The Original Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization FAQ

Discuss The Original Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization FAQ
Version 1.01: A Living Document with a last Revision Date of 7/1/04 by Mike Randolph, Shopping Cart Guru.

The Original Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization FAQ is living document which with be updated frequently that answers the frequently asked questions we receive on improving traffic to eCommerce enabled Internet stores. Except for the basics I'll not be covering general topics that have been well documented elsewhere and will instead focus on the task of search engine optimizing shopping cart software products specifically. With a careful understanding of the SEO topic I believe you'll decide to use our SEO Shopping Cart Software Solution, AbleCommerce.

   SEO Hint $1 After the blatant plug of AbleCommerce.com above I'll remind you: Potential customers are only one click away from doing research on a competitor's product, only one click away from exploring stores with an easier to navigate category structure and only one click away from researching better shipping terms at another online store.

Consider a few 'first impression' issues that are often overlooked: Create and maintain a brand (look and feel) that represents your business which is easily recognizable as yours. Use it for all your marketing materials both on-line and offline. Consistent application of colors and font types along with a quality logo are often the only notable difference between a part time mom & pop store and a true brand or corporate identity. Consider getting professional brand creation and design assistance during this phase, if you haven't already!

Learn from websites such as yahoo.com and google.com that consistently create branded content in a visually pleasing manner while consuming a minimum of time and bandwidth. Since inception Yahoo.com has been particularly good at creating quality content (helpful web pages) with a minimum of graphics. Yahoo.com continues to load quickly even with the addition of compelling bandwidth intensive flash content.

     SEO Hint $2: Note the prominent use of text URL's in the place of images or clever java script menus for important links to sub-categories and products. The important search engines won't follow links included in fancy 'drop down' JavaScript and/or DHTML menus.

Well conceived categorization of products with informative product descriptions, flexible shipping terms, fast loading product pages, secure payment methods and an SSL certificate tied to your domain are more important than a 'snappy' flash presentation. Although once you have your ducks in a row a 360 degree interactive flash presentation can't hurt, unless of course you're marketing swampland in Florida!

Step one is critical to the success of your shopping cart software-search engine optimized-marketing efforts! Get it right the first time or you'll find yourself repeating steps 2 to 10! Determine the **keyword sets** your potential customers are typing into the search engines for the products and services you sell. Your goal is to identify at least 30 different keyword sets.

   SEO Hint $3 Customers won't usually enter a single search term as it results in many poorly targeted results. At Google.com the single search term '**ecommerce**' returns 17,800,000 results, '**ecommerce software**' returns 6,930,000 results and '**ecommerce software hosting**' returns *only* 3,740,000 results.
         Before starting the time consuming process of re-writing your entire website be sure you're doing it for the right keyword sets*!*

The Following is an overview of the steps that AbleCommerce is using for its own SEO efforts. AbleCommerce.com is currently ranked 23rd for ecommerce software and 3rd for ecommerce software hosting, even though the website is 'biased' towards the more competitive keyword set 'shopping cart software' not 'ecommerce software'. With this in mind begin to work on your keyword sets, each having 2 or more keywords. We're working on about 50 keyword sets and have about ½ of them in the top 3 pages at google.com after just a few months.

1. Identify important keyword sets:
    a. Check your website log traffic reports. Analyzing your website traffic reports using a quality tool such as Urchin, Webtrends and the popular Webalizer is critical to the success of your search engine optimization efforts. Log files contain valuable information on the source of sites referring traffic to your website including, sites with pages linking to your site and common search terms used by your customers to find your site. Unfortunately if you're just starting to work on search engine optimizing your eCommerce store you're not going too find much useful information in your log files.
    b. Do searches in Google.com (Install the Google toolbar if you haven't already!) for keyword sets your customers might be using and notice which ones your competitors deem important. Researching what your search engine 'competitors' are doing right and wrong is critical: This is a race in which the winners on the first page take away nearly 70% of the prize money, which in our case are clicks resulting in traffic to your website. It's important to realize that anything less than a top 30 placement (first 2 or 3 pages) and you're lost in the crowd.
    c. Again the goal is to create at least 30 different "sets" of keywords. Remember customers don't usually enter a single search term: Create keyword sets, each having 2 or more keywords.
    d. Use a tool such as WordTracker.com which will give you helpful information about the keywords you have chosen and suggest many other possibly combinations. A few things that you can determine from Wordtracker:
        i.   Is it a poor, good, or excellent keyword set that's frequently used?
        ii.   The number of competing Web Pages for your search terms.
        iii. The predicted daily traffic for each keyword set for a page 1 or first 10 ranking.
        iv.   The number of times a particular keyword set has been typed in 2 months.
        v.   Determine the PKI index for a keyword set to establish which keywords could result in the most 'easily obtainable' traffic. **SEO Hint $4** It's often less time consuming to generate equal traffic from 5 less competitive keyword sets than it is to fight over the 'one' most frequently used keyword set.

    e. Using a commercial tool such as WebPosition gold (Recently acquired by Webtrends) or any of the freely available tools such gorank.com you can establish the **Keyword Density** of your competitions WebPages. This is a quick and reliable way to establish the common keywords.

