



Search Engine Optimisation For Professionals

Understanding tags

You don't need to understand HTML (the language of the internet) to create or edit a website. Most websites designs allow you to make changes in normal type, and platforms like WordPress make this very easy (using its Dashboard).

HTML is a "markup" language, which means that words on a web page are "marked up" with codes that tell the browser how to display the contents. HTML means writing HTML tags. These begin with "<" followed by a word or character followed by "attributes" (e.g. the colour of the text) and closing with ">".

So, for instance, the heading of a blog paragraph might be "Why make a will?" In HTML this would read: `<h1>Why make a will?</h1>`. This is what the search engine "reads".



Some SEO advice for titles

In HTML this is <title>Page Title</title>.

Let's assume you have written your page (which can be a blog post) and identified the keywords ¹. What about the title? Try to place the primary keyword(s) at the beginning of the title, and keep the title short (Google cuts them off after 65 characters including spaces in the search engine results) – in other words, the title should be dominated by the keywords. However, don't "stuff" the title with keywords – it can be viewed as spam by search engines. Use a unique title tag for each page.

It will come as no surprise that the best tactic is to find a balance between a title that is search-engine friendly and reader-friendly. So if your working title is "20 Essential Resources For Home Buyers" and your keywords are "tips for real estate buyers", then you could change the title to:

"20 Tips For Real Estate Buyers".

Make sure the title is unique and summarises the blog post, so don't use the name of your firm.

¹ See the MatureMedia Guide *Finding Keywords For Your Website*



Heading Tags

Heading tags (<h1>) tell the search engines that these words are "important" on your web page or blog post – compared to other parts of the post that we might label “ordinary copy”. This is no different than what human readers do – they scan pages and their eye naturally goes to headings that are generally in a different font or bold (or both). Readers know these words are important because of the different font or style – similarly search engines need to know that these words are intended to have a greater importance.

Heading tags achieve this. Make the headings keywords rich if possible – include the primary key phrase for Google to scan. These tags also make the headline bolder and therefore more prominent.

There are different heading tags (e.g. h1 – h3) - an "h1" code to give it the greatest importance. The main sub-headings get an "h2" – the "h3" might be sub-headings under the main sub-headings (e.g. "a,b,c" or “1. 2. 3”). And so on to “h6”. So:

<h1> Heading 1</h1>

<h2> Heading 2</h2>

<h3> Heading 3</h3>

<h4> Heading 4</h4>

<h5> Heading 5</h5>

<h6> Heading 6</h6>



Rather than have to create a heading tag each time, the style sheet ²applies a common style each time you use the <h1> tag. You can of course change this, although you may need to learn some code. This is discussed in our *MatureMedia Guide to WordPress*.

Heading SEO

Here's another example. Let's say our keywords are: "holistic estate plan" "Wills" "Enduring Powers Of Attorney".

How do you like this heading?: "Holistic Estate Plan Wills Enduring Powers Of Attorney"

Surely this enhances SEO because, as we know, headings that are keyword rich are good for SEO. Yes they are, but (repeating once again!) your article or text is to be read by humans. Therefore your headings need to make sense in the real world. Google won't like it either.

The first way to deal with this problem is to use longer headings, if the need for brevity is the reason you have squeezed so many of these keywords into one unintelligible heading. So, utilising the keywords above, your heading might instead read:

² A template file that applies a common font and layout to web pages e.g. each <H1> will be the same style.



“Use Wills and Enduring Powers Of Attorney To Create an Holistic Estate Planning” What is that if too long for your taste? Try instead: “Wills and Enduring Powers Of Attorney In Holistic Estate Planning”.

What if the words just don't work together? In that case try to put them into two headings.

Begin the heading with a keyword

Google looks more closely at the first few words of a heading – that means you should put keywords in the first few words of that heading, because it is the keywords, of course, that we want Google to notice. Humans also tend to pay more attention to the first few words in a heading.

As we know, it is always better to write in the active voice. For example, which of the following is a better heading for your clients if you practise family law (your keyword is “child custody”)?

“Protect Your Parental Rights In A Child Custody Battle”

“Child Custody And Your Parental Rights”

I'll guarantee that if your potential client searches for a family lawyer to help her/him keep the custody of their children, it is version one that is going to get their attention. Why? Because it is written in the active voice, and the active voice is persuasive. Nevertheless version one has the keyword in the wrong place for Google.



Take a moment and try to think of a way to *begin* the heading with our keywords in a way that maintains the active voice (tick, tick, tick....). Not easy, is it?

