

SEO A to Z

Compton Solutions – SEO

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A – Anchor Text – Anchor text is the text used in links. The search engines use the anchor text in a link to a page to help determine the content of the target page. Always ensure that when linking internally you use your keywords in your anchor text and when getting external backlinks always try to have them include your keywords in the anchor text of the link. Just remember not to overdo the number of internal links (you don't want to be penalised for spam) and to vary the anchor text from external links if you can.

<http://www.webpronews.com/topnews/2004/04/08/anchor-text-optimization>

B – Backlinks – A backlink is a link to a page. Backlinks are crucial to gaining good rankings for your pages as on a simplistic level they are counted as “votes” for a page/site. Backlinks are not created equal though, a backlink from a new page which itself has no backlinks and has unrelated content is not worth as much as a link from an established page which itself has many external backlinks and has content of a similar and relevant type to the destination page. The fewer backlinks on a linking page the better for the destination page as the amount of “juice” that is passed from a page is diluted amongst it's links.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backlink>

C – Crawlers – Crawlers (also known as Spiders) are automated software that the search engines use to “crawl” the web. It is essential that you create a site which the crawlers can navigate as if they can't find your pages then they can't crawl them, Once arrived at a page you need to make sure that the page content is understandable to the crawler, if not it has nothing to with which to classify your page. To understand how a crawler sees your site use a tool such as www.seochat.com's spider simulator. Always remember to write for your human readers as a first priority though.

<http://www.seochat.com/seo-tools/spider-simulator/>

D – Domain names – When starting a new site you have to choose a domain name, and your choice can have an effect on your future search rankings. Keywords in a domain can be good as they do count (a little) to how well you will rank for searches that contain keywords that are in your domain and people will tend to link to you with your domain name as the anchor text. However on the negative side a keyword heavy domain will typecast your site and make it difficult to expand it into new areas in the future, sometimes it is better to create a “brand”. Do a search for one of the really competitive search terms such as “car insurance” and you'll see most of the top listings have neither “car” nor “insurance” in their domain names.

<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/how-to-choose-the-right-domain-name>

E – Error Pages – An area that many sites neglect is to make their error pages search engine friendly as well as human friendly. The standard IIS and Apache error pages are pretty unfriendly to search engine and user alike. However it is easy to design error pages that fit within your sites design and includes navigation will help guide search engine crawlers and human users alike back into your main site.

<http://www.searchmarketingstandard.com/blog/2007/03/the-importance-of-optimizing-your-404-pages.html>

F – Flash – Loved by designers, loathed by SEO's, Flash is re-occurring conflict in the web world. The trouble is that historically the search engines find it difficult to determine the content of Flash. The ultimate sin is to use Flash to design an entire site or as your only method of navigation. Ultimately Flash can be used successfully in a site without negatively affecting SEO as long as you use it where it adds value to your site users and providing you provide alternative methods of getting at the information and links in the Flash piece where appropriate.

<http://www.jehochman.com/articles/seo-friendly-flash.shtml>

G – Google Alerts – Google Alerts are an excellent tool for any SEO. You simply enter a search query and set the frequency at which you want to receive alerts on the keyword and then Google will email you every time it indexes new content with that search term. It's a great way of keeping an eye on your competitors and your marketplace and you can also use it to be alerted when your own site gets mentioned or gains backlinks.

<http://www.google.com/alerts>

H – Header Tags – The header tags in a webpage is a key indicator to the pages content to the search engines. Every page should ideally have a single <H1> tag that sums up the pages content and includes the main keywords the page is optimised for. <H2> and lower tags should be used to introduce sections of content hierarchically. A page missing header tags is losing valuable on-page indicators.

http://www.w3schools.com/tags/tag_hn.asp

I – Images – just about every site contains images, but the search engines can't understand the content of an image by itself (which is why putting text content within an image is such a cardinal sin). We can help the search engines to understand the content of an image by a couple of methods. First off always use the “alt” attribute when embedding an image and put a short textual description of the content of the image, secondly name the image file as descriptively as possible (i.e. sunset-at-dover.jpg rather than IMG00022121.jpg). A good tip if “borrowing” images from others is to always make sure you rename them.

<http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/matt-video-alt-attributes-for-images/>

J – Javascript – It used to be that the search engines didn't read Javascript, but that is no longer strictly the case, now they can read “some” Javascript, though it's not 100% clear what exactly they can understand and what they cannot. The way to make sure that the search engines will be able to fully understand and index your site if you use Javascript is to ensure that you make any Javascript functionality degrade gracefully. This is not just best practice for SEO but also for accessibility. Also consider where you can use more search engine friendly techniques other than Javascript, such as using CSS for drop down navigation. When using Javascript its a good idea to split it out into include files rather than embedding within the page as this saves bandwidth when scripts are shared between pages and improved your page load times.

