

Best Practice Search Engine Optimisation

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Hitwise Australia
Search Marketing Services



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Search Marketing has become one of the most cost-efficient and accountable forms of advertising. By placing marketing messages in front of people searching for a brand, product or service, marketers are able to better target media spend and generate qualified leads extremely effectively. According to research conducted by Hitwise Australia, an average of 3 in every 10 Australian Internet visits came directly from a Search Engine in September 2007. This fast growing source of online customers is highly valued and therefore, creates an extremely competitive environment for marketers. If Search Marketing is not leveraged as a key part of the total marketing mix, companies can quickly find themselves behind the competition.

There are basically two types of Search Marketing opportunities that can be used to drive traffic to a website:

- **Paid Listing** – is an advertising platform enabling marketers to list their advertisements when specific terms are searched for by internet users. In doing so, they nominate the price they are willing to pay 'per click' when someone clicks on their advertisement.
- **Organic Listing** – is a lookup service provided by search engines where web pages are categorised and ranked based on their relevancy to a search term query entered by a searcher. Organic results are not paid advertising, and websites cannot appear in organic search results by paying a search engine directly. Rather, these are the search engine's recommendations of content which is deemed most appropriate and relevant to the searcher.

The screenshot shows a Google search for 'ipod'. The search bar is at the top with 'ipod' entered. Below the search bar, there are two columns of results. The left column shows organic search results, including 'iPod at The Apple Store', 'Cheapest iPods in AUS', 'Apple - iPod + iTunes', 'Apple - iPod', and 'iPod - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia'. The right column shows sponsored links, including 'iPod', 'New Samsung Video MP3s', 'My Mac Apple Shop', and 'Shopping for iPod?'. The search results are labeled 'Paid Listing' and 'Organic Listing'.

While there are many aspects to Search Marketing, this white paper is designed to help marketers:

- Gain an understanding of the basics of search engines and Search Engine Optimisation.
- Identify opportunities to bring more qualified traffic to a website through Search Engine Optimisation.
- Evaluate the search engine friendliness of a website.

The white paper closes with a checklist to help marketers evaluate how well a website is optimised.

A complete history of search engines can be found in John Battelle's best selling book 'The Search'.

2.1 A Brief History of Search Engines

In the early 1990s the Internet started to gain attention from many colleges, universities and other educational and research groups. As each university or college added more information to the web, it became increasingly difficult to find information. At first directories of web content were created, followed by search engines, which helped users find specific content online.

In 1990, Archie, the first Internet search engine was developed. It used a script-based data gatherer to collect file names of the resources on the Internet. Between 1993 and 1995 a number of new search engines such as Excite, Yahoo, WebCrawler, Lycos and Alta Vista began providing results for content rather than file names by reading the text of the web pages and matching them to search phrases. Other search engines such as Ask Jeeves, Inktomi and Google, appeared between 1996 and 1999.

Search engines continued to attract larger numbers of visitors, proving their utility. Today, most popular websites make use of search engines to deliver qualified visitors to their websites. According to research from Hitwise Australia, in September 2007, Search Engines typically account for between 30% and 70% of website traffic and are largely recognised as the gateway to the Internet.

2.2 How do Search Engines Work?

The exact criteria and relative importance of the criteria used in search engine algorithms is a closely guarded secret and a constantly moving target.

Search engines have computer programs or robots (bots) called spiders, which follow links from one web page to another and record all of the content that they find. These spiders will visit a web page, record the text, images and other content they can access, and will send that information to a search engine index.

The index is a large database that contains information on billions of web pages. When a user searches for a word or phrase, the search engine will compare all the web pages in its index and display the results that appear to be most relevant to the user's request.

Search engines use an algorithm that relies on a set of criteria to determine the relevance of web pages to particular search queries. These criteria might include:

- URL of the web page
- Title tag
- Meta keywords & description tags
- HTML heading tags (h1, h2, h3 & h4)
- Body text/content
- The number of links to the web page
- Text used to link to the web page
- Trust with the search engine
- Age of the website

Search engines do not disclose the exact criteria, nor their relative importance, and make frequent changes to algorithms. This is done to avoid misuse of organic (or natural) results. However, by optimising this set of criteria so it is 'search engine friendly', marketers dramatically affect their positions, and therefore increase click-through rates from organic listings.

