



The Guide to Search Engine Optimisation for Small Businesses – Part 2.

Guest post by Nichola Stott, the Media Flow.

In this second part of The Guide to Search Engine Optimisation for Small Businesses we will be looking at technical SEO considerations, to help you market your online business in the search engines. If you would like to start at the very beginning, you may wish to check out the introduction "[What is Search Engine Optimisation?](#)"

Objective: Our objective is to ensure that our technical set-up and foundation is optimal, so that anything we build on top of that can be more easily found and indexed.

1. Domains

If you have not yet chosen or bought your domain, try in as far as possible to find a one that contains your core business term. As an example if my website sells handmade traditional wooden toyboxes; I would try searching for an appropriate domain containing the word "toybox".

Although there are many factors that contribute to having your website rank in the search engines, choosing a domain that contains the most crucial business term can help. Of course, do keep in mind that you are building your website first and foremost for human customers, so any short and snappy, easy to type domain is good from a usability perspective.

It is a good idea to purchase a number of URLs to help protect your brand. As an example if my business was operating in the UK, I would try to find a URL that is available as .co.uk, .com, .org, .biz and .info as a minimum.

Decide which URL you will use and favour in all of your online marketing and communications. If your business is and only ever will be in one country it is best to use the TLD (top level domain) for that country.

In my example let's imagine I buy www.toyboxbynikki.co.uk, and all the other TLD variants I have mentioned above. It is important to do this, as your URL is your brand name, therefore you want to try to avoid other companies launching a similar business using your brand name.

You can simply park all the other domains, or you may wish to put a redirect on a domain such as .com – so that in the event someone types in www.toyboxbynikki.com they will be redirected to your website. You should use a 301 (permanent re-direct to do this.)

Finally; ensure that any other instances of your preferred URL are also permanently redirected in your .htaccess file.



As an example <http://toyboxbynikki.co.uk> and <http://www.toyboxbynikki.co.uk> are two distinct URLs (note with and without the “www”) therefore the secondary URL must be redirected to the primary. This is to avoid losing the value of any link equity that may be accrued, should any other websites link to the URL that I am not using.

2. Site

In as far as is possible, if you want your site to be crawled and indexed it is best to ensure as much of your website is written in HTML. Although there are ways to surface some elements of flash content, and optimise within PDF files – it is best to ensure your site is predominately HTML.

3. Site Architecture

As your homepage naturally tends to be the most often linked to and highly ranked, your homepage tends to have the highest Google PageRank* attributed to it. Any individual page on the world- wide- web can be assigned a PageRank, which is a derivative score that reflects a number of variables. It is a useful guideline as to how trusted and authoritative a page may be, but it is not something to run entire search marketing strategy by. In most cases it is fair to say that pages that have accrued a high PR may rank better than a page that is technically similar, but of a lower PR. Although pages are assigned such scores on an individual basis, some of the value of a page’s PR can be passed to any other pages that are linked to it.

It is important to ensure that your site has a logical, usable and flat architecture, so that other pages on the site are as close to the homepage as possible.

*PageRank is a proprietary method of scoring a pages relative value on the web, and was created by Google’s Larry Page. If you use a browser such as Chrome or Mozilla, you can download safe and easy to use add-ons that will show you the PageRank of any web page you are looking at. I personally prefer Quirk: Search Status in Mozilla, as a free summary tool.

4. URLs

Search engine crawlers like readable URLs. It is another signal as to the purpose of a page. It is therefore important to try to ensure that your page URLs are readable and relevant. Where possible it is best to use a meaningful relevant keyword in URLs.

As an example – if I have a “product detail” style page for a Noah’s Ark style hand- painted toybox, my file structure and URL might look like this...

<http://www.toyboxbynikki.co.uk/wooden-toyboxes/noahs-ark-handpainted/>



5. Tools

Last week we mentioned that installing Google Webmaster Tools and Google Analytics code on your site (for tracking performance) is a fundamental starting point. An additional tool that will help you get a feel for your technical SEO is a search engine simulator, such as...

<http://www.webconfs.com/search-engine-spider-simulator.php>

...which will act as a search engine spider simulator and give you a good idea as to how your site appears to a crawler.

Next week we will be looking at how to build your site, so that the content is optimised for search engines. Usually this element of search engine optimisation is known as “on-page” SEO.

About the author: Nichola Stott is a highly regarded search and social media professional with over a decade of experience in online communications. Nichola is director and co-founder of theMediaFlow, a search and social media agency; and is a regular conference speaker and contributor to online industry media including Econsultancy, SEO Chicks and State of Search. You can contact Nichola on linkedin or twitter.