LET'S CUT TO THE CHASE

**common sense
search engine optimization
for small business**

Craig Killick

simple techniques for getting results

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Quick thanks

Thanks to Daryll Scott for pushing me to write this little book - there may be more to come; to Rob Jones for The Escape Journey; Jacqui Sanwell for the constant feedback and Andrew Wells-King for helping out with my grammar on this project.

Also, a big thanks to my colleagues at The Escape - they are a great bunch who drive my mind - especially you web guys. Also a thank you to my clients who always inspire me to deliver.

On a more general note there's lots of people I'd quickly like to mention who I've never met but have inspired me to pull my finger out: Kjell Nordstrom and Jonas Ridderstrale for the inspirational 'Funky Business'; Seth Godin for his books and ideas, and John Simmons for his inspirational books about words.

On a personal note, a big thank you to Claire, my wife, who puts up with my 'hours', my laptop and my 'work-mode' moods.

Contents

Your business on the web

Never has it been easier and cheaper to create a great web site. Pushing aside the super-systems that the Amazons and Googles of the world are creating, small business owners have a clear and concise route to market with the web - and it's measurable marketing.

We can create a small web site quickly and easily, or employ an agency (local or abroad) to create our online 'shop window'. Unfortunately, in the past, many of our web sites have ended up being more corner shop than Harrods and they don't deliver the promise of growth. Why is that?

I think it's very straight forward and have tried, in this free e-book, to cut to the chase, focussing on the things that I see as most important to good web site optimization. The book is not the most comprehensive account of SEO (search engine optimization) that you will read (I'd always push Aaron Wall's "SEO Book" for that), but I know that these basic techniques work and are [arguably] the most relevant changes a small business (or big business) can make to see a change in the success of their web site. I use them to transform web sites on a daily basis and I want to share them with you.

If you are wondering why I would do that for free, hopefully by the end of the book that will all be crystal clear. You should be able to get through the book quickly and I have tried to write the book in plain English. Take from it what you will and apply what you can and I believe you will see results.

NB. I don't cover web statistics in this book, but it's the staple of any web site - knowing what's going on - and as a client once said to me, *"if you don't know that you don't know; you don't know what you don't know"*.

So, let us start to put that right!

Is this book for you?

Let's get the important stuff out of the way. If you are looking for a quick way to dominate Google for your web site, I can't help. If you think the world is against your five page web site and don't understand that despite trading links with other businesses, you still can't get above Amazon for the search term 'books' then I would suggest you give up completely.

There is no quick and easy way to become the next Amazon or E-Bay - **sorry**. Bigger people than you or I have thrown millions of dollars into web sites and still failed. If they can't do it - why should we be any different? We need a more realistic approach.

My SEO journey

Knowing how something works is very liberating for me because I find it very hard to 'blag'. I need to have developed my own understanding before I talk about something and I do this by experimenting. Online marketing has been my focus for the past three years and I have learned a lot - and it keeps changing, just to keep me on my toes. That said, I stick to the basics - I am not a hardcore SEO'er.

I'm also not a fan of jargon, or indeed jargon users, and I hate it when simple things become confusing. This usually means they don't get results. **These two reasons are why I wrote this book.**

I firmly believe that Search Engine optimization (SEO) is being shrouded in mystery. Not by the people at the top, who fully understand the value of sharing information, but by the people involved in selling it at street level, and... that annoys me (big style) as I see friends being mis-sold to.

Like my friend Duncan, who runs a small business installing plasma screens who was sold on the promise of achieving first place in the Google rankings for just £50 per month. In reality, the company who sold him this amazing deal, bid on 10 highly targeted [exact] keywords in Google Adwords, that yielded about 20 clicks per month.

You may have guessed already, with just over two pages gone, that I am a straight talking kind 'o' guy. Hopefully you will forgive me for that. If you stick with me I am certain that you will get something from this book, especially if:

- You are in marketing but understand that online marketing doesn't quite work the same - you are open to the fact you need to understand more and are looking for some common sense advice
- You run a small business and simply want results - you have some time or money to put into getting those results, the same as any marketing campaign; but you want to do some marketing with a good return on investment (ROI)
- You may just want a clearer understanding of what search engine optimization means without digging too deeply. That said, I believe that this book covers more than enough to do the job

If these reasons resonate in any way - let's crack on - we have some myths to dispel!

Introduction

Do you ever imagine the complexity of a search engine when you type in your search request and it gives you a set of results in a super quick time?

Results **1** - **10** of about **18,700,000** for the escape. (0.17 seconds)

During 2006 Google indexed approximately 25 billion web pages. Many marketers want to control a search engines results in their favour, but perhaps we are being unrealistic when we want our web sites to be on that all important top part of the first page of those results. Let's face it, what are the chances really? One in 25,000,000,000 I guess.

Well, firstly, let me make something clear: Position in a search engine cannot be guaranteed. I mean, in the example above Google had 18.7 million pages to choose from for the search phrase "The Escape". I want to be number one out of 18,700,00? Really Craig, get over yourself.

There are some companies that will sell small businesses the promise of being on the first page of Google, but the way they deliver this is by running Google Adword adverts - a bit of smoke and mirrors - and it fools some people. Ask Duncan (and he's not alone).

Another question to ponder on: Do you have the resources to compete in the search engines against people investing tens of thousands of pounds into their web property? How much are your prepared to invest? Do you still think it's realistic to end up on that first page?

I have spoken to clients in the past who have given me comparisons of web sites they like with features they want on their £5,000 web site.

Web sites like Amazon, which have millions piled into their development every year.

One thing you can expect (in my opinion) is for Google to be non-biased and user focused. To be the best search engine around, they need to deliver the best results in their search engine results pages (SERPs). They can't bow down to what you or I want as marketers, otherwise users would stop using the search engine.

One of the things Google needs to decide (in less than a second) is which one of those 25 billion web pages suits a user's search requirement best. They want to give **them** the most appropriate results. That is more important to them than you or I (as marketers) and our quest to be found.

They have become the leading light in search because of the way they do this, with a system of relevance and authority. Moving forward, search may get more complicated with personal search, but for now, Google are leading the way.

The algorithms that search engines use to create their listings are ultimately fairly complicated. They don't publish all of their criteria of how to get to number one and there is a lot of information on how you can 'beat the system'; some of it solid advice on improvements you can make, some of it complete conjecture. But, I would offer you two basic bits of advice up front:

1. The people REALLY into SEO spend their time - 24/7 - doing what they need to do to drive traffic. Optimizing, checking out competing sites, analysing traffic and search data... it's a full time job.

2. Google tell us the basics of optimization on their own web site. It's not enough to satisfy the hunger of the guys mentioned above, but, it's everything people like me or you need to get traffic - believe me.

This book is for small businesses who are looking to get more attention on the web. You don't want to dominate high ranking keywords just to drive affiliate traffic (advertising); but you would just like to start seeing your web site ranking in the search engines for terms that are relative to your business - where you are and what you do.

Obviously you need to make sure you have the web site to convert the visitors when they get to your web site - but this book is not about that, it's about basic changes you can make to your web site to start seeing a change in traffic you attract from search engines.

Why did I write this book?

In my day job, I meet many small to medium business (SME's) owners and marketers who have web sites in place already. Some of these web sites are brand new but are not doing the business for the people who spent out their marketing budgets on them. What continues to amaze me is that the very basics for search optimization are being overlooked... by marketers, web designers and coders.

The topics I cover in this book may seem very basic, but they get results. I know through my experiences every day with start-ups and business web sites that have clearly defined goals.

I wrote this book because basic SEO is simple common sense.

What skills do you need?

If you are in marketing, or running a small business, I wouldn't expect you to know how to program a web site. If you can - great - if you can't, you will end up with a set of rules for your web designer to implement.

You will need a basic understanding of how to use the web - including search engines. Believe me though, by the time you have finished this book, you will be amazed at how simple it really is.

You will also need a basic grasp of language: Words are what people use to search with. If you are precious about language, are keen to 'sound' more important than you are, or can not let go of control, you may come unstuck. For example, many marketers talk about "a unique proposition" or "bespoke solution" - these do not mean anything! It's all about descriptive, plain english words that a user can understand.

One last thing (but the most important), a big idea...

The power of marketing online has been handed to the consumer. It's not so much about competitors or what you think you sell - it's about the person at the other end, they are in control. They have Blogs, comparison sites, social networks and they have search engines. Google is their friend with 25 billion pages to choose from - we need to leverage that and we need some humility.

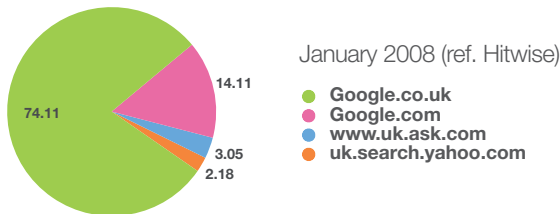**So let's clear the slate and start with a simple basic premise:**

No one cares about us online - they only care about number one - them. A web user is irrational, emotional and has no need to be loyal to you or your company. Let me repeat that: **No one cares about you**.

Take five, get a cup of something hot (or strong) and let that one really sink in - it's important.

What search engines want?

