



Turn Chaos

into **ORDER**

Search Engine Optimization Primer

Building a web site and not planning for its systematic promotion is like creating a print ad without careful consideration of target market, optimum placement and frequency, and then running that print ad just once in a random publication. In other words, it might attract some attention before it's all together forgotten or it may simply not be noticed by anyone, ever.

Not that long ago, web site owners were competing against maybe 40,000 other sites for placement and ranking. Today, you're competing against millions, with thousands of new competitors added every day.

Therefore, when you plan for and begin to build your site, you should also be making careful plans about its subsequent promotion. This planning just constitutes a new section in your company's marketing plan. Now if you've never developed a marketing plan, this is an excellent time to do so. You can do it by yourself or hire someone to do it for you.

Getting traffic to your site is the process of "optimizing" your site's performance, hence the terms "Search Engine Optimization," or SEO. The process requires attention to many details and I believe it is most effective if done at the same time as your site is being created. However, if that WASN'T attended to when your site was initially built, you can still work on optimization after your site is complete.

Some clients decide to handle this process on their own, while others hire it done. Understand that it takes time, diligence and patience, and you won't see results overnight. Not only that, but the approach and rules change all the time! At a minimum, you'll need to do the following before you can expect any significant traffic:

1. **Integrated Content**. While your site is being designed and built, make sure to create tight integration between page content, title, alt tags, and metatags (things like key words, page descriptions, page titles). (if you don't know what I'm talking about, it might be wise to turn this over now to a professional!) Some feel the importance of these aspects has diminished, but I have had good luck with SEO services on sites where these considerations weren't overlooked. Think of it as dotting your i's and crossing your t's. A recent topic of relevance is that of "code to text ratio." This means that your designer uses techniques like external CSS files to keep the page content clean and text heavy. Not knowing these rules can cost your page rankings, so you need to find a design team that understands that technical functionality is just as (or more) important than beautiful design.
2. **Submissions**. Decide who will handle your initial round of Search Engine (SE) submissions and how much time you want that person to spend on the project. Many of the SE companies have adopted a fee-based system. This can run to several thousand dollars if you go that route. Some of these fees are one-time, some are annual, while others charge per click-through to your site and still OTHERS charge you for clicks on certain key words that you bid to use. You'll have to decide whether your budget will allow for you to take advantage of these fees, or whether your approach will be to just submit your site to those Search Engines and Directories for which there is no charge. This can be a viable route, but takes lots of time and effort.
3. **Site Maps**. Recently, many sources have been recommending that you include a sitemap of every single page on your site, and this strategy is intended to make the job of the Search Engines easier and more effective. I'm in favor of this approach, and you can do it yourself if you spend some time researching how.
4. **Covering all Bases**. Make sure to redesign any pre-existing business collateral and print ad campaigns so that they include your URL (web site address).
5. **Site Traffic**. Make arrangements with your site host for collecting statistics on your site's performance. Many hosting companies offer access to traffic analysis reports as part of their monthly account service package. You can also subscribe to traffic analysis services for a low monthly fee.
6. **Inbound Links**. Search engines like Google "reward" you for the number of "quality" inbound links your site has attracted. In the past, you could just contact people and ask them to link to you, in return for you linking to them but the SE's didn't like the sometimes unscrupulous results of this tactic. Today, your page rank is based on "organic, quality" links: these are sites who link to you (whether or not you link to them) and whose content is relevant to yours, such that site browsers would find it valuable to follow the links that lead to you in terms of serving up the information they need. On the flipside: "bad" links to you (from porn sites, link farms, unrelated content sites) can cause your site to drop in rank. So, the best recommendation I can give is that you provide spectacular content and try to make people aware of it.



7. **Sharing Content with Article Portals.** Some site owners have found great success getting content they have written posted on other sites, with links back to their site embedded in their articles, of course. Imagine if a dozen people posted your article on their site, with citations, how many more links and traffic you would then have coming into your site.
8. **Fresh Content.** It can't be emphasized enough. You've got to give people a reason to revisit your site, and if you can create a buzz about it, more's the better. Update your content regularly and watch the traffic climb.
9. **Social Networking.** Stumbleupon, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Myspace appear on the surface to be places to play. However, recent trends indicate that savvy web developers are using them for networking and to establish their expertise. Some say that in a few years, these will be the **ONLY** tools that dictate your web site's rank. Start now to investigate how they work.
10. **Blogging.** Once considered a novel way to talk to friends and hang out online, professionals in all industries now take blogging's impact seriously. Your blog can be an asset to your business site, and can even serve **AS** your site. Traffic to your blog represents increased traffic to your business, so learn how to blog and spend time at other people's blogs, learning and commenting, which will in the end bring traffic back to your site.

