

Search Engine Watch

Search Engine Placement Tips

By [Danny Sullivan](#)

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A query on a crawler-based search engine often turns up thousands or even millions of matching web pages. In many cases, only the ten most "relevant" matches are displayed on the first page.

Naturally, anyone who runs a web site wants to be in the "top ten" results. This is because most users will find a result they like in the top ten. Being listed 11 or beyond means that many people may miss your web site.

The tips below will help you come closer to this goal, both for the keywords you think are important, and for phrases you may not even be anticipating.

Pick Your Target Keywords

How do you think people will search for your web page? The words you imagine them typing into the search box are your target keywords.

For example, say you have a page devoted to stamp collecting. Anytime someone types "stamp collecting," you want your page to be in the top ten results. Accordingly, these are your target keywords for that page.

Each page in your web site will have different target keywords that reflect the page's content. For example, say you have another page about the history of stamps. Then "stamp history" might be your keywords for that page.

Your target keywords should always be at least two or more words long. Usually, too many sites will be relevant for a single word, such as "stamps." This "competition" means your odds of success are lower. Don't waste your time fighting the odds. Pick phrases of two or more words, and you'll have a better shot at success.

The [Researching Keywords](#) article available to [Search Engine Watch members](#) provides additional information about selecting key terms. [Click here to learn more about becoming a member](#)

Position Your Keywords

Make sure your target keywords appear in the crucial locations on your web pages. The page's HTML title tag is most important. Failure to put target keywords in the title tag is the main reason why perfectly relevant web pages may be poorly ranked. More about the title tag can be found on the [How HTML Meta Tags Work](#) page.

Build your titles around the top two or three phrases that you would like the page to be found for. The titles should be relatively short and attractive. Think of newspaper headlines. With a few words, they make you want to read a story. Similarly, your page titles are like headlines for your pages. They appear in search engine listings, and a short, attractive title may help encourage users to click through to your site.

Search engines also like pages where keywords appear "high" on the page, as described more fully on the [Search Engine Ranking](#) page. To accommodate them, use your target keywords for your page headline, if possible. Have them also appear in the first paragraphs of your web page.

Keep in mind that tables can "push" your text further down the page, making keywords less relevant because they appear lower on the page. This is because tables break apart when search engines read them. For example, picture a typical two-column page, where the first column has navigational links, while the second column has the keyword loaded text. Humans see such a page like this:

Home	Stamp Collecting
Page 1	
Page 2	Stamp collection is worldwide experience.
Page 3	Thousands enjoy it everyday, and millions
Page 4	can be made from this hobby/business.

Search engines (and those with old browsers) see the page like this:

Home
Page 1
Page 2
Page 3
Page 4

Stamp Collecting

Stamp collection is worldwide experience.
Thousands enjoy it everyday, and millions
can be made from this hobby/business.

See how the keywords have moved down the page? There is no easy

way around this, other than to simplifying your table structure. Consider how tables might affect your page, but don't necessarily stop using them. I like tables, and I'll continue to use them.

Large sections of JavaScript can also have the same effect as tables. The search engine reads this information first, which causes the normal HTML text to appear lower on the page. Place your script further down on the page, if possible.

The [Hiding JavaScript](#) article available to Search Engine Watch [members](#) provides additional information about JavaScript and search engines. [Click here to learn more about becoming a member](#)

Create Relevant Content

Changing your page titles is not necessarily going to help your page do well for your target keywords if the page has nothing to do with the topic. Your keywords need to be reflected in the page content.

In particular, that means you need HTML text on your page. Sometimes, sites present large sections of copy via graphics. It looks pretty, but search engines can't read those graphics. That means they miss out on text that might make your site more relevant. Some of the search engines will index ALT text and comment information. But to be safe, use HTML text whenever possible. Some of your human visitors will appreciate it, also.

Be sure that your HTML text is "visible." Some designers try to spam search engines by repeating keywords in a tiny font or in the same color as the background color to make the text invisible to browsers. Search engines are well aware of these and other tricks. Expect that if the text is not visible in a browser, then a search engine may not index it.

Finally, consider "expanding" your text references, where appropriate. For example, a stamp collecting page might have references to "collectors" and "collecting." Expanding these references to "stamp collectors" and "stamp collecting" reinforces your strategic keywords in a legitimate and natural manner. Your page really is about stamp collecting, but edits may have reduced its relevancy unintentionally.

Avoid Search Engine Stumbling Blocks

Some search engines see the web the way someone using a very old browser might. They may not read image maps. They may not read frames. You need to anticipate these problems, or a search engine may not index any or all of your web pages.

Create HTML links

Often, designers create only image map links from the home page to inside pages. A search engine that can't follow these links won't be able to get "inside" the site. Unfortunately, the most descriptive, relevant pages are often inside pages rather than the home page.

Solve this problem by adding some HTML hyperlinks to the home page that lead to major inside pages or sections of your web site. This is something that will help some of your human visitors, also. Put these hyperlinks down at the bottom of the page. The search engine will find and follow them.

Also consider creating a site map page with text links to every page within your site. You can submit this page, which will help the search engines locate pages within your web site.

Finally, be sure you do a good job of linking internally between your pages. If you naturally point to different pages from within your site, you increase the odds that search engines will follow links and find more of your web site.

Frames Can Kill

Some of the major search engines cannot follow frame links. Make sure there is an alternative method for them to enter and index your site, either through meta tags or smart design. For more information, see the tips on using [frames](#).

Dynamic Doorblocks

Are you generating pages via CGI or database-delivery? Expect that some of the search engines won't be able to index them. Consider creating static pages whenever possible, perhaps using the database to update the pages, not to generate them on the fly. Also, avoid symbols in your URLs, especially the ? symbol. Search engines tend to choke on it.

