



I

Using Public Relations for Long-Term Success

1

Winning the SEO Battle

Search engine marketing is on fire. It's still one of the most cost-effective ways for businesses to attract new customers online. Unfortunately, it's become a fierce fight among marketers battling to maintain top positions while squeezing higher profits from their campaigns. Attracting profitable customers isn't the only benefit of getting top positions, however.

Many members of the media start their research with a keyword search. Companies at the top get the interview. Those that lack search engine visibility miss connecting with the press, as well as prospects.

For these reasons, understanding search engine optimization is key to everything else you do online. As a search marketing insider for over 10 years, I've seen where the opportunities exist for achieving top visibility. As an *Entrepreneur* magazine columnist and freelance writer, I know that the media is watching. Connecting with customers online is only partial success.

To maximize the impact of the most powerful Internet marketing strategies, you must leverage the Web for three audiences simultaneously: new customers, search engine spiders, and the press.

What Is Search Engine Marketing?

Search engine marketing consists of two complementary but very different campaigns: *search engine optimization* (SEO) and *pay-per-click* (PPC). SEO falls into online public relations because many consumers see search engines as editorial gatekeepers, displaying “the best” matches for their searches. Ha! We know differently. We know that we can influence those rankings, and we do so, in every way possible. While most people consider SEO to be PR, pay-per-click is definitely thought of as online advertising. I’ll talk more about PPC later in Chapter 8, but I want to focus on SEO now.

Through SEO, you can improve your Web page rankings in the organic search results (also called *natural search results*). Here’s how it works. The search engines send out *spiders* (also called *crawlers*) to scour the Web and collect Web pages for the search engines’ databases. Spiders build up a search engine’s library of Web pages, so to speak. Many search engines such as Ask.com, Google, MSN Search, and Yahoo! display both paid and organic results on the same page.

SEO is a tedious and often frustrating process because top rankings are never guaranteed, and when achieved, they need constant protection from the search engines’ ever-changing algorithms (a mathematical formula used to rank Web pages) and your competitors’ continual optimization efforts. Is it worth it? You bet! Who wouldn’t want free targeted traffic? The more clicks you get, the more profitable your campaign will be.

Admittedly, it’s harder to get top organic rankings today than it was a few years ago. There are more Web pages vying for your keywords. Plus, because more companies are outsourcing their SEO strategy to professionals, it’s become a case of SEO expert versus SEO expert. Is getting top rankings even possible? Yes. But now more than ever, you must start with a solid strategy, while avoiding problem practices or SEO professionals who spam their way to the top.

I’ll reveal the dominant strategies you need to make your SEO campaign successful, whether you manage this in-house or through an outside vendor. Because SEO is a moving target, I won’t go into great detail about today’s technical tactics because they could be obsolete by the time you read this book. But I will get a bit techie in the spam sections because the tactics I cover aren’t likely to stop being spam anytime soon.

Are you ready to attract fame, fortune, and fans? Then let's dive into search engine optimization by uncovering the first common problem area: your keyword strategy.

◆ **Tip:** Visit www.CatherineSeda.com for free resources and updated links to cool tools.

Think Theme

Because choosing keywords is the first step in search marketing, it's also the first place marketers make mistakes. Free tools such as Yahoo!'s Keyword Selector Tool, the Google AdWords keyword tools, and Good Keywords show you related keywords that could work for your business. WordTracker and KeywordDiscovery are subscription-based tools that can help you dig even deeper.

Not so fast! Simply getting keyword ideas and possibly an estimated volume of monthly searches for each keyword doesn't mean anything if you don't understand the importance of creating a killer keyword theme. Your SEO success starts here.

You can't just plunk keywords into your home page copy, thinking you're done. You've got to create a keyword theme for your entire Web site. Then you must assign supporting keywords to the pages you want ranked. Each page you want ranked essentially must stand on its own merits. In SEO, it's Web page versus Web page. Yet, each page must tie back into your site's overall theme. That's because a meaty site with many related pages helps individual pages get ranked.

