



## SEO PROGRAMMER'S CHECKLIST

(BEGINNERS EDITION v1.0)

A 10-STEP RULE BOOK  
(\*with 3 bonus tips!)

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## **Author's Note:**

This is a quick "how-to" guide for the aspiring SEO programmer.

It shows you how to organize your code, has tips for architecting layouts and navigation for optimum usability. (read: for the spiders).

## The 10 Rules of SEO - for optimum ranking

Code should be clean. Easy, right? Eh, perhaps not - that's why there is so much written on this topic.

It is recommended that you read Google's entire webmaster guidelines if you are developing a new site and should be the first stop for you, the SEO architect. Google, MSN, Yahoo - most of the larger search engines have it. We focus mostly on Google, since they own over 50% of the market place.

### **Important reading material:**

1. Google's Webmaster tips:  
<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/>
2. Our site has many news articles and related info:  
<http://www.microsaw.com/search-news.htm>

### **Rule #1:**

Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links. Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link.

Your website's navigation is the foundation of your entire website. It binds all the pages together into a common theme and provides a clear vision to your website visitors.

## **Rule #2:**

Offer a site map to your users with links that point to the important parts of your site. If the site map is larger than 100 or so links, you may want to break the site map into separate pages.

Having a sitemap is crucially important. When a spider visits your website one of the first things it will look for is a file called sitemap. Search engine spiders have millions of pages to visit in a very short amount of time, they want to work as efficiently as possible. A sitemap will allow the spider to know what pages are most important to your visitors, and therefore, the most important to the search engines.

## **Rule #3:**

Create a useful, information-rich site, and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content.

You've certainly heard everyone talk about how content is king. It is important to note, however, that not just any content is king...unique content is king.

## **Rule #4:**

Try to use text instead of images to display important names, content, or links. The Google crawler doesn't recognize text contained in images.

This is an extremely important point that many, many website owners tend to ignore. They miss great opportunities to place heavy hitting keywords in great spots within their website. Instead, they place an image in that spot solely for the purpose of appearance.

Fortunately the web and most browsers have adapted CSS. With CSS you can format the style of your links and present important text in a stylish manner. Using CSS you can also present an image to your visitors while keeping important text in your code for the search engines.

### **Rule #5:**

Make sure that your TITLE and ALT tags are descriptive and accurate. This also include proper use of the H1 and H2 tags.

The title tag is the single most important part of SEO that you can optimize. The title tag is included in the head portion of every HTML page. The tag is intended to tell your visitors and the search engine what the subject of that specific page is.

Many website owners make a number of mistakes with their title tag. Many times they'll stuff the title with a list of keywords. Other times they will not

change the title from page to page. All of these things will hurt your rankings and drive the search engines away from your website.

A good title tag should be relatively short and highly descriptive. It should contain your most important keywords for that page, and it should make sense to a human reader.

### **Rule #6:**

If you use images on your website, you should always include an alt tag. Below is an example of an alt tag:

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Use "white-hat" SEO techniques - do not stuff keywords here. All code/content should be "natural", not "mechanical".

### **Rule #7:**

Check for broken links and correct HTML.

This is a simple step to take, and extremely important. This goes back to the concept that we want to make life easier on the search engine spiders. If a spider comes across a website with broken links

it may think that your website is incomplete. There are many good tools to use, and we have a few listed on our tools page.

Also, you should validate your HTML code - Firefox has some great extension you can add. You also of course have great tools at the World Wide Web Consortium's site - the HTML Validator, for example. If you have any mistakes in your HTML, the validator will tell you what they are and what you need to do to correct them.

**Rule #8:**

If you decide to use dynamic pages (i.e., the URL contains a "?" character), be aware that not every search engine spider crawls dynamic pages as well as static pages. It helps to keep the parameters short and the number of them few.

The larger a website gets, the greater the need for it to get some sort of content management system. If you own a shopping based website or a content based website that generates its pages dynamically, you should be aware of the implications to the search engines. Dynamic websites often employ the use of query strings.

### **Rule #9:**

Use Mod-Rewrites to change to spider-friendly site.

You can easily change your website URL's to be search friendly by using a tool called Apache Mod\_Rewrite.

Using Mod\_Rewrite you can turn a URL from looking like this:

`http://www.somesite.com/index.php?query_string=2932&name=some+name`

to this:

`http://www.somesite.com/2932/some-name.html`

There are tools for IIS/Microsoft as well, but typically it's handled via the ADMINISTRATOR directly in InetMGR.exe / MMC.

Also: make sure that you use 301 redirects to let visitors know if a URL has changed.

### **Rule #10:**

Use `<Strong>`, not `<B>`.

This is a complimentary rule to the spiders. Many old HTML tools auto-generate `<B>` (bold) tags. Today,

the search engine spiders understand that <strong> (same result, bold) will mean "hand-coded", versus "auto-generated" and will carry more weight.

### **Bonus tip #1:**

Frames, Javascript, Flash, robots.txt

**Frames:** If you must use frames then create a '\Home\' link on each of your individual content pages and point the link at your frameset index page.

**Javascript:** Use the NOSCRIPT tag to replicate the JavaScript link in standard HTML

Replicate your JavaScript links as standard HTML links in the footer of your page.

**Flash:** If you must use Flash then offer a standard HTML alternative within NOEMBED tags.

**Robots.txt:** Be careful, read our next guide on this powerful and often misused feature. For example, you should ALWAYS have 404 pages with a "noindex, nofollow" attribute.

**Bonus tip #2:**

Be careful who you link to - As you have no control over who links to your website, incoming links will not harm your rank. However outbound links from your website to \"bad neighborhoods\" like link farms will harm your ranking.

**Bonus tip #3:**

Excessive links: Excessive links on a given page (Google recommends having no more than 100) can lower its relevance and, although it does not result in a ban, this does nothing for your search engine optimizations strategy.

## **Next Steps.**

Now you have a site and proper architecture that are optimized for search engines. How about keywords and pay-per-click marketing? How about email marketing campaigns and affiliates?

Additionally, how do you keep monitoring and tracking, especially when concerning the competition?

Then, how can you purchase top rankings or placement through search engine advertising opportunities? We can show you how to get spidered in under 24 hours and get you started on the path of success.

Email us at [support@microsaw.com](mailto:support@microsaw.com) - and we'll send you our "SEO how to.. (advanced edition)" whitepaper, completely free of charge.

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