

The Ten Minute Optimization REDUX – A StepForth White Paper

By Ross Dunn, CEO, [StepForth Search Engine Placement Inc.](http://www.stepforth.com)

In April 2003 I wrote an article called "The 10 Minute Optimization" which outlined a 10 minute process to optimize a web page for top search engine rankings. Well, a few things have changed since then so I thought a [redux](#) (revision) would be a good idea. How I am going to do this though, is a bit unorthodox. This document is largely still pertinent so instead of rewriting the same tips, I reproduced the article (the boxed content) and added a revision section below each point wherever necessary; ultimately bringing this up to date with today's SEO tactics.

1) INTRODUCTION

Many small businesses simply do not have the resources to hire a search engine optimization (SEO) company to promote their web site. There are countless resources online for do-it-yourself (DIY) optimizers where professional SEO's offer general recommendations and advice. This article is my opportunity to offer more of my SEO experience in the form of a 10-minute optimization process.

This process will be effective for any page designed in HTML with at least 1 paragraph of html text but for the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on the all-important home page.

2) Setting the Stage

Before I begin, there are a few things that you must know before proceeding and you should spend more than 10 minutes considering:

2.A) Determine Your Target(s)

99% of you know who your target market is, now you need to choose the keywords that you believe they will search for. There is no use obtaining top search engine placements under terms that are not being searched. This step, alone, requires extensive explanation but there are a few simple tips to keep in mind. For one, you will want to check your current traffic statistics and note what traffic you are already receiving and under what keywords. Now, visit the site of a competitor who you know is doing well online (through either conversation or news articles). Look at their titles on individual pages and try to determine a pattern in the keywords that they have chosen. Also look at the source of their pages (Internet Explorer: click "View" then "Source") and copy their META tags into a notepad on your computer. Between the titles and the META tags you should be able to determine with reasonable accuracy which keywords are most important for rankings.

It is important to note that professional SEO's have many more resources at hand to determine such information with higher accuracy.

Determine Your Target(s) – Updated for December 2006

Few things have changed in this section but the resources for keyword research are now aplenty and far from exclusive to professional SEO's. Here are some recommended keyword research tools:

- ❖ [Keyword Discovery](#) – (min. cost \$69.95/mo unless on bulk package)
This research tool provides access to the statistics of over 180 search engines so that you can see which keyword forms are being searched more often. In addition to basic keyword research, this tool also provides seasonal search trend reports which allow you to see when keywords may be best to



www.stepforth.com

StepForth Placement Inc.
#208, 26 Bastion Square
Victoria BC Canada V8W 1H9

info@stepforth.com

Toll-free in North America: 1-877-385-5526
Phone: (250) 385-1190
Fax: (250) 385-1198

promote organically (unpaid search) or within a PPC promotion.

- ❖ [WordTracker](#) (min. cost \$8.18 US per day)
The granddaddy of paid keyword research, WordTracker has a deep well of 330 million search terms to draw from which is compiled using data from the major metacrawlers Dogpile and Metacrawler.
- ❖ [Overture Search Suggestion Tool](#) (Free)
This free tool was launched by the first pay-per-click company, Goto.com and is the first keyword research tool of its kind. The search results from this tool are restricted to the Yahoo database and there are some limitations such as slow processing, lack of misspelling results, and plural searches are not provided.

Additional Recommended SEO Tools

Whenever StepForth discovers a great SEO tool we update our "[Recommended SEO Tools](#)" page so our readers and clients can keep up to date. Be sure to check it out when you read this article, you just might find some other tools to make your optimization work more efficiently and even simpler.

2.B) Design – Is Your Page Marketable?

This topic can be touchy to bring up but the simple fact is that traffic will have less impact if your web page is unmarketable. Now this covers a lot of different aspects of design, however, a few basic rules should be followed.

- ii) Avoid using strange color combinations that make it hard for a viewer to read your sales copy (red text on a blue background is a perfect example of a painful design). In the same respect it is important not to use text that is too small; try to keep your font size to a minimum of size 10 or 12 (2 or 3 in Dreamweaver).
- ii) Unrelated advertisements on your web site provide distractions to your viewers. If you are selling BMW's then it is generally not a good idea to show an advertisement for herbal Viagra.

Every single graphical element of your home page has the potential to add or deny credibility. Using this space wisely will ultimately create happier visitors and generate more profit.

