Steve Wiideman
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The Four Layers of the SEO Model
How to Rank Higher in the Search Engines
By Steve Wiideman

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The Four Layers of the SEO Model
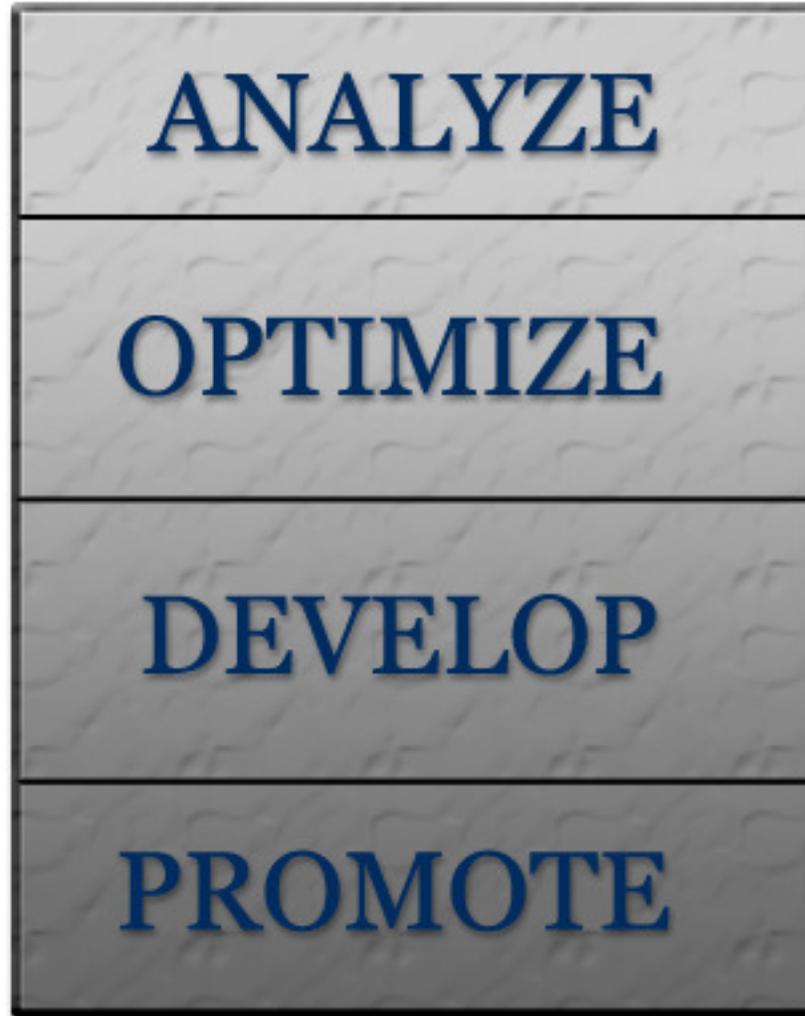How to Rank Higher in the Search Engines
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Introduction

Who is This Book For?

If you have a business with or without a website, and your customers can't find you on the top 10 results in Google, MSN, Yahoo! or any of the other search engines **while searching for your product or service**, then this book for you.

Likewise, if you are on a budget that doesn't include Internet marketing, then The Four Layers of the SEO Model is the tool you need to help launch a profitable online strategy.

This book isn't for multi-million dollar corporations who already get a substantial amount of web traffic through Internet Advertising. This eBook isn't about advertising; it's about creating a search-engine friendly website at virtually no cost.

What You Should Already Know Before Reading This eBook

This eBook was created for both technical and non-technical readers. ***You do not need to be tech-savvy to get through this eBook***. However, you will need a general knowledge of the Internet, including basic terms, such as Browser, Address Bar, Hyperlink or "Link", and Search Engine.

If you have never used the Internet before, you may find this guide to be perplexing. We highly recommend you discover the Internet and its use before reading on.

My Philosophy on Search Engine Optimization

I've been around since the archaic Gopher Server days and have literally "lived the Internet" for well over a decade. I hold a Bachelor of Science in E-Business Management and developed or been a major contributor to well over 100 websites. I survived the "Dot Com Crash of 2000" and remain a true believer in the long-term dependency of Internet in our lives.

That being said, here is my philosophy: I believe that through effective Search Engine Optimization, anyone (and I mean ***anyone***) can build a massive presence on the Internet. The key to success in SEO is planning, executing, measuring, and not giving up. Those are the unbendable principles of this new technology, and if you abide them, they will guarantee you success.

Thank you for purchasing this eBook. I hope it will benefit you in the same lucrative way it has benefited so many other readers.

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The Four Layers of the SEO Model

When I started building this model in my head several years ago, I noticed an undeniable similarity to the basic project management structure I had used so many times before on eCommerce projects. Then I remembered the 7 Layers of the OSI Model that I'd been introduced to in my computer networking courses. These two completely different IT fields inspired me to create the Four Layers of the SEO Model, a visual representation of an effective SEO project.

In my opinion, this model is much easier to remember than those of the OSI Model, not just because there 3 less layers, but because executing on these practices can have an absolutely massive effect on sales. So here they are in all of their glory:

The Four Layers of the SEO Model

| ANALYZE |
| OPTIMIZE |
| DEVELOP |
| PROMOTE |

Pretty simple isn't it? It's easy to compare this model to the Project Management model, which normally includes planning, pre-design, design, development, testing and hypercare. Only these layers work synergistically, each fully dependent on the others.

By Analyze, we are referring to time spent on evaluating keywords and peeking in on your competitor's game book, which includes performing backlink checks on competitor websites.

To Optimize is to design a website that guides the search engines to topic-discovery, rather than having the search engines make their own guess about what your site is about. This layer involves a handful of common SEO Best Practices and a few tricks I've learned over the years that definitely make a difference.

Developing a webpage is only free when you have the time to add mass amounts of content via the SEO Best Practices of the Optimize Layer. We'll discuss this in more detail, but other low-cost tools are available to boost ranking. A few of these tools include RSS (Really Simple Syndication), web forums, and blogs.

The last layer is the Promote Layer. It's at this critical layer that you will get a few high-quality links pointing to your website.

In the sections ahead, we'll talk in detail about each of these layers as they relate to Search Engine Optimization.

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The Analyze Layer

The Analyzer layer contains two parts: Keywords and Competition. Both play an equally important part in discovering what needs to be on your website to rank #1 on the major search engines.

The Importance of Keywords

Keywords are like puzzle pieces to the search engines, every word used on a webpage contributes to the big picture of what a site is all about. Used in the appropriate densities, it is these keywords that will ultimately determine how many people you can reach through the search engines.

Users type in keywords in the Search field to find what they are looking for. The search engine then reaches into its database to find the most relevant result. Relevant results are driven by different factors, mainly by keywords, but also by traffic and the number of links pointing in from external websites.

Getting the Right Keywords is Everything

So how do you know which keywords get searched for the most? There are literally hundreds of Keyword Analyzers on the Web. Only one has passed the test of time and to-date recognized as the authority on keyword searches: WordTracker. At the time of this writing, they are number one, not just because they have the largest following, but because their database spans 120 days, not just a single month like some others.

