



THE PRACTICAL SEO E-BOOK

*FOR SMALL BUSINESSES, MUSICIANS, INDIES
AND ANYONE WITH A DIY MENTALITY!*

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This E-Book was created with the small business person in mind. Whether you are a musician, a record label owner, or run some other kind of business and have a DIY mentality, this report will help you establish your online presence with a good foundation, or make the most of your current online presence. It is designed for people with little to basic knowledge of internet marketing - not for the advanced web marketer.

I myself am not an SEO scientist, but an online marketer who is self-educated in the world of SEO. After much reading and experimentation, I've distilled the overwhelming amounts of information into what I think are the most fundamental and easy-to-implement tactics. I wrote it with small businesses, bands and others who are just starting out in mind – budgets are probably skimpy and you want to be able to accomplish results yourself with as little paid help as possible. All these tips can be easily implemented in such circumstances. If you do have a designer – give this book to him/her to implement for you. These tips are designed to be practical, effective and a good starter in the world of SEO – but not exhaustive.

This is a free e-book so by all means share it with friends and colleagues. I hope you enjoy it and find it beneficial. I plan on making revisions and updates to it so I'm always interested in constructive feedback that might improve it: info@elemental-consulting.com

Some of the topics touched on here will be developed in more detail at Elemental Consulting's [Digital Marketing Blog](#) so keep checking there for updates and tutorials.

Keep an eye on the [updates page](#) for the E-book to make sure you have the latest version.

WHAT IS SEO?

Literally – Search Engine Optimization; i.e. Making your website easy for the search engines to find, index and rank highly, which then makes it easier for your target internet surfer to find you.

SEO is sometimes made out to be the impenetrable domain of a few experts who hold all the keys to elusive search engine rankings. Certainly there are experts who spend their time keeping up with the ever-changing algorithms of Google and other engines, and constantly tweaking their sites accordingly. But for the average website owner, it's not really necessary to go into the minute details in order to perform well, and it's not generally practical for many small businesses to hire such companies because they don't come cheap. For the small business that still wants to rank highly without hiring a specialist, there are some general good practices that you can easily implement which will serve you well. That's what this E-book is designed to explain.

As you delve into the world of SEO, keep in mind a few things:

- 1) SEO is not just about the *volume* of traffic you get to your site, but you should think of it in terms of trying to attract *quality* traffic. Quality traffic means people who are actually looking for what your site has to offer and are therefore more likely to spend some time at your site, revisit it, perhaps make a purchase, enter their email address etc. This is more valuable than having millions of people come to your site but leave within seconds because it's not what they are looking for. In this Web 2.0 world, niche content and traffic is valid and profitable. Don't try and please everybody, but keep in mind who your target audience is, and work on appealing to them.

- 2) Another thing to consider is that SEO is just one of the several ways (both on-and offline) in which you can get traffic to your site. While it may be the most discussed method, you should always keep in perspective your overall goals for your site and business. This means that you should never sacrifice good content or a good user experience for the sake of SEO. The overall idea that I try and convey to clients, and my blog readers is that branding yourself or your company means attracting a fanbase or client base and then developing a relationship with these people. Some people get bogged down in the details of SEO and think they must implement every little trick and technique even if it doesn't necessarily make sense for their business. Note that most practices discussed here are valuable for several reasons, not solely for the search engines. The goal is to provide value and create the most interesting and relevant site that you can.

- 3) Always keep in mind that while you want to be friendly with the search engines, your best friend should be your fan, customer or potential customer since those are the ones you hope to ultimately win over for the long term. The search engines help you find these people, but once they have assisted in that goal, it's your responsibility to build a relationship with those people so that they keep coming back to your site.

So the bottom line is to always exercise common sense and keep the bigger picture in mind. Some internet marketers use what are called “black hat” techniques which involve some dubious (to put it nicely) and ‘spammy’ practices to trick search engines and surfers. You won’t find those discussed here. I’m assuming you have a brand or a site that you want to develop and maintain over the long-term, and with this in mind, any shady practices that may seem to have a quick payoff will damage you in the end.

At the end of the day there is no real substitute for great, relevant and regularly updated content!