Design – Updated for December 2006

The above notes discuss the fundamentals of usability which is a massive topic unto its own. Fortunately there is a fantastic resource for those who wish to learn more about making their website usable; [Usability.gov](#). The U.S. Government put together this resource and so far I have been extremely impressed with its step by step process and fairly user-friendly language. That said, here are some additional suggestions for improving the usability of your website:

- iii) Create Focused Navigation: Try to have a fresh pair of eyes navigate your website while you watch. Note the path each user is taking; is he/she going where you had hoped? Try this with a few people and chart their progress. Dollars to donuts you will be surprised where each user goes. After all this testing is complete you need to ask yourself a single question, "How could you further engineer your website to steer your users to the goal you desire?" For example, you sell BMW's and you just discovered that the majority of your visitors are checking out the "BMW Specs" section of your site but you want them to visit your online gallery of cars for sale. One way to change this is to address the order or boldness of your navigation. Whatever you do you should create a navigation scheme and page layout that directs your visitors in a premeditated



fashion.

iv) Sitemap: this tip is a function of both navigation and search engine friendliness - keep your sitemap up to date! Sitemaps are often forgotten (StepForth's is no exception) in comparison to the other duties required to optimize a website but the fact is that a good sitemap provides alternative search options for both search engine spiders and inquisitive users alike.

Do you want to know more about how to make your website search engine friendly? My article "[Is Your Website Search Engine Friendly](#)" was written recently to help you cover the basics of ensuring that search engine spiders navigate your site problem-free.

2.C) Spot Check for Relevancy

It is very important for your site to be focused. For example, if your web site is supposed to be devoted to 'BMW car sales' then a page or information on real estate sales is entirely unnecessary. Keep in mind that most of the top search engines will rank your site depending upon the topic they determine you are offering. This determination is largely made based upon the text within your web site. Don't give them any reason to get 'confused'.

Spot Check for Relevancy – Updated for December 2006

How much of your website uses similar content? For example, if a search engine were to spider your website would it find pages that may be repetitive in nature? With the web getting so large search engines actually have two different databases; the primary database and the supplemental database. The primary database is the one you see every day and is used to populate the top ranking positions. The supplemental database is home to content that has been found less relevant than other pages indexed. In most cases, websites have pages that have been determined repetitive by search engines and downgraded to supplemental databases. How do you mitigate the damage of losing pages to supplemental results? The sure answer to this is an issue of debate on many forums today but the simple answer is to make every page within your site completely unique in content – that way search engines are not forced to choose one page over another in your website.

GOOGLE SEARCH TIP: Find out if your site has any pages lost in supplemental purgatory by conducting the following search without quotes "site:www.yourdomain.com***" (make sure to keep the 3 asterisks)

Note: This tip is oriented towards additional tweaks vs. the 10 minute optimization but I felt it still merited an update. More information on this topic is available in [this Q&A on Google's supplemental results](#).



3. THE TEN MINUTE PROCESS

Spot Check for Spam

Before optimization begins it is crucial that your page is devoid of any 'tricks' that a search engine may construe as spam. You may not even know they are there! Some web designers with out-of-date information add hidden text because they think it will help your rankings. This is entirely untrue and can cause extreme problems for your search engine visibility. To check for hidden text just hold down the left button on your mouse at the very top of your page and drag it down to the bottom. If there is any hidden text (normally text that matches the color of your page background) it will appear as it is highlighted. Second, you will want to search for unnecessary repetition of keywords on your page. Do you see instances of 5 or 6 keywords being repeated in a row anywhere on the page? If so, remove this.

There are other forms of spam that you should be aware of that are not covered within this article. For more information, see our resource article: "[Inspecting Your Web Site for Spam](#)".

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Polish & Optimize Text

The text on your home page is crucial to maintaining the attention of fresh viewers. In fact, copy is so important that many companies prefer to have a professional copy writer create the content. Since this is not an option for many, you have to keep your text engaging as well as smartly optimized to present an obvious topic to the visiting search engine spiders or visitors. To do this, keep your mind focused on the keyword(s) that you have chosen to target on the search engines while you write the content for the page. Implement the keywords within the text without sacrificing the true intent of the information – to engage and retain your viewers.

Important Note: Often the first 25-30 words of your home page are what each search engine will use for the description of your web site. Try to utilize your target keyword(s) within this area but be certain the resulting sentence is legible and descriptive.

