

SEO guide

Search Engine Optimisation

Step by step advice on how to optimise your web site
for search engines

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SiteMaker
making your website easy

Part 1 – The ground rules

Search Engine Optimisation with SiteMaker is much like Search Engine Optimisation with any website. The key is to make sure that your site contents are focused and relevant to the keywords that you wish to rank highly on. This means making a real effort in a number of places to make sure the terms you use are consistent. And don't be too ambitious, you're never going to beat the big guys if your words are too general and competitive.

This guide is based on our experience and generally accepted guidelines on how to improve website search rankings. It doesn't guarantee results, but will point you in the right direction ;-). If you want more specialist help, employ an SEO consultant, or read the huge range of SEO articles available online.

Throughout this guide we make reference to a website www.joeslondontaxis.com which was built using SiteMaker to test the theories in the articles and show how to get practical results. All results were correct at the time this guide was written in 2007.

Areas we cover	Airport service	Business accounts
<p>Our taxis cover all areas of London with a particular focus on Central and West London. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hammersmith - Chiswick - Shepherds Bush - Hounslow 	<p>We also do a full airport taxi service to Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton, Stanstead, City and probably even Manchester Airport if you're crazy enough! Rates are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heathrow - £25 - Gatwick - £50 - Stanstead - £50 	<p>We also offer business accounts for your taxi needs in any Central or West London area. So if you need to book a West London Taxi, then give us a call on 0870 23 34 xx and we'll get someone to you and sort you out with a business account.</p> <p>West London Taxi business account benefits include:</p>

Joe's London Taxis

Ground rules!

Firstly nobody can guarantee you positions in the search rankings. Search engines keep their search algorithms very secret and update them regularly to make sure they produce true and accurate results.

The second thing to know is that SEO takes real work. You're going to have to give it some thought and

make changes to all the pages in your site. This will take time and you may want to adjust things after a few months as you start to see results. The Internet is a great potential market but you need to invest time and effort in marketing your site if you want it to be successful. SEO is a good way of doing this but like most things it doesn't always come easy.

Next, it's going to take time for your rankings to improve. Search engines can take months to even list your site and then further time to assign you a rank. They will then review your site periodically and check for updates but the frequency of this can vary. So don't expect too much too soon. Be patient, build your credibility and presence, and good things will come. Many sites that rank highly have been around a long, long time.

And finally, SEO isn't everything. There's never an excuse for not marketing your site in other ways if you're serious about getting it noticed. Traditional offline marketing, online marketing (banners or AdWords), putting your URL on letterheads, posting it on industry specific directories/message boards, etc., can all help and these actions will also support your SEO efforts too. So don't forget to look at other forms of marketing too.

First things first

So now the ground rules are out of the way, here are the basics. If you are building a new site, you have two challenges: getting your site listed, and improving its rankings. Even getting your site listed is a subject surrounded in controversy but it also closely relates to how you get it optimised.

In terms of optimisation it's important to know that search engines look for consistency and relevancy within a number of different areas of your in-page content and within your referral links. These include:

1. The URL (or web address) of your page, e.g. www.joeslondontaxis.com, or www.joeslondontaxis.com/taxibooking, etc.
2. Your Page title in the HTML, e.g. "London taxi company", or "London taxi bookings page"
3. Your Keywords metadata in the HTML, e.g. "London taxis, London taxi, Joes taxis, West London taxi, etc."
4. Your Description metadata in the HTML, e.g. "London taxi company provides taxi services..."
5. Your page content, e.g. the text that is on your page, including headings (or section titles) which are treated differently from body text
6. Links on your page, including the anchor text, e.g. the text on which the link is set
7. Images on your page, including the name of the image file, and the link (if any) set on the image
8. Referral links to your pages, including the anchor text of the referral link, e.g. a link on another site referring to your site

- Points 1-7 are easily within your control as they all relate to the contents of your site. Point 8 requires linking to your site from other external sites, which is less easy to achieve, though there are a number of ways in which you can go about doing this.

Remember, while search engines are mechanical they are not stupid! They are in a constant battle with link spammers who attempt to manipulate ranking results for profit. Optimising your pages and encouraging genuine link backs from other relevant sites will help but getting involved in link spamming and other dodgy techniques such as spamming keywords or content can get your site black listed. So more isn't always best, make sure links, content and keywords are all genuine.

