

The ABCs of SEO: How to Drive Traffic to Your Web Site

By ANN BROWN

Every day, millions of people turn to search engines, such as Google, to find what they are looking for by simply typing a keyword. Getting traffic from search engines is the ideal way to drive more people to your personal real estate Web site.

The goal of search engine optimization (SEO) is to take the target words and phrases on your Web site and optimize your site so that the search engines rank you at the top of their results. The following SEO basics will help you get started.

Every page on your Web site needs a title tag, a meta keyword tag and a meta description tag. Let's look at each of these in a little more detail.

Title Tag

A title tag creates the words that appear in the top bar of your Web browser. This is one of the most important aspects of SEO because the search engines use the title tags to gather information about your Web site.

Your title tags should contain specific keyword phrases. For instance, if you are a REALTOR® in Dallas, you obviously want your Web site to appear in the search engine results for phrases such as "Dallas real estate" or "Dallas homes." So, your title tag code might look something like this: <TITLE>Jane Smith, REALTOR® – Dallas Real Estate – Dallas Homes<TITLE>

The goal of SEO is to... optimize your site so that the search engines rank you at the top of their results.

Placing the word "Dallas" twice in the title tag is both effective and allowable, but do not use one word more than two times. Search engines might frown upon that and ignore that particular search word altogether.

Tips to remember include:

1. The title tag is the most important part of your SEO.
2. It should appeal to both the reader and to the search engines.
3. It should be placed immediately after the <HEAD> tag in your Web site's code.

Meta Keyword Tag

A meta keyword tag is a list of all keywords and keyword phrases for which you want search engines to rank your Web site. These tags are within your site's source code; although invisible to the reader, they are very visible to the search engines.

The meta keyword tag should not be full sentences, just a list of all your most important keywords in order of importance. It's best to repeat the same keyword three to six times, but not all in a row. Let's go back to our example of Jane Smith.

An example of her meta keyword tag would look like this: <meta name = "keywords" content = "Dallas real estate, Dallas homes, homes for sale in Dallas, properties in Dallas, REALTOR® in Dallas">

Eighty-three percent of all searches today are done on only three search engines: Yahoo, Google and MSN.

Each search engine has its own size preference for meta keyword tags, but a good rule of thumb is to keep your tags between 950 and 1,000 characters long.

Tips to remember include:

1. Use the meta keyword tag to list your site's keywords and phrases.
2. List your keywords in their order of importance.
3. Don't repeat your keywords more than six times.

Meta Description Tag

A meta description tag is a small piece of code that belongs inside the <head> </head> section of your Web

page. Usually, it is placed after the title tag, but before the meta keyword tag.

The meta description tag is an exciting sentence or two that incorporates your main keyword phrases. Some search engines use your meta description tag as a summary of your Web site, so make sure that this particular tag is enticing to the reader.

An example would look like this:
<meta name = "description" content = "Jane Smith is a REALTOR® in Dallas and specializes in homes for sale and real estate in Dallas and surrounding areas.">

Tips to remember include:

1. Use a meta description tag on all pages of your Web site.
2. Include your site's keywords.
3. Limit the type to no more than 150 characters.

SEO Considerations

After reading about codes, tags and keywords, you may be feeling a bit overwhelmed. Because of the expertise and time it takes to achieve high rankings on the search engines, a good number of REALTORS® today outsource their SEO to a company or individual who knows how to get the job done efficiently and correctly.



to your Web site and, eventually, an increase in your business. Showing up on the first page of the major search engines is equivalent to being on the front page of your local newspaper's classified section 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

With more than 70 percent of consumers going online to search for real estate and related services, SEO is a very wise investment and can help you look like the leader in your marketplace.



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Many companies will help you get ranked on the major search engines, and some things to consider before selecting a vendor include cost, how long it will take and search engine submission.

Price. The cost of SEO most likely will be your number one factor. If you have never had your Web site optimized with the proper codes and tags, be prepared to pay a set-up or optimization fee initially. This usually ranges from \$500 to \$750.

Once your site is set up and properly coded, your SEO provider will begin submitting the information to the search engines. Typically, your Web site will be submitted either once or twice a month for a period of time, and monthly submissions can be \$150 or more each month.

Time Frame. It can take three to four weeks to optimize your Web site properly before submission, so be patient. Many people expect to see instant results once they hire an SEO company to work on their Web site, which is unrealistic.

Each search engine has its own set of rules and standards by which it ranks a site, and normally you will not see decent rankings (in the top 10 or 20) for at least two or three months of your initial submissions.

Ask your SEO company how long it expects to see results and if results are guaranteed. What happens if they do not achieve the rankings they promised? A good SEO expert will continue to work with you and perhaps try different keyword phrases to get you ranked in the top 20.

Search Engine Submission. On any major search engine, you will see tons of ads for search engine submission. These companies promise to submit your Web site to hundreds of thousands of search engines.

Sounds great, doesn't it? In theory, yes. In reality, no. Eighty-three percent of all searches today are done on only three search engines: Yahoo (32 percent), Google (35 percent) and MSN (16 percent).

If you spend your hard-earned money on SEO, spend it on achieving high rankings on these three search engines. Don't waste your money submitting to search engines that are used by less than 10 percent of consumers.

Conclusion

SEO is no small venture. Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile one. Take the time to do it right, and be patient.

By achieving rankings in the top 10 or 20, you will see an increase of traffic

Many people expect to see instant results once they hire a SEO company to work on their Web site, and that is just not realistic.

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