

MCLE ON THE WEB

(\$20 PER CREDIT HOUR)

TEST # 71

1 HOUR CREDIT

To earn one hour of MCLE credit, read the substantive material, then download the test, answer the questions and follow the directions to submit for credit.

Using The Internet To Attract Clients *A properly designed and optimized Web site, coupled with effective search engine marketing, can attract clients*

By **JEFF LANTZ**

While most law firms have Web sites, few of these Web sites are optimized to achieve high rankings for the services offered by the firm. A properly designed and optimized Web site coupled with effective search engine marketing can attract potential clients to visit your firm's Web site and thereby generate more clients and increase revenues for the firm.

Search Engine Optimization

HOW SEARCH ENGINES DETERMINE RANKINGS

Search engine optimization (or SEO) is the process of making adjustments and additions to the content and code of a Web page in order to better help search engines understand and properly index a page, and achieve higher search engine rankings.

Each search engine uses its own algorithm to determine how to rank the Web sites for any given search. While the search engines constantly tweak the algorithms to improve search results, the primary factors remain constant.

The first factor is the title tag, which is the most important of the tags (title, description, and keyword). Because it is the first thing the search engine spiders see, it is the first clue about page content. The title tag should be short (60 to 80 characters including spaces), it should describe what the page is about, and it should try to include the keywords you wish to rank highly for.

The description tag is another factor used in the algorithm. The description tag gives the Web site owner the opportunity to give a short description of what the page is about. The description is often used by search engines in the search results. (This is the little blurb under the link.) The description tag should be a few short sentences and should include the keyword/phrase you want the page to rank highly for.

The keyword tag is the last of the “tags,” however; search engines give this tag very little weight. Google in fact does not consider the keyword tag at all in its algorithm.

The page content — the text on the page — is also a factor. However, if the word or phrase is over-used, it will be considered spam by the search engines. If it is considered spam by the search engines, it will be given little to no weight. Limiting the number of times the word is used to 6-12 percent of the total words on the page will help ensure it is not considered spam.

Additionally, where the words are positioned on the page and in each paragraph is a factor. Words at the top of the page and at the beginning of the paragraph are given more weight than words at the bottom of the page and the end of the paragraphs.

Search engines give additional weight to text in bold, italics or in an H1 Tag. (An H1 tag is an HTML tag that makes the letters in that tag large and bold. It is usually used on the first line of a webpage. You may be familiar with the H1 tag from Microsoft Word. It is the same idea when used on a Web page.)

Similarly, some extra weight is given to list/bullet point. However, if these “word enhancements” are over- used, it will be considered spam by the search engines. Using the word only once in an H1 tag and only once or twice in bold or italics will ensure it is not considered spam.

The last factor used is the number and quality of incoming links to your site (i.e. links from other Web pages to your Web page). Links are essentially a “vote” for your page; however, not all votes are worth the same amount. A link from a page that is contextually relevant to your page is worth more than a link from a page that is not contextually relevant.

The authority of the page is also considered. For example, while both Findlaw.com and the law section (or article) of a small town news paper would both be contextually relevant, the link from Findlaw would be worth more since Findlaw would be deemed to be more authoritative.

Lastly, the anchor text of the link is considered. The anchor text is the words which make up the link. If the anchor text is relevant to the page being linked to, the link will be worth more.

For example, click here would be worth less than find out more about California divorce law.

HOW THE SEARCH ENGINES GATHER THE INFORMATION TO USE IN THE ALGORITHM

Each search engine sends out bots, also called spiders, to crawl and read the information on the Web page as well as the title tag, description tag, keyword tag and all links on the

page. Spiders will follow the links and read and index the content on the page the link takes them to.

However, there are certain computer languages that spiders cannot read. Spiders cannot read Flash, Ajax or images, and they have some trouble reading java script. If all your content is in one of these forms, the spider will have no content to read and index.

QUICK SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR WEB SITE

Each Web page should only be optimized for one or two keywords/ phrases. If you try to optimize one page for more than one or two terms, the multiple optimizations will cancel each other out and you will be left with an unoptimized page. Additionally, by keeping each page on one topic, it will be easier for the user to find the information they are seeking.