You may have noticed that I have focussed mainly on Google so far in this book. This is because it is the most complex of the large search engines, with it's criteria for indexing pages, and subsequently delivers the best results; hence it's popularity. If you are optimized for Google, you are more than likely optimized for the other search engines. What's more, in the UK, Google dominates the search market.

Top UK search engines

January 2008 (ref. Hitwise)

● **Google.co.uk**
● **Google.com**
● **www.uk.ask.com**
● **uk.search.yahoo.com**

74.11
14.11
3.05
2.18

So, let's aim for Google and let the changes cascade across the other engines. This sounds like a sweeping statement, but remember, we want results.

So, let's start with the fact that (apart from the odd manual intervention) a search engine is a machine - a very clever one - but a machine all the same. It doesn't really care for what your web site looks like, who you are or who you think you are. It doesn't care how good your product is or how good your customer service is - in fact, let's remember, no-one on the web cares about us. Do you really care about your suppliers?

So, to organise billions of pages of information, a search engine has to be slick. It has an army of electronic robots that scour the web for information. An electronic 'visitor' comes to your web site, reads the information on your web page and then sends it back to the search engine to

index in it's directory along with all the other pages it has information on. It also follows the links on your web site to move to the next page to repeat the process. It sounds like something out of the matrix - and of course they do quite a bit more than I have suggested here - but ultimately, they are your friend. But, **all the while they are looking at your web site, they are judging it**.

They check the content on your pages; they follow links to other internal pages (pages on your web site); they follow links to other web sites; they even check the links coming into your web site.

But wait... they also check beyond that - they have a look at who links to the web sites that link to you and they also check the links to the web sites that link to the web sites that link to you.

Basically, they are checking you out - a bit like a credit checking agency - and, they don't just take your word for it.
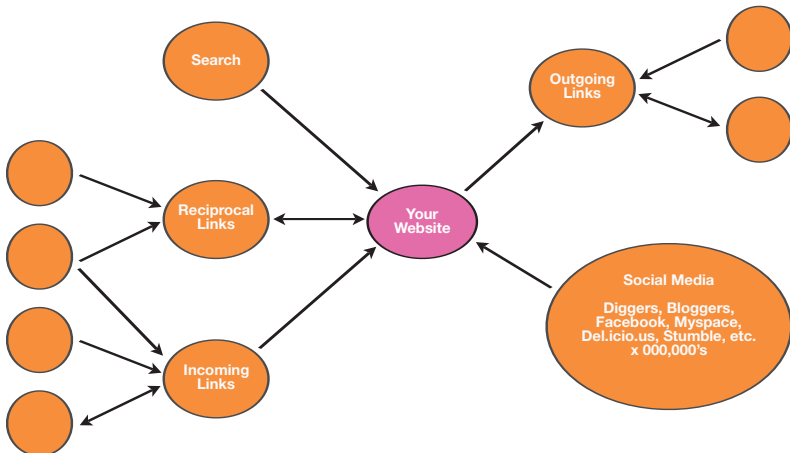
They check the authority of what you say, by seeing what other people are saying about you; whether they think you are good enough to link to and also, how credible the web site linking to you is in it's own right.

So, if on your web site you want to tell the world you are the best cheese maker in England; Google won't just take your word for it, they will judge you based on the opinion of the web.

And, that opinion can be heavily weighted. If a respected cheese organisation backs up your claim on their respected web site, well then Google will take note and give you a plus point. If, on the other hand, your proud mother writes about it on her Blog, well then Google won't add so much weighting.

Two Elements of Good SEO

So, this leaves us with is some very basic rules.

Firstly, tell the search engines what you actually do in a clear and concise way. Secondly, encourage everyone else (especially credible web sites) to back up your credentials.

And that's it. Forget all the other stuff you hear about; these two rules will be enough for your small business web site.

It sounds straightforward, doesn't it? You may even be asking yourself why everyone isn't doing it? In a similar way, losing weight is just as simple - eat less and exercise. How many people do that?

Planning and effort - the 'chore'

Good web site marketing takes planning, lots of hard work creating great, relevant content and then spreading the word with some link building (attracting links to your web site).

So, despite the fact that the principles are simple, do not under-estimate what it takes to achieve a higher profile in search engines.

If you are Microsoft or Apple, you don't really have to try too hard, but I am assuming you, like me, are not a global behemoth. We are small businesses trying to compete on the same playing field as everyone else, with limited resources. But, maybe, we are simply playing the wrong game?

Focus

The problem with many small companies marketing online is that they try to take on the big boys in their own back yard - what's the point?

Simply by realising what it is you sell, and who you sell it to, you can begin to understand how to focus your sales message.

So, let's have a look at the first part of the process - On-page SEO - the stuff you can control.

Optimizing Your Web site

If you think about the two elements of search engine optimization, this is the only one you REALLY have control over. Marketers hate not being in control of their message but welcome to the land of Bloggers, Diggers and social networking.

It is absolutely imperative that you sort your own web site out first before you worry about anything else.

Let's take a look at the things search engines want:

1. Firstly, can they read the content on your page in the first place? There are some technical features on web sites that actually stop that happening: Frames and Flash, for instance, create a road block to your web site content because the content is not clear to a search engine. Flash embeds text inside it's own file then creates a single 'image file' that can not be read at all by a search engine. Ask your web designer if your web site uses Flash (for content), tables for layout, or Frames. If it does, I would suggest it's time for a change, a clear web site build using compliant code as per W3C standards. This isn't a book about web site build, but it's imperative that you start with a good foundation - this is actually easier than it sounds.

2. Can a search engine make sense of your content? Do search engines understand what "integrated solutions provider" means or would it help them if you told them that what you actually do is "computer networking for SMEs"? Taking that idea on a stage; what are your customers typing into search engines? When was the last time you typed "bespoke management solution" into a search engine? I'm guessing you are a little more specific than that. I know I am.

3. Are your filling in the blanks that search engines use to classify your pages - the meta data? We'll come back to this so don't panic. But, just because you may sit at your desk, with a cup of tea, your new PC running Vista and Internet Explorer 7, doesn't mean to say Google sees what you see. One phrase that always makes my skin crawl is... "but it looks good on *my* screen". Frankly my dear, Google don't give a damn!

4. Can the search engines see your links and understand where they go? Navigation and structure comes into play here. If you want Google to like your site - make it easier for them to use.

Step one - planning your message

So, what do you actually want?

Let's start with what really matters to most small business. I am not afraid to say that with most of the web sites I work on, we want something back: Sales leads, online orders or newsletter subscribers, are just a few examples. We are not running a home project; we are running a business that needs to make a profit to survive and needs to spend money on marketing that offers a return.

And, It's okay to want something. Believe it or not, there are people out there who want to give you what you want; they want to buy form you - yes you. Perhaps your communication just isn't quite connecting with the right people yet?

I did a survey with my mailing list during February 2008 asking people about their web strategy. Nearly half of the 92 people who answered (mainly business-to-business SMEs), are looking for sales leads.
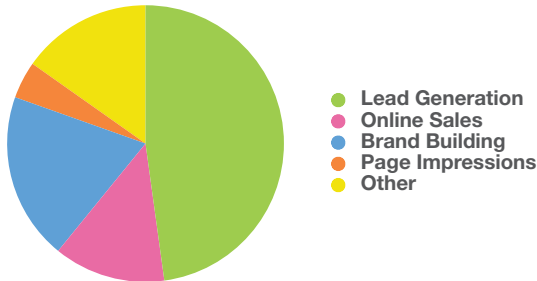
But, 63% of them weren't satisfied with what they were getting.

I can only assume that engagement isn't being made, either on their web site or actually at the search stage, in which case they aren't even in the ball-park, let alone on the bench ready to have a swing.

~~What Do You Sell?~~ What Do Your Customers Buy?

What you think you sell, may not actually be what people are buying. If they think they are buying something else, it stands to reason they begin their search looking for the answer to **their problem**, not your solution.

A well know example of this is the old adage about drills. A person buys a drill because the things they actually want are holes.

Take what I do for a living. People don't really come to me for a web site. Nine times out of ten, a client wants sales leads. It puts a different perspective to my sales approach.

I had a new business meeting recently with the marketing manager of a network security company. She understands what her target vertical markets are looking for, because she talks to them about their problems.

She will spend a day with a client asking them about the key problems their business is facing in terms of network security (her industry). She then creates sales messages based on those [very real] problems.

Which one of these sales messages would be more compelling to a small business and which do I focus on?

- We design eye-catching web sites
- We build web sites that deliver you sales leads

I find this approach helps me **focus on the type of customers I want**.

In my mind, if a client wants sales leads, they are ambitious. They are looking to grow, or they at least recognise that they need more sales. This simple need on their part, is much more likely to yield a successful ongoing relationship on my part, because our outcomes are aligned; rather than someone who simply wants a pretty web site with nice pictures.

Yes, for some companies a pretty web site is enough - it's what they want - but not for me. A web site is a sales tool. If all you want is pretty - go find an artist.

Bringing the sales pitch online

I am a big believer that you can filter clients online. By setting out an honest sales pitch, the people who take the next step are pre-qualified. Yes, you may be turning business away; but is it suitable business for you anyway?

Think about the last time you pitched to a client. That time when you sat in front of a prospect to tell them why you are the company to choose.