Another reason I recommend WordTracker is because of the results you generate from running queries on their database. The results return a Keyword Effective Index (KEI) that not only calculates the number of estimated searches, but also includes competition numbers in the calculation. In other words, Number of Searches / Number of Competing Websites = KEI.

Overture, now Yahoo! Search Marketing, also has a Keyword Selector Tool (KWST) that gets a lot of hype. However, this tool has been noted to be skewed by developers. I've seen a lot of spam in the results myself in the past, so I don't argue that this tool has some bugs. Another drawback of the KWST is that it consolidates plurals and has a man-made database of keywords and keyword phrases; most of which are in no particular sequence. Non-organic results aren't as helpful to your keyword analysis.

For example, WordTracker may tell you that you can expect 4,303 daily searches for banana and 3,220 daily searches for bananas. Overture, on the other hand only has one term: banana, which it claims gets 2,384.5 daily searches (what's a .5?). KWST is a great tool for determining which keywords get the most searches, but you can acquire a more accurate prediction of potential searchers using WordTracker.

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However, this guide promises to deliver a free method to SEO, so I'm going to share another highly effective tool that shows both WordTracker and Overture results. Unfortunately, the WordTracker results won't display KEI, but at least you can see the number of daily searches it estimates you can expect for your keyword. The site is DigitalPoint.com and here is a direct link to their free keyword analyzer:

http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/suggestion/

Hint to Using Keyword Analyzers: Keyword analyzers return a list of suggestions based on the words used in your search. Keep your searches ambiguous to uncover the best selection of terms to use. For example, if you sell banana boat covers, do a search for banana. You may find that there are 10 times as many people searching for banana boat umbrellas, which you wouldn't have know if you were search for specific phrases.

Okay, now we have a tool to analyze our keywords, but we still don't know what keywords our competitors are targeting. That's where researching our competition comes in, bringing us to the 2nd part of the Analyze Layer: Competition.

Your Competition Can Run, but They Can't Hide

There are several things we are going to need to analyze when it comes to competitor websites, but as with any project there is a specific sequencing you're going to need to follow in order to achieve quality results. Here is an outline of the tasks and sequence, which we'll elaborate on in a moment:

1. Obtain a hefty list of potential keywords using a Keyword Analyzer.
2. Perform searches to see who is in the top 5 results.
3. List the competitors in the top 5 of your most valuable keyword searches.
4. Run a backlink check to count inbound links and to find out what keywords they are targeting.
5. List any keywords you discover that weren't tested in the Keyword Analyzer.
6. Analyze the top competitor sites using an SEO Best Practices List.
7. List the best practices and keyword densities used by your competitors. (we'll revisit this item later as well).

When you're done, you'll know what keywords to use. You'll know which competitors you'll be competing against and where they stand in the search engine results. I know this seems like a lot of work, and take it from me, it's worth every minute.

There are tools available that perform ALL of the 7 items above and could save you hundreds of hours. Regardless of what you think you are worth per hour, it is definitely worth the investment to chip in for one of these all-in-one applications.

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If you choose to go this route, here are our software recommendations:

Web Position 4 (This is what I use the most)
SEO Toolkit
eComm Pro
Internet Studio
Classify Pro
Web CEO

Analyzing Backlinks

Item 4 above (running backlink checks) involves using simple or sophisticated software to run queries on the major search engines. These queries return results that include how many external web pages are linking to the competitor, what keywords are used in the actual text of the links, what PageRank the inbound links come from, what keywords are in the title of the page holding the inbound links, and more.

The best tool, of course it isn't the free one, is SEO Elite. We highly recommend using SEO Elite to get the most out of your backlink search. The free tool you can use to get similar, but limited, results is called the BackLink Analyzer. Calculate PageRank with the Google Toolbar (http://toolbar.google.com).

The Proof is in the Searching

To fully appreciate the value of the backlinks, perform a search on Google for the phrase "click here". Notice that Adobe's download page is the first result. Yet, nowhere on the page is there any text containing the phrase "click here". So how do you explain the phenomenon? With backlinks, that's how. Use your Backlink Analyzer to see how many sites use the words "click here" in their link text.

You can also search Google for "miserable failure" to find President George W. Bush's website. You guessed it; several webmasters used those words in their link text. In this case, the malicious use of backlink technology is referred to as a "Google Bomb", and is considered extremely unethical.

Using either SEO Elite or the free Backlink Analyzer, create a backlink analysis for the Adobe Download page you found on Google.

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Check out the results of this backlink analysis:

In the analogy above, my results indicated that there were 239 sites (in Google's index) that contained links to Bush's webpage, 86 of which contained the link text "miserable failure". This number has increased since the last time I checked, but the ratio of "miserable failure" versus non-miserable failures remains at about 31%. So I believe that if 31% of your inbound links contain your keywords, you'll be looking pretty good.

Your goal with this activity is to determine how many one-way backlinks your competitors have pointing to their sites, which should give you a rough estimate of how many you'll need to compete with them. We'll get into Link Development in the Promote Layer later on.

Whatever method you choose (software or analyzing manually); this Layer of the SEO Model is by far the most critical. I challenge you to spend as much time as possible on this layer. It is the foundation of your plan and plays the largest part in the success of your SEO strategy.

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If you already own a website, you'll want to use this tool to create your benchmark. So be sure to check the backlinks to your own website as well as your competitors.

Analyzing the SEO Best Practices of Your Competitors

We'll talk in more detail in later sections about the specific Best Practices I use personally. For the purpose of this simple competitor analysis, I recommend using an automated tool to save you hours of time. A terrific free tool you could use can be found at Scrub The Web.

Recap

The Analyze Layer is the first of The Four Layers of the SEO Model. It involves finding the right keywords to use on your site and a detailed analysis of the strategy used by your competitors (mostly inbound links). When you are done with this layer, you'll have created a benchmark for your own site and have created the following to guide you through the process of your site's redesign.

- A list of quality keywords related to your product or service (at least 3-5 to start).
- An averaged number of backlinks needed to compete in your inbound link battle.
- A handful of one-page reports created for each of your top competitor sites, with SEO data.

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The Optimize Layer

There are several hundred things you can do that would be considered "optimizing a webpage", but for the scope of this eBook I'm only going to cover the ones that have the largest impact to your ranking. You can find more optimization tips at my website (www.stevewiideman.com) and at www.ocinternetadvertising.com.

Optimization involves using the right keywords, in the right locations, and in the right densities. It also involves creating source code that is intuitive to the search engine robots. In other words, only displaying what you want them to see by hiding programming and formatting as much as possible.

First, we'll discuss the Pre-Design Phase of the Optimization Layer, which involves using the keywords you uncovered in the Analyze Layer to help you develop "relevant content" (seen as relevant to the search engines and users).

Second, we'll look at the actual coding of your website and things you can do to clean up (Optimize) your web pages. It's here that we'll be analyzing keyword densities, Meta tags, link text, and other criteria for an optimized website.

See **Appendix A** for a condensed version of my detailed SEO Best Practices Model. Use this guideline as your checklist for best results. This is the checklist I personally use for my clients to do search engine optimization work. You may also want to refer to Google's Webmaster Guidelines for more tips.

