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How To Appear On The First Page Of Google Search Results

Once you create a website for your business, you quickly figure out that people are not flocking to it. When you assess the different ways of driving traffic, your options include advertising your website address, promoting your website address through Public Relations and gaining media coverage, encouraging other sites to link to you and getting placed in online directories.

However, these marketing activities will deliver small and sporadic volumes of traffic. The single biggest thing you can do to drive traffic is search engine marketing. Here is why: it is estimated that 80% of traffic to most websites comes from search engines. There are roughly 500 million searches performed everyday and 88% of that traffic comes from the top 4-5 search engines, Google, Yahoo, Ask and MSN. Of these, Google is by far the largest. Approximately 90% of people searching do not go past the third page of results and few go beyond the first page.

Therefore, if you want to drive traffic to your site it is imperative that you get onto the first three pages of Google and the other top search engines. Surprisingly, the majority of small businesses have not figured this out yet and for those who have, the majority are asking the question, How can I get my site to appear on the first page of Google search results?

Different Options

There are two main methods of appearing on the first page of search results.

Paid for results or Pay Per click (PPC)

This is where you pay to appear in the sponsored links section of the results page. In Google, this is at the top of the page and the right hand side. You decide which search keywords e.g. London restaurant, you would like to appear in. You appear in the search results and you pay for every user who clicks through to your site. The cost will vary by keyword and can range from 10p to several pounds or dollars per click, depending on how many other companies are bidding for that keyword.

Natural results achieved through SEO

Natural results are when you appear in the main list of results. You do not pay to appear or when a user clicks on your link. However, to appear on the first three pages of results, you need to implement a number of design and content changes to your website, which are termed Search Engine Optimisation or SEO.

Which is best?

Both have their merits, but natural results are by far the most preferable because once you have invested in SEO, you do not have to pay for the traffic that is generated.

PPC is a great solution if you:

Have just launched your website and you need immediate presence on the first page of result or if you have not yet successfully optimised your site to appear on the first page. Remember, there are thousands of websites all looking to appear on the first page of search results for certain keywords.

Spiders and Links: The Basics of How Search Engines Work

Without getting bogged down in the technical details of how search engines work, here are a few basics that you should be aware of.

Search engines want to ensure that the most relevant sites are displayed to customers who are searching for keywords e.g. London restaurants.

Each page is ranked by the search engine on different criteria.

Each search engine uses different criteria when calculating the ranking of the site, but there are some commonalities such as:

Automated Spiders are sent by the search engine to index each page on your site. These spiders log the content of your site. This allows the search engine to know whether the key words that a user is searching for appear within your site and on specific web pages. However, in addition, the search engines have decided that it is not sufficient to simply have the keywords appear in the site. They believe that the most useful and relevant sites for the person who is searching are those which have a lot of other relevant sites linking to it.

The important points you should take out are:

You want to make it as easy as possible for the spiders to visit and index your site.

You need to have relevant keywords on your site that are easily found by the spiders.

You need to have many other sites linking to your site.

Four Components of SEO

In order to optimise your website to appear in natural search results, there are four components that you will need to address.

1. Design: What to do when designing your website

Many small businesses make the mistake of designing their website and then start thinking about driving traffic to it. The problem is that the way you design your site can result in your site being ignored by the search engine spiders, which means you will receive very little traffic. When designing your site, ensure you avoid the following pitfalls and ask your marketing agency to confirm that they have been avoided.

Avoid flash sites

Sites are designed in HTML or flash codes. The spiders that are sent to your site by the search engines cannot read flash.

No frames

Some agencies design sites within frames. For example, the menu on the left might be within a frame and the main body of the page within another frame. It makes designing the site easier as the only thing that changes from page to page is the content within the frame. However, spiders cannot read what is inside a frame so you will not get indexed and noticed by search engines.

No dynamic pages

Some sites are developed with a database which generates dynamic pages. You can tell if there are dynamic pages on your site if there is a ? within the page URL. Again, most but not all of the search engines can read dynamic pages.

Text within graphics

To ensure text is read uniformly by different browsers, design agencies often put text within a graphic. It looks great, however, a spider cannot read what text is in a graphic and simply moves on.

Keywords

At design stage, think about the keywords you want to be found by on search engines and incorporate that into your design. For example, if you were to design your site so that a page was allocated to the most popular keywords, it would be easier to include more keywords on the page which would be found by the spiders.

2. Content: What to do when developing your content

Keywords

Choosing the keywords that you want to appear in search results for is one of the most important things you can do. Think of it as planning the location for a physical shop. Choosing keywords that people search for a lot (i.e. generates a lot of potential traffic) and then ensuring that those keyword are peppered around your site (i.e. more chance that the spiders will index them giving you a good chance of appearing high in search results) could result

in your being positioned on Oxford street as opposed to a back alley.

Invest time in choosing the keywords. Think about how you would search for your product or service. If you are running a restaurant, you should immediately think beyond the generic search keyword of restaurant and consider descriptive keywords such as seafood restaurant or family restaurant. You also need to think of target keywords, so consider London restaurant or London seafood restaurant.

Once you have decided on your keywords, you need to place them throughout your site. The main areas are:

Web page title

This is what you see written in the title bar of the browser. It is also what you see when you bookmark a page. This should explain what the purpose of your site or your page is and include keywords, but always in such a way that makes sense to a user who reads it.

Meta tags

The tags are not visible to users but they explain what the content of the page is. Keywords should be placed in here as they are easily searchable by spiders.

Homepage content

Your homepage is searched by the spiders and you should ensure that your keywords appear near the top header. They should also be sprinkled throughout the homepage. See keyword density for guidance on this.

Keyword density

A question often asked is how many times your keywords should appear on a page. The guidance for SEO is that each page should have a minimum of 250 words; your keywords should account for 2 - 8% of the word on the page. That means they should appear between 4 and 16 times.

Two important points to bear in mind are:

1. You need to balance the need to write your copy for your users, in order to sell your product, and the need to write your copy for search engines, in order to be found.
2. To help you achieve both objectives you should focus on a couple of keywords for each page rather than a large number.

3. Links

Inbound links are key

To combat a lot of sites achieving high page ranking by simply stuffing their sites with keywords, the search engines have placed a higher weighting on the value of the number of sites which link into a site. The rationale is that if a site is linked to by lots of other sites, then it must be offering popular and relevant content.

Therefore, your site might be designed in a way that is easily searchable by spiders and your content might be sprinkled with keywords, but you need to have other sites linking to you in order to achieve success.

Audit your links

Ensure you know how many other websites are linking into your site and set a goal for increasing that figure. You should have at least 100 quality links.

How to get links

There are many creative ways to generate links to your site:

Ask friends, customers or suppliers to link to your site.

Post comments on forums or discussion groups with a link back to our site.

Register your site with sites such as stumbleupon and if users like your site, they will bookmark it, creating a link to your site.

Issue an online press release which should result in online media coverage and links back to your site.

Register your site with multiple directories.

4. Maintenance:

Once you achieve a high ranking in the search engines, it is important to realise that you need to maintain your ranking. The criteria the search engines use in the algorithms constantly change and what works today may not work next week. Your site will need to be tweaked to bring you back up the rankings

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