



BLOX

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Gone are the days when a website's ranking on search engine results pages depended primarily on free or paid search engine submissions and the use of meta tags. While these things are still important, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) today uses design, layout and promotional aspects to determine relevance. Outlined below are some practices you can use to help with your site's SEO.

Search Engine Submission

According to 2007 Nielson/NetRatings polls, Google, Yahoo!, MSN and AOL are the top four search providers utilized on the Internet. Use the free URL submissions for each of these to try and improve your site's ratings.

Google - Google is free for primary listings, offers paid listings that are displayed at the top of search results, and has an AdWords program which shows small text banners on the right hand side of the search results. Google search results are based on site content. Their PageRank™ algorithm factors in links from other websites to help determine rank in the search results. Submit to this website at <http://www.google.com/addurl.html> and your website should be in the index within one to two months.

Yahoo! - Yahoo! controls the search results on MSN.com, AltaVista.com, and Alltheweb.com in addition to its own search results. It offers both free and paid submissions. To submit your website to the search engine, go here: <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>.

Windows Live (previously MSN Search) - MSN does not currently provide its own search results. The results found on MSN are actually provided by Yahoo!, and you can be listed in MSN by submitting to <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>. MSN does plan to offer its own search results in the future. Submissions for that should go to <http://search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx>.

AOL - This search engine uses Google search results as its primary and paid listings. See Google.

Blocking Search Engines

Search engines use programs called “spiders” to extract data from websites. By default, TownNews.com puts a robots.txt file in the root of your site to control which files these spiders can crawl. Google, MSN and Yahoo! are allowed to read your site, while all other spiders are asked to ignore it.

Believe it or not, there are pages on your site that you don't want search engines to display in search results. The Robots Exclusion setting in your site's configuration will prevent unauthorized access indexing of certain files. You can configure this on a per search engine basis.

Built-in SEO Functionality

HTML tags - The BLOX architecture follows the latest best practices regarding SEO and is continually updated to reflect new industry trends. This includes things emphasis on coding detail, such as using only one H1 tag per page, optimizing usage of header tags, using strong tags and emphasis tags and implementing clutter-free HTML markup.

Title tag management - A very complex logic algorithm is used to manage the title tag across the site. Depending on the page and section, the title tag will morph into the most appropriate format for that area. For example, story pages include the headline of the story and the first few keyword tags of the story in the title tag.

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Descriptive linking - A design policy of “descriptive linking” is in place, ensuring designers craft the content of a link to be something that tells you about where the link goes (for example “Quad-Cities movie theaters” instead of “Click here!”). Link title tags and other link optimizations practices are also in place.

jQuery JavaScript library - This is used to provide rich interaction throughout the site. This exposes base markup and content to search engines.

Social Marketplace specifics - The aforementioned logic algorithm also manages the title tag on Social Marketplace and subsequent business profile pages, and includes the business name, city and state, as well as the first five keywords assigned to this specific business. These keywords can be managed by the business in their business management dashboard where they can be further optimized and tweaked over time.

The business profile page itself has HTML markup that is optimized for SEO. Included is the most important business information at the top of the code where it can be indexed by bots. Using CSS, it is reorganizes for a better visual display to the end user. All of the keywords and categories assigned to a business are also listed on this page. Clicking on each keyword and category takes you to a search results page for that specific item. These links get indexed by search engine bots, thus helping making these section and search pages more discoverable.

Special promotional blocks showcasing featured businesses include links to dozens of “popular categories” on the site. These categories can contain the site area description (i.e. Quad-Cities Restaurants, Lake County Apartments) and can be included on multiple pages throughout the site. These sections are then be indexed by search spiders from multiple locations, thus promoting area-specific category searches throughout the site.

What You Can Do

Title and <META> tags - These tags are used by many engines to improve relevance, but it’s not advised to rely solely upon them. You have control over title tags, meta keywords and meta description through the URL map. Each URL can have its meta information tailored to its specific content to help increase SEO.

“Above the fold” concept applies - Try to get the most important content to appear in the first 100 KB worth of data on your site. Similar to your print edition, think of this as the uppermost portion of the site that a user would see without needing to scroll. In addition to including your top stories, it should include the name and location of your newspaper.

No cheating - Avoid heavy repetition of words on your site. You already provided the name of your newspaper and its location in the first 100K of data, you don’t have to repeat this information everywhere. Too much repetition of words can actually reduce relevance. The old trick of using invisible, white text on your page is also ill-advised.

Be clear - Use keywords in all links. Instead of using `Click here` for more information about TownNews.com products. use `Find out more about TownNews.com products`. Google, especially, uses this for PageRank™. Similarly, search engines are also more responsive to headline linking than to “more” linking.

Sitemaps - Google proposed the use of “sitemap” files so that spiders can make better decisions about how often to crawl a website. Using sitemaps, it’s possible to make it so that “news” is checked more frequently than the “contact us” page. This can make news appear more quickly in Google (and other engines that implement this standard). Sitemaps need to follow a specific format, and are not set up by default as part of your TownNews.com site design or redesign. More information about sitemaps can be found at <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/docs/en/protocol.html>

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Cross Site Promotion

Word of mouth just doesn't cut it these days. Having users bookmark your site is all well and good, but search engines like to see multiple access points to your site. Cross site promotion is a key component of SEO.

Share your news - Your site pages are all RSS ready. Promote this to other local providers as a mechanism for linking to your site. For example, provide RSS feeds of your top stories to websites for local TV or radio stations.

Group advantage - If you are part of a newspaper group, whether large or small, ask your sister papers to link to your site and, at the same time, link to theirs.

Create partnerships - Have advertisers link back to you from their website using keywords like "news" in the link. Contact local government agencies and ask them to link to you, too.

Caution: Avoid automated link share programs.

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