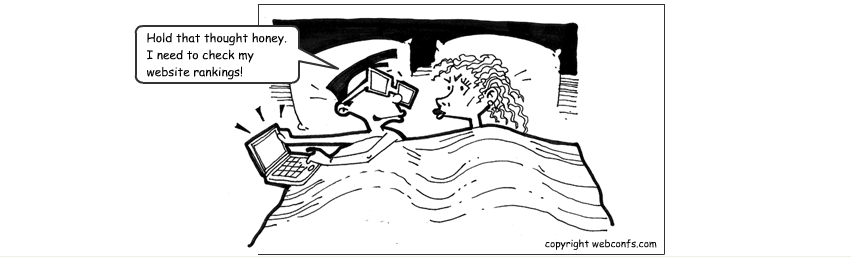
**I. Introduction – What Is SEO**

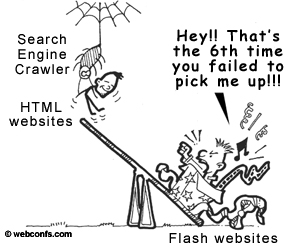


Whenever you enter a query in a search engine and hit 'enter' you get a list of web results that contain that query term. Users normally tend to visit websites that are at the top of this list as they perceive those to be more relevant to the query. If you have ever wondered why some of these websites rank better than the others then you must know that it is because of a powerful web marketing technique called **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**.

SEO is a technique which helps search engines find and rank your site higher than the millions of other sites in response to a search query. SEO thus helps you get traffic from search engines.

This SEO tutorial covers all the necessary information you need to know about Search Engine Optimization - what is it, how does it work and differences in the ranking criteria of major search engines.

**1. How Search Engines Work**



The first basic truth you need to know to learn SEO is that search engines are not humans. While this might be obvious for everybody, the differences between how humans and search engines view web pages aren't. Unlike humans, search engines are text-driven. Although technology advances rapidly, search engines are far from intelligent creatures that can feel the beauty of a cool design or enjoy the sounds and movement in movies. Instead, search engines crawl the Web, looking at particular site items (mainly text) to get an idea what a site is about. This brief explanation is not the most precise because as we will see next, search engines perform several activities in order to deliver search results – *crawling*, *indexing*, *processing*, *calculating relevancy*, and *retrieving*.

First, search engines **crawl** the Web to see what is there. This task is performed by a piece of software, called a *crawler* or a *spider* (or Googlebot, as is the case with Google). Spiders follow links from one page to another and index everything they find on their way. Having in mind the number of pages on the Web (over 20 billion), it is impossible for a spider to visit a site daily just to see if a new page has appeared or if an existing page has been modified, sometimes crawlers may not end up visiting your site for a month or two.

What you can do is to check what a crawler sees from your site. As already mentioned, crawlers are not humans and they do not see images, Flash movies, JavaScript, frames, password-protected pages and directories, so if you have tons of these on your site, you'd better run the **Spider Simulator** below to see if these goodies are viewable by the spider. If they are not viewable, they will not be spidered, not indexed, not processed, etc. - in a word they will be non-existent for search engines.

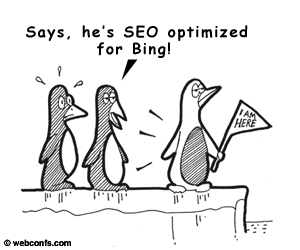
After a page is crawled, the next step is to **index** its content. The indexed page is stored in a giant database, from where it can later be retrieved. Essentially, the process of indexing is identifying the words and expressions that best describe the page and assigning the page to particular keywords. For a human it will not be possible to process such amounts of information but generally search engines deal just fine with this task. Sometimes they might not get the meaning of a page right but if you help them by optimizing it, it will be easier for them to classify your pages correctly and for you – to get higher rankings.

When a search request comes, the search engine **processes** it – i.e. it compares the search string in the search request with the indexed pages in the database. Since it is likely that more than one page (practically it is millions of pages) contains the search string, the search engine starts **calculating the relevancy** of each of the pages in its index with the search string.

There are various algorithms to calculate relevancy. Each of these algorithms has different relative weights for common factors like keyword density, links, or metatags. That is why different search engines give different search results pages for the same search string. What is more, it is a known fact that all major search engines, like Yahoo!, Google, Bing, etc. periodically change their algorithms and if you want to keep at the top, you also need to adapt your pages to the latest changes. This is one reason (the other is your competitors) to devote permanent efforts to SEO, if you'd like to be at the top.