Establish Relevancy

Creating a keyword theme is crucial for establishing relevancy. Relevancy is the #1 rule in SEO. Without it, techniques you use will either be ineffective or could be considered spam.

Here is an example of how to create a keyword theme. Say you're marketing gift baskets. Your primary product categories include baby gift baskets, birthday gift baskets, and holiday gift baskets. **Figure 1.1** shows a possible theme for the home page and three top-level category pages.



Figure 1.1 Creating a keyword theme.

See how each category page has its own theme, yet supports the main “gift baskets” theme? Don’t copy this model exactly because my repetitive use of the keyword phrase “gift baskets” is spammy. Excessive repetition of keywords on a page is a big no-no. I’m oversimplifying this example to demonstrate the concept of keyword theming.

Now that you understand how to do this for your own site, you’ll be well ahead of your competitors who are using keywords without a clue.

Before we move on, look at the Baby Gift Baskets page in Figure 1.1. An effective way to avoid a spam penalty is to use a keyword phrase that includes several keywords in it. For example, these are three possible keywords you could optimize to get organic rankings for “baby gift baskets”:

- ◆ Baby gift baskets
- ◆ New baby gift baskets
- ◆ Unique new baby gift baskets

Focus on the keyword “unique new baby gift baskets” for a minute. How many combinations of other keywords do you see within this one phrase? For starters, how about:

- ◆ Unique baby gift
- ◆ Unique baby gift baskets
- ◆ New baby gift
- ◆ New baby gift baskets
- ◆ Baby gift
- ◆ Baby gift baskets
- ◆ Baby baskets

If you add keywords in front of or behind your core keyword, you'll score rankings for additional keyword phrases without spamming! I'll discuss more about avoiding spam violations a little later on in this chapter.

Are you seeing how to "think theme?" This is a critical concept to understand. Yet, it's not widely discussed. Most of the resources on SEO discuss keyword tools or how to choose relevant keywords. Those are important points, too. However, creating a killer keyword strategy starts with creating a relevant keyword theme for your Web site.

Page Optimization

Now you can optimize your Web pages for your keywords. For starters, sprinkle keywords in the following places:

◆ **URL/File names**

It's probably not a good idea to change your primary domain name at this point. If you redesign your site, you could keep your domain name and place keywords in your file names. For example, **www.company.com/babygiftbaskets.html**.

◆ **Meta tags**

These include a meta title, meta description, and meta keywords. This information is placed in the HTML code of your site pages. The meta title and description often appear as your Web site's listing in the organic search results. Today, the meta keywords tag itself has no power; however, when used in conjunction with the meta title and meta description, it could help.

◆ **Heading**

A page heading is a text headline that is separated from the rest of your page copy. It gets the attention of humans and spiders. Geek speak coming...headings are **<h1>** to **<h6>** tags.

◆ **Alternate text**

This is text for an image that's put inside the HTML code. Instead of images, alternative text can be shown to people with text browsers, handheld devices, and screen readers for people with disabilities. Search engines see this text also.

◆ Page copy

You must have keywords in visible page copy to rank well. Generally speaking, more copy is better than less copy. A few sentences aren't enough. Write copy to help humans and spiders determine what the page is about.

I'm tempted to go into more detail, but I won't. There are way too many techniques to cover in one chapter of a book. Plus, there are no one-size-fits-all answers to the specific SEO questions that you want to ask. That's because each site has a different structure, is at a different level of SEO readiness, and is battling against different competitors. My goal is to tell you the chief strategies you need to know about.

Speaking of strategies, creating a keyword theme for your site will prepare you for developing site content that counts. Your content has a significant impact on your rankings.

Content Is King

The search engines love, love, love content. Because they can't understand images, they rely on content to determine what a Web page is about.

After you've identified the keyword theme for a page, you need to know how many times to use the keyword(s) assigned to it. Use keywords too many times, and you'll be busted for spamming. Don't use them enough, and you won't climb into the top rankings. It's a dilemma.