Pre-Design Phase

This phase could consume you, so I highly recommend using MS Project or Excel to map out your strategy and tasks in terms of milestones and deadlines. Trust me, if I didn't set deadlines, I could easily spend a month on a phase that I could get the most important pieces from in about a week.

First, have all your applicable keywords in hand before starting the design. These are the keywords we dug up in the Analyze Layer. Using "assumed keywords" is the worse possible gamble you could make; take the time to uncover the most valuable keywords for your website.

Second, use a program like Visio or MS Word to draw out your website's architecture and sitemap. This will give you an excellent prediction of how your site will work. This step is absolutely vital if you plan on outsourcing your design to a contractor. The map should include every page and function you plan to include on your website.

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Third, use a text editor and write out **one page of content for each keyword** to be used. Some SEO experts brag about having several #1 keywords all on one page. I say don't risk it, eventually your competition will figure out what you're doing and beat you using an individual keyword strategy. You should include 200-300 words of text. Once the text has been written, go back and add your keywords sporadically. A good rule of thumb is 3-4 instances for every 100 words.

Fourth, find and acquire 1-3 images per page. You can use Google Images if you like, but keep in mind that most of the images you find are copyrighted. I recommend using a picture archive like www.gettyimages.com or www.istockpro.com.

Finally, search Google for 3 websites that have your keywords in the title (that aren't competitor websites). Do this for each page on your website. The search syntax is simply "intitle:your_keywords". I'll go into this more in the next section.

Linking to External Websites

I consider the first 5 bullets of my Best Practices List fairly intuitive, but the six one (creating external links) might raise your eyebrow. Let's discuss this step in greater detail so you can fully understand where I'm coming from.

Authority sites provide huge amounts of information, but without linking to other websites they can become a "spider trap", meaning the webcrawlers cannot leave the site to continue their journey. Everything you can think of is analyzed by the search engines, including these external links, so I can't emphasis enough how important it is to create at least 1-3 per page.

Finding quality external websites to link to is a simple task. Just go to Google.com and perform an "intitle:" search, and then qualify the sites on the first page by viewing their PageRank and making sure that they are not a competitor. Here's an example:

Your keywords are movie tickets. You go to Google.com and perform the following search "**intitle:movie tickets**". You find that the first 3-5 sites are direct competitors selling movie tickets in your neighborhood. Mark them off the list. However the 6th site listed is about the history of movie tickets and has a PageRank of 5 (shoot for a PageRank greater than 3). You add the URL of the site to your list, and then continue down the Google results page to find more.

You'll want to add at least 3-5 links per page, and be sure to include your keyword in the link text. Avoid too many external links, as external links have the potential of "leaking PageRank". We'll discuss PageRank more in the Promote Layer.

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The Design Phase: Finding the Best CSS Template

The next bullet in my SEO Best Practices Checklist is obtaining a soft-color website template that strictly uses Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). CSS helps keep your page's file size down; it centralizes text and page formatting, and ultimately provides the search engines with output that is easier to interpret.

Avoid the temptation to use Flash or heavy JavaScript. Not only do they increase the page's load time, but can include a lot of code, which is measured with the text on your page to determine the overall usefulness. Once your site is generating traffic and has a healthy number of incoming links, you can safely (and gradually) start adding more content.

Here are a few sites I have used in the past on my quest for the Best Template:
- http://www.ssi-developer.net/main/templates/
- http://www.benmeadowcroft.com/webdev/
- http://css-discuss.incutio.com/?page=CssLayouts

Explaining My Page Guidelines

If you've read my guidelines in the appendix you're probably thinking "if I'm using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), then why are you having me add all of these old HTML tags?" This is the true magic of SEO and may be the most important part of the Optimization Layer. See, once you've formatted the webpage using CSS, there is virtually nothing left on the page other than META tags and a few DIV tags; basically you've got a clean slate to work from.

At this point the search engines see your site as containing lots of text, but they don't know how to translate it, and they don't know what points your site is trying to make. This is where the heading tags come in (H1 – H6). By using the H1 tag on your page, you're essentially telling the search engine that this is the most important topic on the page. Using H1 more than 1 or 2 times can appear as spam, so never just load up your page with this tag.

Subsequently, the H2 tag was created to support the H1 tag, sort of like a subheading. You could use the H2 tag several times on the page, so long as it supports and is relevant to the H1 tag. Similarly, the H3 tag should support the H2 tags, and so on. If your webpage were a book, these heading tags would appear to the search engines as your chapter and section titles; thus making the book much more organized.

Prior to the SEO Revolution, we used formatting such as Italic, Bold, Emphasize, Strong and Underline for any text we wanted to stand out to the reader. Today, we use these tags to tell the search engines what we consider to be important on our page, and leave all the formatting to our CSS.

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Think about it this way: You have an H1 tag that says "Affordable Movie Tickets" and H2 tag that says "Where to Find Affordable Tickets" and an H3 tag that says "Movie Ticket Location 1: Ticket Hound"; you've just identified your topic. If you then bold or emphasis text that has nothing to do with your topic, you're in risk of losing points with your SEO (like demerits). For example, if you use text in a paragraph below your H3 tag that says "buy ice cream" and then bold that text, Google may interpret the bold as you saying "this page is about ice cream", even though my heading is about the real topic.

To keep your page from looking really weird with bolded or formatted keywords, simply use your CSS file to make your formatting transparent.

For instance, in your styles.css (or whatever you call it) you would do this:

b, em, strong, u, i { font-weight: normal; font-style: normal; text-decoration: none; }

For making text appear extremely important to the search engines without making it a huge eyesore to your viewers, you may include this class:

.normalize { font-weight: normal; font-style: normal; font-size: 1em; text-decoration: none;}

Use the above class anytime you want use FONT or other formatting tags on the page. Example:

"Find great < font size="+7" >< b >< span class="normalize" >movie tickets< /span >< /b >< /font >."

Using the page guidelines in this checklist will make your webpage extremely intuitive and understandable to the search engines, while maintaining readability and a normal appearance to your users.

A trick people were using for a couple years to improve PageRank was to pay for inclusion on the footer of related websites. Search Engines are catching on to this trend are beginning to adjust their algorithms to virtually ignore footer links. Sites doing this may be subject to penalizing as well. The Optimize Layer best practice for adding links is to do so in paragraphs, not in a list of bullets or randomly in the footer.

See what your page looks like to the search engines at ScrubTheWeb.com.

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Explaining the Title and META Tag Guidelines

META Tags aren't being used nearly as much as they once were. In fact, Google doesn't give any weight to the Keywords META tag whatsoever. However, nearly all search engines use the Title and Description tags in determining relevance and as the text that will appear in the search engine results.

Misuse of these tags could result in ranking penalties; not using them at all could result in not being included in the search results page. Therefore the guidelines should be strictly followed.

Keyword Density Explained

In my eyes there are really 3 different keyword densities I need to be concerned about: one-word, two-word, and three-word densities. You could find keyword densities in everything from the title to the content. Basically what we're talking about here is how many times your keywords appear in the page in proportion to other text used on the page.

