



WEBDRAGON

White paper

Reality in search engine optimisation

Delivering  
Accessibility  
Online

## Reality in search engine optimisation (SEO)

This white paper outlines the ways that businesses can use search engine optimisation (SEO) to attract customers to their websites, and the expectations that businesses should have for these processes.

### Defining goals and attracting customers

The most important aspect of website development has nothing to do with computers and programming code: it is defining the goals for the website. These goals could include directly increasing sales through an e-commerce facility, generating sales leads from the website, or building a database of interested prospects for future direct contact.

Once goals have been defined, and the site has been built for your specific target markets, bringing new visitors to the website is the challenge. Your website is like your shop or show room: like any show room, potential customers will only find out about your location and what you offer because you actively let them know.

Alongside traditional online and offline marketing such as banner and print advertising, search engines such as Google are key for potential customers to be directed to your website, and find out about your products and services.

Giving your company a better ranking in search engines is a process known as search engine optimisation (SEO).

## What is SEO?

SEO is the process of deliberately tweaking your website to rank better for certain keywords in search engines, such as Google, Yahoo! and Bing, according to your products and services.

It is important to remember that in search engine rankings, everyone wants to be number one for every search term that is important to them. We can all understand that that is impossible: each search term can only have one number-one result (which might change regularly). You can however take efforts to tweak your website to appear higher in search ranks, with the aim of getting more people to follow through to your website and help you achieve your online goals.

There are two types of tweaking that will result in higher website rankings:

- On-site SEO, which relates to the programming code and content on your business' website itself
- Off-site SEO, which relates to the way and quantity in which other websites link back to your business' website.

Focussing on different aspects of these is useful at different points of SEO success.

## On-site SEO

There are several factors within your website that will determine your ability to rank well.

### Metadata

Metadata is a major part of the structure of each web page. Alongside the visible content on the web page, metadata explicitly tells search engines the title of the page, the keywords relevant to the page, a concise description of the page, and other relevant information.

At its most basic, your website must have accurate metadata on pages so that they can be correctly identified by search engines. Not only must the content of metadata be accurate, it must also bear a strong relationship to the actual content on each page: if the page is about cars but the keywords are about philanthropy, search engines will know that something is amiss.

Each page should have its own metadata, different from every other page in the website, relating specifically to the content on that page.

Putting this in place enables search engines to accurately profile your website, based on more than just what you see on the screen.

### Code-to-content ratio

Every web page is made up of programming code (including HTML, CSS and JavaScript) which contains and controls what appears on screen as well as the metadata for the page. This programming code sits around and in between the page's content to manipulate and display the content as required.

Depending on the software package used to produce the web page, and the skill of the developers and operators, the amount of programming code that sits around and in between the content can vary greatly. Some pages can have twice as much programming code as they have content, while others can have 100 times as much! This factor is the code-to-content ratio, and lower is better.

Because search engines focus on high-quality content, they give preference to pages with a lower code-to-content ratio (for example 4:1), as there is less "noise" for them to sift through to find the information that is relevant on a web page.

It is crucial to select a software package, and an agency, that can produce the kind of high-quality, low code-to-content ratio programming code that will enable your website to rank better.

### Content freshness

Search engines are more likely to regularly review content if it is regularly updated. A site that stays the same for weeks on end will not be seen as a vibrant part of the web.

For this reason, maintaining a news or blogging section that permeates your website is an excellent way of reminding search engines (and users) that your website is a living medium, with valuable content that needs to be checked regularly.

## SEO-friendly web addresses

Within your website, it is better to have web addresses that match the content on your page. This includes the domain name (such as [www.ourproducts.com.au](http://www.ourproducts.com.au)) and individual page addresses.

It is much better to see an address like [www.ourproducts.com.au/products/gizmo](http://www.ourproducts.com.au/products/gizmo) than [www.ourproducts.com.au/index.aspx?pid=205](http://www.ourproducts.com.au/index.aspx?pid=205), as the first example gives some clues regarding the content of the page.

## Use clear link text

The text that is clickable in each link should be relevant to the content that is being linked to. For a link to a catalogue, for example, it is better to have “[View our catalogue](#)” as clickable content, rather than “[Click here](#) for our catalogue”. The first example shows a direct connection between the clickable text and the content being linked to, while the second is vague, and much less effective.

## Internal linking on keywords

Within your own website, it is helpful to have as many links as possible between pages. Turning your keywords into links within pages underlines those keywords’ importance (literally!).

## Links to other websites

It is important to draw a distinction between links *to* your website, and links *from* your website. As part of off-site SEO, you should maximise links from other websites *to* your website, while as part of on-site SEO, you should minimise links *from* your website to other websites.

By minimising the number of links *from* your website to other websites, not only will you keep visitors on your website for longer, you will also be demonstrating to search engines that your website content is comprehensive and not reliant on external sites.

## Off-site SEO

Off-site SEO is crucial to establishing the authority of your website as a trusted source of information. Essentially the search engines are verifying that your site is relevant enough that other websites are linking to it, en masse.

The key here is in persuading other websites, not directly connected to your own, to link to your content.

