

“Search Marketing the Organic Way” by Branch Communications

TRACK 1 - INTRODUCTION

Jason’s search for the Golden Fleece took him on a long difficult voyage through unknown seas. He and his Argonauts set off on their quest with little hope of finding the Golden Fleece.

Prospective customers trying to find your website may face a quest that is as long and difficult. After all, those industrious search engine spiders do have to crawl through millions of websites.

That’s why search engine optimisation is so important. It can turn the hunt for your website into just one click of the mouse. And naturally, the more prospective customers that find your website, the greater the benefit to your business and your bottom line.

I’m Roz Chandler, Managing Director of Branch Communications. Thank you for taking the time to listen to this audio presentation, one of a series intended to guide you through the ever changing world of e-marketing.

This presentation focuses on search engine optimisation – what it is, why it is so important and how you can achieve a high ranking website in search engines.

We hope you enjoy our presentation and that Branch Communications can help you grow your business.

Barry sez.... “With £5bn being spent online, on average every 6 weeks, every business needs to understand the new media controlled by search engines.”

TRACK 2 – DON'T NEGLECT YOUR SEO

Let's start with some facts.

84% of internet users find websites using a search engine

And 55% of online transactions originated from a search using a search engine.

And it is anticipated that in 2005, search will account for 50% of all online revenues.

There is little doubt that search engine optimisation is vital to marketing success on the internet today, and plays a huge role in helping internet users find sites with the information they want.

So what is it? Search engine optimisation is the process of achieving organic listings on crawler based search engines and directories. This involves maximising the search engine 'friendliness' of a website, with alt tags, meta tags, keywords, microsites and relevant content. These techniques increase a site's ranking, as search engine spiders can then find, read, navigate and categorise your website.

Search Engine Optimisation is of increasing importance to marketers as the costs of off-line marketing and pay per click budgets soar. As a result, more and more businesses are turning to search engine optimization to achieve high rankings on popular search engines. SEO is recognised as an extremely cost effective way of generating traffic and reaching consumers on the lookout for their content, products and services.

As more revenue is being generated by on-line sales than ever before, companies need to be quick off the mark to take advantage of this – by

making use of approved and durable search engine optimization techniques to drive traffic to their sites.

We hope we can help you in your quest to improve your websites' presence on the internet.

Barry sez... " Building a great website that is invisible to search engines is like building a great store which has no road going to it. It may have the best products – but no-one is going to find it!"

TRACK 3 – GETTING TO GRIPS WITH SEARCH ENGINES AND DIRECTORIES

Search sites, amongst which are the popular ones of Yahoo, Ask Jeeves, Google and MSN, fall into two categories, pure search engines and directories. It's important to understand the difference so you can get the best out of them both.

Pure Search Engines

Pure search engines add website pages to their databases automatically based on submissions by the owners of the websites. Occasionally though, their spiders crawl out to hunt for new and updated websites. They then use complex analysis, based on the sites content, keywords, metatags and html code to rank sites to match an individual search as closely as possible. We can advise on alt tags, meta tags, keywords and relevant content to maximise the search engine 'friendliness' of your website.

Directories

The other type of search site is directories. To be listed on a directory, you must actually submit your front page URL using the directory's submission form. Unlike pure search engines, directories don't automatically add sites to their database. Every submission is checked manually to decide if it's appropriate for the directory and/or the category you have requested.

Web sites submitted to directories are usually ranked according to the information provided on the submission form rather than the information on the website. Make sure you consider the content of the form carefully, to maximize your websites rankings – it's critically important to get this right first time, so ask us for help if needs be.

Most of the major search sites on the Internet today combine search engine and directory functionality. Major search engines like [Google](#), [MSN](#), [AltaVista](#), [Excite](#), [Lycos](#) and [HotBot](#) all have some form of directory associated with them. The opposite is true of major directories such as Yahoo! and LookSmart. If no results from their human-edited directories match your search query, their search engines then search through a database of spidered sites to give you results.