“Child custody – protect yourself and your children”

So the <H1> should be:

- Keyword rich
- Keywords first
- Active voice

In the rest of the page there is room to depart from these principles in the <H2> and <H3> headings (up to <H6>) – there you can optimise more for your readers.

More about headlines

Let’s talk some more about headline content, because you need to capture your reader at this point or the gig is pretty much up. Some readers will know the brilliant book *The Selfish Gene* by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, which posited the idea that humans are hulking machines whose most significant function is to carry genes from one generation to another. Yes, we’re a beautifully constructed machine, but Dawkins’s thesis is that we are nevertheless “merely” a means to propagate genes. Headlines are a little like that. They can look pretty, take advantage of metaphor or alliteration, but really, at bottom line, they exist to get the reader to (at the least) read into the body of the text. So the idea of a “better” headline is not an aesthetic assessment, it’s entirely utilitarian.



So you must have the headline in mind before you write the body of the text.

Bullets and numbers

Check out any good blog (or longer website page) and you will see the judicious use of bullets and numbering. That's because Google likes lists, and humans appreciate them as well, especially if they are short and to the point. That means lists are worth maximising, so (yes) it should be keyword rich and like headings, have the keywords at the beginning and important words in bold, for example:

- **Superannuation deeds:** our custom self managed deeds are maximized for **tax concessions** and breadth of investment opportunity.
- **Plain English:** don't be baffled by legalese that will only get you into trouble. We make sure you will grasp every word before you sign.

Bold keywords

Use bold formatting for words that reflect what you want both Google and potential clients and customers to believe is the subject matter of the page. What is it you want the reader to notice? What is it that gives you a competitive advantage? Price? Quick turnaround? Your unique experience? These are the words that are worth emphasis in bold.

“Our **superannuation deeds** are lawyer-made to your personal needs at do-it-yourself prices”



“**Quarterly Snapshots of your business accounts** by our experienced team give you every **tax benefit**”

“Our **discount family trust deeds** are the key to generational planning”

Meta description tag³

These are explanations of the page that search engines use on their search results pages to show “snippets” of the page. They are less an SEO issue than a marketing exercise for potential clients and customers to entice them to “click through” to your site. It should be 150 – 160 characters (including spaces).

Therefore it’s best to think of it as a type of compelling advertising copy using keywords. Each page should have a unique meta description:

“Make a will with an experienced lawyer in Melbourne at will kit prices. Plus three free enduring powers of attorney for a professional estate planning package.”

Blog tags v. “categories” in blog posts

Categories resemble a Table of Contents - readers who like a blog may look at other posts in the same category and so visit longer. Posts can have one or more (usually up to four) categories. They:

- tell the reader what the blog post is about;

³ Most websites have control panels that allow you to create a description (meta description), keyword tags, page titles etc.



- collect groups of information.

You will add to your categories as your blog posts grow, but after a while the list of categories won't change too much. Every post is generally categorised (if you don't it will be assigned "uncategorised" in WordPress), but having a more specific tag is optional. It is a keyword that describes the post.

On the other hand there will be a limitless number of tags. They are the index words of the blog. They:

- are "micro-categories";
- will have shorter names – 2-3 words at most;
- if you have enough of identical ones, you really have a category.

WordPress has a built-in tag suggestion tool within the post editor (look in the right hand side of the post editor page in the "Post Tags" box). You then select "Choose from the most used tags in Post Tags" – once you have 20+ blogs there should be a sufficient group to continue to choose from.

Anchor text

The link (hyperlink) is the blue underlined text that takes you to another site or another page on your site. The text in that link is called "anchor text". For example:

"Surprisingly, the [Sydney Morning Herald](#) took quite a different editorial view than it's sister publication [The Age](#)".



In this example the blue text will link to the relevant page of each newspaper.

It's best to make this anchor text SEO attractive. Let's look at a blog of a divorce lawyer who operates a separate website – let's call our divorce lawyers the firm of Hargreaves Stillson. Their website is (not surprisingly) www.hargreavestillson.com.au. The blog is www.divorcelaw.com.au. Let's say the blog post is about using collaborative law techniques to deal with intractable divorce negotiations. Their aim is to send readers of the blog to a specific page of the firm's website, which highlights its expertise in collaborative law (that's why you wrote the post). The keywords are "collaborative family law specialists". The blog post ends with, "if you have any further queries about collaborative family law then please contact our firm. You can find out all about us at our website www.hargreavestillson.com."

