

Random Thoughts

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from William Blinn Communications

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5 Steps to Profitable Search Engine Optimization (And 2 Things to Avoid)

This is the first of what will be a 2-part article that explains the basics of search engine optimization. It is not, as some people think, an effort to fool search engines or to trick people into visiting your website. The goal of search engine optimization should be to help the search engines and, by doing so, to attract the right people to your site.

Finding the right key words to improve search engine results for your website isn't difficult, but it is time consuming. There's no magic incantation you can mutter, but you can begin the process of making your website more visible by completing the process described here.

If someone guarantees you a "top-10 search engine ranking", run!

First, a couple of definitions are in order. "Key words" aren't words; they're phrases. Individual words are all but meaningless. Context is important. For example, if you're trying to improve the ranking of a company that collects automobile dealership data, you wouldn't make much progress with individual terms such as "vehicle", "inventory", or "data". On the other hand, "vehicle inventory data" might be a good starting point.

Second, search-engine rankings don't matter. If someone guarantees you a "top-10 search engine ranking", run! The person is either a fool or a thief. What matters is website traffic: You don't want *visitors*; you want the *right visitors*.

Anybody can produce a top-10 ranking for a website by using convoluted search terms that nobody would use. The bottom-

adp drive
adp web suite 1000
arkona
auto dealer
auto dealer web site
auto dealer website
auto dealer websites
auto dealers software
auto dealership data
auto dealership software
auto direct mail
auto information
auto market
auto markets
auto parts inventory
auto service data
automaker news
automate
automotive consultant
automotive consulting
automotive data
automotive direct mail
automotive industry analysis
automotive industry corporation
automotive management
automotive market
automotive retail data
automotive technology
automotive training
autosoft
car dealer software
car dealership software
car parts
car report
data collection
data normalization
data polling
dealer management
dealer management systems
dealership data
dealership management software
dealership parts inventory
dealership software
dealertrack
f&i data
fixed operations data
fixed ops data
inventory system software
repair order data
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used car dealerships
used car warranty
used cars dealers
vehicle inventory data
vehicle parts data
vehicle sales data
vehicle service data

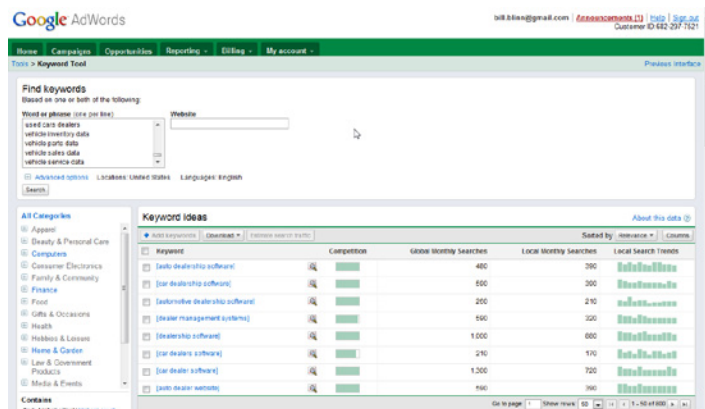
line measurement is how much business you receive from your website, not its ranking or how many people visit it.

Optimization involves identifying the right search terms, modifying your website to make good use of those terms, and making your site both search-engine friendly and human friendly.

So let's get started.

1: Identify Key Phrases

What products or services do you offer? What kinds of people or companies buy them? How might they refer to them in a search query? Try to come up with at least 15 to 20 such terms. The more relevant terms you can think of, the better. In my case, I came up with a list of about 60 terms. That's it at the bottom of the left column.



2: Find Related Terms

When I gave Google's Keyword Tool the 61 terms I had developed on my own and asked it to suggest *exact* search terms for further review, I got back a list of 800 terms. That's an overwhelming list! What you'll find at this stage is that even with "exact match" turned on, you'll get a lot of suggestions that are irrelevant.