While there are several available search engines, I’ll be referring mostly to Google throughout this report. It’s still the most important search engine (and my personal fave ☺) and will most likely drive a significant chunk of your traffic. Although algorithms vary from one engine to the next, the methods I discuss will put you in good standing with all of them – the tips discussed here are the fundamentals.

WHEN TO IMPLEMENT SEO

Ideally you should be considering these SEO concepts right from the get-go; at the conceptualization and design stage of your site so that you can integrate them into the design as it is executed. Some designers are more SEO-savvy than others so you may even have to educate your designer a little, or give him/her a copy of this e-book so he/she can implement some of the ideas into the design.

However, I’m assuming that many of you already have a site up and running that you would like to optimize, and that’s totally fine too. These techniques can be implemented at any stage with little trouble, and it’s never too late to start!

THINKING OF BUILDING A FLASH SITE?

Two words – PLEASE DON’T!!!!

Flash is known to be more difficult to optimize for search engines because a lot of the content is basically invisible to search engines– there are ways to do it, but it’s just so much easier if you can avoid it altogether. And if you are a one-person company or doing things mostly under your own steam, you’ll find it much easier to make changes to the optimization of your site without Flash, unless you happen to be a proficient Flash developer.

Using elements of Flash for navigation or small design enhancements is fine, but I strongly advise against basing your whole site on it, not

only for the sake of SEO but also because, typically unless it's extremely well-executed, Flash provides a poorer user experience overall for a typical (business) site (in my opinion).

If you are working with a Flash-site and are tied to that format for a while, I recommend checking out the following resources which can help you with optimizing a Flash site:

[How To SEO Flash](#)

[A Modern Approach To Flash SEO](#)

[SEO Friendly Flash](#)

[Does Flash SEO Still Suck?](#)

The same principles discussed in this e-book still apply, but the implementation will be different in order to work within the structure of Flash.

****UPDATE****

Google just announced that they are getting better at reading Flash sites. For more info:

<http://searchengineland.com/080701-000002.php>

This doesn't necessarily mean all Flash-related problems are solved; SEO should still be a consideration for Flash developers, but it is getting easier.

LET'S GET STARTED

THE CONCEPT OF KEYWORDS

This is the most fundamental concept in SEO. Keywords and keyphrases are the words that users might enter into a search engine to find information which could potentially lead them to your site. They also indicate to search engines what your site is all about.

Keywords can and should be placed in the meta tags, URLs, and content of your site in order for search engines to 'see' them. This means that the content of your site must actually be relevant to, and contain your chosen keywords prominently (we'll get to how to do all this later on in the book).

An important factor to consider is that some phrases will be more competitive than others ie. More sites will be targeting certain obvious phrases and it will be harder for your site to rank highly when that is the case.

So you want to consider who your target audience is and what kinds of words you want your site to be associated with in order to attract that

traffic. For example, if we're talking about your official site for your hip-hop group, you might want to grab people that are searching for "hip hop music", "hip hop downloads", "underground hip hop" etc. Some of these terms are likely to be very competitive so, let's say your group is from Boston, you might want to branch out into people looking for "Boston hip-hop" or even "Boston bands" etc. You might even go further afield to consider that people who are looking for "hip hop clothing" might also have interest in your music.

So wherever possible, you will want to try and come up with less obvious, but still relevant keyphrases for your site which will have less competition and can deliver you highly targeted traffic and for which you can rank highly.

As you can see, the game of finding fruitful keywords can be a delicate one – they have to be relevant enough to attract and keep web surfers, but specific and targeted enough that you can rank highly for them. In some cases obscure phrases can work to your advantage because there's not a lot of competition – ie not a lot other sites also targeting those words – therefore you have a better chance of showing up highly in the rankings. But you also have to be able to tailor some of your content to those chosen keywords in a relevant way. This can be an opportunity for you to think creatively about your business, who you are trying to target, and how people might find you.

When I talk about ranking highly, I basically mean that your site shows up at least within the first 2 pages of Google listings (preferably the first page) for that keyword or phrase, since most people don't look beyond that in the search results.

