

# 5 Steps to Search Engine Success

Everyone wants their website to rank No.1 in Google, but there can be only one winner. Arachnophobia is not an option! If you're smart enough to throw the search engine spiders the occasional fly from your kitchen window sill, you'll stand a better chance than most of achieving good listings. Follow our top 5 tips to get those friendly little cyber spiders working for you...

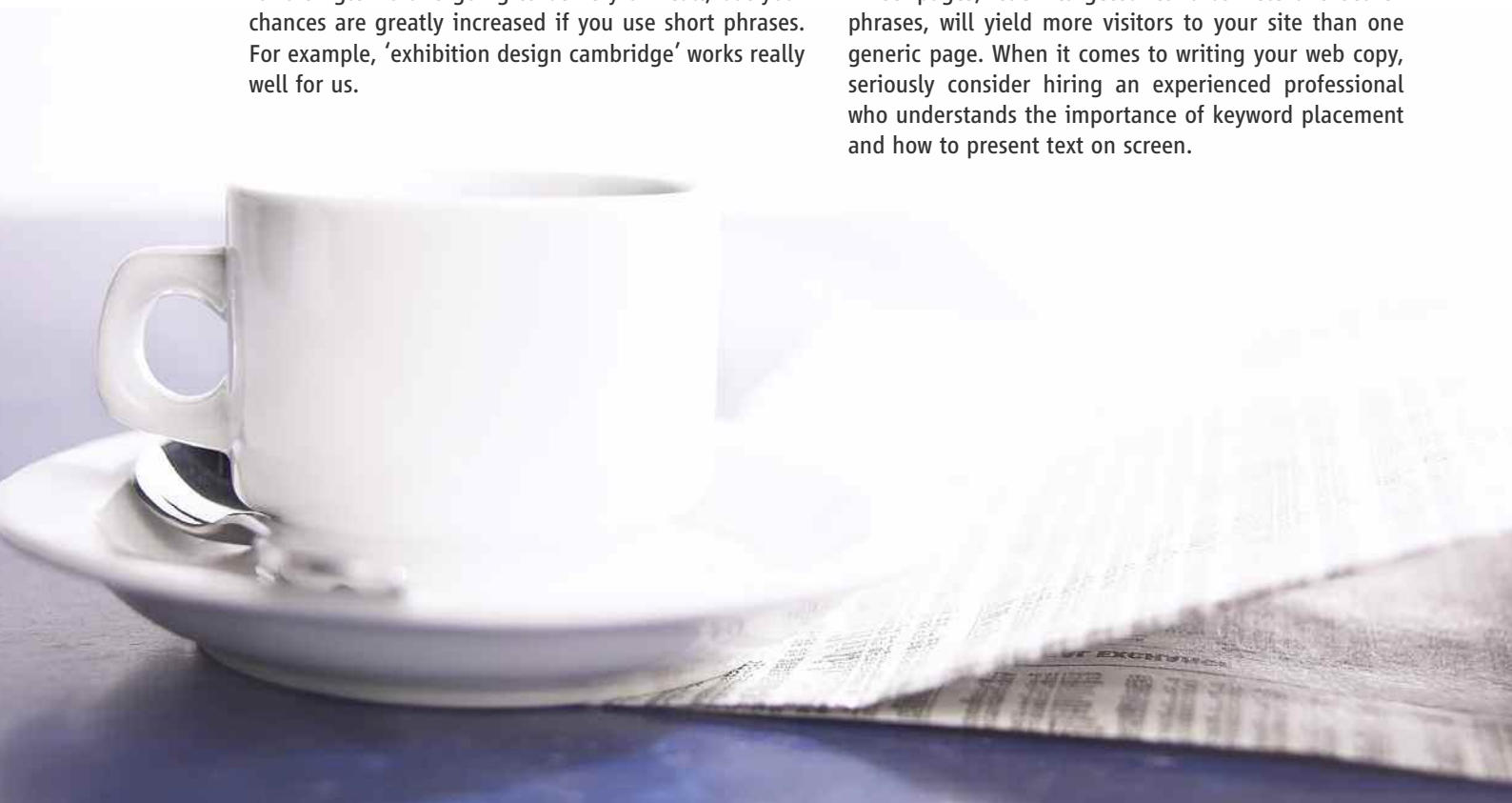
## 1 Research your keywords and phrases

Do your research BEFORE you start. The lessons you learn here will feed into the design process later. It is important to start with a thoroughly researched list of the actual search terms most often used to find content like yours. You may think that everyone will search for your products under 'widget', but test that theory and you might find that more people are actually searching on 'widgets' or 'gizmos'.