The last step in search engines' activity is **retrieving** the results. Basically, it is nothing more than simply displaying them in the browser – i.e. the endless pages of search results that are sorted from the most relevant to the least relevant sites.

**2. Differences Between the Major Search Engines**



Although the basic principle of operation of all search engines is the same, the minor differences between them lead to major changes in results relevancy. For different search engines different factors are important. There were times, when SEO experts joked that the algorithms of Bing are intentionally made just the opposite of those of Google. While this might have a grain of truth, it is a matter a fact that the major search engines like different stuff and if you plan to conquer more than one of them, you need to optimize carefully.

There are many examples of the differences between search engines. For instance, for Yahoo! and Bing, on-page keyword factors are of primary importance, while for Google links are very, very important. Also, for Google sites are like wine – the older, the better, while Yahoo! generally has no expressed preference towards sites and domains with tradition (i.e. older ones). Thus you might need more time till your site gets mature to be admitted to the top in Google, than in Yahoo!.

*"SEO" redirects here. For other uses, see*[*SEO (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEO_(disambiguation))*.*

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| [**Internet marketing**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_marketing) |
| * **Search engine optimization** * [Social media marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media_marketing) * [Email marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email_marketing) * [Referral marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Referral_marketing) * [Content marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_marketing) |
| [**Search engine marketing**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_marketing) |
| * [Pay per click](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay_per_click) * [Cost per impression](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cost_per_impression) * [Search analytics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_analytics) * [Web analytics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_analytics) |
| [**Display advertising**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Display_advertising) |
| * [Contextual advertising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contextual_advertising) * [Behavioral targeting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavioral_targeting) |
| [**Affiliate marketing**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affiliate_marketing) |
| * [Cost per action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cost_per_action) * [Revenue sharing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenue_sharing) |
| [**Mobile advertising**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_advertising) |
| * [v](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Internet_marketing)      * [t](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_talk:Internet_marketing)      * [e](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Internet_marketing&action=edit) |

**Search engine optimization** (**SEO**) is the process of affecting the visibility of a [website](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Website) or a [web page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_page) in a [search engine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine)'s "natural" or un-paid ("[organic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organic_search)") [search results](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_results_page).[[*jargon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Explain_jargon)] In general, the earlier (or higher ranked on the search results page), and more frequently a site appears in the search results list, the more visitors it will receive from the search engine's users. SEO may target different kinds of search, including [image search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_search), [local search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_search_(Internet)), [video search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_search), [academic search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_databases_and_search_engines),[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-aseo-1) news search and industry-specific [vertical search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertical_search) engines.

As an [Internet marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_marketing) strategy, SEO considers how search engines work, what people search for, the actual search terms or keywords typed into search engines and which search engines are preferred by their targeted audience. Optimizing a website may involve editing its content, [HTML](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML) and associated coding to both increase its relevance to specific keywords and to remove barriers to the [indexing activities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_crawler) of search engines. Promoting a site to increase the number of [backlinks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backlinks" \o "Backlinks), or inbound links, is another SEO tactic.

The plural of the abbreviation SEO can refer to "search engine optimizers," those who provide SEO service.

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| Contents   [[hide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization)]   * [1 History](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#History) * [2 Relationship with search engines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Relationship_with_search_engines) * [3 Methods](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Methods)   + [3.1 Getting indexed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Getting_indexed)   + [3.2 Preventing crawling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Preventing_crawling)   + [3.3 Increasing prominence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Increasing_prominence) * [4 White hat versus black hat techniques](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#White_hat_versus_black_hat_techniques) * [5 SEO copywriting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#SEO_copywriting)   + [5.1 Technical details](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Technical_details)   + [5.2 Professional role](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Professional_role) * [6 As a marketing strategy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#As_a_marketing_strategy) * [7 International markets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#International_markets) * [8 Legal precedents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Legal_precedents) * [9 See also](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#See_also) * [10 Notes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#Notes) * [11 External links](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#External_links) |

## History

[Webmasters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webmaster) and content providers began optimizing sites for search engines in the mid-1990s, as the first search engines were cataloging the early [Web](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Wide_Web). Initially, all webmasters needed to do was to submit the address of a page, or [URL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uniform_Resource_Locator), to the various engines which would send a "[spider](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_crawler)" to "crawl" that page, extract links to other pages from it, and return information found on the page to be [indexed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index_(search_engine)).[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-2) The process involves a search engine spider downloading a page and storing it on the search engine's own server, where a second program, known as an [indexer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_indexing), extracts various information about the page, such as the words it contains and where these are located, as well as any weight for specific words, and all links the page contains, which are then placed into a scheduler for crawling at a later date.

