



July 6, 2000

Make Your Site 'King Of The Hill!' With Powerful Search Engine Strategies



Dear Mr. Internet:

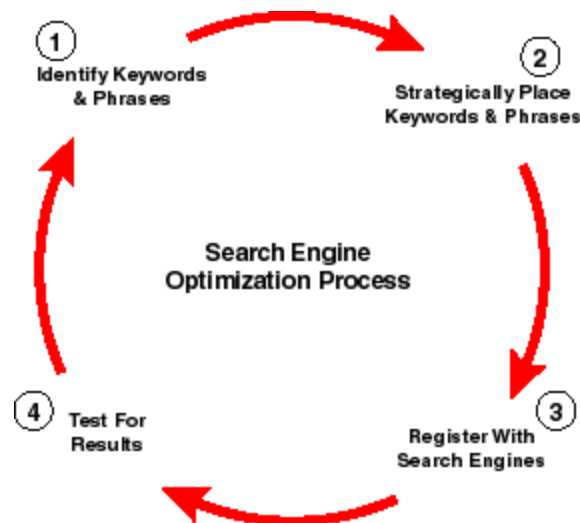
What does it really take to have my Web site consistently place high in the top search engines?

Sharon Hodnett
C-21 Mike Bowman Realtors
Eules, TX

Dear Sharon:

Depending upon the search engine, either a great deal of work or at least in one case, just a matter of "buying" your way to the top!

The process of getting your site to place high (i.e. within the top 10 positions) of the major search engines is referred to as search engine optimization. And, as the diagram below illustrates, it is an ongoing cycle consisting of four phases:



Unlocking Search Engine Results With The Right Keywords / Phrases

Choosing keywords and phrases that your target market is likely to use when searching for real estate services is, well... "key" to search engine optimization. Since real estate is geographically oriented, your key phrases should include a reference to your location. For

example, if you were a Buyer's Agent specializing in exclusive homes in the Denver, Colorado, area, some keyword / phrases you might consider are:

<i>location</i> real estate	<i>location</i> homes
<i>location</i> relocation	<i>location</i> schools
<i>location</i> buyers agent	<i>location</i> fine homes

Where you would substitute "location" with "Denver", "Denver, CO", "Denver Colorado" as well as every other suburb, township, and county in which you work.

While it is one thing to guess at which keywords / phrases might be used, it is quite another to know! [GoTo.com](#) is a major search engine that has a free service where you enter in keywords and phrases to see what frequency they (and similar terms) were actually used in the previous month. This will give you a more accurate picture of how prospects actually search, and it will often suggest other terms that you hadn't considered. You can find this service at http://inventory.go2.com/inventory/Search_Suggestion.jhtml

Where To Place Your Keywords / Phrases

For optimal results, it is important that your chosen keywords / phrases are placed properly on your site. While each search engine has its own rubrics about what it considers proper placement, the following are good general rules of thumb:

- **Meta-tags** - special tags within the HTML code of your Web page (hidden from normal viewing) that describe the content of your site.
- **Page Title** - text that shows up in the title bar of the browser when the page is loaded.
- **Body Text** - ideally keywords / phrases should be at the beginning and end of the page text.
- **Domain Names** - keywords within your domain name (separated by hyphens) will help ranking with several search engines.
- **File Names** - using keywords with the name of your HTML file names can help as well. (i.e. "denver_real_estate.html")

If things are starting to sound a little complicated --we're just warming up!

How To Register Your Site With The Search Engines

You let search engines know that your site exists by registering with them. Unfortunately, since each search engine has different rules or "algorithms" that determine how they rank Web pages given a particular search, this process can be less than straight forward.

In fact, to maximize your chances of ranking high with the major search engines, you need to employ the use of "doorway" pages that direct traffic to your site through links. You create a separate doorway page that is optimized for each search engine. It is these doorway pages (not your site) that you actually register with the search engines.

There are online services that can help you automate the process of registering your site or doorway pages, such as [Submit-It](#) (as well as many others). However, you must be careful with the registration process. Register too infrequently and your site could lose ranking, too often and you could find your site "censored" due to search engine "spamming" (i.e. over-

submitting to the search engines).

Most of these online submission services will not do a good job of keeping track of how often you submit a page and hence are highly limited for anyone serious about optimizing their site with the search engines.

What's The Easy Way?

It's probably becoming clear at this point that real-world search engine optimization is not for the faint of heart! There is a software solution, however that handles all the above in addition to testing for results. [WebPosition Gold](#) is considered the industry's leading search engine optimization software. Be forewarned however, even with this relatively easy-to-use software solution, achieving consistent high rankings with the major search engines is still a lot of work.

One alternative is to hire a "Pro" to do the work for you. Many agents have received e-mails promising top ranking in the search engines (all 400 or so of them!) for a mere \$49.00 (or something like that) --don't bother. Real professionals often charge a minimum of \$1,000 just to get started and will limit who they work with in any particular geographical area. If you are interested in looking into this possibility, the folks who make [WebPosition Gold](#) make a recommendation on their Web site.

How To Buy Your Way To The Top

[GoTo.com](#), mentioned earlier, allows you to "bid" your site's positioning / ranking for any number of given search keywords / phrases. You can check this out by simply entering "your city real estate" (without the quotes and substituting your city with the location you do business in) in the search field and see what comes up. You will notice that each of the top returned results have a dollar amount associated with them. This is the amount the owner of the Web site will pay each time his/her link is clicked.

The bidding process is dynamic and real-time and done through your browser window at a special location of the GoTo site. This means you can adjust your ranking for any given keyword / phrase any time you want. One tip that will save you money is to not bid for the top position, just the 3rd or 4th one down. You can often save considerably per click-through that way.

Do I Really Need To Go Through All This To Increase My Site Traffic?

Search engines are just one way to drive traffic to your site, but certainly not the only or even the most important means of doing so. For example, Judy McCutchin's site <http://www.dallashomes.com> (2nd place winner of the recent Mr. Internet / REALTOR Magazine Internet Marketing Contest) had nearly 11,000 visitors to her site during the month of December, 1999. However, only 164 of those came as a result of search engine referrals. (NOTE: she has recently implemented many of the techniques mentioned in this article resulting in a dramatic rise in her search engine rankings).

If you do decide to seriously use search engines as a means to generate new business -- expect a major investment of time and/or money. However, don't fall into the trap of obsessing over search engine placement. It is just one of many online business building tools available to the Internet-savvy real estate professional.

Article Resources:	
GoTo.com - a major search engine where you can bid for search results ranking	GoTo.com Keyword Search - where you can see how often a keyword / phrase was used in actual searches
Submit-It - one of many online search engine registration services	WebPosition Gold - the industry leader in search engine optimization software

Mr. Internet's Tip O' The Month:

How about a very clever, quick, and free way to create e-mail response "templates" that you can use instantly in any situation? It's very simple, you just add your message to an existing signature* file and save it as a new "signature"! This way, any time you need to respond with this kind of message, just pop in this special template signature, and you are done!

For example, you could develop a "first-response" e-mail that would be used (with little modification) for anyone who sent you an initial e-mail inquiry off your Web site. Instead of typing it out each time, you would just insert your "first-response" signature and add the sender's first name. Takes about 5 seconds...

This is a great way to keep your critical e-mail messaging timely and consistent with little effort on your part!

Written by Michael J. Russer

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