When you first start out, you will not immediately appear on the first pages, unless you're in a very non-competitive niche, but in a relatively short period of time after implementing these techniques, you should see your placement start to rise and your traffic accordingly.

A useful tool to use when looking for keywords is:

<http://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/>

It will give an estimate of how much traffic a give phrase will generate daily, and also ideas for other search terms.

ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

'On-page' optimization simply refers to all the various techniques that you can implement on your webpages and have direct control over.

DOMAIN NAME

If you haven't yet set up your site, you might want to try and incorporate one of your main keywords into the domain name itself. Don't worry if you already have a site, and perhaps are using the name of your company or band as the domain, that's fine...

SEO vs. Branding

When it comes to choosing a domain name, this can be an area where SEO and branding considerations are pitted against each other. i.e. Should you use the name of your company/brand as the domain name, or go for a more SEO-friendly domain that contains a keyword or two?

This is something of a judgment call and will depend on the type of business you are in. Sometimes the name of your business will not obviously indicate the content of your site or the type of business (eg. "Dell" doesn't suggest a computer manufacturer), but that doesn't mean you should ditch it for something more seo-friendly. "Desktops-laptops-and-printers.com" just doesn't have the same ring to it and is a pain in the rear to type in or remember correctly. So if the longevity of your business is based more around the name recognition of your company, and having fans and potential clients be able to remember you name and email address easily - you should favor branding in making your decision.

If however you intend to sell primarily online only, using search engines and other links as your main form of traffic – ie, where a memorable URL is not as necessary, then by all means go for the keyword friendly option.

There may be a way to navigate between the two. For example, if the name of your rock band is Blue Snake, you might want to call your site BlueSnakeRock.com, or BlueSnakeMusic.com for example.

As I discuss below, if you use your brand for the domain there are still very effective ways to utilize your keywords in your URLs so you will get the best of both worlds.

URL SELECTION

When creating individual pages for the various sections of your site, you have a great opportunity to target each page for different keywords. Don't make the common mistake of optimizing all your pages in exactly the same way for the same keywords. When you create the page name for each section of your site, you should include relevant keywords in the URL. So if you have a section of your site dedicated to free audio and video from your band, you will want to use an appropriate URL name eg. Bluesnakerock.com/free-audio-and-video.htm

This way your keywords are right there in the URL for the search engines to see.

You'll notice the use of hyphens in the URL there - this acts as a separator so that the engine can read each keyword separately, instead of one long word "freeaudioandvideo" which is not the way a human would type it into a search engine.

Underscores can also be used as separators - there doesn't seem to be a definitive answer as to which is better, but general opinion seems to suggest that hyphens are preferred. They also have the advantage of being more legible when viewed online, since underscores become obscured by the underline that typically accompanies a link on a webpage.

WORDPRESS & BLOG PERMALINKS

If you are using Wordpress as your CMS (content management system), or are running a blog on it, you should take the following steps to optimize your URLs, also known in the blogosphere as Permalinks. Permalink is just another name for the specific URL assigned to each blog post or page you publish.

There are other blog systems out there but I personally use Wordpress mostly and it is my favorite so far. This principle applies to other blog software but I'm using Wordpress as the specific 'how-to' example here.

The default format of a blog post/page URL in Wordpress is to use an id number, so that your URL will look something like:
Yourdomain.com/blog/?p=203

This doesn't tell the search engines much. So here's what you do. Go to the *Settings* screen from your dashboard, then go to the *Permalinks* section.

Check the button next to “Custom Structure” and in the text field, type:
/%postname%/

This will automatically use the title of your post as the Permalink.
Eg. Yourdomain.com/this-is-my-first-blog-post
This is a much more search engine friendly URL. ***

You can also manually edit the permalink for each post when you are writing or editing a post or page – the permalink will appear right underneath the title and you can edit it as you choose. (If you are using slightly older versions of Wordpress, the permalink is called Post Slug, but functions the same way)

Ideally you would implement this customization from day 1 of your blog, but what should you do if your blog is already established and you’ve been using the default format up till now and have pages and posts with those funky-looking URLs?

If you change the default naming structure midway through, what will happen is that your old links will no longer work – so if someone has linked to a post on your blog using the old URL, anyone following that link will end up at a dead page – not good.

