

When it comes to Search Engine Optimization (SEO), there's plenty of bad advice out there on the best way to increase your online visibility. In fact, you may think all you have to do is employ a few tricks and ploys, invest a few bucks (literally a few bucks - like \$5.00), and you'll be on your way to SEO success.

But just like any aspect of your business, SEO doesn't come easy or for free. We've taken a few moments to help debunk some of the most ubiquitous SEO myths. Our advice is to stay away from these tactics; not only are they ineffective, but they can actually result in your site being penalized by the search engines.

Myth 1: Stuff the Meta Keyword and Alt Tags with keywords

Thanks to years of overuse and abuse, the Meta Keyword tag now plays a tiny role in the search engine algorithms. So, before stuffing a bunch of keywords in the Meta Keyword tag and considering your page optimized, remember that this tag is only used to determine a page's relevance, not its rankings.

Alt tags are used to describe an image, and are particularly helpful for those with slow-loading or non-visual browsers, as well as for the vision-impaired. Somewhere along the line, someone thought it would be a good idea to stuff Alt tags with lots of keywords, and the idea caught on. Of course, it didn't take the search engines long to figure this out. But even if they hadn't, do you really want to do the online equivalent of parking in a handicapped space?

Myth 2: Fill your website with loads of Tiny Text and get big results

Tiny text is text so small that it is virtually unreadable to the human eye. The idea is that you can include lots of keywords on your Web page, making your page more appealing to the search engines and resulting in higher rankings. There's just one problem with this tactic – search engines want your pages to be valuable to the user, not to them.

Myth 2B: Fill your website with loads of Invisible Text and Links

A cousin to tiny text, Invisible Text is achieved by placing a bunch of keywords on the page in the same color as the background thereby making it, well, invisible. Similarly, Invisible Links are used to artificially boost the amount of links coming into a site. Of course, the search engines can detect these things a mile away.

Myth 3: Cloaking is a good idea

If BMW Germany's website can get busted for this, so can yours. A "cloaked" page is a page that shows one thing to the user and another to the search engines. Again, because the search engines want valuable content provided to the user, they may devalue or even drop your site altogether if they spot this technique.

Myth 4: You can get guaranteed rankings

Nothing in life is guaranteed, and certainly not your search engine rankings. Companies that guarantee rankings or placement in the search engines should be avoided at all costs. Why? Because only the search engines control rankings, and they can (and do!) change their algorithms without notice.

Myth 5: Automated SEO tools are an effective, cheap solution

Let's see if we've got this right: there's an SEO tool out there that will do all this work for you, help you make you a ton of money, and cost you just a few bucks a month. Back on planet Earth, the reality is that just like any other aspect of your business, it takes time and talent to effectively optimize a site.

Myth 6: Submitting your site to 18,000 directories for \$2.99 is a good idea

Some of these services actually do submit your site to a bunch of directories...directories no one visits and that carry virtually no weight in the search engines. Even at \$2.99, you're being overcharged. Seriously, do you think you can get effective SEO results spending less than a value meal at McDonald's?

Myth 7: Hits are a good indicator of site traffic

Hits are terribly misunderstood. Here's why: a hit isn't an actual site visitor; it's merely a file request. So, if your homepage has 25 files on it (each unique image, for example, is a file) then your web stats will reflect 25 hits, all from just one visitor. Instead of hits, track the number of unique visitors to your site.

Myth 8: You can kick back once your site is optimized

Due to the constantly changing nature of the Web, even the most optimized sites can't rest on their laurels. A few years ago, just when some people thought they had optimized their site to the hilt, along came Mobile Search. Then, there was the Social Media tidal wave of YouTube, MySpace, blogging, etc.

Source: The Karcher Group