

## Search Engine Optimization Terminology Explained

By Wolfgang Jaegel and Gregory Smyth

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is becoming increasingly important in online marketing. In September 2006, a survey by MarketingSherpa identified Search Engine Optimization as the most cost-effective tool used by marketers in the USA.

Search Engine Optimization covers a wide range of activities, all of which share a common goal: increasing an organization's online Return on Investment. At first glance, the terminology used in Search Engine Optimization can be perplexing. What I will try to do in this article is explain the basic terms used, without going too much into the technical nitty-gritty of how Search Engine Optimization is actually done.

So, without any further ado, let's get into some definitions.

**Search Engine** – A Search Engine helps users find web pages on a given subject. Search Engines maintain an extensive database of websites from which they draw search results. They use automated programs known as “Spiders” to collect information on websites.

**Major Search Engines** – For the purposes of this article, Major Search Engines means Google, Yahoo and MSN. Between them, these three Search Engines account for 85% of all search traffic.

**Algorithm** - An algorithm is a set of detailed instructions for accomplishing a task by proceeding through a series of well-defined successive stages. Search Engines use algorithms to assign Quality Score and rankings to websites. Algorithms can be extremely complex (Google looks at over 200 variables) and are closely guarded by the Search Engines.

**Organic Search** – Organic Search refers to the results on the left hand side of the page when you search for a specific keyphrase on one of the Search Engines. Organizations do not pay for Organic Search listings, they are assigned by the Search Engines based on a wide range of criteria. Organic Search results typically account for 80-90% of all click-throughs from a search results page.

**Search Engine Optimization** – A range of integrated techniques with the goal of securing higher Organic Search rankings on the major Search Engines for targeted keyphrases. Search Engine Optimization is made up of on-site and off-site optimization tasks.

**On-Site Optimization** – Tasks carried out on the website being optimized to ensure that the website can be readily indexed by Search Engines. This includes website usability (design conventions, information architecture, load speeds, etc.), code structure, directory and file structure, keyword density and proximity and W3C compliance. On-Site Optimization is predominantly a one-time task. On-Site Optimization represents approximately a 25% weighting of the overall website quality score.

**Off-Site Optimization** – Tasks carried out outside the website being optimized, in particular the building of in-bound links from relevant third-party websites and portals, submissions to third-party directories and content syndication via Web 2.0 channels. Off-site optimization is an ongoing task and it must be kept up if high listings are to be retained (competitors will be doing it too!) Off-site optimization represents approximately a 75% weighting of the overall website quality score

**Keyphrase** – A search term made up of one or more words that a user inputs into a Search Engine.

**Generic Keyphrase** – A keyphrase that is not well defined and will yield a very high number of non-specific results. An example would be “Hong Kong hotel”.

**Specific Keyphrase** – A well defined keyphrase that will yield a smaller number of more specific results. An example would be “5 star hotel Kowloon”. Specific keyphrases typically result in better conversion rates as the traffic they send is better qualified.

**Keyphrase Position** – The position a particular keyphrase occupies on a Search Engine results page. Typically, the first 10 keyphrase positions appear on the first results page.

**Keyphrase Movement** – The number of positions up or down a Keyphrase moves on a Search Engine within a given timeframe.

**Link-Building** – The building of quality in-bound links from authoritative websites and portals. This is largely down through “link bait”, which means creating content that is so compelling that other websites can’t resist linking to you.

**Third-Party Directories** – Directory sites that charge a fee for listings. Search Engines look for inclusions in Third-Party Directories to assess how serious a website is. If your website is listed in, for example, Yahoo Directory and Best of the Web, Search Engines will assume it is more serious.

**Content Syndication** – The syndication of content (e.g. press releases and articles) through relevant third-party websites and Web 2.0 channels. Content syndication can help raise a website’s profile and secure higher Search Engine listings.

**Web 2.0** – There is no simple definition for Web 2.0. Broadly put, it is a paradigm shift in the way the Internet is used. Web 2.0 involves a more open approach to the Internet, in particular user-generated content, Blogs, Podcasts, social media, review sites, Wikipedia, etc.

**Metatags** - Meta elements such as Description and Keywords that provide information about web pages, usually to help Search Engines categorize pages. Metatags are inserted into the HTML code, but are not visible to website visitors. Search Engines no longer give much positive weighting to Metatags when assessing a site, but they will penalize a site that has improperly formatted or absent Metatags.

**White Space** – Gaps in a website’s code that have no purpose and increase file size. Search Engines take a negative view of White Space.

**Deep Pages** – Pages that take four or more clicks to access from the home page. Deep Pages have a negative effect on a website’s Quality Score.

**Broken Link** – A link that points to another page or server that is permanently unavailable. Broken links are indicative of poor website usability and will be penalized by the Search Engines.

**W3C** – The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is the main international standards organization for the Internet. Complying with W3C standards is voluntary, but failing to do so can result in serious penalties from the major Search Engines.

**“White Hat”** – The name given to ethical Search Engine Optimization techniques that will not be penalized by Search Engines and that will be of long-term benefit to a website.

**“Black Hat”** – The name given to unethical Search Engine Optimization techniques. These may have a short-term benefit, but once the Search Engines discover that a website is using Black Hat techniques they will severely penalize it, and possibly ban it altogether. In 2006, Google banned BMW Germany. The full gamut of Black Hat techniques would require an entire separate article to discuss, but they include such things as hidden text, keyword stuffing, Metatag stuffing and link farms.

These definitions cover the most commonly used phrases in Digital Marketing. Hopefully they will give you a clear idea of what kinds of techniques can be used to promote your website to the major Search Engines – and what techniques and problems to avoid.

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