What questions did they ask? What documents were you asked to tender?

Now ask yourself - can any of this go online?

When me and Rob (my business partner) first started The Escape as a design company, a new business meeting involved us lugging a big portfolio of work around and talking through every project. We then spoke about the services we offered. Our pitch was unrefined then and we did the old Unipart sales pitch - "the answer's yes, what's the question?"

It confused people- "so are you a design agency or a print company", "you do web sites but you also print business cards".

We needed to work out what we actually did and, more importantly, what type of work we wanted to do to push our business forward. We also realised that to compete at the higher end of the market, we could no longer compete on cost - it had to be about value.

Over a period of time we worked it out. We sell creative marketing 'stuff' that is designed to get business results.

Slowly, a 'marketing' strategy starts to emerge.

We know what people want from us, we know what we can do. So let's answer those questions we face in every sales pitch...

"What do you actually do? Let me see some samples to prove that you can do it for us. And, how much does it cost?"

As a very basic web sitemap, it looks like this:
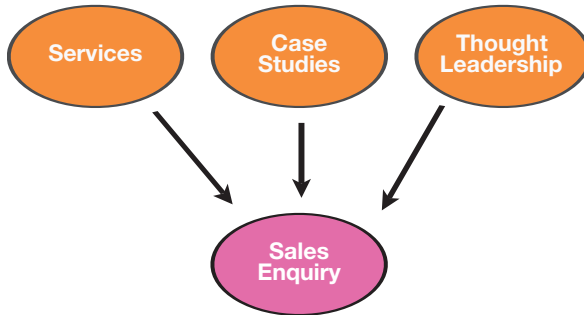
Our services, explain what we do. Case studies show how we have done it for other people in relation to the problem - the solution and the results.

Finally, we also prove our worth with some thought leadership. If we want to be taken seriously in what we do, we need to show that we know what we are talking about.

We write white papers, articles, run a Blog, write the odd e-book (like this) and it combines for general profile building on the web. It's also a great way to engage existing clients.

But Craig, I hear you say, what if our competitors see it?

Innovation generation

It is a genuine concern to some companies; they do not want competitors to see what they are thinking just in case they steal ideas. In those cases, some amazing information never surfaces.

By the way, how many competitors do you have that could benefit from something you say? Real competitors? Is it long term information or does it get dated quite quickly?

- Now, how many customers do you have?
- How many potential customers do you have?
- How many industry peers do you have?
- How many Bloggers are interested in what you do and could tell other people about how clever you are?

Think back to the cheese story.

I am a one in ten... million

If people do not find information from you, they can find it somewhere else.

Take this book for instance. How much is it worth to you? If you read every page and then implemented some of the ideas, you will have taken some value and you may thank me for it. You may even have thought it was worth paying for! The information in this book may lead to some new business for you worth thousands of pounds. **So, why do I am telling you how I do what I do for free?**

Firstly, I am not a book seller or an author. Secondly, you have Google. You could find all of the information I am giving you here somewhere else, also for free. I'm not unique - who would I be kidding if I thought otherwise?

But, let's say you do have good fortune with the advice in this book; you will relate it to me, relative to the service I provide for my clients. If you can track those benefits to my knowledge (or at least me writing about

'the' knowledge) then I have increased my profile, and that of my business. You may even tell people about me and share it with your friends, increasing my reach.

If ten people tell ten people each, who tell another ten people each; well then there is an extra one thousand people who have heard of me. Maybe, say, 10% of them might link to my web site - then there are a hundred extra links I have encouraged, relating to what I am selling.

But, what if you found the similar information from somewhere else? Maybe one of my competitors: who loses out then?

For the sake of writing this book, which took about ten days, including edits, my profile raises with my current customers and anyone who stumbles across it on the web. Also, bearing in mind this information may have a shelf live of a couple of years, I have additional online authority that spreads. So, if I create another book, I would have already built up a recognition.

What's more, as my friend Daryll keeps telling me, I'll also have "a bloody great calling card".

Creating effective web pages

So, in terms of your web site, you have the start of a sales strategy. You can establish what information you need to display to get people to buy into your company. We can now begin to establish the elements of information that people want and then it's a simple case of putting it together so it makes sense to someone visiting your web site.

Goal!

Until recently, one of the most overlooked parts of a web site was a clear goal. ie. The action you want someone to take when they get to your web site.

On an e-commerce web site, this would probably be the checkout. On a marketing web site, looking for leads, there would be some sort of call-to-action to make contact. Call Us... E-Mail Us... Fill In This Form... etc.

So, what do you want a user to do when they get to your web site?

What works for your business model best? When you have decided what that goal is remember: This is the KPI - key performance indicator. This is the stat that matters. This is the home win, three points in the bag, thank you very much.

Some people get confused and start measuring hits, visitors and other relatively useless web statistics. If you doubt this simple logic; why not choose from one of these two options for your web site:

- 1000 visitors a day and no leads
- One visitor per day and one lead

I am hoping you chose the second option and after a year you would have had 365 visitors and 365 leads (366 on a leap year); compared to 365,000 visitors and zero leads.

If, like me, you want results - you need a measurable goal that matters. I'm not saying ignore web statistics by the way, they are a valuable tool to make your web site usability more effective, allowing you to recognize and adapt any bottlenecks.

Every page could be your home page

Secondly, Google has changed the rules in terms of web site structure. Whereas we tended to rely on visitors to find our home page first, an optimized web site structure is now pretty flat. On a well optimized web site, the first page that a visitor should come to from a search engine, should be the exact one they are looking for - which is not necessarily your home page.

For example, during January 2008 on our company web site - www.the-escape.co.uk - the home page only accounted for 46.63% of the entry pages in a list that covered 100 different pages - these are the top six.

- default
- reference/websitebrief/
- reference/betterwebpages/
- reference/keyperformanceindicators/
- reference/successfulwebpresence/
- reference/blogging-tips/
- other
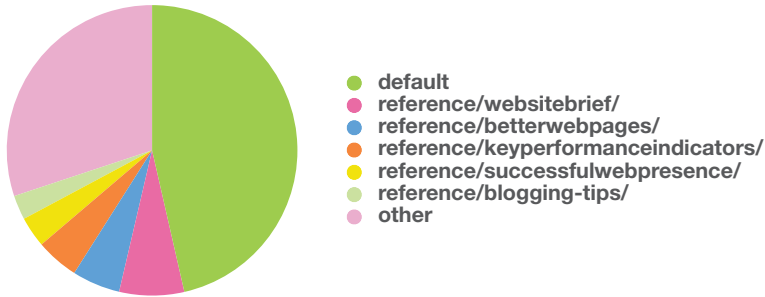
Directing traffic

With that in mind, we need to make sure **every single page on our web site is optimized** with specific information, clearly stating an intention, drawing a visitor in from a search engine and directing them to our 'goal' page.

We need to allow people to understand what that goal is on each page, or at the very least, allow people to see the action we wish them to take if they are ready to take it. This is usually achieved with a 'call-to action'.

A 'call-to-action' can be as simple as a line of text at the end of your page that tells the visitor what to do next... eg. "For more information, please xxxx".

On The Escape web site, we have two goal pages and guide people to them with call-to-actions (sign posts). The most important one is the page that says "Thank You for enquiring", the second one is the "Thank you for subscribing to our newsletter" page.

Notice that both pages are confirmation pages: A lead isn't a lead until it's been made.

The goal you set for your web site should play to your business strengths. If you can't check e-mail regularly, but people expect a quick reply, perhaps your big call-to-action should be a phone number?

This flat structure approach sounds very hard to manage, when you can't control the sales process, but you have to remember that the 'web site experience' is all on the customers terms anyway. You just need to ensure that when they land, they know what's what and they have the tools to take the next step.

Search engine friendly web pages

So, we have established that each web page of a well optimized web site could be the first people see. Why is that and is it good?

It's great for you, if your web pages are specific, because the person lands straight at the page they want. Google has done the hard work and delivered them directly to the place they need to be, on your web site. This saves your user precious 'clicks'.

Imagine walking into a department store and the first concession stand you see is the one you want - what a bonus - and right next to it is the checkout. You don't have to search the store.

Steve Krug got it spot on in the title of his book about usability - "Don't Make Me Think!" (well worth a read by the way).

When you realise how to produce specific pages, you will wonder why anyone would choose to do create pages in any other way. It is very simple to craft your web pages to attract more relevant traffic from search

engines. Let me show you how to do this with your service or product pages.

Getting specific

When someone is in a search engine, looking for something they really want, they get real specific with their search term. The more they know what they want, the more specific they get.

So, for instance, if I were to search for a local company to me (Basingstoke) to do some copywriting, I would go to Google.co.uk and type in "basingstoke copywriters".

If this didn't give me a great set of results, I may go back and type in "basingstoke copywriting" and then spread my net to "hampshire copywriters". (Basingstoke is in the county of Hampshire in England).

(This routine is obviously personal to me, you may type something completely different in. After all, we are all unique.)

So, if I had a marketing company in Basingstoke, that offered copywriting services, I should be creating a page all about my copywriting service - we'll get into the specifics in a minute.

Many companies create a vague page of services that covers the lot in one hit - this does not answer the specific query I have.