Barry sez... "Search engines loom for 'votes of confidence' – being listed in the most respected sites, under the right category, means your site will have internet indicators proving your site is right for your subject!"

TRACK 4 – SUBMITTING TO SEARCH ENGINES

Just the once

Before submitting new pages to a pure search engine, check that the page has not already been added – or 'indexed' to use the correct terms! There is no need to submit, or rather resubmit, a page if it is already in the search engines database. In fact, resubmitting URL's with no major changes, just to be noticed, can do more harm than good.

Google is one of the most popular and successful pure search engines. It's also extremely user friendly, whether the website user or owner. As a website owner, just add your main URL and Google will eventually spider the rest of your site. It currently takes one to two months for Google to index pages. You can check if they have by typing your URL into their search box.

Other search engines have there own submission criteria – please do visit the individual search engine websites, or email me for support and advice at roz.chandler@branchcommunications.co.uk. We will be happy to help.

It takes time

After submitting your new website pages to the search engines of your choice, put them to the back of your mind for at least two, if not three months. You can then check whether your website has been indexed by typing your URL into the search box. You should find that each of the search engines has indexed your site, and you should also see the number of targeted traffic to your site increase!

Whilst three months is the norm, it will seem like quite a long time to wait in the fast moving world of marketing. A Pay per Click strategy will provide

much speedier results, guaranteeing your websites rankings, which we can tailor make and implement for you.

Barry sez.. "Imagine you were being inundated with people saying 'List me...list me!' First time – you put them in the queue, second time, you put them to the back of the queue – more than that, and you block their requests! Search engines and directories do the same."

TRACK 5 – MAKING FRIENDS WITH DIRECTORIES

Follow the form

Getting listed on a directory will take some deliberation – and make use of your people skills.

The first step is to submit your front page URL using the directory's submission form. Before submitting to any directory, read the guidelines thoroughly and follow them implicitly. The golden rule is to get it right first time, as once your website is listed with a directory, it's very hard to change.

Choose the best category for your website carefully – we recommend doing a search using the engine in question and relevant keywords for your website, to see what categories get listed. Do this objectively, putting yourself in the shoes of your customer.

Also, remember to choose subcategories over top-level categories. If you submit to a top-level category even though appropriate subcategories are available, it is very likely that your submission will be denied. And, if your website targets a specific geographical area, whether local, regional, national or worldwide, be sure to submit it to the appropriate area – and no more.

You will also need to choose a title for your website. As most directories do not provide much flexibility, the safest option is to use your company name or the official name of your Web site. Adherence to this rule varies by directory however, and some may allow the odd keyword. Take advice though as this practice may not be viewed favourably by some directories.

The description of your URL on your submission form is a big factor in the ranking your site will be given once listed. Definitely avoid using blatant sales copy or jargon, or making it too long. If you do, the editors will without doubt get the red pen out. Make sure you include important keywords and say clearly and concisely what your website does. Using the meta tag description for your site, which we'll come on to, is a good starting point. Edit it into a short yet descriptive sentence, making use of words featured on your website. If your website bears no relation to the description on your form, this will start alarm bells ringing with the editor – especially as descriptions including salubrious terms have been submitted in the past just to get high rankings (even though they would be visited by people that are far from the target market!)

The human touch

An editor manually checks every form submitted, to decide whether the website should be listed at all, and if so in which category. A website will then be ranked according to the description provided on the form – not the content of your website.

Remember – the human touch goes a long way. Get to know the Editor, understand their way of thinking, and follow the guidelines. Fall out with the editor, and they could choose to change the content of your submitted form – or not list your website at all.

Barry sez... "Pretty much everyone has forgotten about directories when seeking high listings and have gone hunting links. Consider what search engines look for – high quality links from sites where people are respected viewers of the site to be linked to. Can an automated link script do that for you?"

TRACK 6 - KEYWORDS

Old wives tales

Before I move on to keywords, let me just put your straight on a few misconceptions about search engine optimization.

