

# MasterClass: Search Engine Optimisation, 10 Steps to Success

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SEO Master Class: 10 Steps To Success

By Phil Robinson

SEO is complex, but it does not need to be. As with any strategic activity if you develop a methodology or process you can give yourself a pre-defined set of stages which drastically simplifies the process.

Without a process, where do you start?

Perhaps start some keyword research on Overture's Search Term Suggestion Tool and pack your meta-tags and title-tags with some relevant keywords... a complete waste of time!

Due to the mystique of SEO and tons of articles written on small elements of search engine optimisation and marketing, I decided it was time someone wrote an article that dealt with the big picture. Companies that cannot afford to outsource their SEO to an expert need an overview to all the stages involved, not just snippets that have limited value on their own.

This article is a shortened version of an 18 page White Paper titled 'How to Implement Successful SEO'. This paper is available to download from <http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com/resources/white-paper.php>

## 10 Stage Methodology

1. Site Performance Audit
2. Objectives Setting
3. Project Plan
4. Keyword Analysis & Selection
5. Content Development
6. Site Structure Optimisation
7. Link Building
8. Search Engine Submission
9. Reporting & Analysis
10. Maintenance & Improvement

### Step 1 - Site Performance Audit

Before beginning work, you should measure how your site is performing with SEO currently. It's a mistake to start work unless you have a clear picture of where you are now because if you change something it could make things worse without you ever knowing. Ideally, you should measure the following:-

Search Engine Inclusion - this will tell you how many pages of your site is included on each major search engine index. Remember if your site is not even included in the search engine indexes, you are wasting your time trying to increase your positions.

Link Popularity Check - this will tell you how many incoming links you have to your site. Remember that having incoming links from 'relevant' sites is a crucial factor for improving search engine positioning.

Search Engine Rankings - an obvious one, although remember that if your Search Engine Inclusion score is zero, then you will not be ranked for any search phrase.

Traffic Statistics - get a free trial of a web analytics package that shows your sites Unique Visitors and Referring Search Phrases. Crucially, you will be able to calculate your sites conversion rate which is the ratio of Unique Visitors to Conversions. Your conversion could be an information request, free trial or brochure download. Referring search phrases is also crucial, as you could be getting lots of high positions, but no resulting traffic!

Our How To Guides explain how to do all the above yourself. Alternatively, we can do this free on your behalf, as we have automated tools that do it for us.

<http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com/how-to-guides/>

## Step 2 - Objectives Setting

This does not require any explanation, other than that you must set clear goals for your campaign. Without 'SMART' objectives you will have no focus and will lack feedback measurables. Typical 'SMART' objectives can be:-

- \* Increase unique visitors to 5,000 per month by March 2005
- \* Increase number of information requests to 25 per month by March 2005
- \* Achieve Top 10 positions for 15 selected search phrases by March 2005

## Step 3 - Project Plan & Timescales

This might seem dull, but it is crucial. Without it, you will have no structure to what you are doing and when you are going to do it by. Even the most disciplined person would find this useful, as it breaks down all the stages into manageable chunks.

## Step 4 - Search Phrase Analysis & Selection

Don't skim read this section if you think it's good enough to get your keywords from your Google Adwords account or Overture's Suggestion Tool. Although useful, the information is far too basic to provide really intelligent information to guide you. Always remember that this stage is 'THE' most important stage of your SEO campaign, so it's vital to get it right.

Here are some golden rules:

- \* Do not simply choose Keywords that generate the most impressions or relevant searches
- \* Remember that there will be hundreds or thousands of search phrase combinations
- \* Take into consideration the competitiveness of each keyword. Trying to achieve rankings for phrases that have 10 million competing sites will be difficult, if not impossible
- \* Look for niche keywords that generate good impressions that have relatively low numbers of competing sites
- \* Assign % relevancy scores to each keyword in order to create a list of highly relevant phrases that you know will generate quality traffic

I understand that this is not a simple matter and that many readers will not know where to start on this activity. It might help you to see a sample of the research we provide  
<http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com/services/keyword-research-reports.php>

If you intend to run your own SEO campaign, then we are happy to provide you with our Keyword Reports as a standalone low-cost project. We provide Keyword Research to some of the UK and Europe's largest Marketing and Web Agencies.

#### Step 5 - Content Development

Once you have identified the best search phrases to target for your SEO campaign, you need to provide content that will appeal to people searching for these phrases. Do not simply provide content that you think will appeal to search engines, as this is classed as spamming and may result in your site being dropped by the engine.

It is critical that you only adopt safe strategies that are consistent with the guidelines provided by the search engines and SEM industry. As an agency, we have no tolerance of any person or agency that advocates the use of non-ethical techniques and spamming. Remember that best practices will bring long terms lasting results without the risks and short term nature of spamming methods.

#### Step 6 - Structure Optimisation

The objective here is to make sure your site is search engine friendly. Your inclusion analysis in step 1 will have told you whether the search engines are spidering your site successfully.

If you have submitted your site to all the engines, but all your pages are still not indexed properly, this tells you that your site does not have the right technical characteristics and code structure to be indexed or spidered successfully.

