WEB PRO

Search

The secret to SEO is subtlety and balance.
Mark Buckingham shows you how to develop a way with words

Keyword density: writing great copy

Let's be honest: is your web copy a lifeless, self-centred affair, brimming with keyword repetition and lacking that all-important emotional connection? We know keywords are important, but the extra traffic you'll obtain through your SEO efforts could be wasted if you don't put your users first. Getting hung up on keyword density and proximity could render your prose repetitious and prosaic – and when was the last time we engaged with a site that did little more than ram its self-centred message home?

Of course, being verbose is a useful rule of thumb, but it's not always immediate – striking an ideal balance will require a re-draft or two. When writing web content, I tend not to worry too much about keyword density methodologies and keyword repetition any more. I find that writing good, creative copy and being mindful of the primary keywords relevant to each page (in the title, headers, sub-headers, body copy, link text and so forth) usually works just fine.

Arbitrarily basting your copy with search terms and synonyms is likely to jar with your reader, if not send them swiftly elsewhere. Granted, a failure to mention your prized key terms at least once or twice may also mean your site is invisible for that search term, but if you don't respect the unspoken laws of balance, subtlety and honesty when crafting web text, your efforts could be wasted.

Knowing and implementing the phrases that people search for is key to SEO – but excessive repetition could dilute your message and, at worst, leave your users clicking fervently for something more palatable. See, I've mentioned the word 'repetition' four times now – get my drift? ●

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How to... SEO and the user experience

Expert advice

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SEO and the user experience should be integral to the design of any website. Imagine you are the user and try to view things from their perspective. Today's users want information quickly; obstacles such as poor navigation and lack of guidance will render your site poor in comparison to your competitors'. No matter how good content is, it has to be presented in a clear and logical fashion. A thoughtfully planned site that can easily be navigated and is intuitive to use will help build and develop the organic SEO of your site.

1 Ensure that your website has a clear navigational structure
A logical hierarchical navigation, where subsets of content are easily found, is always essential. Never allow the user to get lost by leading them down a blind alley.

2 Adopt a consistent style for any links
Make sure that links you include are treated in the same way by underlining or using a different colour to draw attention to them.

3 Provide text links whenever you use image rollovers
If you use image rollovers, make sure you provide text links somewhere on the page, typically at the bottom.

4 Include meaningful 'alt image' tags
Provide succinct, informative alt image tags that accurately reflect the subject of the image and content of the page.

5 Present your page copy carefully
Organise the structure of page copy in a clear and logical way, using headers and sub-headers to break up large sections of text. Pay particular attention to your page titles, including the primary keyword or key phrase that's relevant to that page.

6 Include a site map
The inclusion of a site map should be a basic requirement for any site, particularly for large sites where a 'drill-down' of information is required.

To summarise, if you create a user-friendly environment, then many of the basic SEO requirements will also have been met.

How to ...
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