### Directories

Where online business directories are available for your industry, it is useful for your organisation to be included.

### Social networks

Social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn, are great ways to create your own links back to your website, and encourage other users to link to it. When a lot of users have linked to content, it has effectively “gone viral”, and can be a solid source of visitors back to your website.

### Blogs

While blogging should be an important part of your on-site SEO program, off-site SEO means using other websites’ blogs to get links back to your own website. This can include leaving relevant comments on other websites’ blogs with link back to your own, relevant stories, or collaborating with other websites to publish stories about each other.

## What colour is your hat?

In SEO, there is a right way of doing it, and a wrong way.

For example, in tweaking your on-site content, it is possible to cram each and every search term into the HTML code without it appearing on-screen, or buying links from unscrupulous sites to build up the number of links to your website. These techniques, and others like them, are known as black-hat SEO, and can be highly effective in building up short-term results for short-term gain, however they are typically very destructive over the longer-term.

On the other hand, using white-hat SEO, SEO experts will do their best to align your website with the way search engines operate. The results can and will change daily as search engines continue to hunt down the “best” and most popular content for each search term.

Any attempts to artificially game the system via black-hat SEO techniques can, and often will, result in persistently low rankings, or in extreme cases, black-listing of sites.

The right way of doing SEO will see a steady, sizeable, and most importantly *sustainable*, increase in your organisation’s search engine rankings.

## Measurement

A major part of SEO is the ongoing tweaking that is required to ensure that your website continues to rank well for targeted keywords. Tweaking requires an understanding of what is working so far and what needs to be adjusted.

There are several ways of measuring how effective your SEO program is, both manual and automated.

### Manual SEO measurement

It is possible, albeit tedious, to manually enter each targeted keyword into search engines, and look through to see where your website is in the results.

The main drawbacks to this are:

1. It is a slow process
2. You cannot guess all the search terms for which your website appears in the results
3. It is not fool-proof.

In recent years, search engines like Google have started to personalise their search results for different users, based on each user's search history and click-through rates. What you see when you enter a search may be quite different from what someone else sees, meaning your results are not authoritative.

### Automated SEO measurement

Major search engines and analytics packages provide tools that report on all search terms that return your website, and your ranking for those search terms. You can also track how often your website is being checked by search engines: the more often, the better.

These tools, such as Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools, can give you a snapshot of where your site is ranking for different search terms.

### Building your measurement program

The tools above should all be taken into account with any SEO measurement program.

To be meaningful, and to ascertain progress, your SEO measurement program needs to be taken over a period of time. This means collecting data from the tools above at regular intervals, and then combining them into meaningful reports which will reflect the return your organisation is deriving from your investment in SEO, and to what extent it is bringing you closer to your online goals.

## Success factors

The success of the SEO program will be determined by a number of factors, including:

- the skill level of people undertaking the optimisation work
- the determination of unique, differentiated keywords for your offerings and target audience
- the frequency of your monitoring program.

The improvement in search engine results is progressive, rather than instantaneous the moment an SEO program commences.

## In the meantime

Based on research, organic search engine results (those that appear in the main listing) have been shown to be more attractive in being clicked by visitors than paid advertising. However, because no SEO program will ever be instantaneous, it is important to look at what options are available while your search engine rankings are still building.

The most common alternative is search engine marketing (SEM). SEM typically involves paid advertising directly within search engine pages, using tools such as Google AdWords.

SEM allows you to bridge the gap between no search engine presence and great search engine rankings by paying your way to appear in results for targeted keywords.

As your organisation's SEO efforts start to pay dividends, it is important to regularly review the return you are getting from your SEM program, and adjust your SEO–SEM balance over time.

## Achieving your SEO goals

SEO is a powerful way of attracting potential customers to your organisation's website, and will achieve great results.

In undertaking your SEO program, it is important to find a digital agency that will help you set goals, select targeted keywords, optimise your website, and measure results, to ensure you get the most from your online investment, and achieve your online objectives.

## About Webdragon

Webdragon was formed in 2005 with a mission to deliver accessible and easy to use online solutions which contribute to client operational and marketing objectives.

During the past four years, Webdragon has significantly grown in capacity. Today it is established as one of the leading e-Business solution firms in Australia building and maintaining websites that are accessible to the entire community.

Webdragon specialises in providing web content management, e-Commerce, e-Marketing, graphic design, and managed IT infrastructure solutions to not-for-profit organizations and to clients in the corporate and government sector. By specialising in these key areas, we maximise the value provided to our clients through the combination of a high level of domain knowledge and the ability to implement proven technical solutions. Our solutions are first and foremost focused on enabling our clients to achieve their business objectives through the use of technology.

“The team at Webdragon will provide you with high quality service. They will work closely with you to ensure that the deployment takes place smoothly, accurately and on time. The support we have received has been outstanding.”

Greg Ure, Managing Director  
Caron Laboratories Pty Ltd

Webdragon has invested significantly in leading technologies to enhance its product and service range. These products enable our clients to benefit from easy to use and cost effective solutions that deliver a quick return on investment.



## Contact us

If you would like Webdragon to provide you with further information on how we can help maximise your e-business potential, please contact us using one of the following channels:

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