<http://www.devarticles.com/c/a/JavaScript/Making-JavaScript-Applications-Degrade-Gracefully/>

K – Keywords – Every website and every webpage needs to understand what it's keywords are. Keywords (and a by keyword we include keyword phrases) describe your site and page content, and they are what the search engines classify your site with and what search engine users use as search terms when performing a search. When writing any content it's important to write content with the keywords in mind that you expect people to use when searching. When choosing the keywords to aim at remember that the more popular a keyword is as a search term the more people are going to be optimising for it, sometimes it can pay to shoot a bit lower and pick up some traffic from less competitive keywords rather than no traffic for a very competitive keyword.

<http://www.seochat.com/c/a/Choosing-Keywords-Help/How-to-Effectively-Choose-Your-Web-Sites-Keywords/>

L – LSI – An individual word can have many different meanings depending upon the context in which it is used. An easy example is “apple”, which in one context can be a fruit and in another it can be a technology company. Latent Semantic Indexing is a technique that allows search engines to work out the context in which words on a page are being used within the content of the entire page. LSI is also used in the context of user searches, allowing it to return results that are appropriate within the context of the search keywords. Google place a very large amount of weighting to LSI in determining its search results.

<http://allaboutseo.wordpress.com/2006/12/19/google-lsi/>

M – Matt Cutts – Matt is the Head of Google's webspam team. His team is responsible for making sure that the Google organic search results are free of spam and return relevant results. He is probably the most well known Google employee as he is a very publicly accessible and is a well known blogger and video blogger on the subject of SEO as it affects Google (with the apparent blessing with his employers), as well as being a frequent speaker at SEO and webmaster events worldwide. As with all things though remember that Matt works for Google and will always represent Google's best interest not necessarily that of the SEO community.

<http://www.mattcutts.com/blog>

N – Nofollow – Linking to a page (either internally or externally from your site) counts as a “vote” for the destination page and Page Rank is passed from the origin page to the destination page, we'll call this “link juice”. Now there may be times when you don't want to pass this link juice to the destination page, for external links this may be because the owner of the destination page has paid you for this link (and it is against the terms of service of several of the search engines to sell links for Page Rank benefit) or it may be an unimportant internal page (such as a “terms and conditions” page) that may have a link to it from every page on your site and you want to stop the search engines from seeing this page as one of your most important (due to the number of inbound links). To prevent passing link juice in such cases we can use the rel=”nofollow” attribute on individual links, which is an explicit instruction to the search engines not to pass link juice. You can also set nofollow as a meta tag at page level which will set all links from the page as nofollow without the attribute having to be set on each individual link. You can use the nofollow tag to control which pages internally on your site that you direct Pagerank to, a common example being restricting all but one link to common pages that have many internal links ,such as “contact us” pages, so that they do not become Pagerank “sinks” unnecessarily. Not all search engines respect the nofollow tag, Yahoo being the most notable example.

<http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/blog/050118-204728>

O – On-page – On page SEO is that which you can control yourself as a site owner, which also means it's the elements of SEO that you can be penalised for if you do things that are against the search engines terms of service. All elements of site design, navigation, coding, hosting content, etc are all On-page factors. What isn't on-page? Well that's known as off-page and in general are the inbound links to your site from external sites. Off-page SEO is generally believed to be unable to hurt you as it cannot be directly attributed to you.

<http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=3627642>

P – Page Rank – The concept of Page Rank was invented by Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin. At a simplistic level it works by counting each link a page receives from another page as a “vote” for that page, the more votes the higher the page rank given to a page. However in reality not all links are equal, the higher the page rank of the origin page and the closer it's contents relevance to the the receiving page the greater the value that is passed on. Most search engines use similar concepts for ranking pages but under different names (such as “web rank” at Yahoo). An unofficial market in Page Rank has grown up where owners of high page rank sites sell links to other sites, however Google has recently declared this to be against their terms of service as it is a method of artificially influencing the search results. Many sites that were openly selling links for the purpose of passing on page rank have had their page rank devalued.

<http://www.webworkshop.net/pagerank.html>

Q – QDF – Many pages get to the top of the search listings for a search term due to being established long lived pages with many relevant backlinks gained over time. However some user searches will be for topics where the age of a page isn't relevant, they may be searching for a information about a particular breaking news story, or the latest craze, or for information in an area which is fast moving. In cases such as this the Query Deserves Freshness of QDF factor kicks in and boosts pages based on the freshness of their content.

