

A Beginners Guide To SEO



Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a search engine's "natural" or un-paid ("organic") search results.

Source Wikipedia

Your Options

The words "search engine optimisation" (SEO) may sound a bit intimidating at first but, they're critical to the success of any business. However, jumping into SEO and not knowing how it works is like going to a new city without a map. You can wing it, but you may miss out by not knowing where you're headed.



What is SEO?

If you can imagine the Internet as a city, like Cork or Dublin, search engine optimisation represents the city bus stops. Some of those stops are vital, and people need to get to them, and some of them are out in the middle of nowhere and aren't as important.

Now, imagine that riders aren't sure which stop they need, but they do know where they want to end up. They say to the bus driver, "I want to go to the most up-to-date library in the city." The bus driver considers all libraries along his route, remembers which one seems most popular with riders, and takes his passenger to that location.

Just as the bus driver makes an educated guess as to which library is best based upon the number of people who visit it, search engines guess which web sites are most relevant based upon how many visits they receive. When someone types something into a search engine, the engine goes to work to pull up websites that will best meet their needs.

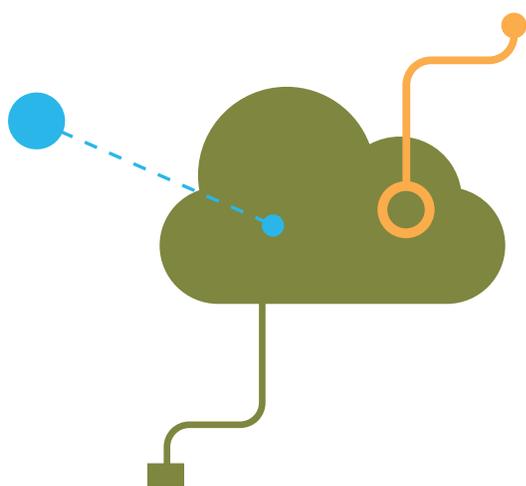
For example, if you type “Chocolate Chip Cookie Recipe” into your search engine, it quickly makes two determinations: Which recipes in its database are relevant to your search; and of those, which are the most popular.

As a business owner, you want your business to be both relevant and popular. One step to do this is by optimizing your rankings in search engines.

The Early Days of SEO

Not so long ago, people who wanted their web site to look important to search engines would simply fill it with words they hoped would match internet searches. Search engines weren't terribly complex at the time, and they'd automatically send users to sites that may – or may not – have been worthwhile.

Content mills built a business out of promising their clients SEO-rich content. It became a matter of how “stuffed” a site was with particular search words, rather than whether those sites offered any meaningful information to users. It was frustrating for users and for legitimate businesses that wanted to get the word out.



Although users grew frustrated combing through pages of useless websites, the best sites began to receive more direct hits and search engine engineers took notice.

Because of this, there have been some recent changes in SEO resulting in a new set of rules, and we're here to help you learn what you need to get started.

A New Algorithm

Recently, search engines decided to weed out “stuffed” websites and send users directly to sites with meaningful information on offer. They suspected that sites people were visiting over and over again were likely the ones providing the most relevant information.

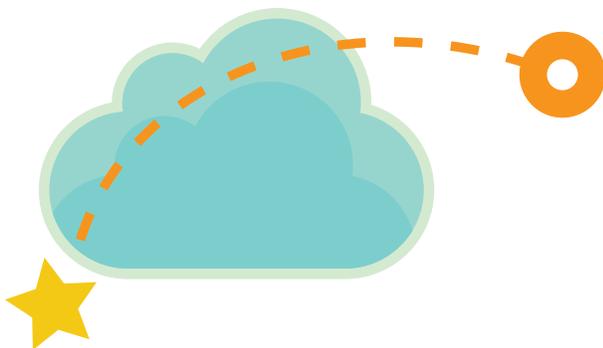
The algorithm they devised is made up of hundreds of components aimed at finding the most useful sites for any given search. As a business owner, you want to position your website in such a way as to attract that algorithm.

Create a Clearer Path

Creating an SEO-friendly website is really about manners. Be honest with your potential customers about what they’ll find on your site. If you own a bike shop, don’t fill your site with words that have nothing to do with the services you offer in an effort to get people to “accidentally” visit. Doing so is called “cloaking” and is considered shady and won’t help people buy more products or services from you.

Think about every word used on your site and make sure it applies to your business. There’s no reason to use the word “parachute” if you own a business that sells windows and doors.

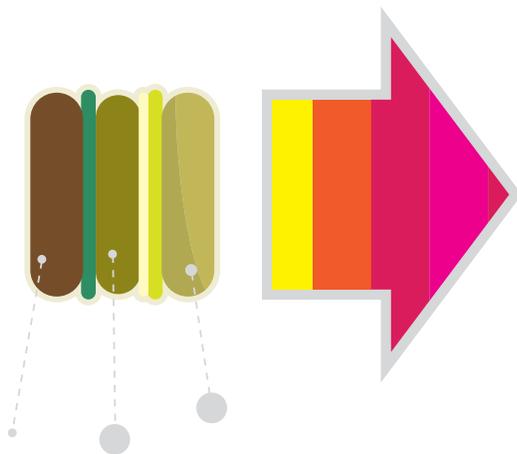
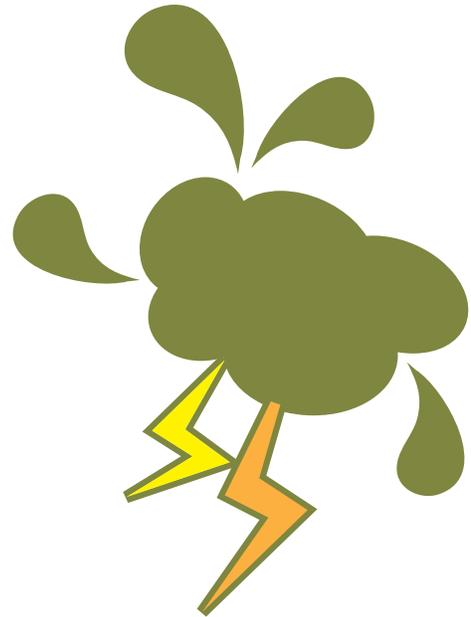
Experts tell us that the [title tags](#) and page headers are the most important places to plug keywords. You should also make sure that they’re scattered throughout your website: URLs, image names, and content pages.



If you have any text that you want indexed by search engines, keep it clean. Don’t hide it inside an image or any place else it might be overlooked. While we’re on the topic, make sure you don’t bury your content inside JavaScript, Adobe Flash, or other cool-looking rich media as the search engines frown on that.

Avoid the “Spam” Label

The content on your website should be concise, honest about what you offer, and keyword-rich. However, loading content with tons of keywords will lead search engines to suspect you of spamming. Search engines are designed to ignore spam sites, meaning that your website won't show up when customers come looking for your services. Integrate your keywords, but make sure they sound natural in the content of your site and are not just “filler” words.



The Bottom Line

Although at first glance SEO seems as bewildering as Cork without a map, there's no reason to be intimidated. Take it one step at a time and you can build a great website full of relevant content that'll help drive more business.