

Why isn't my site showing up on the UF search?

Introduction

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- Professional background in software implementations, training, and web design/optimization
- Interests: SEO, social media
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Improving your positioning with the UF search and beyond

Take a good, hard look at your site.

- Are you using HTML correctly?
- How intimate are you with your content?
- Have you even THOUGHT about the key words your users may be trying use to find your site?

Let's be honest with each other now. Chances are, it's not them, it's you.

Disclaimer

- The following tips will help you optimizing your site for ANY kind of search, within the UF search domain and beyond.
- Remember: These are general tips that will help, but may not guarantee, better search rankings.

Myths and Misconceptions

Meta tags are the most important part of website optimization.

- Meta tags, such as keyword, title, and description tags, are informational HTML tags in the head section of website pages that search engine spiders use as part of their indexing strategy.

- Meta tags are by NO means the most important part of optimizing your site, but they are a part of a successful website optimization strategy.

Guaranteed Top Rankings or Your Money Back!

- Money-back guarantees are worthless in search engine positioning because outcomes are always unpredictable and ever-changing.
- New submissions are always being added to databases, changing rankings continuously.
- Bottom line: technicians simply cannot control the search engines.

Success will happen over night!

- No-one, and I mean no-one, can guarantee good organic search results within 24 hours.
- You've heard it before: 'Top 10 listing in 8 hours'.
- Any form of SEO that talks of instant results will likely provide only a short-term boost in traffic - and worse still, will be likely to originate from shady techniques such as spam (of the referrer, comment or plain email variety).
- As algorithms to detect this sort of bad behavior becomes more advanced, this sort of promotion is becoming more and more likely to harm your long-term search engine prospects.
- In short, if you want to get traffic to your site - don't look for the quick and instant gratification. Play the long game instead.
- A site that gathers 10,000 visits in a day and no more after that is worth less than the site that gets 10,000 visits a month through organic means.

Once you achieve good rankings, your set

- Search engine positioning requires trial and error, and success is ephemeral.
- Today's top listings will change tomorrow; sometimes, listings change on an hourly basis.
- Maintaining positioning requires constant monitoring and tweaking. It can't be guaranteed, and results aren't permanent once achieved.

Be a Buddhist – with SEO

“Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.” –Buddhist quote

So what does it really take?

A little bit of good design, good content, and a well thought out and usable site.

Carl will be talking about usability more in depth in the next session. For us, it means having an intuitive work flow that helps give a positive user experience. Usable also encompasses the concept of accessibility.

- Large institution with the potential of an enormous audience. If a handicapped person were to visit your site, will it make sense? Accessibility falls under the topic of proper HTML coding with appropriate use of tags and attributes.
- Create a well designed, usable, and accessible site
 - o Know who your users are
 - o Identify all potential keywords
 - o Write good content
 - o Use good HTML coding
 - o Know your search engines
- Try unconventional methods
- Persistence!

Terminology

bot (robot, spider, crawler) A program which performs a task more or less autonomously. Search engines use bots to find and add web pages to their search indexes. Spammers often use bots to “scrape” content for the purpose of plagiarizing it for exploitation by the Spammer.

bread crumbs Web site navigation in a horizontal bar above the main content which helps the user to understand where they are on the site and how to get back to the root areas.

CMS Content Management System - Programs such as Wordpress, which separate most of the mundane Webmaster tasks from content creation so that a publisher can be effective without acquiring or even understanding sophisticated coding skills if they so chose.

content (text, copy) The part of a web page that is intended to have value for and be of interest to the user. Advertising, navigation, branding and boilerplate are not usually considered to be content.

directory A site devoted to directory pages. The Yahoo directory is an example.

keyword spam (keyword stuffing) Inappropriately high keyword density.

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META tags Statements within the HEAD section of an HTML page which furnishes information about the page. META information may be in the SERPs but is not visible on the page. It is very important to have unique and accurate META title and description tags, because they may be the information that the search engines rely upon the most to determine what the page is about. Also, they are the first impression that users get about your page within the SERPs.

Robots Exclusion Protocol (robot.txt protocol) is a convention to prevent cooperating web spiders and other web robots from accessing all or part of a website which is otherwise publicly viewable. Robots are often used by search engines to categorize and archive web sites, or by webmasters to proofread source code.

search engine (SE) a program, which searches a document or group of documents for relevant matches of a users keyword phrase and returns a list of the most relevant matches. Internet search engines such as Google and Yahoo search the entire internet for relevant matches.

SEO Short for search engine optimization, the process of increasing the number of visitors to a Web site by achieving high rank in the search results of a search engine. The higher a Web site ranks in the results of a search, the greater the chance that users will visit the site. It is common practice for Internet users to not click past the first few pages of search results, therefore high rank in SERPs is essential for obtaining traffic for a site. SEO helps to ensure that a site is accessible to a search engine and improves the chances that the site will be indexed and favorably ranked by the search engine.

