



LoopFuse Marketing Best Practices Exchange

Search Engine Optimization: Best Practices

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Overview

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of making sure people find your website when searching Google, Yahoo or Bing for websites that promote goods or services like yours.

Let's say your business develops software for managing customer service call centers. Great SEO would help ensure your site is among the first few Google results when someone searches for "call center software." People who come to your website via search engine links and enter your sales funnel are called "SEO Leads."

If you're doing a good job of SEO, then SEO leads can be very valuable. A marketer at a database management software company once observed that **SEO leads were 10 times more likely to become qualified sales opportunities than leads generated by the next best lead sources**, such as white paper promotion campaigns (e.g., TechTarget, eMedia, et al) or trade shows, etc. Conceptually, this makes sense: SEO leads are likely in need of what they're searching for and trying to find you (inbound leads) instead of vice versa (outbound leads).

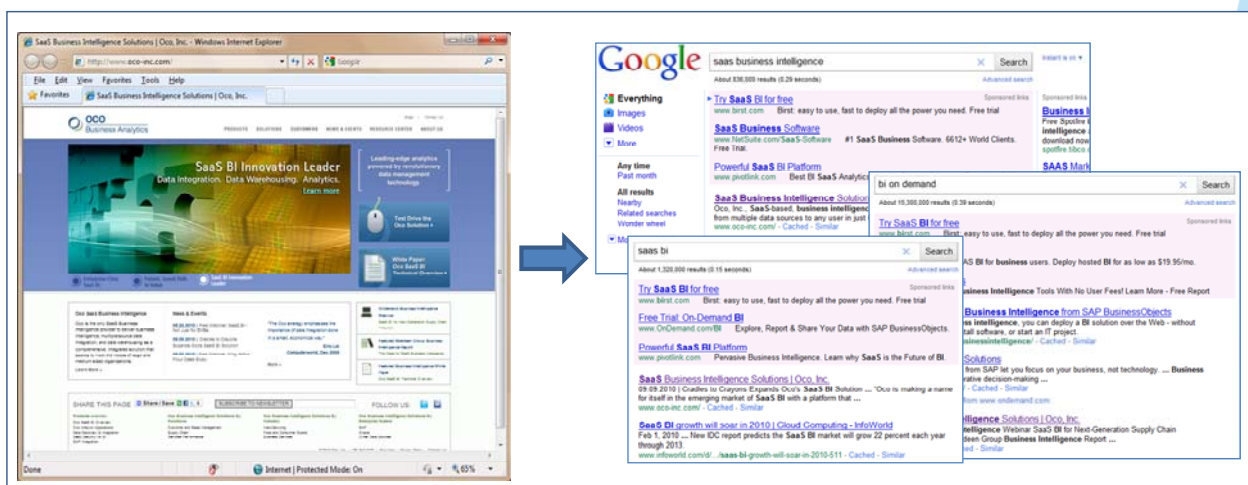
Therefore, SEO is a very worthwhile web marketing investment. This paper will explain SEO basics and provide useful SEO tips to help increase high-quality traffic to your website, including :

- Anatomy of a website that's designed to produce strong SEO results
- Choosing what search terms to optimize for
- Other SEO Do's and Don'ts

This paper will also touch on a related topic, Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising (e.g., Google Adwords), but a separate paper will cover PPC more in-depth.