Keyword Density

This is where *keyword density* comes in. Keyword density is the relationship of a keyword phrase to the total number of words on a page. If there are 100 words on a page and seven of them are your keyword, then your keyword density is 7 percent.

This might surprise you, but there's no magic keyword density number.

You have to optimize your Web page based on your competitors' Web pages. If competing Web pages have an average keyword density of 2 percent and yours has 7 percent, your page could scream "SPAMMER OVER HERE!" to the search engines. Or, if the top ten pages have an average keyword density

of 7 percent and yours is 2 percent, your page won't be seen as equal to your competitors. Aim to fit in. A little above is fine, but don't try to kill your competition, or you will kill your page's ranking potential.

Here's a warning about keyword density. Look at the Web pages you're going to analyze. Spammers are often in the top ten rankings. If you include their pages in your analysis, you could be optimizing your pages for death. In the section on "Avoiding the Spam Police," I'll teach you what *not* to do so you won't be unfairly penalized for a spam violation. Also, refer to those tactics when evaluating your competitors.

Don't stress out over keyword density. Use it as a general guideline because the top ten Web pages fluctuate anyway.

Keep in mind that the search engines aren't ultimately your most important audience—your prospects and the press are. If your keyword density makes your page copy distracting, annoying, or illogical to humans to read, it's definitely too high—no matter what your competitors are doing.

Create Content

E-commerce sites generally have a problem when it comes to content. They don't have any—or at least enough of it. These sites have copy on the home page, but the supporting site pages tend to have just product images and links to the shopping cart. Without enough content, a spider can't tell if a home page about "baskets" should rank for "gift baskets," "picnic baskets," or "bike baskets."

To make matters worse, a Web page with a very high link-to-copy ratio raises another problem. It could be misinterpreted as spam because link farms and Web rings tend to have this characteristic. Those sites have little or no content, just a lot of links to boost the link popularity score of sites they link to. (I'll cover link popularity in the next section.) My point is, if most of the words on your site pages are hyperlinks, that's bad. You need to add relevant content. Here are a few solutions:

- ◆ **Add content to your product category pages.** For example, add content to www.company.com/babygiftbaskets.html. This copy will tell spiders and humans what this category of products is all about. The links on this page can take them deeper into your site.

- ◆ **Create and optimize content-only pages and then put them at a top level of your site's structure.** For example, you could create www.company.com/babygiftideas.html, or put your Baby Gift Ideas page inside a directory that might look like www.company.com/babygiftbaskets/. Spiders don't crawl more than a few levels deep, which is why juicy content pages need to be at a top level. A page inside www.company.com/products/newproducts/baskets/baby/giftbaskets won't likely be found by spiders.
- ◆ **Create a sitemap, which is a Web page that lists the URLs of key content pages within your site.** Put this page at a top level of your site (for example, www.company.com/sitemap.html). Spiders will find this page and then crawl the pages you link to. And humans will find this index useful, too.
- ◆ **Consider feeding individual products pages to comparison shopping engines.** I'll refer to these engines as shopping communities in this book, such as BizRate, NexTag, PriceGrabber.com, and Shopping.com. Product pages are usually too deep within a site to be found by spiders anyway.

◆ **Note:** *One of my e-commerce clients showed me how a much smaller competitor with a cheesy-looking Web site outranked hers. My client's product inventory was much bigger, and her Web site was beautifully designed. However, along with other differences, my client's competitor had significantly more content on both his home page and top-level pages. So, I proposed that one of my client's action items should be to write "how-to" articles for her site, in order to educate potential customers and act as search engine spider bait. She needed Web pages with copy to balance out her Web pages that had mostly product photos and links.*

Let me bring up an important point about creating content pages. As I already mentioned, make sure that your copy serves your human audience. An educational page will rank far better in the organic search results than one created just to trick the search engines.

And remember to write content to lead your prospects into action or to invite the press to contact you. When it comes down to it, a #1 ranking doesn't matter if it doesn't generate new business. Include links to other resources

on your site and, of course, to relevant products or services. That's an effective landing page for SEO—one that ranks well, brings in new visitors, and persuades them to take action.