Site owners started to recognize the value of having their sites highly ranked and visible in search engine results, creating an opportunity for both [white hat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_hat_(computer_security)) and [black hat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hat_hacking) SEO practitioners. According to industry analyst [Danny Sullivan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Sullivan_(technologist)), the phrase "search engine optimization" probably came into use in 1997.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-3) The first documented use of the term Search Engine Optimization was John Audette and his company Multimedia Marketing Group as documented by a web page from the MMG site from August, 1997.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-4)

Early versions of search [algorithms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithm) relied on webmaster-provided information such as the keyword [meta tag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meta_tag), or index files in engines like [ALIWEB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aliweb). Meta tags provide a guide to each page's content. Using meta data to index pages was found to be less than reliable, however, because the webmaster's choice of keywords in the meta tag could potentially be an inaccurate representation of the site's actual content. Inaccurate, incomplete, and inconsistent data in meta tags could and did cause pages to rank for irrelevant searches.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-5)[[*dubious*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Disputed_statement)*–*[*discuss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Search_engine_optimization#Dubious)] Web content providers also manipulated a number of attributes within the HTML source of a page in an attempt to rank well in search engines.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-6)

By relying so much on factors such as [keyword density](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keyword_density) which were exclusively within a webmaster's control, early search engines suffered from abuse and ranking manipulation. To provide better results to their users, search engines had to adapt to ensure their [results pages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_results_page) showed the most relevant search results, rather than unrelated pages stuffed with numerous keywords by unscrupulous webmasters. Since the success and popularity of a search engine is determined by its ability to produce the most relevant results to any given search, allowing those results to be false would turn users to find other search sources. Search engines responded by developing more complex ranking algorithms, taking into account additional factors that were more difficult for webmasters to manipulate. Graduate students at [Stanford University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_University), [Larry Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Page) and [Sergey Brin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Brin), developed "Backrub," a search engine that relied on a mathematical algorithm to rate the prominence of web pages. The number calculated by the algorithm, [PageRank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PageRank" \o "PageRank), is a function of the quantity and strength of [inbound links](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inbound_link).[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-lgscalehyptxt-7) PageRank estimates the likelihood that a given page will be reached by a web user who randomly surfs the web, and follows links from one page to another. In effect, this means that some links are stronger than others, as a higher PageRank page is more likely to be reached by the random surfer.

Page and Brin founded [Google](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google) in 1998. Google attracted a loyal following among the growing number of Internet users, who liked its simple design.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-bbc-1-8) Off-page factors (such as PageRank and hyperlink analysis) were considered as well as on-page factors (such as keyword frequency, [meta tags](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meta_tags), headings, links and site structure) to enable Google to avoid the kind of manipulation seen in search engines that only considered on-page factors for their rankings. Although PageRank was more difficult to game, webmasters had already developed link building tools and schemes to influence the [Inktomi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inktomi_(company)" \o "Inktomi (company)) search engine, and these methods proved similarly applicable to gaming PageRank. Many sites focused on exchanging, buying, and selling links, often on a massive scale. Some of these schemes, or [link farms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Link_farm), involved the creation of thousands of sites for the sole purpose of [link spamming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spamdexing).[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-9)

By 2004, search engines had incorporated a wide range of undisclosed factors in their ranking algorithms to reduce the impact of link manipulation. In June 2007, The New York Times' Saul Hansell stated Google ranks sites using more than 200 different signals.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-nyt0607-10) The leading search engines, [Google](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google), [Bing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bing), and [Yahoo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo), do not disclose the algorithms they use to rank pages. Some SEO practitioners have studied different approaches to search engine optimization, and have shared their personal opinions[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-11) Patents related to search engines can provide information to better understand search engines.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-12)

In 2005, Google began personalizing search results for each user. Depending on their history of previous searches, Google crafted results for logged in users.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-13) In 2008, Bruce Clay said that "ranking is dead" because of [personalized search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personalized_search). He opined that it would become meaningless to discuss how a website ranked, because its rank would potentially be different for each user and each search.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-14)

