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5 Search Engine Mistakes Not to Make

If you want to improve your search engine rankings, first fix these critical errors that can make your site invisible on the internet.

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By Bill Treloar

People searching for your products or services on the Internet can be an important source of new [customers](#) for you. Because someone searching for what you sell is already "sold"—they're looking to buy. Where else can you find that kind of qualified sales lead?

Since most people give up on a search if they don't find what they're looking for in the first three pages of the search engine results, your web site needs to get ranked in those top three pages—and the higher, the better.

But there are five common characteristics that can relegate even the most attractive and compelling site to the search engine hinterlands. Many nice-looking sites show up on page 72 of the search engine results instead of on page 1 or 2 because they make one or more of the following five critical mistakes.

1. Insufficient content. Your web site needs to have at least 200 words of keyword-rich text per page. Search engines determine what your web page is about based on the words you use on the page. A page that's mostly product photos may be very meaningful to someone shopping for those items. But the search engines have no way of understanding what's in those pictures—they need text content to do their jobs.

Your text needs to use the keywords that people will search for. If you're an exterminator and your site talks at length about "exterminators", "pest exterminators", "insect extermination", and "rodent infestation," the search engines will understand that your site is about those

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terms. But if someone searches for "pest control," your site won't show up unless you use that phrase on your site, too.

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2. Use of frames. Creating frames is a technique that webmasters use to simplify their work and to help ensure a consistent appearance across all the pages of a web site. For example, your site designer may have created an outside "frame" for your page that has a top border with site identification, logos and so on. It may also have a left side border with links to the various pages on your site. And it may have a bottom border with contact information, a copyright statement and links to things like a privacy statement. In frames, the "meat" of the pages, where the real content is, is the area enclosed by those borders, and that's the only part that changes as you go from page to page.

Unfortunately, search engines may have difficulty moving around in a framed site and may fail to add all of your pages to their listings. And pages that are missed will never show up in the search engine results when people search for your keywords.

A more important problem occurs when the content pages do show up in the search engine results' pages. That's because when a searcher clicks on the link in the search engine results, it brings them to the content part of the page. Just the content part, which doesn't include the outside frame where site identification appears and where the links are that visitors need to find your contact information or the page where they can place an order. The simplest solution? Simply avoid using frames.

3. Graphics that include text. Because different visitors to your site have different fonts installed on their computers, the only way to ensure that the text on your web pages looks exactly as you want it—the size, font, line breaks and so on—is to include it in a graphic. And often such text looks really great.

Unfortunately, search engines can't tell if that graphic says "REALLY Cheap Widgets" or if it's a photo of your new puppy. Words in graphics are wasted on the search engines. In order to understand that your page is about "really cheap widgets," they need to find those words in plain text on your page.

In a similar fashion, navigation buttons that include words also can't be read by search engines. So what should you do? Include keywords in the links to pages on your site. This will help the search engines understand that those pages are relevant to those words. So either replace your navigation buttons with plain text links to the pages on your site, or supplement them with a redundant set of plain text links somewhere else on your page.

4. Dynamic content. Dynamic web pages are most often found on [e-commerce sites](#) that have numerous pages featuring hundreds of products. (Dynamic pages are constructed "on the fly" from a database of product information and can often be identified by the presence of a "?" somewhere in the page address.)

Regrettably, dynamic pages are often ignored by search engines for a number of technical reasons. One way to fix this problem is to create topical pages that aren't dynamic. For example, you may sell many varieties of both tabletop widgets and portable widgets. By creating a static page (a "normal" web page that's not created by your database) for tabletop widgets and another for portable widgets, you can use your essential keywords on those pages and still link to your dynamic pages to display individual products. Your dynamic pages are unlikely to be seen by the search engines, but your static, topical pages describing your selection of tabletop and portable widgets should.

5. Insufficient link popularity. Almost all the major search engines factor into their rankings some measure of the number and quality of other sites that link to yours. That's a reflection of their belief that good web sites don't link to other web sites that are worthless.

If lots of high quality sites link to your site, the chances are that you have a better site than one without any incoming links. Of course, you might be comparing your well-established site to a brand new site no one knows about yet, but over time, it seems to work out that better sites have more incoming links. And all other things being equal, a site with a lot of

incoming links will be ranked higher by the search engines than a site with fewer incoming links. And a site with no incoming links may be dropped entirely from some search engines.

Try to obtain links from web sites that complement yours but that don't compete with you. Investigate directories that list sites in your line of business. And be prepared to offer to link back to those sites in return for a link from them to you.

If you can refrain from making these 5 critical mistakes, you can avoid earning an abysmal search engine ranking. Being *visible* on the web is the first step to being *found* on the web. And while you may still need search engine optimization to obtain rankings in the top three pages of searches on your important keywords, you first need to make sure you're not condemned to page 72 by these five critical errors.

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