Creating a keyword theme and relevant content make your Web site ready to be crawled by the search engine spiders. These are two of the three most powerful strategies in SEO. Yet the third one might have the biggest impact on your rankings—and that would be “popularity.” The search engines will reward your site for being popular.

Popularity Matters

One way search engines determine how to rank Web pages is through link popularity. This term refers to the quantity and quality of links pointing to your Web site. High link popularity suggests your site is an expert resource, worthy of higher rankings than other sites.

Link Building Steps

There are many ways to get good links. Here are four simple steps for getting started.

1. Identify high-ranked sites.

Start with the keyword phrase you want to be ranked for most. Run a search for it in Ask.com, MSN Search, Google, and Yahoo!. Check out the pages at the top of the organic results. Skip direct competitors. Choose professional-looking sites or blogs that have good-quality content similar to yours in theme.

2. Request an inbound link.

E-mail is usually the most efficient way of asking for a link. This provides an e-mail trail, too. Avoid writing a generic-sounding link request because your e-mail could be blocked by spam filters or deleted by recipients. Instead, personalize and customize your e-mail. Include reasons why the recipient should link to your Web site and how your Web site could serve their visitors.

3. Hyperlink keywords in your description.

Ask for your company name and a description to be put on your link partners' sites. Here's the secret step: *Include your keyword in your description*

and hyperlink it to your site. Why? Spiders follow links on the Web. Keywords linked to your site get associated with your site. This is one of the critical steps that many business professionals don't know about—hopefully, your competitors!

4. Use relevant landing pages.

Think “keyword theme” for a minute. You'll want sites and blogs to link to the page you're optimizing. Don't link them all to the home page. Use the most relevant page instead.

Google's PageRank can help you choose your link partners. PageRank is Google's system for ranking a Web page based on the quantity and quality of Web pages that link to it. The scoring scale is 0 to 10, with 10 being the best. Basically, the higher a page's PageRank score, the more you want a link from it because Google likes it.

You can download Google's toolbar, visit a Web page, and mouseover the PageRank bar in the toolbar to reveal the score.

A higher PageRank score doesn't equal a higher ranking, but it's a pretty important vote from Google, which certainly helps. Just don't rely exclusively on a PageRank score because the toolbar's data isn't very reliable.

Top Five Bad Link Neighborhoods

A discussion about link popularity isn't complete without warning you about “bad neighborhoods.” You should link to other sites because an authority site does (get more links in than out, however). And that's the site you want to emulate. Spiders like expert sites.

But a link to a bad neighborhood can hurt your rankings. A site that offers little or no content, just a ton of links, is bad. Remember, spiders value content and relevancy. So, a lack of those two qualities should tip you off. Here are the top five kinds of neighborhoods to steer clear of:

1. Web rings

A Web ring is a group of Web pages that only link together. One page links to another, which links out to another.

2. Link farms

A link farm consists of a group of Web pages that all link to each other. Most of the time, a link farm doesn't contain much content, only links.

3. Free-for-all sites

A free-for-all site allows people to submit their URL to a link directory. These sites might collect your e-mail address for spamming purposes.

4. Link-infested directories

A link-infested directory may be focused on a particular topic, but it contains little or no content, just a bunch of links. Directories generally accept new link submissions, if relevant to the directory. (The major search engine directories such as the Open Directory Project and Yahoo! Directory are fine, even beneficial.)

5. Guestbooks

A guestbook might allow participants to include a link to their sites or an e-mail address. Some SEO spammers have created software programs to post links to thousands of guestbooks at a time.

Insider Insights: Chris Sherman



Chris Sherman is president of Searchwise LLC, a Boulder, Colorado-based Web consulting firm, and executive editor of SearchEngineWatch.com.

What's the #1 mistake marketers make with SEO?

Thinking it's "too hard" or "too expensive." Even basic blocking and tackling (good titles, copy, link campaign) can be enormously effective. And for many Web sites, once optimization has been done, it can pay dividends for years with minimal ongoing cost.