This guide will go through each of these points in turn and discuss how they are relevant to SiteMaker as well as how to go about achieving each one of them.

Like I said, none of this is solid fact, but it is based on perceived wisdom and what little guidance search engines give out. However, we also want to encourage debate. So if you know something useful or have found a good resource please let us know.

Part 2 – Choosing your keywords

Now we reach the how to stage for getting your SiteMaker site effectively optimised for Search Engines. This section now kicks off with a discussion on what to do, so pay close attention!

One of the key points in the ground rules section is that "search engines look for consistency and relevancy within a number of different areas of your in-page content and within your referral links". Let's start at the top and talk about keywords themselves, as these will be the important building blocks of your SEO tactics.

Keywords explained

Keywords are the words or phrases that you want people to be able to find you under when they do a search on the internet. These are essentially the words or phrases that best describe your business and the things that people would think of when they are interested in your goods or services. The more specific the words or phrases match what you offer, the more likely it will be to drive people to your site.

Let's take my example company 'Joe's London Taxis' and see how it works. For this fictional business, there are a number of keywords we could try. For each word or phrase below I've indicated how many terms or results are returned by google.com as an example of their competitiveness. Here are some terms I could use:

business (1.4 billion results on Google)
car (652 million)
london (402 million)
taxi (97 million)

These don't seem too good. The sheer volume of pages returned on these terms will make it very hard for them to ever have an impact for my little business. How about:

london taxi (2.7 million)
west london taxi (1.6 million)
hammersmith taxi (221,000)
london minicab (220,000)
west london minicab (96,000)
hammersmith minicab (24,500)

That's getting a bit better. Using two or three word phrases improves your chances of ranking highly as these phrases attract fewer competing companies and can be more specific to your market. And it looks like 'minicab' produces much less competition than 'taxi', i.e. there is a greater chance I can score highly with 'minicab' as fewer companies compete for this word. This will all help me make my choices about which keyword phrases I should use for my site.

As the effectiveness of the search improves, the number of search results will drop, so it's a balancing act between being on page 100 for a top phrase with millions of searches and being on page 1 for a less used phrase with only a few thousand. Personally I think higher up and more focused is better.

How many keywords should you use?

That's debatable too. Most articles suggest less is more; as few as 5 keyword phrases per page as a target, e.g. "london taxi, west london taxi, west london minicab, london airport taxi, hammersmith taxi" is 5 keyword phrases (usually just separated by a comma). Most keyword optimisers won't complain until you have more than 15-20. So somewhere in the range 5-20 won't hurt. I chose 15 for my example site.

If you have an exciting or unique brand name then this should be included in your keywords (and probably included in your URL too).

Don't forget, your keywords will need to vary from page to page reflecting the contents of that page. There can be some overlap, but you can take different page contents as an opportunity to expand your list of keywords. For example, for my page www.joeslondontaxis.com/taxibooking I wanted to choose words relating to booking a taxi, e.g. "book a london taxi, london taxi booking, etc."

It's best to plan the keywords for each of your pages and only then start to go through the pages themselves and make sure the keywords are correctly represented and consistent in the right places.

So there's your first piece of homework: work out the keywords and phrases for each of your different pages. Don't worry about getting it 'right' first time. These are things you can change as you go along, but try to think about the important, specific phrases that summarise or capture the contents of each of your pages.

Part 3 – Getting your site listed

We've now prepared our keywords and that will come in handy for optimising the site, but the first challenge is getting the site listed at all. Search engines can take a long time (3-6 months) to list new sites although there are some things you can do to speed this up. However, even getting your site listed can be a controversial topic.

It's no secret that Google uses in-bound links as a way of assessing the importance and subject of your site. By this I mean it works out how many sites link to your site and what keywords they use in their link. It also factors in the 'importance' of the sites that are linking to your site based on their 'page rank' which is a value (on a scale of 1 - 10) attributed to those sites by Google. If a high 'page rank' site links to your site it is deemed to be a valuable link, which in turn will boost your own site's 'page rank'. Visit the sites below for more details:

<http://www.google.com/technology/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PageRank>

Before your site can even get a page rank it needs to be indexed and then listed. Before it can be indexed and listed, it needs to be found by the search engine. So how does that happen?