Snippet Content found in the META description tag that is displayed by some search engines as a result of a search query

social media Various online technologies used by people to share information and perspectives. Blogs, wikis, forums, social bookmarking, user reviews and rating sites (digg, reddit) are all examples of Social Media.

spider (bot, crawler) A specialized bot used by search engines to find and add web pages to their indexes.

Throw-away phrases “click here” “order now” “more info” etc.

web 2.0 Is characterized by websites, which encourage user interaction.

From <http://www.seomoz.org/blog/smwc-and-other-essential-seo-jargon>

Look at the Big Picture

You need to know your Users, Search Engines, Keywords and your Content

Know your users

Conduct heuristic evaluations based on feedback with people in your college and reach out to your users by conducting user group studies. These studies can be as simple as having users prioritize and arrange index cards with keywords written on them in groups to actually giving them a lists of tasks to complete using information on your website - like a scavenger hunt. Having the user describe where s/he encountered problems may help you figure out new key words you didn't think to use or rearrange content to make it make your content flow make more sense to your end user.

Heuristic Evaluations

Gather 3-5 of your finest colleagues and have them do a

Card Sorting

What the heck is it?

Card Sorting was originally developed by psychologists as a method to the study how people organize and categorize their knowledge. As the name implies, the method originally consisted of researchers writing labels, representing concepts (either abstract or concrete) on 3 x 5 cards, and asking participants to sort (categorize) the cards into piles that were similar in some way. After sorting the cards into piles, the participants were then asked to give the piles a name or phrase that would indicate what the concepts in a particular pile had in common.

Benefits

In the world of information technology, Information Architects and developers of Desk-top and Web-based software applications are faced with the problem of organizing information items, features, and functions in order to make it easier for users to find them. As a result, they have turned to card sorting as a means of soliciting feedback from potential users regarding the optimal organization. Inherent in this approach is the assumption that an organization derived from a sorting task will be helpful in a finding task.

Lo-fi

Get out some plain old index cards and write your keywords down. Have users arrange and organize the cards in a way that makes sense to them.

Hi-fi

Use web-based tools to allow users to sort topics remotely by sending them a link to a virtual card sort.

<http://websort.net/>

<http://www.optimalsort.com/pages/default.html>

Know your search engines!

You wouldn't start building your house without knowing building codes and restrictions, or coming up with a plan, would you? Building your website is no different. You need to know what the rules are with each different search engine to know how they are going to rank your site.

SEO, search engine style. Guidelines from the major search engines on how to get better ranking:

- Google - <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35291>
- SEO for the big three - <http://www.isedb.com/db/articles/1400/1/SEO-For-MSN/Page1.html>

Introduce yourself

While search bots crawl the net all the time, they may not be hitting your site frequently, or even at all. By submitting your site manually to search engines, you are actively inviting them to come to your site for indexing. Below are links to where you can submit your site to the big engines

- Google: <http://www.google.com/addurl/>
- Yahoo: <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>
- MSN: <http://beta.search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx>

Add the robot.txt file to the root of your web folder

The robot.txt file tells the search bot which pages to index and which ones to ignore. In this file, I can tell the search bot it can look at certain folders first, then tell them which ones to ignore. I can also tell it how often to come back and index my site. For example, I would set this file to ignore Drupal or Wordpress install folders not related to content and only focus on my image/content/etc directories and to come back every 14 days or once a month. Just search on how to create the robot.txt file - there are a lot of resources on the web that will help you create one.

Robot.txt example from CNN

..Identify potential keywords

Load up on keywords in the right places.

- Start with some basic keyword analysis
 - o Create a basic list from:
 - Personal knowledge
 - User feed back
 - Other websites like yours
 - o Become friend with Keyword suggestion tools
 - <http://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/>
 - o Refine
 - Rinse, and repeat!
- Use them everywhere
 - o In your metadata..
 - o In breadcrumbs..
 - o In your path or URL..
 - o In the text of hyperlinks on your page..
 - o In h1 tags as the title of your page..
 - o In ALT and TITLE attributes..
 - o In your content..

..In your metadata

What it looks like

```
<HEAD>
<TITLE> This is the Web Page Title. This will appear on your SearchSight.com Listing</TITLE>
<META name="description" content="This is where you place your web page's description. This will
appear on your SearchSight.com listing.">
<META name="keywords" content="place, your, keywords, here, separated, by, commas">
</HEAD>
```

- Relevance is minimal, but is considered in the overall equation of page quality
- Some indexing search engines may present the content (referred to as a Snippet) of your META Description Tag as the result of a search query.
- Use a distinct list of keywords that relate to the specific page
 - o For example:
 - WRONG: <meta name="keywords" content="shoes, brown shoes, blue shoes, and red shoes">
 - RIGHT: <meta name="keywords" content=" shoes, brown, blue, red">
- Tips
 - o A description should be no more than 156 characters.
 - o Place main keyword phrase as close to the beginning of the description as possible.
 - o The description should flow and sound human when read.
- Things to avoid
 - o Stop words
 - o Include: a, and, the, because, this, that and there