You have a couple of options.

If your blog is not that old, or doesn’t have any incoming links, you can go ahead and change the default setting with little or no problem.

However if you are worried about your posts losing rankings or bringing up errors you can try either of the following Plugins which will redirect the old URL to the new one, so no traffic is lost:

<http://scott.yang.id.au/code/permalink-redirect/>

<http://www.deanlee.cn/wordpress/permalinks-migration-plugin/>

A step-by-step guide on how to use the plugin:

<http://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-friendly-url-structure/4556/>

I have not used either of these plugins myself but they seem to get good reviews based on research I’ve done.

If for some reason the plugin does not work for you, or you just don’t want to try it, the only other option would be to maintain the default naming structure, but just manually change the post slug/permalink each time you make a post from here on out. So your old posts would still have the old funky links, but going forward your posts would be nicely SEO-ed.

*** Credit where credit is due, I first read about this in Caroline Middlebrooks e-book “How to Develop Money-Making Niche Sites with

WordPress”.

I recommend her blog because she has a very easy to understand style of writing and a very practical, no-nonsense approach.

META TAGS

Meta tags are pieces of descriptive HTML code that are found at the very top of the code for any webpage. They are contained within the <HEAD> tag of a webpage and include, most commonly the elements ‘title’, ‘description’ and ‘keywords.’ You can go to any website, right click and select View Page Source to see an example.

TITLE TAG

The title tag for your pages is one of the most crucial features of SEO. Unlike other meta tags, this one is actually viewable to human browsers – it’s what appears at the very top of your browser window. So it tells both humans and search engines what the site is all about. Therefore it should contain the relevant keywords for that page.

A lot of people automatically put their company or band name in the Title tag but that is not the most effective thing to do, especially if your brand name is already in the URL. The advantage of the Title tag is that it can and should be customized to each specific page. If you want to include your company name, at least put it at the end of the Title tag so that the search engine sees the other keywords first. The idea here is that you want to attract new visitors who don’t already know your brand name and are not using it to search but are searching by other relevant keywords in your area of business, so the title should be focused on those phrases.

e.g. Free Indie Rock Music Audio and Video | Blue Snake Rock Band

Since humans see the contents of the Title tag too, try and work it into a sentence or phrase not just a list of keywords. It seems to be general opinion that you shouldn’t use more than 80 characters here. You won’t necessarily be penalized for more than that, but it’s not necessary since it will probably be cut off by the search engine and not visible when displayed in the search results page, or the browser may cut it off so only part of your text will be visible at the top of the window.

The HTML Format of the tag is as follows:

```
<head>  
<title> Free Indie Rock Music Audio and Video | Blue Snake Rock Band  
</title>
```

KEYWORDS AND DESCRIPTION

Format:

```
<head>  
<title>Free Christian Indie Emo Rock Music and Video Downloads from  
Pink Stripe band</title>  
<meta name="Description" content="a collection of free music and  
video from indie emo rock band, Pink Stripe ">  
<meta name="Keywords" content="rock, emo, music, video, indie,  
pink stripe, downloads, free, mp3">
```

Neither the keywords nor description meta tags are as important as they used to be, but it doesn't hurt to include them.

The description line does appear in the search results page in engines like Google and Yahoo, so a well-written description could potentially sway a surfer to actually click on your listing.

The Keywords tag is thought by many experts to be nearly useless at this stage. If you do want to use it, you should focus on keywords and phrases that actually appear in the content of that page. Separate your terms with commas. One expert I read suggested you could make use of it for words that might be misspelled by searchers and include the misspellings as keywords. I have not personally tried this method.

ALT TAGS FOR IMAGES

This is another item that seems to have been downgraded in importance by SEO experts in recent years. But it's not totally irrelevant so I would recommend using ALT tags as part of your site – it's another way to legitimately include your keywords on your pages.

Image ALT tags were originally used so that if your browser could not display images, or if you like to browse without images, text would show up in place of the image to let you know what you were missing. Search engines can also see this stuff, and with Google's Image search being another place your site could be indexed, it shouldn't be overlooked when optimizing your site. The contents of the ALT tag is

also the text that sometimes appears when you mouseover an image on a webpage. So since it is visible to humans, use sentences, not just a list of keywords.