There are two schools of thought in this: either adding your URL directly with the search engines or using inbound links (from popular sites) to direct them to your site more naturally. Using a combination of both methods is also worth considering.

Add URL

The first way is to submit your URL directly to the search engines using the 'add url' pages that they provide, e.g.

Google - <http://www.google.com/addurl?continue=/addurl>

Yahoo - <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>

MSN - <http://search.msn.com.sg/docs/submit.aspx>

This method should in theory allow them to index your site quickly and efficiently. However, there is some debate as to whether this is counter-productive.

Sites submitted in this way are usually new sites and often those that do not have a large number of inbound links. This leads some people to believe that as 'new sites' the search engines will discriminate against them and delay their full indexing. There is also debate about whether a 'Google sandbox' exists which is supposedly a holding area of newly submitted sites until they move into the main index.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandbox_Effect (note this article is disputed)

Google denies there is any sandbox. Others speculate that this observed phenomenon is merely the

result of how the complex Google algorithms index web sites and Google's constant battle against spammers.

Inbound links

The other less controversial way to get your site listed is by using inbound links, particularly those that contain your most important keywords in the link text and come from sites which have content that is related to your own.

Even a single high quality inbound link can put the search engines onto your site and get it indexed quickly. Once at your site, the search engine web crawlers or bots will then spider all the pages and work out how it links together.

There are several ways to go about getting good inbound links and there are certainly more than we list here, but these are a few recommended ideas:

- Add your site to relevant local directories - these might be business directories or interest/subject based directories, but make sure they are reputable.
- Contact webmasters of related sites and ask for reciprocal link exchanges - this is where you place a link on your site to them in exchange for a link on their site to you. Don't be too ambitious with this as big popular sites are not going to link to your site out of the goodness of their heart. Try to find sites of a similar size and subject to your own which will entertain the idea of you helping each other.
- Write articles about your subject including a link to your site - any article must actually contain useful information otherwise it won't get published. So if you're an expert in the area you're writing about and it is relevant to your site, give the article to other site owners who are likely to publish it with a link back to your site. Make sure the article contains some of your relevant keywords. (This may also be possible with useful contributions to blog articles or forums, but be very careful about link spamming - if you don't have anything genuinely useful to say, don't say it!)

Once your site has been indexed, you're in a much stronger position for the future. Sites that have been around for a long time have a legitimate history and tend to stay in the indexes. If you have an existing site that is indexed, then try linking that one to your new site.

You can check and see if your site is listed by typing 'site:www.youraddress.com' into the Google or Yahoo search. Remember if you have multiple domain names make sure you try each of them.

If you're using your own domain name make sure you are using the IP pointing method we recommend and not the masked forwarding option often offered by domain companies. Masked forwarding will make it very difficult for your site to get listed, as it appears to have no content!

So there you have it. Now, let's get listed!

I linked my site www.joeslondontaxis.com from our online blog. Because our blog has a page rank of 5 with Google and is regularly updated this was a good starting point. My site was indexed by Google within 2 weeks, though it took 3 months to appear on Yahoo.

Part 4 – Optimising your SiteMaker site

OK, so you've done the work, got your keywords worked out for your different pages, got your site listed (registered) on the major search engines (see previous section), now what do you do? How do you make the changes in SiteMaker? Good question. Here is the 'how-to' for SiteMaker...

Now that you've got your list of keywords, you're ready to start making some changes. These keywords (or phrases) are your target words that you want your site to be found with when people use the search engines. Therefore, you will want to make sure that they are used appropriately on your site and that there is consistency in how they appear.

However, this still needs to be done in a sensible fashion. Just dumping a bunch of words on your site that don't really make sense or fit with your site or page can lead to problems, so this needs to be done carefully.

My keywords

For my site (www.joeslondontaxis.com) I chose a set of keywords which were:

"joes london taxis, london taxi, west london taxi, hammersmith taxi, london minicab, west london minicab, london airport minicab, london airport taxi, london taxis, west london taxis, hammersmith taxis, london minicab, west london minicab, london airport minicab, london airport taxis"

This is the general set that I chose as appropriate for the different markets I am interested in, e.g. mostly in west London and including airport services. I further tailored them to each of my pages to make sure that they were better matched.

