

Search Engine Marketing - Before You Start

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One of the most important aspects of a search engine optimisation campaign is also one of the most overlooked - preparation! There are some important steps to take in advance of launching your campaign that will make sure it has a better chance at succeeding.

Before You Start

Before you start any search engine optimisation campaign, whether it's for your own site or that belonging to a client, you need to answer the following important questions:

- 1) What is the overall motivation for optimizing this site? What do I/they hope to achieve? (e.g. more sales, more subscribers, more traffic, more publicity etc.)
- 2) What is my/their time-frame for this project?
- 3) What is my/their budget for this project?
- 4) Who will be responsible for this project? Will it be a joint or solo effort? Will it be run entirely in-house or outsourced?

Answering these questions will help you to build a framework for your campaign and establish limitations for the size and scope of the campaign.

How Search Engine-Compatible is the Site Currently?

Something I find very useful before quoting on any SEO project is to produce what I call a Search Engine Compatibility Review. This is where I carry out a detailed overview and analysis of a site's search engine compatibility in terms of HTML design, page extensions, link popularity, title and META tags, body text, target keywords, ALT IMG tags, page load time, and other design elements that can impact search engine indexing. It just helps sort out in my mind what design elements need tweaking to make the site as search engine-friendly as possible.

You might consider preparing something similar for your own site or clients.

Requirements Gathering

Next, you need to establish the project requirements, so you can tailor the SEO campaign to you or your client's exact needs. For those of you servicing clients, this information is often required before you are able to quote accurately.

To determine your project requirements, you need to have the following questions answered:

- 1) What technology was used to build the site? (i.e. Flash, PHP, frames, Cold Fusion, JavaScript, Flat HTML etc)
- 2) What are the file extensions of the pages? (i.e. .htm, .php, .cfm etc)
- 3) Does the site contain database driven content? If so, will the URLs contain query strings? e.g. site.com/longpagename?source=124234234ffdg444 (containing ? symbols), or does the site use parameter workarounds to remove the query strings? (the latter is search engine friendly).
- 4) Are there at least 250 words of text on the home page and other pages to be optimized?
- 5) How does the navigation work? Does it use text links or graphical links or JavaScript drop-down menus?
- 6) Approximately how many pages does the site contain? How many of these will be optimized?
- 7) What is the current link popularity of the site?
- 8) What is the approximate Google PageRank of the site? Would it benefit from link building?
- 9) Do I have the ability to edit the source code directly? Or will I need to hand-over the optimized code to a site admin for integration?
- 10) Do I have permission to alter the visible content of the site?
- 11) What are the products/services that the site promotes? (e.g. widgets, mobile phones, hire cars etc.)
- 12) What are the site's geographical target markets? Are they global? Country specific? State specific? Town specific?
- 13) What are the site's demographic target markets? (e.g. young urban females, working mothers, single parents etc.)
- 14) What are 20 search keywords or phrases that I think my/my client's target markets will use to find the site in the search engines? (More about this next lesson).
- 15) Who are my/my client's major competitors online? What are their URLs? What keywords are they targeting?
- 16) Who are the stake-holders of this site? How will I report to them?
- 17) Do I have access to site traffic logs or statistics to enable me to track visitor activity during the campaign? Specifically, what visitor activity will I be tracking?
- 18) How do I plan on tracking my or my client's rankings in the search engines?
- 19) Do I or my client have the ability and resources in place to respond to increased traffic/business as a result of the campaign?
- 20) What are my/my client's expectations for the optimisation campaign? Are they realistic?

Answers to the first 10 questions above will determine the complexity of optimization required. For example, if the site pages currently have little text on them, you know you'll need to integrate more text to make the site compatible with search engines and to be able to include your target keywords. If the

site currently uses frames, you will need to rebuild the pages without frames or create special No-Frames tags to make sure the site can be indexed, and so on.

This initial analysis will help you to scope the time and costs involved in advance. For those of you optimizing client sites, obtaining accurate answers to these questions BEFORE quoting is absolutely crucial. Otherwise you can find yourself in the middle of a project that you have severely under-quoted for.

The remainder of questions are to establish in advance the who, what, where, when, why and how of the optimisation campaign. This will help you determine the most logical keywords and phrases to target, as well as which search engines to submit the site to.

For those of you optimising web sites for a living, you might consider developing a questionnaire that you can give clients to complete to ensure you tailor the web site optimization to their exact needs.

You're Now Prepared

So now you are clear about your motivations for optimising the site, you know more about the target markets, you know how compatible the existing site is with search engines and how much work is involved in the search engine optimisation process. You're ready to tackle the job!

Article by Kalena Jordan. As well as running her own SEO business [Web Rank](#), Kalena Jordan manages [Search Engine College](#), an online training institution offering instructor-led short courses and downloadable self-study courses in Search Engine Optimisation and Search Engine Marketing subjects.