



retain, expand, attract

WHITEPAPER SERIES

**SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION:
MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITY,
VISIBILITY AND PROFIT FOR
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

Creating and maintaining a website is a large investment. It may be the greatest website ever or just another website in the already cluttered realm of cyberspace, but no one will ever know unless they actually get there. Millions of other websites are battling for the same visibility, so there's no guarantee that your website will show up high in the search results field. How can your website break the mold? It's called search engine optimization.

What is Search Engine Optimization?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of making adjustments to your website in order to increase traffic from users who use search engines.

This is done by taking advantage of the algorithms that engines use to determine the rank of websites amongst the field of results (how high up they are in the results field).

Using strategic keywords and other tactics is known as "organic", or unpaid, SEO. There are also paid methods of SEO that include paying to have your site advertised on the side of a results field.

How Search Engines Work

Since the objective of SEO is to maximize visibility to search engines, it is helpful to understand how a search engine operates.

Search engines, such as Google, have four primary tasks that help serve their purpose. Those tasks are:

- "Crawling"
- Developing an index
- Calculating the relevancy and rank of items in the index
- Displaying results

Crawling

"Crawling" is when a search engine sends a crawler out to collect data. The crawlers stop at each document (a website, photo, etc.), collect information, and store it in a database, which leads to the next task.

Developing an Index

The data collected from crawlers is stored in a massive database. Search engines sometimes have numerous data storage centers in different cities throughout the world. This proves to be helpful when users demand instant results from a search.

Calculating Relevancy and Rank of the Items in an Index

Once all of the data is stored, the search engine must find a way to rank all of the websites. The evolution and expansion of the Internet has resulted in relevance being determined by not just one, but rather hundreds of factors such as popularity and strategic keyword placement.

Checking Your Own Search Engine Rankings: Why It's Not Accurate

When you're wondering how high your website is ranked in search engines, the most common move (and mistake) is to see for yourself. There are multiple reasons why doing so can be misleading:

- **You Typed It In, But Nobody Else Will**

Most likely you typed in your organization's name, address, domain name or something else that's very specific. Obviously those search terms will result in your website being ranked very high because its essential information that is posted on your website. However, companies looking to expand or relocate aren't going to type in something specific like "Brown County Economic Development Coalition" but rather something vague such as "northeastern Wisconsin economic development".

- **Where You Are Searching From**

Search engines know where you are searching from and therefore the results of a search vary depending on location. For example, someone performing a generic search such as "available properties" in Illinois will see different results than someone doing the same search from Michigan. Since location plays such a crucial role in the results field, the key words and phrases on your website need to adhere to what people outside your area are using as a search query.

To prevent "working the system" none of the major search engines publish their algorithms; furthermore, they are continually being refined. That is why if anyone promises to get you a Top 10 ranking, you should run the other way.

Displaying Results

The final step in the search engine process is actually displaying the results from a search. After the data from sites have been indexed and ranked, a user has a choice of multiple websites. More often than not, the first few websites shown in the results field are the ones that users flock to. Getting your website high up in the results is critical for your organization, and SEO can do just that.

Why Do I Need to Utilize SEO?

Where your website appears in a list of search results is the difference between having millions of users see your website and having nobody other than yourself seeing your website. Here are some statistics that illustrate SEO's crucial role in online marketing:

- 62% of users click a link on the first page of results
- Almost 50% of users click the first link, and only 5% clicked on links beyond the top four.
- Only 5% of click-through traffic goes to the websites listed beyond the top four.
- 86% of those surveyed used a web search to find a local business.

If those statistics aren't enough to convince you of SEO's importance, perhaps taking a look at the future will. A 2009 Forrester report said that by 2014, \$55 billion will be spent annually on interactive marketing. That \$55 billion will represent 21% of all marketing budgets.

Given that information, it's clear that your target audience will be moving online and so will your competitors. If you want your marketing efforts to stay relevant as well as effective, a strategic approach to SEO is vital.

Needless to say, it's critical for your site to be ranked high in order to maximize visibility. With that increased visibility comes the satisfaction of potential clients because it shows that you are doing what it takes to rise above the competition.