For example on my 'taxi bookings' page (www.joeslondontaxis.com/taxibooking) I used:

"book a london taxi, london taxi booking, west london taxi, book a minicab, london minicab booking, joes london taxis, london taxi, west london taxi, hammersmith taxi, london minicab, west london minicab"

This contained some overlap with my site keywords, but it also contained more specific words/phrases to do with my bookings page. Using these two pages as an example I entered the keywords onto the pages in such a way that they would be usefully picked up by search engines.

Step By Step

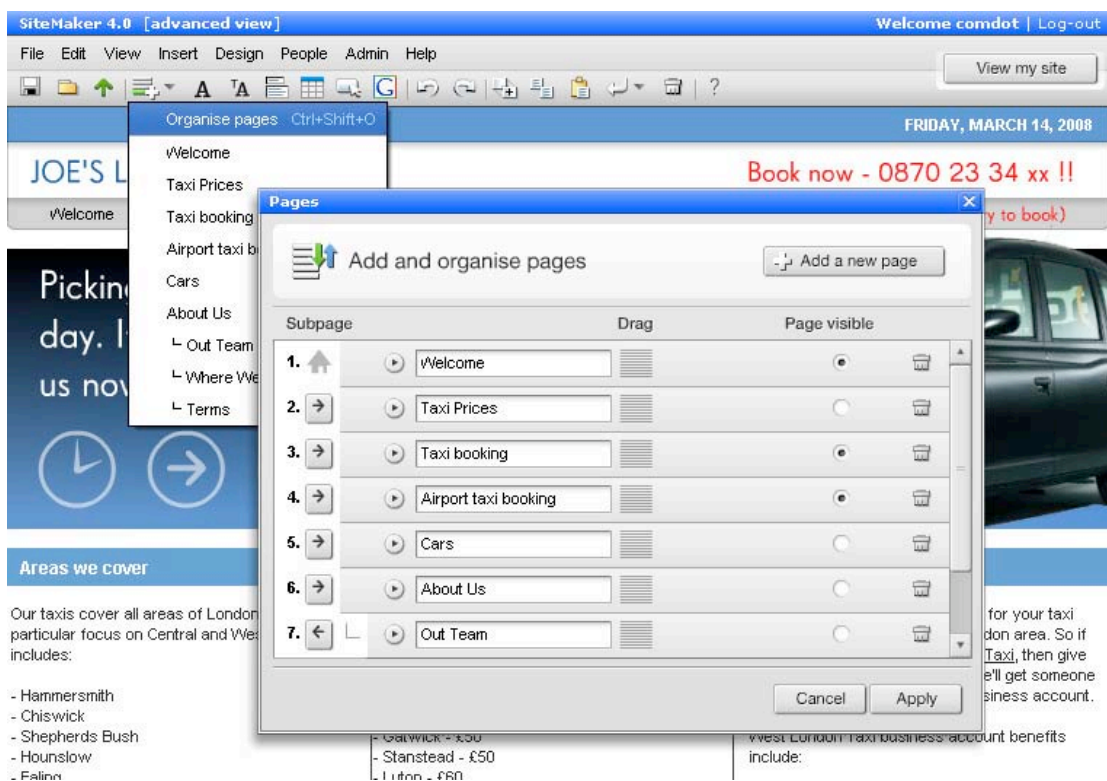
If you remember from the first section, we had 8 different areas to optimise. I'll go through each of these in turn:

1. The URL (or address) of your page

This can be the URL of your site, or indeed the URL of a particular page. In my case I would use www.joeslondontaxis.com for the site, or www.joeslondontaxis.com/taxibooking for the Bookings page.

This URL should be relevant to the contents of the page and use (if appropriate) some of your keywords. For example, my company 'Joe's London Taxis' is also my domain name, and my bookings page is named /taxibooking (not page1.htm). If you have a brand name that isn't specific to your product, e.g. Youtube provides videos online, don't worry about that, just make sure it's one of your keywords, as it may be something people search for.

You can change the names of your pages in the 'pages' panel within the SiteMaker toolbar.



