

Mark Buckingham on...

Killer content for SEO

When it comes to search engines, the humble word becomes an invaluable commodity, so make sure you pick the right keywords to make your site sail to the top

Want to create killer web content that will boost your rankings and traffic? Got the SEO bug? Have you started talking about 'ethical optimisation'?

Hold on! You need to focus on creating quality content before jumping in at the deep end of the optimisation pool. Investment in SEO can mean the difference between success and failure, but balance is everything. With Google and other major search engines typically giving weight to usability and depth of content, an overzealous approach can do more harm than good.

Typically ascribed as 'organic' or 'ethical' SEO, most reputable specialists will be eager to make the distinction over more questionable techniques employed by less conscientious companies. Search engine copywriting is the part of optimisation given to priming your on-page content for search engine prominence and is best approached as an extension of traditional copywriting techniques. Applied diligently in tandem with ethical SEO methods, it's pivotal to any website marketing strategy.

In our saturated online marketplace, competition is just a click away. Your website copy must speak convincingly. Even with top rankings, a failure to

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connect with your visitors through good salesmanship could hand your competition the advantage. Although there's no substitute for expert advice, not everyone has the budget to hire a seasoned pro. However, with perseverance, it's possible to achieve good results.

Ensure copy is organised and focused

Does your website empathise with your readers' needs, fears, frustrations or aspirations? Reading and navigating your website should be an intuitive experience. Be original, too, within reason, but steer clear of disingenuous hyperbole ...

- Avoid information overload, present your copy carefully and provide links to more detailed pages
- Be engaging, succinct and 'on topic'
- Make every word count. Use catchy headers, bullets and call-to-action messages
- Integrate selected search terms or keywords throughout your text, tags, titles and links, yet avoid excessive repetition or keyword 'stuffing'
- Ensure your content is accessible to search engine crawlers
- Field-test your content and get it professionally proof-read.

It's advantageous to be attentive to the principles of key-phrase density, proximity and frequency when optimising web content. It's not advisable to saturate your text, but initiate this process by compiling a blueprint of 15-20 key-phrases divided into their respective categories, emphasising a handful of primary key-phrases across the board. Evaluation of your web stats, current rankings, the results from your PPC campaign, Google's Webmaster tools and Overture's Keyword Selector, are just a few ways to

kick-start this process. It's also beneficial to talk with your customers, research your competition and brainstorm to help identify the terms that people will use to find your company, services or products.

The term 'hybrid cars', for example, may be a widely used phrase, but unless you operate a site that's been around for years and enjoys considerable link-popularity, the chances of you leapfrogging your way to the top are slim. Focusing on long-tail terms such as 'London hybrid electric car sales' may give your site a more realistic chance of attaining prominent rankings and more targeted enquiries. Keep on top of emerging buzzwords and localised/regional search terms too, but be wary of selecting phrases that are too specific.

Taking the time to understand the basics of key-phrase (or keyword) density can be fruitful, but don't get bogged down with it. Aim for a density of between 2.5-6 per cent. Persevere and you'll strike a definite balance.

Keyword density tools such as www.live-keyword-analysis.com will help. Target your selected key-phrases throughout the body of your text, title, image and anchor tags, subheaders and links, etc. It's not essential to integrate your key-phrases in the exact order they may be entered into a search engine – aim for a balance spread and ensure they're consistent to the theme of each page. Effective optimisation is all about balance: a harmony of streamlined, accessible design and engaging, lucid content are the keys to search engine success and profitability on the web. ●

Mark Buckingham is the director of NetSeek (www.netseek.co.uk), which specialises in organic SEO, copywriting, design and PPC management and training.