What's your favorite simple but powerful tip?

Leverage those title tags! No matter how sophisticated SEO becomes or how many changes the search engines make to their algorithms, a good title remains crucial—not just for good ranking, but as a powerful call to action for searchers that should compel people to click on the result link.

How has SEO helped your business?

Since I've been writing about SEO from the beginning, I've leveraged my knowledge into writing, speaking, and consulting engagements. Ironically, I do little SEO work on my own site—I don't have time!

Notice any commonalities here? Most of these bad neighborhoods don't offer content, just links. Although guestbooks have content, it's not the right kind. What's the #1 rule for SEO? You got it: relevancy. Because anyone can create or post to a guestbook, the content isn't often relevant to much of anything.

And, in case you're wondering, blog spamming isn't a good idea either. Because blog marketing can enhance your SEO efforts, in the past few years blog spamming has replaced guestbook spamming. Blogs are actually better targets for spammers than guestbooks because good blogs are content rich and topically relevant. Don't be afraid to participate in blogs. Just be careful. If you post your relevant comments and your URL or e-mail address on a few blogs, you should be fine.

All right, you now know the essentials of improving your link popularity while avoiding bad neighborhoods. Think about getting links to and from content-relevant, quality sites and you'll be on the right path. Ethical linking takes time, and it's worth it.

Unfortunately, there are more tactics that are serious spam violations. Make sure that you, your Webmaster, or the SEO professionals you're planning to hire don't use any of those tactics, which I'll cover in the next section. You don't want to be caught by the spam police. Not being in a top ranking isn't nearly as bad as not appearing in the displayed search results at all.

Avoiding the Spam Police

The scary thing is that some spam works—until you're caught.

Spammers who play on the dark side of search with "black hat" SEO techniques often buy up domains for a "churn-and-burn" strategy. They use spamming tactics to shoot to the top of organic results. They hope their rankings last long enough to make money as an affiliate, ad publisher, or SEO marketer.

When a spam domain is caught and banned by the search engines, it's been burned. Spammers focus on their other domains. The churn-and-burn approach is not a healthy move for business owners. You never want to mess with your primary domain like that.

I'm going to assume that you're interested in playing by "white hat" rules. I'm going to share the worst spam violations so you can make sure you, or your SEO team, don't accidentally do something dangerous.

Seven Spamming Sins

In addition to the link spamming tactics discussed in the previous section, here are a few totally “old school” tactics; if you're caught using them, not only will you be penalized by the search engine spam police, but you also might be laughed at. Nobody wants that.

Don't use the following tactics:

1. Doorway pages

Also called *gateway pages*, *entry pages*, *hallway bridges*, *bridge pages*, or probably half a dozen other names, doorway pages are created for spiders, not visitors. In fact, they're often hidden from visitors and contain links into your Web site that search engines follow.

2. Meta refresh tags and redirects

A meta refresh tag, which is placed inside the HTML code of a Web page, can be used to redirect people automatically from one page to another without requiring them to click a link. Sometimes, a redirect is necessary.

For example, if you completely redesign your Web site and all of the URLs change, you'll want people who find your old URLs to be automatically redirected to your new URLs. But unfortunately, because spammers often optimize a page for high-traffic keywords and then use the meta refresh tag to send people to a completely irrelevant Web page, your site could be unfairly penalized if you use a meta refresh tag this way. So instead, use a server-side redirect, called “301” to tell the search engines the old URLs have been permanently changed to the new ones. Speak to your geeks, and they should set this up without causing you any pain whatsoever. Internet geeks are gods.

3. Duplicate content

Putting the same, or even similar, content on different domain names is considered to be duplicate content. The search engines don't want sites with the same content polluting their organic results. A previous client of mine tried this, even though I told him not to. Remarkably, his primary domain was not penalized, but none of his duplicate pages were indexed, even though the spiders did come check them out.