Changing the names of your pages

2. Your page title in the HTML: e.g. "London taxi company", or "London taxi bookings page"

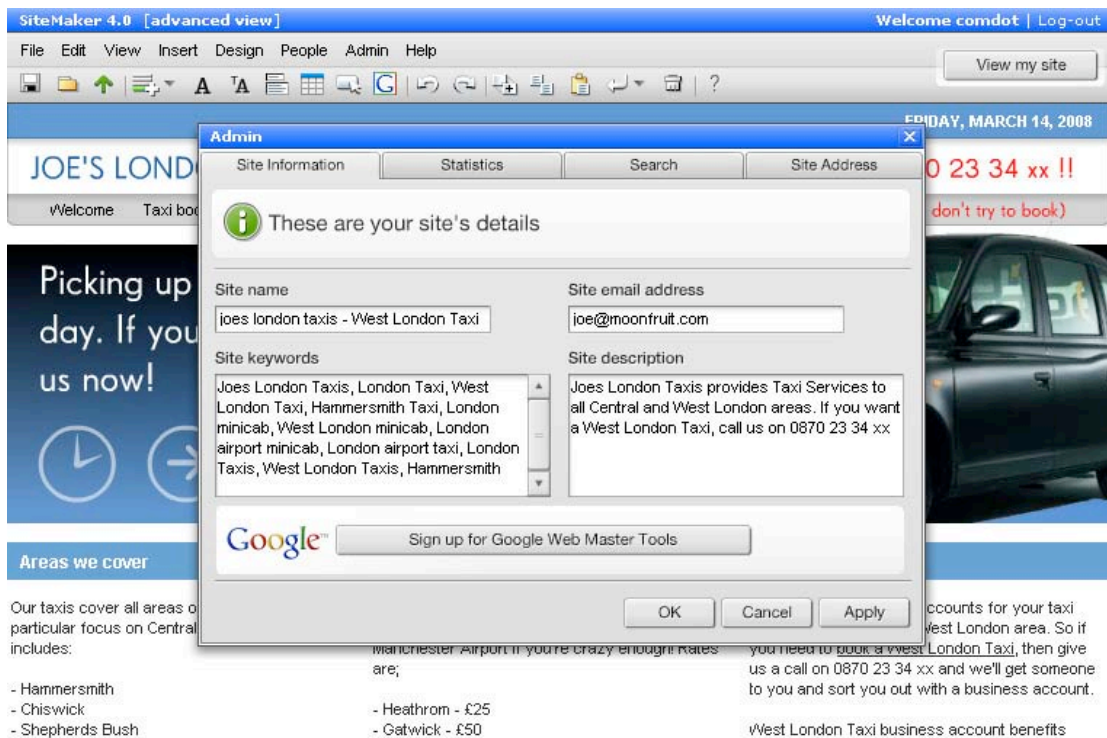
3. Your Keywords metadata in the HTML: e.g. "london taxis, london taxi, joes taxis, west london taxi, etc."

4. Your Description metadata in the HTML: e.g. "london taxi company provides taxi services..."

The 'Title' tag in the HTML is the name you see at the top of the browser bar when you visit the page. The Keywords metadata is also hidden in the HTML and gives the search engine an idea of what your site is about based on particular words and phrases. The Descriptions metadata is again hidden in the HTML and is a short text summary of your site.

