

Secrets to Search Engine Positioning: How to get found when others search for your site

by Jay Lipe (Marketing Guy) and Ed Kohler (Web Guy)

Imagine for a moment your company owns a kiosk in the mall, and on that kiosk, you've posted award-winning pictures and marketing copy about your product. This is a great marketing tool, right? Maybe.

But now imagine that your kiosk sits, not in the middle of the mall, but off in a dark and dusty corner where no one ever goes. By our reckoning this marketing tool is a downright waste of money.

Much the same principle applies with websites. A high-quality website (the kiosk in this example), by itself, doesn't guarantee success. *How many people see that site ultimately determines its success.*

Below are some tips and techniques to ensure search engines—a key ingredient to web success—drive targeted traffic to your site.

Why You Need Search Engines

A recent survey in Target Marketing magazine ranked the top ways people found websites:

Search Engines	46%
Random surfing	20%
Word-of-mouth	20%
Magazine ads	4%
By accident	2%
TV spots	1%
Targeted Email	1%
Other	6%

Another internet survey showed that over 85% of global surfers use Search Engines to find goods and services. Clearly, search engines are a top method for finding websites.

Furthermore, many people familiar with your site (e.g. customers) already have your address memorized or bookmarked. That means people who use search engines to find your site are more likely to be new customers or prospects.

Finally, search engines are a relevant and credible way for people to find you. Some methods (banner ads come to mind) have lost credibility over the years. Yet search engines are still regarded as a fast and objective way to find what you're looking for on the web.

All this means that search engines are a golden opportunity to attract new traffic to your site—one of the key reasons you chose to build a website, right?

Here Mr. Spider.....

To keep current on the millions of websites out there, search engines employ 'spiders'. These spiders are super-fast page scanners that automatically visit web pages, catalog the information and then store these web pages in a database. So, when a user visits a search engine and types in a keyword, the engine scans its database for relevant web pages. Based on indexing the spider has done after visiting your site, your site is then suggested as a site that matches up against the keywords typed in by the user.

As a marketer, your goal then is to organize and present your website in such a way that, when the spiders do visit, they capture and catalogue your web pages and produce the highest possible rankings for your site. If you're wondering what the most common spiders are, visit this site to learn more:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/spiderchart.html>

Now read on for some tips and techniques to help you attract spiders. But beware, you have to think like a spider to attract one!

Strategize on Search Engines BEFORE Designing your Site

Good graphic design goes a long way towards welcoming new users to your site. But, it can also sabotage search engine optimization. If you don't strike a good balance between website design and search engine optimization, you'll end up like the great looking kiosk stuck in the corner of the mall.

As a first step, before website design has begun, develop a brief plan for search engine optimization. For starters, answer these questions:

- Are we committed to search engines as a viable way to generate site traffic?
- Which search engines do we want to appear in regularly?
- What ranking level will we be satisfied with? (I wouldn't settle for anything less than Top 10)

Design a Spider-Friendly Site

To get listed on search engines, your first step is to attract the spider. This just means that you have to follow a few basic rules when developing your site:

Reduce your graphics

Spiders are graphic-illiterate. When a spider scans a graphic, all it sees is a blank spot. If it isn't text, it isn't seen. So, if you're loading your front page with a lot of graphics or fancy flash animation, all the spider sees is a blank page.

One of the hardest things I've had to do as a web marketer is get over my love of graphics. You see, graphics may grab a human's attention in the printed world, but they'll go wholly unnoticed by a spider. The copy on your pages is what the spider sees, so I recommend using well-crafted copy (using choice keywords) throughout your site with a minimum of graphics. Save 'em for when you really need 'em.