Keeping abreast of algorithm changes is complicated due to its constantly evolving nature, and therefore many companies choose to outsource their Search Engine Optimisation and paid Search Engine Marketing campaigns to expert analysts and marketers.

2.3 Types of Search Engines

As the Internet has matured, users have become more knowledgeable and content more varied, search engines have evolved to better suit the needs of searchers. Today, there are a variety of search platforms people can use to narrow search results to specific content such as image, video, local and news search.

Web Search

Web search is currently the primary type of search engine result. Web search displays lists of web pages to the searcher who can then select the most appropriate result based on their needs. This is currently the most popular form of search engine vertical. Marketers can optimise their web pages to display targeted marketing messages to searchers looking for their brand, product or service.

[Sign in](#)


[Web](#) [Images](#) [News](#) [Maps](#) [New!](#) [Groups](#) [Scholar](#) [more »](#)
 [Advanced Search](#)
[Preferences](#)
 Search: the web pages from Australia [New!](#) [View and manage your web history](#)

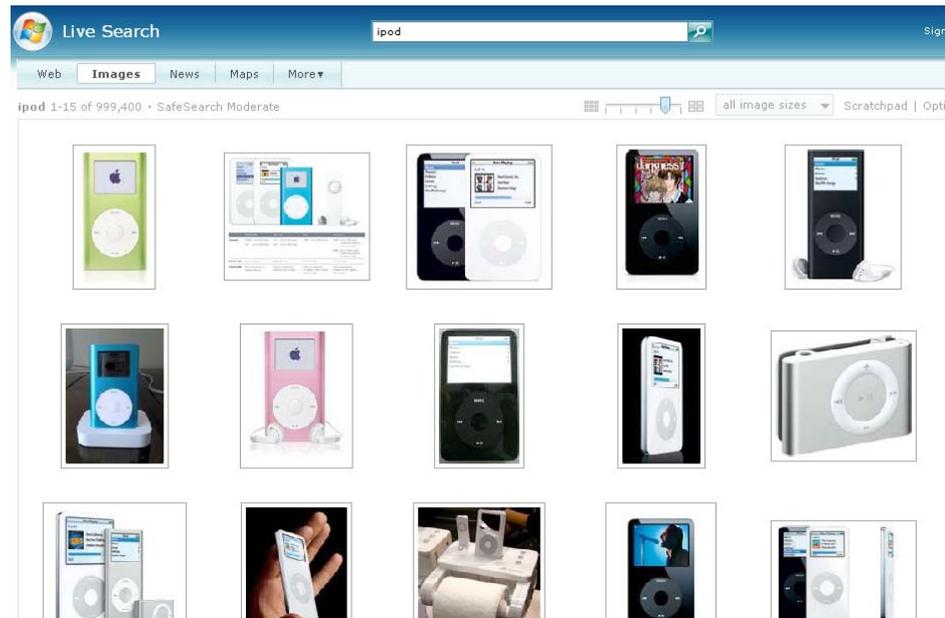
Web Results 1 - 10 of about 54,100,000 for **buy shoes**. (0.20 seconds)