4. Information pages

Because surfers and spiders value content, a domain name used as a single information page doesn't provide value. Don't take the dozens of domains you bought, post one page of content on each of them,

optimize each for a keyword, and then link them all back to your Web site. Spiders will smell spam.

5. **Hidden text**

The search engines can easily spot keywords camouflaged into the Web page's background color, in hidden links, and anywhere else that would not be easily seen by visitors. (Meta tags are fine because visitors can view the source code.) And just because you catch your competitors using hidden text doesn't mean you should. If your competitors jumped off a cliff...well, you know the rest.

6. **Tiny text**

Making text super tiny so that visitors can't really see it, but technically it's not hidden, doesn't cut it either. Tiny text is spam, so don't go there.

7. **Keyword stuffing**

Keyword stuffing, also called *keyword loading* or *keyword spamming*, is the overuse of keywords. (Refer back to the section "Content Is King" for more details on proper optimization.) Here's a quick way to tell if you are keyword stuffing: If what you're writing doesn't read well to humans, you're stuffing. Think humans before spiders.

There are more SEO "dos" and "don'ts," but if I overwhelm you now, you might give up and not do anything I recommend in this book. Actually, hiring an SEO consultant or firm is a pretty good idea unless you, or your team, want to become an SEO warrior. Unfortunately, I hear from business owners who get burned by SEO firms all the time. However, business owners also need reasonable expectations if they don't want their SEO firm spamming. In the next section, I'll shed light on what you can, and can't, expect from a search engine optimization firm or consultant.

SEO Professionals: Snakes and Saints

Choosing an SEO consultant or firm is challenging. Unlike choosing a Web site designer, you can't really see what you're getting. Will search engine spammers tell you they spam? Not likely. But I have talked to a few spammers who admit and proudly say they do "black hat" SEO because that gets them clients looking for an instant traffic jolt at any cost. Besides spammers, some poor-quality SEO professionals also use bad tactics to cover their inability to do the job right.

Assuming you don't want to put your site in jeopardy, which I believe you shouldn't do, here are some questions you should ask potential vendors in order to sniff out potential spammers.

What about pricing? It's all over the map. Quality SEO firms charge thousands or tens of thousands of dollars a month. Some SEO consultants charge hundreds or thousands of dollars an hour for sharing their secrets with your team. Just remember, if the price sounds too good to be true, it's probably spam.

By the way, because SEO professionals must often sign nondisclosure agreements with their clients, you won't likely see a full client list on the vendor's Web site. Trust your intuition. If you get a funny feeling something ain't right during your conversations, run away...fast.

Questions to Ask SEO Professionals (and Answers)

Before you sign a contract with an SEO consultant or agency, do your research. Otherwise, you could accidentally hire spammers. Here are essential questions to ask potential vendors:

What performance guarantees do you make?

The answer correct answer is "none." Organic rankings are never guaranteed. Period. Organic rankings take months to achieve, and they're in a constant state of flux. Nobody can guarantee traffic either. If they say they can, they're either doing PPC instead of SEO or redirecting traffic from Web sites they've already optimized.

Will I need to change my Web site?

Absolutely. Your keywords have to be in your Web pages. Very likely, you'll also need to add more content. Anyone who says you don't need to do a thing to your site is either link spamming or redirecting traffic from optimized sites.

What's your linking strategy?

Link popularity is such an important part of SEO that this component must be addressed by whomever you interview. Ask vendors to describe their process of finding Web sites, communicating the link request, and what you'll need to do. None of this should be top-secret information. What they say should give you confidence that they're taking time to get high-quality, content-relevant Web sites to link to yours.

What kind of reports will I receive?

A significant chunk of SEO work on your Web site happens in the first few months. That's why many SEO professionals require a 6-, 12-, or even 24-month agreement. However, even though it may take months to see your site climb into top rankings, you should have routine communication with your vendor. You might receive ranking reports, as well as revenue reports. (ClickTracks, WebSideStory, and WebTrends are a few Web analytics companies whose reports can track sales from organic search.)