What's wrong with this? First, you could have sent the searcher to the specific page of the website that deals with collaborative law. Remember, the reader got to the end of the post, so presumably they have an interest in the topic. As well, the search engine reads the link to the firm's name and ascribes the benefit there, to that page. This solely promotes searchers who type in your firm's actual name because the SEO benefit goes to the external site you link to, not the post where the link originated – the firm gains the SEO benefit of the inbound link. That's fine, but it doesn't get the attention of users looking for the services undertaken by your firm. In fact you want to attract searchers in the throes of divorce who are looking for a lawyer skilled in collaborative family law techniques.



In this situation, what's a better alternative for the anchor text? That's easy. Ask yourself, what are your keywords that can be legitimately included in this anchor text? To get the value of the link back to your firm's website, together with the SEO value to users searching for a family law firm that specialises in collaborative law, you could make the sentence "Check out our website if you want to read more about our work as [collaborative family law specialists](#)." In this case the blue anchor text, "collaborative family law specialists", links to your firm's website www.hargreavestillson.com, or better the specific page on that website that deals with collaborative law. Therefore that anchor text ranks with the search engine for your key phrase and you get SEO credit for that. Simple! ⁴

What about internal links?

Back to our family law firm that specialises in collaborative law techniques. They have produced an e-Book entitled "How Collaborative Law Can Save Your Sanity When You Divorce". They create the following link in their website:

"Download [here](#) for our ebook about collaborative law."

We know that there is SEO value in internal links, so what SEO value does the firm get from using the word "here"? None.

⁴ You create the link in the WordPress dashboard – it's easy. See MatureMedia Guide *WordPress As Your Professional Platform*



Try this instead:

“Check our eBook to find out how our work as [collaborative family law specialists](#) can save your sanity.” Blue anchor text links to the eBook download.

How about an internal link from one post to another to another post in your blog? Let’s say the keywords are again “collaborative family law specialist” – you want to refer your reader to another post you have written on your blog, “The Need To See A Specialist When Looking For A Collaborative Law Solution”. Instead of the words “[click here](#) to read another post on this subject” try instead “you should be careful which firm you hire for this type of work, at best you need a [collaborative family law specialist](#) to show you the way.” That anchor text links to your article “The Need To See A Specialist When Looking For A Collaborative Law Solution”.

A plugin for internal linking will help e.g. SEO Smart Links ⁵ which automatically links a specified term with pages, tags etc.

Also, check for broken links. These appear regularly, and hurt your reputation with users. It’s just a bad look for users to find themselves at a dead end when they click on a link on your blog. Google doesn’t like it as well.

⁵ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/seo-automatic-links>



Once you have a decent amount of content, it is too difficult to track the broken links manually. Instead you can install a plugin to check and then monitor for broken links e.g. Broken Link Checker ⁶. This (or similar) plugin will automatically monitor your posts for broken links.

Link externally, not just internally

It may appear counter-intuitive, but sending visitors off to another site (that is not your own) can be a good investment. This may be especially so if you link to the bigger core sites for your business or firm e.g. the CPA site for chartered practising accountants.

There is a level of social media reciprocity you can tap into. Link to another site and you might find they link back to you. This might be from a post or from your blogroll (usually found in the sidebar of your blog, it is a list of other blogs you recommend to your readers).

Internal links are important to search engines, they tell them what you consider important in your content. External links tell a search engine that you help visitors to find relevant useful information. It is always best if you can make the anchor text rich with keywords. Behind the anchor text are the HTML code – so you might have a line in your blog that reads, “Check out what he says about [collaborative family law](#), it's really interesting.”

⁶ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/broken-link-checker/>



Link popularity – inbound links to your pages are important for a higher ranking

Search engines are the judges in a worldwide competition, a beauty contest between the competitor websites. Other websites are also casting votes by way of links. And the more links to your website, the higher its ranking. This is called “link popularity”. Search engines listen to the opinion of other websites in order to form an opinion about yours ⁷. If lots of websites link to your page, that tells the search engine that page is important. So what you want are inbound links, the more the better, though as we will see, the quality of those links is critically important. What makes a website page popular? You need to learn those criteria if you want to attract inbound links.

There is bad news in this as well. All that SEO work you did on your site to get a higher rank in a search engine will have a lot less affect on inbound linking (because it is external to that effort). And since inbound links are one of the foundations of the Google algorithm, it limits what you can achieve by content development alone.

