

# Internet Marketing Secrets

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## SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Best Practices

*With your host Michael Campbell and SEO Specialist Mike Marshall.*

**Michael Campbell:** OK. With me now is Mike Marshall, who is widely known as the creator of the original Theme Master LSI tool for SEO professionals. He has recently released a new tool called [SEO Recon](#), that will analyze what your competitors are doing and generate detailed reports on how to get higher rankings than they do, in the search engine results.

We're going to chat today about SEO best practices. We'll take a look at a list of things that you should and should not do. We'll also take a look at what types of things can get you banned and how to do SEO properly so you'll stay within the webmaster guidelines.

Hello Mike, and welcome to the podcast.

**Mike Marshall:** Hello, Michael. It's nice to be here. Thanks for having me.

**Michael:** You're very welcome. So, tell me. Let me know all about the SEO practices. I'm sure that the listeners would be very excited to learn from someone such as yourself, who knows SEO and LSI and theming and all that stuff inside out.

**Mike:** As far as best practices, I think the first thing I want to clarify is that I'm not talking about standards for SEO. That's a whole different kind of discussion. There's a lot of debate over that. What we're talking about is primarily the mechanics of implementing search engine optimization and what there are as far as dos and don'ts. I want to have the listeners understand some of the principles behind best practices, and then also some of the details.

So, as most SEO practitioners know, implementing search engine optimization is typically divided into on-page factors and off-page factors. And so there are best practices that people will put together to kind of give you guidelines on what you need to do to succeed in both of those areas, and also what you need to do to avoid being penalized by the search engines in both of those areas.

**Michael:** OK. Where would you like to start, with the on-page or the off-page?

**Mike:** I first want to step back a bit and talk about how to understand best practices, and then I'll go right into on-page factors.

**Michael:** OK. Sure.

**Mike:** The one thing to keep in mind with best practices that a lot of people forget is that typically the list of things to do to avoid penalties and getting banned tend to be more widely applicable than the guidelines of recommendations for what you need to do to succeed, and there's some important reasons why.

When you're looking at a list of what you do - for example, something that's very common is you'll hear someone say, "For you to have a successful page in Google, you want the keyword density of your key phrases in your copy to be between two and four percent." And then they give something like that as a guideline.

An important thing to remember with guidelines like that is that they're usually made from averages of averages, or what some people will call aggregates of aggregates. So you have a bunch of people out there going about the business of search engine optimization, and they find a pattern across of what things make them successful on some of their pages. But depending on what industry you're in or what key phrases you're working with, you may find different guidelines are more or less useful.

So, when you have one list that's a best practices list, that's typically comprised from a lot of other people's averages and their experience. So you've got an average of averages. And it may or may not be applicable to your key phrases or your industry, because, when that list is given, usually you're not provided with, "Here are the key phrases that we researched in coming up with these numbers, " or "Here is the industry we were doing marketing in when we came up with these numbers." So always take that with a grain of salt.

Now, on the other hand, when it comes to penalties and being banned, if you got penalized on something, you got penalized, and if someone else does the same thing in a different industry, they'll get penalized, too. So those are typically more widely useful.

**Michael:** Right.

**Mike:** So let's go right into on-page factors and looking at some of the things that people will tell you to do on a best practices list.

One of the things that I find that's often overlooked, believe it or not, is the title tag and how people craft their title tag. And one of the best best practice guidelines for a title tag is: make sure your key phrase is toward the front of the title tag.

Many companies - large companies, even - will put their company name at the front of the title tag. And that's fine if that particular page is actually for branding your company name. But if you're trying to target a particular key phrase with that page, you want that key phrase toward the front of your title tag for high prominence. And that will give you a higher relevancy for that key phrase.

The title tag is pretty much the most powerful element on any web page, so you don't want to waste it by putting irrelevant words toward the front of the title tag because those get more weight than the words toward the end of the title tag.

**Michael:** It's amazing that it's 2008 and people still don't get that.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Michael:** If they're a well-known brand name, then, yeah, it might make sense to put their company name in the title because most people are just going to go to Google or whatever and type in that brand name anyways, so they'll find you regardless.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** But yeah, I have to agree that, that is the single most important on-page factor is putting your keyword in the title tag and putting it towards the front of the title tag - maybe

just one or two words at the most before your keyword phrase appears. So it could be something as simple as "the" keyword phrase.

