Pen2Paper

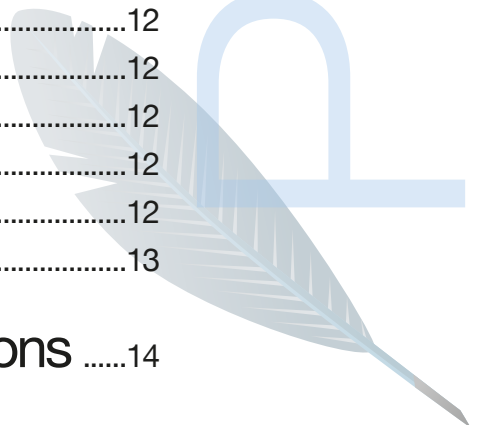# Introduction to Search Engine Optimisation

in The Field of Promotional Products

Chapter 1. Introduction

Working Hard Or Hardly Working

The first rule that you must learn about SEO is that it's hard work. Not the technical, mental comprehension type of hard work but the time-consuming repetitive hard slog kind. **Nothing in the world of SEO happens quickly**. You will not see instant results from all your hard work. It will take weeks and months to see your efforts come to fruition. You may consider this to be a harsh introduction to the subject of search engine optimisation but this hard work is so fundamental to the practice of SEO that there is no suitable place to introduce it other than at the very beginning. If your website is to compete in such a busy industry as ours then you must **work harder than your competitors to beat their rankings.**

Googling, Google It, Google

Google have become such a household name that they are completely synonymous with searching the Internet. It's not to say that they're the **only** search engine out there. Microsoft have their very own "Bing" which is very comparable from a technical point of view but they simply don't have the market share that Google do. One of the main reasons why Google have gained such popularity is the power of their "search algorithms". A search algorithm is simply the method by which Google decide which order the many matching sites should appear in a results page. When they first started out, Google had a better algorithm than anyone else. They could cut out more spam and return more relevant results than the other search engines. Since then, most of the other search engines have been trying to play catch-up by trying to reverse engineer and duplicate the way that Google ranks their results. Nobody outside of Google themselves really knows how the Google Algorithm works. It's a closely guarded trade secret – in part because they don't want their competitors to know what they're up to but mostly because they don't want people like us to figure out exactly how to "cheat the system" and get our sites to rank well without doing any hard work. This article will focus on how to improve your rankings with Google not because it's the only search engine around but because a good Google ranking will give you the best return on your efforts. The other search engines 'copy' Google to such an extent that the principals outlined here will help you with the other search engines as well.

Content Is King

There's nothing Google loves more than fresh, hand-written, original and *relevant* content. That phrase simply cannot be emphasised enough. Earlier, I mentioned the amount of hard work that's involved in SEO. Content authoring is the source of most of this hard work. To maximise your chances of ***success***, you will need to ***regularly*** post fresh content onto your website (more on this later) as well as creating content around the internet that links back to your site (more on this as well).

Creating fresh original content might not sound that hard but unless you're William Shakespeare, you're going to run out of ideas eventually. Here's a few suggestions for topics that might help:

- Advice to customers – don't be afraid to be specific. Write about buying pens to give away at trade shows or including pens in mail-outs. The more specific your advice is, the easier you will find it to avoid repeating yourself in a later article.
- Industry news – write about exhibitions you've been to, awards you've won or interesting observations about the industry. You can use this as a medium to show your company's "public face" and build a reputation with customers as well as helping your SEO.
- Product reviews – write what you love (or hate) about a particular product, why you think people will like it, what specific applications it has.

Now that you've got some ideas about writing, let me introduce the concept of ***relevancy***. It's no good writing a blog article about Lady Gaga and expecting it to help you sell Promotional Pens. Google have a fairly complex ***relevancy algorithm***, which they use to determine how relevant an article is to the rest of your site. The more relevant the article the more SEO power it has. One of the most important factors in the relevancy algorithm is the use of ***keywords***. Keywords are a concept that we will be coming back to time and time again. A keyword (or a "key phase") is the term that an end-user types into Google. In our case, it's probably going to be "Promotional Pens", "Printed Pens", "Personalised Pens" or something along those lines. If you want to be found on these phrases, it's important to include them in your articles. Don't overdo it though – it's called "Keyword stuffing" and Google can spot it from a mile off.

