

Phases of Search Engine Optimization

A comprehensive professional search engine optimization (SEO) campaign is typically conducted as a three phase process over the course of 8-12 months.

SEO Campaign Outline

- **Phase I: Discovery/Research**
 - Initial discovery and strategy development
 - Target term research
 - Establish baseline performance for search terms in all major engines
 - Assess conversion goals and performance
 - Assess link popularity and page saturation
 - Assess search engine-friendliness of site construction
 - Review recent site traffic statistics

- **Phase II: Implementation**
 - Identify target pages for optimization
 - Optimize page copy
 - Linking strategy (internal and external)
 - Format style sheet and apply header tags
 - Format page titles and meta tags
 - Search engine submission
 - Conversion optimization

- **Phase III: Analysis**
 - Search Engine Monitoring
 - Post-optimization position report
 - Analysis of progress and consultation

Phase I: Initial Discovery & Research

An initial analysis of your current web site is a critical first step toward an effective and lasting search engine strategy. The Discovery phase helps to objectively assess your site's search engine-friendliness and tells us exactly how your site is currently performing in the major search engines. This information can then be utilized to establish a baseline for future reference and help you format your site for improved search engine positioning.

» Discovery & Strategy Development

Before initiating your SEO campaign it is critical to understand your business model and core demographics in order to formulate strategies for reaching target audiences and defining concrete action goals for your web site.

» Target Term Research

Selecting the right terms for attracting target visitors to your site is the first step for an effective search engine presence. Researching terms relevant to your online marketing goals will help determine which terms hold the greatest strategic advantage. This research provides you with the popularity/search rates of each term under consideration, and also helps you identify term variations you may not have even considered. The terms you select as a result of this research should serve as the foundation of your SEO campaign.

» Initial Position Report

Prior to optimization, a position report should be prepared to show precisely where your web site currently ranks in the major search engines (e.g. Google, MSN, Yahoo Search) for each of your targeted terms; this report will serve as a baseline for future progress.

» Conversion Goals

Prior to optimization, an assessment of your existing conversion goals (i.e. desired user actions) and baseline performance will be conducted. If conversion goals have not already been established we will work with you to identify goals and help identify a baseline of performance.

» Link Popularity and Page Saturation Assessment

Your web site should be analyzed in order to determine how many of your site pages are currently indexed in major search engines (page saturation) and how many other sites link to your site (link popularity). Each of these factors can affect how search engines rank your pages and also provide helpful insights into areas where your site may have an advantage or disadvantage toward obtaining prominent search engine positioning.

» Search Engine Friendliness Assessment

It is critical that you examine your web site structure to ensure that it is search engine-friendly and does not contain any potential SEO barriers. A Search Engine Friendliness Assessment provides a thorough site evaluation to ensure that your web site pages can be indexed by crawler based search engines such as Google and Yahoo Search, and includes the following core components:

- Search engine spider simulator test
- Review of internal linking structure
- Review code and table/page layout
- Identification of other potential SEO barriers

If it is determined that your site does contain structural SEO barriers, these issues should be addressed prior to implementing your SEO campaign.

» Review of Site Statistics

A review of your recent site statistics/logs to will help assess how visitors currently access your site and can be used as a comparison for post-SEO visitor trends.

Phase II: Implementation

The Implementation phase is where the Phase I research is put to use by optimizing your site pages for your target terms and improved search engine performance.

» Identification of Target Pages

The first step in Phase II is to determine how you will integrate your target terms into your site pages. You may already have existing site pages that can be optimized for your terms, or you may need to create new pages altogether. Whatever the case, you should make sure that your site has the appropriate pages to dedicate to each of the terms you want to target and that these pages logically fit within your overall navigation structure and content themes.

» Page Copy Optimization

Once you have identified pages for optimization, you will need to edit your page copy to appropriately integrate your terms while retaining strategic messaging so that your pages not only appeal to search engines, but the human visitors who read them.

» Linking Strategy

It is helpful to review your internal linking structure to identify opportunities for inserting key terms into anchor text leading to your optimized pages and to ensure that search engines can effectively spider your site. Obtaining external links leading to your site is also helpful for SEO purposes, but is a separate link-building effort beyond the scope of the SEO process discussed in this outline.

» Header Tags and Style Sheet Formatting

Applying the appropriate header tags (e.g. H1, H2) to your page headings and subheadings help ensure that your key terms receive maximum weighting; your CSS style sheet can be formatted so that these tags are consistent with your overall site design scheme.

» Format Page Titles

Your page titles are a critical factor that can affect both search engines rankings and human click through rates. For this reason, it is important to make sure that the titles of your optimized pages are strategically worded to integrate key terms and appeal to potential site visitors.

» Format Meta Tags

While no longer heavily weighted in most search engines, the proper formatting of your meta keyword and description tags ensures that your key terms are appropriately utilized within these often misunderstood tags, and that you do not break any rules in the process.

» Basic Search Engine Submission

In many instances, your site pages may already be indexed in major search engines, such as Google, Yahoo Search, and MSN. If they are not, then there are options for submitting your site to these engines directly. Obtaining links from sites that are currently indexed in these engines can also help search engines find and index your site. If your site has a search engine-friendly linking structure (as it should) then any new pages you add should automatically be found by the search engines, which may take anywhere from several weeks to several months.

» Conversion Optimization

It is important to ensure that your site is strategically designed to encourage the desired user actions on the site (conversion goals). We will make recommendations for messaging and page elements that reinforce these calls-to-action and increase action among your site visitors.

Phase III: Analysis

Post-optimization analysis allows for the measurement of campaign outcomes.

» Search Engine Monitoring

Following the Phase II implementation process, search engines will be monitored to confirm that that your optimized pages have been properly indexed.

» Position Reporting

Once your optimized pages have been properly indexed by the search engines, a post-optimization report for key term positioning of your site pages is prepared to objectively gauge improvement relative you your initial positioning.

» Monitoring & Ongoing Analysis

After evaluating your new search engine positioning for target terms, we will continue to monitor progress and gauge the impact of this work (i.e. Return on Investment) and plan for future growth opportunities that match your business model and outreach needs.