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Optimize the Title

The title of the home page can be optimized quite simply by placing the keyword or keyword phrase that you have chosen to target first and then finish with the name of your company or web site. For example:

" BMW Car Sales – MyBMW.com"

The search engines place a great deal of weight in the title of your home page and the keywords within your title will likely be chosen as the title of your listing on the search engines. The title also plays a huge role in the relevance of your site. The topic denoted within your title will be compared to the content within the body of the page, if the topic and content match, you will have a much better chance of obtaining higher targeted placements.

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META Tags

The META tags located within the invisible source of your web page. They were originally designed to provide the details of your web site to visiting search engine spiders and they still do, to a degree. Since this part of your web page is invisible, META tags were increasingly used to misinform the search engines of the content of a web site – spamming. As a result, META tags play a lesser role but they should still be properly optimized so that they contribute to the topical relevance of your web site.

META tags are basically composed of the Description and Keyword tags. The Description tag should provide the same or similar 25-30 word description of your web site that you created earlier for the first text within your visible page. The description is occasionally used as your description within the search engines but it is unpredictable. The Keyword tag should include the keywords/phrases that you are targeting in order of importance. Start with the most important and then proceed to less important but still relevant keywords. It is extremely important that you do not repeat any word more than 3 times within the Keyword tag. This includes words within target sentences. Also do not place repeated keywords close together.

META Tags – Updated for December 2006

Save yourself the time of creating a Keyword META Tag; they are mainly ignored by search engines today. The fact is that the Keyword META Tag was abused too heavily by Spammers and have little or no effect due to their suspect nature. The Description Tag, however, is just as important as ever and should be carefully crafted for each webpage.

Navigation... Provide Clear Paths

Is the navigation within your site entirely graphical or programming oriented? In this case I recommend that you create a textual link menu at the bottom of your page. For added punch (and this is a big hit) you should make each link count by using the keyword/phrase that best describes the target page. For example:

[BMW Accessories](#) | [Used BMW for Sale](#) | [More About MyBMW.com](#)

versus these less powerful links:

[Accessories](#) | [Used Cars](#) | [About Us](#)

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Test and Spell-Check

Preview the page and spell check it then once you are certain everything is properly balanced, upload it to your server.

Test and Spell-Check – Updated for December 2006

Before you upload your site I recommend the following course of action;

Establish a Baseline: Do you have traffic reporting for your website? (most do) If so, I highly recommend taking a snapshot of your latest traffic and visitor behavioral statistics to provide yourself a baseline; after all, you won't know just how successful your promotions have been without something to compare them to.



If you are using a quality traffic reporting tool such as ClickTracks then be sure to run the Site Archiver which will take a snapshot of your website and allow you to compare it with your new site at a later date. By comparing both designs you will be able to distinguish whether your visitors are staying longer on each page, where they are going within your website (are they now going where you want them to go?) and which keywords they used to access your site/page(s) now versus before. ClickTracks is not a prohibitively expensive program but it does require some time devoted to it in order to reap the desired rewards of increased sales through visitor retention. For more information see our stats website at stats.stepforth.com or go directly to ClickTracks for details.

Please keep in mind that you can gain much of this information yourself by taking a record before and after the update comparing such information as exit rates and time spent on each page. If you see an improvement then you know you are on the right track but if you see a no improvement or worse behavioral results then you should rethink your page or site structure layout.

Hurry Up and Wait

What happens now is entirely up to the history of your web site and your marketing budget. There are many search engines that offer paid submission for the regular or prompt indexing of your new page/web site. If you have paid for prompt indexing then you may see the fruits of your labor within a couple of days depending on the search engine.

In this case I am going to assume that you have a non-existent search engine budget. If your site has already been submitted to the search engines then you can simply wait until a spider returns to check for new content, at which time your new site/page will be found and processed accordingly. If you wish this process to proceed post-haste or your site has not yet been submitted, then you may submit your newly revised page to the search engines for what may be a faster response time. Be sure to read the rules that each search engine carefully defines before submitting or resubmitting your web page.

Hurry Up and Wait – Updated for December 2006

Paid submission to search engines has largely gone the way of the Dodo Bird these past few years. In our experience, the best way to get your site listed is to publish an article or press release and have it syndicated by a press release dissemination service such as PRWeb.com. By submitting your website you will get some instant traffic and likely some free backlinks which will earn your website a visit from many of the more worthy search engine spiders.