You could also argue that the more specific a user's search phrase, the more they actually want what they are looking for.

Back to my marketing business, I would also have a page about "Market Research", "Graphic Design", etc. and any other service I also offer and each of these pages would be specific too.

Remember - At that first point of search in a search engine, that moment when the person is looking for a copywriter, they are not specifically looking for you. Therefore, your focus is on the service in question, not your company. Also, don't even think about your other services on your 'copywriting' page - make sure your content for that page is specific.

It helps to see every page as its own entity and every page on your web site has to work independently from each other.

Here's an analogy for all you music lovers: Each page of your web site is like a pop song. It works independently from the others songs, but can also be put together to create an album. When someone buys into 'your' music it may be through just one song, and, through that one song, they discover that you have others that they like.

Keywords

So, a search engine needs specific content to understand what a web page is a about. It sends it's robots to your page, they scan the words and try to build a picture of what the page is about - in terms of content.

It looks for important words, and words that appear together to create phrases. These are called keywords and key phrases.

Keywords, therefore, in terms of SEO, are words that you want to be found for in a search engine and you use them in your content. Arguably you cannot be found for every word to do with your web page, but you need a starting place - some core "key-words".

Many people talk about keywords and keyword research because the more precise you can be using words that people are searching for, the more chance you have of being found - but they need to be realistic.

There is data available that actually shows you what people are searching for and how much competition there is so **never assume that the words that pop into your head are the best ones to go for.**

Going back to our basic principle of telling the search engines what OUR web page is about then, we need to establish some words we can 'pepper' into our content to keep it focussed and attract traffic.

Firstly, what are the words we need to use? You can do some basic keyword research to give you some ideas because one man's "farming" is another man's "agriculture"; one woman's "UPVC windows", is another woman's "double glazing".

There are basic online tools for the job including:

- Google Keywords External Tool
  https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal
- Wordtracker Free Keyword Tool
  http://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/
- SEO Book Keyword Search Tool
  http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-tools/seobook/

Make sure you get your country results whenever possible (one man's "tap" is another man's "faucet") and with so many words and phrases different between American and English, for example, you need to make sure you reach the right audience.

A quick search in Wordtracker shows me some additional keywords (or phrases) that I can start thinking about before I write my web page copy about copywriting:

marketing communications copywriting; professional copywriting; web site copywriting; advertising copywriting; copywriting for marketing campaign

Word of warning - you do not need that many and I would suggest using these purely as a guide.

Next, think laterally. Why would someone need a copywriter? Where are you based? What have you got that your competitors don't? You need to define options when creating your content - something that could differentiate you.

As we start to think about constructing our content, remember, we are looking for specific traffic so we need to be specific with the words we use. So, **always have the audience in mind**.

When you have a whole bunch of words, you can start to craft your content. Words need to be used in context with each other when you use them and don't go over the top repeating words just to increase the amount of times they appear. People still need to read your words and Google can spot bad content a mile away - this can also harm your search rankings, if Google see you 'cheating'.

So, with our example, we may end up with a page that talks about a copywriting service based in Basingstoke, Hampshire. We may start talking about the types of copywriting we provide, ie. web site copywriting, copywriting for marketing, copywriting for business to business, etc. - the more specific the better.

Basically, you are telling people where you are and what you do for THAT SERVICE.

Key Phrases

Arguably, key phrases are more important. These are groups of words that create phrases. The more descriptive you can be in the way you group words, the better.

An example I use when demonstrating this is for a beauty product shop that sells nail varnish and nail polish.

If I selected just the keywords - nails, polish and varnish - these could also apply to a hardware store.

So, in content I need to talk about nail polish products, etc.

Making sure the search engines understand what your page is saying

Some elements of your web page content are more important than others - by a long way. We have spoken about focused content, but what about the way your page is 'coded'?

When programmers create web pages, they use all sorts of tags and programming language that, when run through a web browser, make it look a certain way.

If you go to any web page, right click on it and choose "View Source" you can see the programming code of that page.

One area of web programming that is becoming more important, is something called semantic mark-up.

Semantic markup is basically a way of selecting elements of your page and saying to the world wide web... "This is the title of my page", "This

is the heading", "This is a paragraph", "This is a list of bullet points". It's a way of adding description to the elements of your web page.

This used to be bodged by programmers by taking a standard element, say a line of text, and styling it differently so it looked like a header. To a search engine and the rest of the web, it's still a line of text - the same as all the others. The search engines do not see the style - and if they do, they ignore it. They are looking to be told, specifically what each element of a page is, regardless of how it looks on screen.

It's worth noting at this stage that many companies use generic tags across their whole web site. This confuses Google and dilutes the importance placed on the many different pages of a web site. The main two areas that get used across a complete web site, without enough distinction are the **Title Tag** and the **Meta Description**.

Starting from the top then, here are the specific 'tags' we need to get right so that Google can correctly make sense of our page:

Page Title

The page title is what it says it is. ie. What is the title of the page - what are you calling it? This code is not seen on the content of your page but if you look across the window bar of a web browser you will see it there.
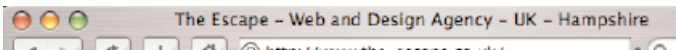
Arguably more important is the fact that you see the Title Tag as the blue link in a search engine result when your page is listed:

So this is why you need to be specific. The example above shows The Escape home page. Let's look at a service page. This is for our web site copywriting page:

Website Copywriting and Content from The Escape - Web Agency in the UK
We understand how to write relevant, attractive content for business websites. Content that attracts traffic and drives it through to give you tangible ...
www.the-escape.co.uk/services/ online/website-copywriting/ - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

The title tag is found in the source code and looks like this:

```
<title>Web site Copywriting and Content from The Escape - Web
Agency in the UK</title>
```

If you ensure that every page on your web site has a different Title Tag, Google and the other search engines will begin to understand what each page is about and display your specific pages accordingly when a relevant search phrase is entered. So, you should end up with lots of differing pages:

Website Copywriting and Content from The Escape - Web Agency in the UK
We understand how to write relevant, attractive content for business websites. Content that attracts traffic and drives it through to give you tangible ...
www.the-escape.co.uk/services/ online/website-copywriting/ - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

Branding and Corporate Identity Development - The Escape - UK ...
The Escape offer design consultancy and cohesive brand strategy for business, local government and charities.
www.the-escape.co.uk/services/ creative/design-consultancy/ - 11k - Cached - Similar pages

Marketing Collateral from The Escape Design Agency in the UK
The Escape design brochures, direct mail, exhibition stands and collateral. Tactical design pieces or as part of a brand and marketing strategy.
www.the-escape.co.uk/services/ creative/marketing-collateral/ - 11k - Cached - Similar pages

E-Commerce Website Case Study for Magic Mitre - The Escape
CMS Website design and build case study for a UK charity helping children.
www.the-escape.co.uk/clients/case-studies/picstud-web/ - 11k - Cached - Similar pages

Database Web Integration and Online Applications from The Escape
The Escape build powerful content management systems that are easy to use, deliver powerful web pages and make for an adaptable website.
www.the-escape.co.uk/services/ web/database-applications/ - 10k - Cached - Similar pages

Meta Description

The meta description is another line of invisible code that sits behind your web page, ie. you don't actually see the words on your web page. This snippet of text is more often than not used by search engines as an explanation of what the page is about. This is displayed in a search engine listing:

Website **Copywriting and Content** from **The Escape** - Web Agency in the UK
We understand how to write relevant, attractive **content** for business websites. **Content** that attracts traffic and drives it through to give you tangible ...
www.the-**escape**.co.uk/services/ online/website-**copywriting**/ - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

The follow on text is derived from:

```
<meta name="description" content="We understand how to write
relevant, attractive content for business web sites. Content that
attracts traffic and drives it through to give you tangible
results." />
```

The description should be individual to each page and specific.

I always see the **Title** and **Meta Description** like an advert for the web page. The **Title** being the headline and the **Description** being the justifying text.

The two elements together need to convey the following:

- Do they immediately get across the specifics of that page? If you read those two lines and nothing else, would that give you enough of an overview?
- Do they act as eye catching advert copy when they come up in the search results? Is your advert compelling?

It's worth noting how many characters the search engines show for your title and meta descriptions. Google shows approximately 63 characters

for a Title and up to 156 characters for a Meta Description - keep it to the point.

NB. Note how the last word "results" is missing from my meta description above in the web site copywriting example (tangible...). This is an opportunity to re-word the meta description to make it more concise and my 'advert strapline' more compelling.

Meta Keywords

A quick word about meta keywords - another invisible tag that can help describe your page. These are not recognised as much as they used to be and common consensus is that they are no longer necessary.