..In breadcrumbs

- Shows where in the site hierarchy the currently web page is located
- Provides shortcuts to jump higher up the site hierarchy
- Not only will breadcrumbs help orient the user to where they are in your site, it also gives another opportunity to add to your key word density.
- Links lend more weight to keywords
 - o search engines treat that single link as a “vote” for the page.
 - o the anchor text (text of the breadcrumb link) provides the search engines with an important, contextual clue
- Avoid common ‘throw away’ phrases
- <http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/279-SEO-Breadcrumb-Trail-Boosts-Rankings>

..In your path or URL

- Using keywords within your Site Architecture (aka Information Architecture)
 - o Establishes real links to keywords
 - o Increases site usability for users
 - o Increases maintainability for webmasters
 - o Are easier to remember!
- An intuitive site structure is good for users and SEO.
- Tips:
 - o Develop a standard naming convention
 - o Use your keywords in your site architecture and in your page names
 - o Use dashes instead of underscores in your page names
 - For example: seo-techniques.html instead of seo_techniques.html
 - o Enable clean URLs if you are using a CMS like Wordpress or Drupal.
 - To do this, you will need to enable clean URLs within your CMS (ie Drupal or Wordpress). With this feature turned on, you will get clean URLs.
 - This will allow you to have your key words in your URLs as well as within your page content as well as give the user more meaningful URLs.
 - Example
 - Clean: <http://website.com/about-your-website>
 - Dirty: <http://website.com/node/4>
- http://www.avangate.com/articles/url-rewriting_70.htm

..In the URL text

- Keywords in URLs are weighed more heavily than regular keywords
- Importance of keywords is also transferred to the destination page
 - o Destination page should also have descriptive, keyword-rich text in the title and content
- Avoid common 'throw away' phrases
- <http://www.poeticsystems.com/blog/Ethical-Hyperlinks-SEO.html>

..In your HTML

- Personal philosophy
 - o A well designed, usable and accessible site is most likely going to be a site that also ranks high in search queries.
 - o Visit UF ADA Accessibility Guidelines
- Use proper HTML coding
 - o Tags vs Attributes
 - o ``

..In a h1 tag as the title of your page

- Use your site name and keywords in page titles
 - o Avoid generic page titles like About Us, News, etc.,
 - o Instead, use About the College of Education
- Adding h2/h3/etc tags with keywords for page sections will give more weight and priority to those keywords
- Heading HTML example

..In ALT attributes

- ALT attribute
 - o Commonly misunderstood to provide a tool-tip for an image
 - o Provide alternative information about an element
 - o Generally required for image/image maps
- Alt tags are extremely important when building ADA accessible sites, especially for the visually impaired. Special browsers can read the source code and can output the information to large print, Braille readers and speech outputs and give robots additional key words to index. Not only is this a good web practice in general, but it will also allow your site to be ADA accessible.
- <http://ezinearticles.com/?Do-Alt-and-Title-Attributes-Help-With-SEO?&id=432783>

..In TITLE attributes

- TITLE attribute
 - o Provide additional information about an element
 - o Displayed as a tool-tip
 - o Can be used to describe any HTML element except for base, basefont, head, html, meta, param, script, and title
- Good use for a TITLE attribute
 - o Provide descriptive text within an anchor tag
- ALT attributes ARE picked up by search engines
 - o Provide alternative information when browser cannot display an image or input element
 - o Help increase the SEO of a website
- TITLE attributes ARE NOT
 - o Too easy to affect SEO via keyword stuffing
 - o Should still be used to provide a good user experience
 - o tool-tips provide about images, links, fields and much more,
- Gives user context to what is happening around the web page

..Write Good Content

This may seem pretty obvious, but use the words that you want people to find you by WITHIN the content you write.

- Remember to make sure your keywords are in your destination page content when you have followed a link.
- Aim for 250-500 words per page
 - o 50 well thought-out words for smaller pages
- Focus on keyword rich text
 - o Avoid excessive use of graphics
 - o Remember to use ALT attribute when using graphics
- Keyword density
 - o A measure of how many times your targeted keyword or keyphrase is being used in the content of your web page.
 - o Aim to have a keywords density of 3-5% of your total page content
 - o Helpful tool: http://www.googlerankings.com/ultimate_seo_tool.php
- Avoid using your keywords too often
 - o AKA "keyword stuffing"
 - o Instead, use words/phrases with similar meaning as your keywords
- Keyword positioning
 - o heading of the page
 - o in the first sentence of the first paragraph and
 - o near the bottom of the page.
- Online tools that will help with this include:
 - o http://www.googlerankings.com/ultimate_seo_tool.php

Other Ways to Draw Traffic to your site

Social Media

Sites like Twitter and Facebook

Resources

Books

Websites