

Become Irresistible to Search Engines: 3 Tips

Integrators can use these tools to help Google, Bing and Yahoo find their sites. *by Don Kreski*



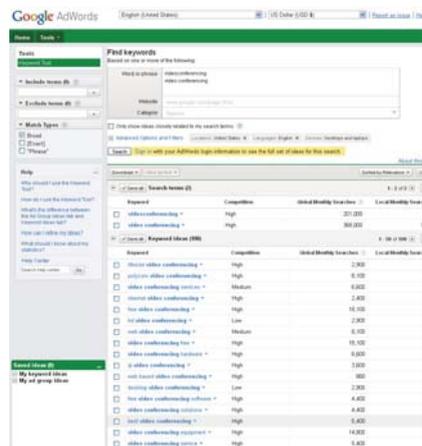
If you want to build traffic for your website, the best place to start is natural search, the free listings that appear in Google, Bing and Yahoo. To rank well here, you'll need to examine your site carefully to make sure your pages are relevant to the search engines as well as to potential customers.

It's important to understand that the search engines want to deliver the best possible information on any topic that someone may search. "In a lot of ways they've come full circle," says Tim Grant, director of search and social media strategy at Gamma Partners in Chicago. "They are emphasizing quality content as they try to rid their indexes of sites with low-quality copy, duplicitous copy and over-optimized text."

As a result, if you focus on creating usable, informative pages you'll have gone a long way toward building a site that will rank well. That being said, there are several steps that will help in the process.

Start with Keywords

Integrators should create a list of keywords and key phrases that define their offerings. It's crucial that these terms are



Google's free keyword tool can help integrators determine how clients search for their offerings.

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the ones that potential customers actually use when they search for a business like yours. "A few years ago we worked on a website for a staffing company who hated the term 'staffing,'" Grant says. "We do staff augmentation," they said. The problem was that very few people ever search for that phrase."

To help you sort out which terms are viable, Google offers its free AdWords Keyword Tool, where you can type in any word or phrase and see the number of searches conducted last month using that term. Better still, it offers suggestions for similar terms and provides their monthly search volume. If I type in "videoconferencing," for example, I learn that there were 74,000 searches for that term in the United States last month, but 135,000 for "video conferencing." Normally we start a keyword analysis by brainstorming terms that might describe a product or service, then check out each in the keyword tool.

Note that the terms that have the highest number of searches are not necessarily the best. It's very often true that longer, more descriptive phrases — say, "multi-point video conferencing" — will describe your offering more exactly. If so, optimizing for the longer term will give you a better

chance of converting visitors into customers, even if it has a lower search volume.

Plan Pages

Once you have your list of priority keywords, you need to define the pages that you will optimize for each topic described by those terms. Generally, one page can be optimized effectively for no more than three closely related terms. One way to look at this is, if you come up with a list of 20 words or phrases that describe your business, you'll need to create or rework at least seven pages to attract potential clients searching with those terms. Or if you have seven services that you want to promote, you'll need to create one page for each, and then optimize each for the three terms that best describe them.

You'll want to look at the navigation of your website at this point as well. The search engines will interpret a page that's accessible from many pages of your website as an important page, and others that are less accessible as less important.

Write Good Copy

The copy you include on each page will be the most important factor in how those pages are ranked. "The bottom line is that high-quality, unique copy about your company, your products and your services grabs the attention of search engines as well as customers," Grant explains.

As you write the copy, be sure to include the key terms you are targeting for that page, so that the search engines can see that they are, in fact, what the page is about. "You also have to realize that you have a very short

OPTIMIZATION TIPS: TAGS, PHOTOS AND MORE

AS INTEGRATORS OPTIMIZE their website pages, they'll find the copy they write will be the most important factor that Google, Bing and Yahoo consider in determining page rank. However, there are other factors to consider:

Tags. The value of meta tags, which appear in the source code for each web page, is much lower than it once was, but they are well worth creating, says Tim Grant, director of search and social media strategy at Gamma Partners in Chicago. The title tag, and to a lesser extent, the meta description tag, are still a factor in the way each page is indexed, but their main value is that they appear in your listing on the search results page. "How you word them will have a strong influence on whether searchers click on the page," he says.