        SEO Hint $5: Following the herd will often leave the better grass un-explored!

    f. Research your customers buying cycle to identify your keyword sets. For example pretend your thinking of purchasing a fishing boat, you'll want a new fishing pole and fish finder. Selling fish finders? Even if you don't sell fishing boats or poles you'd still do well incorporating information on the poles and boats your customers like the best and how there best used with your products.
    g. Narrow down your list of keywords sets to the **most important ones.** You'll normally establish a few keyword bases and variations on those to create your keyword sets. For example 'eCommerce' is the base which leads to 'eCommerce software', 'eCommerce solutions' and 'eCommerce software hosting'.
    h. Carefully and finally you are able to establish an initial store theme or keyword base to promote. For example our AbleCommerce.com website's primary theme's (base keywords) are 'shopping cart' and 'ecommerce' and 'hosting'. Sub-themes include variations of the base keyword along with commonly used variations such as: 'Shopping Cart Hosting',

'eCommerce Hosting' and other variations which accurately represent the AbleCommerce shopping cart feature set and available services.

    i.   DO NOT spam or do 'tricky' things. Consider that google.com consistently provides accurate search results for over 4 billion web pages (4,285,199,774 as of July 1, 2004). If you work to create honest helpful content you'll do well. If you try 'tricky' things and work against the heavily funded brilliant folks doing their absolute best to provide reliable search results for the entire planet…you will NOT achieve consistent results from your optimization efforts!

    j.   Submit your site to the important search engines manually while focusing your research and optimization efforts on the top three search engines: Google.com (40%), Yahoo.com (30%), MSN.com (30%), AOL (15%) and Ask Jeeves (8%) *.

        * Search engine usage according to notable Neilson//NetRatings research firm, well known for it's television ratings services. Yes it adds up to more than 100% that's because users frequent multiple search engines but clearly it would seem google.com gets many of the 'first' searches.

2. Identify issues that might cause the search engines not to crawl or index you website. Such as excessive use of JavaScript, linked images and '?' (Question marks) in your URL's. Confirm your pages are not more than one directory level deep from the root of your home page. Don't join or participate in unknown link exchange strategies as you could be 'judged' by your neighbors content and activates. Be sure your page names match the linked text. For example the product 'My Blue Widget' should have a link of '[My Blue Widget](#)' and the page it's linking to should be named '`My-Blue-Widget.htm`'. The page extension doesn't seem to have an effect. Research URL re-writing tools such as Apache mod_rewrite and for Windows 200x servers ISAPI_Rewrite by Helicon Technologies is an excellent tool. ISAPI_Rewrite is incorporated deeply into the IIS 5.0/6.0 layer. It's possible to use these tools create more search engine friendly page names. For example the following rule and some modifications to your shopping cart pages your stores URL's could be dramatically improved.

```
<add key="(.*)/.*-P(\d*)(?:C(\d*))?\.aspx(?:\?(.*))?"
value="$1/product1.aspx?Product_ID=$2&amp;Category_ID=$3&amp;$4" />
```

Your product page name goes from un-friendly:

/product1.aspx?Category_ID=27&Product_ID=122

To Friendly:

/My-Blue-Widget-C27P122

SEO Hint $5: If your site utilizes frames get rid of them yesterday as some search engines don't seem to like to index framed sites.

3. Optimize your web page, product and category titles to be keyword rich and of the correct length for the length of the keyword set for each page. A good page title for our product 'My Blue Widget' could be 'My Blue Widget: Free Shipping on Widgets'. Web Position Gold says that for 2 keywords a page title of 3 to 5 is correct and for 3 keywords 5 to 7. Don't overuse identical page titles. Re-work your product descriptions to obtain keyword densities, prominence (early placement of keyword sets in the webpage) and page lengths (number of words) appropriate for the number of keywords in your set. Carefully consider the keyword densities of your competitors during this process. WebPosition Gold is an excellent tool for this as it will give you many helpful hints and keep you out of trouble with the search engines as well.

4. Speaking of keeping out of trouble confirm your NOT spamming or doing anything that the search engines deem inappropriate.

5. Begin to improve your page ranking at google.com by increasing the number of pages (which are indexed in google.com) that link to yours. Page ranking is very important at google.com and without it you're site will not reach its full potential. AbleCommerce users can add a store listing in topsites.com to help drive page ranking up. This is especially helpful for new stores or domains as

it's typically difficult to get indexed by google.com unless there is a link pointing to your site from a page ranked 4 or better in the google.com index.