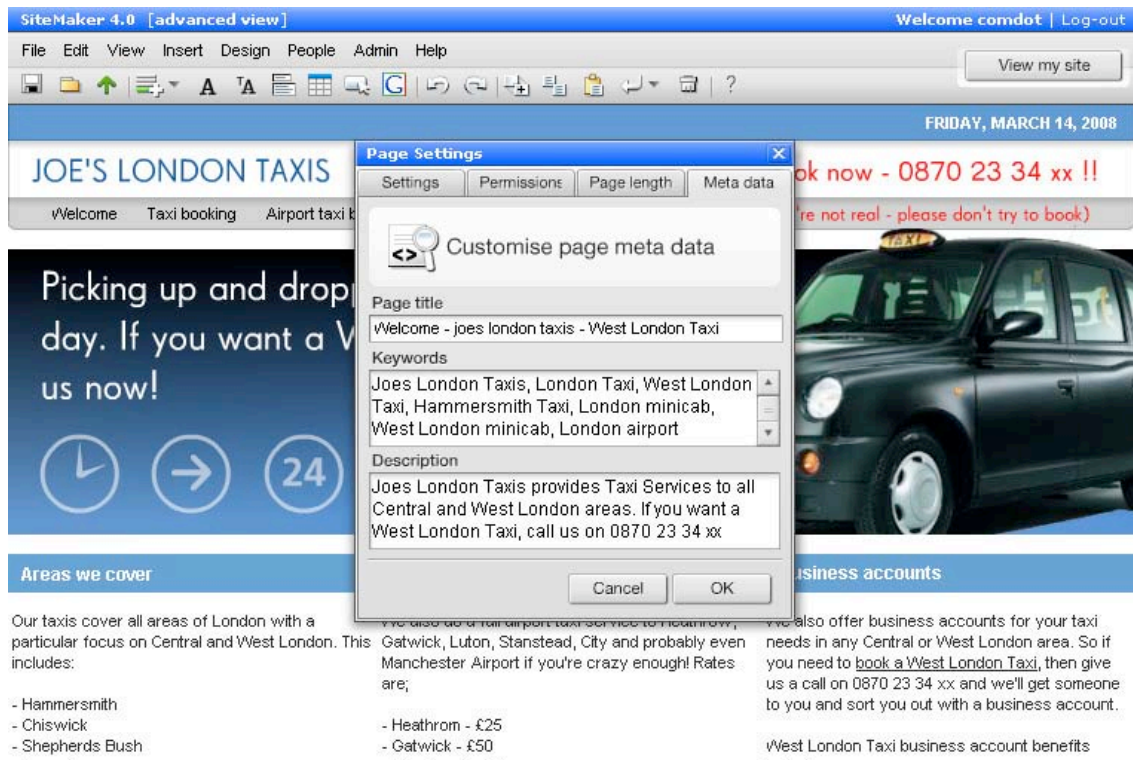
All three are important to get correct and consistent as they are used by search engines, though always in context with the rest of your site contents. In SiteMaker there are a couple of ways of setting these things. We let you set a default for all pages (useful if you have hundreds), but we also allow you to set these for individual pages, giving you more control.

If you go to 'Edit' -> 'Admin' -> 'Site information' you'll see the 'Site name', 'Site keywords' and 'Site description' fields – we can ignore 'Site email' here. These will be the default metadata values that are inserted into the HTML for all of your pages, unless other values are added to the individual page settings themselves.



Editing your site information

For individual pages, go to 'Edit' -> 'Page settings' -> 'Meta data' and you will see the 'Page title', 'Keywords' and 'Description' fields which insert the values into the HTML for that particular page.



Editing the metadata on a page

For example, with my site I chose to set the default keywords to:

Keywords - "joes london taxis, london taxi, west london taxi, hammersmith taxi, london minicab, west london minicab, london airport minicab, london airport taxi, london taxis, west london taxis, hammersmith taxis, london minicab, west london minicab, london airport minicab, london airport taxis"

Description - "Joes London Taxis provides taxi services to all central and west London areas. If you want a west London taxi, call us on 0870 23 34 xx"

These appear on every page I created and will remain unless I generate a different set for specific pages using the 'Page Settings' panel. For my Taxi Bookings page, I decided to create a different set and changed these to:

Title - "Taxi booking page - book a London taxi"

Keywords - "book a london taxi, london taxi booking, west london taxi, book a minicab, london minicab booking, joes london taxis, london taxi, west london taxi, hammersmith taxi, london minicab, west london minicab"

Description - "Use this page to book a west London taxi with Joes London Taxis. Book by phone or by email."

You can see how simple it is to make some adjustments to the keywords/description so that it is more specific to the actual page you are on, without having to change them all.

5. Your page content: e.g. the text that is on your page

This includes all the contents on your page, particularly text and any 'alt tags' (alternative text) you have attached to your images. All this text is represented in the HTML and therefore gets picked up and used by search engines, so make sure it includes some of your keywords. Don't just dump them on the page so that it becomes a mess of words (remember your site is read by people too!); you have to make sure that they are relevant and appropriate with the message of the page.