If you want to add some they won't hurt, and may still positively affect some other search engines. Again, this is a tag in the source code:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="content, copywriting, web site" />
```

The more you add, the more you dilute them so stick to a small number and keep them on message. I always suggest never more than five.

Page Heading

The page heading is an obvious element to include as it reinforces what the page is about:

```
<h1>Web site Copywriting and Content</h1>
```

Simply by placing two tags either side of the words in our content, we are telling the search engines that this is the heading. Remember that you only need one page heading per page.

The H1 Page Heading, along with the Title and Meta Description, are arguably the three most important parts of your web page. They allow a

search engine to differentiate your pages. With appropriate content on the rest of the page, a search engine can grab a snapshot of what your web page is about.

Content and additional markup

When you write the words on your web page, you should also break your content up and there are two key reasons for this:

1. Your customers are human - they need to be able to read and scan your content - on their terms.
2. Search engines can make more sense of a page if the content elements are described to them.

When you write your content you are able to tag elements to describe what you are writing and how it should be taken:

sub heading - level 2   `<h2>Engaging content</h2>`

paragraph   `<p>When it comes to content and copywriting on your web site, we develop specific and engaging web pages and marketing messages:</p>`

bullet List - un-ordered	`<ul>`
list item	`<li>Writing content that attracts traffic to your web site through search engines and social web sites - concentrating on your relevant audience.</li>`
list item	`<li>Writing words and messages so that when a visitor finds your web site, they are encouraged to take action - delivering you tangible results.</li>`
end of bullet list	`</ul>`

Google will also understand how to weight the importance of the individual elements when it's robot scans your page.

Good use of sub headings and bullets points, etc. will also break your web page into readable chunks of information - perfect for people scanning through your web content.

This also allows you to enter your key phrases into sections so that a search engine can logically compile the content of your page. For instance, one of your sub headings could be 'Copywriting for Charities'. The subsequent paragraph(s) would be about that subject until the next sub heading.

Bullet points are another great element of a web page. They are easily scannable by the reader and also allow you to embellish in short, sharp, keyword-rich statements.

Industry jargon beware

All industries have jargon, abbreviations and acronyms. Does your audience know and understand them?

If you use an abbreviation or acronym, there are tags you can use in your content that describes what it means. A small dotted line appears under the word that when hovered over, displays the meaning. Eg.
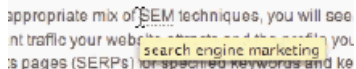
The code behind the page looks like this:

```
By ascertaining the appropriate mix of <abbr title="search engine
marketing">SEM</abbr> techniques,...  ... pages (<acronym
title="Search Engine Ranking Pages">SERPs</acronym> ...
```

Images

Logos, photos and diagrams that you place on your web site are not 'content' as such. They are images made up of pixels and as such carry no weight.

In the graphic design world I have seen many agencies wanting to stick with their corporate typeface, so they place large images with the words in the image as pixels.

Google can not read images, so you need to make sure that you place a description of the image in the code. This is called 'Alt' text (alternative).

This is especially important if you are using the image as a link to another page:


```
<img src="http://www.the-escape.co.uk/
_assets/client/images/portfolio/
coll-picstud.jpg" alt="See search engine
marketing Case Study" />
```

Remember, the description of your image should be accurate and needs to be focussed on your objectives. That said, you should put in a keyword or key phrase if it's relevant.

Flash and search engine optimization

Flash is a great technology for supplementing the aesthetics of a web page. In terms of search engine optimization, it works the same as an image - all of the 'content' is embedded in the Flash file and is not viewable by a search engine. NB. There are uses of Flash that combine with databases that buck this trend but I am talking basic flash for flash's sake. My suggestion is only use Flash for video or when text and images simply won't do.

Other aspects of content optimization

I won't pretend that there aren't other things you could do, but we are looking at the basics that will make the difference to a small business web site.

By applying these simple rules to every page of your web site you will see a difference in the way the search engines index and rank your web pages.

If you have an existing web site and want to see how it looks to Google, try this. Go to Google and type into the search box:

site:www.yourdomain
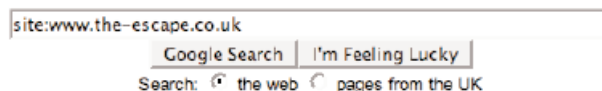
You may be amazed at what gets shown. Google may be indexing every page the same if you do not have different Titles and Meta Descriptions for each page.

Online Web Page Analyzer Tool

You can view how a search engine may see all the elements of your web page (in terms of content) with this straightforward tool we created at The Escape:

www.the-escape.co.uk/tools/pageanalyzer/

It breaks down the different sections of your web site, including the meta data and also shows you the saturation levels of your main key phrases.

Descriptive linking and navigation

So, we have established how to place content on a web page. Let's have a look at how you can link your pages together more effectively on your web site.

You should have pages on your web site that link internally to each other, hopefully, pushing a visitor towards your web site 'checkout page' - the goal. The most common way web pages link to each other on a web site is through navigation - but is this enough and are your navigation links descriptive?

What you call your links matter. This applies to what you name the links in your navigation and what you name the text within your content that links to other pages - anchor text.

Anchor text

Anchor text is the actual words that are used in a link. eg. If the text in the link to your services page says "What We Do", then "What We Do" is the anchor text.

Where people make mistakes with anchor text is in the very vague: **click here for more information** or **find out more**. I can just imagine a search engine robot pulling out it's wiry hair screaming "More information about what?"

Good use of anchor text (especially on external sites linking to your web site - and we'll come to that soon) can really benefit the page you are linking to - the target page.

Say you had some anchor text, it could be in the navigation, or it could be in the body content; and then say the word linking was "copywriting services" and it linked to a page about marketing - there's not as much relevance than if it linked to a page about "Web site Copywriting", especially if the target page had the title, the meta description and the H1 heading backing up the claim of the link.

That's why it is important to have descriptive anchor text that describes the page you are linking to - they match in message.

Consistency

Now, if that link happens over and over, ie. Google finds more links linking to that page with the anchor text "copywriting services", from within your web site or from other web sites, it is much more likely that it will increase the relevance of that page for the search term "copywriting services".

Internal linking is not as potent as external incoming links but it still counts.

So, the more relevant your internal linking in your web site the better. Specific anchor text links going to specific pages. Suddenly, Google can make even more sense of your web pages.

Navigation

Let's not delve into the design of your navigation but one thing to steer clear of is using images as buttons. Yes the "alt text" sits behind your navigation button but it won't be as potent or understandable as descriptive text based navigation - Case Studies, Our Services, etc.

Drop down navigation

Drop down navigation is a design feature that makes the the sub navigation of a section appear when a users moves their mouse over the main section navigation title.

One issue of overloading your navigation with drop down navigation (becoming used more widespread on web sites) is the amount of extra words you put on a page. You may not see them when you look at the web page in a browser, but the link text of every piece of navigation will be taken into consideration when deciding what the page is about - because they are in the source code.

One example I came across recently had more content (words) in the navigation (and sub navigation) than it did on the page content. The key message of the page was overshadowed by the navigation. Navigation in itself is bound to be more generic and can detract from your specific web page and the less "non-relevant text" you place on your page, including your navigation, the better.

Breadcrumbs

Breadcrumb navigation is a "where you are now" navigation that tends to sit at the top of the content of a page.

It's great for usability and theoretically, breadcrumbs could help your SEO cause, because your web site structure is included in the navigation,

eg. **Web site copywriting is an Online Service**... and you are creating additional internal links on your web site.

Breadcrumb navigation tends to be quite shallow, ie. it only adds a couple of extra pieces of text on your web, so it shouldn't overshadow your web page content.

In-line anchor text

Have you ever been watching the TV with your friends when the adverts come on? An ad comes up for [let's say] a car with some new feature. One of you may say in passing, "that looks good doesn't it?" Before you know it the next advert's on and the moment passes.

This is what happens when people read web pages. But, they love clicking if the moment is right. If the link highlights something more relevant to the reader than the rest of the content on the page, and they want to know more about it then why not give them the link?

From a user experience it's perfect, because they can choose whether they want to click or not - before the moment passes.

From your perspective it gives you the chance to add more internal links into your pages. Not too much so that your web page is overloaded, but enough to give people extra choice. It also gives you the chance to add in extra 'key phrase' relevant links to other pages - including other web sites.

Weight your links

There are two things to bear in mind with this approach. Firstly, you want to create site-wide links so they all point towards the most potent area of your web site. This helps tell the search engine what you think is the most important area of your web site.

Arguably this is your services or product section.

Secondly, it gives you the opportunity to mix anchor text as long as you keep the context. You could have links that point to your copywriting services page, which have phrases such as; copywriting services, our copywriters, writing copy for business, etc.

Putting It Together

A case study I use on a regular occasion is actually a small business selling to consumers (my wife's, in fact), and it illustrates the point of the content we have spoken about so far.

Truly Scrumptious Beauty is a beauty salon in Farnborough, Hampshire. The salon offers beauty treatments in this geographical area and all marketing is done through the web site:

www.trulyscrumptiousbeauty.co.uk

The web site is not overly designed but it does stick with the basic principles I have discussed so far.

clear structured navigation

clear 'call-to-actions'

anchor text
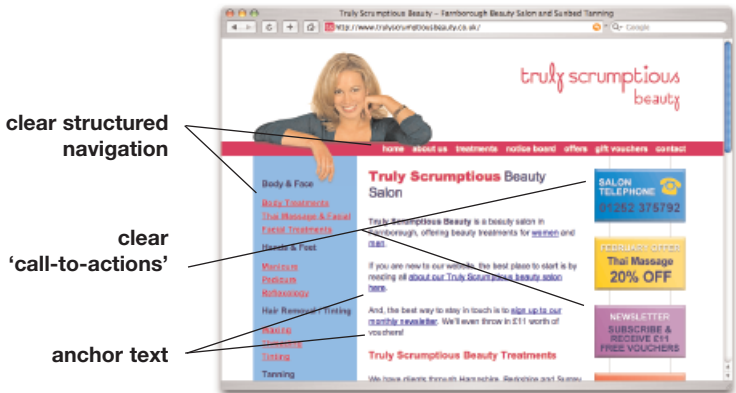
Specific service pages

To highlight the importance of the treatments on offer, we have established two things.

1. If people are looking for 'beauty salon', the home page will take care of that.
2. To cater to the treatment specifics, we focus each page on that potential enquiry, eg. 'manicures in Farnborough'

Behind the page

So, the page in question for manicures talks about manicures only, none of the other services (although they are in the content a little bit due to navigation).

The main elements of the code look like this:

```
<title>Jessica Manicures from Truly Scrumptious Beauty</title>

<meta name="description" content="Manicure and Jessica Nail
Treatments from Truly Scrumptious Beauty Salon in Farnborough,
Hampshire."/>

<h1>Manicures & Nail and Hand Treatments</h1>
```

You will notice that we have also mentioned the specific brand, "Jessica", that may also work with a query.

We also mention Farnborough and Hampshire because we are geographical in our service offering.

ie. If a person in Edinburgh is searching for a manicure, we wouldn't satisfy their criteria due to the hundreds of miles between us.

When we look at the keyword / key phrase saturation of the page, it looks like this:

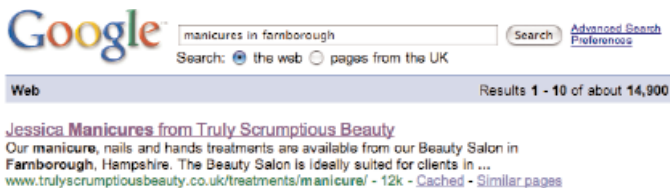| Keyword	Frequency (% of word total)	
jessica **	18	(3.4%)
manicure **	12	(2.2%)
treatments	11	(2%)
hands **	8	(1.5%)
treatment **	7	(1.3%)
hand	7	(1.3%)
nail	7	(1.3%)
manicures	7	(1.3%)
mens	6	(1.1%)
jessica prescriptive manicure **	6	(1.1%)
mins	6	(1.1%)
salon	5	(0.9%)
nails **	5	(0.9%)
beauty	5	(0.9%)
truly	5	(0.9%)
hampshire **	4	(0.7%)
hand treatment	4	(0.7%)
about	4	(0.7%)
truly scrumptious	4	(0.7%)
tanning	3	(0.6%)
massage	3	(0.6%)
body	3	(0.6%)
farnborough **	3	(0.6%)
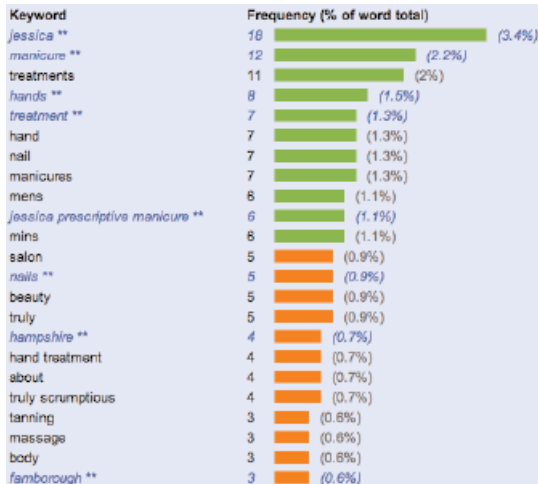
This approach allows us to effectively market that page to our more specific audience.

Google
manicures in farnborough   Search   Advanced Search
                                           Preferences
Search: ⦿ the web ○ pages from the UK

Web   Results **1 - 10** of about **14,900**

Jessica **Manicures** from Truly Scrumptious Beauty
Our **manicure**, nails and hands treatments are available from our Beauty Salon in
Farnborough, Hampshire. The Beauty Salon is ideally suited for clients in ...
www.trulyscrumptiousbeauty.co.uk/treatments/m**anicure**/ - 12k - Cached - Similar pages

This method of being specific with our sales message allows us to attract only relevant traffic.

#	%	Query	Position
	Top clicked queries The top 20 from which users reached your site, and the percentage of the top 20 queries represented by each click.		
1	16%	truly scrumptious farnborough	1
2	12%	waxing aftercare	2
3	11%	truly scrumptious	5
4	9%	truly scrumptious beauty	1
5	9%	aftercare for waxing	2
6	5%	massage farnborough	2
7	5%	eyebrow tinting	5
8	4%	sports massage farnborough	2
9	4%	truley scruptious in farnbrough	2
10	2%	beauty salons farnborough	2
11	2%	mens beauty	2
12	2%	sunbed in farnborough	2
13	2%	threading hair removal hampshire	2
14	2%	truly scrumptious salon	2
15	2%	waxing in farnborough	2
16	2%	beauty salons websites	7
17	2%	waxing treatments	7
18	2%	massage in farnborough	12
19	2%	beauty salon hampshire	13
20	2%	beauty salon	21

This is backed up by how Google sees the web site in Webmaster tools.

The chart shows the top 20 search queries that our web site shows up in, **that people actually click on**, and where we are in the Google UK rankings.

Although there are some vague searches in there, 50% of them have either **Farnborough**, or **Hampshire** in.

You could, quite rightly, argue that these are the searches we are being found for, what about the others?

That is a balance of time/budget, vs. reward and something you should always pay attention to as a small business.

In this case, the web site has two defined goals - enquiries and newsletter subscribers. We average about 40 enquiries a month and the newsletter subscriber list is growing at a rate of about 5-6% per month.

Based on value, the web site offers fantastic, measurable, return on investment compared to our older traditional marketing and advertising campaigns.

Part Two - Referrals

Summary

You may have heard the terms 'link building', 'reciprocal links', etc. and wondered what they mean. Perhaps you still subscribe to the old technique of e-mailing a Webmaster to ask that you link to each other? Let's go back to how Google ranks pages at a very basic level. Let's talk about authority and trust.

Have you seen the new movie with Daniel Day-Lewis?

It's 11 o'clock on a bright and crisp morning as I look out of the window. It's 24th February 2008 and tonight it's Oscar Award night. There is lots of coverage in the media about Daniel Day-Lewis and his performance in the movie "There Will Be Blood".

This film has been heaped with critical acclaim and an Oscar for the leading actor seems a cert. Of course, he is a well known and respected actor, who has already received an an academy award for his role in 'My Left Foot' and has appeared in a string of films such as "Gangs of New York" and "The Last Of The Mohicans".

The thing is, as an actor, Daniel Day-Lewis has credibility. Perhaps early in his career, before he had become well-known, he could have told you he was a great actor but he, **and more importantly we**, would not have had a frame of reference for his claims. Now, we have thousands of them.

What's more, some of the frames of reference are very authoritative. For starters, he already has an Oscar (he did also win this year, so now he has two) in recognition of his acting ability from the most prestigious

award committee in the industry. He has a back catalogue of films he has been in, which have also been critically acclaimed. We have seen for ourselves how good he is in other films.

Then there are film critics. We may not agree with all of them all of the time but they have credibility in what they do, critiquing films and acting performances, and so they carry weight. Put it this way, they have more weight when they say a film is outstanding than me or you.

All of this credibility adds up. And, it goes a lot deeper than I have high-lighted, but the idea, broken down into some very simple parts goes like this:

1. Firstly, we know that he is an actor. More specifically he is known for a certain type of film. Could you see him in an all out action film? So, in terms of the first part of this SEO book, he has established who he is and what he does, specifically.

2. He has track record - We may have seen one of his films and this gives us a frame of reference going back. He may not be your cup of tea, in terms of the type of film he makes and this defines his offering. On the other side of the coin, you may have already bought into him as an actor and when his next film is released you will watch it regardless; until he lets you down.

3. He has authority - He has his Oscars, his other awards and some successful films. He has a fan base. What's more, rather than take his word for it, he has critical acclaim. He has other people telling you how good he is; people who themselves have authority for talking about actors and films.

All in all, if Daniel Day-Lewis was a web site, he would have the right ingredients. He has the brand name, the offering, the authority and he has lots of other people telling the world how good he is.

So what about you?

Marketing a business used to be about convincing everyone else how good you are. Then along came the Internet with Bloggers and comparison sites that blew that all away.

No amount of clever PR, it would seem, can stop people ranting, letting off steam or simply just gossiping about your brand.

For instance, I just typed the search phrase "Dell" into Google and number six out of 454,000,000 pages is this listing about "Dell Hell":

My **Dell** hell | Technology | The Guardian
I wrote a blog post headlined, "**Dell** lies. **Dell** sucks." There was a method to my mad rant: I learned some time ago that you can search Google for any brand, ...
www.guardian.co.uk/technology/ 2005/aug/29/mondaymediasection.blogging - 59k -
Cached - Similar pages