In 2007, Google announced a campaign against paid links that transfer PageRank.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-15) On June 15, 2009, Google disclosed that they had taken measures to mitigate the effects of PageRank sculpting by use of the [nofollow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nofollow" \o "Nofollow) attribute on links. [Matt Cutts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Cutts), a well-known software engineer at Google, announced that Google Bot would no longer treat nofollowed links in the same way, in order to prevent SEO service providers from using nofollow for PageRank sculpting.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-16) As a result of this change the usage of nofollow leads to evaporation of pagerank. In order to avoid the above, SEO engineers developed alternative techniques that replace nofollowed tags with obfuscated [Javascript](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javascript" \o "Javascript) and thus permit PageRank sculpting. Additionally several solutions have been suggested that include the usage of [iframes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iframe" \o "Iframe), [Flash](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flash_animation) and Javascript.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-17)

In December 2009, Google announced it would be using the web search history of all its users in order to populate search results.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-18)

[Google Instant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Instant), real-time-search, was introduced in late 2010 in an attempt to make search results more timely and relevant. Historically site administrators have spent months or even years optimizing a website to increase search rankings. With the growth in popularity of social media sites and blogs the leading engines made changes to their algorithms to allow fresh content to rank quickly within the search results.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-19)

In February 2011, Google announced the "[Panda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Panda) update, which penalizes websites containing content duplicated from other websites and sources. Historically websites have copied content from one another and benefited in search engine rankings by engaging in this practice, however Google implemented a new system which punishes sites whose content is not unique.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-20)

In April 2012, Google launched the [Google Penguin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Penguin) update the goal of which was to penalise websites that used manipulative techniques to improve their rankings on the search engine.[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-21)

## Relationship with search engines

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Yahoo_google_Haifa.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.21wmf8/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Yahoo_google_Haifa.jpg)

Yahoo and Google offices

By 1997, search engines recognized that [webmasters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webmaster) were making efforts to rank well in their search engines, and that some webmasters were even[manipulating their rankings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spamdexing) in search results by stuffing pages with excessive or irrelevant keywords. Early search engines, such as [Altavista](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altavista" \o "Altavista) and[Infoseek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infoseek), adjusted their algorithms in an effort to prevent webmasters from manipulating rankings.[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-infoseeknyt-22)

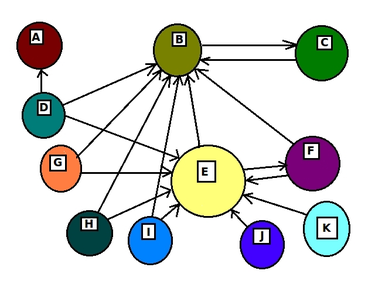
In 2005, an annual conference, AIRWeb, Adversarial Information Retrieval on the Web was created to bring together practitioners and researchers concerned with search engine optimisation and related topics.[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-airweb-23)

Companies that employ overly aggressive techniques can get their client websites banned from the search results. In 2005, the [Wall Street Journal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wall_Street_Journal)reported on a company, [Traffic Power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traffic_Power), which allegedly used high-risk techniques and failed to disclose those risks to its clients.[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-24) [Wired](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wired_Magazine) magazine reported that the same company sued blogger and SEO Aaron Wall for writing about the ban.[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-wired09082005-25) Google's [Matt Cutts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Cutts) later confirmed that Google did in fact ban Traffic Power and some of its clients.[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-26)

Some search engines have also reached out to the SEO industry, and are frequent sponsors and guests at SEO conferences, chats, and seminars. Major search engines provide information and guidelines to help with site optimization.[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-g-wmguide-27)[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-ms-wmguide-28) Google has a [Sitemaps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitemaps) program to help webmasters learn if Google is having any problems indexing their website and also provides data on Google traffic to the website.[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-googlesitemaps-29) [Bing Webmaster Tools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bing_Webmaster_Center) provides a way for webmasters to submit a sitemap and web feeds, allows users to determine the crawl rate, and track the web pages index status.