**Mike:** Right. Exactly. And another thing to keep in mind is to think of both your title tag and your description meta tag as a means for pulling in your visitor, to improve your click-through rate on the search engine results page. You don't want to just slam it with just a series of words. But you want your description to be compelling because, when people are scanning the search results page, they want to be looking for something that draws them in and says, "Well, this looks really interesting, and I'd like to see more of this."

But if all they see is a string of words, they look at it and it's just a jumble. It doesn't make any sense to them. The reason why people tend to do this with their description tags is because they think of it like a longer keyword meta tag, and so they think, if they can slam more keywords in there, that's going to actually improve their ranking. And what many people don't realize is that the description meta tag typically does not affect your ranking. The main thing that it does is attract the searcher from the search results page.

**Michael:** Right. Now, if we step back and think about how we actually search, if I go to Google and I type in a phrase, I'm going to scan down the list, and I'm going to look for a description that's compelling to me. I might not click on the first result or the second or third, thinking, "Well, that's lame. That sucks. Oh, what's this guy doing?"

I might click on the fourth one because he took the time to make a description that was compelling to the visitor, gave some kind of a feature or benefit or something that triggered me to want to click. And, as my friend Jerry West always says, "Search engines don't buy anything; people do."

**Mike:** [laughs]

**Michael:** And what else would you consider to be important on-page factors, in addition to the title tag and the description tags?

**Mike:** Something else that's important in on-page factors is obviously how you're using your key phrase throughout your copy, what many people refer to as the keyword density - so, the frequency of the words with respect to all of your other content that's going to be visible to the reader.

There are two things I want to say. One is that there is another measurement that isn't given much attention, and that's called proximity - the proximity of the terms in your key phrase - which I believe is actually more important than keyword density. And I'll give the following illustration as an example.

Let's say you have a page that has 100 words on it. And on that page, the first word is "dog" and the last word is "food." So you're going to have a two percent keyword density there. Two out of 100 words is "dog food."

And let's say you have another page - once again, 100 words - and the first and second words are "dog" and "food." Right? Same keyword density, but the proximity is very different. The one that has "dog food" as a phrase at the beginning is actually going to be viewed as more relevant than the first page that has "dog" at the beginning and "food" at the end, because the proximity between the terms is smaller.

**Michael:** Right.

**Mike:** And that's something to keep in mind, that it really does matter how closely together the terms are or your key phrase. Keyword density alone is not a good measure of relevancy. You need both keyword density and proximity. So that's one thing.

The other thing is, when you're looking at keyword density values, many people will look for what's the right keyword density value this month for Google, or for Yahoo, or for MSN, or whatever. And that's really the wrong way to look at it. You need to figure out what the right keyword density value is, based on what your competitors are doing for that particular key phrase. Time and time again, I've seen pages ranked in the top 10 that totally run against what's normally considered the best practice for a keyword density value.

For example, I'll see ranges from four to 10%, or sometimes as high as 12% or 8%, as being the average of, actually, the top-ranking competitors for a key phrase. And so you need to really look at your competitors. Remember, you're not working against Google; you're working against your competitors. That's your competition.

**Michael:** That's a very important point that a lot of people don't get. Google is not your competition. Your competition is your competition. And if you want to know what kind of densities or keyword proximity, things that your competition are using, really, as you nailed it, it's topic-sensitive. So people in the car industry are going to be completely different than those in the baking industry. People who are making banana bread or Hondas are going to be totally different.

**Mike:** Right. Exactly. And what this does, the great thing about realizing this is it causes you to focus on your competitors and not go about algorithm chasing, which is what a lot of people do. And the thing with algorithm chasing, trying to figure out what is Google or Yahoo or MSN's algorithm this month, is that it's the wrong direction to go in.

And the illustration I use is that - and many people have heard this before - you're in the woods with a bunch of other folks. A bear comes out and chases you. To survive, you don't have to outrun the bear; you just have to outrun the other people running from the bear.

**Michael:** Right. Yeah. And the algo, it's a moving target.

**Mike:** Oh, yeah.

**Michael:** If you try to shoot something in the sky where it is, that won't work because, by the time your arrow gets there, it'll be gone.