Nevertheless, remember that Google is looking more and more to quality content. For smaller professional firms, this is where the real opportunity lies, because larger outfits have (and still do, post Panda) large budgets to spend on inbound

⁷ These issues are discussed in full in the MatureMedia Guide *Get Found On Search Engines*



link development and other mechanical SEO. But content development, enhanced by the basic SEO techniques we have learnt, is where you can shine (and even outshine!) your big sibling competition.

Not all links are equal in value

Now the link plot thickens. The ideal kind of links are those that:

- come from relevant sites (sites which use the same keywords);
- come from important sites (have a high ranking);
- include your keyword as part of the visible link text (anchor text);
- include varying link text (not the same link text each time); and
- come from a page that links to few other sites.

Tick the boxes on some or all of these points and you gain Google street cred bigtime.

Be Realistic - it's more about targeted traffic, less about rankings

What do you want, a higher ranking or targeted searches that convert into traffic?

This goes back to your goals. Think about it – do you want to attract 50 people actively looking for your product or service, or do you want to be seen by 1000 visitors who will never be interested in your service? “Accountant” brings a very wide audience (and how do you propose to get a high ranking against multi-



national competition?), but “Mysuburb Accountant and Financial Planner” is well worth the SEO effort to improve rankings.

What is really unique is quality content (and by now you know how to do that!) – this will always be a more worthwhile effort than working to gain keywords against thousands of firms/businesses selling precisely the same services, many of whom have a lot more money to throw at the effort.

But what they don’t have is your voice, your opinions, your expertise or your personal vision.

Getting links

You don’t have a lot of control over backlinks, nor the anchor text that is used, unless you have influence with the offsite linker. But remember, they are gold, especially if they use a key phrase in their anchor text that is highly competitive (and therefore most used by searchers). So how do you get other sites to link to your pages? Apart from paying an SEO company to “campaign” on your behalf, here’s a few well worn methods that are commonly used:

Social bookmarks – sites like www.delicious.com are for bookmarking web pages, blogs etc., and these bookmarks are available for anyone to see. Sites such as Digg, StumbleUpon and Reddit also allow bookmarking, though other functions as well. The bookmarking is “social” because others share their views, much the same as a friend tells you about a great new movie. As we have learnt, just as you place greater value on the recommendation of a trusted friend, so search engines also place great emphasis on what others say about your blog.





Social bookmarks also allow you to browse through other's bookmarks and check their recommendations.

It is easiest to use a social bookmarking site by installing the button on your browser. When you want to bookmark a site, just push the button, and presto you will be asked for some more information to "tag" the site for future reference. You can access these bookmarked sites from any computer.

Delicious.com is the big daddy of social bookmarking sites. You can save your bookmarks online, share them with others, and take a look at what others have bookmarked.

Digg.com is a social news site. A listing here is being in the Olympic finals, a listing in the front page is the Gold Medal. If you "digg" a story (get it?) you can vote for it, and therefore it gains popularity. There is a common belief amongst SEO professionals that you cannot achieve a front page listing without professional help.

Reddit.com is news oriented.

StumbleUpon.com – one of the most interesting social bookmarking sites, it can send major traffic your way.

Social bookmarking for SEO

It doesn't take a lot of imagination to realise that social bookmarking can be useful for SEO if you bookmark your own articles, because search engine spiders



crawl these sites all the time. However, it's not foolproof and as ever the best way to get noticed is to have great content.

There are services and software that allow you to bookmark your blog article to multiple sites. However, be careful that you are not identified as a self promoter who does not contribute to the community, so make sure you also bookmark other sites as well. As with all things social media, make sure you know the landscape before you find yourself flat on your face. However, these communities can also be generous if you show the right attitude. For instance, when I first joined a LinkedIn Group, I messaged one of the prominent members before I submitted my first question, just to ensure I did not interfere with the dynamic of the Group. She replied promptly with some great advice.

Also, you should aim for the assistance of your faithful readers, so make it easy for them to bookmark your blog post and if possible apply appropriate keywords to the tag. You can use a plugin such as "AddThis" as a social bookmarking plugin.⁸

If you make your mark in social bookmarking, then those browsing through a bookmarking site might follow the trail back to the originator of the bookmark

⁸ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/addthis>



(that's you!) or perhaps join your social bookmark network because you make useful choices they can also follow.