The [Search Engines And Dynamic Pages](#) article available to Search Engine Watch [members](#) provides additional information about testing for and solving dynamic delivery problems.
[Click here to learn more about becoming a member](#)

Build Inbound Links

Every major search engine uses link analysis as part of its ranking algorithm. This is done because it is very difficult for webmasters to "fake" good links, in the way they might try to spam search engines by manipulating the words on their web pages. As a result, link analysis gives search engines a useful means of determining which pages are good for particular topics.

By building links, you can help improve how well your pages perform in link analysis systems. The key is understanding that link analysis is not about "popularity." In other words, it's not an issue of getting lots of links from anywhere. Instead, you want links from good web pages that are related to the topics you want to be found for.

Here's one simple means to find those good links. Go to the major search engines. Search for your target keywords. Look at the pages that appear in the top results. Now visit those pages and ask the site owners if they will link to you. Not everyone will, especially sites that are extremely competitive with yours. However, there will be non-competitive sites that will link to you -- especially if you offer to link back.

Why is this system good? By searching for your target keywords, you'll find the pages that the search engines deem authoritative, evidenced by the fact that they rank well. Hence, links from these pages are more important (and important for the terms you are interested in) than links from other pages. In addition, if these pages are top ranked, then they are likely to be receiving many visitors. Thus, if you can gain links from them, you might receive some of the visitors who initially go to those pages.

There are also other ways to attract quality links. One that has recently gained traction is linkbaiting. Linkbaiting refers to a variety of techniques used on a web site to attract links from other web sites. This can include content, online tools, downloads, or anything else that other site owners might find compelling enough to link to.

The originators of linkbaiting techniques were Aaron Wall and Andy Hagens. The post on SEO Book, "[101 Ways to Build Link Popularity in 2006](#)," can give you an idea of how to use linkbaiting to attract quality links.

The [More About Link Analysis](#) page available to Search Engine Watch members provides in-depth advice on building relevant links to your web site. [Click here to learn more about becoming a member](#)

Just Say No to Search Engine Spamming

For one thing, spamming doesn't always work with search engines. It can also backfire. Search engines may detect your spamming attempt and penalize or ban your page from their listings.

Search engine spamming attempts usually center around being top ranked for extremely popular keywords. You can try and fight that battle

against other sites, but then be prepared to spend a lot of time each week, if not each day, defending your ranking. That effort usually would be better spent on networking and alternative forms of publicity, described below.

If the practical reasons aren't enough, how about some ethical ones? The content of most web pages ought to be enough for search engines to determine relevancy without webmasters having to resort to repeating keywords for no reason other than to try and "beat" other web pages. The stakes will simply keep rising, and users will also begin to hate sites that undertake these measures.

Consider search engine spamming against spam email. No one likes spam email, and sites that use spam email services often face a backlash from those on the receiving end. Sites that spam search engines degrade the value of search engine listings. As the problem has grown, these sites now face the same backlash that spam email generates.

Submit Your Key Pages

Most search engines will index the other pages from your web site by following links from a page you submit to them. But sometimes they miss, so it's good to submit the top two or three pages that best summarize your web site.

Don't trust the submission process to automated programs and services. Some of them are excellent, but the major search engines are too important. There aren't that many. Submit manually, so that you can see if there are any problems reported.

Also, don't bother submitting more than the top two or three pages. It doesn't speed up the process to submit more. Submitting alternative pages is only insurance. In case the search engine has trouble reaching one of the pages, you've covered yourself by giving it another page from which to begin its crawl of your site.

Be patient. It can take up to a month to two months for your "non-submitted" pages to appear in a search engine. Additionally, some search engines may not list every page from your site.

**Detailed information about submitting to each major search engine is available to Search Engine Watch [members](#).
[Click here to learn more about becoming a member](#)**

Verify and Maintain Your Listing

Check on your pages and ensure they get listed, in the ways described on the [Check URL](#)

page. Once your pages are listed in a search engine, monitor your listing every week or two. Strange things happen. Pages disappear from catalogs. Links go screwy. Watch for trouble, and resubmit if you spot problems.

Resubmit your site any time you make significant changes. Search engines should revisit on a regular schedule. However, some search engines have grown smart enough to realize some sites only change content once or twice a year, so they may visit less often. Resubmitting after major changes will help ensure that your site's content is kept current.

Beyond Search Engines

It's worth taking the time to make your site more search engine friendly because some simple changes may pay off with big results. Even if you don't come up in the top ten for your target keywords, you may find an improvement for target keywords you aren't anticipating. The addition of just one extra word can suddenly make a site appear more relevant, and it can be impossible to guess what that word will be.

Also, remember that while search engines *are* a primary way people look for web sites, they are not the *only* way. People also find sites through word-of-mouth, traditional advertising, traditional media, blog posts, web directories, and links from other sites. Since the advent of Web 2.0 applications, people are finding sites through feeds, blogs, podcasts, vlogs and many other means. Sometimes, these alternative forms can be more effective draws than search engines. The most effective marketing strategy is to combine search marketing with other online and offline media.

Finally, know when it's time to call it quits. A few changes may be enough to achieve top rankings in one or two search engines. But that's not enough for some people, and they will invest days creating special pages and changing their sites to try and do better. This time could usually be put to better use pursuing non-search engine publicity methods.

Don't obsess over your ranking. Even if you follow every tip and find no improvement, you still have gained something. You will know that search engines are not the way you'll be attracting traffic. You can concentrate your efforts in more productive areas, rather than wasting your valuable time.

[Next: How To Use HTML Meta Tags](#)

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Note: the date shown on this article reflects updates provided by [Claudia Bruemmer](#), Internet Marketing Writer and former ClickZ Managing Editor. This article was originally published by Danny Sullivan in October of 2002.

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