<p>FREE Website & Domain Sponsored Link www.free-web.com.au We Design Your Site, You Manage It Easy-You only pay hosting \$110/year</p> <p>Womens Shoes - Express Global Delivery Buy Womens Shoes Online. Buy the latest fashion from the world's leading fashion designers, all ready for Express Global Delivery: ... www.mycatwalk.com.au/fashion/womens-shoes.html - 6k - Cached - Similar pages</p> <p>Shoes - Compare Prices and Buy at MyShopping.com.au in Australia Read Shoes Reviews, Price Comparison and Store Ratings. Compare Shoes and buy from the best Australian stores at MyShopping.com.au. www.mysshopping.com.au/PT-240_Shoes - 75k - Cached - Similar pages</p> <p>I Shoe City - Buy Mack, Blundstone, Dr Martens, and Redback boots ... Fashion, casual and work shoes for women and men. www.shoecity.com.au/ - 31k - Cached - Similar pages</p> <p>LocoRunning Australia - Buy running shoes online LocoRunning Australia sells running shoes designed by runners for runners of all abilities in Australia. www.locorunning.com.au/ - 15k - Cached - Similar pages</p> <p>Shoes from Shoebuy.com - Free Shipping & Return Shipping Shop for the latest styles of womens shoes, mens shoes, kids shoes, sandals, boots, clogs and slippers. Free shipping & returns, no tax. www.shoebuy.com/ - 36k - Cached - Similar pages</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sponsored Links</p> <p>Websites Cheap Custom Web Design from \$495 - \$995 100% Australian. See Our Portfolio. www.TheWebShowroom.com.au</p> <p>Don't Build Websites Build a High Traffic Website Complete turnkey solution, its here www.sitesell.com</p> <p>Buy Web Site Build and own a website in minutes. Free Trial. Sign Up Now! www.homestead.com</p> <p>Cheap website design \$699 10-page professional website incl. hosting and domain name www.legacybooks.com.au/websites</p> <p>Budget Website Solution Simple, effective & profitable website. 100% Free Trial www.auscreations.com.au</p>
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Image Search

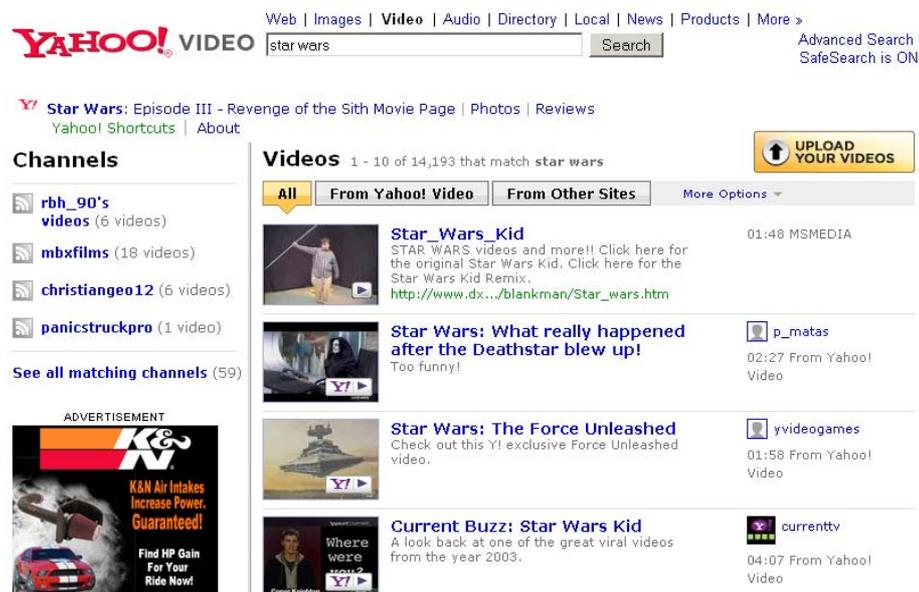
Major search engines provide an image search option that returns images considered relevant to a specific search term. For example, a search for 'ipod' on the Live.com search engine returns photos and other graphics related to ipod devices.

With the rise of consumer-generated media and online consumer reviews, and more and more people looking for images of products online, marketers should optimise the images featured on their website to ensure that their website appears in brand and product related searches for images.



Video Search

Video search is a relatively new vertical, and has become popular as Internet users have gained easier access to higher speed connections. Many companies are taking advantage of opportunities to deliver rich brand messages by creating marketing material targeted at video search engines. In this example, a search for 'star wars' through Yahoo! Video returns a list of video results.



Many companies invest millions of dollars in the production and distribution of TV commercials. Video optimisation presents another opportunity to distribute commercials and marketing videos to both potential and current customers.

An example of a TV commercial that has been successfully optimised and marketed online is the Carlton Draught advertisement mimicking a famous scene from the movie 'flash dance'. This video became very popular on many video search engines and created significant positive publicity for the company and their product. In the video search result listing below, the copy describing the video includes several terms that resonate with searchers for the commercial.