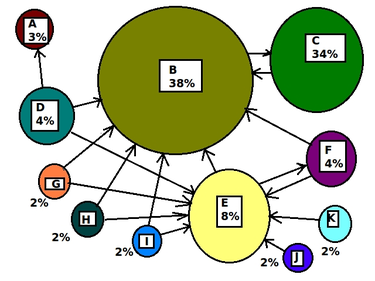
## Methods

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| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/f/f4/Ambox_content.png | This section **contains**[**instructions, advice, or how-to content**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not#NOTHOWTO). The purpose of Wikipedia is to present facts, not to train. Please help[improve this article](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Search_engine_optimization&action=edit) either by rewriting the how-to content or by [moving](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Help:Transwiki) it to [Wikiversity](http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/" \o "v:) or [Wikibooks](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/" \o "b:). *(October 2012)* |

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Websites_interlinking_to_illustrate_PageRank.png)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.21wmf8/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Websites_interlinking_to_illustrate_PageRank.png)

Suppose each circle is a website, and an arrow is a link from one website to another, such that a user can click on a link within, say, website F to go to website B, but not vice versa. Search engines begin by assuming that each website has an equal chance of being chosen by a user. Next, crawlers examine which websites link to which other websites and guess that websites with more incoming links contain valuable information that users want.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Websites_interlinking_to_illustrate_PageRank_percents.png)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.21wmf8/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Websites_interlinking_to_illustrate_PageRank_percents.png)

Search engines uses complex mathematical algorithms to guess which websites a user seeks, based in part on examination of how websites link to each other. Since website B is the recipient of numerous inbound links, B ranks highly in a web search, and will come up early in a web search. Further, since B is popular, and has an outbound link to C, C ranks highly too.

### Getting indexed

The leading search engines, such as [Google](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google), [Bing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bing) and [Yahoo!](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo!), use [crawlers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_crawler) to find pages for their algorithmic search results. Pages that are linked from other search engine indexed pages do not need to be submitted because they are found automatically. Some search engines, notably Yahoo!, operate a paid submission service that guarantee crawling for either a set fee or [cost per click](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pay_per_click).[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-30) Such programs usually guarantee inclusion in the database, but do not guarantee specific ranking within the search results.[[31]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-31) Two major directories, the Yahoo Directory and the [Open Directory Project](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Directory_Project) both require manual submission and human editorial review.[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-32) Google offers [Google Webmaster Tools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Webmaster_Tools), for which an XML [Sitemap](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitemap) feed can be created and submitted for free to ensure that all pages are found, especially pages that are not discoverable by automatically following links.[[33]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-33)

[Search engine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_search_engine) crawlers may look at a number of different factors when [crawling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_crawler) a site. Not every page is indexed by the search engines. Distance of pages from the root directory of a site may also be a factor in whether or not pages get crawled.[[34]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-cho-34)

### Preventing crawling

*Main article:*[*Robots Exclusion Standard*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robots_Exclusion_Standard)

To avoid undesirable content in the search indexes, webmasters can instruct spiders not to crawl certain files or directories through the standard [robots.txt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robots.txt) file in the root directory of the domain. Additionally, a page can be explicitly excluded from a search engine's database by using a [meta tag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meta_tag) specific to robots. When a search engine visits a site, the robots.txt located in the [root directory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Root_directory) is the first file crawled. The robots.txt file is then parsed, and will instruct the robot as to which pages are not to be crawled. As a search engine crawler may keep a cached copy of this file, it may on occasion crawl pages a webmaster does not wish crawled. Pages typically prevented from being crawled include login specific pages such as shopping carts and user-specific content such as search results from internal searches. In March 2007, Google warned webmasters that they should prevent indexing of internal search results because those pages are considered search spam.[[35]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-35)

### Increasing prominence

A variety of methods can increase the prominence of a webpage within the search results. [Cross linking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methods_of_website_linking) between pages of the same website to provide more links to most important pages may improve its visibility.[[36]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-Shari-36) Writing content that includes frequently searched keyword phrase, so as to be relevant to a wide variety of search queries will tend to increase traffic.[[36]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-Shari-36)Updating content so as to keep search engines crawling back frequently can give additional weight to a site. Adding relevant keywords to a web page's meta data, including the [title tag and meta description](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HEAD_tag), will tend to improve the relevancy of a site's search listings, thus increasing traffic. [URL normalization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/URL_normalization) of web pages accessible via multiple urls, using the [canonical link element](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canonical_link_element)[[37]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-37) or via [301 redirects](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/301_redirect) can help make sure links to different versions of the url all count towards the page's link popularity score.