<http://www.goupstate.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070603/ZNYT01/706030354/1051/NEWS01>

R – Robots.txt – Sometimes you might not want the search engines to crawl some or all of your pages (you might not want login pages to admin areas of your site to appear in the listings for example). To control where the search engine crawlers are and are not allowed to crawl on your site you use a file named “robots.txt” that you place in the root directory of your website in which you can set exclusion rules. All the major search engines respect directives in robots.txt, but beware as some of the smaller search engines do not. You can also use your robots.txt file to notify the search engines where your xml-sitemap (if you have one) is located. If exchanging links with another site always check their robots.txt file to ensure that they are not blocking the search engines from accessing the page that your link will be on, if it is blocked then your backlink is worthless.

<http://www.robotstxt.org/>

S – Sitelinks – A common SEO question is “how do I get the extra little links under my Google search listing like xyz.com does when searching for 'xyz' ?”. These extra listings are known as Sitelinks and they are generated automatically by Google. They will only be displayed if Google thinks that they will help the user and if your site is deemed particularly relevant for a search term. A poor site structure can hamper Google from generating Sitelinks for your site. If you are looking to gain sitelinks for your site having a large number of deeplinks into you site will help.

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=47334>

T - Titles – The Title tag is one of the most important on-page factors that a page has. A well written and concise title will neatly describe the contents of a page to both the search engines and your human readers. It's important to include your keywords in the page title, but not to overdo it so that it looks like spam. Each page on a site should have a unique title. A common mistake is to start all your page titles with your domain or brand name, if you do wish to have your domain or brand on every title for branding purposes then always put your domain/brand at the end of the title rather than at the beginning. Most search engine results pages limit the display of the Title tag (Google to 65 characters for example), so try and keep your titles under these limits.

http://www.w3schools.com/tags/tag_title.asp

U – URL Re-writing – It's quite easy to end up with horrible URL's on a site nowadays what with the prevalence of content management and blogging systems out there. It helps neither the search engines or the human reader to have a url such as www.yourdomain.com/w776h/g.php?z=TH7TGF7&y=HHJHs88JJ8, it's hard for a human to remember and you are missing out on valuable keyword space for the search engines to consume. With URL re-writing you can set your webserver up to rewrite these horrid URL's into something friendly to all your visitors, human and search engine alike. So we can easily turn that URL into www.yourdomain.com/friendly-keyword-rich-url.

<http://www.seochat.com/seo-tools/url-rewriting/>

V – Video – Video content is a new area for most websites, when Google bought YouTube it signalled its intention to bring Video content into the search arena, and the major search engines are bringing video content into their results listings. Compared to other forms of content it's believed that the video along with audio, are the ones which it has the most trouble understanding. Therefore it's essential to provide as much textual content to accompany your videos to enable the search engines to properly understand them.

<http://www.blinkx.com/video-technology#Video%20SEO>

W – Whitehat – One of two distinct SEO camps, the Whitehats work within the terms of service set by the search engines and therefore do not employ any techniques that will risk a site being given a penalty or ban. The opposing camp are the Blackhats who will manipulate the search engines in any way they can to achieve rankings regardless of the possible consequences. In reality though most SEO's are what might be considered Grey hats, as ultimately any SEO work is aiming to manipulate the search rankings and the line between white and black is very hard to place, hence everyone is a differing shade of grey!

<http://www.silverdisc.co.uk/articles/seohats/>

X – XML Sitemaps – An XML Sitemap is a file that you can submit to the search engines that contains a list of the URL's that make up your website along with metadata for each URL (date of last update, frequency of updates and how important a URL is compared to others on the site). The XML sitemap acts as an aid to the crawlers when they are crawling your site, but they do not act as a guarantee that a page will be crawled or indexed.

<http://xmlsitemap.com/>

Y – Yahoo – One of the Internet survivors, and still a popular search engine. One of its best uses is it's Site Explorer tool that gives you one of the most complete backlink finder tools for a site (OK if it's a site you own then Google Webmaster Tools is probably the best, but for sites that aren't yours then Yahoo is your best bet). Simply go to Yahoo and do a search for “link:www.domain.com” and you'll get what you are looking for.

<http://www.yahoo.com>

Z – Zeitgeist – Thought there wasn't a “Z” entry for SEO? Well Google provide a tool called Zeitgeist, which they describe as “Search Patterns, trends, and surprises”. It basically allows you to see search trends over time split by country.

<http://www.google.com/intl/en/press/zeitgeist.html>

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