**Mike:** [laughs] That's right. It'll be gone.

**Michael:** You've got to shoot where it's going.

**Mike:** That's right.

**Michael:** And you have no way of knowing how they're going to turn the dials and where the search engine's going to be next week or next month. You have no clue what's going to happen with that. So there's no sense in trying to chase an algo.

**Mike:** Right. And so you need to focus on your competitors when you're trying to figure out "What is a competitive keyword density or proximity value for my title tag, for my copy, for an H1 tag?"

Another thing about on-page factors that a lot of people forget is that it's actually important what words you have on the links on your page, whether you're linking to your own pages or linking to pages outside of your domain, that the wording and text that you use on those links also helps with your relevancy score.

**Michael:** Right. A lot of people don't realize that, or they don't think that the linking is important, whereas the linking actually carries a lot more weight. For example, H1 tags, things of that nature, many things that you're using to describe the page to the human and the important elements to the human, such as bolded occurrences, H1 tags, and links, those things are important to the human.

Guess what: they're also very important to the search engine, because the search engine is trying to emulate the machine to have a more human experience and everything from what's important on the page to the LSI to everything about what language is being used on the page and trying to determine what exactly that page is about based on all the factors that are on the page.

**Mike:** Right. There are two really important principles to keep in mind when you're doing SEO research, and that is the search engine has to do two things really well. One is they have to figure out what indicators will tell them what a human reader is going to see and find important on a page. So whatever elements that you would use to draw attention for a human reader, those HTML tags and positionings and code is what the search engine is going to use as an indicator of what the human reader is going to see.

So, when you use bullet points to highlight things for a reader, a search engine sees that as important. When you use an H1 tag to bring prominence to some line of text for the human reader, the search engine sees that as important, and so on. So whatever is an indicator for what the human reader is going to see and find important, the search engine is going to see that as important also.

And the other thing that the search engine has to do that greatly affects SEO research is the way they give a scoring and ranking to pages. A common misconception is that search engines have an absolute standard, an absolute grading scale that you have to make in order to rank on the first page. What they really do is they grade on a relative scale, or they grade on a curve.

And so they always pick the best of the lot, which is why, no matter what search phrase you type in, somebody's going to be number one, no matter how abysmal their page is. You can have a page ranking number one that has two inbound links total and only 200 words of copy. The reason why is because the other pages that are relevant to that key phrase are just as bad. You're never going to type a search phrase and find a result with Google saying, "Sorry, no one made the grade today. No one got an A. Try the next page."

**Michael:** Right. Very rare does it happen that they don't have something to offer you, unless you're typing in a great big long numeric phrase or something like that..

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** ... which is something that I do, personally, to track my PDFs. I'll give each one a unique number that's not elsewhere, so that I know where my PDF ends up, so that once that unique number has been spidered, I can see, "Oh, my PDF has been posted here, posted there, posted there, " I can actually track what's going on.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** So that's a very important point, is that the scoring is relative to each other, so again, it's a matter of looking at not Google, or trying to get SEO generalities, it's more about looking at the competition, seeing what the competition is doing, and look at how you are positioned relative to those other pages.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** And something else I might mention is that very often pages will pop in and out, so that if you're doing something SEO-related and you've been doing pretty good, let's say you're number 6 or 7, I wouldn't worry about it. You have to track it over time, because the number one person and the number three person, they might be your real competition. The guy in position 2, the guy in 4 and 5, they might only have got there yesterday, and they might pop out again, because a lot of people forget, the way that Google works is that it'll crawl, then it will index, then it will sort. So it's the sorting process that you go through when you find out all the pages that are relative to each other.

So for example, if I look up my name, Michael Campbell, I'm usually somewhere in the top five to eight results. Some days I'm 2, some days I'm 8, and it changes on a daily basis depending on how many other pages about Michael Campbells in the world - that's a billion - will pop in and out of the search engine. And very often they'll get spidered, they'll be indexed, but you know what? Three days later, they pop out of the index.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Michael:** So it's also important to track your particular keyword phrase that you're competing for over time to find out who your competitors really are in the sorting process as opposed to those who just pop in and out of the index.

**Mike:** Right.

Michael: Now, did you want to tell us about some of the off-page factors? I'm sure a lot of people are really, really interested in the off-page ones...