Review the title tag on all your pages. Make sure the tag communicates what the page is about and includes the keywords you want the page to rank highly for.

Next, review the content on the page. Check to see if there is sufficient content and the keywords/ phrases are on the page. There is no set number of words that are needed; however, roughly 300 words should be enough. It is important to use the keyword/phrase more than once on the page, but don't use it too much because if it is overused, the search engines will treat it as spam. (Remember to keep it between 6 and 12 percent.)

The keyword should be used once in an H1 tag and once in bold; but only do so if it looks appropriate. (Do not make this change only to increase your search rankings.)

Also make sure that you have text that spiders are able to read. Check to ensure that all the information on the page is not a text image or in flash. A text image will look like regular text on a page; however, it is really a picture that only has words. If the text is in a text image, take it out of an image and just have it as regular text. If the navigation is in flash, add navigation links on the bottom of the page.

Lastly, search engines like Web sites with fresh content. If possible, add a new page or a few blog entries each month. It's better to add a new page than it is to add information to an existing page.

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR IF YOU HIRE A SEO COMPANY

Be wary of companies that guarantee number one listings in the search engine rankings. (<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=35291>) There is no way to make this guarantee since the rankings are completely automated and the algorithms are constantly being tweaked.

Be cautious of companies claiming that Google, Yahoo! and MSN give their clients preference in rankings and indexing. No such preference is given.

Be skeptical of claims that some companies make about getting your company listed in thousands of search engines. Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft Live and Ask.com collectively power more than 99 percent of all U.S.-based searches. (<http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=3627654>) These companies power/provide results to thousands of other search engines. (Even AOL and Netscape get their search results from Google.)

If your Web site is indexed in these four search engines, it will be included in the search results should a user search one of the smaller search engines (for example, Yahoo! powers Go.com) so there is no need to be indexed in other search engines. Additionally, there are search engines that you don't want your firm listed in since they require the submission of your e-mail address that can be used to send junk mail.

Also, be skeptical of companies that won't explain the optimization process. There is nothing about search engine optimization that is so sophisticated that it cannot be explained at some basic level.

Lastly, be skeptical of companies that promise quick results. While some results can be seen quickly, it usually takes months to see a significant increase in search rankings. If the company promises quick results, they may be using "black hat" techniques.

("Black hat" techniques are alterations that provide no benefit to users and are made solely to increase a page's ranking. Search engines have found out what these methods are and will penalize you when they discover you have engaged in these practices — and they will find out. An example of a "black hat" technique is repeating the keyword phrase hundreds of times in tiny font and the same color as background so only search engines will see it.)

If these techniques are used, when the search engine finds out about them, your rankings will drop and your site may even be de-listed.

BENEFITS OF SEO TO LAWYERS

Having your law firm's Web site optimized will lead to high search result rankings, more visits from potential clients, and hopefully more clients for your firm. Additionally, it is inexpensive since it doesn't have to be renewed or redone on a regular basis.

In addition to having your site ranked highly, search engine optimization can also produce secondary benefits to attorneys. As a part of the SEO process, additional content that discusses the various areas of law your firm practices usually needs to be created and added to the Web site. These explanations enable you to demonstrate to your clients you are an expert in the area and are the best choice to represent them.

Search Engine Marketing

The three most widely used methods of search engine marketing are 1) keyword search/sponsored results (also called CPC or PPC), 2) advertisements placed on a search engine's content network, and 3) placement-targeted ads.

KEYWORDS/SPONSORED RESULTS

Keyword search/sponsored results are the ads one sees above and/or to the right of search result listings on various search engines. The three main parts of the ad are: 1) in which geographical location the ad will be displayed, 2) the text of the ad, and 3) the keywords. For each ad you create a list of keywords that trigger the ad. The ad is only shown when a user's search query matches one of your ad's keywords. You can limit the display of the ad to a city, state or county. Search engines know where the computer doing the searching is located through its IP address.

When created, these ads contain keywords that trigger the ad to be displayed. For example, if a Los Angeles real estate lawyer includes in the keyword list, "real estate lawyer in Los Angeles," the ad will be displayed when someone searches for "real estate lawyer in Los Angeles."

The position of the ad is determined by a combination of its click-through-rate and the maximum amount you are willing to pay. However, it is important to keep in mind that an ad with a low click through rate can't buy the top position.