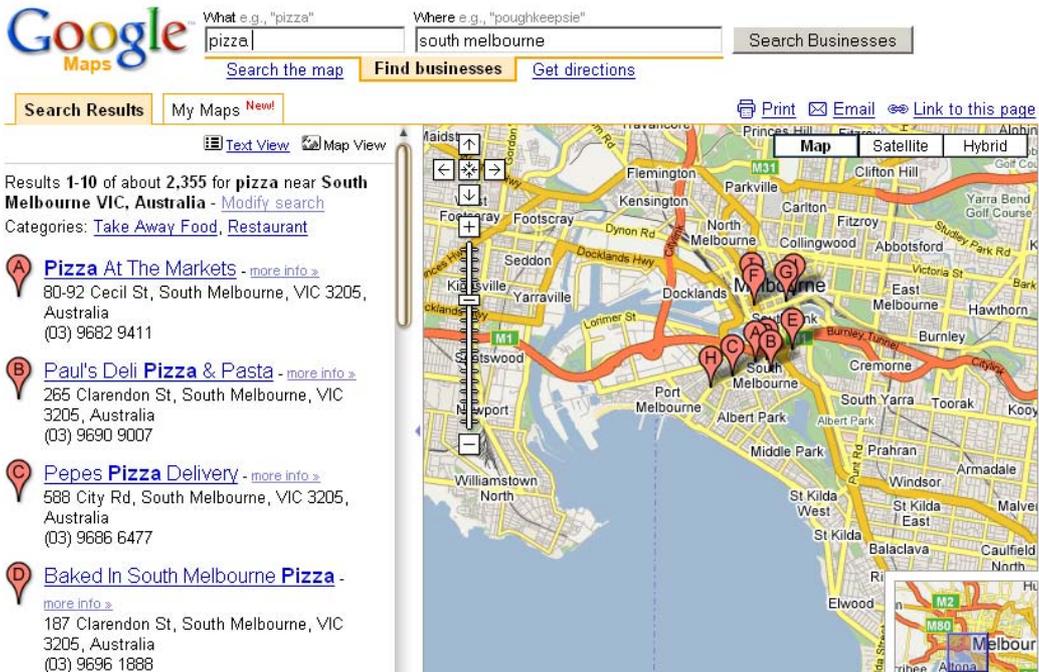
YouTube - Flash Beer Ad
 The Carlton Draught Flash **Beer** Ad from Carlton Brewery, for ...
 1 min 34 sec - ★★★★★
www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMX-pmV2yiM

Local Search

Local search allows Internet users to find companies and services in a local area. For example, a search for 'pizza' on Google Australia's Local Search returns restaurants and take-away options for pizza.

Optimising your website for local search engines is an excellent way of receiving highly qualified traffic. Local search is able to display a company's listing to people looking for related products and services within a specific area.

Although local search is likely to deliver lower search volumes compared to regular web search, in general, the visitors are much more qualified and therefore more likely to generate sales or conversions.



Google Maps What e.g., "pizza" Where e.g., "poughkeepsie"
 pizza south melbourne Search Businesses
 Search the map Find businesses Get directions

Search Results My Maps **News!** Print Email Link to this page
 Text View Map View

Results 1-10 of about 2,355 for **pizza** near **South Melbourne VIC, Australia** - [Modify search](#)
 Categories: [Take Away Food](#), [Restaurant](#)

- A** [Pizza At The Markets](#) - [more info >](#)
 80-92 Cecil St, South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
 (03) 9682 9411
- B** [Paul's Deli Pizza & Pasta](#) - [more info >](#)
 265 Clarendon St, South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
 (03) 9690 9007
- C** [Pepes Pizza Delivery](#) - [more info >](#)
 588 City Rd, South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
 (03) 9686 6477
- D** [Baked In South Melbourne Pizza](#) - [more info >](#)
 187 Clarendon St, South Melbourne, VIC 3205, Australia
 (03) 9696 1888

News Search

News search engines attempt to find the latest news reports and media releases, allowing users to have access to the latest information on a topic. As of 1 October 2007, according to Hitwise Australia, the most popular news search engines amongst Australian Internet users are Google and Yahoo!.

News search engines provide companies an opportunity to present timely information, such as announcements and press releases to the public, as well as to gain additional exposure for their brand. For example, a search for 'General Motors' on Yahoo! News can return recent news stories in regards to the recent agreements made with UAW (United Auto Workers).

