

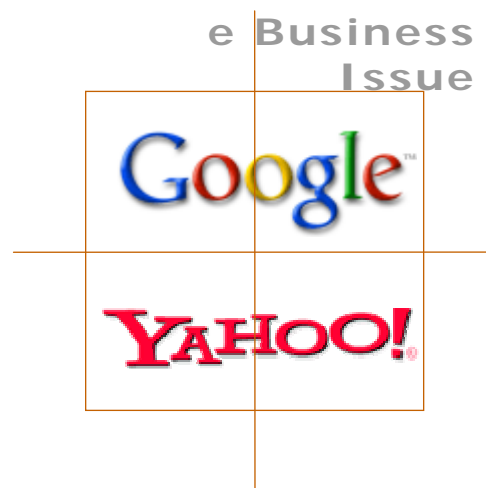
eMarket Services makes it easier for you to use
electronic marketplaces for international business

LET THE SEARCH ENGINES FIND YOU

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Introduction

Your Internet homepage is a major part of your e-business strategy. It has been developed to support your sales and support and to attract new customers. A study done by the German researcher GfK has shown that 76% of purchasing decision makers in Germany rely primarily on Internet as a research tool in their purchasing process, 29% do research exclusively online.

With your homepage in place you would like to be found – and turn to the world of search engines, soon you find that it is a profession of its own to optimize and market your homepage on the Internet.

This e-business issue will give you an overview of what is required and some of the tasks needed to perform better in the searches.

Search Engine Optimization

As with any marketing activities, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) consists of dedicated work and persistence. As you enter the world of SEO you need to know what your options are and how to succeed. Your wish is to be able to pay a reasonable amount to have someone – or yourself – make sure that your homepage is at the top of every search list. You soon realize that this is a hopeless dream in most cases – unless you decide to take Internet marketing as serious as you take your other marketing activities.

The Internet has grown to become a major source of information. More and more people turn to Internet to find the answer to problems and to find products and services. Entering a few words into a search engine like Google (www.google.com) or Yahoo (<http://search.yahoo.com>) easily turns up millions of Internet pages that contains the word you are searching for – and most users will only browse the first 10-20 of these before they either make their choice or make a more specific search.

As an owner of a homepage, you may see these search engines as your enemy and try to find ways to out smart them. There are “illegal” ways to try to trick a search engine – to try to make your homepage more popular or relevant – but be advised that the search engines and their owners are constantly re-writing their software or manually check the content of their database and attempts to trick the search engines can result in your site being banned and removed from the database.

Instead you should realise that the search engines are trying to help the Internet users to find relevant sites and work harder on improving the content of your homepage and its position in the “Internet community”.

To optimize your homepage your efforts could cover the following:

- Improve the content of your homepage
- Make sure that Search Engines can find your homepage
- Make sure that Search Engines can read your homepage

In order to do all these things you must:

- Know your business
- Know how to market your business
- Know how to improve your standing in the community you aim at

- Know the technology to improve the technical details on your homepage
- Have the resources to do necessary marketing

Improve the content of your homepage

Although many search engines use software to search and analyze your homepage, your target group is still the human buyer that should visit your homepage and decide to do business with your company.

In the world of “SEO” they talk about keywords and how they appear on your homepage. These keywords are the same as a person would use to find your homepage. There is a trend towards using more than one search word – and it is said that shorter keyword searchers are shoppers, and longer keyword searchers are buyers. The SEO Book¹ claims that good keyword phrases are 2 to 5 words.

In addition to a good Internet domain name that users can guess – and remember (like www.sonyericsson.com or www.WhatTimeIsIt.com) you want the content of your homepage to contain your keywords. When you write the articles on your homepage you must remember that you use the keywords in a normal way – and not try to overstuff your text by excessively repeating your keywords. Both your human visitors – but also the search engine spiders² are able to detect text that is written only for the purpose of being listed in the search engines. The end result is that neither buyers nor spiders will find your homepage attractive enough.

The technical side of writing for search engines is to make sure that your keywords appear in places that spiders use to determine relevance. In order to market the homepage of www.emarketservices.com the following should be used.