An example of keyword stuffing might look like this:

"The great thing about these **promotional pens** is that as far as **promotional pens** go, they make great **promotional pens** and we just love **promotional pens**."

It's also important to include **links** in your articles. The link's "anchor text" also needs to match the keyword. Anchor text is the name for the actual text that appears underlined for a user to click on. For example:

Click here to see our range of [promotional pens.](#)

In the text above, the anchor text of the link is "promotional pens". It's a common mistake to put the anchor text on some less relevant words:

[Click here](#) to see our range of promotional pens.

Anchor text is extremely important in the Google algorithm. The second example above would help your ranking when somebody searches Google for "click here" but would do very little good for people searching for "promotional pens". Whatever you do, don't be tempted to re-use old articles or plagiarise from elsewhere. Google can spot this as well (they call it 'duplicate content') and they consider it to have no positive value what so ever. The way the Google algorithm looks at articles is quite complex. The position of the keywords is almost as important as their frequency of use. It's important to have the right text highlighting (bold/italic), the right article length, etc. Rather than attempt to describe all the rules, I'm going to give a huge recommendation to an online tool that can teach you to write perfect, SEO-friendly articles. This is what we use and it can teach anyone to write articles in a few minutes.

ScribeSEO is the tool I'm taking about. Click that link to have a look for yourself. Scribe generates wonderfully details reports about your keyword density and positioning and gives you advice on how to improve your articles. You can copy-and-paste your articles into their website or even have it integrated into your own Blog. It's a paid service but it's not expensive. I would **strongly** recommend you to sign up for it for at least a month or two. Eventually, you will have used it enough that writing SEO-friendly articles becomes second nature to you, in which case go ahead and cancel your Scribe subscription. Be warned that without a tool like Scribe you can end up doing more harm than good with your articles (if Google decides that they look like Spam).

Freshly Squeezed Link Juice

If you've read up about SEO before, you've undoubtedly come across the term "link juice". Link Juice is sometimes referred to simply as "authority" although the juice metaphor is better at explaining how the authority 'drips' through the hyperlinks of the Internet.

One of the fundamental parts of Google's ranking algorithm (and something that set them apart from their competitors in the early days) is the way in which they give each website (and each page within that website) a (publicly invisible) score. The score for a web page is based upon the number of links that point to that page from elsewhere on the Internet. The number of links is not the only factor though. What is also important is the score of the pages that provide the links. Before we get tangled up in that concept, let me give a simplified example.

"Web Page A" has a lot of it's own incoming links so Google have given it a score of 100. Within "Web Page A" there are two links, to (unsurprisingly) "Web Page B" and "Web Page C". B and C have *no other links* from anywhere else. Google will then determine the score of B and C to be 50 each because they are taking equal share of the score from Web Page A.

In the previous section, I discussed **relevancy**. You can think of this as different "flavours" of link juice. If you'd like to get lots of "Promotional Pens" flavoured link juice coming into your website so you need lots of incoming links from articles and sites about "Promotional Pens" where those links use "Promotional Pens" as their anchor text.

Chapter 2 – On-Site Optimisation

On-site optimisation is the practise of ensuring that your actual website is as SEO friendly as possible. When Google's computers visit your website, they see only the code in the website. They're blind to images, style, layout, etc. It's important to get your code up-to-scratch so that Google can understand it and find it's way around your site. In this chapter, I will be referring to examples of HTML code for the benefit of those readers who are able to modify their website code themselves. It's worth reading this chapter anyway even if that's not you because you may need to ask your web designer to implement some of these changes for you.

