

# Do It Yourself SEO [Part I]

Contributed by Jamey  
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This week, we'd like to write a little about Search Engine Optimization. SEO is a vast, and ever changing area of expertise that ranges from common sense, on to rocket science. However, for the purposes of this article we'll only cover things that you as the layperson can do to boost your page ranking. And, just so you don't nod off, we'll break this up into two parts.

The companies that would love to take your hard earned money to optimize your site for search engines are plentiful. And, don't get me wrong, there are plenty of reasons to turn to firms that specialize in this field. Especially if you do business in a highly competitive industry, such as Business Cards, or Website Design.

Before I delve into the subject, it is worth clarifying something that not everyone knows. Search engines exist to connect people in need of something with the most relevant and important content. Sounds simple, but some people miss that point completely and feel that they exist for marketing and promotion. True, many of the larger engines offer paid links and ads. But the organic search results, (unpaid), are far more valuable.

So, before you fork over your entire advertising budget in an effort to climb Mt. Google, try the following SEO tips that just about anyone can do for free. I know, "time is money Jamey". I guarantee you, the tips below will take less than an hour. You have an hour, right?

The tips below apply to websites that are not entirely flash driven, and are not a part of a franchise package or turn-key solution. I'll cover those in part II. Tip 1: Check your meta tags on every page.

Don't worry, it is truly easier than it sounds. Most browsers have the ability to display the actual html code that dictates how a page is displayed. Root around your browser's menus to find "View Source" or use the built in help to find out how. If you are still having problems we'd be happy to help you find that. Again, this does not apply to sites that are entirely flash driven.

Meta Tags are not displayed visually, but are used by browsers and search engines for various critical purposes. Here are the two I want you to look at.

- `<meta name="description"...`

The description meta tag should not be empty, and it should succinctly describe the contents of each page. If your meta description contents are blank, or not really related to the page it is on, search engines will be less than impressed.

- `<meta name="keywords"...`

Again, the contents of the keywords tag should not be blank. It should list key words and phrases that are actually found on the page. If you sell chairs and toaster ovens, and the page in question mentions chairs but not toaster ovens, don't mention toaster ovens in your keywords unless you add it to the textual content of the page. View the source on this page to see what we chose to use.

You'd be surprised how often I find empty meta tags on sites that really need to be found via search engine. This is tantamount to paying for a full page ad in the Wall Street Journal without including your company name or contact.

Unless you have a 100 page website, this should take up less than an hour of your time.

Stumped on what keywords to actually use? You could sign up for a free account with Google and use their powerful analytical keyword tools. Or, your web designer could do it for you as well. Truly professional web developers and designers include the meta tags as part of the development process. It just makes good sense.

Tip 2: Check the title of every page.

Don't worry, you won't have to dig around in html code for this one. While you are visiting each page to inspect your keywords and descriptions, check out the title of your browser window.

How appropriate are the titles of each page in relation to the actual content of the page? Are they too brief? Are they too cute? Are they sipping a Bahama Mama on some beach south of the border? I wish I was, but I digress. Believe it or not, Search Engines do use page titles as a part of the complex algorithms they use to calculate importance and relevance. (Importance & Relevance=Page Rank).

Too many times, I run across sites where the description is either the same across all pages, missing, or just not descriptive enough. In other words, not helpful to search engines (or your customers).

Case in point. Let's say you sell custom mudflaps specifically for 1972-74 Chevy Vega's. (We used to have a green one). You have a "Contact Us" page, and an "About Us" page, each titled exactly as such. There are literally millions of pages on the internet titled "Contact Us", and "About Us". Seize upon this opportunity, (and page titles are a huge opportunity), to make those pages a little more relevant to people trying to find them. For instance, instead of "Contact Us", I would recommend "Contact ChevyVegaMudflaps.com to learn more about our Chevy Vega Mudflaps". Instead of "About Us", title the page "ChevyVegaMudflaps.com leads the Vega Mudflap industry, learn more here."

Changing page titles does involve editing the "title" tag in the head of your web page. If you can't, or don't feel comfortable doing this, contact your webmaster or friendly neighborhood ad agency.

Depending upon the competition in your specific industry, this could literally mean rocketing from page 33 of a Google search, up to page 1. I've seen it.

Take care,

Jamey