All of these steps are vital to the success of your site. If a huge influx of site visitors isn't critical to your business success, you can afford to spend a little less time and money on this process. But if you completely ignore them, your site will experience very little traffic.

What next? Just as you track the success of your various ad campaigns and other promotional efforts, you should track your site's progress. Again, here are some things you can do yourself, or you can hire them done:

1. Whenever you run a promotion or get free press, check your traffic reports (statistics) to see how much traffic you got, who came to your site, etc.
2. About 4 - 6 weeks after the first round of Search Engine and Directory submissions have been made, check your site's traffic. Read through your stats and make some baseline observations about who's coming to your site and what key words and phrases people were looking up when they found it. Getting familiar with the information contained in your traffic reports will really pay off.
3. Run periodic searches on a number of different search engines: remember, not everyone uses your favorite engine, so you have to conduct searches with as many as you can! Search for the words you'd **LIKE** to be associated with.
4. As you think of new key search terms that might be effective, convey that information to your site developer and have him or her add those terms to specific pages on your site.
5. Take various ones of your top key words and conduct your own searches on those words. Make note of which sites turned up and then take a careful look at those sites to see why the search engine found **THEM** but maybe didn't find you.



Search Engine Optimization Packages

If you're starting to sweat over the time all of this may take, you're not alone. Many businesses that understand what it takes to drive traffic to your site realize they can't do it alone. Loose Ends offers the following customizable packages for you to choose from:

Level I—What I'll Do:

- Handle your initial round of submissions.
- Make recommendations on metatag recommendations and/or site copy changes.
- Make and submit a site map for you.
- Analyze your competitor's metatags.

Cost: \$135.00 based on \$45/hr.

Client Responsibilities:

- You'll be tracking your own stats and following up on the reciprocal link recommendations on your own.
- You'll need to contact your site developer to make any key word or copy changes.
- Notify Loose Ends when you'd like to do this process again (for best results, you'll do it periodically).

Level II—What I'll Do:

Provide ongoing analysis for a specified number of hours/month, or at the interval you prefer (every other month, quarterly, etc.). (You can select any or all of the following list and set the time limit):

- Examine your site stats at the interval you specify (weekly, monthly, quarterly).
- Check your "referrers" stats and let you know where your traffic is coming from.
- Check the search engine key words and phrases area in your stats and forward to your web developer.
- Check your ranking in the various search engines where you've been submitted based on your most desirable key words/phrases.
- Relay ranking information to your web developer.
- Examine "top rankers" in your most critical search words or phrases; relay their metatag information to your web developer.
- Resubmit your site after designer rearranges and/or amends your metatag information and page content.
- Provide general recommendations and observations to you and your web designer on an ongoing basis.

Cost: \$45/hr.

Client Responsibilities:

- Establish a budget for the above activities and set time limit for the contractor.
- Notify the contractor of any significant publicity or ad placement dates so that information can be tracked in your stats records.
- Provide suggested industry clusters for inclusion in the effort to secure reciprocal links.
- Continue to examine your stats regularly.

Payment:

For the first three months of this service, service will be invoiced on an hourly basis at the rate of \$45/hr. After that trial period, you have the option of negotiating a retainer contract agreement.

Terms:

Loose Ends offers no guarantees of rankings, successful listings in specific search engines or traffic volume, due to the unpredictable and ever-changing nature of Search Engines and Directories. Loose Ends employs strategies that have been successful in my experience. The best way to secure a top spot in your favorite Search Engine is to pay for it. This can be extremely expensive and out of reach of many small businesses and organizations. My goal is to assist clients with the process of attaining rankings and traffic appropriate to their site's goals, while avoiding the often high cost of numerous paid placements.

Authorize me to provide the service you want by indicating below. Fax this form to 928-445-47247 and mail your check to:

Loose Ends, 1567 Shoup St., Prescott, AZ 86305

____ Level I, \$135 payable in advance.

____ Level II, specify the interval at which you want your traffic analyzed: monthly quarterly

Client Name

Date