

Best Practices for Ranking Higher on Search Engines



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Delivering Clear and Measurable Advantage™

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Background

Many factors can influence the position of a web site in a listing of unpaid (organic) search results. The exact method of ranking each site is a closely guarded secret of each search engine. Generally, each search engine relies on some proprietary technology to balance a variety of factors, known and unknown. Identifying and understanding as many of these factors as possible suggests several best practices that web sites should consider in order to influence position within unpaid search listings.

The recommendations below relate solely to unpaid results. Paid search result positioning is primarily influenced by bid rates and is thus not addressed in this document. For more information on paid or unpaid search, please call 212-448-0333 or email search@i33.com.

Best Practices

- **Place your target keywords strategically and liberally on your site**

Search engines assume that the most important words on your web site appear in headlines and the top few paragraphs of text. Decide what search keywords you most want to target, and distribute them prominently on your web site pages, matching keywords to content on your site. Use different forms of the keywords (e.g., “cruise,” “cruises,” “cruising”) to ensure search coverage. Make sure that copy and headlines are in HTML text (and not in gif or Flash format) so that a search engine can “read” and subsequently index the page.

- **Optimize text content**

Since the text of a page is a key influencing factor in search results placement, a web site should ensure that there is sufficient text (non-image, non-Flash) on each page to facilitate indexing by search engines. Body copy should include the most important keyword phrases, as well as those keyword phrases listed in other tags. Add new copy-filled pages (how-to articles, tips, press releases) to your site since other sites tend to link to this type of content.

- **Avoid keyword “spamming”**

Since frequency is a factor in determining page ranking, some web sites have resorted to keyword “spamming” – repeating a relevant keyword or group of keywords hundreds of times on a page and in tags in order to influence the page ranking. Search engines have begun to penalize web sites that use spamming methods.

- **Encourage links from external sites**

Search engines often increase a web site’s rank based on the number and quality of other sites that link to it. Consider sending friendly requests to other sites to link to you. This

tactic can work well, but don't forget to include reciprocal links. Some web sites have attempted to create artificial links to influence page ranking, although search engines are starting to penalize sites that employ artificial links.

- **Increase click-through rates from search engine listing results**

Once a site is listed, search engines review the actual results where the listing appears. In other words, does anyone click on it? High-ranking pages that generate low click-through rates may be dropped by search engines in favor of lower-ranked pages that pull in visitors. You can test different title tags and copy to determine response rates.

- **Develop appropriate titles**

A page title is often the first line of copy displayed in each search listing. In order to encourage clicks, the title should be compelling and include the key phrases you want to communicate to the searcher.

- **When possible, minimize use of dynamic URLs**

Search engines have a difficult time indexing pages that use dynamic URLs. If dynamic URLs are required, try to create category-level pages that include relevant text in the URL (e.g., www.cruises.com/atlantic/caribbean/winter/).

- **Minimize use of Flash content**

Search engines have a difficult time indexing web sites that use extensive amounts of Flash. In fact, search engines tend to read HTML text only. If you must use Flash, include as much HTML text as you can, as well as standard HTML links. In addition, duplicate the Flash content in HTML as much as possible.

- **Avoid use of image maps**

Search engines have a difficult time indexing pages using image maps. If you must use image maps, include another navigation scheme that uses only standard HTML hyperlinks.

- **Steer clear of JavaScript navigation**

Search engines have a difficult time indexing web sites that use JavaScript navigation. If you must use JavaScript navigation, include some form of standard HTML link navigation for your site. This ensures that search engines are able to index your site and allows users who have not enabled JavaScript in their browsers to view your content.

- **Keep current**

The search landscape is constantly changing. For the latest information about i33's paid and unpaid search engine marketing services, please call 212-448-0333 or email search@i33.com.