I've found that the best tool for analyzing keyword density is actually a free tool on ScrubTheWeb.com. Web Position also contains a very useful tool, but I'm still a bit partial to ScrubTheWeb.com on this one. Here's the basic idea. Every individual keyword on your site should be between 3-5% in density. Same goes for every 2 and 3 word phrase used. Example "affordable", "movie" and "tickets" should each be at 3-5%, "movie tickets" should be at 3-5%, and "affordable movie tickets" should be at 3-5%. Everything else should be below 3%. Remember, going over 5% could be seen as keyword stuffing – so be sure to analyze each page before publishing.

The robots.txt File

This simple little file can get you listed or keep you from ever being listed. The robots.txt file tells the search engines whether or not you would like to be indexed, and if so, which pages on your website you would not like to be indexed.

Thus far, all of the major search engines have adhered to the rules on this file, keeping with good webcrawling ethics. Store this file on the root of your webpage, in the same folder as your index.html (or homepage).

Occasionally webmasters are forced to move domains. It's the robot.txt file that will help keep your files in their index with the new domain name. Visit the Google Removal Tool if this ever comes up in your organization, and be sure to disallow all of the individual pages on your old domain's robot.txt file prior to the removal submission.

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Here are some examples of how to use the robots.txt file:

The following allows all robots to visit all files because the wildcard "*" specifies all robots:

User-agent: *
Disallow:

This one keeps all robots out:

User-agent: *
Disallow: /

The next one bars all robots from the scripts and images directories:

User-agent: *
Disallow: /scripts/
Disallow: /images/

This one bans Slurp from all files on the server:

User-agent: Slurp
Disallow: /

This one bans keeps Googlebot from getting at the styles.css file:

User-agent: googlebot
Disallow: /styles.css

For more complex examples, try retrieving some of the robots.txt files from sites like ESPN.com.

Using Google Sitemap Technology

Google is now offering a way to exclusively list every page you would like indexed in one file, called **sitemap.xml**. Pages not listed in the sitemap.xml can still be indexed during the Googlebot's normal monthly crawl; this is just a way to almost guarantee inclusion in the Google directory.

Visit the Google Sitemap page to learn more.

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Testing the Site for CSS and HTML Corrections

There are hundreds of tools and websites that offer free CSS and HTML validation tools. What I use most of the time comes with the Web Position software. I like using this tool because I can setup a schedule and run weekly or monthly reports. This insures that I will know what needs to be fixed without proactively having to run a report when I have time.

If you're on a budget and can't afford such a tool, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C.org) offers free tools to validate both CSS and HTML. Depending on the size of your website (and the number of pages), using these free tools could take a very long time. Here are the links to the free validation tools:

W3C CSS Validation: http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/
W3C HTML Validation: http://validator.w3.org/

Performing Broken Links Tests

Broken links on a website can get you penalized, so be sure to run a broken link check anytime you make a change to your website. Search engine spiders hate broken links because they act as sort of a deceiving dead-end; in other words, avoid them all costs!

I use Web Position to schedule and run weekly link validations for all of my websites. If the e-mail Web Position sends me is empty, I know my site is fine. If there are bad links, I can see what pages they are on, make the necessary corrections.

A free tool is offered by the W3C, but bear in mind that the tool reads every link on your site, which could take up to an hour or more depending on the size of your website and the number of links.

W3C Link Validation Tool: http://validator.w3.org/checklink

Find an Editor for Syntax and Readability

My wife is my biggest critic and she loves to tell me I'm wrong. So when I asked her for help with content editing she pulled out her red marker and really let me have it. She never hesitates to include "I don't understand" in areas that require clarification. Now I know my sites are not only without spelling errors, but are understandable as well.

Whomever you choose to do your editing, make sure they have a genuine interest in your project. Make them feel comfortable about marking up areas that don't make sense, or images that don't fit with the page. Also be sure they have a program that checks spelling and grammar, so they can catch your grammatical errors as well.

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Recap

The Optimize Layer is true SEO layer. It's here that you will leverage the results from the Analyze Layer and where you will be setting the foundation for the next layer: the Develop Layer. By following the SEO Best Practices Checklist (Appendix A), you can insure that your web pages are completely understandable to the search engines and that your topics are clearly identified.

You've now just gotten through the ground work for building a successful SEO site. You're using the right keywords to compete with and have built a site that works for your users as well as for the search engine spiders.

Now comes the tough part, developing dynamic and interactive content to maintain user retention and to add more value to the relevancy of your website. In English, you'll be adding more technical stuff to seduce the search engines with.

If you know nothing about web development or do not have the budget to afford a contractor, I suggest skipping this section. However, if you have the time to learn some basic programming skills, I highly recommend adding this development for your site. It will save you time on site maintenance and time on having to add fresh content whenever you slip in ranking.

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The Develop Layer

As I mentioned at the end of the last section, the Develop Layer is by far the most technical part of this eBook. Don't get discouraged though. You can still get the ranking you desire without this section, but it is a great "organic" method of maintaining your ranking without spending extra time on the next layer, the Promote Layer. At the end of this section, I'll help you setup a Requirements document for your developer (if you choose to hire one).

Developing your website is both for your visitors and for the search engines. It pleases the visitors to have fresh content to read and interact with and is a good reference point for up-to-date information. Development impresses the search engines, because it increases your keyword densities, heightens your relevancy, and provides a continuum of fresh content for the webcrawlers to gobble up.

The Most Effective Ways to Develop Your Site for SEO

1. Automating your Google Sitemap.
2. Add RSS for others to borrow content and to pull content from other sites.
3. Include Blogs and Web Forums to feed fresh content to search engine spiders.
4. Install an integrated Affiliate System to pay visitors for sharing your website.
5. Install web site analytics via software or online provider.
6. SSI and dynamic content.

Automating Your Google Sitemap

In the Optimize Layer we looked at creating a simple one-page xml file to help Google index all the important pages of your website. Believe it or not, Google has a program you can actually install on your web server that will automatically index every page on your website and feed it to Google for you. All you have to do is install the tool and run it. Visit Google's Sitemap support site to learn more.

Explaining RSS

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Feeds are snippets of information pulled via RSS. Though for me, learning RSS wasn't so simple and if you Google search for it, you'll see that the developers using it like to keep it that way. The philosophy behind RSS is to provide a way for other websites to borrow content from one another.

Perhaps you create a daily, weekly, or monthly newsletter on your website. I'm sure those newsletters contain your keywords as well as links to other pages on your site. This can be extremely valuable for a webmaster of an external site who may consider your newsletters as an authority on your product or service. If RSS is installed, the webmaster need only copy some code into his/her website and instantly, your newsletter (with backlinks) will be up on someone else's site.

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Do the math, if several thousand websites share (syndicate) your newsletter; imagine how many people will be able to find your site. Even better, imagine how many links you'll have for the search engines to weigh into your Backlink-based PageRank score. The possibilities are endless.

Because search engines like fresh content, you'll want to pull as much of it as you can as often as you can; and you want it to happen without any manual work required. With RSS, you could have new content on your site everyday without ever lifting a finger.