It's not about including invisible text – white keywords on a white background does not work.

It's not about filling your meta tags with keywords. This may have been successful in the past, but as things have moved on, you'll find this practice not only doesn't help your rankings – it may actually reduce them.

You don't need to produce hundreds or thousands of pages with similar content, on the grounds that the more the merrier. In actual fact, to our friendly search engine spider, less is more. Producing mirror sites with exactly the same content no longer works either – in fact this is banned and even penalized by most search engines. Make the content of multiple sites different – justify their raison d'être.

Don't think you need to follow the latest algorithms of each search engine, or tweak your site continually to match the ranking criteria of each search engine.

In fact, the key to successful search engine optimization is to simply keep the content of your site relevant with an abundance of keywords.

The key to SEO

Your choice of keywords is one of the most important tools and first step in achieving high rankings. Start by listing all searches you can imagine for your website. Then ask colleagues, friends and family for their thoughts – you'll be surprised at the ideas they come up with. Wordtracker.com and keyword research tools in Overture and Google can also help you here.

Having completed your list of keywords, the next step is to write the visible copy for your website, including as many keywords as you can. Make sure it says exactly what you do in as many different ways as possible, so spiders can crawl straight to your website without having to think too hard.

Barry sez.. "Search engines are automated programs trying to deliver the best results for their users. Think! Are you trying to produce a site that is good for users or just for search engines? Try and publish a site that is good for both – not just for one."

TRACK 7 – TITLE TAGS

Title tags explained

Another important factor in achieving high search engine rankings, in fact as important to search engines as visible text copy and links, is title tags. All search engines use title tags to gather information about your Web site. It's an HTML code snippet that creates the words that appear in the top bar of your Web browser, or in the clickable link on the search engine results page.

The title tag belongs in the <HEAD> section of your source code, and is generally followed by your Meta description and Meta keywords tags. The order of these tags is not critical, so don't worry if your HTML editor places them in a different position. In fact, some website design tools and content management systems generate title tags automatically from information you provide.

Writing title tags

The general consensus is that company names should belong in a title tag – but not exclusively. To boost your rankings, add some descriptive keywords to the title tag – before the company name. This means that those searching for you by company name or brand and by product or service will find you high up their search results.

So, if your company is "Branch Communications Limited." and you are an internet marketing company in Milton Keynes, you shouldn't place only the words "Branch Communications Limited" in your title tag. Instead, why not use "Internet Marketing Company, Milton Keynes – Branch Communications".

Before writing the title tag for any page, you may find it useful to have written the visible copy for your site, so you can fully understand what the page is about. The visible copy should have been based around keywords and phrases that best reflect your business and product or service. From this you can choose the most relevant keywords to create a new, persuasive and descriptive phrase for your title tag. Remember, the first words in any tag are given more weight, so it's most important to get these right.

Barry sez.. "The title tag is the most important bit of code in your HTML – don't waste it!"

TRACK 8 – META DESCRIPTION TAGS

Meta Description Tags explained

The Meta description tag is a snippet of HTML code that belongs inside the <Head> </Head> section of a Web page. It usually is placed after the Title tag and before the Meta keywords tag, although the order is not important. It provides the description of your website on the search results page – which arguably entice people to visit your website. But, the keywords and phrases used in a Meta description tag no longer affect the search engine ranking of your website.

So why bother

Whilst meta descriptive tags can't (may not) affect the position of your website with search engines, they shouldn't be ignored. Without meta descriptive tags, search engines will create their own description of your website to show with their list of search results. Best not to leave this to chance. Writing and implementing meta descriptive tags provides you with an element of control - a chance to encourage more visitors to your site by using phrases full of keywords to lure them in.

Barry sez... "Although this tag is not the most important – it is used by every search engine in one way or another (including Google) – don't ignore it!"