Many search engines provide tools that will show you the most popular search terms that people are using, and to help you define a list of keywords and phrases relevant to your content. Remember that getting ranked highly for a single word is going to be very difficult, but your chances are greatly increased if you use short phrases. For example, 'exhibition design cambridge' works really well for us.

## 2 Create some great original content

Search engines want to provide their users with the best quality search results. Site owners who take the time to create interesting, original web content are rewarded with higher rankings. Pages that rank best often contain very niche content, targeted towards very specific search terms. The more exactly your content matches a search term, the higher a page is likely to be ranked against that search term. It is a good idea to break web content into many short pages, each of which can be designed to rank well against the best search terms you identified. Why create a single page for 'coffee' when you could have a page optimised for 'java', one for 'arabica' and even one for 'kopi luwak'? Three pages, each targeted towards relevant search phrases, will yield more visitors to your site than one generic page. When it comes to writing your web copy, seriously consider hiring an experienced professional who understands the importance of keyword placement and how to present text on screen.



### 3 Code your pages effectively

The code behind your website has a direct effect on how well the page scores in the search engines' ranking algorithms. Enter the concept of 'semantic coding'. This refers to the correct use of XHTML standard tags to structure content in a way that is meaningful to search engine spiders. When followed correctly, this methodology helps spiders 'understand' the relative importance of the different content items on a web page, in turn affecting how well it gets indexed.

Bear in mind that template-based web solutions and low-end web design packages have not usually been developed with search engine optimisation in mind. They tend to require a lot more time, creativity and potentially advertising spend from you to achieve good rankings, so remember to factor this into your online marketing strategy if applicable.

### 4 Boost your link popularity

It's important to try to increase your link popularity by getting as many inward links to your content as possible. Many search engines' algorithms now factor in link popularity when ranking web pages. They check to see how popular content actually is by seeing how many other sites link to it. The more sites linking to your web page, the better it's ranking will be. The more 'popular' the page linking to your content, the bigger the bonus effect this in turn has on your page's rank.

How much time and money you throw at this will be determined by how important search engine referrals are in achieving your business objectives. Start by getting your site listed in the major online directories such as Yahoo!. It's worth spending some time finding the right category under which to be listed, and you may want to be listed under more than one.

There are plenty of other directory sites and portals out there that will let you add a short entry for free (and a bigger, better one if you pay them). Try searching for local business listing directories, trade directories or industry-specific portals that are relevant to your business. Some people go further, and actively approach owners of other relevant websites who may be prepared to exchange reciprocal links.

### 5 Analyse your traffic data

Having worked hard to get good rankings, you'll have to stay on the job. Having access to traffic data is a prerequisite for your ongoing search marketing strategy. Analyse the traffic you are getting and identify areas for improvement. Where are your visitors coming from? What search terms led the most people to your page? Which search engines and referring sites delivered the most visitors? Were the visitors relevant – what was the bounce rate? How long did they spend on your page? Where did they go next?

Once you understand the current situation, you can compare this data against your objectives and refine your strategy and fine-tune your pages accordingly. You should regularly review your content, keyword selection, site structure and user interface design. You should also keep an eye on your rankings by searching on your keywords in various search engines. As other site owners improve their sites and content gets re-indexed, your site's ranking may be adversely affected. Don't take good positions for granted - you'll have to fight to keep them!

Finally, if you have a search engine marketing budget that's burning a hole in your pocket, now would be the time to start experimenting with sponsoring keywords and buying advertising space – but that's a topic for another day...

---

Halfpenny Design Ltd, 9 West Road, Histon, Cambridge. CB24 9LH  
 t/f. 01223.720.124 | e. info@halfpennydesign.co.uk | www.halfpennydesign.co.uk  
 Registered in England No. 5743626 | VAT No. 879 2771 63

© Halfpenny Design Ltd. 2007. All rights reserved.