Leaky Sieve Websites and the NOFOLLOW attribute

A common mistake which I see all the time is the "leaky sieve" website. In the example I used in the section about Link Juice, I neglected to mention what happens to "Web Page A" after it has shared it's 100-strong link juice with web pages B and C. The answer is that Web Page A will loose a good deal of it's link juice (although not all of it) and hence will loose its otherwise strong ability to rank well. This is also known as "giving away links". If you link to a different website (even one of your own) from yours then your site is leaking link juice. It's quite common that you would like to offer your visitors a link to a different site – maybe you have one web site for pens and one for other products. Fortunately, Google have provided a way that you can place links on your web site that look like any other link but do not pass link juice. These are known as "NOFOLLOW" links. They tell Google's Robots not to follow the link, not to pass link juice - just to ignore it.

In terms of HTML code, a normal link looks like this:

Promotional Pens

and a NOFOLLOW link looks like this:

Promotional Pens

Titles, Headings and Descriptions

There are a number of places with the code of your website where you can reinforce your keywords and demonstrate to Google the relevancy of the keywords to your website. Repetition here is important but don't over do it.

Title

The <title> tag appears inside the <head> section of your code. The text entered in this tag should contain your keywords but should also look attractive to humans. This is the text that will appear in blue in the Google search result and will also appear at the top of your user's browser window. If your title text is longer than 70 characters then Google will chop the end off and show '…'. Evidence also shows that they will pretty much ignore any keywords after the 70 character limit, so be brief.

<title>Promotional Pens From The Pen Warehouse</title>

Headings

You should have a heading tag on every single page within your site. It's quite common just to use the name of your company as an <h1> or "top-level" tag but Google would prefer if the headings tags described the content on each page. You can use a combination of <h1>, <h2>, <h3>, etc tags to categorise the sections displayed on your page. There's no definitive recipe for which heading tags to use but it's important that you have some headings on each page and that they include your keywords where possible.

<h1>Our Range Of Promotional Pens</h1>
<h2>Contour Ball Pen – Our Best Selling Promotional Pen</h2>

Description

The description tag or to name it more accurately, the "meta description" lives next to the title tag in your code and is limited to 160 characters. The meta description It can be longer but as with the title tag, Google will cut it short. This is the text summary that appears in black below the address of your site in Google. Use the meta description to entice customers into visiting your site but be sure to use your keywords as well.

<meta name="description" content="Visit The Pen Warehouse Website To Find Out About Our Exciting Range Of Promotional Pens.">

Keywords

The meta keywords tag is somewhat defunct these days. Google have publicly admitted that its use does very little for improving your relevancy but I would take the attitude that it can't hurt to have them anyway. It's simply a comma-separated list of relevant keywords.

<meta name="keywords" content="pens, promotional pens, printed pens, pen warehouse">

Images

It's important to remember that when you place text within an image, Google's robots can't read it. You might have a fancy-looking button that says "click here to see our wonderful range of promotional pens" but if that button is an image then it's doing nothing for your SEO. You should make sure that every image on your web site has an ALT tag. The alt tag (short for "alternative") provides a text-based alternative to the image. The code for your button should look like this:

 Google will now know that this image is about promotional pens which goes further to improve your relevancy.

URLs

Can you tell me what the page below is about, just by looking at the link?

http://www.example.com/index.php?page=av4d&type=4j39f&action=render

Depending on the software your website uses, these types of links can be all too common. Google doesn't have a clue what the page is about from the URL and the URL doesn't add any relevancy. This is not always a simple fix (and is not possible on some websites) but ideally you want your URLs to look more like this:

http://www.pens.co.uk/plastic-pens/panther-extra-ballpen.php

This lets Google know exactly the category and name of the product without even visiting the page. Having a domain name that contains your keywords doesn't hurt either. Google can quite confidently assume that a web site called 'pens.co.uk' is going to be about pens.