Link partners

This is stating the obvious. If you are looking for those valuable backlinks i.e. links from other sites, then why not get them from a friend or from a reciprocal (“you scratch my back...”) relationship. This might be a strategic partner or a customer or even someone you have simply approached for a leg-up. Find them by using your keywords in Google and see who rates well in a business ancillary to your professional area and then send a message to their webmaster. Be careful about this approach, remember how annoying it is to receive unsolicited marketing calls in your business. Instead make the message personal, explain what is the advantage for both sites, describe your site, and offer an easy method of trading links. Where do you want them placed, and where will you place the reciprocal link e.g. on your links page. You might also like to exchange articles in the future, especially if you notice that their site uses guest posts.

However, the sites should have a relationship to your own business, industry or profession, and have a sufficiently high search engine ranking (greater than your own) to earn brownie points with Google. See if you can get the reciprocal linker to include your site's keywords in the anchor text of their link.

Of course (of course!) there is a buck to be made here, and you will not be surprised to learn that there are commercial link-location software and services for sale. Enter at your own risk.



Caveat emptor

Now for the rest of the caveat emptor and all the usual warnings. Google does what it does and you really don't know what that is. You might build an impressive list of reciprocal links only to find they are useless because of changes in the Google algorithm (this has happened before), or because they have not been properly executed. Therefore don't rely on it, and anyway it is quite time consuming.

You will find "link partner services", both paid and free, that are featured in internet ads and in search engine results. Some are better than others, some are legitimate commercial operations and some less so. All claim to be "search engine friendly", and most of the free services offer suggested templates for invitations to potential link partners. The best advice is to speak with your webmaster, or web designer, to get a professional opinion. However, so-called "black-hat" techniques that involve buying links are very dangerous. You may find it gives your site a short term boost, but you can also run afoul of Google. If you aren't found out today, there is every chance you will be tomorrow, because that's what Google is spending valuable time learning, how to detect paid SEO that is not organic (natural). In other words, it's actively looking for cheats.

This warning may appear unfair given the protestations of many SEO practitioners that they absolutely do not practice black hat techniques and their strategies are Panda (or later update series) compliant. Yes, it's tempting, but as a mature professional you have been around long enough that you do not believe everything you are promised. Usually when we embark on a program that is too



good to be true (“1000 legitimate inbound links and a first page Google rating for \$200”) it’s because you *want to be convinced*. That’s what their marketing relies on, an active partner in deceit. You have been warned.

Have a site map

A sitemap is exactly that – a page in your site that contains a set of links to every page on the site, organised in a hierarchical manner. In a more technical sense, it is an overview of your blog in XML (Extensible Markup Language).

Importantly, it is not only useful for users who may have gotten “lost” in your site. It is also useful for search engine crawlers, it tells them what is on your site that they may otherwise may have missed. It makes it easier for the web crawler to find every page of your blog.

Use a plugin for this for your blog that automatically builds a sitemap in the background.⁹

Some commentators place a great value on a site map for SEO purposes, or point out that it returns real SEO value for minimum input and is therefore a no-brainer.

⁹ e.g. <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/google-sitemap-generator/>



Get plugins that make SEO easier

There are dozens of SEO plugins.

For instance, WordPress has the free [All-In-One-SEO](#), or my favourite [Yoast Plugin](#), and many WordPress themes have built-in SEO optimization. Once you start using an SEO plugin, be careful not to delete or disable it because you may lose all the rankings you have worked so hard to obtain.

Do competitor analysis

Who is in your space? What are they up to? What are they doing that works for them? This is an easy research task, just put your keywords into a search engine and see who features in the results. Remember to do both the primary and long tail keywords.

Another good idea is to sign up for Google Alerts ¹⁰ using your keywords – how often do your competitors appear in the results? Also use the name of your major competitors to monitor when they are mentioned.

Compare oranges with oranges (like with like). What are they selling? What are their services? Can you discern whether you share an ideal client profile?

Enter you competitors brand names together with your own into Google Trends to see your performance over time compared to yours.

¹⁰ <http://www.google.com.au/alerts>



Use Webmaster Tools

What information does Google have about your website? Go to www.google.com/webmasters and use your Google account username and password to sign in (or get a Google account at Google.com/accounts). Then submit the domain you want to be the subject of the webmaster tools. This can be a bit tricky – there are a couple of ways to verify that you are the owner of the site, the most common way requires that you have access to the CPanel of your site to upload an HTML file.

You will see “crawl errors”, which interfere with Google’s ability to look at your pages. You can discover why the error has occurred. You can submit an XML sitemap and check many features of your site, including html improvements that can be made.

Okay, we’ve looked at getting found on search engines, keywords analysis and SEO. Now for the fun – WordPress as your blogging and website platform.