Attracting Google's army of spiders

Rose Judson explains how to ensure your website catches more than flies!

As a pest control professional, you probably have something of a professional interest in spiders. As a search engine marketing professional, so do I. But in my case, I'm concerned with search engine spiders, automated programs that crawl the World Wide Web, moving from site to site via links. When these programs find your pest control website, they index it, adding it to the databases of Bing, Yahoo!, and Google.

They tell the search engine what your site is about and assign it a quality score. The better your quality score, the more likely it is that your site will rank on the front page of search results. This makes it easier for the 165,000 people who search for 'pest control' in Britain each month to find you. If you're not seeing your site in search results, you need to attract the spiders. You need search engine optimisation (SEO).

SEO is the process of changing the organisation and content of a site to influence its search ranking. The basic principles of SEO are simple: search engine spiders like more or less the same things human customers like. They want a site that…
③Is clearly organised and easy to navigate
③Has useful, relevant, original content that's updated regularly
③Has lots of links from other pages, proving it has a good reputation.

Search engines tweak their algorithms frequently, putting emphasis on different quality factors, but these three ingredients are always valued.

Keywords - the foundation of site optimisation

When crawling your site's pages, spiders will notice terms that are used over and over again. These are keywords, and it's in your interest to do some research into keywords people search with when they want to find a business like yours. Using search keywords in the content on your pages means you're more likely to turn up in results when users enter them into the search box.

Use the free tool at **http://goo.gl/sqfGh** to generate a few short lists of keywords (make sure you select 'United Kingdom' as your country, USA is the default). These can include:
③Searches on your company name
③Searches for 'pest control' or 'exterminator' in the areas you serve (for example, 'pest control Redditch', 'pest control Alvechurch', 'pest control B45')
③Residential or business terms ('home extermination service', 'restaurant pest controllers')
③Terms that deal with specific pests: rats, mice, silverfish, etc.

Pick about seven to ten important keywords to use for each of your website's pages.

Website organisation

Don't try to put everything about your business on your homepage. Your homepage should summarise what your business does and give its full contact information, along with a list of communities you serve. Other topics should have their own pages. You can have an 'about' page that gives more information about your company, a page listing services and fees, one with your location and operating hours (including a map), the products you use, case studies, etc.

On each page, make sure you separate content into sections with clear headings that use keywords. Keep paragraphs short, and use keywords as often as seems natural.

Beware: stuffing content with keywords to the point where it doesn't sound like normal writing can backfire on you. It puts readers off, and search engine spiders may think your site is a spam site. Also, don't plagiarise other sites. The search engines can spot this and will penalise your site for it with a low quality score.

> "SEO is the process of changing the organisation and content of a site to influence its search ranking. The basic principles of SEO are simple: search engine spiders like more or less the same things human customers like."

> "Millions of people in the UK have social media accounts they pay attention to regularly."

Metadata and navigation - the techy bit

Next, you need to optimise some information only the spiders can see. Right-click on your homepage and select "view page source". This will open a window that contains the page's source code, including the metadata: the title, description, and keywords. For instance, if you visit BCPA's site and look at the source code, near the top of the page you will see:

```
<title>British Pest Control Association</title>

<meta name="Description" content="British Pest Control Association" />

<meta name="Keywords" content="british, pest, control, association,
controller, uk, member, bpca" />
```

I'd revise this to:

```
<title>The British Pest Control Association: Improving Public Health
Through Pest Control</title>

<meta name="Description" content="The British Pest Control Association
represents professional exterminators of public health and nuisance
pests, providing training, research and industry outreach." />

<meta name="Keywords" content="british pest control association, pest
control certification, pest management level 2, bpca certified, bpca"/>
```

The title should announce what your page is about. The description should summarise it in a sentence or two. The keywords should include five or so of the terms you researched.

Update metadata for each page, making it relevant to that page's topic.

Finally, make sure your site's navigation bar – the part of the site where users can click to other pages – is text-based rather than Flash animated. Spiders can't see the links on a Flash bar, and if they can't see the links, they won't visit and index the other pages on your site.

Good site content draws links

One of the most effective things you can do to improve your search engine rankings is to create original content - 'link bait', we call it. Anything that draws readers to your site and attracts links, likes and tweets is good. More links means more visits from the spiders, which usually means a higher ranking.

One option is to maintain a blog. You write short entries about your latest projects, special offers, your views on the industry, new products you are trying out, consumer guides and tips for homeowners or businesses, etc.

A blog should be updated at least once a fortnight. It doesn't need to be 'War and Peace' – short articles are all that's required.

If that's too time-intensive, you can opt to add a few static pages to your site that include useful information for potential customers. Guides and short lists are good for this: 'Top Ten Summertime Pests in Britain', 'How To Keep Mice Out Of Your House' etc. BPCA can help with these.

Whichever option you choose, you'll want to promote it via social media.

Social media and link building

Millions of people in the UK have social media accounts they pay attention to regularly. Posting your latest articles and updates to Twitter, Facebook, and sharing sites like StumbleUpon can bring a lot of eyes to your website, raising it in the search result rankings. Companies frequently employ private contractors (like yours truly) to run their blogs and social media accounts.

If that's not in your budget, it's still worth it to spend a few hours claiming Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts for your business. These are free to open and give you a place to put up a link back to your website. You should also edit your company's profile on free directory sites, such as Google Places, Yahoo! Local, Yelp.com, and MerchantCircle.

Finally, make sure your site contains links back to organisations you're associated with. If you're approved by local councils, link to them. If you've won a local business award or are listed with a Chamber of Commerce, link to them, too. And if you're a member of, say, a trade association, by all means put that link front and centre on your page.

Rose Judson is an independent Search Marketing Specialist and Google Adwords Certified professional based in Birmingham.

Her practice focuses on improving clients' website content and social media profiles. Clients range from sole-proprietor businesses to Fortune 1000 corporations.

This article is a summary of a presentation given at the BPCA Servicing Committee meeting on 11 September 2012.

rose.judson@gmail.com
Telephone: 0791 000 3933
Skype: rose.judson

> "Beware: stuffing content with keywords to the point where it doesn't sound like normal writing can backfire on you. It puts readers off, and search engine spiders may think your site is a spam site."