If you are interested in developing this technology yourself, you can pick up a book like RSS & Atom or simply search the Web for "How To's" on the subject. Here's a great link I found at XML.com that should help you to get started and give you a little history on RSS: http://www.xml.com/pub/a/2002/12/18/dive-into-xml.html.

The Power of Blogs and Web Forums

Blogs are simple pages that look similar to a journal. Normally the site owner and site staff will post messages to the blog. Visitors are usually able to post comments if they like. Having a blog adds clean, simple-to-write content for your site.

A Web Forum is an environment where users can interact on your website, leaving behind a potentially large amount of keywords and content for the search engine spiders to gobble up. It's a way to get users to want to revisit your website (responding to posts) while adding free content for you at the same time.

By performing a search on Google for "SERPS" you'll have a good example of how frequently Web Forums get crawled, and how they rank on the search engines. View the results to see how many URLs contain the word **forum** in them.

Depending on your hosting provider, web forums can be very simple to setup. Most providers now have tools that automate the installation of web forums for you. Simply visit your control panel and click on the respective Forum Installation button or link.

Once you've installed the forum, be sure to setup the permissions, so that you are the only administrator; you may also want to restrict HTML at first, at least until you discover your audience. My recommendation is to start out with two sets of forums: one or two general introduction-type forums, and 4-6 topic-related forums.

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Effective Forum Example:

<u>*Movie Tickets Forum at Movie Hound*</u>

<u>Introductions Forum</u>
Meet people who use this site and talk about your history with movies. Be sure to post your favorite movie here too!

<u>Movie Lounge Forum</u>
Talk about whatever you like in the movie lounge. Meet new people, find old friends, and talk about whatever's on your mind.

::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

<u>Movie Tickets History Forum</u>
Talk about the history of movie tickets in this forum. From the cost of a ticket in the 40's to the way the look of the ticket has evolved since its creation.

<u>New Releases: The Hot and No-So Hot Movies of the Year</u>
Discuss new releases and give your review in this forum.

<u>Movie Spoilers and Links to Trailers</u>
This forum is not for people who want the movie spoiled for them.

Notice the use of the keywords in the links. Each forum is a link (which search engines like) and each link contains the keywords (which help search engines determine your page topic).

Forums are a powerful tool for allowing your visitors to write content for you. Remember, the more content, the better your site looks in the eyes of the search engines.

<u>Installing an Affiliate System</u>

This new trend in marketing has become a real phenomenon in recent times. An Affiliate System allows users to sign up as an "affiliate" and make money through sales commissions. The programming creates an Affiliate ID and hands the user a custom URL to send out via e-mail or to post on a website(s). Once installed, all you have to do post a link on your site and periodically monitor your Affiliate Control Panel.

While this is not necessarily an SEO Tool, the value of this programming is unparalleled. Imagine several thousand users sending out e-mails for you or posting several thousand links on their various websites. The potential for success is simply unbelievable. You can even customize the link text in the code you provide your affiliates with to help you with quality link development (which we'll discuss in the next section).

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The only downside to this type of marketing is that you actually have to pay commissions. My suggestion to get over this little detail is to simply **inflate your price** to compensate for the overhead. Then it's win-win because you get the return you wanted and your affiliates get a nice profit.

My affiliate program of choice is idevaffiliate. It's extremely intuitive, and currently the entire program can be installed on your web server for only $149. I found the product well worth the price, especially when you consider the amount of potential affiliates that could be working for you to help sell your product or service.

Installing Web Analytics

The only way to track user-behavior on your site is through web analytics. Sure, you can get some basic info from your control panel, such as how many visitors you had, which browser they are using, what page they left from, etc. But the true value of web analytics can only be leveraged through a professional provider or sophisticated software.

Robust analytics programs can not only provide basic visitor information, but they can also track conversions (ie: percentage of buyers to percentage of visits) and provide real behavioral data. Such data includes how long the average visitor stayed on a page. What links they clicked, and ultimately where the user ended up on your site before dropping off.

The more high-end your analytics program is, the better your Media Kit will look when you start offering advertising on your site. You can tell potential advertisers that according to your XYZ Web Analytics, you have a reach of Xk users in X demographic, with a total audience of Xk overall. That should get their attention and help you generate some extra advertising bucks.

Some analytics programs can actually help you track Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising conversions as well. This is extremely important if you are on a budget and don't feel as though you are generating enough conversions from your PPC campaign.

Here are my recommended Web Analytics providers:
- Click Tracks
- Google Analytics

SSI and Dynamic Content

So you've got some time on your hands and you become CSharp, ASP or PHP savvy. All of these programming languages are fundamental to creating Server Side Includes (SSI). What you see when you open a website in your browser is the rendered HTML

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page. It's also what the search engines see. What you and the search engine don't see is the programming and code before the page is rendered. The code is hidden.

Here's an example of how this works: You have a header and footer that are exactly the same on every page of your website. Every webpage is 22k in file size. By taking out the footer from each page and creating a footer.php or footer.asp, you've just taken the site down to 17k. By taking out the header from each page and putting them into header.php or header.asp, your site is now 12k, and so on.

Each page on the web server now summons the header and footer using a small script. When the page is rendered, this script is replaced by the content on the header and footer. So essentially, if your pages were approximately 22k each prior to the SSI change, and you had 30 pages, you've just dropped your site's overall size down from 660k to 360k. Now that's optimized!

SSI is a great way to keep static content separate from content you plan to make a lot of changes to. It can also save you lots of time when it comes to updating several web pages that all contain the same content; since now you'll only have one page to update.

Talk to your developer about SSI, or take a 3-day course in CSharp, ASP or PHP. SSI can be an extremely efficient way to help you manage your content and help keep your total website size down to a minimum.

Developing Your Project Proposal (Requirements)

If you are planning to hire a programmer to do the above work for you, it's important that you have a very detailed Project Proposal assembled. This proposal protects you and provides the programmer with a clear view of what's expected of him or her.

To keep this simple, your proposal should include the following:

1. A brief summary of what the site is about and what you are trying to accomplish
2. Contractor expectations (deliverable dates, technology specifications, and warrantees).
3. Include several links to sites that already have the content you are looking for (if possible).
4. Include Visio or MS Word sitemaps and markups, as applicable.
5. Require a signature at the bottom of the proposal before making any agreements.

My recommendations for finding quality programmers:
- www.guru.com
- www.programmingbids.com
- www.allfreelancework.com

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Recap

By developing your site with Google Sitemaps, Blogs, Web Forums, Affiliate Systems, Web Analytics, and Server Side Includes, you open up several doors of opportunity for the search engines to feed on dynamic content. It also adds a whole new level of professionalism to the functionality of your website, which will greatly help with visitor retention.

If you are hiring a contractor, be sure to layout clear expectations. You should also revisit the Optimize Layer once development is complete. If you take away one thing from this section, I hope it's the understanding of how important fresh content is to your long-term SEO strategy.

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The Promote Layer

Regardless of how wonderful you have done on the first three layers, your website may still be isolated from the rest of the Web if you don't spend any time on this last extremely important layer. The Promote Layer is about developing a strategy to drive a continuum of traffic to your website.

