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Basic Elements of a Search Engine Optimisation Strategy by Trevor Southwold

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Successful search engine optimisation (SEO) strategies share common elements, although in implementation they can be very different. Broadly speaking, a search engine optimisation strategy should be comprised of two parts - on-site optimisation and off-site optimisation.

On-site optimisation is about producing and arranging a website in such a way that it is easy for search engines to navigate and understand. There are so many websites on the internet today that manually indexing them all would be impossible. Instead, today's search engines rely on computer programs to investigate websites as they come online. These computer programs are known as web crawlers, or spiders, and they save all the web pages they come across. After these sites are saved, they are indexed by the search engine operator. Making sure that your web pages are connected to one another makes this task easier for web crawlers, who cannot 'see' URLs that have no inbound links and have not been manually submitted for inclusion.

To work out what a website is about, Googlebot and the other search engine web crawlers investigate it for specific clues. The information they collect helps search engines decide on the relevance of a site to a particular search query. Important indicators include page titles, header tags, exact keyword match domains (although this particular signal is diminishing in significance due to widespread abuse) and keyword density. By measuring these key features, web crawlers are able to determine whether a particular site matches a certain query.

On-site optimisation involves making sure that the key information collected by search engine crawlers to categorise (and rank) a website reflects the overall function and purpose of the website. This might involve ensuring that page titles and header tags are appropriate, content pages target specific search queries, keyword density is optimal, and domain names target specific search queries.

Off-site optimisation, or link building as it is more commonly known, is the process of making sure that a website is significant within the wider structure of the web. While on-site optimisation is about structuring the content and pages within a website so that they can be easily understood by search engines, off-site optimisation is about placing the website within the web superstructure in such a way that search engines consider it significant. At the heart of this is the process of link building.

Internet search was changed forever by the innovation of link counting. By counting the number of links that lead to websites, search engines became able to work out their relative significance. A website with thousands of inbound links is almost certainly more influential than a website with very few inbound links, so websites with thousands of inbound links tend to appear higher within the search results than those with very few.

Off-site search engine optimisation campaigns focus on building links with other websites. Although there are many different approaches to this problem, some of the most common include spamming blog and forum comments, which is both unethical and becoming ineffective, paying for original content to be hosted on blogs, and writing informative short articles for submission to directories. All these pieces of content contain links back to the website that is being optimised for search engines.

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