

Most Common SEO Mistakes

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Generally I get contacted by site owners after their site is finished and already published to the web. The owner seeks out my advice after the site has been live for a while and still has no sales and/or traffic. I have put together a list of the most common problems I see when evaluating sites.

1. One of the most common mistakes I see is duplicate title tags. (The title tag is what appears at the top of the browser when the page is displayed and is what the search engines display for the first line of the site link in their results.) In other words most, if not all of the site's pages have the same title tag. Usually it is the name of the business. Search engines place a lot of emphasis on title tags. When multiple pages have the same title tag, the search engines discount those pages' importance.

It is extremely important to title the page with the keyword phrase the page is optimized for. It is best if the keyword only is listed in the title. If that is not possible, at least the keyword should be first. For example: "Small Dog Collars" or "Small Dog Collars – MySite.com"

2. Although meta tags are given little importance now days by the larger search engines, it is possible to misuse them and actually hurt the site. The biggest mistake I see with meta tags is for the meta description to be the same for every page. Pages with duplicate meta descriptions will suffer greatly in the rankings. The same goes for the meta keywords tag. The keyword tag must contain ONLY those keywords found on that page. Also, it is important not to put the same word in the meta tag descriptions more than 3 times. Don't make a list of meta keywords like this: large collars, red collars, small collars, leather collars, nylon collars. Search engines could see this as stuffing keywords. Search engines consider this spamming. It is much better to omit meta tags altogether than to misuse them.

3. Internal linking is often a real problem. Too many links can cause the search engine spider to quit indexing the site before it is actually finished. Google states that a site should have no more than 100 links on a page. I suggest no more than 50. And that is still a LOT of links!

For SEO purposes, the links should always be made with text. Many designers create images for their linking. This is very counter productive for optimization purposes. And along these lines, the navigation system should never be in any form of java script, Flash, or image map. A link with anchor text “leather dog collars” which points to a page optimized for “leather dog collars” is the best method of linking for SEO purposes.

However, do not end up stuffing keywords by having too many links on the same page with the same word or words. For example, don't have half of a page's links like this: large collars, leather collars, small collars, etc. Instead, have “collars” for the heading of the group and then have the links “large”, “leather”, “small”, etc. below. This is not perfectly optimized, but it is better to be cautious than to risk being seen as stuffing keywords by the search engines.

And lastly, it is important that every page on your site has multiple links to it. Pages which have only one incoming link will not be ranked well. They may even be placed into Google's supplemental index. It can be difficult to work a page out of the supplemental index once it is in there.

4. Links to other sites are often a problem too. The days of linking to your friend's hobby site are over. Spamming has become such a problem that the search engines have really changed their algorithms with respect to linking. A dog site simply cannot have links to a totally unrelated site such as a pottery site. I am not saying one single link to a non-related page will get your site banned, but just be aware this can be a problem.

To make it a little easier to tell your friend you can't link to his site, inform your friend that a link from your dog site to their pottery site will do their pottery sight no good whatsoever. Although incoming links are extremely important to a site, the incoming links MUST come from sites with a similar theme. It is great for your dog page to get a link from dog training, dog breeding, dog nutrition, and

dog house sites. A link on a computer website to your dog site won't benefit your site at all.

Many new site owners may also fall prey to scams which promise "thousands" of incoming links for \$29.99. There is a good chance these scammers will use what are called link farms. The search engines consider link farms to be spam. Always remember, there is no free lunch!

5. Another scam which new site owners often waste money on is paying money for submissions to "hundreds" of search engines. There is simply no purpose in submitting to even dozens of search engines. When I create a new site, I simply submit the site to the group of directories I have listed on my site. Within weeks, sometimes days, my new site will be indexed by the top search engines. I never even bother submitting directly to any search engines...not even Google or Yahoo. It doesn't hurt to submit to them, but it works just as well to get links with the directories and by posting some articles with your site's link to article directories.

Additionally, offers of "Guaranteed Inclusion" in search engines are complete scams. Anyone can get a site included in all the top search engines. But getting listed on their first or second pages is going to cost you more than \$29.99. It is going to require work!

There are two ways to get great listings in the search engines. One way is to learn basic SEO skills, do the work yourself, keep learning about SEO, and keep tweaking your site as it works its way higher and higher in the search engines.

The other way is to spend enough money to hire a professional Search Engine Marketer. For a small site, be prepared to spend \$500 dollars or more.

There really is no in between. Do the work yourself or pay a professional. Any money spend in between will generally be wasted.

6. Lastly, one of the biggest mistakes I see occurs when people pay someone else to design their site. The majority of site designers simply don't understand SEO. The designer may have created an awesome looking site, but the fancy scripts and Flash they used will keep the site on page 100 of the search engine results! Before

you start the site, or pay someone else to start it, make sure SEO is considered before the first line of code is written.