All the major search engines have ad programs and all charge on a cost-per-click method. Cost-per-click is exactly what the name implies; your firm is only charged if someone actually clicks on your ad. (For information on how to create an ad campaign on Google visit: <http://adwords.google.com/select/Login>.) To learn how to create an ad campaign on Yahoo!, visit: <http://sem.smallbusiness.yahoo.com/searchenginemarketing>.

To learn how to create an ad campaign on MSN, visit: <https://adcenter.microsoft.com>.) These ads are an effective way to advertise since they are cheap and highly targeted — only people who are already searching for services your firm offers see the ads. Additionally, these ads can be geo-targeted so the ad is only seen by users searching the Internet in a defined geographic area (i.e. your city or state).

CONTENT NETWORK

Individual Web site owners decide if they want their Web site to be part of the search engine's content network so advertisements can be displayed on their Web site (so they can make money). The search engine reads and understands the content of the pages on its content network and, if the content on one of these pages matches the keywords in your ad, your ad will be displayed on that page. The problem is that sometimes the search engines believe the page is contextually relevant when really it is not.

PLACEMENT-TARGETED

A placement-targeted ad is essentially a banner ad; the difference is the method of buying the ad space. With a banner ad, one communicates directly with the hosting site to display the desired banner ad. Google (and only Google so far) has made it easier to put an ad on someone else's Web site through what they call "placement targeted" ads. Google has arrangements with various sites (two examples are findlaw.com and abajournal.com) to place ads on their Web site. One creates the ad through Google, tells

Google which participating Web sites they want their ad displayed on and how much they are willing to pay. Google takes care of getting the ad placed on those Web sites. You can elect to pay on either a cost-per-click basis (CPC) or cost-per-thousand impression basis (CPM).

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Test — 1 Hour MCLE Credit

This test will earn one hour of MCLE credit.

- 1.** Search engine optimization will lead to higher search result rankings.
- 2.** A search on Google, Yahoo!, MSN and Ask.com will give the same search results.
- 3.** The title tag is the less important than the description tag and keyword tag.
- 4.** The number of times a word appears on a Web page is an important factor in the algorithms.
- 5.** The number of incoming links is not considered by the search engines in their algorithms.
- 6.** An incoming link with the anchor text, Learn about California real estate law, would be worth more than a link with the anchor text, Go here to read more.
- 7.** Search engines gather the information used in its algorithm by sending out spiders.
- 8.** Spiders are always able to read everything on all Web pages.
- 9.** It is recommended to optimize a Web page for multiple keywords/ phrases.
- 10.** Placing the keyword in an H1 tag or making it bold can help increase the page's ranking for that keyword.
- 11.** All pages should only be 40 to 50 words long.
- 12.** You should only hire an SEO company that will guarantee your site will be listed first for all keywords.
- 13.** Significant increases in rankings will usually take months.
- 14.** The SEO process has to be re-done every six months.
- 15.** Sponsored Results (pay-per-click ads) is the most effective method of search engine marketing.
- 16.** If your firm only practices in one city or just the state, it is wise to geo-target your PPC ads.
- 17.** Placement-targeted ads are offered by all the major search engines.

18. With pay-per-click ads, your ad is only shown when the search query matches one of the keywords in your keyword list.

19. When you place an ad on a search engine's content network, you control which Web site it is displayed on.

20. The keyword tag is an important factor in the search engine algorithms.

Certification

■ This self-study activity has been approved for Minimum Continuing Legal Education credit by the State Bar of California in the amount of one hour.

■ The State Bar of California certifies that this activity conforms to the standards for approved education activities prescribed by the rules and regulations of the State Bar of California governing minimum continuing legal education.

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1 HOUR CREDIT

- Print the answer form only and answer the test questions.
- Mail only form and check for \$20 to:

MCLE ON THE WEB — CBJ

The State Bar of California

180 Howard Street

San Francisco, CA 94105

- Make checks payable to State Bar of California.
- A CLE certificate will be mailed to you within eight weeks.

Name

Law Firm/Organization

Address

State/Zip

State Bar Number (required)

1. True___ False___
2. True___ False___
3. True___ False___
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