



Search Engine Friendly Site Design Cheat Sheet By 6S Marketing Inc.

Importance of Design

Search engines are merely an element in an overall marketing campaign. What is outlined below are guidelines and not hard and fast rules. If search engines are an important aspect of a campaign then the guidelines below should be followed as closely as possible.

There must be a balance between the various factors involved in creating a successful site. Strategy, graphic design, copy, branding, functionality and search engines are all important elements in creating a successful site.

Search engines can drive a significant amount of traffic to a site and help with sales generation and branding. However, simply adjusting meta-tags and submitting will not place your site in the top engines. A comprehensive campaign is required. What is outlined below will give your search engine marketers (hopefully [6S Marketing Inc.](#)) the best chance of ranking your site well in the engines.

Following these relatively simple points can help save time and money over the long term.

Site Quality

This is fairly obvious, however it should be mentioned. The overall site quality, graphic design and content will affect rankings as editors are more likely to include the site in a directory and webmasters are more likely to link to the site. Hiring a professional graphic designer or design team is always recommended. Think twice about your designer if they're your VP's son, creating the site in the basement on his new PC.

Homepage

The use of text on the homepage (index page) cannot be overemphasized in regards to search engines. In addition to search engines, a short text paragraph explains to first time visitors in a concise format what the Web site is. On the homepage there should be an explicit reference to what users can expect from the site and what they can accomplish on the site. The who, what, where, and how of the Web site should be stated for surfers to view in text as soon as they arrive at the site.

Updated Quality Content

In the search engine world – content is king. Having plenty of good quality content in text throughout the site describing your product/services is essential. In addition, updating this content is important. Tricks such as dynamically inserting new content via a database each time the page loads or each day can help with “freshness” points. Forums, news articles and archiving newsletters on the site are a good way to add new content for some sites as well.



Site Design

When designing it helps to keep the following points in mind.

- Use of text on all pages (if possible)
- Quality coding is important – extra tags and code with errors will cause a decrease in rankings – hence the important of a professional coder
- Frames cause serious problems in search engines and should be avoided
- A completely Flash based site should avoided, however use of Flash to enhance the site is great
- Flash navigation should be avoided if possible (workarounds available)
- DHTML navigation should be avoided if possible (workarounds available)
- Flash introductions should be avoided
- “Splash” pages should not be used. A splash page is generally a graphic on the homepage with the message “Welcome to our Web site. Please click here to enter”. In addition, usability research has shown that splash pages and Flash intros cause a decrease in conversion rates, and decrease the functionality of the site.
- Use of graphical text should be minimized (ie. using a picture instead of text).
- Use of external style sheets and Javascript is recommended in place of inserting code on each page of the site. This reduces the amount of code above the main content of the site. This has a number of advantages beyond search engines including ease of editing of the coding and speed of loading.

Example:

Javascript

Placed in head tag - `<script language="JavaScript" src="roll.js" type="text/javascript">
</script>`

Stylesheet

Placed in head tag - `<link rel="STYLESHEET" type="text/css" href="style.css">`

- Text navigation - using text navigation at the bottom of the page has two advantages. First from a usability stand point this can help surfers navigate the site. This is a standard form of navigation that is quite often expected. In addition the use of text links is advantageous for search engines. For example, if DHTML or Flash is used for the main navigation, text links can help create a search engine friendly site.
- Naming – the identification of pages and names of directories should reflect keywords targeted
- Alt tags – Alt tags should be used on images
- Directory structure should be kept to a minimum number of directories. For example www.domain.com/faq.html is better than www.domain.com/directory/customerservice/faq/faq.html
- Databases - any section of the site that requires a user to enter search variables will not be accessible to search engines
- “?” in URLs are bad – dynamic URL’s generally will cause a decrease in rankings. Most dynamic URL’s can be mapped to what appears to be a static page and this is highly recommended.