

We design and build websites.

Then we host, market and promote them.

Then we analyse and improve them.

We do it every day of the week.

So you have a new website... what's next?

A free guide to SEO from Webfaced.

What is this document & why have Webfaced given it away free?

For many clients, the creation of a website signals the end of a process. The build may have been done internally or by an agency but whichever way it happened it is likely that a lot of time, effort, thought and money went into its creation. The fact is that once a website has been built it should never be the end of the process, your website's existence does not guarantee its success!

A simple analogy normally gets entered at this stage so we will of course oblige!

If you decided to open a shop on your local high street the grand opening would be a momentous occasion. You might have banners and balloons, music playing and maybe even enlist the help of last year's Big Brother runner-up to hand out flyers. Some will be enticed into the shop by the banner on the door, some by the products they can see in the window and some just to witness last year's Big Brother runner-up's rapid fall from celebrity! At the end of your first day you might have sold a few items and certainly some people will have gone home and talked about your new shop and what you sell; good times.

The truth is that whilst opening a shop on the web might be cheaper than on the high street, it is the lack of a physical presence on a high street that means that the launch of your site can *never* be the end of the project. You could open a shop on any high street in the world and people will see you. They will walk past your door on the way to another shop, they will peer into your windows and make a mental note to return if they need something in the future. For the sake of argument, on the web there is no window or high street; once you launch your site it is going to take a miracle for anyone to stumble across it. You need to tell people about your site, point them in the right direction and then push them through the front door.

There are many ways of advertising your business online and many great books that talk you through the processes, however, this document has been put together to inspire you to start looking at Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and gives you some ideas for improving your presence on the web. Webfaced provides [SEO & PPC services](#). If you are new to [search marketing](#) and have read through this document, and require assistance, please [contact the Webfaced team](#).

What is SEO?

SEO is the process of creating and maintaining a web site in order to increase the traffic the site receives from search engines. A good starting question would be, "why focus on search engines?" and the simple answer is that search engines have become the world's most visited high street. In the UK Google takes a 90.39% market share (Hitwise Dec 2008) therefore, as a website owner you have just built your premises on Google street. We know that could be the cheesiest thing you have ever read and from this point the high-street analogy will stop. We promise!

It's worth noting at this point how a Google results page is broken down as SEO only focuses on one area of the page which is highlighted in green below.

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The search result you can see above the green box and those to the right of the screen are Pay Per Click listings and are ranked according to how much the advertiser is willing to pay for each click. PPC is a very useful strategy (particularly early on) and can provide a business with fantastic results. Webfaced offers a [PPC management](#) service, however, this document focuses on organic results (those found in the green area above).

Web pages ranking in the organic search results receive the majority of user's attention (both visually and via clicks); between 60-70% depending on the prominence of ads and the relevance of secondary content. It is this majority of attention coupled with the fact that visits via these links are, unlike sponsored listings, completely free, that makes domination within the natural listings so important.

A search engine wants to be sure that the site it recommends to a user is going to be of interest therefore it compiles a mountain of information about the sites it finds on its travels through the web to make a more informed decision when a user asks it a question. It is providing search engines with this information, both directly and indirectly, that will push your site to the top of the pile.

SEO is a well-known subject where ten years ago it was still a bit of a dark art. Asking most people what factors matter in SEO they would inevitably say, "Keywords on your site". This is certainly the approach that many companies still hold onto. Google have shaken things up with changes to their search algorithms and this document is designed to describe a few important aspects of SEO but NOT everything! If you want to use this document as a starting point for your own work then fantastic, if it inspires you to contact us to discuss a project where we take care of this and much more for you then that's even better!

Why does my website need SEO?

As mentioned above, the majority of web traffic is driven by search engines. If your site cannot be found by search engines or your content is unsuitable you miss out on being listed by the search engines and promoted to millions of users each day. Whether your site provides content, services, products or information, search engines are a primary method of navigation for almost all web users.

Search queries (the words that a user types into the search box which contain terms and phrases best suited to your site) carry extraordinary value. Experience has shown that search engine traffic can make (or break) an organisation's success. Targeted visitors to a website can generate awareness and revenue at a fantastic ROI.