TRACK 9 – META KEYWORD TAGS

Once upon a time

At the outset of the internet, meta keyword tags were an easy, simple technique used by search engines to decide how to rank sites in their search results. Most website creators just crammed their meta tags with every pertinent keyword, with spaces between and without, in full capitals and full lower case, in plural and singular.

Then search engine databases grew in size, as the internet flourished, and spammers began to abuse meta tags by including words in the meta tag that had nothing to do with their website – just to attract visitors.

Repetition of keywords in meta tags was also thought to boost rankings, another trick popular with spammers. These days, repetition is do your website more harm than good. We recommend never inserting the same word twice in a row in a tag, even if you're using different variations.

So, not surprisingly, the clout of meta tags has decreased and search engines, as they have grown in sophistication, have placed greater emphasis on the actual copy content of websites. It now plays a minor part with only a few search engines, far behind copy content and title tags.

Worth while today?

Well, all the tools mentioned play a combined part in determining how a search engine will rank your site. So, meta keyword tags should be used in conjunction with all other justifiable tools. Meta keyword tags certainly won't harm your rankings as long as you don't fill them with keywords or repetition – and may even boost your rankings with a small number of search engines.

Writing meta tags

Having written your keywords, visible copy, title tags and meta description tags, writing meta keyword tags is straightforward.

Start by using the keywords from the page's title tag as a basis. Then take any pertinent sentences from your visible copy and add them to the end, separating them with a comma or a space. It may be a good idea to add some common misspellings of the main keywords.

Barry sez.. "If in doubt – leave them out!"

TRACK 10 – LINKING UP

The popularity and number of links to your website are seen as a vote of confidence in your website. All major search engines include link popularity in their algorithms when determining rankings.

Having said that, don't pursue a strategy of link farms and software offering thousands of irrelevant inbound links. This is definitely a case of quality not quantity. Work hard and take time to develop links with companies you are proud to be associated with and who will drive traffic to your site. Start by looking at who your competitors link to and from, and enter all the directories relevant to your industry sector.

Barry sez.. "Quality (on theme links) – not quantity!"

TRACK 11 – SITE MAPS

Site maps are easy pickings for hungry spiders. They are a simple way to help them out and boost your website rankings. Don't tack it on at the end, but give it some thought, and have links from every page of your website to your site map – and vice versa.

Barry sez... "Consider how a spider can crawl your site. No inks to a page – no crawl!"

TRACK LAST 12 – AND THAT'S NOT ALL

On behalf of everyone at Branch Communications and Make me Top, I hope that you have found this presentation informative and useful in your quest for a high ranking website in search engines. We would welcome your feedback, which you can provide by visiting our website at www.branchcommunications.co.uk.

You can also visit our website to test your knowledge with our Search Engine Optimisation quiz. How much have you learnt? Don't worry – you don't have to let anyone know your score and we promise you it will be fun.

If you want more advice about SEO, we are only a phone call away. It's an evolving area – in fact by the time you hear this presentation, more changes will have taken place to make it an even more important emarketing tool. Do come back and visit our website for up to date information.

During 2006, we'll be adding to our range of audio presentations to keep you up to date with the ever changing world of e-marketing. Forthcoming CD's include Email - the issue of deliverability, Search – demystifying trusted feeds, sponsored listings and Paid Inclusion, and Affiliate Marketing – The

benefits. Make sure you register at our website, www.branchcommunications.co.uk to be sure of receiving these as soon as they are launched.

TRACK 13 – MAKE ME TOP

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Barry Lloyd for his valuable input into the creation of this CD. Barry Lloyd, founder of Make Me Top, is one of the pioneers of Search Engine Marketing in the UK, having being involved in commercial Search Marketing since 1997.

Barry is also a founder member of the World Association of Internet Marketing (WAIM) and an Executive Board Member of SEOPros.org. He is one of the founders of the [Search Marketing Association - UK](#) and on the current Board of this trade association for search engine marketers in the UK. He writes regularly for [Search Engine Guide](#), [Search Engine Blog](#) and [High Rankings News](#).