

## Search Engine Optimization

Crawlers, Spiders, Robots... these are programs that search engines use to crawl the text and links on websites. The engines then add the crawled sites to their index, which is how people find them when typing in keywords. Search engine rankings and indexes change all the time. The major search engines are also always changing what their crawlers are looking for.



Some important things to help you get indexed and rank higher:

- Relevant content. The content should contain your keywords and be useful to the person who finds your site when searching. The top content on each page is most important and should be keyword rich while still useful to a site user.
- Keywords. Choose **4-5 keywords or phrases per page** and surround them with relevant content. Again, the first 100-200 words are the most important. Keywords should be 5-8% of your content.
- Frequently updated content. This is where your blog comes in handy, as typically blogs are updated quite often.
- Easy Navigation. Your website should be easy to navigate with good architecture and link structure. You not only lose site users when they can't easily find what they are looking for, you can also lose engine crawlers. If they get lost in the site, they just move on.
- Limit Flash. Flash is basically invisible to search engines. You can have the most beautiful site out there, but if it can't be found it's not working for you.
- Page titles, meta descriptions and content should match on each page.
- Choose your title well and include keywords. Make it relevant to the page.
- Meta Descriptions - A short (about 160 character) keyword rich description relevant to the page purpose and copy is one of the most helpful things you can do for the crawlers.
- Clean coding. Of course you want your site to be pretty, but the cleaner the coding the better. The more text the crawlers find the better. Avoiding frames is also helpful, as crawlers can get stuck and/or lost and move on.
- Links. Make sure your links are not broken. Add links in your text as well as in your menu. Use keyword phrases to link to (for example, rather than click here place your link on the words Real Estate Home Staging Expo).
- Name and Alt Tag all photos and media. If one of your keyword phrases is home staging, isn't it better to name your photos home\_staging\_example1.jpg rather than just after.jpg? Also use descriptive alt tags such as "Living room after home staging provided by (your company name).
- Include local phrases describing your area and a map to your location.
- Include a call to action on each page (newsletter sign up, contact information, etc.)

## Tools and Tips

Google offers many, many free tools. One of the most useful is Google Analytics. Once you sign up and place the code provided on each page of your site, you can then track where your traffic comes from, how long users are staying, what keywords they used to find you, and much more. This will help you learn which areas of the site are working and which aren't and to adjust your content accordingly.



Google Adwords can help you target the keywords you'd like to use. Remember "home stager" might be harder to get to #1 with than "home stager Raleigh". Were I in Raleigh, I definitely would type in the search bar "home stager" + Raleigh to narrow down my results. It won't help me to find a home stager that is 500 miles away from the home I need staged.

Google Alerts tell you when your keywords are found in a new article or site on the Internet. It's a good idea to set up alerts for your company name and your own name to see who is talking about you.

Yellowpages.com – Add your business here, it's free. (Yes, they will call you offering their upgrades, but they don't continue to call after you say no thank you).

Press Releases. Most of you probably already submit press releases. Remember that your press release should contain your keywords and phrases, also high in the content, just like your website.

Directories and links. Inbound links to your site are like votes to the search engines. The more relevant ones you have, the better. This being said, paid link directories are often completely ignored. If you are a Home Stager then a link to your site from a Realtor, painter, or any vendor that goes hand in hand with your business would be a relevant link; a link from a shoe store, not as relevant. **Reciprocal linking is a great thing.** Have the vendors that you recommend link to your site and link back to theirs. Even better is to provide a short paragraph describing them and why you use them. Better still is to swap articles for your blogs, newsletters and websites.

Keep in mind that paying to advertise your business is fine, but most people scroll past the sponsored spots when doing a search and look for the organic search results. These carry more weight and seem more relevant to the user.

Client testimonials. Yelp.com (and I'm sure many other sites, use what's popular in the area where you live) allow you to enter your business information and then invite clients to review their experience with you. **To someone searching for a business to work with, client testimonials may seem like the most trustworthy information.** Having the clients add them themselves is even more convincing.