

# Are You Paying Enough Attention to SEO?

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By Larry Kavanagh

6 Ways to get your SEO efforts headed in the right direction

Pure-play websites crush classic direct marketers when it comes to search engine optimization (SEO). Most produce 50 percent or more of their total sales this way, garnering millions in revenue. Many direct marketers view their sites as cash registers where shoppers go to check out. They've either ignored or only paid lip service to SEO.

SEO can produce big sales gains, particularly if your site generates less than 10 percent from it. Here are some basic suggestions to get your natural search "sales moving.

## 1. 50 Phrases

Identify 50 phrases, which can be single words, that your web-browsing prospects would query on a search engine. Don't go too broad in your selection; choose terms that are relevant for your site, and rename them if need be. Try "horse show ribbons," for example, as opposed to simply "ribbons" if you sell awards for equestrian competitions.

## 2. Dedicated Pages

Create a page on your site for each of these 50 phrases or words. Many of these should be names of your product categories. Optimize a page for only one word or phrase by having it appear in one or more of these positions:

1. At the beginning of the meta title tag (title tags appear in the bar at the top of your web browser) and in the meta description tag.
2. In the H1 tag (the headline for a search engine). While shoppers respond well to headlines with strong benefits, search engines want to know the page topic. Sophisticated techniques allow you to show different headlines to search engines and shoppers.
3. In a short paragraph at the top of the page. The paragraph can be benefit-oriented, but it must contain the page's phrase. Search engines cannot read words in a graphic, so make sure this is text. What's more, search engines react poorly if the search term makes up more than 7 percent to 10 percent of the total words on a page, so don't spam it.
4. In the alt image tag on a photo (shown when you hover over a picture).
5. In the URL string for the page, if you can. For example, [www.equestrianprizes.com/horse\\_show\\_ribbons/c/23/](http://www.equestrianprizes.com/horse_show_ribbons/c/23/) is much better than [www.equestrianprizes.com/category.asp?c=23](http://www.equestrianprizes.com/category.asp?c=23).

## 3. Stay Close to Home

Place a link to these dedicated pages on your homepage. The category links from your homepage will cover many of your top terms, but you can get the rest on the homepage under a "frequent searches" heading. Search engines give more weight to pages that are one click from your main URL.

## 4. Build Inbound Links

It's fine to have internal links pointing to your top 50 pages; it's more important to have links from external sites. Use one or more of the ideas below to distribute links to the page:

- distribute an electronic press release;
- send tweets to your followers on Twitter (tweets appear on their Twitter pages);
- write updates on your Facebook fan page (these will also appear on the Facebook page of anyone who has friended your own "fan page);
- ask your email file to link to the page — many of your customers have blogs or websites;

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- identify noncompetitive sites with readers who might be interested in your 50 pages — ask the sites' webmasters to add links to these pages, and offer to do the same in return; or
- use a service such as [www.smallbusiness.yahoo.com](http://www.smallbusiness.yahoo.com) to launch several information-oriented sites quickly and inexpensively on domain names that include the keyword you're trying to optimize — make the sites informative, and include links back to your e-commerce pages.

### **5. Hide Duplicate Content**

E-commerce sites perform better when you give shoppers different ways to sort and find products. Unfortunately, these features can confuse a search engine that can't decide which version to use of a seemingly duplicated page, and thus the search engine ranks you poorly. Use Google's webmaster tools ([www.google.com/webmasters/](http://www.google.com/webmasters/)) to see how your site stacks up. You can add no-follow tags to links to hide these features from search engines.

### **6. SEO Analytics**

Use SEO analytic software to track your intermediate results and find opportunities. Use Google Analytics to track SEO sales from your top 50 terms. There are other analytic packages designed to track the number of inbound links you have, as well as your ranking across multiple search engines for your 50 terms.

These metrics will tell you if your actions are making a difference before it's reflected in your sales results. Enquisite is an inexpensive, effective SEO analytic software, and Google webmaster tools also can help.

SEO takes time. Once Google picks up your changes, it usually takes three days to five days to reflect the changes in the rankings. Patience is a virtue.

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