If you search for "Kreski Marketing," for example, the listing in Google will read "Kreski Marketing Consultants — marketing services for the audio visual industry," which is the title tag for my home page. The next line you'll see is the URL, www.kreski.com, and the next reads "Kreski Marketing Consultants offers professional marketing services for the audio visual industry," my meta description tag.

Google has made it clear that they no longer index from the keyword tag, but it's still best practice to include one. If nothing else, it can help you keep track of the terms you are targeting on each page when you work on updates. "Keyword tags were far more important at one time, but they were heavily abused," Grant says.

Photos & Videos. Alt tags, which appear when you roll your mouse over a graphic, are important for two reasons. First, they are indexed as additional text content for the page. Second, they determine how the graphic is indexed for image search results. "Generally image search is more important for product manufacturers," Grant explains, "but it can be an entryway for an A/V integrator." Note that the search engines are not analyzing the image itself, but indexing it using the alt tag and the file name.

"It is possible for Google to index some content from an online

video, but we've never had any luck in getting them to do so," says Grant. Like a photo, a video will most likely be indexed using text associated with it. Grant suggests the best way to add videos to your website is to create and optimize a channel on YouTube, then embed that YouTube video into your web page — but that's a topic for a future column.

URL. Some search engine marketers suggest that the URL, or page address, should contain one of the search terms, but Grant says that is of limited value. "If you're creating a new page then yes, it may be worth including a keyword or phrase [for example, ABCsystems/multipoint-video-conferencing.html]. But if you're updating an existing page, you're much better off leaving the URL as is, because you want to preserve incoming links, social media references, and whatever ranking the page has accrued."

Coding. Sometimes website owners overlook the importance of the way the page is coded for its ranking. "The search engines are looking for clean pages that load quickly," Grant says. "It's one more clue to the quality of the experience their users are likely to have." If you weigh down your pages with oversized, poorly-optimized photos, for example, you're likely to see your rankings suffer. "Even spelling errors can affect how you're ranked in Google."

Basic Steps. If you want good rankings in Google, Bing, Yahoo, and the other sites that use their data, first decide on the products or services you want to emphasize; then find the top two or three phrases that describe each, using the terms that potential customers would use. Once you have your key terms, draft your pages around them. You need quality content. You need to keep your pages fresh and relevant. You need to code the pages cleanly.

"There are no tricks," Grant says. "You want informative pages that are as attractive to potential clients as they are to the search engines." —Don Kreski

window in which to convince your reader that he has, in fact, landed on the page he wants. He needs to see the search term right away — in the headline, for instance — and he also needs to see photos or other materials that convince him he's in the right place."

Brevity is not necessarily a virtue. Although the page must be attractive to potential customers, search engines tend to rank pages with more complete information more highly than shorter pages. "Remember that any page can be an entry way into your website, and so every page must stand on its own," Grant adds. "In addition to the basic topic of the page, readers will want to know who you are, what you do,

whether you serve their geographic area. And they want to learn these things quickly, so you have to organize the pages so they can easily pick out important information."

How often should you use the term? It depends on how much copy is on the page, but generally no more than two or three times. It used to be that using a key term over and over would get you better rankings, but the search engines figured out the tricks years ago.

Freshness is also a factor, and one that services firms often overlook. "It may be that your offerings don't change much from year to year, but Google believes that old products and stale copy are not very valuable," Grant says. "You don't need

to create new pages all the time, but you do need to update important pages frequently if you want them to rank well."

Links from other websites and social media platforms are also important. You'll want to work on securing such links, but to a large degree well-crafted pages offering useful information will, over time, naturally accrue them. There are a number of other factors that you will want to consider, among them meta tags, photos, videos, and the speed your pages load. **CI**

DON KRESKI is president of Kreski Marketing Consultants, which specializes in marketing and PR for the audio visual industry. Find him at kreski.com.

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