For example, on my site I've included the following passage on the 'home' page:

"Picking up and dropping off 24 hours per day!! If you want a west London Taxi call us now" and "So when you want to book a west London Taxi just think of us and call 0870 23 34 xx".

Both of these include my "west London taxi" keyword which, with other references to "Taxi bookings" and other services I offer on the page, will support my rankings. But I've been careful to make sure it's still readable and not overly crowded.

Search engines also pay attention to 'Heading tags' within your HTML, which are generally used to describe sections of your content. Words that appear within the headings are also deemed to be of greater importance in your site.

We generate three levels of heading tags on your pages based on your content: H1, H2 and H3. H1 is the most important and H3 the least. Any title text boxes that you put on your page are automatically turned into H2 headings in the HTML. The very first of the title text boxes that appears on your page (from top to bottom) is given the H1 status.

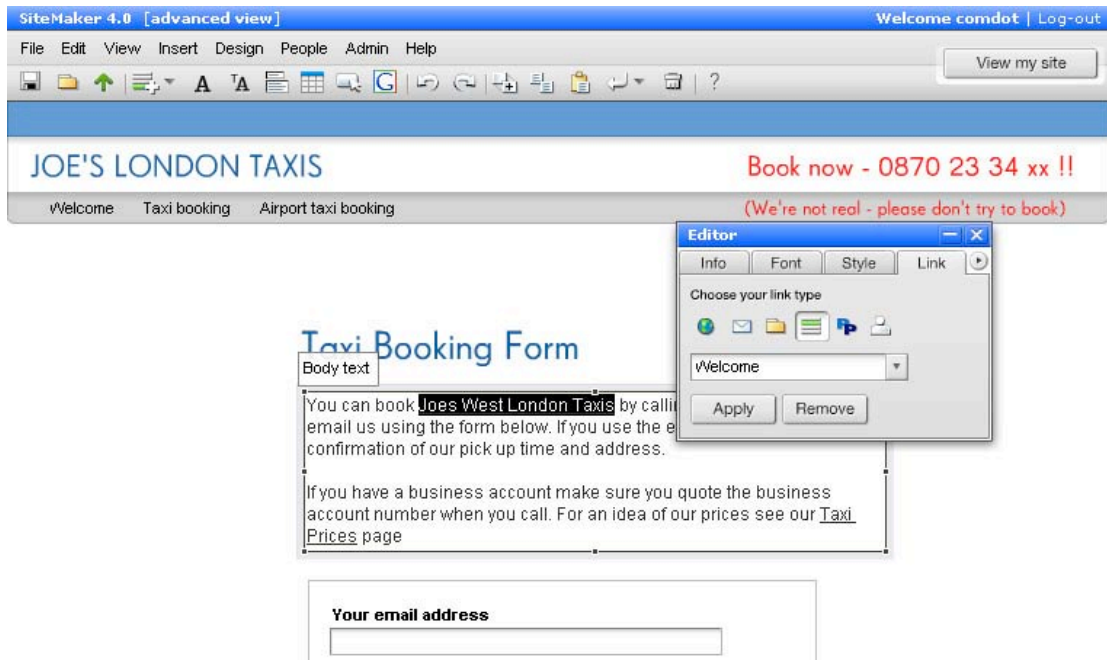
In body text boxes, if you use bold headings to separate text, i.e. adding the 'bold' style to create a heading within a text box, then these are given H3 status.

6. Links on your page, including the anchor text: e.g. the text on which the link is set

As well as the menu links on your page (which use the menu name as 'alt' text) links in text on your page are a good way of reinforcing your keywords and creating interlinking between your pages.

For example on my home page, I have created a link on the words "book a west london taxi" which links to my 'taxi booking' page. To do this in SiteMaker you have to be using a 'body text box' which is preset with standard or system fonts as only this type of font permits links ('graphic fonts' do not allow links to be set). Select the text box so that you can edit the contents and then highlight the text string by clicking

and dragging. Go to the editor, click on the 'link' panel, choose 'link to a page' and then select your page. Finally, use 'apply' to save the page. This link will be correctly represented in your HTML along with the 'anchor text' which is the word or words on which the link is set, and will be read and indexed by search engines.