- The Title (within the <title> tag in the page header) is important
- The Heading tags (<H1> to <H6>) used to show headline structure.
- The content of the hyperlinks. Your guide to electronic e-marketplaces is a better link than: “Your guide to electronic e-marketplaces” or “Click here”
- The Alternative (Alt-tag) of pictures. (Search engines cannot “read” your pictures, but it can read the words that describe them)

In addition there are special “Metatags” that are used to describe the content and keywords of your homepage. These Metatags used to be important, but today most spiders are able to read the content of your homepage and determine themselves what it is all about. In addition – Metatags are easily used by the marketing department to try to sell products – and does not have to reflect the real content of the homepage like the Title, Headlines etc.

Make sure search engines can find your homepage

People search the Internet by writing your URL (“Uniform Resource Locator” - The address that identifies the location of a Web page on the World Wide Web, such as www.eMarketServices.com) or they browse through a directory or enter search words in a Search Engine like Google, Yahoo or MSN.

Spiders that are to find your homepage need a starting address. In some cases, this can be because you have submitted your homepage address to a Directory or a Search Engine and

¹ The SEO Book by Aaron Matthew Wall, www.seobook.com

² A “Spider” or “Robot” is automatic software that visits your homepage, reads its content, indexes it and stores it content in the search engine database.

hope that this will trigger a visit from the Spider. In other cases, the best way to be found is to have a link on an existing page that is regularly visited by a spider.

There are several ways that you can make sure a link to your site is found on other homepages:

Participate in online communities and show that you and your site have information of value. People will visit your site and by the strength of your content decide to recommend it.

- As you are active on the Internet and participate in discussion groups, make the speech you delivered at a business meeting available online, write reviews – make sure you add a link to your homepage.
- Produce a free tool or e.g. an expert article on a subject and make it available on your homepage so that people want to link to it.
- Ask and exchange links with high quality sites. (Make sure that you only link to sites that are of value to your visitors – if you add links to any kind of site both your visitors and the spiders will downgrade your site)

When you exchange links³, use different kinds of words. If the spiders expect that all your links were automatically produced – and all reside on homepages that you control – they might assume that you are trying to manipulate the search engine and remove you from their listing.

Make sure that Search Engines can read your homepage

The spider software is constantly improved and changed, but still there are certain technical elements that you should be aware of and try to avoid if possible. Some of these elements are the use of frames, flash and java script navigation⁴.

Spiders read the text of your homepage, and cannot read a word within a picture. If you use pictures as links to other parts of your homepage, you should include an “Alt” text to let both the search engines and visually impaired visitors know what the link is for.⁵

On the other hand – if you include information that only the spider can see – such as hidden frames, white letters on white background – spiders might detect it and decide that you are trying to manipulate them.

If your homepage is using techniques like frames and flash animation – you should add a <noframes> section with text that the spiders can read – and/or a link to a sitemap that contains all of your content that your users only could visit through java script navigation.

Be also aware that many of the elements that spiders are unable to read also cannot be viewed by older version of Internet browsers⁶.

3 “How to create an effective linking strategy to promote your web site”,
<http://www.linkingmatters.com/WhyLinkingIsImportant.html>

4 “Through a spider’s eyes”, http://www.netmechanic.com/news/vol4/promo_no18.htm

5 For more information about writing for the visually impaired, please search the Internet. One source you will find is:
<http://www.info.gov.hk/digital21/eng/knowledge/guide/guidelines2004.doc>

6 If you want to see what your homepage looks like to a spider, try the LynxView:
<http://www.delorie.com/web/lynxview.html> - you have to place a special document on your site though – to prove that you are the rightful owner of the site.

Keep up the good work

Improving your homepage for Search Engines is not a one-time task. As you can see from the examples above it is a continuing job where you also should track your competition, compare your results to them and learn from them.

To learn more you should search for "SEO" and you will find that there is a whole community out there that is willing to share or let you buy their knowledge.

Some sites that could get you started in addition to the other links in this article are: www.seotoday.com and www.searchengineworld.com/tips/keywords.htm