Spotting Snakes

I've had my own not-so-fun experiences with SEO snakes. Once upon a time, I was the vice president of online promotions for a Web agency. In the late 1990s, the agency outsourced a few clients' SEO campaigns to other firms while the agency was developing its own SEO program. We caught one of the SEO firms pagejacking, which involves stealing content from other top-ranked Web sites to get a client higher rankings. Not good. After we had fired that firm, its pagejacking tactics were later exposed by the press. Another SEO firm that wined and dined us practically disappeared once we signed the contract. We discovered later that the firm was selling an SEO service that never existed. A lack of reporting and customer service in both cases prompted the agency's investigation of, and ultimately firing of, both firms.

With those experiences under my belt, I thought I could spot SEO snakes once I became a consultant. Focused on speaking and training, I decided to recommend several SEO firms to my clients who wanted to outsource their campaign. While launching my business, a smooth-talking SEO salesman won me over with his enthusiastic talk of technology. Sigh. He burned at least two of the three companies I sent his way. Again, the lack of reporting tipped off the clients.

My own scary stories reveal the darker side of this industry. Good clients can get burned. You can protect yourself to some degree by asking the questions I've included here and being wary of firms that say they use any of the aforementioned serious spam violations as part of their strategy. Before you sign a contract, however, ask for a few references. Finally, make sure the SEO firm has a routine reporting system and follows it once you're a client. Unfortunately, sometimes it takes several months to realize you've hired a snake.

The Saints Come Marching In

Hold on. Now I've got to give praise where it's due. Many SEO professionals are saints. They're heroically battling against search engines and competitors to get your Web site to the top of the organic search results. There's no guarantee of success or of maintaining it once it's been achieved. It's an ongoing battle.

Okay, I realize that saints aren't known for their warlike ways. Maybe the "good guys" are more like knights. But "Knights and Snakes" isn't as catchy of a subchapter heading. However, if you prefer to think of the good SEO professionals as knights fighting for your Web site's visibility in the search results, go ahead. It's a fun metaphor.

While SEO saints are out to do good work, they're sometimes burned by prospects and clients. First, bad prospects request meeting after meeting to pick the brains of the good guys, never signing a proposal. Not cool. Bad prospects also demand a proposal that specifically details every tool and technique that will be used. Um, SEO professionals won't give up their hard-learned expertise. No way. And bad clients expect top ten rankings for all of their keywords within 30–60 days, without spamming, of course. That's ridiculous.

I once spent about 30 minutes evaluating a friend of a colleague's site and e-mailing her some SEO recommendations. I think this woman wanted a button that would instantly fix her lost Google rankings because she replied that her site wasn't important enough to do the kind of work I was proposing. Although I had volunteered my time, I was still irked by her response. Hopefully, by sharing my story, you'll understand the challenges search marketers face.

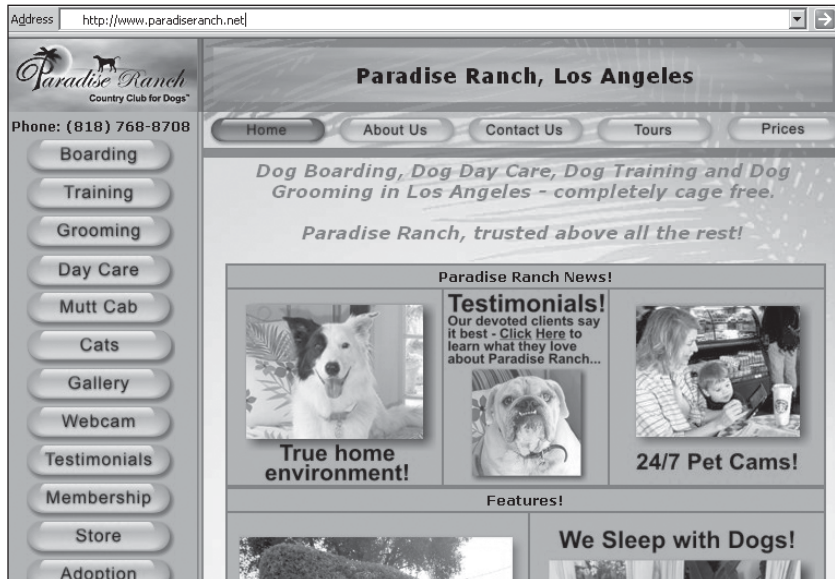
Let's get back to the good stuff. The topic of search engine optimization isn't complete without a "Success Story." I worked hard to collect a cross-section of companies to feature in this book. And as you might imagine, it wasn't easy convincing my clients and colleagues to share their hard-learned lessons with the public, possibly their competitors. Fortunately, my pleading paid off!