On further searching for "dell hell" I find another 281,000 web sites. This is not an isolated incident but it does prove one thing. Consumers, and that includes your customers, have a voice; a voice that other people may listen to. Technology has also given them easy access to use their voice.

This means you can spout about how great you are to your hearts content and you can optimise your web site with specific content. But, people will be judging you on a whole range of merits other than what you tell them. They are looking for your Oscars, and your critical acclaim.

So how do you go about getting it?

Authority

So, you may be sitting there shouting, "yeh, yeh, yeh; but I am not a famous actor, or a big brand, what do I do?"

It's a valid point. The Daniel Day-Lewises, the Radioheads and the Arsenals of this world have **fans**. You could argue that there is a certain element of emotion that overrides logical thinking as they become fans and this doesn't translate to business.

What about Apple? Or Google? Yes, but these are consumer brands Craig; what about business-to-business?

Think about your current customers. Why do they use you... really? Are you the cheapest, the best quality or the market leader? These absolute claims are hard to quantify. Based in the service sector, I honestly think huge factors in business are personality and relationship.

Yes, you have to deliver a promised product or service, but the way you do it also comes into play. In the world of hardened business, people still prefer, and dare I say *like*, certain products and services. Some of the choices are rational but I would suggest that most of them are not. It still boils down to winning **people** over.

This approach requires a new style of marketing. A style that is much more about engaging people. If you can combine what you do (and you have to be good at it in the first place) with a way of telling people about it, in a way that they understand and care about; they will buy into your brand.

And, what's in it for them?

And so to search engine marketing

So what's this got to do with your web site and getting better listings in the search engines?

Based on the principle that Google rewards the most authoritative sites, we can assume that we need our web site to be be both recognised and credited.

The initial Google Page Ranking system was based on the way academic papers are written, and the citations they use. ie. A person writes an academic paper and cites other papers for reference. This boosts the authority of the original piece as a reference point and the more new papers written, that refer to a paper, the more the 'referred to' paper gets credibility.

This simple thought may lead you to think that to get good listings then, you need to get credibility on the web, with some quality incoming citations (links)... and you would be right.

Your next thought may be, as a small business, how are you going to do that when you are competing with so much authority on the web?

Who cares about me?

All things being equal on the web, no-one really cares about you. You are just one in a list of thousands, even millions, when it comes to a Google search result.

So, stop for a moment and think about how you use the web yourself - as a user. Think about the way you click around between sites; what you type into search engines; how you judge web sites in a completely irrational way, etc. Come on, we all do it. Surely you have sighed watching

a friend or colleague (or even worse, your mum) surfing the web because they do it differently to you.

Building authority through links

People linking to your web site is an extension of your search engine optimization/marketing efforts. But, you can't control this process; you can't make someone link to your web site.

But, if you can encourage people to link to **your** web site, somehow, this may lift you up in the search engine rankings. But, there are two main provisos.

Who is linking?

Firstly, who is linking plays a part. A link from a reputable and relevant web site is good; a link from your local butchers doesn't carry much weight; unless you are an abattoir, of course.

And, if you think about the citations on an academic paper; it's authoritative papers linking to the source, not you or I handing in our 7th grade homework.

Why they are linking to your site?

Another wider reaching issue is why people link to your web site and the words they link to you with in their anchor text. Arguably, if someone linked to your web site with the word 'sausage', and their web site was all about sausages, you would go up the rankings for that word. I am simplifying this idea somewhat but this is the basic principle.

The more specific the source and the more specific the anchor text, the better the link - and only if the words and messages tie in with yours.

Getting links

So, we have established that we need 'on topic' credible links from credible sources. How do we get them?

There are different schools of thought about how to get links and I will highlight a couple before I share what I believe to be the best way for a small business.

Paid links

Adverts and links that you pay for can be short lived. You pay someone for a link on their web site to yours and you get the visitors (if they click) and potential incoming links. There is an argument that Google does not like paid links and this may affect your rankings in the search results.

For short-term marketing campaigns, paid links, such as pay-per-click advertising can get you exposure. But, I would argue that they will offer less value over the long-term, especially as the web matures and advertising costs go up. This is already apparent with Google Adwords pay-per-click, with unrealistic amounts being 'bid' for keywords by lazy marketers with big budgets.

Reciprocal Links

This is the technique of swapping links with another web site. A web master (or marketer) tends to e-mail the webmaster at the other end to ask to swap links. With some web sites this could be worthwhile but it is time consuming to do. You also need to understand what weighting the other site has - you may be passing more benefits to the other site than you are getting back, which may actually drag down your ranking.

If you swapped links with an industry body, for instance, it may be worthwhile. If it is with a web site that is not subject oriented, it's probably not worth it.

Directory links

If I am honest, creating links from directories can be hit or miss but there are a few that are worth going for. I am assuming (for the sake of this small book and the fact that you are a small business) that you do not have the time to see which ones work for you and which ones don't. If you want more information about directories, I highly recommend the following resource:
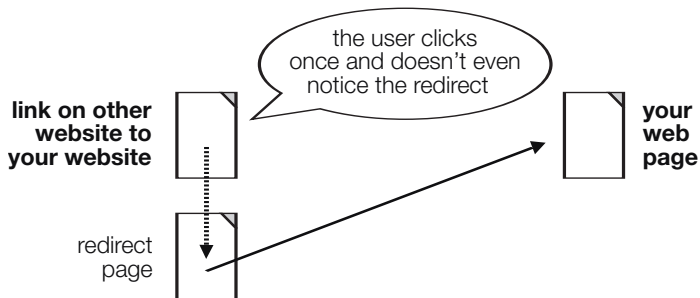
**SEO Book - SEO and Directories -
http://www.seobook.com/archives/001583.shtml**

When a link is not a link

One thing to watch out with on some directories, paid sites and people you are linking with in general, is how their link actually links to you.

Some links actually flit through an intermediate web page on the directory's server, meaning you may not get any link value.

the user clicks once and doesn't even notice the redirect

link on other website to your website

redirect page

your web page

There is also a way of creating **NoFollow** links, and more and more web sites use these to protect their own rankings. Basically, the link is tagged up to say to search engines, please ignore the fact that I am linking to this other web site, it's not important to mine. The standard style for this is a red back ground, **like this** .

Behind the scenes, in the source code, it looks like this, with the "a href" being the link address:

```
<a href="http://www.google.co.uk"
rel="nofollow">www.google.co.uk</a>
```

Checking links to your site and other peoples web sites

There are ways to check out who is linking to your web site.

One is to load Google Webmaster tools and include your web site. If you are not technical, I'd leave that one, but more information can be found on the Google web site:
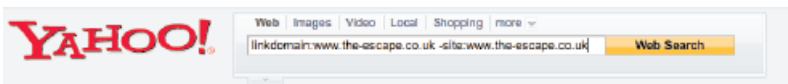
www.google.co.uk/webmasters

Another simpler way is to ask Google in their search box by typing in "*link:www.yourdomain.com*"
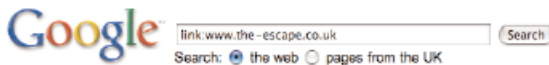
Or, in Yahoo:
"linkdomain:yourdomain.com -site:yourdomain.com"

Of course, you could also put your competitors web sites in to see who is linking to their web site. This digging may open up some opportunities.

My favourite way of finding links is by using Firefox and loading the **SEO For Firefox tool** from Aaron Wall of SEO Book: http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/seo-for-firefox.html

I have created a video that explains more on this subject: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62qubcF218w

Quality Content

In my view, the most sustainable way to build credibility and authority on the web for a small business is with quality content.

Quality content for me would include articles, white papers, Blogs, tools; anything that adds value for the user (your customer). It can help to elevate the way people see your business online, especially in the B2B market and that includes your existing customers as you offer them additional value.

Quality, useful content gives people a reason to want to come to your web site; it gives people a reason to share your web site with their friends, colleagues and peers. If optimized, it also gives Google some great pages to index in their results. If your content is really great, people may even link to it without being asked!

Would you read a company brochure?

I wouldn't, would you? If you answer yes, would you then go back and read it again a week later, or a month later? Of course not.

So think about a traditional small business web site: Home page, About Us, Services.... yawn! People may [skim] read it the first time but unless they take decisive action, there and then, they're off; and they may not ever come back.

Stop and have a quick think about the content you search for online - Updated news information? How to do something? The answer to a problem you have perhaps?

These are all areas that can be exploited for your online marketing. Your audience want knowledge and you if have it, why not share it?

If I am honest, I do struggle to convince traditional marketers that this is the way to go and I often hear the same arguments. Some of these reasons are valid but the vast majority of 'reasons why not' are based on old marketing ideas of control.

I don't want our competitors to find out what we are doing

Think about Google. Think about the billions of web pages out there. I can guarantee that 99.9% of the content is not unique in its core idea. What makes you so special?

As mentioned earlier in the book, creating a white paper about something you excel at, for instance, and publishing it on your web site, associates you with that thinking.

You may be scared to publish it just in case one of your competitors find it, but creating quality content is like farming with rich seeds. There are people on the web that crave information, many of whom have Blogs.

The very nature of people indicates that they will then go on to share this information. Maybe as an altruistic act, maybe just to show-off, but they will tell other people all the same. It's how social media became social.

And, if they don't find it from you, they will find it somewhere else and spread their message.

What should you write about?

Some businesses are more dynamic than others for sure, but every industry has something happening. What's more, so does your business. The more you begin to notice things you can write about the better you will become at writing attractive content.

Why not write about recent problems you have seen and how you over-came them? Remember, when you think of key words and phrases, to angle the 'story' from a users point of view - where is the value for them?

I have a small business customer that sells UPVC replacement windows. So, as marketers, we subscribe to the trade press; we check out Google News and Blog updates and we generate content based on what is happening in the glazing industries. There is quite a lot of innovation.

On top of that we create seasonal articles such as "How to save money on your heating bills this winter", and we check for topical stories such as climate change issues that relate to energy consumption, energy rat-ings on homes, and the growth of Home Information Packs in the UK. We have articles that discuss how much value new UPVC windows add to a typical home. These answer questions people will be asking.

Every industry has value added content opportunities that answer ques-tions.

## I don't have the time or money to create content

It's funny how advertising seems like a sane thing to do. A 'rational' cost that can be justified, compared to something less tangible such as creat-ing content.

An advert will get you a short, sharp exposure. A process that requires you to repeat it on a regular basis. There is also no credibility behind an advert. It's cold and it is there to sell. You know it, and so does the read-er.

Value added content on your web site is different. It allows you to culti-vate exposure in a credible way. If your content is relevant, you should

be answering the questions and dilemmas that your audience faces. You are answering their question at a time when they have the problem and are looking for it. It should create a **right-here, right-now, engaging connection**.

Your relevant article or Blog post should find it's way into a search engine listing pretty much straight away (if you have a good web site). It may then fade away after the immediate flourish, but, if it has quality that other people recognise, approve of, link to, and tell their friends about, it will then start to naturally grow, gaining a relevant listing in the search engine ranking pages (SERPS).
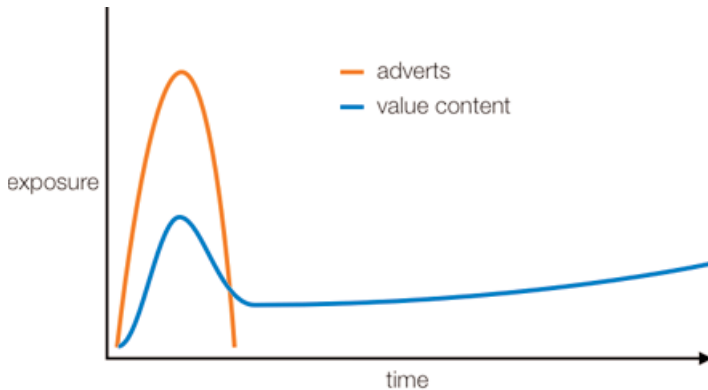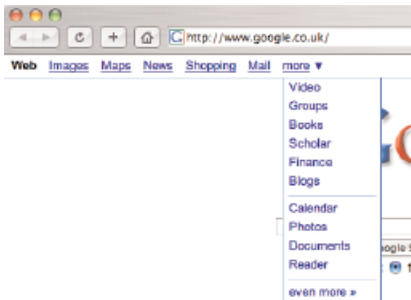

It's like planting a seed… in a sustainable forest of online profile. Corny, but true - your marketing begins to sustain it's own momentum and each credible piece can lead to another.

How to create content

Sourcing information

If you are wondering where to start, why not see who's writing what on the web? A good place to start is our old friend Google.

As well as the standard search in Google, you also have **news search** and **Blog search**.

News search also allows you to subscribe to "keywords" for news alerts by e-mail. By doing this, Google will send you an e-mail when a new news story comes up relating to your chosen word(s).

There is no shortage of content to be written. The more you write, the more opportunities you will find.

How often should I write?

It's definitely a case of quality over quantity, depending on your industry of course. The more time you have to craft your content, the better.

Start slowly and then build up, but only continue creating these articles if you see value the other side.

For example, I Blog for The Escape about 4-5 times per week, but, any Blog post worth deeper investigation may become an article on my web site.

The reason (and difference) for creating an article on my web site over a Blog post is the value it can create by 'not getting lost'.

A Blog is a great way to create ongoing content and commentary but yesterday's Blog post soon gets superseded and buried somewhat. By cherry picking the best quality posts and transferring them to a reference section of my web site, I am creating more of a library of books rather than news articles - books with a longer life.

But, I can't write

Most of us can write basic sentences but to really engage we need to make a decision. If you can't write, you may need to find someone who can. A person who can take the seeds of your idea and build a quality article.

There are many companies online that offer this service, some very cost-effectively in India and I admit to have never tried them so can;t comment. It is, however, an option and the cost to try might be low enough to test them out.

Also bear in mind how your content will actually be read. It is the quality of the information that is more important. A simple grammar and spell-check may suffice.

Take time to do some research beforehand and test your articles. If you are unsure on writing styles and skills, see how other people are doing it.

I personally have read many books on persuasive writing and have developed a style. It's not perfect, but it works, and, it's getting better.

Favourites include:

- We, Me, Them & It: How to Write Powerfully for Business and The Invisible Grail: How Brands Can Use Words to Engage with Audiences - both by John Simmons
- Can I Change Your Mind?: The Craft and Art of Persuasive Writing by Lindsay Camp
- www.copyblogger.com - Brian Clark's Blog

Ultimately, it's about how much you want to write your own content and the potential value it may offer your business in return. It is then your decision whether to learn yourself or outsource.

If you have the budget, a good PR agency may be able to write your content for you online, and then distribute it for you through traditional media as well.

Content Value

You may be wondering if it's worth the trouble, especially when the next book about SEO you read may contradict my advice. I'm not sure it would and I have my current experiences that keep pushing me in this direction but there are a lot of opinions out there.

With the rise in costs of pay-per-click, the hunger for information and value of natural search, there has never been a better time to engage with your customers through content.

If we go to my landing pages for The Escape web site (Quarter 1 - 2008) you will see that after the home page, the next five top landing pages (the first page that people come into my web site) are all quality content pages.
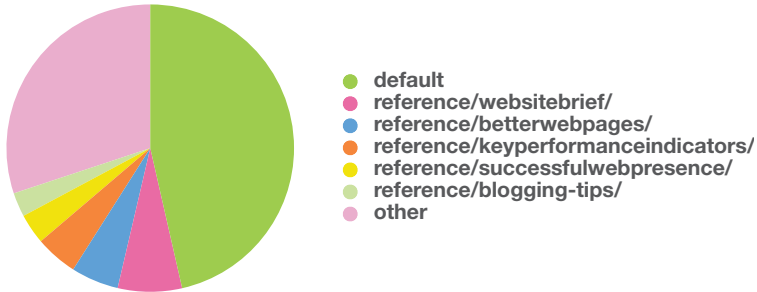
And then, of course, there is the added value that you can communicate and distribute new articles to your existing customers - engaging your current audience with more value, perhaps as an ongoing e-mail marketing campaign?

Example of content

www.magicmitre.co.uk - The Magic Mitre is a DIY tool for creating mitre joints. It is a patented device with a removable template that allows you to get the perfect angle when you are fitting skirting or crown mouldings, etc.

Think about how you would market the product and then wonder about the problems that a customer may have to want this product in the first place.

We spent a lot of time developing a "Top Tips" section showing how to cut mitre joints. The web site attracts visitors directly to pages that show them how to cut mitre joints in specific applications - coving, skirting, baseboard, etc. with additional Youtube videos - a mixture of content to attract them from search engines, and video to engage them when they land.

These additional 'top tip' pages account for approx 40% of the landing page views, ie. the first page that someone has seen, driven from search terms such as "cutting perfect mitre skirting", "cutting architraves", "how to cut the perfect mitre" and "measure angles tools woodworking".

In fact, over the past 30 days (March 08) the web site has been found for 403 different search terms.

Conclusion and Summary

As mentioned at the beginning of this book, delivering quality traffic makes sense when delivering a tangible return on investment. This does depend on your resources of your time and money as a small business, which is why I have focussed on the key points. But your web site optimization can be achieved very cost-effectively.

I truly believe that now, more than ever, low entry costs allow for any small business to create a relevant niche presence on the web, especially while so many companies are still getting it very wrong.

By writing the right words, in the right way and in the right place; and by producing some quality content, you will attract traffic that suits your business. By sticking to these simple principles, you will get a result.

You will no doubt receive, or read, additional information about web site optimization and some of it will be valid to you and your business, but these simple principles should be enough to deliver results.

About Craig Killick

I fell into web stuff mainly through a business that has been a big part of my life. I set up The Escape in 1998 with my partner, Robert Jones, and over the past ten years our consultancy has grown organically with our offering of creative, web build and online marketing for business.

In 2003 I become enamoured with using the web for marketing, mainly because of the measurability - something I crave as a small business owner. I emersed myself in learning through reading a number of influential books about SEO, web site design, usability and psychology and studying NLP for verbal communication methods. You could say I was self-taught, with a massive hand from some clever people who write. It's now a massive part of my life as I run a number of small projects through web sites.

Away from work, I am married to Claire and we are expecting our first child together. I also have two teenage daughters.

You can find out more about me at:

www.the-escape.co.uk/escapees/craigkillick

blog.craigkillick.co.uk

Feedback

If you have any feedback about this book, please feel free to get in touch with me at info@the-escape.co.uk