**Mike:** Yes.

**Michael:** ... because this is the stuff that, when Google came around with their link reputation, everybody knew about link popularity was, just get as many links as you can. And then the PageRank algorithm came into place in like, 2000, 2001, and then all of a sudden, linking became so much more important, such as the link reputation, and how many pages were voting for you based on their links.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** So it's the off-page factors that people can't get nailed down. A lot of the on-page ones they can wrap their heads around, but it's the off-page factors that really confuse a lot of people, and I hope that you can shed a lot of light on that for us today.

**Mike:** Yeah. Yeah, I'd love to.

One of the things that I always like to say first about off-page factors, because there's so much hard work involved, is that it's the quality of your link more than the quantity of the links that's going to help you at the end of the day.

A lot of people have an approach to link-building that they will just go out and go after as many links as they possibly can, giving no regard whatsoever to how qualitatively good the actual link is. For example, they will often say, if there's a guy that's ranking above them, and they see this page has 100, 000 links, and they think, "OK, well I might as well just give up on this key phrase. I'm not going to get 100,000 links anytime soon."

And they don't realize that when you're thinking about ranking for a particular key phrase, not all 100,000 links that that person has is doing work for them and helping them to rank for that key phrase. It's the links that are more relevant that are actually doing the work, and I've often found pages where you'll have a page that has 300 links outranking several pages, each of which has over 100, 000 links. And that's because they have more finely tuned, if you want to use that phrase, the links that are pointing to them.

And so in measuring the quality of the link, there are what I call a couple of relevance factors that you need to take into account. And that is the title tag of the page linking to you, the link text of the link pointing to you, and also the text around the link. It's always better to have an embedded or annotated link than to have a link that's just off by itself on an ad section or something like that. The more it's embedded in the copy on the page, the better it is for you.

And when you use the text of the link, and believe it or not, people still make this mistake, make sure the link text is descriptive. Don't have "Click Here". Don't have your company name or your domain name as a link text all the time.

When you go after a link, make sure that you provide the webmaster with some examples of what they can use. You always want to make it as easy as possible for the person to link to you. They shouldn't have to think about anything; it should be as simple as a copy and paste. If they find your content interesting and they want to link to you, give them like three examples of a sentence with an embedded link with keyword-rich text in that link that they can use.

And make sure you vary it; you don't want all your link text to be the same, because that doesn't look as natural, and at least what Google is looking for is something that looks more organic or natural.

And there's an illustration will help with that. Imagine you're going through a mall, you're buying shoes, and you've got two shoes you're thinking of buying, you're not sure which one, so you start asking people what they think of this particular brand. And let's say that you go to 10 people, and all 10 of them give you the exact same 12-sentence response to your question, the exact same 12-sentence response. After a while, you start to think that this is contrived, that there's something going on here. It doesn't seem natural.

Well, the same thing happens with links, and the text that you have in a link, that is what forms your link reputation. So if a link is a vote for you, in Google's eyes, the text tells them what you think that vote is about, what that vote is for.

**Michael:** Excellent. That's a really good illustration. So the link is the vote, and the text is what you think about the candidate, in other words.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** If they gave you a comment field on the ballot box.

That's also a really good idea about the quality of the links, not the quantity. So in other words, you want to link smart, not hard.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** So you want to get good, relevant links from high PageRank pages if possible, and things that are well-trusted authorities such as the Yahoos and the starting points, and the links from directories can often be a very good first investment for sites that want to get a lot of bang for the buck, that I can tell you that if you're paying \$350 for every single press release that you do, and you do a press release every two or three weeks, why on Earth wouldn't you spend \$350 to be listed in a PR5 or six directory for a year?

**Mike:** Oh, yeah. Definitely.

**Michael:** It's advertising. Think of it as advertising, and you can write off the cost of it. So that's something that people shouldn't be afraid to do, is look at their links and link building, if you're paying for directory listings, treat them as advertising. You get to write them off.

**Mike:** When it comes to Google and PageRank an important thing to remember is that there are a lot of benefits for a site when you have pages with high PageRank.

But when you're talking about ranking for specific key phrases, the most important PageRank is the PageRank of the relevant links pointing to you. More so than the PageRank of your page, the PageRank of the relevant links pointing to you are going to be what helps you more in ranking for specific key phrases.