Download the list and review it when you have time to consider each term carefully. Admittedly, this part is a bit nebulous because you're attempting to identify terms that

someone who is looking for your product or service might use to find you.

I like to add an extra column on the left edge of the spreadsheet with the suggested terms. I use this column to indicate whether the term is in or out. Using Excel's sort and filter features, I can edit the list without actually deleting any of the data.

My reduced list consisted of 108 terms.

3: Develop Individual Page Terms

Most websites have several sections, each dealing with a specific product or service, so you'll need to scan the list, looking for terms that apply to each of those pages or sections.

Returning to Google's Keyword Tool, I plugged in the section-specific phrase I had selected and asked for a list of related search terms. Google handed me about 350 suggestions. I trimmed that to about 180.

Now the quick, easy part is done. The time consuming part of the job involves determining which of the 180 terms will be good "bait" and then working out how to include them in a way that makes sense to the search engines and to website visitors.

I'll cover the final steps next month and describe the 2 things you should avoid at all cost. **β**

Monitoring Progress

What's better: 1 large monitor or 2 smaller monitors? Remember when monitors had a diagonal measurement of 12 inches? Some were just 8 inches diagonally and a few were even smaller. If you spend a lot of time in front of a computer, you should be thinking seriously about obtaining a larger monitor (24-inch LCD screens from good manufacturers are available for around \$200) or about adding a second monitor.

In early July, I replaced a 1400x900 17-inch monitor (once it seemed huge) with a 1920x1080 24-inch (well 23.6-inch actually really) monitor. The extra resolution really makes a difference. If you need to run a lot of applications simultaneously and be able to see more than one at a time, you have 2 choices: More than 1 monitor or a large high-resolution monitor.

If I'd had the money and the space, I would have upgraded to a 27-inch or 30-inch monitor, but those check in at \$1000 more. My 24" Viewsonic cost one fifth of that and it fits in the space I have available.

When it's time for you to buy a new monitor, keep this in mind. Size does matter. The larger the screen you buy, the higher the resolution you can use.

But if you really want to make a difference, add a video card that supports 2 monitors and add a second monitor.

At the office I added a second monitor and the difference was astonishing. I've never met anyone who, after trying a second monitor, would ever go back to a single monitor. Now I know why.



Within a few minutes of having the second monitor on my desk, I needed to do something that would have required making two applications uncomfortably small or flipping between two applications, always needing to see what the bottom application is showing so that I can enter information in the top program.

With the second monitor, I could read what I needed to see on the right and type on the left. Or the other way around. Copy and paste was equally easy. Copy. Move the mouse. Click. Paste. Done.

If you find yourself switching constantly between applications, you're a candidate for a second monitor. These days it isn't an expensive proposition: A video card that supports two monitors and a second monitor would set you back less than \$200 in most cases. This assumes that you already have one monitor that you plan to keep.

Now what I really want is two 23.6-inch 1920 by 1080 monitors! **β**

Still Using XP?

If you're still using Windows XP with service pack 2, it's past time for an upgrade. *Computerworld* recently noted that Microsoft has ended support for Windows XP SP2 and that shocked me. Not the end of support, but the thought that anyone would still be using this version of XP. Service pack 3 was released more than 2 years ago and SP2 dates back to 2004. Those computer owners who had an irrational fear of SP3's security measures have missed nearly 1200 bug fixes.

Those who aren't yet ready for Windows 7 should at least upgrade their systems to service pack 3. This version will be supported until 2014. And should you be in the 1% of XP users who installed the 64-bit version, SP2 will be supported until 2014 because Microsoft never released SP3 for that version.

SP3 is free. Just download it from Microsoft's website or pay Microsoft \$4 and they'll send it to you on CD or ask a techie friend who will probably be able to find a dusty copy somewhere in the archives.

Whichever method you choose, now is about 2 years past time to do it! **β**