Ten Minute Optimization COMPLETE!

The following are additional elements that will supplement your online promotions. These are all fundamental changes that have occurred in the promotion world since the 10 Minute Optimization was first published in 2003. These had to be added to ensure that this white paper was thorough.

4) Link Building – Added for December 2006

The most dramatic change since 2003 has been the increase of importance of link building. Just how many reputable, relevant websites link to yours? Were these links freely given or did you have to provide a reciprocal link in order to achieve them? The world of search engine optimization has seen enormous growth in the link building sector and it has become a science unto itself.



"How can I build links?"

The following methods will gain you links and they are placed in order of importance:

1. Have a website that is so well maintained, so informative and effective that users freely provide you with links because they like it so much. Hands down, this method will always win over your competition. Search engines such as Google will reward your site handsomely if it finds many one-way links from reputable sites.
2. Publish articles via a blog or an online newsletter and syndicate these articles across news websites. For example, I syndicate many of my SEO articles across reputable SEO sites such as SearchEngineGuide.com, SiteProNews.com, ISEDB.com, WebProNews.com, etc. Syndication is actually quite effortless... just write content which is good enough that your industry sites happily post your articles.
3. Reciprocal link building is a highly popular method of building link popularity. Essentially you have to contact other industry-related websites and request a link to your website in exchange for one from your own. This type of link building is far less effective than one-way links from reputable sites but it does hold some weight.

To find out how to build links to your website consider this article called "[When Do Inbound Links Dictate Ranking](#)" and also consult www.ericward.com where the authority on links, Eric Ward resides and regularly offers some great tips.

5) The After Thoughts

Many methods of promoting a website have become available over the past few years; so many that it is a bit mind blowing. In most cases StepForth has written about each offering to provide our readers with the required knowledge to take advantage of them. Here are some places to start if you need a refresher:

Social Networking: ["SEOcial Networking – Search Marketing and Social Networks"](#)

Jim Hedger discusses the popular phenomenon of Social Networking and how you can leverage it for added visibility. ([PDF Version](#))

Blogging Article #1: ["A New Marketing Tool That is Difficult to Ignore"](#)

If you don't know a thing about Blogs then this is a great place to start but it is very basic.

Blogging Article #2: ["Blogs: How They Can Make You Money"](#)

Written this October, 2006, I expound on the many benefits of blogs and some of the techniques to best promote your blog.

Google Maps: ["Have Your Company Listed Free In Google Maps"](#)

Every bit of free advertising in the online world is helpful and Google Maps is a little advertising real estate that is not to be missed.

Ross Dunn Answers SEO Questions #1

Questions answered are: ["What Exactly are Good Backlinks?"](#)

And ["What are Good and Bad URL's and How to Fix the Bad Ones"](#)



Ross Dunn Answers SEO Questions #2

Questions answered are: "[Does a Domain Name Play a Part in SEO?](#)"
"[How Important are Unique IP's?](#)"
"[How can I Remove a Blacklisting by Yahoo?](#)"

Ross Dunn Answers SEO Questions #3

Questions answered are: "[What are Supplementary Results?](#)"
Additional topics covered: "[Good URLs, Session Variables and Backlinks](#)"

Ross Dunn Answers SEO Questions #4:

Questions answered are: "[When do Inbound Links Dictate Rankings?](#)"
"[How Important are Links in SEO?](#)" (see "QUESTION Continued...")

SEO Answers #5: "[Should I use More than one Press Release Service?](#)"

Ross Dunn Answers SEO Questions #6

Questions answered are: "[Which Steps should I Follow when Optimizing my Dynamic Website?](#)" and "[Can you Maintain the Integrity of my Design while Implementing SEO?](#)"

SEO Answers #7: "[What Determines Duplicate Content SPAM?](#)"

6) Conclusion for the 2006 Redux

Do you find yourself overwhelmed? Perhaps you want to outsource your SEO? Obviously StepForth is an option that I highly recommend but there are many other firms out there whom you can contact for quotations. Here is an article by Jim Hedger on how to [Outsource Your SEO Needs](#) and what to look for in an SEO firm. In addition, we recommend you visit www.seoconsultants.com for a list of reputable search engine optimization and placement companies.

QUESTIONS? Please call StepForth toll-free at **1-877-385-5526** or [ask an SEO question online](#).

