

## Best Practices for Search Engine Optimization

*Search engine optimization (SEO)* is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines such as Google and Yahoo. This is most commonly done to improve the visibility of a website in the search results from a "natural" or "organic" search performed by a user of one of the popular search engines. Typically, the earlier your website is presented in the search results (e.g. the higher it "ranks"), the more likely users are to visit your site.

A common component of a broader *Internet Marketing Strategy* for any business that relies on the web as a source of business, SEO considers how search engines work. Essentially, search engines continuously scan websites, building a master "index" of all the content that they find. This scan is continuously ongoing, following the links websites have to their own content as well as those between sites. The path and frequency in which a search engine finds your site, as well as the content it finds there, determines how your site is cataloged in its master index, and ultimately, how relevant your site is ranked within the displayed search results.

Optimizing a website primarily involves manipulating its content and coding (HTML) so that the search engine indexing process can occur unimpeded, and to improve the site's relevance to common search phrases.

### Built-in real.leads Features

Real.leads websites have a number of built-in features designed to enhance a website's search engine performance:

- A site map that offers plain text links to every section in the site for search engines and visitors alike to more freely navigate every section of your site
- Pages specific to the various geographic areas that your MLS(s) cover, including pages for each city, county, and school district. This offers a landing page for search engines to use for searches on a specific geographic location
- Enhanced browser titles to be more unique and specific to each page for improved indexing per page

While these enhancements do not guarantee improved search engine rankings, when coupled with the other SEO suggestions below, they are an effective part of an overall Internet marketing strategy.

### Optional Keywords and Site Description

We recommend that you write a **Description** for your site and a **Keyword** list which can be added to your site's *meta tags*. This will help insure your site appears in relevant search results.

- A Description gives the search engine a summary of what your site is about and may be used in the snippet of the search result. These are generally a sentence or two.  
For example, "Residential real estate website for buyers and sellers. Free online market evaluation." could be a useful description.
- A Keyword list can include words and phrases expected to be used in search engine initiated searches, such as services and or branding. Business DBAs and common misspellings of words ("remax" for "RE/MAX") should be included. Keywords are indexed by search engines without regard to case.

An example of suitable keywords would be:

"RE/MAX, remax, Remax [Office name], RE/MAX [Office name], Foreclosures, selling a home, selling my home, real estate listings, real estate, real estate agent, short sale, short sales, cma, market analysis, quick sale, Country Club Plaza Condominiums, lofts"

**Note:** Names of cities, counties and school districts should not be included as keywords, since they are already on the site map. However, informal and popular names of places that are locally well known (shopping/entertainment districts, golf courses, subdivisions, housing developments, etc.) should be included.

## Create Original Articles and Content

The single most important factor that will affect how effective search engine indexing will be for you is to ensure that your website has content that includes keywords that are relevant to what people will be searching on when using a search engine to identify providers of real estate services.

We recommend creating some original content for your site. To be most useful, this content should be relevant to the topics in which your target audience (prospective home sellers and buyers) are likely to be interested.

One example would be a brief welcome article on your website front page that introduces yourself and/or office and the primary services you offer and the primary areas you service. Another good section for search engines and your visitors alike would be pages that describe your principal areas of focus that encourage visitors to look for real estate in the area. Keywords that someone might search for that are used in these articles will be indexed by search engines. Remember to keep your site focused on the visitor experience and not primarily a search engine.

Another way to create relevant content is to start a *blog*. A blog is very similar in concept to a newspaper column. Blogs are often written as a "diary" in editorial format, by individuals with insight or specialized knowledge about a given topic. As a professional and expert in your local housing market, you may consider starting a real estate blog.

The blog can be created on any number of popular blogging sites, such as [www.Blogger.com](http://www.Blogger.com). They make it quite simple to start and maintain a blog. Once your blog is published on one of these sites, your real.leads website can automatically incorporate your blog into your website content.

You would have full control of this blog and we would just pull the feed provided by the blog. A blog post on your own site letting your visitor base know that you added something new is a great way to get the word out about new content or services you or your office offers.

It would be useful for your blog to include references to topics of interest to the national press (e.g. "foreclosure" or "mortgage rates") so as to promote rapid search engine identification.

Effectively promoting your new content will lead to faster discovery by those who are interested in the same subject. Other webmasters who follow your site or RSS feed could pick the story up as well.

## Sharing Links with Other Sites

After content, the next most important factor in search engine effectiveness is the *popularity* of your website. Popularity is determined by number of incoming links to you from other sites, and how heavily trafficked they are.

- Your primary domain (URL) should be listed through **RE/MAX Mainstreet**, to ensure your inclusion on the office/agent rosters found on [www.remax.com](http://www.remax.com). This is a very popular, high traffic site, which will in turn direct search engine traffic to your website.
- **Zillow.com** and **Trulia.com** are two high traffic sites that, when you post your listings, will publish links back to your website. Real.leads provides an automated feed compatible with both of these popular sites. The document titled Republishing Your Office Property Listings, found on the [www.realleads.net/training](http://www.realleads.net/training) site, contains more information on setting up Trulia and Zillow connections.
- The major search engines each have a “local business directory” feature where you should be listed. As a local business, adding your business information to this part of the search engines will help your customers find you on Google Maps, Yahoo Local and similar sites.

This requires a manual submission and verification process that must be done by you. Use the following links to learn about the process required of each:

- Google Local: <http://www.google.com/local/add/businessCenter>
- Yahoo Local: <http://listings.local.yahoo.com/csubmit/index.php>
- MSN/Live Search: <https://ssl.search.live.com/listings/ListingCenter.aspx>
- Consider establishing a presence on one or more popular social networking sites (e.g. My Space or Facebook). These sites can give you very broad and persistent exposure within your community. To learn more about the opportunities this creates for real estate professionals, see this article: <http://www.realtown.com/century21pei/blog/facebookrealestatemarketing>.
- The **Open Directory Project** is an exclusive directory of Internet Sources. This directory ranges in subjects from broad to specific. They are highly selective of who they list in their directory as they wish to be as useful as possible to their web users. Visit <http://www.dmoz.org/add.html> to read more information about this directory.
- Trading links with other professionals in your area and adding a reciprocal link to their site would help your site climb in the popularity rankings.

## A Single Main Office/ Premier Agent URL

We suggest having only one main URL used for a site to consolidate traffic and popularity on. Keeping the majority of visitor traffic and external links going back to one URL is how to best build up the popularity of a website since Google does not consolidate popularity going to one set of website content from different URL's. As a premier agent, we suggest you register your own domain so you have a top level domain for indexing. We suggest not primarily using a sub-domain URL under your office which would not be treated as relevant to search engines. To help your primary URL get exposure, you should list it on all your business cards, letterhead, posters, etc.

## Tracking the Results of Your SEO Efforts

To gain visibility of the nature and sources of traffic to your website, it is recommended that you register for a Google Analytics account. The document titled *Visitor Traffic Reporting for real.leads Websites*, found on the [www.realleads.net/training](http://www.realleads.net/training) site, contains more information about setting up a Google Analytics account.