## White hat versus black hat techniques

SEO techniques can be classified into two broad categories: techniques that search engines recommend as part of good design, and those techniques of which search engines do not approve. The search engines attempt to minimize the effect of the latter, among them [spamdexing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spamdexing" \o "Spamdexing). Industry commentators have classified these methods, and the practitioners who employ them, as either [white hat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_hat_(computer_security)) SEO, or [black hat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hat_hacking) SEO.[[38]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-38) White hats tend to produce results that last a long time, whereas black hats anticipate that their sites may eventually be banned either temporarily or permanently once the search engines discover what they are doing.[[39]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-39)

An SEO technique is considered white hat if it conforms to the search engines' guidelines and involves no deception. As the search engine guidelines[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-g-wmguide-27)[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-ms-wmguide-28)[[40]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-40) are not written as a series of rules or commandments, this is an important distinction to note. White hat SEO is not just about following guidelines, but is about ensuring that the content a search engine indexes and subsequently ranks is the same content a user will see. White hat advice is generally summed up as creating content for users, not for search engines, and then making that content easily accessible to the spiders, rather than attempting to trick the algorithm from its intended purpose. White hat SEO is in many ways similar to web development that promotes accessibility,[[41]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-41) although the two are not identical.

[Black hat SEO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spamdexing) attempts to improve rankings in ways that are disapproved of by the search engines, or involve deception. One black hat technique uses text that is hidden, either as text colored similar to the background, in an invisible [div](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Span_and_div), or positioned off screen. Another method gives a different page depending on whether the page is being requested by a human visitor or a search engine, a technique known as [cloaking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloaking).

Search engines may penalize sites they discover using black hat methods, either by reducing their rankings or eliminating their listings from their databases altogether. Such penalties can be applied either automatically by the search engines' algorithms, or by a manual site review. One example was the February 2006 Google removal of both [BMW](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMW) Germany and [Ricoh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricoh) Germany for use of deceptive practices.[[42]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-intwebspam-42) Both companies, however, quickly apologized, fixed the offending pages, and were restored to Google's list.[[43]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-43)

## SEO copywriting

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| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/9/99/Question_book-new.svg/50px-Question_book-new.svg.png | This section **needs additional citations for verification**. Please help [improve this article](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Search_engine_optimization&action=edit) by [adding citations to reliable sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Introduction_to_referencing/1). Unsourced material may be [challenged](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) and [removed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability#Burden_of_evidence). *(December 2010)* |

**Search engine optimization (SEO) copywriting** is textual [composition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composition_(language)) for [web page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_page) [marketing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marketing) that emphasizes skillful manipulation of the page's wording to place it among the first results of a[user](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User_(computing))'s search list, while still producing readable and persuasive content.

### Technical details

*Main article:****Search engine optimization***

Crawlers rely upon keyword placement within the text of an article, and typically disregard images.[[44]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-44) Text appearing in several key locations (such as the <[title](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML_element#title_tag)> and <[meta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML_element#meta_tag)> tags of the page's code) gets special attention because search engines compare information found there with other pages to determine relevance. SEO copywriters also strive for unique written content on the page, distinguishing it from similar pages competing for placement in the search results. Other factors that determine relevance during a search are the page's [keyword density](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keyword_density), the placement of the keywords, and the number of links to and from the page from other pages.

### Professional role

SEO copywriting is most often one of the various jobs of a [copywriter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copywriter). However, there are [freelance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freelance) copywriters who hire out their services solely for SEO, agencies and firms that specialize in SEO (including SEO copywriting), and [copywriting agencies](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Copywriting_agencies&action=edit&redlink=1) that offer SEO copywriting as part of comprehensive writing and editing services.

A freelance SEO copywriter will work with a client to determine the appropriate keywords needed to promote the client's business. Online keyword research tools are then used to gather a list of potential phrases.

While an obvious goal of SEO copywriting is to cause the business's or product's web page to rank highly in a search, most experts in the field would argue that it is of secondary priority. The foremost goal of SEO copywriting is to produce succinct, effectively persuasive text for a well-written web page that will motivate the reader to take action. Writing that "optimizes" a search but offers little useful information or only weak persuasion is frowned upon in the profession as ineffective. At its worst, it becomes a costly resource inducing potential buyers to turn away from the site rather than generating sales. The main goal of the SEO copywriter remains writing interesting content that people want to read and link to.