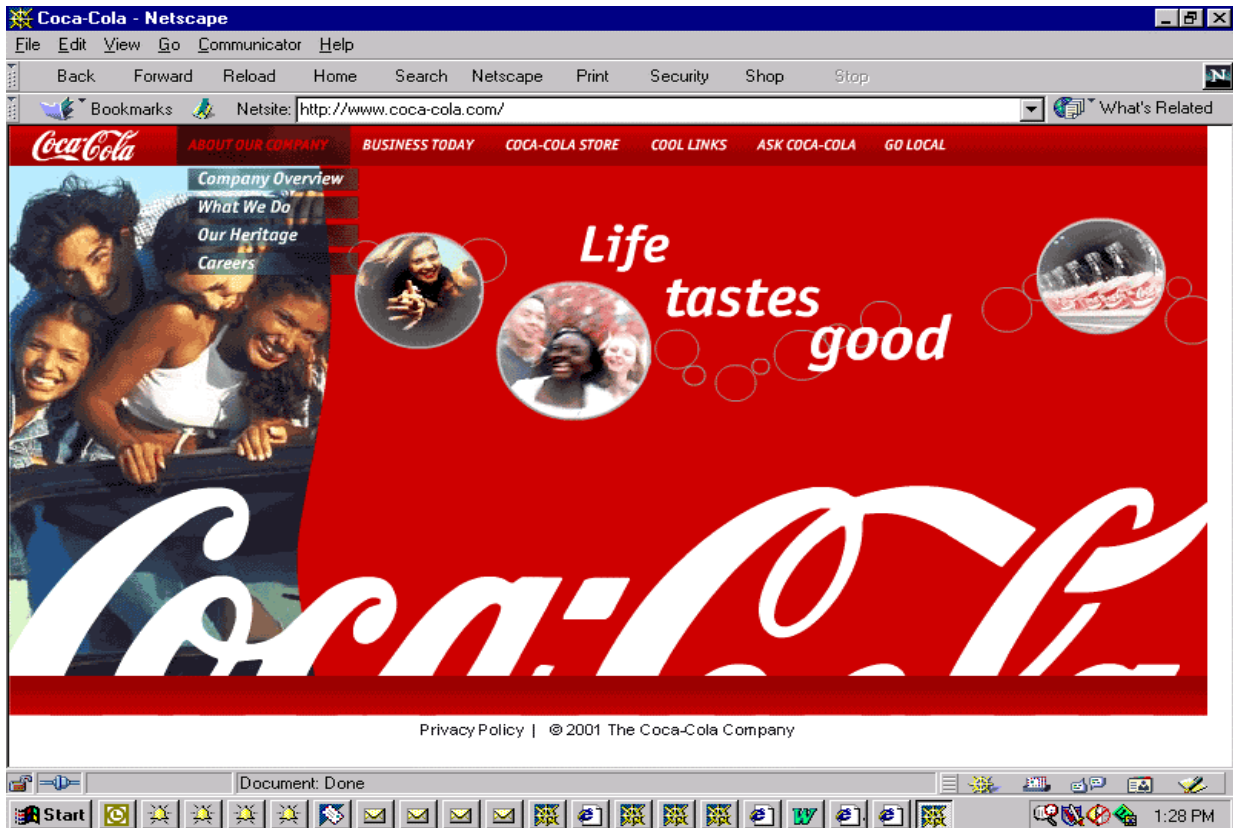
Be liberal with your contact info

Since the spider sees the copy on each page, why not build your company contact information into the footer of every page? This helps 3 ways:

- 1) Search engines will grab this information and index it as well.
- 2) People often print off pages from a site. Having your contact info there at the bottom helps them get in touch with you when all they have is a hard-copy.
- 3) Putting a physical address on each page increases credibility.