**Michael:** OK. Now, you also talked about the surrounding text, the surrounding text that - so that would be what you would consider to be the words that are before and after the exact text link. So you want to get key words in that link. But what would you suggest for people, what kind of words should be surrounding that link?

**Mike:** The words surrounding that link should be supporting terms, relevant - thematically relevant terms should be around that link.

**Michael:** OK. Now, what else would you consider to be very important off-page factors?

**Mike:** You mean aside from links?

**Michael:** Yeah, aside from links.

**Mike:** I'm not sure if it will be considered off-page. But anything you can do with viral marketing is also helpful. So for example if you've got a page with some really good content, an article or something like that, I always recommend having social bookmark links at the end of that article.

**Michael:** Right. And something that may be overlooked is commenting on other people's blogs.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** For example - just yesterday, I think it was - I noticed that someone did a comment about Twitter and the different clients that are available. And when I went to look at the article on the blog it already had 40 Digg's. And I thought this thing's going to go viral.

So I went and commented - I think I'm comment Number 4. It now has something like 45 comments that scroll on for pages and pages, but my comment is Number 4. And it has over 600 Diggs the last time that I checked.

**Mike:** Wow.

**Michael:** So, all sorts of people have found that page, and it will be around now for a very long time. And of course the PageRank for that page being a PR7 will spill over onto that particular blog page over time.

Now, even though the links are no-follow, meaning I won't get a PageRank benefit from that comment. But I'm already starting to get four clicks per day from that particular blog comment.

So if that continues and that page continues to get Dug and continues to grow, then that particular off-page thing, the comment that I did on someone else's blog is bringing me traffic and expanding my market to people who may not have known about me or heard about me otherwise.

**Mike:** That's true. That's very true. Yeah, getting comments and blogs, making your content available for bloggers to post as additional content on their sites is also great. So if you have got content, you now have an RSS feed that you can feed to aggregators and get your content out there.

There's also - and this kind of goes into an article syndication, which is another way of getting exposure and traffic and some viral marketing going as well. There are a lot of people talking these days about link bait or link bait programs.

And this is an area where it requires a lot of creativity to create something that's going to have a great appeal to a large number of people. But it is a great way to both get traffic, exposure, branding and link building.

And there are a couple of principles that you have to keep in mind when you're going about link baiting. One is obviously create something of interest. It can be something that's humorous, something that's controversial, something that is a list of tips, a Top Ten list, list of do's and don'ts related to your product, your service, your company or your industry.

And then you want to make this accessible to people in any number of ways. So, one of the ways that you can get someone to link to your content is you have to find potential link partners whose audience would be interested in what you have.

And basically any kind of link bait idea is going to be you offering something of value to others; them having enough interest in it to spread the news and information to others and then link to it.

And so, one of the things you want to do is make sure that, whatever kind of potential link partner you have in mind, you need to think, why would their readers find this valuable?

And if you're sending out emails to people to try to get them to link to you, you need to make sure that you can convince them that what you have is going to be of value to their readers. Otherwise why would they put a link to it or include it in a newsletter or anything?

So you always need to think in terms of offering value. And that's the best way to get word-of-mouth spreading anyway.

**Michael:** Right. So you could even do something like go to the social news sites like Digg or Propeller. Go into the travel section and then put in an article topic like - a really good headline like, "10 Things You Should Never Eat on an Airplane" [laughs] and then watch what happens because all sorts of people travel and they'll be linking to that like crazy.

**Mike:** Yup.

**Michael:** Yeah, link bait is a very good way to get your brand name out there and get links in a hurry. Now, what if I put you on the spot for a second, if you'll let me?

**Mike:** Sure.

**Michael:** I want to ask you... What are your three favorite SEO strategies and why?

**Mike:** And why, hmmm...

**Michael:** Yeah. If you can just give me a quick rundown on your three favorite - if you could pick three things that you do on a consistent basis, and just two or three sentences why you do each one.

**Mike:** OK. OK, one of my favorite SEO strategies is actually using and getting links from blogs. So basically what I do is I have a blog post on my blog. And that blog post will actually link to something on my site like where I've got a product or service that I'm offering.

