

What you need to know about Search Engine Visibility — before you talk to your IT guy

Sooner or later, if you have a commercial web site, you will begin to worry about Search Engine Visibility, and its technical counterpart, Search Engine Optimization or SEO. In a nutshell, when a client types a search enquiry into a search engine like MSN, then you want *your* web page to come up, preferably as the first “hit” but at least on one of the first 10 – 20 items. If it does, you have good SE visibility; SEO is the process of changing a web site so that this happens.

Your web site designer, or an SEO specialist, will make the changes to help this happen, but they can’t do it without your help. Before you meet, here are some things you should know:

- *It’s tough to be number one.* There are 718,000 results for the search term “widgets” . What are the chances that you will beat them all and become the new #1?
- *Winning is temporary.* Suppose your designer creates a page that manages to mention “widgets” 3,492 times on one page, and you’re now number 1. How long will it be before Widgets ‘R Us change their page to use the term 3,500 times? Besides, most search engines realise what you’re doing and will de-list you if you use blatant tactics like that, and your clients will get really bored reading it!
- *It can be expensive.* Companies that consistently rank highly for competitive search terms spend a great deal of time and money to do so. A typical small business needs to find an affordable niche where they *can* perform well.

With that in mind, prepare for meeting your SEO specialist by considering alternatives. Maybe you specialise in *antique* widgets. A smart consumer who is look for that topic will give up looking through 718,000 results sooner or later and search for “antique widgets” (putting the words in quotes makes most search engines look for the exact phrase). Now you’re only competing with 15 sites for the best ranking. Beating 15 sites is a lot easier than beating thousands!.

What other phrases will describe your product? Make a list and prioritise it. Ask your clients how they found your web site. Bear in mind though, that asking clients or looking at your web site statistics will only provide data about words and phrases *that actually found you*. While you can work to improve your ranking for those phrases, somehow,

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you need to dig and find the phrases that people used which *didn't* find you, because *those* phrases are the ones you need to add for the search engines to find.

Your web-site techies can do marvellous things, but you are the one who knows your business and your clients. Use that knowledge to help your specialists do their job.

PS – when I chose to use “antique widgets” as an example for a search term, I had no idea that over 80% of the actual hits on a search of this term were other pages dealing with SEO. And I thought I was being original!