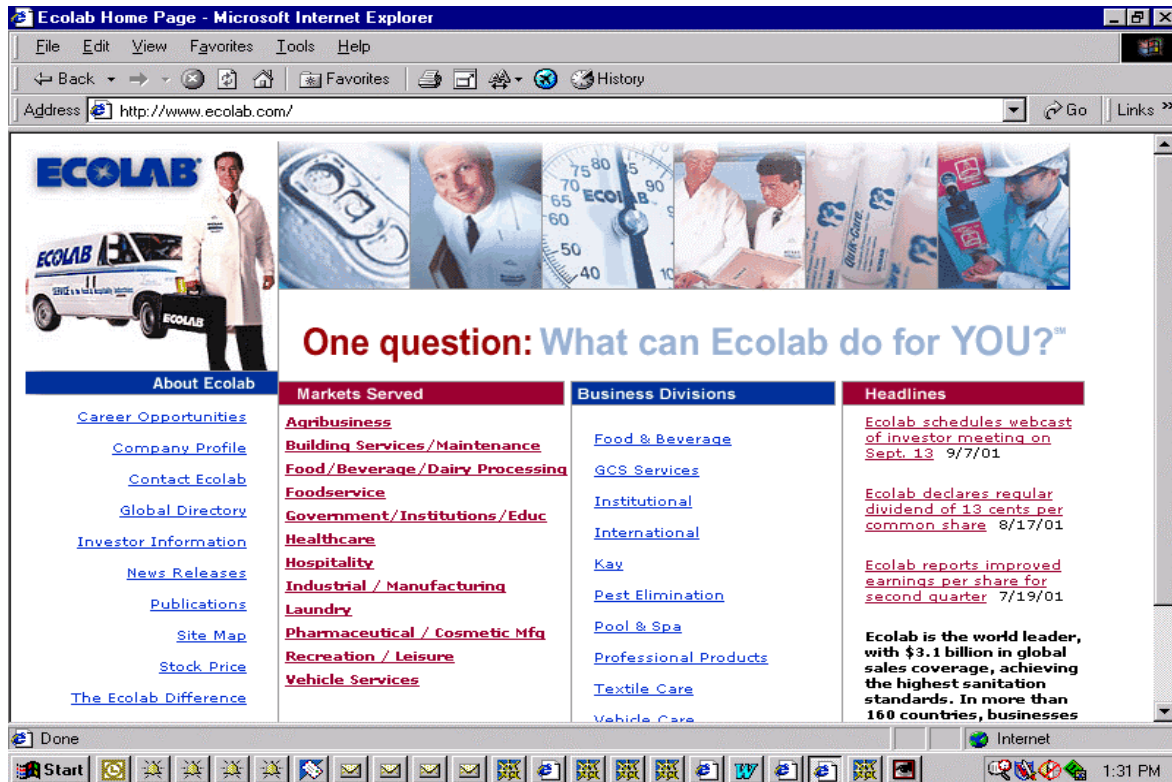
Use text over graphics

Here is a website that features great graphics. It also sports one of the most recognizable brand names out there:



To the untrained eye, this is a nice looking site with great graphics. But spiders don't see these great graphics. Instead, it scans this page for relevant text and there's not a lot of it on this page. Maybe Coca-Cola isn't interested in appealing to search engines because they have such a recognizable name. People probably just type in 'coke.com' and get to their site. But you and I don't have that same luxury of instant brand recognition.

Now, contrast Coke's approach with the approach below:



Here Ecolab uses plenty of text and even subdivides the text by markets, business divisions and headlines. Using this approach increases the odds a spider will index your site high in its database.

Choose a Strong Title

Your title bar appears at the top of your browser menu and looks like this:



Whenever a user clicks onto your website, or into a section of your site, they'll get a title bar for that location. To program your title bar, you'll (or your site developer) will write some simple code like this:

```
<TITLE>E&Y International Home</TITLE>
```

What you put in your title bar is VERY important for several reasons:

1) It appears as the bookmark title for those who bookmark your site. Like this:



2) It appears as the link title (blue highlighted & underlined) when your search results come back after performing a search and

3) Search engine spiders give high priority to your title and expect your title will be descriptive of your site's content.

So for example, if your site has as its title 'Flyaway Travel', then that's what will appear in my bookmarks. That's fine, but wouldn't it be better if the title also described what you do? Like maybe 'Flyaway Travel—Cheap Domestic Airfares'. That way, when I come across your bookmark after some time, I am reminded of who you are and what you offer.

***The Top
Search Engines***

www.google.com
www.iwon.com
www.aol.com
www.netscape.com
www.dogpile.com
www.metacrawler.com
www.lycos.com
www.altavista.com
www.excite.com
www.lycos.com
www.infoseek.com
www.hotbot.com
www.webcrawler.com
www.google.com
www.askjeeves.com

Remember too that if you don't put a title in the title bar, your site title bar will read as "Page 1" or "home page".

A couple of hints here...

- If your business is regional, you may want to underscore your trading area in your title bar. For example, our consulting company is largely Twin Cities based. We've therefore designed the title bar to read:

Emerge Marketing-Minneapolis, MN

This calls out the regional expertise of our business and helps distinguish our business from more national (and pricier) firms.

