attracts the audience. Blogs can be a very lucrative traffic source, so once you decide to conquer the blogosphere, it is time to track your results, too.

Social bookmarking sites like del.icio.us, furl.net, or stumbleupon.com provide stats on each website in their system. Check how many people bookmarked your site every once in a while.

Tracking buzz about your site will probably not be the biggest priority, but it can give you unique qualitative insight to round out the many quantitative metrics of your web business.

Heatmaps

Heatmaps have been used in web research for years, but came with a heavy price tag. Now, every webmaster has the opportunity to use this invaluable tool to test their website. A heatmap is a visual representation of the most popular areas on your web page. It shows you which links, images, and page areas receive the highest volume of clicks from your visitors.

Check out <http://crazyegg.com/> for a free heatmap tool, or check your "Site overlay" report in

your Google Analytics account.

Marketing Campaign Metrics

If you run paid search campaigns or email campaigns, your search and email marketing solution will give you detailed statistics on every activity. Save these stats into a spreadsheet after every campaign to see which campaigns bring in the most visitors or revenue.

Your analytics software will tell you whether your latest marketing campaign brought in a huge amount of traffic. But unless you compare it to the campaign data itself, it won't tell you which keywords or emails worked best to bring in that traffic. If you run paid search campaigns or email campaigns, your search and email marketing solution will give you detailed stats on every activity.

Save these stats into a spreadsheet after every campaign to see which campaigns bring in the most visitors or revenue. For example for an email marketing campaign, you may want to track the number of emails sent, open rate, click-through rate, and generated revenue.

To save yourself time compiling the different stats, many analytics solutions allow "tagging" your links so they show up as coming from a certain marketing campaign in your traffic reports. (If you are using Google Adwords, your Adwords stats can be linked to your Analytics account, giving you instant insight into your campaign results.)

Data from Your Merchant Partners

You probably already check your merchants' statistics more often than your own website stats – this is the actual revenue we are talking about, after all.

To get the most out of these stats, create a few custom spreadsheets and make a habit of copy-pasting your most important metrics into them from your own web statistics program and your merchant partners' statistics. These spreadsheets will give you a better overview, and more reliable stats, about your business than either of them on its own.

Your spreadsheet could include the number of visitors, page views, and the amount of orders and revenue for a period of time (week, month). This enables you to calculate stats such as revenue/visitor, and orders/visits.

For example, orders/visits (dividing the number of orders, or sales, by the number of visits) will give you your conversion rate. Compare this metric with the click-through rate shown for the same period by your merchant/network. If your click-through rate keeps growing, but your conversion rate remains low, that should be a warning sign: your website converts visitors into shoppers, but the merchant(s) fail to convert those shoppers into actual buyers.

To get even more detailed stats, you can break down all these statistics for your product categories, or specific merchants. But don't forget the big picture, either. These detailed stats will show you which areas are more profitable and which areas are not worth pushing, while the big picture stats can give you an overall feel on how your business is developing.

Building Your Own Statistics System

We have covered a lot of different data sources in the two parts of this article, so your head may be spinning from all the numbers. Keep in mind that these are all available statistics that you can record, but you probably don't need them all every day to make decisions about your business.

Don't get lost in too much detail, because the more numbers you need to input every week into your sheets, the less chance that you will keep up with them. Tracking the most important metrics – your visits, page views, revenue, and most important referrers and merchant partners – can provide a solid long-term overview of how your business is developing.

Keep an archive of all the rest of the statistics available about your business, so that you have them at hand should you decide to look into those details later on. (Not to mention that analytics firms and software packages come and go, so keep a backup of your data! Better safe than sorry.)

If you are serious about building your affiliate business, invest some time into working out a statistics tracking approach that suits your business goals and work style. As your business grows, you will quickly get a feel for which statistics provide the most meaning to you in your day-to-day work.

About the Author

Katalin Torok is an independent marketing consultant with a focus on Web 2.0. Her website and blog contains many helpful tips at: <http://mktg.idared.net> .

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