The format is as follows:

```

```

WEBPAGE CONTENT

The content, i.e. the actual text on your webpage should include your keywords. "Keyword density" (the number of times your keyword appears in relation to the total number of words on the page) is not as important as it used to be but you may still see the term being used. The main thing is to provide relevant and interesting content that reads naturally. There are a few main places where you should include your keywords, but don't "stuff" your page with them unnaturally where it doesn't make sense.

Your keywords should be included in the Title tag, the URL of the page, the first paragraph of text and if possible, a couple more times in the rest of the content. Use common sense - it helps if they appear frequently, but your content still has to make sense to the reader. Consider using them in headlines or section headers in the page, and you can also use emphasis such as bold or italics <i> on certain words to highlight them to the search engine.

SEOBook.com provides this free tool to analyze keyword density:

<http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword-density/>

LINK ANCHOR TEXT

The anchor text of a link is the text that you actually click on. When creating links to your page from other sites, or internal links to other pages on your site, be thoughtful of the text you use in the link anchor i.e. don't just say "click here". If you are providing a link to download a free mp3 for example, the link anchor text should be something more descriptive like "download a free mp3 of Blue Snake here."

Format:

```
<a href="http://www.bluesnakerock.com/girls-are-cool.mp3">Download a free mp3 of Blue Snake's "Girls Are Cool"</a>
```

FILE NAMES

This is another area in which opinions are varied as to the effect of file names on search engine ranking. But it's good protocol to name your files – webpages, mp3s, images, videos etc with useful, relevant names, and since it definitely won't hurt your rankings, I say 'why not?'. Without being spammy, you can choose wisely when naming your files to make them relevant. If you have MP3s, don't just name them "track one" or something generic like that. Include the name of your band, genre and track title for example, and remember to use hyphens to separate your words
eg. "Blue-snake-rock-girls-are-cool.mp3"

INTERNAL LINKING

Another important factor when determining the ranking of your site is internal linking – i.e. how the various pages on your site are linked to each other. Having a nicely structured site whose pages reference each other in a cohesive and relevant fashion is good practice and will improve your overall ranking. Remember to make use of specific and relevant link anchor text, and vary it throughout the site.

FRESH CONTENT

Search engines like content that is updated regularly. If your site gets stale, your ranking will drop because it becomes less relevant. Not every kind of site lends itself well to updated content which is where a blog can come in handy. A blog, by its nature can be any kind of content and is frequently updated. If you are a band you can utilize a blog even when you don't have an album out because you can let your fans know about what you are up to. Are you in the studio recording? Post pics of your sessions or let them know what songs you are working on. Share rough cuts of tracks – ask for feedback. Give your fans the feeling they are getting some personal insight into your life as an artist. This kind of regularly updated content not only helps develop your relationship with your fans, keeping them engaged and coming back to your site frequently, but it also looks good to the search engines.

Also keep in mind that the more pages your site has, the better it looks to search engines. So it's important to keep adding pages on a regular basis. You can create pages for photos, for song lyrics, tour dates, reviews/press, newsletter archives etc etc. Think of each page as a little piece of search engine bait that has the ability to attract more and varied web traffic. Over time, all these various elements add up.

OFF-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

This refers to ways to improve your site's ranking that involve 3rd party sites, not just your own.

BACKLINKS

Backlinks are simply links from other websites back to your own site.

Backlinking can be an entire marketing strategy in itself and I recommend that you consistently work on this aspect. The idea is that in addition to the content of your site, search engines look at who you are associated with – which, and how many sites are linking to you. If sites they deem to be high quality are linking to you, this makes your site look better in their eyes. If low-quality or 'spammy' sites are linking to you, it will have an adverse effect.

So, as with all popularity contests, it's all about the company you keep.

Swapping links with blogs and other sites can be a good way to get backlinks and increase traffic. However, you want to be selective about your links and choose only relevant sites to link with. Don't associate yourself with a site that has a lot of 'spammy' links in their link directory, or that does not have good, regularly updated content. This is the equivalent of being guilty by association.

