

Ross Dunn Answers SEO Questions – Edition #6

By Ross Dunn, CEO, [StepForth Search Engine Placement Inc.](#)

Two excellent questions are answered in this article:

- A) Which steps should I follow when optimizing my dynamic website?
- B) Can you maintain the integrity of my design while implementing SEO?

A) QUESTION: Which steps should I follow when optimizing my dynamic website?
- Chriz R.

ANSWER:

To be certain of the particular answer for you I would need to know more about your website so I will provide a list of what I would term the most common steps to optimizing a dynamic website that utilizes a shopping cart.

1. **URL's:** Banish those ugly dynamic URL's and open your website to the search engines. Accomplish this by using a rewrite such as ISAPI_rewrite on Windows servers or a mod_rewrite on Apache servers. This tweak will provide search engines with an easier route to follow through your website. Why? When search engine spiders visit a website and find dynamic URL's there is a high likelihood that the website will not be fully spidered. This is because search engine spiders are trained to avoid the possibility of getting caught in a loop when indexing a website. For example, what if a search engine spider was indexing a website and found a dynamic calendar? Theoretically this spider could go on forever indexing the calendar, day after day. As a consequence, spiders place a limit on the depth that they will index a dynamic website; usually 3 levels. Here is a sample of a bad URL and a fixed URL:

Unfriendly URL:

<filename.php?id=F98ZF4&productId=39222§ion=wicked&brand=582&template=53>

Search engine friendly URL:

<http://www.surfboardsforyou.com/boards/wickedboards/39222/board53/>

In short, by making your website's URLs appear static the higher the likelihood that your website will be properly indexed. Once this fix has been applied optimize your website for rankings.

2. **Titles and Meta Description Tag:** Common in my world of SEO consultation is dealing with Content Management Systems (CMS) that do not allow for product/page specific title or Meta Description tags. These lower quality CMS end up using the same title and Meta Tags on every page within the website; this is the kiss of death for search engine rankings. If you are serious about obtaining top rankings you need to either increase the functionality of your CMS to provide title and description customization or switch to an alternative, more search engine friendly CMS.

Title Tags: A page title must concisely correspond to the ranking target for the page that it is on; after all it is used as the title for any ranking you obtain so it should be highly relevant. How this is done is up to you and the degree in which your CMS is setup for search engines. For example, excellent search engine friendly shopping carts such as [Product Cart](#) and [Apple Pie Shopping Cart](#) already incorporate the automation of optimized titles based on the product or page you are on within your website. If your system does not have this innate automation then the best option that comes to mind is to have additional functionality added to your website to allow automation. You can usually hire the maker of the software to make this addition.



Description Tags: The Description Tag is often used as the description for any search engine ranking a page obtains. As a result, this content must be highly relevant and engaging; to get users to click and visit the page. Fortunately the higher end SEO friendly carts (linked to above) already provide automated Description Tag functionality with the option to override automation with a custom Tag on a page-by-page basis. If your system does not offer automation and/or customization then you should again consider hiring an informed programmer include it.

Note: Keyword Tags are not mentioned here because of their vastly diminished importance in the world of search engine optimization. The fact is that search engines are paying little (if any) attention to this tag. In fact, I would venture that the Keyword Tag is ignored unless it is being used to SP@M in which case it will produce negative affect. So my tips generally do not include Keyword Tag advice – just FYI.

3. **First Text:** If possible, ensure that the first text a search engine indexes is relevant to the page at hand. For example, at StepForth ideally we like to include the page's target keyphrase within the first 10 words of text on the page.
4. **Headings:** Often the heading on a page is within the first 100 words of text that a search engine spider will index. To ensure the heading aids rankings it is important that it not only reflects the page's keyphrase but that it utilizes a Heading 1 tag. The Heading 1 tag will provide enough emphasis that the keyphrase will stand out from the prior words indexed. In addition, the Heading 1 tag (H1) was originally created as the signifier of a page's topic and for the most part this fact stands true to this day. If your CMS does not already incorporate H1's in the formal heading of the page then you should seriously consider having this functionality implemented.
5. **Site Structure:** If at all possible create a site structure that is no more than 4 levels deep. An example of how this can be arranged is to minimize the number of sub products/pages within your system.

For example, try to avoid the following 6 level site structure (extreme example):

Bike Helmets (styles shown) → Racing Style Bike Helmets (about this style) → Racing Style Bike Helmets (brands shown) → <Brand> Racing Bike Helmets (Styles shown) → <Brand> <Style> Racing Bike Helmet (image shown) → <Brand> <Style> Racing Bike Helmet (detail shown)

Instead you could use this tighter 4 level structure:

Bike Helmets (styles shown) → Racing Style Bike Helmets (about this style integrated with a listing of brands shown) → <Brand> Racing Bike Helmets (Styles shown) → <Brand> <Style> Racing Bike Helmet (detail shown)

6. **Navigation:** The navigation of your website is paramount to proper search engine spidering. The navigation links should be in text format and use the keyphrase that the target page is optimized for. In addition each page must have a link to a central Sitemap that comprehensively lists every page and product/service within your website.
7. **Images:** If your system can support this make certain to place descriptive product information in the ALT tags for each product image. If you can you should also stamp each product picture with your website address in as attractive a manner as possible. The result is that search engine spiders will be able to index your product images appropriately and they may be featured in Google Image searches. By having your website address on the images you will have the added benefit of potentially receiving business from this search venue.

Is There More You Can Do to Optimize Your Dynamic Website?

There are many additional customizations that can be added to a dynamic website to produce efficient optimization results. Unfortunately, it would take too much time for me to describe each one effectively. If you would like more information on what can be done please [give me a ring](#) or drop me an [email](#), I would be glad to help or refer you to someone who can.



B) QUESTION: Can you maintain the integrity of my design while implementing SEO? - Chriz R.

ANSWER:

My first instinct is to say “yes, of course!” because 90% of the time we do not need to disturb the general integrity of a website when optimizing it (i.e. layout, site structure, the majority of content, etc.). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The fact of the matter is that some websites are provided with restrictions that stifle proper search engine optimization. For example, it is exceedingly rare but occasionally we are given websites to optimize that:

- ❖ Are entirely Flash based
- ❖ Have content the clients do not want us to touch at all
- ❖ Have too many links to outside sources
- ❖ Are loaded with too many incidences of a keyword phrase (SP@M)
- ❖ Etc.

In such cases, it is our job to educate the client that the restrictions being placed upon us will significantly diminish the chances for ranking success. It should be noted, however, that in no situation whatsoever will we make changes without the express approval of our client. StepForth is a customer-centric firm so effective communication is our mainstay; we know you know your business far better than we do; we are here simply to help you properly succeed online.

Thank you for your questions Chriz. I have many other great questions awaiting responses and I promise to respond to as many as possible over the next two weeks on the [SEO Blog](#). Tune in and [send in your SEO questions here](#). – Ross Dunn