Creating a link back to your homepage

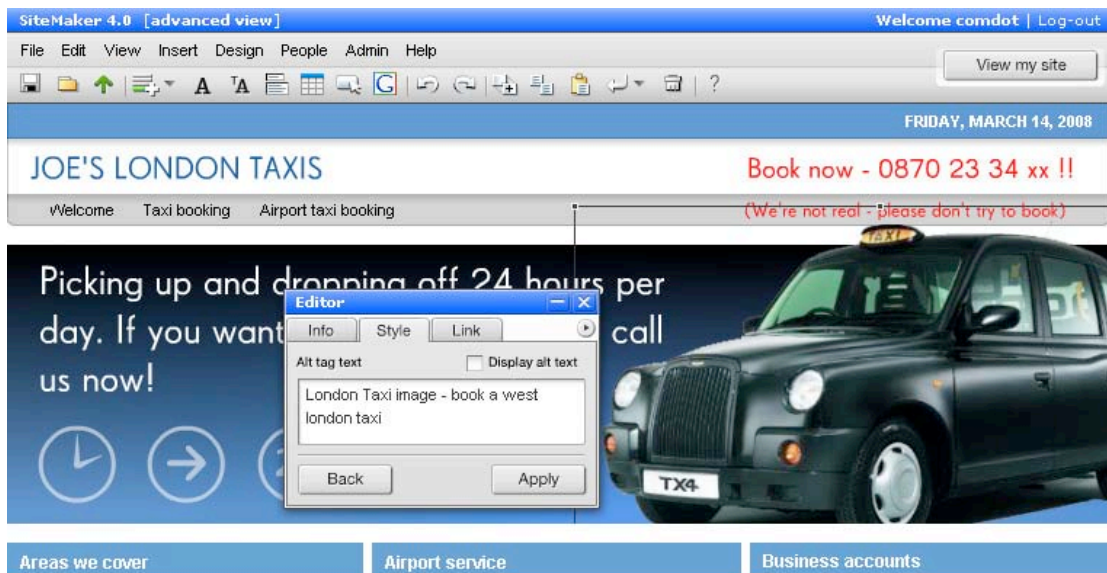
Additionally, on my Taxi Bookings page (and other pages), I have created links in the text back to my Home page using anchor text like "Joes West London taxis", etc.

Try to make sure that all your pages have 1, 2 or 3 links to other pages using relevant keywords. Don't get carried away and put in 10 to 20 links as this might be overkill and result in search engines penalising you for link spamming.

7. Images on your page

Your images can also be used to flag keywords as well as provide a text description of the image itself. For example on my home page I have set an 'alt tag' on the image to say "London Taxi image - book a west london taxi". This additional text provides extra information about your site and the text description makes the contents more accessible to users with screen readers i.e. the visually impaired. You can also make these images link to other pages in your site which will further improve the interlinking of pages.

To create an 'alt tag' on your image, select the image, click on the 'Style' tab in the 'Editor' and then use the 'alt tag' button. Enter your text and choose whether you want to display the text on rollover (it will always be displayed in the HTML), click 'Apply' and you're done.



Adding an alt tag to an image

8. Referral links to your pages

We used referral links to get the site listed in the first place, but they are also a good tool to improve the keyword relevancy and keep your site high in the rankings. It's always worth asking other site owners in related fields to put a link back to your site and include some of your keywords in the link text. Not everyone will do this and it's best not to pester people too much, but if you already have a relationship with another site owner, then this could be a good thing to do.

Part 5 – Summary

And that, as they say, is that!

Like we said at the beginning, this is not meant to be the 'be all and end all' of SEO guides, but it does provide some useful, practical tips in a confusing world. **Please (please!) remember**, that this is not an instant process. It will take some time before your new site starts appearing in the search results. But

follow the steps above, be patient and you can bet that your site will eventually turn up, and a hell of a lot quicker than if you did nothing.

So, all that is left to say is, good luck with optimising your site.

The results

The last time we checked the results of our optimisation for the www.joeslondontaxis.com website was July 31st 2008, with results unchanged from December 12th 2007. The rankings were:

"West London Taxi" - number 1, "Joes London Taxis" - number 1 (Google.com)

"West London Taxi" - number 1, "Joes London Taxis" - number 1 (Yahoo.com)

"West London Taxi" - number 6, "Joes London Taxis" - number 1 (msn.com)