A Little History on Website Promotion

Web site promotion went from being a free exchange of links to being an unbelievably expensive industry. It use to only take a quick e-mail to get a link put up on someone else's site. Everything was friendly back when the Internet first started taking off. Then came Google.

Google began to calculate in backlinks as part of their PageRank scoring process; and PageRank played a role in where your site came up in their search results. Before long, webmasters who had built successful (high PageRank) websites realized that they could actually charge people for the honor of having a backlink, regardless of whether the link had anything to do with the site. Sales of links started at a couple of bucks and are now going for up to $2,000 or more.

Directories use to be free to include your URL. You could simply click the Add URL link and submit your info. These same directories (and about a thousand new ones) sell the same listings for $49 - $300 per year. Some even sell by the month!

Here's an eye-opener for you: Go to Ebay.com and do a search for "PR5" or "PR6". Take a look at what people are selling links for – you'll fall out of your chair (I did).

So how do you promote without going bankrupt? Strategy, that's how. In the upcoming sections we'll talk about developing a strategy to promote your site online and offline. We'll look at competitors, text links, e-mail marketing and press releases. You'll find that there are in fact affordable ways to promote your website, without sacrificing your body parts to the Link Vultures.

A Quick Review of PageRank

There are only two main ranking mediums you need to be concerned about: Google PageRank and Alexa Traffic Rankings. Both are important, since from their respective toolbars users can get an idea of how relevant your site is to their search, and how much traffic your site normally receives.

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Google PageRank uses a voting system **by page**, with a 1 to 10 scale. It gets super complicated, but for the scope of this lesson I'm going to try to keep it simple. Think of the United States Congress and how each state has a specific number of representatives based on the population of the state; the higher the population, the more representatives, ergo **the more votes** a state can have.

On a website, Page A votes for the importance of Page B via a hyperlink. If Page A has a high PageRank, then more votes are given to Page B. Each Page A is given a specific number of votes based on the PageRank. The more links there are on a page, the more spread out (and lower) the votes will be to the pages being linked to.

In other words, keep the number of external links on your website down, so that you're only sharing votes with other pages on your own website. Market each page of the website, not just the homepage, so that you have more votes to work with. Lastly, try to only get one-way links from pages containing a high PageRank. Check out this calculator to get a more visual example of what I'm talking about:

http://www.webworkshop.net/pagerank_calculator.php

Alexa Traffic Rankings help advertisers get a feel for the number of potential visitors they could solicit to on your website. The more traffic you have, the higher you can charge other companies to advertise on your site. You're not dealing with search engine ranking with Alexa; you're talking about actual visitors and web traffic. Download the Alexa Toolbar to see your current rank, or visit Alexa.com.

Don't Get Lost in Internet Marketing

There are several thousand Internet marketing agencies out there that would love to take your money. They'll brag about their "network" and their "reach" and entice you by showing you some of their big-wig clients. Don't fall for it. Most of these companies will simply add a page for you on one or more of their websites, send out a quick online press release, possibly send a few thousand fake visits your way, and then tell you it's not their fault that you're not selling anything.

Internet marketing isn't brain science. You just need a good strategy and a basic understanding of accepted Internet marketing principles. You also need to know where and how to develop one-way links to your website, which I'll cover in just a moment.

Don't get overwhelmed. Stay away from agencies in the beginning (or at all if you can avoid it). Stick to your plan and collaborate with other entrepreneurs in your field in forums and communities. You can do this without spending an arm and a leg, so don't get discouraged.

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Develop a Strategy

Using Excel or MS Project, map out the phases of your Promotion Plan. Give yourself plenty of time, especially if you are an entrepreneur with a day job. My strategies all have durations of 6 months to 2 years depending on competition and client goals.

Your strategy should include the mediums you plan to utilize (which we'll discuss in the next few sections), the time you plan to spend on each phase, and the budget (if any) you plan to allocate for each phase.

Here's a quick generic sample of a 1 year strategy I've used. Keep in mind that we don't start the Promotion Layer strategies until we have completed the first three layers of the model.

Sample Strategy (Generic)
Start Date 01/01/05

Phase	Initiatives	Complete No Later Than
Phase I – Link Development	Engines, Directories, Blogs, Forums, Communities, Link Programs, Link Brokers, Internal Affiliate Program.	04/01/05
Phase II – E-mail Marketing, Newsletter Only	Add signup form to website. Refine template and begin 1st weekly campaign.	05/01/05
Phase III – Press Releases	Begin a monthly plan to post and distribute 5 different press releases to 20 different websites per month.	06/01/05.
Phase IV – Develop RSS Feeds for Monthly Articles	Begin writing a weekly article on the website and syndicate using RSS. Set a goal to get 10 new subscribers each month.	8/01/05
Phase V – Advertise Offline	Word of mouth, flyers, business cards, marketplace, conventions, and free workshops. Also, local papers, magazines, radio and television, depending on budget.	12/01/05
Phase VI – Analyze Results	Analyze Backlink Improvement, use tracking tools to determine where the most clicks originated. Write and implement a new strategy.	01/01/06

The breakdown of this strategy would be by task, and may take you several days to put together. I encourage you to make each phase of your strategy fun. Enlist friends and family to help with the simple tasks, such as compiling an e-mail list or even writing content for you. Visit Guru.com or Elance.com to find inexpensive contractors to help as well.

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Ahead, I'll be discussing the various promotion items in the chart above; as well as few other suggestions that should give you **the marketing boost you need to drive more traffic to your website**. Theoretically, this section is for bonus points, since the other 3 layers really build the groundwork and the structure of your online business. The Promotion Layer's job is to put a huge sign out in front of your virtual building and to get the word out to your potential customers.

The number one promotional technique on the Internet is Link Development. Most of the strategies here include posting or sending a link to your website. Links don't just improve your PageRank; they also drive traffic either directly or indirectly. Keep this in mind as you start developing your strategy.

Start with the Basics

Submit to Free Directories

There are literally thousands of free places to post your link; you just need to know where to find them. As a thank you for purchasing this eBook, here is a list of about 1,600 to help you get started (MS Excel is required). Many of the sites listed are free; some will charge you $5 to $50 for listing. I recommend posting to the free ones first, and then reinvesting returns as part of your long term Link Development Strategy.

Find more by doing an "inurl:" search for "addurl":
http://www.google.com/search?q=inurl%3Aaddurl

Be sure to run a broken link check on your site before submitting your site to any directory. You don't want to get banned or appear as a spider trap by Google. Start with the four most important:

The Four Most Important FREE Submissions:
- Google
- MSN
- Yahoo!
- The Open Directory Project

Other Important FREE Submissions:
- Amacai
- Alexa
- ClickKey
- NetInsert

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Pay the Piper

Paying for submissions will definitely give your site a quick boost in ranking, but you have to keep in mind a variable most SEO's forget about: Link Aging. After awhile the value of a one-way link diminishes. Search engines are looking for fresh content so if you're going to pay-to-play, do it sparingly and at intervals.