By distributing to news search engines carefully crafted press releases and announcements with copy that is optimised for a specific product or brand, a company can use news search not only to drive traffic to its website, but to also help build a positive online perception of their brand.



Also try: [general motors buyout](#), [general motors hybrid](#) [More...](#)

News Stories for **General Motors** (Results 1 - 10 of about 17,760) Sort Results by: Relevance | [Date](#)



[441 News Photos](#)



[22 News Videos](#)

1. [Local UAW Workers Approve Deal with General Motors](#) 
 WIVB Buffalo - Oct 09 2:41 PM
 (Tonawanda, NY, October 9, 2007) - - Local auto workers are giving the thumbs up to the United Auto Workers contract with **General Motors**.
2. [Lordstown UAW Passes Contract with General Motors](#) 
 WFMJ Youngstown - Oct 09 3:54 AM
 Auto workers in Lordstown finished voting on a new contract with **General Motors** this morning and the votes are in. Members of UAW locals 1112 and 1714 have PASSED the contract.

Google's Universal Search is being tested in the US and integrates vertical search results into other search results to help direct queries to relevant verticals.

Universal Search

Google has recently released the concept of universal search, designed to span across multiple verticals and return more varied results. Universal search has the ability to display images, video, news, and other content within the regular search results.

Google's Universal Search is currently only active on select queries and topics on google.com, but may be expanded in the future. The following example for a search for 'Michael Jackson' using Google's Universal Search shows image, news and video results along with regular organic listings. Google has determined that many people searching for Michael Jackson are interested in photos, news and videos that relate to the singer, and have displayed all results related to him.

The screenshot shows a Google search for 'michael jackson'. The search bar contains 'michael jackson' and the search button is labeled 'Search'. Below the search bar are links for 'Advanced Search' and 'Preferences'. The search results are categorized by 'Web', 'Images', 'News', 'Video', and 'Music'. The 'Image results' section shows three images: a Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Dept. badge, a portrait of Michael Jackson, and a photo of him in a red jacket. The 'News results' section shows a news article titled 'Michael Jackson plagiarized hit tune, Belgian court rules' from AFP, dated 11 Sep 2007. Below the news results are links to 'The Age' and 'MSNBC'. The 'Classic Rock' section shows a link to 'www.michaeljackson.com/'. The 'Pop music' section shows a link to the Wikipedia page for Michael Jackson. The 'Music' section shows a YouTube video titled 'Michael Jackson, 1983' with a 5-star rating and a link to watch the video.

The launch of Google's Universal Search signals a move toward integrating vertical search results into the main search engine results. This indicates that making all website content – including news releases, images and videos – visible and optimised to search engines will become increasingly important in attracting potential customers.

3.1 What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the art and science of improving a website's relevance in the eyes of search engines, so that online brands are listed 'towards the top' of search engine results for specific keywords.

As reviewed earlier, organic search results are displayed by search engines based on their relevancy to a query entered by a searcher. Search engines determine the relevance of their pages based on a proprietary algorithm, which incorporates the criteria listed in section 2.2 of this white paper, as well as other factors that search engines do not disclose. In many instances, organic search results are more 'trusted' by searchers than paid listings, because they in fact are not directly 'paid for' advertisements, but rather, deemed relevant by the search engine.

As such, by optimising a website, a search engine optimiser is able to assist search engines to recognise the relevancy of those web pages for the desired keywords.

Search Engine Optimisation ensures your website is easily found by search engines.

3.2 What does SEO Involve?

Given that algorithms are complex and closely guarded secrets, what can marketers do to maximise opportunities to attract large volumes of qualified buyers from organic listings?

By carefully analysing organic results for your brand, competitors and the industry as a whole, analysts are able to expose content to search engines and improve the possibility of search engines sending qualified traffic to your website.

Following are a number of factors that could improve a website's visibility in organic search results:

- **Relevance** – Search engines aim to display the most relevant results based on the searcher's query. Marketers should ensure that their web pages are relevant to the keywords that their customers and potential customers are using to search for their brands and products.
- **Accessibility** – Many company websites are large and complex in terms of navigation and functionality. Search engines can often have trouble accessing some web pages or content of websites, making them difficult to add to the search engine index and display to searchers in organic results. Companies should ensure that the majority of web pages are accessible to search engines by ensuring that the web page code is well structured and free from errors, and that there are easily accessible links to all pages of the website.
- **Popularity** - Search engines seem to consider websites with more incoming links as being more popular than other websites, which can often relate to increased exposure in the search engine listings. Marketers should focus on obtaining links from reputable and related websites to increase their popularity online.