And what I do is I contact what people call A-List bloggers in that particular area. And I write the content in such a way that I know they'll find it of interest. And then they post on it. And what happens when an A-list blogger writes a post and puts a link to something, a whole bunch of other bloggers will do the same thing.

They'll pick up that post and they will add their own feedback or comment to it. But as its being spread from blog to blog, you're link is going with it all over the place.

**Michael:** Right.

**Mike:** And that's actually one of my favorite ways. And I think the reason why is because it can work so quickly. It works very fast as anyone who's been blogging for any time - if you got something that's really popular, it spreads very quickly.

**Michael:** What would you consider to be your second favorite?

**Mike:** My second favorite would probably be article distribution. And you've kind of got to love writing, or have someone who works with you who loves writing, to make this work.

**Michael:** Right.

**Mike:** But my favorite thing about article distribution is that, once again, there are so many people out there looking for great content. And my favorite thing about it is, when you have an article go out, and you've got the link coming back to you, you control everything about your link reputation when you use article distribution.

And I always try to target pages or sites that have a page rank of four or higher for hosting it, but I try to get as many as I can, but like I said, the thing I like most about that, is that

you control the link reputation, because you control the title tag, the link text, the content, the wording around the link text, is all controlled by you.

**Michael:** Excellent point. Now, what would you say is number three?

**Mike:** I think number three would probably be good old-fashioned, what I call "link bartering", and that is, it's different from buying links, it's bartering for them. I do this with clients a lot; I look at what assets the client has, whether it be products, ebooks, things like that, white papers, and what I try to do is partner them up with a potential link partner who can benefit from that asset.

So for example, you have someone who has subscriptions, and they're trying to find more subscriptions, so they find a topically related site and try to get a link from it, and what you offer to that webmaster is a discount on your subscriptions for their readers. So anyone that comes from their site gets a discount as long as that link is up.

Or you can, and one of the things I did with one client, have a contest, where you get a bunch of websites involved in hosting the contest for you. And if someone wins from their entry point, then they get, that webmaster gets one of your free products, or 50 percent off, or something like that, so that gives them, encourages them to participate in the contest. And so once again, you're not shelling out any money per se, you're just offering them something of value in exchange for them offering you a link.

**Michael:** Excellent tips. Now, if you could just tell me, really quickly here, what are the three biggest mistakes an SEO can make?

**Mike:** One of the biggest is one that I've talked about so far, and that is having a title tag that is not optimized well, just having your company name in there and not putting much thought into your title tag or your description tag.

The second one would be, and this may not occur as often, but when you design a new site, not redirecting your old pages properly to your new pages. I've seen people lose five years' worth of work because they didn't do the right kind of redirect, so they used 302 redirects instead of 301 redirects. That's a huge mistake.

And the third biggest mistake, I would say, is algorithm-chasing. You spin your wheels and waste a lot of time chasing algorithms when you should be focusing on other things that are actually going to more directly impact your bottom line.

**Michael:** OK. Now, if you could, give me some tips about things that we're not supposed to do, so in other words, what kind of things can lead to big trouble and end up even getting you banned in the search engines?

**Mike:** OK. Very important, very important stuff here: One of the things that is most important, with regard to off-page trackers that can get you hurt with the search engines is not being involved with link farms.

Link farms are pages that will offer you to get a link, and they say, you know, "Linking is important, so if you link to me, then your link will show up on these pages, " and a lot of times it's automated, so you'll have a page that has hundreds and hundreds of links, and it may even be divided up by categories, but there are hundreds of links on this page, and when you link to pages like that and they're linked to you, this is called a "link farm." When you participate in link farms, the search engines frown upon that and will penalize you for it.

There are some things that will get you banned, where you're really trying to cheat the search engine. So for example, and here's the principle, if you're doing anything where you're trying to trick the search engine into thinking that you have something that you really don't, or you want something that the search engine sees but the user does not see ever, then that is something that's going to get you in trouble.

So for example, one standard thing is invisible text, so when you have the same color for the text and the background, so of course the visitor, the human reader, never sees it, but the search engine sees it in the source code, so you think, "Here's a way for me to get some extra content, extra key phrases in, to boost my relevancy in the eyes of the search engine without cluttering up my page with respect to the human reader." So you want to stay away from invisible text, you want to stay away from tiny text, which is designed to do the same thing, so small that the reader can't read it, but the search engine still sees it.