SEO copywriters often work with "optimizers" who are more expert in the technical aspects of SEO. Together they will not only rewrite text but also alter the code to design a page that is most favored by search engines. It is not a clear, scientific process, however. Attempting to keep themselves competitive and defending against the composition strategies of so-called black hat SEOs, search engine designers today do not disclose the complex algorithmic processes of their search engines. In spite of the insights of optimizing technicians, SEO copywriting requires finesse and repeated experimentation to assess how the team's page revisions will fare in a potential customer's search.

## As a marketing strategy

SEO is not an appropriate strategy for every website, and other Internet marketing strategies can be more effective, depending on the site operator's goals.[[45]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-45) A successful Internet marketing campaign may also depend upon building high quality web pages to engage and persuade, setting up [analytics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_analytics) programs to enable site owners to measure results, and improving a site's[conversion rate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversion_rate).[[46]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-46)

SEO may generate an adequate [return on investment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Return_on_investment). However, search engines are not paid for organic search traffic, their algorithms change, and there are no guarantees of continued referrals. Due to this lack of guarantees and certainty, a business that relies heavily on search engine traffic can suffer major losses if the search engines stop sending visitors.[[47]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-47) Search engines can change their algorithms, impacting a website's placement, possibly resulting in a serious loss of traffic. According to Google's CEO, Eric Schmidt, in 2010, Google made over 500 algorithm changes – almost 1.5 per day.[[48]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-48) It is considered wise business practice for website operators to liberate themselves from dependence on search engine traffic.[[49]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-49)

## International markets

Optimization techniques are highly tuned to the dominant search engines in the target market. The search engines' market shares vary from market to market, as does competition. In 2003,[Danny Sullivan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Sullivan_(technologist)) stated that Google represented about 75% of all searches.[[50]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-50) In markets outside the United States, Google's share is often larger, and Google remains the dominant search engine worldwide as of 2007.[[51]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-51) As of 2006, Google had an 85–90% market share in Germany.[[52]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-grehan-1-52) While there were hundreds of SEO firms in the US at that time, there were only about five in Germany.[[52]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-grehan-1-52) As of June 2008, the marketshare of Google in the UK was close to 90% according to [Hitwise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitwise" \o "Hitwise).[[53]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-53) That market share is achieved in a number of countries.

As of 2009, there are only a few large markets where Google is not the leading search engine. In most cases, when Google is not leading in a given market, it is lagging behind a local player. The most notable markets where this is the case are China, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the Czech Republic where respectively [Baidu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baidu" \o "Baidu), [Yahoo! Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo!_Japan), [Naver](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naver" \o "Naver), [Yandex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yandex" \o "Yandex) and [Seznam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seznam" \o "Seznam) are market leaders.

Successful search optimization for international markets may require professional [translation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_translation) of web pages, registration of a domain name with a [top level domain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top_level_domain) in the target market, and [web hosting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_hosting) that provides a local [IP address](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IP_address). Otherwise, the fundamental elements of search optimization are essentially the same, regardless of language.[[52]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-grehan-1-52)

## Legal precedents

On October 17, 2002, SearchKing filed suit in the United States District Court, Western District of Oklahoma, against the search engine Google. SearchKing's claim was that Google's tactics to prevent [spamdexing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spamdexing" \o "Spamdexing) constituted a [tortious interference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tortious_interference" \o "Tortious interference) with contractual relations. On May 27, 2003, the court granted Google's motion to dismiss the complaint because SearchKing "failed to state a claim upon which relief may be granted."[[54]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-54)[[55]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-55)

In March 2006, [KinderStart](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=KinderStart&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "KinderStart (page does not exist)) filed a lawsuit against [Google](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google) over search engine rankings. Kinderstart's website was removed from Google's index prior to the lawsuit and the amount of traffic to the site dropped by 70%. On March 16, 2007 the [United States District Court for the Northern District of California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_District_Court_for_the_Northern_District_of_California) ([San Jose](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jose,_California) Division) dismissed KinderStart's complaint without leave to amend, and partially granted Google's motion for [Rule 11](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Rules_of_Civil_Procedure#Chapter_III_-_Pleadings_and_Motions) sanctions against KinderStart's attorney, requiring him to pay part of Google's legal expenses.[[56]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-56)[[57]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization#cite_note-57)