Anatomy of a Well-Optimized Site

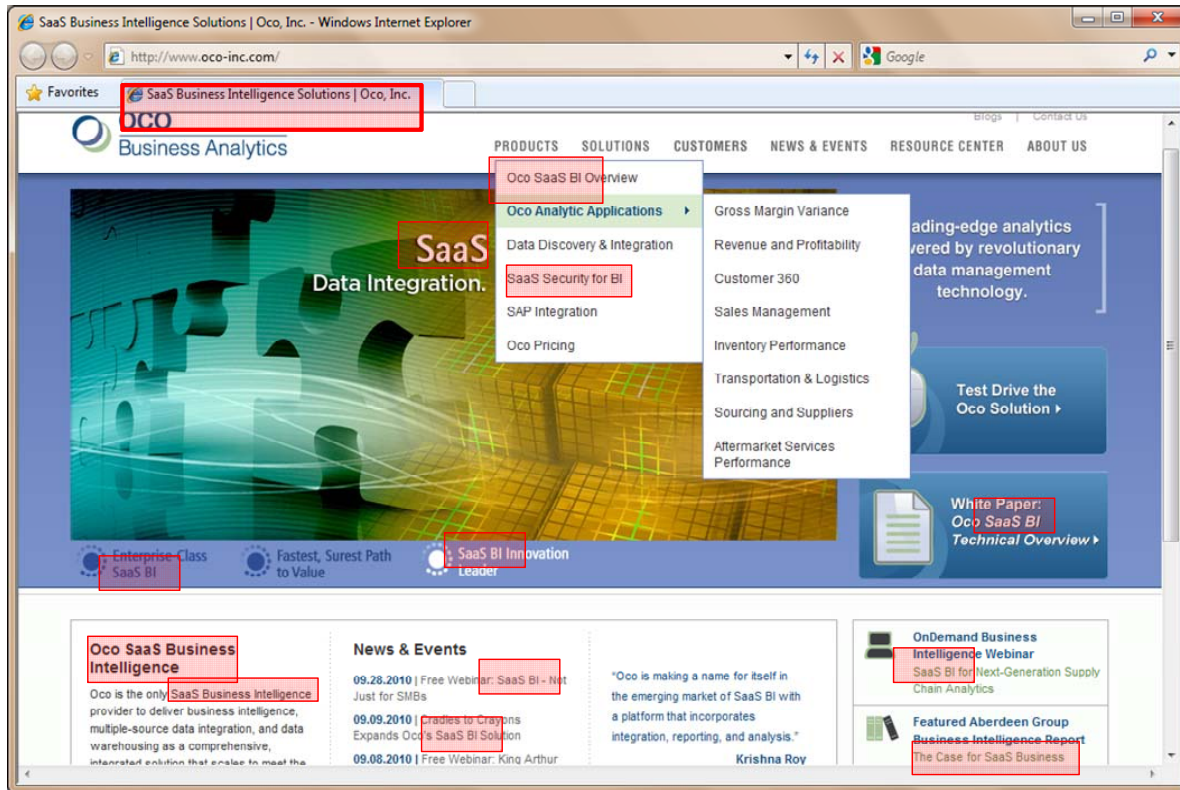
The picture below shows a LoopFuse customer with a well-optimized website. As you can see, Oco's website shows up as the 1st or 2nd item when you search for SaaS Business Intelligence (or related



terms).

The page shows up at the top of the Google search results because the Google web indexing engine has “crawled” the content of the web page and determined that it is highly relevant to terms like “SaaS BI.” Google does not publicize the rules its engine follows when determining a page’s subject matter and relevance, and its rules differ from other web indexing engines like Bing and Yahoo (neither of which return the Oco web page above at the top spot in “SaaS BI” search results).

The following practices have been shown to positively affect how a web indexing engine like Google rates the relevance of a page to a certain term or terms; “SaaS BI,” in Oco’s case.



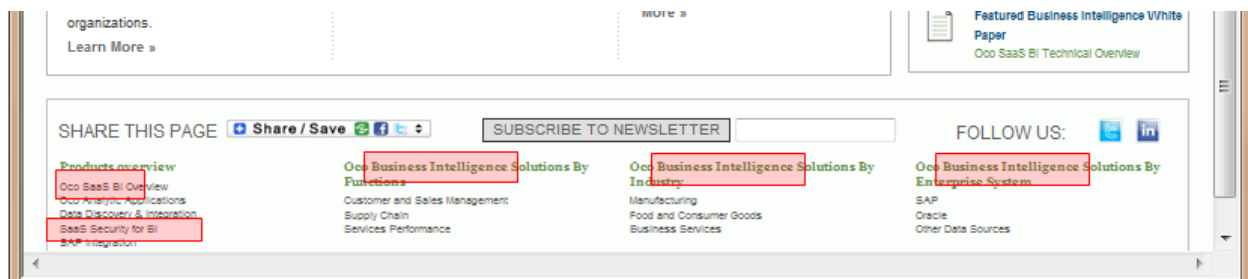
Notice the frequent use of “SaaS BI” on the web page above. Use the term(s) for which the page is being optimized in:

- Web page text
- Menu items
- The Web page title (<TITLE> HTML tag)
<title>SaaS Business Intelligence Solutions | Oco, Inc.</title>
- Web page Meta data – description and keywords
<meta name="description" content="Oco, Inc., SaaS-based, business intelligence provider delivers a set of reports and KPIs from multiple data sources to any user in just 6 to 10 weeks" />
<meta name="keywords" content="SaaS business intelligence, SaaS BI" />
- URLs (e.g., “../oco-saas-bi-overview.htm” instead of “../oco-product-overview.htm”)

- Title, Href and Alt parameters of links and images (<A> and HTML tags), as was done with the large banner image on the page above:

```
<a title="Saas BI Innovation Leader: Data Integration, Data Warehousing, Analytics."  
href="http://oco-inc.com/oco-saas-bi-overview.htm">  
  </a>
```
- Links to other pages with similar keywords. Outbound links are important to provide additional related content to both internal pages (other pages on your website with similar terms) and external pages (third-party sites).
- Site Map footer – providing a quick navigation element to help users find the content they want quickly. As it appears on every page, it naturally and logically repeats key word usage – thereby increasing your page relevance.

Using the key term as a section header (using the <H> HTML tag) and/or within hyperlink text is also beneficial. That's why you may notice websites that include a section full of links at the bottom of pages, as shown in the image below:



Human readability versus Indexing Engine readability

Some of the practices above can be taken to extremes. In an effort to influence the web indexers, one could literally fill a page so full of "SaaS BI" references in the example above that it ceases to make sense to human readers – and may result in poor search engine results as Google determines your content to be unreadable by humans. Proper SEO optimizes for human and for web-indexing readability.

You don't have to optimize every page for the same term







While you'll generally pick a primary topic for which to optimize your site, there are other secondary terms or phrases you'll also use for optimization in order to attract visitors. In our example, Oco optimizes their site for SaaS BI, which is its target market. But, Oco realizes that many potential customers use other web search terms when looking for solutions. They may try "inventory analysis," or "supply chain reporting." For these important search phrases, create specialized "landing pages" (such as the "Inventory Analysis" page shown on the right) that are optimized for secondary SEO terms.



Optimizing for different search engines – Google vs. Bing vs. Yahoo, etc.

As mentioned above, different search engines have different rules for ranking the relevance of web page content to search keywords. The Oco website usually ranks #1 when searching for "SaaS BI" on Google, but it's further down the results list when searching on Bing and Yahoo. Following the advice in this paper should improve your SEO results on all engines.

If there's a question whether to design for better SEO on one search engine versus another (e.g., for Yahoo rather than Google), you should settle the matter by using Google Analytics or LoopFuse (shown below) to determine which search engine(s) drives the most traffic to your site, and then optimize for the top engine(s). According to the LoopFuse report below, Google drives over 80x more overall traffic to the site than Bing. While you may be inclined to improve SEO for Bing, it probably shouldn't be done at the expense of lowering Google SEO.

Displaying all Search Engines	
Visits	Search Engine
1,159	 Google
14	 Bing
4	 Yahoo!
3	 AOL
1	 Ask.com
1	 Search.com

What Term(s) Should You Optimize For?

The search terms for which you optimize your website will vary depending on the maturity of your market, what types of visitors you're trying to attract and many other factors. This can often be a more strategic marketing messaging and positioning exercise. Here are some tips to consider:

Focus sharply	<p>“Jack of all trades, master of none” applies to SEO. You’ll be more successful optimizing a site for one or maybe a small handful of related topics than you’ll be trying to optimize for a long list of keywords. Keep your page title, page content, and page metadata consistent with each other and all focused on the term(s) for which you’re optimizing. Resist the temptation to make the page or site serve too many different audiences.</p> <p>You’ll use pay-per-click (PPC) advertising to drive traffic to your website for less strategic, infrequently-used search terms (e.g., in the Oco example above, they optimize for SaaS BI (their market), but use PPC to attract people searching for things like “Inventory reporting,” “Profitability Analysis,” “SAP data integration,” etc.</p>
Take an outside-in view	<p>It may seem instinctive to optimize your site for the term used to classify your product or market—what you are. But that might not be the same term your target customers are using to search the web. This is often true within nascent (and still largely unknown) markets or companies. Instead, consider terms describing what your product is used for. For example, a Temporal Analytics software company might optimize for “stock market predictions” instead of “temporal analytics.”</p>
Analyze the competition	<p>It’s easy to see what keywords others in your market are optimizing for. Go to any website, click the right mouse button on a blank part of the page and choose “View Source” from the pop-up menu. A window will open and display the HTML code that defines the page in your browser. Near the top of the page, you’ll find <meta name=“keywords” followed by a list of keywords for which the page is being optimized. Study a few sites in your market to get keywords ideas.</p>
Use SEO software	<p>There are services in software like Google Adwords, WordStream and HubSpot that provide information about keywords, such as how frequently they’re used in Internet searches, etc. Also consider building an XML site map using free tools. This site map is invisible to visitors, but provides a useful and meaningful file of data to search engines.</p>
You [probably] don’t need to optimize your brand	<p>Unless your company name is also a general term, you don’t need to give your company name or other brand elements the SEO treatment. For example, Loopfuse.com will rank at the top of SEO results because the web domain name is loopfuse.com, and the website naturally has many mentions of Loopfuse, etc. Adding “Loopfuse” to a page’s META Keywords list isn’t necessary.</p>