And you want to stay away from "cloaking" as well, and that is where you, on a server side, you deliver one thing to the search engine, and something very different to the human reader, and the search engines frown upon that.

I strongly recommend always looking at a search engine's terms of service and their guidelines, because they will tell you certain things explicitly that they frown upon, and will get you into trouble. And they may update that from time to time, so it's important to keep up with what's going to be a problem.

**Michael:** Right. And I read the Google guidelines again, for the 10th time, two days ago, and I realized, if you read between the lines, there's a lot of good SEO tips that are actually in there, for example, putting descriptive words around your photographs in the citation, or using italic to do the citation for the photograph, and to put your ALT tags into images, and yeah, there's the usual stuff about, "Stay away from link farms, " "Stay away from invisible and tiny text, " "Don't do cloaking, where the search engine sees one thing, and the human visitor sees another." I would add to that, from personal experience, "Don't host doorway pages," and also, don't follow SEO companies that cold call you. [laughter]

**Michael:** For example, I got a call yesterday from some company offering to do me SEO, and I'm, "Oh, really?" I was like, "OK, go look up 'internet marketing secrets'. I'm number one in Google, Yahoo, and MSN. Can you get any more SEO than that?"

**Mike:** Right. [laughs]

**Michael:** And before the guy could even call up my page, and I realized, he's got this phone number which is my direct line, which is only in the Whois database.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** And I realize that this guy is making cold calls out of the Whois database, and for people who don't know, that's where, when you register a domain name, certain information goes, about you, into a public registry and very often people looking to sell you stuff will use that as their yellow pages. And if you get a call from an SEO company, or an email saying, "Oh, we think we can help you," just ignore that, because the chances are you could go to Search Engine Land or World Resource Center and learn everything you need to know about SEO, probably in a day or two of your own research, and from podcasts such as this one.

Now, a lot of people have discounted reciprocal linking. What's your feeling on that? They say that, "Oh, if you link to me, I'll link to you, " and all the reciprocal linking thing seems to be more discounted; it's not given the same weight as it was before.

**Mike:** Yeah, that's what I've found also. It's obviously still good for traffic, if you're getting links from folks, you know, that are sending you traffic, but it's not going to have the same boost that it used to. And if you do reciprocal linking, obviously you won't get hurt for that, but it's not going to help you as much. You need to try to get a one-way, inbound link.

**Michael:** Right, and there's other things that won't get you banned per se, but they will give you a penalty of like minus 100.

**Mike:** Right.

Michael: And then you have to work your way out of that hole, from being at minus 100, if you ever do. And those kinds of things would be what they call being a "thin affiliate", if you just copy and paste what's on the destination or the advertiser's page, you just copy and paste what they said about their product.

**Mike:** Right.

**Michael:** And what Google really wants you to do, is do your own product comparisons, rate things on a star scale, or put in recipes, or do your own content as well. So being a thin affiliate is something else that, you won't get banned per se, but you will be penalized when it gets looked at by human evaluator.

And that's something else that people don't realize, is that Google has thousands of college students making anywhere from \$14 to \$18 an hour in countries all around the world, and what they do, for part time up to 20 hours a week, is to go and look at web pages. They're web page raters, and that's how you get a trust score.

And you wonder how some pages get green light all the way to the top of the search engine? There is no such thing as a sandbox or anything like that, and it's because the pages are being posted on a trusted domain. And if a human reviewer has looked at that domain, and they didn't find any instances of link farm, invisible text, cloaking, hidden text in the CSS, doorways, and you're not being a thin affiliate but you're actually adding value, then you'll get a positive score, and that becomes a trust score, and that's almost like a green light to the top of the search engines once you achieve that.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Michael:** So stuff that can get you banned, or stuff that can get you a negative score, stay away from that stuff, because you really don't want to dig yourself out of that hole. You're better off throwing the domain name away and starting again.

**Mike:** Right. And one word of advice I would give is, if you end up doing something like that, inadvertently perhaps, or because you had some guy do the work for you and they did something that was shady, and you do want to get back into the search engine, always fess up. Don't try to dance around the issue, hide stuff, make excuses, just tell them, "OK, can you tell me, what do I need to do to fix this?" You know, don't try to say, "I didn't do anything! It's your fault! Something's wrong with your algorithm!" Just fess up, come up clean, and be nice and courteous.

