

Optimisation for Search Engines

You want to be on the web in order to drive your business forwards, so you need a solution that enables you to be found by the major search engines. This Application Note will help you make search engine optimised websites with Pepperio.



How does a search engine work?

A very simple browser

A search engine first launches an application that works like a very simple browser. This browser, also referred to as a “spider” or “crawler” only supports basic HTML features and not more sophisticated elements like Javascript or Flash movies.

The spider visits a web page, downloads it to a central server, stores all content in a database and indexes its content based on relevance. All links found in the downloaded page are “spidered” in this same way. And so on. From this moment a visitor can use the search engine to query the database that holds the stored content. On regular intervals the spider checks to see if there is new or updated content available on your website.

Because of the limited functionality of the search engine’s spiders, they often are unable to read pages that regular users view perfectly through their browsers. In this case your site becomes a dead end for the spider, because there is no content, so no further links can be found. In fact, when your site has these so called “spider blocks” it will not reach the audience you intended, because they will never find you through a search engine.

Spider blocks

Prevent Spider Blocks!

Spider blocks can be caused by the following factors:

1. **Flash:** Flash movies are not indexed by search engines because for search engines they contain no text.
2. **Forms:** forms are often used to implement navigation for a website. Search engines are not able to submit these hidden forms and therefore this kind of navigation will prevent your site from being spidered.
3. **Frame sets:** In general, do not use framesets if you want your site to be indexed properly. The biggest mistake one can make is to display a message like “Your browser does not support frames”. In that case this message will be the only content that can be found by a search engine.
4. **Javascript:** If you use Javascript to create hyperlinks there is a high chance that a search engine’s spider will not be able to recognise it as a valid link.
5. **Client side redirects:** Redirects are used by spammers to ‘trick’ spiders. Spiders however recognise this and will not follow these kinds of redirects.
6. **Query strings, cookies, sessions:** Spiders will avoid crawling URLs which are too long or have parameters in them (like <http://mysite.com/page.asp?id=1234>). Also permanent cookies and browser detection scripts are causes for spider blocks.



Spider block example

Example

How you see this site:

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Western Australian Government's job portal. The header includes the logo 'jobs.wa.gov.au' and the text 'EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'. A navigation bar contains links for 'HOME', 'SEARCH FOR JOBS', 'APPLICATION INFORMATION', 'GRADUATE OPPORTUNITIES', and 'HELP'. A sidebar on the left lists 'Job Search', 'View Latest Jobs', 'Help', 'Email me Jobs', 'Login', and 'Closed Jobs'. The main content area is titled 'Job Search' and contains a search form with filters for Occupation, Salary Range, Location Region, Agency, Work Type, and Level. A search bar is labeled 'Position Number or Keywords' and 'Advertised (in the)'. A badge on the left indicates '500 Jobs Advertised'. The footer mentions 'powered by BIGREDSKY'.

How a search engine sees this site:

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.01 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head>
<title>Your browser does not seem to support frames or frame support has been disabled</title>
</head>
<body>
<br><br>Your browser does not seem to support frames or frame support has been disabled
</body>
</noframes> </html>
```

And the result is:

The screenshot shows a Google search result. The search bar contains the text 'Your browser does not seem to support frames or frame support has been disabled'. Below the search bar, there is a link to 'jobs.wa.gov.au/search/'.

Optimise your site

The Jury

The Indexing mechanism of a search engine is like a jury giving points to a contestant. The more points you get the bigger the chance you'll be the winner in the final ranking. This section provides some tips on how you can get many points. However, don't overdo it because you'll be punished if the density of your keywords is too high and it will be recognised as malpractice. ☒

The voting process

Improving results

How crawlers vote for pages:

(please note that the actual ranking can differ from the ones presented below!)

1. Word in "title" meta tag
2. Word in <h1> tag
3. Word in <h2> tag
4. Word in link text
5. Word in bold
6. Word in meta tag "keywords"
7. Word in first paragraph
8. Word in body text
9. Word in image description tag

No extra points are assigned for any other tags, even custom tags like <Mainheading>, Flash, other movies or images!

How search engines represent your pages:

In general search engines will use the content of the <title> and <description> meta tags to display your page in their search results. The content of these tags are of equal or bigger importance than the content of any print advertisement. Paying attention to a proper title and description can therefore make a huge difference to the number of visitors that you will receive.

Use link texts that make sense!

Search engines attach meaning to the text that is used to describe links within the content. Therefore prevent the use of link texts like "read more..." or "read entire story...". Instead use descriptive titles like "How our product x helps solving problem y".

Use a Robots.txt file

A robots.txt file will tell a spider where to look and what to spider or not. Make sure you have one and if you do, make sure that it allows the spider to crawl the pages you want it to crawl. If you don't have Pepperio you can find some useful information on: <http://www.robotstxt.org/>

Use a sitemap

Search engines always look for sitemaps, because they contain important links and the structure of your site.

Build links

Building links is very important. Not only because they will deliver traffic directly from the referring sites. Like keywords vote for your page, links from other websites vote for your page as well. However pay attention to the type of site that you want to link from, because the weight of vote of the referring site is determined by the number of votes this site has itself. In general try to build links from sites that have authority, like important customers, suppliers and online directories like DMOZ.

Some additional tips on link building

1. Always link to your home-page, because otherwise the votes will distributed among other pages on your site and the number of votes for your homepage will be much lower!
2. Use descriptive text for the links, not just the site name or URL.
3. Do not use so called link farms or try to build them yourselves. They will be considered as spam and you may be excluded from the search results.



Pepperio helps!

We hope you find this information useful for building better sites. Pepperio supports you in many ways to build search engine optimised sites:

No Spider blocks with Pepperio

Pepperio sites won't have spider blocks. Pepperio does not use Javascript in the wrong places, it does not use forms or Flash for navigation, it does not use frame sets, client side redirects, query strings, cookies or sessions. On the contrary, the Pepperio software and setup of the templates assures that your site is deeply and properly indexed by search engines.

Optimised pages with Pepperio

With Pepperio you can really tune your website to excel at the search engines:

1. You can create any custom URL you wish, containing just the right structure and relevant keywords.
2. Pepperio provides editors for the metatags like "title" and "description" and offers automated checks that will prevent them from becoming too long.
3. Pepperio pages are Strict xHTML 1.0 and the templates are pre-tested before they are released for use.
4. We make sure that the first paragraph really is the first paragraph and the flow of content is just how a spider likes it.
5. For all images on your site, you can enter descriptions in a very convenient way.
6. Pepperio uses style sheets to render pages that only use tags that vote for your pages.
7. Pepperio provides sitemaps that are generated automatically, contain no bad links and they are always up to date.
8. Pepperio offers "in context" managed links that will deliver higher votes and prevent dead links.
9. Finally on the server side, we take every measure to make sure that your site scores well.

So Pepperio helps you in every way it can. Now it is up to you to do the most important part: writing content that is useful, relevant and attractive. Pepperio's built-in WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) editor helps you to create pages with a very professional look and feel quickly and perfectly.

pepperio™

 Website management for smaller businesses