Other SEO Do's and Don'ts

Besides the web content practices described above, there are other factors that affect your site's SEO, including the number of other sites that link to yours, how frequently people click on links to your web pages from within the Web search sites, and so on. Here are some additional SEO best practices:

<p>Increase links to your website</p>	<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create great content that people find informative and useful. Give away free advice or products (like software downloads). You'll be rewarded with word-of-mouth promotion; people will tweet, email and blog about your page(s) and increase traffic to your site. • Release press announcements (containing occurrences of your SEO keywords that link back to your site) over newswire services like PRWeb.com, which is economical, user-friendly and effective. News websites monitor PR announcements and may re-publish your news (containing links to your site) on their sites. • Finding business partners who will add descriptions of your business and a link to your site is also effective. They'll often expect you to reciprocate. • Make sure the text/links on the other website include your SEO term(s). <p>DO, BUT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add mentions of your website when constructively contributing to public discourse, such as adding comments to others' blogs or when making updates to Wikipedia, BUT...Wikipedia and many blogs insert special web link parameters (NOFOLLOW) that instruct web indexers to ignore links to other sites when indexing their web pages. People will view and follow links, but web indexers will ignore them and they will not improve your SEO. <p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay "link building" services to create links to your site within their directory sites. • Similarly, don't pay for inbound traffic to your site. You may see an increase in your Google Page Rank, but it will be short-lived, and will dilute the value of your analytics/reporting.
<p>Avoid getting penalized by the search engine indexers</p>	<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search the web for articles on "black hat SEO" to learn more about practices that will hurt your SEO <p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add invisible text to your web pages (e.g., white text on a white background) or string together repeated sequences of keywords in order to up your SEO. Web search engines like Google have ways of telling when a website is greatly sacrificing human readability in order to increase SEO, and they will penalize your site by lowering a page's SEO score or not even indexing it.

Consult SEO specialists	<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider hiring an SEO consultant to optimize your website. They're usually helpful with pay-per-click advertising, too. Depending on your business, market and website, they'll work pretty intensely for the first few weeks getting everything set up, and then go into monitoring and tuning mode (working a few hours per week) after that. You should see noticeable results within 2-3 months, and then just bring them in one per quarter to keep SEO up to date with changes to your market, products, messaging, etc. • Contact colleagues for SEO consultant recommendations
Measure SEO performance	<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure your SEO performance before, during and after you implement your SEO changes. You can use SEO reporting software (e.g., Google Analytics) to show you what search terms are bringing people to your site. • Perform simple before and after measurements. Google your SEO term and see where your site shows up in the results (1st listing? 79th?). Then after you perform your SEO changes, repeat the test and see if you improve. NOTE: It can take a few days for your changes to affect the search results.

Additional Info / Next Steps

Hopefully you found this paper helpful. Be sure to visit the LoopFuse Marketing Best Practices Exchange blogs <http://www.loopfuse.com/resources/articles.php> to read public discussion on this topic, including many other tips and tricks shared by web-marketing experts.

Upcoming papers will cover topics such as:

- Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
- Sales & Marketing machine (Lead qualification, nurturing)
- Website design
- Pay-Per-Click Advertising (PPC)
- PR/Social Media/Networking
- Mass Emailing
- Events marketing
- Direct mail
- Advertising
- Marketing Launches
- Reporting