On-site content

Earlier on I discussed content creation and recommended the ScribeSEO tool to help you create perfect SEO friendly content. What I didn't mention was what to do with all your beautiful text content. There are two places in which you need to deploy this content, one of which I will write about now and the other of which will be covered under the chapter on "Off-Site SEO".

Product Descriptions

It's hard for Google to distinguish your site from all the others selling the same/similar products when you all have identical text on the product pages. Writing your own product descriptions is a great way of making Google **want** to index your site because they see that you're unique.

Blogging

Even with unique product descriptions, eventually your site will end up being 'static'. If your site goes for long periods of time without having any freshly updated content, Google will start to think that your site is stagnant and your rankings will drop. This is why so many companies now have a blog on their website. Posting your fresh content from Scribe onto your blog will keep Google interested. Their robots will check back regularly to read your new, relevant content and improve your relevancy score every time you post. You should write a few hundred words at least once a week. You really need to be writing more than your competitors do, so there's no 'upper limit' to the amount you need to blog.

Conversion Rates

While not strictly SEO, it's worth mentioning conversion rates as well. Using tools like Google Analytics (discussed later) you can see how many unique hits your website is getting. Take a look and compare this to the number of enquires you get and you will probably be shocked. Websites within our industry are often plagued by very low conversion rates. People are visiting your site but not making an enquiry. The reasons behind this can be complex but there is a simple rule you can follow that will make all the difference – your calls to action. Your call to action is mostly likely a button or link which says "click here for a quote" or "email us for an enquiry". Making these buttons and links bigger and clearer than they are now **will** improve your conversion rate. I'm pretty confident in saying that that goes for everyone – the call to action is almost never too big, too brightly coloured or too obvious.

Page Speed

As of a couple of years ago, Google started penalising sites for being too slow. Try running PageSpeed (available as an add on for Chrome or Firefox) and see what it reports. The output can be pretty technical but there's tons of free advice on the Internet about how to implement the suggestions from PageSpeed. Not only will this help your SEO but it will make your users happy too.

https://developers.google.com/speed/docs/insights/using_chrome

Chapter 3 – Off-Site Optimisation

By now you should have some idea about how to improve your website to that it has maximum appeal to the Google robots but the story doesn't end there. Off-site SEO is extremely important to your rankings. Put simply, off-site SEO is the SEO work that you do on websites other than your own. Primarily this means **link building**. In order to bring the most link-juice possible to your site, you need to have as many links as possible from other sites, all of which will pass on some of their link juice. This is without a shadow of a doubt the hardest part of SEO. Link building will make or break your SEO campaign. The biggest problem you will have is "why would somebody want to link to me?".

Article Directories

Article directories have been growing in popularity over the past few years. The premise is fairly simple. Sign up to a website, write some unique and interesting content and in exchange they will give you a link. Since these links appear in your article, they will be highly relevant links which is great. The article directories will normally display adverts alongside your article which is how they make their money. Make sure to read the terms and conditions of the article directory carefully to ensure that they're not giving you a "nofollow" link that wouldn't pass any link juice.

Blogging Sites

There are a number of websites which will host a blog for you, allowing you to post articles and control the links as you wish. It's more important that you have a blog on your website but a few *external* blogs can be a great way to build some nice links. Don't worry too much about updating these as regularly as you update your on-site blog.

Link Directories / Business Directories

These sites can generate some great links as well, especially if they have a relevant category in their directory. Often they will ask for a small fee (either annually or oneoff) in return for a link. The ones that you have to pay for have a lot less links on than the free ones and so in turn they're sharing their link juice with a lot more sites and giving you a lot less.

Forums

I won't advocate spamming forums but if you contribute to a forum (e.g. advising customers about the industry) then you're usually permitted to add a link in your signature back to your website in return for your time. Be sure to write helpful and relevant posts or you'll be kicked off the forum and your links removed.