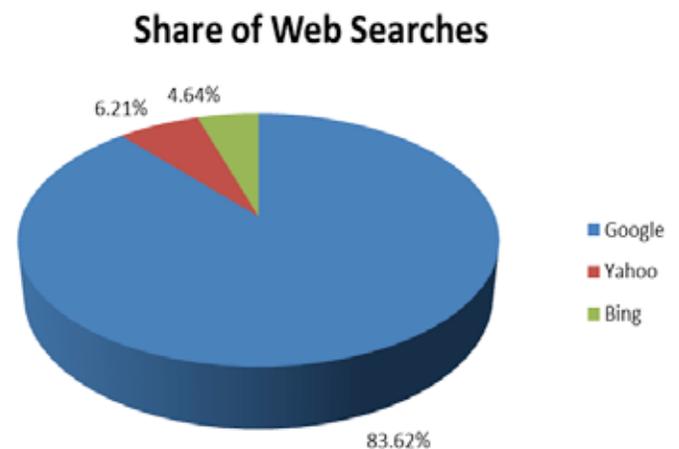
Another reason why SEO needs to be a key component of your EDO's marketing strategy is because you need to make it as easy as possible for site selectors to find your website. You may not know exactly what the selectors are typing in to search engines, but it is possible to put your website in a position to have a great chance of being discovered easily.

How Many Search Engines Are There, and Which Ones Should I Care About?

There are way too many search engines to count, but there are three that dominate the arena. Those are Google, Bing and Yahoo.

While Google, Yahoo and Bing essentially do the same thing as any other search engine, the difference lies in the method that's used to collect and rank the results from a search.

Google is often hailed as the "go-to" search engine for multiple reasons. When putting together an SEO strategy, Google should be considered the test engine because that's what the majority of users will rely on to find information (hence how "Google" has become a verb and not just a noun).



Source: NetMarketShare (<http://bit.ly/WEIjL>), June 2011

What Google's Mission Can Mean to Your EDO

What made Google the superstar search engine that it has become? There are factors such as ease of use and the high magnitudes of the relevancy of search results, but its ultimately because Google has found a way to provide better content (results) for their target market (people looking for information online).

Your EDO isn't a search engine, but an ED website should adopt the same goal as Google, and that's to provide the target market with what they want. It's a valid strategy because web surfers who go to Google and visitors who navigate to your website are essentially doing the same thing: looking for the most relevant information or content in the easiest way possible.

This document describes how to take advantage of search engines like Google, but perhaps it's time to start acting like Google too.

What Role Does Social Media Play in SEO?

Many search engines include the amount of traffic when ranking a website. If you can find ways to increase traffic, an increase in your website's rank will follow. One of the best ways to do so is by using social media to your advantage.

The biggest advantage your organization has from using social media is the increase in the size of your audience and the ability to broadcast to that audience. The key to using social media for SEO purposes is to draw the audience to your website using a variety of methods.

One of the primary tasks of social media is to share links to content -- blogs, news stories, videos -- whatever it might be. If your organization uses Twitter or some other social media platform to post links to your website, there will be an increase in traffic. If your link is interesting someone else may post the same link, which will exponentially increase your website's exposure.

Having a blog on your website with good content and strategic keywords to match what people are searching for is another way to increase traffic to your website. That increase in traffic will not only come from the content of a blog showing up in search engines, but also from providing links to the blog in your social media posts.

Don't have the time or know where to begin when it comes to social media? Ady Voltedge can do this for you too. Call us to find a solution that will work for you.

What We Can Do for You

Ady Voltedge has many SEO tools that we use in the website development process to optimize your site. These include:

CSS

In laymen's terms, using Cascading Style Sheets to design your website organizes, programs and ranks content in such a way that search engines are able to decide what is and what isn't important on a website. The CSS coding also makes it obvious to search engines when there are hyperlinks on your websites, and more links equals higher relevancy.

Good Content

Similar to keywords and descriptions, there is a strategic way to create content on a website. Our staff knows how to generate content in an effective manner and that will equal more visibility for your website.

HTML Optimization

HyperText Markup Language is the standard programming language used when designing a website. Understandably, the coding can get very complex. Just as it would be confusing for someone to read, it can sometimes even get too complicated for a search engine to read. The key is to maximize a website's capabilities while maintaining efficiency.

W3C and Section 508

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international organization that seeks to develop standards in web design. Section 508 outlines what standards and guidelines must be met to maximize accessibility to users with disabilities. Search engine crawlers know the standards and can tell when a site is neglecting the guidelines. We make sure that the sites meet the 508 standards so everyone can experience your website.

Case Study: Trek Travel

If there is one project we've done that truly exemplifies our efficient programming, it would be the website we updated for Trek Travel. They hired us to reprogram their website, keeping the exact same navigation and content, which presents the perfect laboratory for demonstrating our programming capabilities. The size of the website decreased, page loading time increased by a factor of 2.5, and search engine optimization soared. The efficient programming also reduced their hosting costs from \$800 month to \$100/month.

