

Search Engine Optimising: What is it?

In a perfect world, all you'd need to do to get your site listed well would be to put it on line and tell a search engine that it exists. But faced with the millions of new sites that go live every day, most of the search engine operators use automated programs - known as spiders - to gather the data. The spiders look for certain indicators to guide them to a site's relevancy. The more easily these indicators can be found and understood, the more accurately can the spider assess the relevancy of the page.

There are essentially two types of search engine: those driven by automatic "spiders", and those operated by human editors. In practice many of the listing companies use a combination of the two techniques.

Spiders have a limited amount of intelligence which allows them to judge the relevance of a page for a particular search criterion. They're also able to recognise - and delist - certain of the more obvious tricks. This helps the search engine companies to avoid sending hits to sites that are trying to gain traffic that isn't relevant to the search word.

Human operators visit hundreds of sites daily, making judgments in a few seconds of what the site's about. Yahoo is the best known of this type of directory; like most systems of this type, Yahoo also receives input from spiders.

So search Engine Optimisation is the process of making a site easily understood by the spider or the editor. A carefully judged weighting is given to certain keywords to achieve a listing under relevant searches.

When a page has been optimised, it's submitted to the search engines for evaluation and - hopefully - a high level listing. This last part of the process is a question of finely judged timing - Multiple submissions are necessary, but overdo it and you'll be de-listed (see pitfalls for more about this).

The XSEO approach to all this is offer the search engines what they're looking for: clearly understandable pages that can be easily classified by humans or spiders. Inevitably, there are a few tricks of the trade that we use, but they're designed to help the search engine, not fool it.