Social Networking

All of the big social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn will **only provide NOFOLLOW links**. There is some suggestion in the SEO world that these links are still important as it shows to Google that people are discussing your website and interested in it. Try to encourage your customers to become a 'fan' on Facebook or follow you on Twitter but keep the content strictly business and whatever you do **don't ignore your customers on social networks**. It's a very common mistake and not only will do nothing for your SEO but will publicly harm your reputation.

Don't forget about social media sites like YouTube or Flickr where you can post relevant videos and photos along with links back to your website.

Multiple Domains

If you're lucky enough to own more than one web site domain, consider choosing one "main" domain and linking the others to it. This can be a hugely powerful way to consolidate all your incoming links into one place.

Link Building Services

At some point in your SEO work, it's going to become very tempting to pay someone to build links for you. There are some fantastic SEO experts out there that will help you to build very high-quality back links BUT they're very expensive. The cheaper guys are often scammers who (if they create any links at all) will create links from poor quality websites full of machine-written gibberish. Often these websites will also contain links to pornographic

or illegal content and you don't want Google to associate your website with them! BE VERY CAREFUL handing over money to anybody. Don't rely on Googling their name to check their reputation – look for a known, reliable source for recommendations if you want to go down this route.

Google Services

More and more Google are starting to "inject" other types of search results into the results page. These include:

- Google Maps – Showing nearby results.
- Videos – YouTube and other videos that match the search criteria.
- Images – Harvested from relevant websites around the Internet.
- Shopping – Relevant products submitted to Google's database.

For the most part, these additional services are very easy to sign up to and will give you an additional way to be found in search results. Often local results or shopping results will appear quite high in the results.

Chapter 4 – Tools of the trade

Identify your keywords

It's up to you to decide if you want to concentrate your SEO efforts on a single keyword or spread yourself a little wider. It's easier to work with just one key phrase but depending on the nature of your business, you may choose not to limit yourself. The best place to research keywords is with Google themselves. They provide a "Keyword Tool" as part of their Adwords advertising platform. You have to sign up to Adwords to use it, but you don't need to pay a penny.

https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordTool

I'm not going to go into too many details of exactly how to use this tool because there's plenty of tutorials on the Internet for it (as well as Google's own help section). Pay attention to the "local monthly searches" rather than the "global monthly searches" as "local" means "UK". This figure will give you an idea of the potential target audience for any given keyword. The greater the target audience, the greater the number of competitors who will be slogging out to get the number #1 spot in Google which means you'll be in for some hard work. Some phrases receive very low monthly searches but can be very easy to optimise for. Product names are often a good example of this. Optimising for these less-popular search terms is known as "long-tail".

Check your progress

It's important when you're running an SEO campaign to know that Google will customise your search results based upon your previous search activity. That sounds a little complicated but the jist of it is that what you see on Google is not always what everyone else sees. Fortunately you can turn this feature off. Read more here:

http://support.google.com/accounts/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=54048

Analysing Traffic

It's not strictly an SEO tool but Google Analytics is a brilliant way to find out all kinds of information about the traffic on your site. If you don't already have it set up then do so before you start. Seeing the daily hits graph growing as you run your campaign is not only very satisfying but also very useful.

Webmaster Tools

Make sure to also sign up for Google Webmaster tools on your domain. If you have a .com or other international domain then you can use this to tell Google that your target audience is in the UK. You can also submit sitemaps (basically a coded list of all the pages on your site) that will help Google index your site quickly.

Generating Content

I've mentioned it already but it's such a great tool for content generation that it's worth mentioning Scribe SEO again. Have a look at their web site and check out the video showing off the features.

On-Site SEO analysis

This tool can be a little technical so if you have somebody who does your website coding for you, you may want to point them as this link. It gives a very detailed report about the state of your SEO (or the state of your competitor's SEO if you wish) with helpful tips that will really set you on your way to improving your rankings. It's free to use for the most part (up to one analysis per week) but some of the advanced features require a subscription. The subscription service is well worth paying for as it will help you find out what everyone else in the industry is up to and give you a good idea why they're beating you in the rankings.

http://www.woorank.com