Paradise Ranch Country Clubs for Dogs demonstrates how niche businesses can rise to the top quickly with SEO. More importantly, it sheds light on an emerging trend I'll cover later in this book: the localization of search.

continues on page 22

Success Story

Paradise Ranch Country Club for Dogs



URL: www.ParadiseRanch.net

Contact: Richard Jenkins (www.WebSearchEngineer.com)

Title: Search Marketer

◆ Goals/Challenges

What were your goals for doing SEO?

Unless people knew the URL, nobody could find the Web site for relevant keywords in the organic search results. Our goal was to get Paradise Ranch to rank in the top spots for dog care services in Los Angeles (dog boarding, training, daycare, and grooming).

What challenges/concerns did you face implementing the campaign?

First, we had to redesign the Web site because it consisted of three cheesy pages that offered no relevant value to potential clients. We knew we needed quality content for the search engines, too. But before we jumped into SEO, we invested in educational resources and conferences because we were worried that

we might accidentally use spamming tactics if we didn't know the search engine guidelines and rules.

◆ Strategy

Describe your implementation strategy.

We created different Web site landing pages for Paradise Ranch's main services: dog boarding, dog training, and dog grooming. We optimized each of these pages, and others, for relevant keywords. Because the dog ranch is based in Los Angeles, we focused on optimizing phrases that include "Los Angeles."

How long did it take to launch your SEO campaign?

SEO never stops! Okay, our site redesign and initial optimization of about 12 pages took about 30 days.

What problems or surprises did you encounter, and how did you resolve them?

We learned not to throw all of the keywords on the home page. That borders on spam, and adding too many keywords to one page dilutes the page so it ranks for nothing. Early on, we also made a mistake of optimizing the site for broad, highly competitive terms. Using geographically targeted keywords in SEO and PPC is a much easier and more profitable way to go. While waiting for our SEO efforts to kick in, we did geo-targeted PPC to get instant traffic.

◆ Results

What results did you achieve?

Within the first 90 days, the site landed top three positions for primary keywords in Google, MSN, and Yahoo!. Regional keyword targeting was key to our success. Paradise Ranch's business boomed. And because the cost-per-lead was so low, the ranch cut two print advertising campaigns that brought in minimal business, if any. We still do PPC because it's profitable, but we've reduced our bids or stopped bidding on expensive keywords that Paradise Ranch dominates in the organic search results.

What's your #1 recommendation for SEO marketers?

Geo-targeting is gold. There's less competition, and it's easier to achieve top organic rankings faster with regional keywords than with broad keywords.

continued from page 19

Regionally based companies can jump into search marketing without losing their shirts. And national companies can reap higher profits by tailoring their SEO and PPC campaigns to targeted communities. Jump on the local search wave, and you'll likely invest a lot less time and money for high-converting search campaigns.

Tips to Remember

Whether you're managing your SEO campaign in-house or outsourcing it, you now know the three most critical strategies you need to create a successful campaign: keyword theme, relevant content, and link popularity.

You also have a list of link and site spamming tactics to avoid. This list, and the questions for interviewing SEO professionals, should help you connect with the "white hat" optimizers, if you decide to enlist some help.

The discussion of SEO doesn't end here. Throughout this book, I'll reveal tips for optimizing your online marketing opportunities to seduce spiders while catching customers and pleasing the press. Writing articles for the Web does all this and makes you "The Expert."