You can strategize by Googling the keywords you are targeting and trying to get the top ranked sites to link to you. If your site is brand new it might be a struggle to get major sites to link to you because the big dogs may have nothing much to gain by linking to you, ranking-wise, but if you are providing great content they may want to link to you as a good resource for their visitors. I would recommend at first targeting sites within your own 'social circle' or just above it until you increase your own ranking, then you can start to reach out to bigger sites with more confidence.

Link swapping is not the only way to achieve backlinks. If you provide relevant content, other sites may naturally want to link to it, particularly bloggers. For example, if you are a musician and can provide a free mp3 download, you should email relevant blog sites and if they post a link to the mps (hosted on your server), this would be a backlink. Or if you are a business and publish an article or blog post about something relevant to your market, other bloggers may see fit to reference your content and link to it. This type of backlink has a nice organic effect- the more people see and link to your content, the more that other sites will also link to it.

A good way to get some high quality backlinks is to utilize social networking sites such as MySpace, YouTube, Delicious, StumbleUpon etc. These types of sites are ranked very highly in search engines, and because you have the ability to upload your own content to them, in the form of video, blogs, profiles etc, you can add links back to your site which will be visible to the search engines, thereby gaining some high quality links.

For example, if you have a MySpace page, make sure you link to your site in a blog posting on your profile (all MySpace blog posts are indexed by search engines). If you have video content, make sure to get it on YouTube. Upload photos to Flickr and include a link in the description field. You can submit stories to Digg and other user-submitted content sites that provide backlinks.

Keep in mind that Google likes a variety of link text anchors, so when soliciting links from other sites, either provide a variety of anchors, or let them come up with their own which will include words and phrases you may not have thought of, and seem more natural to Google.

Keep an eye on the blog for more detailed discussions on backlinking strategies in the future. For now just be aware that not only does making friends with other sites improve your visibility and therefore traffic to your site but the more quality sites that link to you, the more highly you will be ranked.

SEEING THE RESULTS

Your web host will most likely provide some type of traffic tracking feature (such as AWStats or Webalizer) for you to monitor traffic to your web site. You can also supplement this with Google's free Analytics tool. Some type of tracking method is necessary so that you can see the effects of the changes you are implementing.

Here are some key things to look for in all the data you will have access to:

Page views – simply the number of times pages on your site have been displayed

Unique visitors/users – the number of individual users that have looked at your site. Unique means that if one person comes to the site 5 different times, they are still counted as one user.

Referrals – where your traffic is coming from, sites that link to you, search engines

Search keywords/phrases – the actual words that are being typed into search engines that have led people to your site.

You should also be able to see which the most popular pages on your site are; so if you are targeting different phrases on various pages, you can see which are proving popular.

Hits vs. page views

A lot of people casually use the word “hits” when discussing how much traffic they get. But be aware that while this number often sounds large it is not a good indicator of actual traffic. A “hit” to your site is basically any time a file is pulled from your server – that could be an image, mp3 or any file. So if you have a lot of images on your site, your hits will look large because each time an image is displayed, it counts as a hit. But a more accurate estimate is users or page views.

APPENDIX

Advanced Reading

If you would like to take your knowledge of SEO further, here are some great specialist sites:

[Seomash.com](#)

A summary of SEO-related news from all the major sources

[Seobook.com](#)

SEO expert Aaron Wall's leading site is an excellent resource

[Wordtracker Academy](#)

lots of useful articles and case studies

[Thirty Day Challenge](#)

A free training program showing you how to make your first \$10 online.

Useful Tools

[Alexa.com](#)

provides a ranking of all internet sites.

[SEO Book's tool box](#)

Provides a variety of useful free tools

[Wordtracker's Keyword Tool](#)

Research possible keywords and see how much traffic they could bring

[SEO All-In-One Plugin](#)

Useful plugin for Wordpress blogs to help you easily SEO each post or page

Useful Blogs

[Caroline Middlebrook](#)

A down-to-earth internet marketer with easy to follow advice

[ProBlogger.net](#)

The online bible for bloggers; an invaluable resource