- Try to keep your title to around 8 words or less.

Remember, it's how *your customers and prospects* see your business that counts. Even though you really like your tagline, if it doesn't help you register high in the search engines, it's not good marketing.

Make your Meta Tags mega-superior

Meta tags are hidden descriptions of your web pages that appear only in the embedded source code. They're used to point search engine spiders to the right places. Meta tags are very powerful because they actually help control how your web pages are displayed in the search engines. You can use up to 1,000 characters in a meta tag and this includes letters, spaces and commas.

Here's an example of how a meta tag might be programmed:

```
<meta name="Description" CONTENT="Custom photo albums and branding products, for business, resorts, schools, national parks, cruises, and more.">
```

```
<meta name="KeyWords" CONTENT="extended exposure, exposures, scrap books, journals, bon-voyage, bon voyage, commemorative, promotional, personalized photo albums, family reunions, corporate branding, disposable cameras, branding products, promotional products, promotions, advertising specialties, agfa, disposable cameras, real estate gifts, national park products, travel souvenirs, resort souvenirs, souvenirs, custom photo albums, travel advertising, creative solutions, creative advertising, vacation stuff, incentive products, thank you gifts, business promotions, asta marketing services, travel bags, st paul, st.
```

```
paul, Minneapolis, mn">  
<meta name="revisit-after" content="5 days">  
<meta name="robot" CONTENT="ALL">  
<meta name="rating" CONTENT="General">  
<meta name="distribution" content="Global">  
<meta name="robots" content="INDEX">  
<meta name="Template Author" content="Ed Kohler -  
http://www.4factors.com/">  
<meta name="Creation Date" content="Saturday, May 5, 2001">  
<meta name="Last Update" content=" Saturday, May 5, 2001">  
<meta name="Copyright" content="Copyright © 2001. J. Michael  
Industries. All Rights Reserved.">
```

If you need some help in developing a meta tag for your site, the following site has developed a ‘Meta Tag Generator’:

<http://www.haystackinaneedle.com/recommend/genmeta.html>

Notice that key words are a chief component of your meta tags. When you feature the right keywords in your meta tag, you’ll end up driving traffic to your site.

Keywords are Important

Most websites allow you to list up to 875 characters in your keyword section. Here are some hints on finding the right keywords for your site:

Hint: Visit www.wordtracker.com They’ve compiled a database of terms that people search for. You can enter keywords into their database, and they’ll tell you how often people search for them. They’ll also tell you how many competing sites use those keywords. So, if you’re contemplating using ‘dry cleaning’ as a keyword for your site, you can check on its popularity.

Using this handy site, you can then build a keyword and submissions strategy around selected keywords.

Hint: Use the long and short versions of keywords (e.g. consult, consulting, and consultants).

Hint: Use key phrases to describe your business. So instead of using ‘marketing’, I’ll also use ‘marketing consultants’.

Hint: Don’t forget to include common misspellings as keywords. For example, if your company is in the marketing business, consider including ‘marekting’ or ‘markeitng’. That way, when someone inadvertently misspells or mistypes a search term for a search engine, it will still list your site in the search results.

Hint: A way to track your site’s ranking ability in various search engines is to include a fictitious term in your keywords. So for example, if you’re a manufacturer of steel products, include a term like ‘oxshards’. After submitting your site and getting a visit from the spider, visit the search engine and do a search using ‘oxshards’. Your site should come up in the search results.

Check into your competitor’s keywords

You no doubt already know what some of your keywords should be. They might be products, services, business categories and maybe even geography terms (if you’re an accountant in Chicago, try ‘Chicago Accountants’ as a key phrase).

Another way to find out popular keywords is to visit your competitors’ sites. While at your competitor’s site, click on View→Source in your browser’s navigation bar.

The code you’re now looking at will contain the keywords for this site. Search through these keywords to determine which you’re already using and which might be good to add to your keywords. Why reinvent the wheel? Take advantage of someone else’s existing expertise.

How do you submit to a search engine?