Different search engines will place different weightings on these factors, and they will also consider many other factors, such as words in the URL, the age of the domain, the frequency with which content is updated and the amount of trust the domain has with the search engine.

From an optimiser's perspective, all of these factors are important and should be considered when performing Search Engine Optimisation on a website.

One of the key aspects of Search Engine Optimisation is choosing the language to 'optimise' – that is, which terms and phrases should be included on both visible and 'behind the scenes' copy on your website, to ensure that the content is relevant and actionable. There are three important areas to review and consider when choosing keywords to optimise:

1. Keywords for different phases of Search
2. Keywords that reflect natural consumer language
3. Keywords that have been proven to drive traffic to competitors

4.1 Keywords for Different Phases of Search

Often, people use different terms for different phases in their quest for information. For example, online shopping is often characterised by two phases: research and purchase. An important part of choosing keywords for Search Engine Optimisation is to identify the search terms that relate to these two phases and direct searchers to the appropriate content based on their search.

Example: 'Mobile Phones' vs. '\$0 Up Front Mobile Plan'

When analysing how people research and purchase mobile phones online, Hitwise has found that keywords typed into search engines during the initial research phase tend to be generic, such as 'mobile phones' as the consumer remains unsure about the specifics of the product he or she wants to buy. To attract customers at this initial phase, a mobile phone provider could optimise web pages for the keyword 'mobile phones', and list features and benefits of their mobile phone packages. This information will help 'researchers' make a decision on the mobile phone and phone plan they wish to purchase.

As the searcher discovers information and compares competitors in the market, he or she becomes more educated and savvy about the offerings and starts to refine searches accordingly. After some research, the searcher may have decided to opt for a phone and plan package with no up front fees, and may type into a search engine the term '\$0 up front mobile plan'.

This query is much more specific and is more likely to result in a purchase of a mobile phone plan than the more generic queries used in the research phase. A mobile phone provider may optimise web pages for the keyword '\$0 up front mobile plan' and incorporate only the main features of the phone in point form, and a 'call to action' encouraging the visitor to purchase their mobile phone plan.

When customers are at the buying phase, it is important to provide a clear 'call to action', such as a 'Buy Now!' button to encourage them to perform the desired action, such as buy a product, or subscribe to a service.

