



# Bear Canyon Consulting, LLC

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## Search Engine Optimization

What to expect, what it means, and how your business fits in.  
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Search engine optimization (SEO) is not an exact science and nor will it ever be. It takes time, patience and commitment from both the SEO professional and the clients. Unfortunately good ranking does not happen overnight and once a site does achieve a desired ranking, it may soon drop as search engine algorithms are constantly changing. So what should you expect? How does it work? The following document should help clear up any questions, misconceptions and myths about the SEO world, as well as explain some of the popular practices.

## What is SEO?

### Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Defined

To optimize a Web site is to make it friendly to the search engines and place it as high as possible for keyword phrase queries. When using search engines, most Internet users will not look beyond the first several pages of results. This is why it is important for your site to rank as high among the first few results as possible for your carefully researched keyword phrase. Good optimization is achieved by follow the search engine rules, avoiding spam techniques, having great content (and PLENTY of it), having good meta tags and link popularity. Each Search Engine uses a unique algorithm, which is the set of rules that govern the way a Web page is ranked. The practice of optimization ensures that a Web site has all of the necessary ranking elements to be "search engine friendly." In my practice, I check about 66 elements.

## The Basics

### Keyword Phrases

The most important part of what I do, as an SEO professional, is keyword research. It's my starting point and draws the roadmap for the rest of an SEO project. The competitiveness of the keyword phrases used will dictate the amount of time to obtain desirable search engine rankings. These keyword phrases must be thoroughly researched, analyzed and tested. Why optimize for a keyword phrase that no human types in? A good SEO professional should be able to provide you with a list of keyword phrases that pertain to your service and/or business that are not too competitive.



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## How Long Does it Take to Achieve Desired Ranking?

It can take between 3 to 6 months to achieve good ranking in the popular search engines. Web sites with low link popularity and poor search engine rankings for competitive keywords phrases can expect to reach their search engine ranking goals within 3 to 12 months. This timeline varies depending upon the competitiveness of the keywords phrase, the amount of the Web site redesign needed, SEO copywriting, architecture restructure, and many other factors influencing the complexity of the SEO strategy. Keep in mind that simply submitting your Web site to the free search engines and directories provides no guarantee that you will be indexed.

## How is Good Ranking Obtained?

Desired ranking occurs through great home page copy, high link popularity and the use of well researched keyword phrases placed in key areas of your Web site. A search engine spider (or crawler) looks for two things: 1) text and 2) links. Spiders follow text links and look in your text for reiterations of your keyword phrases. Make sure you have PLENTY of good copy on your homepage. I like to see at LEAST 200 words on the homepage of my client's site. In some cases I bring in a professional SEO copywriter.

## The Myths

### We'll submit your site to thousands of search engine!

I regularly get this E-mail in my "admin" or "webmaster" accounts for most of the domains I manage. What are these 1000 search engines? Are human Web site visitors using them? No. Onestat.com gives the following statistics regarding the search engines that humans actually use:

The 7 largest search engines on the Web are:

1. Google 55.2%
2. Yahoo 21.7%
3. MSN Search 9.6%
4. AOL Search 3.8%
5. Terra Lycos 2.6%
6. Altavista 2.2%
7. Askjeeves 1.5%

These are the search engines YOU want your Web site to be in. Not "Fred'sCoolSearchEngine.com". These "one thousand" search engines will only generate spam and end up wasting your time. Concentrate on the search engines people use. THAT is where your traffic will come from.

### Guaranteed #1 Rankings!

This is just as popular as the "we'll submit your site to 1000's of search engines," E-



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mail. No reputable SEO firm would ever promise this. Why? We don't own Google, Yahoo or any other of the major search engines. Usually this claim involves picking some obscure keyword phrase that can be easily optimized in a site AND is never actually searched for by humans! RUN away from SEO firms that make this type of promise.

## **Is Using Automated Submit Software OK to use?**

Absolutely not. It is directed violation of most search engine terms to use this type of software. The best method is hand submitting your site to the search engines. It's free and it's easy. Since there are only a handful of search engines/directories you need your Web site in, it doesn't take very long. I have a list of these submit areas on the [www.kelie.com](http://www.kelie.com) site under "search engine tips".

## **Do I resubmit my site every week?**

If your site is already in a search engine, why should you resubmit it? It wastes bandwidth and time. Many services tout this as a feature to their program when it's really not necessary at all and can be construed by some search engines as spam. Multiple submissions may result in your Web site getting permanently removed from a search engine.

# **The Practice**

## **Organic SEO**

Organic SEO (or "natural" SEO) is what I have been practicing for the past 5 years. It is based on common sense optimization that doesn't utilize Pay-Per-Click (PPC) programs (buying traffic) or spammy techniques that can get you banned. Spammy techniques usually don't keep your site ranked high for very long and that sends you right back to your SEO professional again. With organic SEO, you submit your ethically optimized Web site to the free search engines and directories. I've used only organic SEO for my clients as it has done them well without paying the high costs of a PPC program. Organic SEO is a great way to increase targeted traffic to your Web site over time. It is also the cheapest route to site optimization.