**Michael:** Right. What they really want you to do is log into your Google account, and they have a reinclusion request, and then you can read the Google guidelines, the webmaster guidelines, that are also posted there, and look down that list, and you go, "Oh, I see what I did. I did this wrong and this wrong."

Then you can fess up in that little dialogue box, it's your little confessional box, and you can go in there, and you can say, "Yes, Google, I was bad, I had invisible and tiny text in my page. I'm sorry. It won't happen again." And very often, they will allow your domain to become a PR0 to PR3. You will go from grey to being a white bar, so instead of saying "Unranked" they'll reset it to 0 and they'll let you work out from there.

But also too, sometimes they say no. And if they say no, if you've asked for reinclusion and they still won't let you in, sometimes it's just better to throw that domain away and start again.

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Anything else that you want to give the readers and listeners? About things to avoid, or things that can get you banned?

**Mike:** Make sure you don't try to deliver to the search engines something that you're hiding from your human reader.

**Michael:** And everything else that you learned in kindergarten. Don't hit, play fair, hold hands crossing the street.

[laughter]

**Mike:** That's right.

**Michael:** Now, what about for someone who's just starting out, a newbie coming into all this? There's so much information out there, and the Internet is such a big place. Are there certain websites or people that you think that the beginners should follow for SEO advice? What would you tell them?

**Mike:** Yes. I think there are a couple of sites that you need to go to so that you can keep up on what is going on in the industry. And one of those places is going to be SearchEngineLand.com, that way you can keep up with what's happening in the industry that's going to impact what you do.

And as far as information about how to go about doing optimization, you have to be very careful what site you kind of latch onto for that kind of information, because as a newbie, you may not know that some of the information you see could be outdated. It may be something that worked years ago but doesn't anymore, so you want to make sure something is current and reliable.

I would actually highly recommend the World Resource Center that is run by Search Engine Workshops. There you'll find kind of an aggregate of all the reliable sources of information that have kind of been proven reliable over the course of time, over four, five, six, seven years. And I would say that would be the best place to start, and it's constantly updated with what's going on.

**Michael:** OK. And what are you up to now? What's your focus, or could you tell me a little bit about PointMetrix.com and SEORcon.com?

**Mike:** Yeah. PointMetrix is a company that I'm working with that offers competitive intelligence products, which basically means this. We offer reports that will tell you exactly what your competitors are doing for a particular keyphrase and what elements are most

important, so that you can have a keyphrase-specific roadmap for optimization with both on-page and off-page factors. And that roadmap will tell you exactly how you need to navigate those competitors for the various factors. So instead of having a very generic rule of thumb, you'll have a keyphrase-specific guideline for what you need to do for each of the various factors.

**Michael:** Excellent, thank you so much, Michael Marshall, for being on the call with me today. I'm sure the readers and listeners will get a whole lot out of your SEO best practices, the pros and cons of optimization, and the list of things to do and what not to do, what gets you penalized and banned, and it's just been a wonderful call. And I'm very happy that you participated with me today.

**Mike:** Thank you Michael. It was a pleasure being here with you today.

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[Planet Ocean Unfair Advantage eBook](#) - This manual is the oldest SEO publication. It's updated monthly so it's always relevant. If you read the Unfair Advantage, I'm confident that you'll have a complete understanding of SEO strategies. (<http://cdzn.com/pob>)

[Search Engine Workshops](#) - If you prefer to learn in a classroom environment, the SEO workshops holds several events per year in popular locations. Three instructors - Robin Nobles, John Alexander and Mike Marshall - teach all the fundamentals, so you can be confident applying SEO strategies to your own websites. (<http://cdzn.com/sew>)

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[SEO Recon by Mike Marshall](#) - This is an advanced tool for SEO professionals. It compiles and transforms disaggregated data about your competitors and converts it into strategic knowledge about their search engine positioning, performance, capabilities, weaknesses and strengths. It's competitive intelligence that you can apply to your webpages and get higher rankings in the search engines. (<http://www.cdzn.com/rec>)

That's it for this edition my friend. Thank you for reading. We'll chat again soon. Until then, here's wishing you all the best for online success.

**Michael Campbell**

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