



S-E-Oh that's how you found me...

It's easy to get search engine terms confused. Search engine optimization involves tweaking a website's content to raise placement in search results.

To understand how SEO works, it's helpful to understand how search engines work. Internet search engines, like Google, Bing and Yahoo, use automated web programs (bots) to scour the Internet and index all the content they find. Then, when someone visits the search engine to look for information, it uses complicated mathematical formulas to dig through its staggeringly massive databases in order to present the most relevant web pages, usually within milliseconds. In other words, search engines are magic.

The trick to SEO is making that magic work for you, and the best way to do that is by thoughtfully targeting the keywords your potential customers use and incorporating those keywords into your content. To continue with the magic analogy, think of a web search as a wish your customer makes. By placing the right keywords on your website, you are harnessing the magic of search engines to tell your customers you can make that wish come true. "Dear Google Fairy," you are saying, "if anyone out there is wishing for a widget, please let them know I have several in stock."

This may sound easy, but for that very reason it can get a bit complicated. For example, "widget" might seem like the most obvious keyword if that's what you sell, but "widget" might be a technical term that isn't used often outside your industry. Is it possible your customers are searching for "thingamabob" or "doohickey" instead? Is there a regional slang term for "thingamabob," and do some people shorten "doohickey" to "hickey?" Are you listing your refurbished doohickeys as "pre-owned" instead of "used," the more common term? Just because a word is familiar to you and your colleagues doesn't mean someone outside your professional circle is going to use it, or even know exactly what it means.

Take the word "keyword," for example. It's commonly used by people who understand SEO, but if you're new to the subject you might not realize that "keyword" can mean more than one word. Another term is "search phrase." Some people even type complete sentences (especially questions) into search engines. You can target potential customers more accurately by peppering the pages of your website with strings of words prospective and existing customers are most likely to use.

This is why it is vital to know your audience. Are your potential customers going to search for "custom-made widget" or "professional-grade doohickey?" Do they want "thingamabob parts," or even "thingamabob service?" And are they going to search for it close to home? If someone is looking for "cheap widget in East Texas," is there a phrase on the appropriate page of your website that will let them know you have what they need?

It's also important to know your competition. The more popular a search term, the more results a search engine will return for it. It can be difficult to rank high enough in the results to capitalize on the most popular keywords, so it helps to consider phrases that aren't used as frequently, especially those phrases that aren't being used by your competitors. It can be better to be at the top of a less popular search than to disappear in a more popular, oversaturated one.



When you're developing content for your website, keep SEO in mind. A few simple steps can go a long way toward moving your site to the top of the search list.

- Compile a list of five to ten keywords or search phrases that best fit the goods or services you offer.
- If you have access to server-level analytics, see which keywords have brought your site the most traffic.
- Put yourself in your customer's shoes. If someone has no idea your business exists, what words or phrases would they use to seek out the goods or services you provide?
- Look for words and phrases that aren't being used by your competitors.
- Don't overlook misspellings, especially if you offer a unique product or office in a town with a unique name.

Once you've narrowed down a list of keywords you want to use, you can incorporate them into your site's content and structure.

- Consider the topic of each page and use the most relevant keywords. Don't use your "doohickey" keywords on your "thingamabob" page, or vice versa.
- Use the most relevant keyword in the page's title tag.
- Use the most relevant keyword in the H1 header tag of the page.
- Use your keywords at least three times in the body copy of your page.
- Use your most relevant keyword at least once in bold.
- Use keywords in the alt attributes of your images, in your meta description tags and in the url whenever possible.
- Don't put your keywords inside images or graphics, because the text can't be searched or indexed.
- Make sure each page is accessible by at least one static text link.

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