## **All Eggs in One Basket**

I can't stress the following point enough. A Web site is **not** a marketing plan. It is only **one** resource that should be woven into the entire fabric of your business. Marketing starts after a Web site is completed and live on the Internet. People familiar with the search engine industry probably remember the major update Google did in November of 2003 known as the "Florida Update". This major algorithm change devastated and even closed many businesses. Why? Business owners relied on Google as their sole means of getting sales, and this was their **ONLY** marketing plan. It was a hard lesson to learn for many. A good monthly monitoring plan along with other marketing practices make for a successful online business. A Web site should complement marketing efforts that are already in place. My most



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successful clients run ads in newspapers, major magazines and publications, and coupons. They also join trade shows, affiliate programs and much more. It takes WORK! The Internet is not magic!

## Monitoring

In order to keep up with how your Web site is doing in the search engine, it must be monitored closely in many ways. Some clients find this out only after it is too late when they need monitoring the most. The biggest changes that your site will need are after a big algorithm change. Most monitoring packages include incorporating these needed changes that must be made to your Web site in order to maintain good ranking.

### Example

After the Florida update in November 2003, I had a panicked clients E-mail me about loosing their first page ranking. I advised them to purchase our monthly monitoring service that would allow me to make these changes for them at a cheaper rate than my normal consulting fee. One person wanted to a receive monitoring services "every other month." This is like turning on your alarm security system every other month – not wise at all! Unfortunately, this person fell victim to the "all eggs in one basket" syndrome. Google didn't owe this client anything for the free listing and a lot of sales were lost.

Do people call the newspaper classified ads when their product doesn't sell? Probably not. SEO is advertising and marketing, just a different medium and strategy. Be sure to ask your SEO professional what kind of monitoring service is included when you consider hiring them. Sometimes an SEO professional will include 6 months of monitoring with your SEO services; others will charge a monthly fee. Please be advised that if you don't have any monitoring service and your ranking drops, you are subject to a consulting fee. An SEO professional's time is very valuable and sending then daily E-mails about your ranking is generally not part of your service unless you have signed up for monthly monitoring.

## What To Do If Your Search Engine Ranking Falls

Search engine rankings will constantly fluctuate. This is mainly due to three factors:

- 1) There are literally thousands of new sites going live on the Internet every day;
- 2) People are becoming more and more aware of SEO;
- 3) Algorithms constantly change to keep up with the spamming practices and to provide more relevant results.

If you notice that your ranking falls drastically or seems to have dropped out of the index completely, the first thing to remember is not to panic! If your ranking does not come back after a few weeks of monitoring, it's possible that the search engine has made a major change in the algorithm. Your listing can come back and it may not. The worst mistake you can make at this time is to try and "chase the



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algorithm," making many, constant changes to your Web site. You'll never know what is actually working and what isn't. This is where patience comes in. After a drastic change it is best to wait at least a month before doing analysis and making changes to your site. A monthly monitoring service usually includes these changes for you.

## **Search Engines and Directories**

Directories are search indexes that are arranged and edited by humans. Typically arranged in alphabetical order and by category. The results are static, so from a Web site owner's perspective, they are effective and save a lot of time. The biggest directory that you definitely want your site in is called DMOZ (or Open directory). They supply the directory portion to many of the top search engines.

A search engine is a service that is reviewed by an automated search engine spider in order to rank your Web site.

## **After Optimization**

After optimization it is safe to submit your site to directories and search engines. You should NEVER submit a site to the search engines before it has been properly optimized. I've found that many people submit their Web site first and optimize it later. It is at that time they consult with an SEO professional because their ranking hopes were never achieved.

Once a Web site is optimized, it is important that the client does NOT make any changes to the Web site without communicating with the SEO professional. Months of SEO work (search engine rankings) can be flushed down the drain in a matter of seconds when Web pages are modified or altered. Therefore, to protect your investment and search engine rankings do not make any alterations.

# **SEO Glossary**

## **Algorithm**

The set of rules each search engine follows to rank your site. Each search engine has a unique algorithm that is constantly being updated and changed.

## **Backlinks**

Links **from** other Web sites **to** your Web site. This is also referred to as incoming links. Quality incoming links will help your site the most.

## **Keyword Phrase**

Keyword phrases are multi-word phrases used in search engine queries. SEO is the process of optimizing Web sites for keywords phrases so that they rank highly in the results returned for search queries.



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## Link Popularity

Link popularity is the total number of Web sites that link to your site. It's best if the sites linking to and from you are related in theme to your site.

## Paid Inclusion

Some directories will only consider placing your URL/Web address into their database if you pay them a fee. I recommend Inktomi to my clients. It's cheap and gets you into other popular search engines and directories. You can't lose.

## PPC

Pay Per Click. Paying for your traffic by bidding on terms and keyword phrases. Clients bid on search terms. Bidding price is determined by popularity with generic keyword phrases costing more than precise highly targeted keyword phrases. Competitive keyword phrases drive lower amounts of traffic but result in a higher ROI (return on investment) and sales conversion.

## ROI

Return on investment.

## SEPR

Search Engine Results Page. This is the list of results that appear in a search engine from a keyword phrase query.

## Spam

With respect to search engines, spam is defined as any technique used to give your Web site an unfair ranking advantage over other pages. If you have to go out of your way and employ tricks to obtain high ranking, it is probably spam and will not keep your site ranked high for long and can quite possibly get your Web site banned. Spam techniques also violate search engine terms of service (TOS) in most cases and can get your site banned.

## Spider

Spiders are also known as a robots or crawlers. These are the programs that are used by search engines for indexing the Web sites and gathering the content on Web pages within a Web site. Spiders crawl a Web site by following the links between Web pages. This is why it is essential that all the Web pages within your Web site be linked to each other.