Every search engine treats site submissions differently. In some, submission links appear right on the search engine’s front page. For example, Alta Vista (www.altavista.com) has a link on its front page that looks like this:

[About AltaVista](#) | [Terms Of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#)
[Submit A Site](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [List Your Products](#) | [A CMGI Company](#)

Other search engines make you dig a bit deeper to find the site submission procedures.

After you've found the place to submit your site, most search engines will ask you for this information:

- Your site's web address (also called a URL with the format http://www._____.com)
- Your personal email (so they can get back to you once it's been indexed)

That's all they need to know. Now they will add your site address to their querying code and you'll then get a visit from its spider.

How long does it take for your web page submissions to be indexed? That all depends on the workload for the search engine's staff and spiders. But generally, the following timeframes apply for getting approval for your submission to certain search engines:

Search Engine	Approval Timing
Altavista	<i>1 - 2 weeks</i>
HotBot	<i>2 weeks</i>
Northern Light	<i>2 - 4 weeks</i>
Excite, Lycos	<i>4 weeks</i>
Google	<i>4 - 6 weeks</i>
Infoseek, Go	<i>6 - 8 weeks</i>
Webcrawler	<i>12 weeks</i>
<i>Source: NetMechanic.com</i>	

If after these times pass and you don't seem to be getting any results from your submission, we recommend resubmitting.

Some differences between Search Engines and Directories

Now that you know more about search engines, let's talk a bit about directories.

Here are some ways they differ from search engines:

	<i>Search Engine</i>	<i>Directory</i>
Cost	Free	Costs in the vicinity of 0-\$300 yr.
How it's edited/indexed	Robot Edited	Human edited
Resubmission	Best to resubmit every year	No need to resubmit
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unabridged content• Whole site indexed and searchable	Abridged—usually only lists home page

How to submit to directories

Unlike search engines, directories won't find your site if you don't tell them about it. They don't use spiders to scour the Internet for new pages. So with directories, you have to actively seek them out and submit.

Also, they usually only search the front page. Additional pages can be submitted for a price.

Some of the top directories today are:

Looksmart	www.looksmart.com
Yahoo	www.yahoo.com

In addition there are regional directories you might want to check out. In the Twin Cities, a well-known regional directory is www.ourtwincities.com .

Also, don't overlook your industry directories and member directories. For example, if you're in the travel industry www.astanet.com (the American Society of Travel Agents' site) might be worth checking into.

One other submission method—Pay-per-Clicks

There is one other type of search engine that can build your traffic. It's called a pay-per-click or 'paid submission' search engine. At these search engines, you open an account, make a deposit of between \$10-\$100 (\$50 is the deposit for Overture.com (formerly GoTo.com) and then list your keywords.

What makes these sites unique is that you 'bid' on the keywords you'll use to steer viewers to your site. Each keyword has a market value based upon the relative demand for it among other people using the site. Bids for keywords can be made for as low as 5 cents on GoTo.com, and as low as 1 cent on most other pay-per-click sites. After you successfully bid on certain keywords, then you submit your site and pay for each click on your chosen keywords.

So for example, if you're a manufacturer of plastic thermoforming, you might bid on the term 'plastic thermoforming' for 5 cents per click through. Each time a visitor types in 'plastic thermoforming' and your site pops up, your account is charged 5 cents.

Maybe you're a business consultant and you want to bid on 'business consultant'. You'd probably find that it's valued higher, say at \$1.00 per click through. The value of any keyword on these sites is based on its relative popularity. So, the more popular a keyword is, the more you can expect to pay for it.

One benefit to these sites is you only pay for results. You only get charged for those searches that use the terms you've bid on.

You also have flexibility to change your keywords frequently. After a time, you can log onto a member's area and review the traffic each keyword delivers to your site. If any of your keywords aren't carrying their weight, just change them to what you think will.

