

Reaching the Summit of Natural Search Results

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A climber's checklist for reaching the top of search engine results rankings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Climber's Checklist

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of designing a website to enhance its chances of being ranked highly when a person uses a search engine to find related content. The checklist will help educate readers about the fundamentals of SEO and provide tactics to improve a website's ranking in the listings of natural (unpaid) search results returned by the many popular search engines.

Why SEO is important

Search engines have become the quickest and easiest method to find products and services on the Internet—in May 2007, 550 million searches per day were conducted in the United States by Internet users.¹ Ranking well increases a company's chances of converting possible customers into paying customers.

Of the two types of search results returned by the major search engines—natural and pay-per-click (PPC)—studies show that natural search results are noticed, read and clicked on more often than paid search results. Natural results have a 65 percent click-through rate if listed first versus a 3-10 percent click-through rate for a paid search.² Given the increasing cost of PPC advertising using popular keywords in competitive industries, a strategy of optimizing a website to achieve higher natural search results rankings can produce a higher return on investment (ROI) for many advertisers.

Scope of this Checklist

This checklist first provides an overview of two fundamental concepts in natural SEO: site relevance and site popularity. It will then recommend tactics, for enhancing site relevance and popularity that can improve a website's ranking on natural search results. Finally, the checklist

provides a list of additional resources the reader may find valuable when executing natural SEO.

Although many search engines are available, Google dominates the industry landscape (Figure 1) with a 65.26 percent share of all searches as of April 2007³. Given the

Google-centric nature of search today, this tool will focus primarily on techniques for optimizing a website for Google.

Intended audience

The information and recommendations provided in this paper are intended to help **web marketing strategists** plan more effective website designs and advertising campaigns, as well as to assist **website developers** in executing the plans and campaigns.



Figure 1: The Google-centric search landscape.

CONTENTS

Page	
2	Important SEO concepts and definitions The important ideas and language of SEO
4	The Natural Search Climber's Checklist A comprehensive step-by-step guide to effective SEO Step I: Pre-Climb Preparation Step II: On-Page Tactics Step III: Off-Page Tactics
9	Additional resources A list of directories, tools and other sources of information for executing effective SEO