Search engines are continuously improving their technology and returning increasingly relevant results to users. However, there will be elements of a site that they can't understand or that they interpret incorrectly that good SEO could assist with pro-actively. In addition to making content available to search engines, SEO can also help boost rankings taking you higher up the list where searchers will be more likely to see it.

In weighing up whether you should invest in SEO there is a very simple question to ask yourself, "Would you rather pick where you appear in the list of Google results or have someone else decide where your site should appear?". The online environment is becoming increasingly competitive and those companies who perform SEO will have a decided advantage in attracting visitors and customers.

How does a Search Engines Work?

1. **Crawling the Web**

Search engines run automated programs, called 'Bots' or 'Spiders' that use the linked structure of the World Wide Web to 'Crawl' the pages and documents that make up the web.

2. **Indexing Documents**

Once a page has been crawled, its contents can be 'Indexed'. This is when the pages that are found are filed in a giant library that the search engine then uses to match someone's search query with a web page. This index needs to be well managed by the search engine so that requests for billions of documents can be completed in a fraction of a second.

3. **Matching Queries**

When a request for information is given to a search engine by a user (hundreds of millions each day), the engine retrieves from its index all the documents it has found whilst crawling that match the query. A match is determined by the terms or phrase the user is searching for existing in the webpage.

4. **Ranking Results**

Once the search engine has determined which results are a match for the query, the engine's algorithm (a mathematical equation commonly used for sorting) runs calculations on each of the results to determine which is most relevant to the given query and sorts the pages accordingly. The results are then ordered from most relevant to least so that users can make a choice about which to select.

What Problems do Search Engines Experience?

As mentioned in the section above, a search engine crawls the web by following links on pages. This takes a spider on a journey throughout a site and then (if the site has outbound links) onto the next one. If you imagine a thread existing between every link on every site you begin to see how the 'web' got its name. There are certain things to look out for that may make it difficult (or impossible) for a spider to follow a thread through your site:

- Complex URLs with many dynamic parameters eg. `http://www.url.com/page.php?id=4&ID=4&User=%Dom%` (spiders may be reluctant to crawl URLs like this because they often result in errors and broken links)
- Pages with more than 100 unique links to other pages on the site (spiders may not follow each one)
- Pages buried more than 3 clicks/links from the home page of a website (unless there are many other external links pointing to the site, spiders will often ignore deep pages)
- Pages that are split into "frames" can hinder crawling and cause confusion about which pages to rank in the results.
- Pages accessible only via a select form and submit button
- Pages requiring a javascript navigation to access them
- Pages accessible only via a search box
- Pages blocked purposefully from search engines eg. via a robots META tag or robots.txt file
- Pages that re-direct before showing content (search engines call this cloaking or bait-and-switch and may actually ban sites that use this tactic)

Relevance and Popularity

If you do a Google search for "Web Design Webfaced" you will see 9700 possible results. However, Google needs to rank these so that the most relevant and useful result appears at the top. This aids Google's users and makes them return to the search engine which creates a loyal user base and secures valuable advertising revenue for the search engine. The two keys to how the results are ranked are 'Relevance' and 'Popularity'.

Relevance - The degree to which the content of the documents returned in a search matched the user's query intention and terms. The relevance of a document increases if the terms or phrase queried by the user occurs multiple times and shows up in the title of the work or in important headlines or subheaders.

Popularity - The relative importance, measured via links (the act of one work referencing another, as often occurs in academic and business documents) of a given document that matches the user's query. The popularity of a given document increases with every other website that links to it.

Relevance

In document analysis, search engines look at whether the search terms a user enters are found in important areas of the document. Each web page holds some standard information which in the past were the only indicators used to determine relevance. The Page Title, META data, URL and source code within the page are all important elements that you need to ensure remain relevant to the target phrase for the page.

META tags have changed over the years, the META keywords tag for example is widely regarded to no longer be used in the analysis of pages. However, the META description tag is still of some importance, particularly as several search engines use this tag to display the snippet of text below the clickable title link in the results pages, likewise the Page Title also appears here.

Because of the secrecy surrounding search engine algorithm, nobody knows for sure how much of an impact elements like this have on ranking. However, as described earlier, covering all bases offers the best chance of success with search, particularly as Google has been known to switch their algorithmic logic leaving companies with a narrow SEO strategy to fall down or even completely out of the Google index.