Make Search Engines Work For You

We've all done it - Googling ourselves to see what is out there. Before requesting our services, some clients had performed a search pertaining to their EDO and the results included content that disparaged their region. The first reaction is to become upset, but it's important to quickly switch to your second reaction, and that's doing something about it.

The solution is simple. The negative content got online somehow, so it's just a matter of producing more content that reflects positively upon your region. This can be done in different ways:

- Sign up for news feeds or closely monitor news outlets that would generate content relevant to your region. If you do this, you'll always be in the loop as far as what's being said about your region. If you know what people like or don't like, it's easier to make changes.
- When you find some positive publicity, make sure everyone knows it. Write a blog post detailing the news, post a link on your website that will direct visitors to the news or use social media to spread the word.

If you follow some of those tactics, you will essentially be taking over your region's online presence and the discussions that are occurring regarding your region. You may not stop every heckler, but you will have taken a huge step in managing your region's reputation.

Keywords/Descriptions

Strategic keywords and descriptions make your site stand out from the crowd. Google has keyword tools that show which phrases are being used in searches and what keywords we can use to capitalize on those searches.

Keywords are basically whatever words you think users will enter into a search query. There should be about 15-20 keywords and those words need to be in the content of your web page. If they aren't, the search engine trackers will see that and not even acknowledge the keywords' presence.

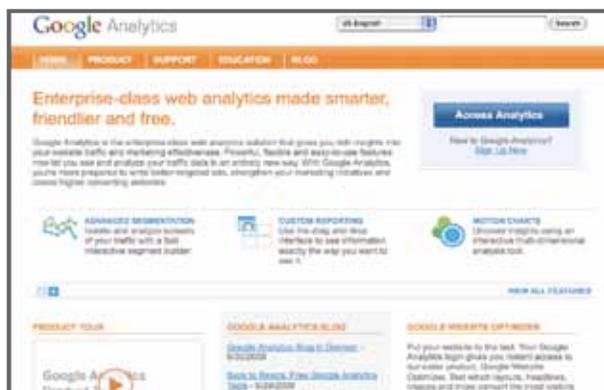
The description is just a short description of your page. This description shows up underneath the link to your website in a search engine results field. Besides containing your selected keywords, the description should also reflect the content on your page.

Google Site Map

A sitemap is a file that web developers send to search engines. It serves the same purpose as any map, and that is to simplify navigation. In this case, the navigator is a search engine. Since the search engine has a "map" of the website and all of its pages, the engine can now index the website more efficiently.

Google Analytics

This is a software tool that allows you to monitor and analyze your website's traffic. You can see how many users have been to your website, how they got there, and what they did on the site (which pages were viewed, search box inputs, etc.).



What You Don't Want to Do

While all of the above tips help take advantage of the search engine's algorithms to an extent, "gaming" the search engine system isn't an effective tactic in the long run. Those algorithms are constantly changing, so certain methods of increasing your rank will only work for a short period of time. However, if you stick to the basic fundamentals of web design and optimizing your page, your website will always be ranked high. In the end, search engines can distinguish a website with terrible content from a site with great content. Therefore, if you stick to the basics and just make sure that your website has great content, you won't need to resort to any "black hat" tactics.

After reading this document, the importance of implementing SEO techniques should be strikingly clear. If you want your EDO's marketing efforts to be taken to the next level and to rise above the competition, feel free to contact Ady Voltedge to discuss any questions you may have.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janet Ady is president of Ady Voltedge, a firm that she founded in 2003. Her areas of expertise include marketing strategy development, the creation of the optimal navigation for E.D. websites, and place positioning.

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ABOUT ADY VOLTEDGE

Ady Voltedge was founded in 2003, and continues to be run by its founder and owner Janet Ady. Within the last year, the firm hired its first full-time site selector, Paul Hampton, and integrated the Ady International Company site selection firm into Ady Voltedge.

- Ady International Company was operated by Janet's father, Bob Ady, who located more facilities in the US than any other individual. The techniques, processes, client history, and corporate contacts that he cultivated over his career are now part of Ady Voltedge.
- In addition, Ady Voltedge also gained a treasure trove of marketing communications directed to site selectors – over 1,000 in all – which we have analyzed so as to help our clients craft the most compelling and effective marketing communications to this important audience.

Ady Voltedge provides a complementary suite of services:

- We provide site selection services to expanding and relocating companies
- We develop E.D. strategies for EDOs and help implement them.

We believe our success in both areas is not coincidental: each areas builds off the other. Ady Voltedge is the only firm in the country of any size that works on all parts of the economic development value chain.



A unique and highly specialized research and marketing consultancy conceived and designed to help organizations retain, expand and attract investment and talent.

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