Each site has hugely varied number of problems which is impossible to cover in this article. Typical problems can include web server issues, incorrect use of content management systems, poor site linking structure, incorrect use of frames and tables and lack of site maps.

This involves re-working your web site page templates, HTML code and internal linking structure. Site

Optimisation involves:

- \* Improving the HTML code structure of pages to ensure the most efficient spidering of your web site by the search engines
- \* Improving the sites internal linking structure using keywords and site maps
- \* Optimising page elements such as titles, meta keywords and descriptions and footers
- \* Ensuring the site is search engine friendly by removing off-page factors that may hinder search engine spiders, and detecting spam techniques that may be in use.
- \* Optimisation of page content to include more relevant search phrases, thereby increasing relevance to internet searches.

## Step 7 - Link Building

Maximizing the number of relevant sites that link to your site is very important. An effective linking strategy establishes your site in the online marketplace that already exists for your industry.

A successful linking strategy involves:

Content Strategy - Building content of value on your web site that will attract other sites to link to you

Outbound Strategy - Publishing outbound links that your surfers will find valuable

Inbound Strategy - you should research and create a list of other sites that you can request a link from

The primary question you should ask yourself is: Why would people link to me?

It is critical that you build information of value on your web site. This should not simply be reinventing and doing what everyone else is doing; you are far better linking to other good sites and providing information that is lacking or missing from the web.

Always remember:-

- \* DO NOT use link farms as they will do more harm than good
- \* DO NOT link to sites that provide no value
- \* DO NOT request links from low-traffic sites that are not relevant

The key benefits of link building are higher rankings, driving relevant traffic, brand building and integration with your relevant online community or target market.

## Step 8 - Search Engine Submission

This is the easy part. Just remember to avoid automated submission tools that might save you time, but can result in delays, being ignored or even banned

If your site is not coded or structured correctly, then it's a waste of time bothering to submit your site to the engines because it will have little or no effect.

You need to submit your site to the crawler-based engines as well as the human edited directories such as yahoo, dmoz and business.com. The good news is that contrary to popular belief, once a site is properly indexed by the crawler-based engines you should not need to re-submit your site ever again.

## Step 9 - Reporting & Analysis

It's important to measure where you are in relation to your objectives set at the start. At the very least, any serious SEO campaign must be backed up with the following reporting information:

Search Engine Positions - for all relevant phrases across all the search engines

Web Analytics Tool - referring traffic, unique visitors, source of traffic

There are many Search Engine Positioning reporting tools on the market. Many of them are difficult to use and provide unreliable reporting. The best one we have come across is called Advanced Web Ranking. Go to <http://www.advancedwebranking.com/>

As for web analytics tools, we have tested many and they vary in price, quality and ease of use. We would recommend getting an analytics tool that does not involve installing software and maintaining yourself as this can be a real pain. You can get excellent quality analytics services on low monthly rental schemes, where you access your live reports via a web login password.

As you would expect we provide an analytics package as part of our managed SEM service. However, if you want to do it yourself I suggest reading some of the many independent reviews available on the web. A good source to start is [http://www.e-consultancy.com/publications/web\\_measurement/](http://www.e-consultancy.com/publications/web_measurement/)

The best analytics tool we found is called ClickMetrix. We liked it so much we partnered with the vendor and created our own added value version.

For some sample live reports, click here

<http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com/services/web-traffic-analysis.php>

## Step 10 - Maintenance & Improvement

SEO is not a one-off activity and requires ongoing improvement. Remember that search engine algorithms are constantly changing their Relevancy criteria - therefore a website that is number 1 today may number 13 tomorrow.

The golden rules are:

- \* Link building - make link building one of your ongoing activities
- \* Reporting - continue to report all measurables at least monthly
- \* New Content - continue to update and create new relevant content
- \* Monitor Ranking Algorithms - this requires lots of time. You can use the many forums available
- \* Optimisation Reviews
- \* Search phrase analysis - continue to monitor new phrases and re-visit original keyword research as a reference point

## Final Word

If you have found this article useful, and want to receive occasional updates via email containing similar articles and tips, please subscribe to our newsletter:

<http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com/resources/newsletter.php>

## About The Author

Phil Robinson is the Founder and Director of ClickThrough Marketing, an ethical search engine marketing agency that delivers long term traffic and web site ROI. He provides training and presents at seminars such as for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, speaking on a range of internet marketing topics such as search engine marketing and advanced web analytics. [www.clickthrough-marketing.com](http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com)  
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## Notes for editors

Photo of Phil Robinson <http://www.clickthrough-marketing.com/corporate/press-kit.php>

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## About ClickThrough Marketing

ClickThrough Marketing are a search engine marketing (SEM) consultancy focused on helping you reach new customers within the online market place and search engines. We offer a managed SEM service that increases your online exposure, search engine rankings and web sites ROI.

We use only safe strategies that are consistent with the guidelines provided by the search engines and SEM industry. Our credibility is a result of our deep commitment to providing ethical search engine optimisation services that deliver traffic and ROI in the long term.