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In the image above, an illustration of an entry in the Google SERP shows the use of the META description (black text) and title tags (blue text). It is on this page that searchers generally make their decision as to which result to click, and thus, while the META description tag may have little impact on where a page ranks, it can significantly impact the number of visitors the page receives from human traffic. This is another focus for you as part of SEO Management, it's not just about appearing at the top of the list, it is very much about ensuring that the most amount of people click through to the site.

As these adverts do not cost per click then to attract the most amount of attention the consumer should be encouraged to click it by offering promotion and sales related information in it. This does require specific focus since a high click through rate is a positive thing for SEO. Most of the search engines will use a page's title tag as the blue link text and headline for a result (see images above), and thus it is important to make them informative and compelling. The best title tags will make the targeted keywords prominent, help brand the site, and be as clear and concise as possible.

Search engines are used to dealing with manipulation of the META data above for commercial benefit. For this reason they do not place their full attention on source code and META information because this could be misleading and very different from the content a human actually sees on the page. Targeting the visible text on a page to a search term is very important and is another key focus for SEO Management.

It's important to remember that search engines measure the terms and phrases in a document to extract a great deal of information about the page. Writing well for search engines is not easy, however, more and more, writing for humans is going to benefit your site the most. Genuine natural and fresh content for your target audience which is rich in keywords, informative and engaging will rank well.

- Ensure that the primary search phrase for the page is prominent in the copy
- Ensure that copy is on-topic - Search engines use sophisticated lexical analysis to help match related keywords to primary keywords to ensure that the article really is about what it appears to be. Google for example will scan a site which it believes to be focused on 'web design' and look for words it understands are related (website, design, SEO etc). This is a massive step away from being fooled by 'keyword stuffing', an old black hat technique for cheating the system and is a step towards only showing true human focused content in results.
- Ensure that copy is of high quality - Search engines use the findings of researchers to identify common elements in high quality writing. Thus, great writing can provide benefits to rankings, as well as visitors. Grammatical errors make a webpage hard to read for a user and show a lack of care so it is not surprising that a search engine will not want to recommend it to its user.
- Ensure that the page follows an optimized document structure - The best practice is generally to follow a journalistic format wherein the document starts with a description of the content, then flows from broad discussion of the subject to narrow.

Popularity

As mentioned earlier, the key to good SEO comes down to not only relevance but popularity. Every link to a site is seen as a vote. If your site has a high number of votes from trusted sources, this confidence will flow into your site and you will stand a better chance of being ranked well. The emphasis needs to be on the quantity of quality links as five hundred links from good quality sources is worth more than five thousand links from poor sources. The most well-known system for ranking sites based on link data is the formula

developed by Google's founders. PageRank, which relies on log-based calculations, is described by Google in their technology section:

PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages "important."

A good way to generate links to your website is to influence mainstream or niche press outlets to cover either your brand or the products you sell. This is a highly effective way to drive attention to the site but takes a considerable amount of time to look after. Press release sites are good starting places for driving traffic and links and as these tend to feed the major online news search engines (Yahoo! & Google News), they can provide high visibility as well. Through the publishing of content to these networks and then re-publishing or 'spinning' the articles across other platforms a snowball effect of content and links can be generated.

Many hundreds of thousands of news and offer sites are not pieced together by humans but rather compiled automatically by a program that surfs the web and 'Scrapes' content from sites it finds. This means that over the course of a few months you may find content from your site directly copied onto other sites. This is often seen as a negative point from a brand protection and copyright perspective, however, from an SEO angle it can be very beneficial. If you were to write an article or press release including links to your website and publish it somewhere it is highly likely that after a month that same article (and links) will have been copied and published onto several other sites. So, from the publishing of one article you could generate many links from other sites without having to lift a finger.