6. It's likely time to begin monitoring your keywords in the search engines if a month or two has gone by. WebPosition Gold has tools for this but I prefer the WebTracker tool at the www.gorank.com site as it access the Google's API directly and bypasses the possibility of Google misinterpreting your excessive queries. Don't be too itchy to change any single page as it's important to have consistency between your pages, continue to work your important base keyword sets intoyou're your web pages.

7. Re-visit your website log files and identify which keywords are bringing traffic to your site. Be especially careful to identify trends such as which page titles seem to get more clicks than others. Even if you do get a high ranking listing you could still be losing click because your page title isn't inviting or interesting enough. That even though you're listed in 100 search engines only 3 seem to have any traffic (Google, Yahoo and MSN).

8. Advanced SEO: Learn how the linking strategy you're employing effects the distribution of page ranking between your websites pages. A sound linking strategy can help 'focus' your websites page ranking to important pages such as your home page, so to speak putting them in the search engine spotlight.

9. Advanced SEO: Gateway pages with unique helpful content for hard to crack keyword sets. For example consider the document your reading.

10. Constantly stay up to date with search engine changes, monitoring your important keyword rankings daily. Stay up to date with what's happening by monitoring sites such as Search Engine Watch.

Helpful Search Engine Optimization Links

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Apache Mod_Rewrite	A robust URL re-writing module for the popular Apache Web Server It can be used to allow dynamic pages be indexed by search engines. Checkout this detailed overview.
CSS Optimizer	Reduce your page load times.
Google Tool Bar	Search the web with Google's Browser Tool Bar. • *Eliminate annoying pop-up ads* • Fill in forms with one click • Highlight search terms on a page • View the *Google Page Ranking* and check the '*backwards links*' or sites that are linking to the page you're browsing that have been indexed by Google.
Google's official information on SEO	A few tips that may help you distinguish between techniques that will improve your rankings and ones that will only improve your chances of being dropped from search engine altogether!
GoogleRankings.com	Quickly check your Google Search Position.
Google Page Ranking explained	Page Rank is a topic much discussed by Search Engine Optimization (SEO) experts. At the heart of PageRank is a mathematical formula that seems scary to look at but is actually fairly simple to understand.
GoRank.com	Keyword Density Analyzer, Link Popularity Analyzer, Top 10 Keyword Analyzer and Yahoo Keyword Density Analysis Comparison to Google

ISAPI_Rewrite	A robust URL re-writing tool for Windows servers by Helicon Technologies. It can be used to allow dynamic pages be indexed by search engines. Checkout this detailed overview.
MarketPosition	Informative site by the folks that write WebPostion Gold many helpful articles.
NetIQ	Webtrends log analyzer and Web Position Gold (Trial) Search Optimization Tool: Optimize Pages, Upload, Submit, Report Rankings, Track Traffic, and More.
Ranks.nl	Useful online keyword density tool and another.
Search Engine Watch	Search Engine Watch provides tips and information about searching the web, analysis of the search engine industry. Including Search Engine Submission Tips, Search Engine Listings and Search Engine Ratings and Review.
SEO Optimize your phpBB URL's	Thread in the phpBB community forums with lots of great information on using Mod_Rewrite to make your phpBB URL"s search engine friendly. View the AbleCommerce Community forms phpbb robots.txt file.
Wordtracker.com	Discover the right keywords, and you'll see your traffic skyrocket! Article on Improving your Word Tracker results.
Word HTML Cleanup	While Microsoft Word is a great document editor unfortunately its html output is overly complex resulting in really big files. Dream Weaver has a nice clean up Word HTML command or try the tool linked to the left.

The Original Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization FAQ revision history: SEO gold miners log book.

7/1/2004 – Initial revision note: Typos and all the Original Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization FAQ is ready for some search engine optimization. A crude archived version of this document BEFORE optimization is available here. The word count in Microsoft word is currently showing over 2500 words, too large for a single optimized page. Considering a two keyword set occurring at a frequency of 10% that's a lot of repeats. This document is going to be broken into multiple documents each with the base theme of 'Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization' with sub-themes including the popular variations of the base search theme.

7/1/2004 – 1.01 SEO note: While Microsoft Word is a great document editor unfortunately its html output is overly complex resulting in really big files. Using MS Word's (Office 2000-XP) save as HTML feature this document is over 110k a truly excessive size for the amount of content for sure. Using the save as HTML (filtered option) generated a more respectable 63k file, however a nicely formatted file of less than 37k was quickly produced using Macromedia Dream Weaver's handy clean up Word HTML feature.