If you have a budget and can afford a reasonable amount of initial spending, here is where I would put my money:

Pay to Play Directories
- Yahoo! Directory Submit (currently $299)
- Google AdWords (Pay-Per-Click)
- MSN (Pay-Per-Click)
- LookSmart (Pay-Per-Click)
- Yahoo! Search Marketing
- Yahoo! Yellowpages
- SuperPages
- SmartPages

The listings above were based on the relationships the websites have with other websites and networks on the Internet (greatest exposure). Other excellent places to add links include forums, discussion groups, blogs, and communities (MySpace.com, Yahoo!360, TagWorld, Classmates.com, etc).

When obtaining or buying one-way links, be sure to put more emphasis on the websites that do not require a reciprocal link (backlink to their website). These are only good for traffic (if any) not for the Googlebot. Google's value in reciprocal links has completely dropped of the planet.

Post Where Your Competitors Post

In the Analyze Layer, you created an index of websites where your competitors are listed. Hopefully you used SEO Elite so you could identify which sites were the higher priorities. But if not, at least you have a list and that's a lot better than nothing.

If you are in a highly-competitive industry, you'll find out that most of the sites linking to your competitors are bigwig advertising companies. Some of which will charge you well over $5,000 for link and a page on their site.

Stick to the websites that are written by regular folks who most-likely won't charge you for a link. So how do you ask for a link? This is the golden technique that will not only take you the most time, but will bring you by far the greatest results.

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Here's what I do: First I find the person's real e-mail address by performing a WHOIS search to see who owns the domain. If the domain is hosted with a 3rd party host like Geocities, I look for an e-mail or contact form on the page. In my first correspondence I **do not** ask for a link. Most of my e-mails are canned files that I drop a few custom lines into for each request.

In my request I compliment the usefulness of their site, the colors and layout, and overall design. I include the owner's name if I can find it. Then I mention that I forwarded the site address (don't use the word link) to a few friends and family members I thought could use the information. Then I thank them for their time and tell them to keep up the good work.

About 80% of the time I get a person-generated response. Instantly, you have a relationship with the owner. Once you've got a good relationship with a webmaster or site owner, it's easy to get them to work with you; sometimes as easy as "hey, would it be too much trouble to add my site to the list of companies you have shown on this [page] page?"

Success in business is all about relationships.

Post Where Your Competitors Don't

Believe it or not, most of your competitors are not yet investing in Link Development. Chances are they're paying some advertising company thousands of dollars for rich media or banner ads, and not getting the results they had hoped for. So you've already got an edge, and here's how to exploit it:

Three Places to Get Awesome Linkage

1. Search for and acquire links from college websites owned by students.

   Did you know most universities carry a PageRank of 8 or higher? Pages under the homepage share a good part of that PageRank. Try to guess how many students there are in the world with a website. My guess is over a million. Use advanced search features in Google, MSN and Yahoo! to find pages with .edu in the URL and include your keywords in part of the search title (intitle="keywords">.

2. Use the Google Directory to find related sites listed by PageRank

3. Government websites have unbelievable PageRank. Get listed by registering with the Chamber of Commerce or by finding a relevant page where you think you might be able to get listed.

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Allow Others to Sell For You

By offering an affiliate program to your guests you open a whole new window of opportunity. The obvious downside is that you'll have to pay a commission for each sale made through an affiliate link. Depending on your particular industry, you may want to consider increasing your cost to compensate for the overhead.

Nearly every successful website built from the ground up by people like you and I offers an affiliate program. Your affiliates want to make some easy cash, so they signup and blast your URL on every website they can think of; from MySpace and TagWorld to their own homepages. Some affiliates even use pay-per-click advertising, depending on the demand and return.

I like to use idevaffiliate because it's almost completely hands-off. It takes a few hours to add your ad banners, text ads, and text links. After that, you can sit back and relax as your customers slowly begin to enroll and distribute your links.

Send Out Press Releases at Least Once Per Month

How can writing a press release help you drive traffic? Simple, online press releases are designed for mass distribution and for acquiring a huge amount of one-way links. Every time someone syndicates (RSS) content from a website holding your press release, the syndicated site is making your content (including links) viewable to their entire audience.

Whether they are syndicating from your website or from a third party site such as the ones listed below, they are grabbing your content to share across the web. The best part is that they are doing it completely free.

You can use a CMS like Xoops, Mambo or Joomla to create and manage your press releases, or you can simply go to one of the sites below and submit your content one at a time. The fastest way I know of to get a press release on as many sites as possible is by using the Media Magnet Press Release software by OnlinePressReleases.com. This software actually submits your press release to over 28,000 contacts, which I think is pretty awesome.

Important: In order for this strategy to be effective, you absolutely must include links to your website in your press release; maybe once or twice in the content, then again in the signature or company overview at the bottom of the page. The links should contain your keywords, **not** your website or business name.

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If you're taking the manual route, here's a few websites you can submit your press release to:

A Few Press Release Websites

- Free-Press-Release.com
- USANews.net
- EmailWire.com
- PRFree.com
- SBWire.com
- PR.com
- PRWeb.com

- ThomasNet.com
- Click2NewSites.com
- eReleases.com
- CorporateNews.com
- eWorldWire.com
- PRNewsWire.com

Purchase Text Links

If you're reading up on SEO, you should know that there is a lot of controversy around the buying of text links. In the past, Google has frowned on webmasters purchasing links just for the sake of positioning in their search results. After all, they are trying to display only the most relevant results to their patrons, as opposed to confusing or non-relevant sites.

We covered Google Bombs in the Analyze Layer, but I'd like to go over a few other principles you should keep in mind when purchasing links. I call these my 4 Principles of Link Buying.

4 Principles of Link Buying

1. Never purchase reciprocal links, they are a waste of money and you may even lose ranking if a good percentage of your links are two-way links.

2. Avoid Link Farms or any website that just posts non-related links on one page. Remember the keyword density rule: you want to be linked to from pages where your keywords have a reasonable unique density in the page (normally between 3-5%).

3. Before hiring a link development company or a link broker, do your research. Read reviews, talk to previous clients, and search discussion forums. These are an extremely valuable asset to your campaign, so choose wisely.

4. Try not to pay more than $100 for a link. Trust me, $1,200 for a year calculated with the aging factor of one-way links is too much money. It's better to pay a small amount on several sites for a shorter time span. You never know, a PR3 site could become a PR8 if the owners happen to be marketing right when you purchase your link.

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In Principle 4 I mentioned Link Aging. Research has shown that a site with 2,000 backlinks could be placed 2nd to a site with only 20 backlinks, if the 2,000 backlinks of the first site were older than those of the site with 20. Your link development strategy should be on a continuum. I know this is a reality check for people who thought they could drop 10k on links and become a millionaire overnight. Just get a handful of new links every month and you'll be just fine.

Link brokers sell individual links on successful websites. Use link brokers if you've got a substantial budget for online advertising, because purchasing links could be like playing the roulette table with no guarantees. But one good win is really all you need.