Another fairly labour intensive task is the tracking of links obtained by your competitors to find an edge in what is effectively a link building race. Competitor analysis needs to fit into your link building strategy along with proper management of the following:

- **Anchor Text** - describes the visible characters and words that hyperlink to another document or location on the web. You need to ensure that anchor text features relevant keywords which will signal that 'Site X' believes your site is relevant to the words expressed in the link.
- **Global / Local Popularity** - of a site in its geographical market is very important. Where some SEO firms have gone wrong is in building a huge number of links from link farms and directories in a geographic location away from the company's target territory (usually Eastern Europe). Even if all of these links were trusted (which they rarely are) all this does is signal to a search engine that the site being linked to is of most relevance to users in Eastern Europe which can have a detrimental effect to ranking in the home country. If you hear "Thousands of links in 24hrs" comments from an SEO firm chances are you should take your business elsewhere.
- **Relevant Placement** – comes from the search engine's ability to understand a link to your site within the context of the page the link sits on. Search engines have been noted to weight the text directly surrounding a link with greater importance than the other text on the page. Thus, a link from inside an on-topic paragraph may carry greater weight than a link in the sidebar or footer. Part of your SEO work needs to focus on ensuring that links are built in 'on-topic' pages rather than randomly, another failing of many SEO agencies that seek quantity and sacrifice on quality.

A Dozen Top Tips

- 1) **DO** – Research the best keywords to target
- 2) **DO** – Monitor what your competitors are doing
- 3) **DO** – Optimize your title and META tags
- 4) **DO** – Ensure you use H1, H2 and H3 headings in your page copy
- 5) **DO** – Ensure your content has Title and ALT attributes
- 6) **DO** – Ensure your image names reflect your target keywords
- 7) **DO** – Create an HTML sitemap page
- 8) **DO** – Generate and upload an XML sitemap for Google
- 9) **DON'T** – Spam your pages with keywords
- 10) **DON'T** – Neglect your website, keep it fresh and exciting
- 11) **DON'T** – Forget to focus EVERY page at a keyword or words
- 12) **DON'T** – Buy or exchange poor quality links

So that should give you an overview of some of the things you should be looking at from an SEO perspective, the next question is, are you going to do it yourself or enlist the help of an agency like Webfaced?

In-House or Outsourced?

As in many other areas of web development, a long-standing argument exists between those who feel that learning and practicing SEO should be done in-house, versus those who feel it is best left to the professionals. There are advantages to either side, and it's best to weigh these against each other when making a final decision:

Advantages of working with an SEO specialist

- **Diverse Experience** - Professionals with several years of SEO experience under their belts can tell you what to expect from the search engines as you conduct the optimisation process. They can also interpret and understand ranking data that may indicate certain trends or strategies that should be implemented or avoided.
- **Pre-Existing Relationships** - Many SEOs have contacts inside the SEO industry to people with experience in certain fields and expertise in unique areas that can have a great impact on the success of your efforts. If your chosen SEO agency also designed and built your site they will understand you and your market better and this could represent cost savings over time.
- **Link Building Knowledge** - Professionals will have the ability to quickly identify topical communities and the most popular and relevant sites in them, saving time when link building. SEOs also have considerable experience with link acquisition, and will recognize the requirements of certain sites for paid links.
- **Identifying Linkable Content** - SEOs are often masters of crafting and launching content. Not only can they identify the content most likely to get links from the specific web community, they're also experienced in how to package and promote it.
- **Fixing Possible Problems** - Professionals are competent at identifying and managing issues that can cause a lack of indexing, low rankings or penalties from the search engines. This is a skill that can be very hard to develop without years of practice and experience. If you have a ranking issue, an SEO agency can be of great value.
- **Time Savings** - SEO can be an exceptionally time-consuming task. An experienced SEO has the processes and systems of optimisation down to a science and can use that efficiency to provide better service in less time.

Advantages of DIY-SEO

- **Complete Control** - With personal responsibility comes complete control for each element of your site's progress. There can be no question as to who or what created a link or modified a document.
- **Learn from Your Actions** - The ebb and flow of the SERPs will quickly teach an amateur what works and what doesn't. Certain links, timing and on-page changes will be fully visible and recordable, making it a learning process.
- **Personal Responsibility** - Your success or failure will depend entirely on your own efforts, narrowing responsibility and preventing overlaps in work or issues of blame.
- **Cost Savings** - Doing SEO yourself means you don't have to pay someone else. If you find that your time is less expensive than outsourcing the discipline DIY can be a great way to save money.

Next steps

SEO is crucial and as a subject it is very broad. The amount of focus that SEO requires is huge making it a difficult thing to complete internally. This is where [Webfaced](#) can help you with their [search marketing](#) offering. Contact us today to discuss your project in more detail.

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