Some of the top pay-per-click sites are:

<i>Site Name</i>	<i>Address</i>
Overture (formerly Go To)	www.overture.com
Ah-Ha	www.ah-ha.com
Power Search Express	www.PowerSearchExpress.com

Search Hound	www.SearchHound.com
Search Feed	www.SearchFeed.com

Track your traffic

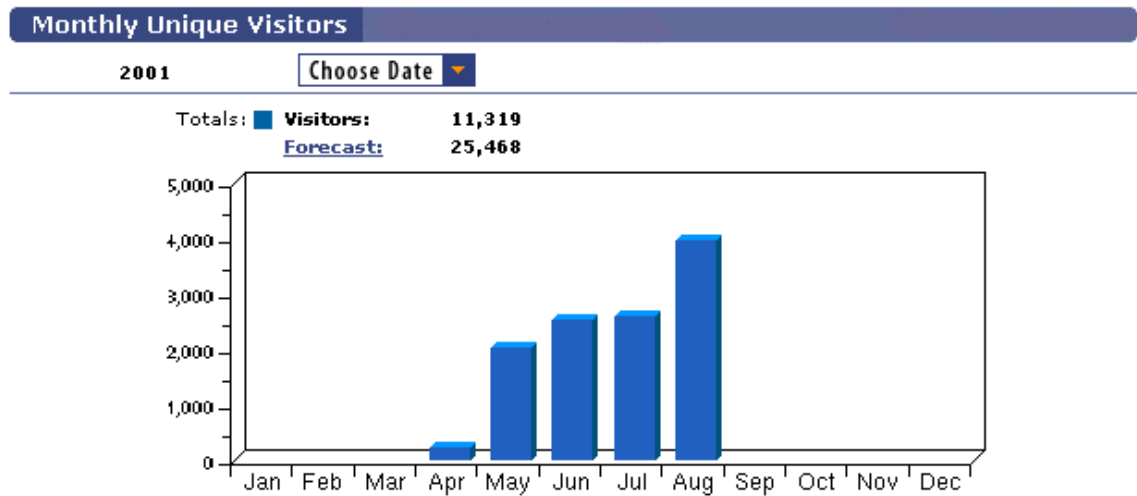
As any good marketer knows, rigorous analysis is key to marketing success. That means you'll want to build metrics into your search engine ranking effort. Simply put, these metrics help you track what you're getting from this effort. In web terms you'll want to know:

- ***How many***—How many unique visitors are we getting? How many page views are we getting? How many people are returning? How long do they stay?
- ***Who***—are these people? What search engines are they coming from. What are their typical web-hosting arrangements? What keywords are they using?
- ***Where***—do they go in your site? Are they coming for the free stuff? Are they reading many or few pages in your site? Are they returning?

All in all, we've found the most valuable metrics to be:

1. ***Unique Visitors per day***
2. ***Page views per day***
3. ***Average page views per visitor***
4. ***Most popular pages on the site***
5. ***Common search phrases used***
6. ***Most common site entry point***
7. ***Most common site exit point***
8. ***Most requested pages***
9. ***Top referring sites***
10. ***Busiest days and times of day for your site***

The best way to answer these questions is to use a Web Analytics site. These sites help you accurately and powerfully analyze your Web site traffic. We use Superstats (www.superstats.com) and have been very pleased with it. Here's a sample report you can generate from this site:



Using a site like this helps you answer these questions on a monthly, weekly or even daily basis. There is a cost for this service, but it's well worth it to get updated-to-the-minute feedback on your site.

Use professionals

If it seems like this is complicated, it is. This is a whole new marketing vehicle to many of us and that's why you'll want to consider using outside professionals in your web marketing efforts. They can help you develop marketing strategies and then implement those strategies. So you can just concentrate on running your business...

A Brief Glossary

Directory: websites with look-up capabilities that assigns other websites to categories. Directories are edited by humans, as opposed to search engines, which are edited by spiders.

Keywords: descriptive words that are embedded in your site. Common places to use keywords are:

- 1) In your web pages
- 2) For search engine registration
- 3) For directory listings

Meta Tags: hidden descriptions of your web pages that describe the page's content and help point search engines to the right places.

Page View: a page view is registered each time your web page is loaded or reloaded on someone's browser.

Pay-per-click: search engines that rank results based on keywords that are bid upon and bought on the free market.

Search engine: online software that helps you navigate through the enormous amount of information on the Internet.

Spiders: an automated program that indexes documents, titles and/or a portion of each document. These documents are acquired by the spider as it automatically traverses across the Internet (kinda scary, huh?).

Unique Visitor: one individual who visits your site across a one year timeframe.

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