A Few Popular Link Brokers
- Textlinkbrokers.com
- Linkbuildingdirect.com
- Onewaytextlinks.com
- Text-link-ads.com
- Linkexperts.com
- Overthemark.com
- PaidTextLinks.com

Link development firms should be researched before making an investment in one. These firms normally have a minimum spend of over a thousand dollars. Again, this is a good way to get fresh links fast, but is by far the most costly method.

A Couple Link Development Firms
- Netsmartz.net
- WebRanking.com

E-mail Marketing

If you're not sending out e-mails to your customers or offering a free newsletter on your website, you're losing out on potential traffic. With effective e-mail marketing, you're only marketing to people who have asked to marketed to (it's called Opt-In). In other words, they want you to send them information periodically. Think push versus pull.

In my newsletters I put a few sentences of a recent article I wrote followed by a "read more" link to get them back to my website. I also include links to useful tools and resources (most of which I collect affiliate commissions for). It's a fair exchange of needs. I send my readers information they want, and if they find something they need within that information I can usually collect a commission.

Never attempt to manage your own list of subscribers, you risk sending an e-mail to someone who may have opted out; there are legal issues there. I strongly recommend using online software to manage your e-mail marketing campaign.

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There are several hundred choices when it comes to E-Mail Marketing software. I use Intellicontact.com, but there are many other choices. Here are a few:

E-mail Marketing Providers:
• Opt-in Pro
• Constant Contact
• Vertical Response

Whichever one you choose, be sure to abide their guidelines by not uploading some random list you might have bought somewhere. One last word on e-mail marketing software: be sure to send out a periodical at least once per month. Seeing your e-mail in your client's inbox, even if they don't open the e-mail, keeps your name fresh in their minds. Happy e-mailing!

Advertising Offline

When you advertise offline you're touching a whole different market. Many people today aren't very computer savvy; some have never even been to Google or MSN.com. By advertising offline, you're influencing non-web users to try something new. My advice: offer a substantial discount in your offline ads, such as a free item. Also try the "register online to win" sweepstakes strategy. That seems to be a growing trend to get people to start using the Web.

Where to Advertise Offline

Here are my suggestions for getting started with offline advertising:

Lower Cost Offline Advertising
• Local Newspapers – Classifieds
• Local Newspapers – Article About You
• Business Cards (Get FREE Cards)
• College Bulletin Boards
• Brochure Stands at Your Dr.'s Office
• Car Wash Bulletin Boards
• YMCA and Other Community Facilities
• Church Programs and Leaflets

Higher Cost Offline Advertising
• USA Today
• New York Times
• Los Angeles Times
• Village Voice
• Ruxton Media Group
• Industry Magazines
• Industry Periodicals (ie: Wedding Books)
• Wall Street Journal
• ValPak Coupon Books

Another way to get ideas is to call an advertising company or broker and say you're doing research on offline advertising mediums. Name a few you've heard of and ask where the company you're calling advertises.

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Recap

The Promotion Layer is the driving force behind the long-term effectiveness of your website, in regards to driving and sustaining traffic growth. There are many ways to promote your site, but by far the most effective is through link development **with your keywords in the link text**. Other mediums that also have an impact on residual promotion include e-mail marketing campaigns and distributing press releases.

The four layers of the SEO model are: Analyze, Optimize, Develop and Promote. Each layer builds on the previous one and together these layers can help you rank at the top of all the search engine results pages.

SEO isn't brain surgery; all it takes is a good strategy and proper execution. Try networking with other entrepreneurs on sites like WebmasterWorld.com and YoungEntrepreneur.com. Keep notes of everything you try so when the project is over you can go back and adjust your strategy for next time.

Feel free to also visit my homepage at SteveWiideman.com and my Internet marketing site, OC Internet Advertising, for more articles, tools and support. Thank you for purchasing my eBook and good luck with your Search Engine Optimization!

Copywriter

Steve Wiideman

Steve Wiideman is an IBM Global Services veteran with over 10 years of IT background. Steve holds a Bachelor of Science in E-Business Management and won the 2006 CCA National G.R.E.A.T. Award.

Steve has built and marketed several successful websites for clients and his own organization. With over a decade of web design and e-commerce experience, Steve now does individual and group training on Search Engine Optimization strategies.

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Steve Wiideman's Best Practices of Search Engine Optimization Checklist

- ☑ Use a spreadsheet and write out your anticipated milestone dates
- ☑ Have all applicable keywords in hand before starting the design
- ☑ Use a program like Visio or MS Word to draw out your website's architecture & sitemap
- ☑ Use a text editor and write out one page of content (text) for each keyword to be used
- ☑ Visit Google Images or a pay-per-image site and get at least 1-3 images to be used per page.
  - o Rename and save the images as keyword-01.gif, keyword-02.gif, etc.
- ☑ Search Google for 3 websites that have your keywords in the title (that aren't competitors)
  - o Add the links to your text files somewhere within the paragraphs (use []'s)

At this point you are ready to either design your website or hire someone to do it for you. **If you are hiring someone, be sure to be as detailed as possible in your SOW.**

- ☑ Obtain a soft-color website template that strictly uses Cascading Style Sheets (CSS).
- ☑ Modify the template to include company logo, navigation and appropriate footer info.
- ☑ Use the following page guidelines:

  1. Keep each page under 23k in file size.
  2. Have at least 200-300 words of text per page.
  3. Use "ALT" text on all images, and include your keywords whenever possible.
  4. Include at least one H1 tag with the keywords
  5. Include at least one H2 tag with the keywords
  6. Consider using at least one H3 tag with the keywords
  7. Keep all JavaScript (if you must use it) in an external .JS file
  8. Keep all Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) in an external .CSS file
  9. Hide your formatting with the CSS
     - o Modify your H1, H2, H3, Bold, Strong, and Underline tags to fit.
     - o Create new styles for bolding text, underlining, etc.
  10. Wrap your keywords with Bold, Strong, and Underline tags.
  11. Include at least 3 internal and 3 external links containing variants of the keywords.
  12. Avoid adding too many links to the footer
  13. Avoid adding external links to pages with 0 PageRank

- ☑ Use the following Title and META guidelines:

  1. Start the Title, Description, and Keywords tags with your keywords.
  2. Keep the Title under 60 characters, Description under 150 characters, and the Keywords tag under 874 characters (including spaces).
  3. Never repeat a keyword more than 3 times in a META tag.
  4. Examples using the keywords "movie tickets":
     - ▪ < title >Movie Tickets on Sale Now at MovieHound.com< /title>
     - ▪ < meta name="description" content="Movie tickets at the lowest price in town…
     - ▪ < meta name="keywords" content="movie tickets, lowest price, movie hound
  5. Keep your META tags in the correct sequences.
     - ▪ Tags should be Title, Description, and Keywords in that order.
     - ▪ Start the tag with < meta name="" content="" > not < meta content="" name="" >

- ☑ Keep your Keyword Density levels between 3-5%.
- ☑ Use a robots.txt file.
- ☑ Use a Google Sitemap file (sitemap.xml)
- ☑ Test the site for CSS and HTML corrections using a validation tool.
- ☑ Perform a broken link check using w3.org or software.
- ☑ Have a friend or associate perform syntax and readability testing for each page.