7/1/2004 – 1.02 SEO note: Finally we have a cleanly formatted file to analyze, we'll see how it goes in the next update of The Original Shopping Cart Search Engine Optimization FAQ.

7/1/2004 – 1.03 SEO note: Web Position Gold tells us there is a lot of work left to go! Below are reports based on the keywords 'Search Engine Optimization' The very first issue to resolve is the page length of the document which was 2904 words before this note. Web Position Gold is suggesting a page length of between 584 and 980 words so we'll break the document into 4 or 5 pages that with the standard headers and footers of our site will be about the right length. The headers and footers of our site will also have a

dramatic effect on the keyword densities of the final pages. Since the headers and footers of your website are used on though out a website on nearly every page they are very important!

A keyword prominence of at least 58% is suggested for the Title area. Your prominence is 33.3% right now so you might consider increasing your prominence in the Title.

A keyword prominence of at least 45% is suggested for the Link Text area. Your prominence is 29.5% right now so you might consider increasing your prominence in the Link Text.

A keyword frequency from 1 to 2 is suggested for the Alt area. Your frequency is 0.0 right now so you might consider increasing your Keyword count in the Alt.

A word count from 1 to 41 is suggested for the Alt area. Your word count is 0 right now so you might consider increasing your word count in the Alt.

A keyword prominence of at least 46% is suggested for the Alt area. Your prominence is 0.0% right now so you might consider increasing your prominence in the Alt.

A keyword frequency from 1 to 13 is suggested for the Body Text area. Your frequency is 32.3 right now so you might consider decreasing your Keyword count in the Body Text.

A word count from 534 to 740 is suggested for the Body Text area. Your word count is 2759 right now so you might consider decreasing your word count in the Body Text.

A keyword prominence of at least 41% is suggested for the Body Text area. Your prominence is 24.5% right now so you might consider increasing your prominence in the Body Text.

A total frequency from 5 to 35 is suggested for the page as a whole. Your total frequency is 44 now, so you might consider decreasing your frequency count.

A total word count from 584 to 980 is suggested for the page as a whole. Your total word count is 2907 now, so you might consider decreasing your word count.

Page Analysis

Area - Detail Shown	Frequency	Words	Weight	Average Prominence	Start Pos.
Head					
Title # 1- Full Match	1.0	8.0	37.5%	33.3%	1
Title Summary (1 Total Title, 1 w/keywords)	1.0	8.0	37.5%	33.3%	
Meta Keywords	None				
Meta Keywords Summary (0 Total Metas, 0 w/keywords)	None				
Meta Description	None				
Meta Description Summary (0 Total Metas, 0 w/keywords)	None				
Body					
Heading # 1- Full Match	1.0	8.0	37.5%	33.3%	9
Heading # 2- Full Match	1.0	5.0	60.0%	66.7%	2262
Heading # 4- Full Match	1.0	15.0	20.0%	69.2%	2679
Heading Summary (4 Total Heading Texts, 3 w/keywords)	3.0	28.0	32.1%	32.9%	
Link Text # 1- Full Match	1.0	9.0	33.3%	28.6%	17
Link Text # 4- Full Match	1.0	9.0	33.3%	28.6%	2267
Link Text # 20- Full Match	0.7	3.0	66.7%	100.0%	2546

Link Text # 21- Full Match	0.7	4.0	50.0%	100.0%	2567
Link Text # 22- Full Match	0.7	3.0	66.7%	100.0%	2571
Link Text # 23- Full Match	0.7	5.0	40.0%	100.0%	2575
Link Text Summary (29 Total Links, 6 w/keywords)	4.7	112.0	12.5%	29.5%	
Hyperlink Url # 20 - Partial Match Only	0.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	2546
Hyperlink Url # 21 - Partial Match Only	0.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	2567
Hyperlink Url # 22 - Partial Match Only	0.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	2571
Hyperlink Url # 23 - Partial Match Only	0.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	2575
Hyperlink Url # 27 - Partial Match Only	0.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	2633
Hyperlink Url Summary (28 Total Hyperlink Urls, 0 w/keywords, 5 w/partials)	3.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Alt	**None**				
Alt Summary (0 Total Alts, 0 w/keywords)	**None**				
Comment	**None**				
Comment Summary (0 Total Comments, 0 w/keywords)	**None**				
Body Text # 1- Full and Partial Matches	32.3	2759.0	3.5%	24.5%	149
Body Text Summary (1 Total Body Text, 1 w/keywords, 1 w/partials)	32.3	2759.0	3.5%	24.5%	
Overall Main Page **(63 Total Areas, 11 w/keywords, 6 w/partials)**	44.3	2907.0	4.6%	30.1%	

The overall totals above are only your overall averages for frequency, words, weight, and prominence. The average prominence is NOT a percentage indicator of the "correctness" or overall score for your page. Click here for help on understanding this chart!