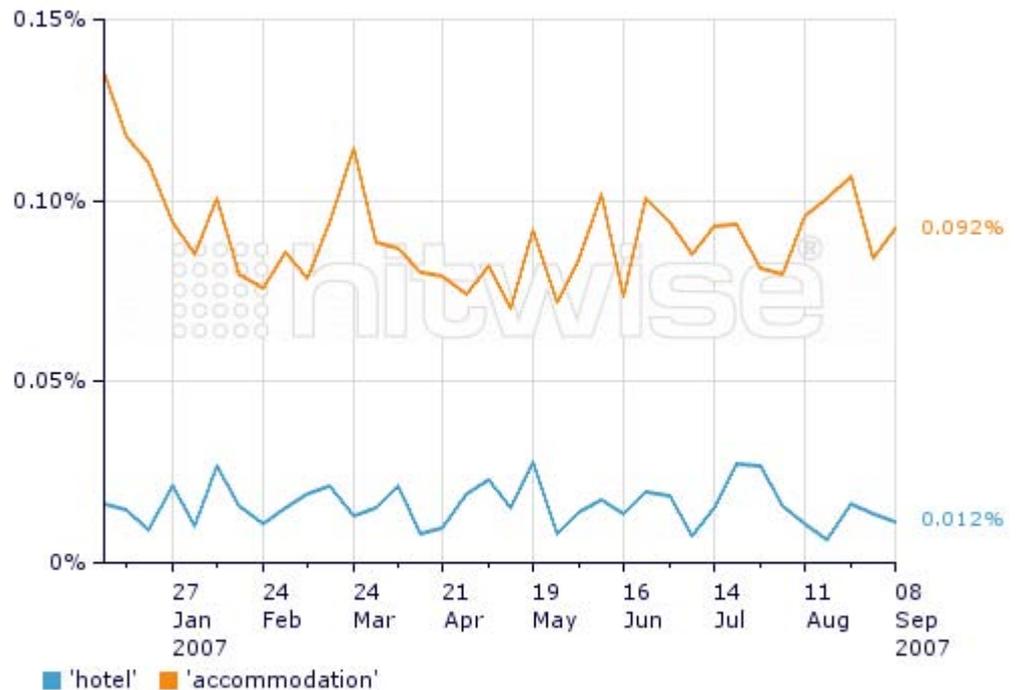


4.2 Keywords that Reflect Natural Consumer Language

When optimising a website, a search engine optimiser should always consider terms that reflect natural consumer language in local markets, which are likely to deliver the most qualified traffic to the website.

Example: Query volume 'accommodation' versus 'hotel'

While there are many terms related to booking a hotel, it is important to understand which search terms not only generate conversions, but also deliver the highest volume of traffic to tourism websites. For example, in analysing the resonance of the term 'accommodation' versus 'hotel' amongst Australian internet users, we used Hitwise Australia Search Intelligence™ data to compare the volume of traffic these queries send to websites in the Travel – Destinations & Accommodation industry.



Weekly search term share of traffic to 'Travel - Destinations and Accommodation', based on Australian usage. Created: 13/09/2007. © Copyright 1998-2007 Hitwise Pty. Ltd.



From this graph we clearly see that six times more traffic goes to Destinations and Accommodation websites on searches for 'accommodation' than on 'hotels'. Companies in the tourism industry can use such information to build website content to attract more visitors.



4.3 Keywords that have been Proven to Drive Traffic to Competitors

Understanding which keywords and terms competitors successfully use to optimise their website can give marketers insight into which terms to include in their website optimisation plan.

For example, if www.jbhifi.com.au wants to gain market share amongst people buying electrical goods & electronics online, then the Hitwise Search Intelligence™ Search Term Gap Analysis report would be valuable as it shows terms that send traffic to its competitor, www.retravision.com.au but not to www.jbhifi.com.au.

Search Terms Gap Analysis - Strengths for 'Retravision' vs 'JB Hi-Fi Australia'

The results below show search term Strengths for the website 'www.retravision.com.au' which receive more traffic when compared against the search terms for the website 'www.jbhifi.com.au' sorted by the Gap Index descending for the 4 weeks ending 15/09/2007. Search term strengths are where subject A receives more traffic than subject B.

Displaying 1 to 30 of 373 search terms.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Rank	Search Term	Retravision	Gap Index
<input type="checkbox"/>	1.	retrovision	4.34%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.	retravision catalogue	1.77%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.	retravision	57.14%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4.	www.retravision.com.au	1.26%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5.	retravision australia	0.87%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6.	retravision.com.au	0.62%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7.	retravison	0.41%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8.	retravision stores	0.37%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9.	www.retravision	0.34%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10.	beta electrical	0.34%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	11.	retravision queensland	0.34%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	12.	retrovision stores	0.27%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	13.	retrovision catalogue	0.24%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	14.	retravision perth	0.24%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	15.	beta electrical	0.22%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	16.	retravision wa	0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	17.	clive peters	0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	18.	retra-vision	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	19.	corporate express	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	20.	retavision	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	21.	age of love nbc	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	22.	harveynorman	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	23.	retra vision	4.79%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	24.	th50px700a	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	25.	www.retravision.com	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	26.	panasonic dnr-ex87	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	27.	electric wall ovens	<0.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/>	28.	electrical stores nt	<0.20%	

From this information, it is possible to see that retravision.com.au is getting significant amounts of traffic from specific product codes and brands, which may lead to sales because the searcher is looking for specific products.

JB Hi-Fi can use this information to optimise their website to ensure that the brands, product names and codes listed on their websites are easily indexed by search engines and more likely to appear in organic search results. By doing this, JB Hi-Fi can compete more effectively with competitors like Retravision on products and brand that both retailers stock.

Investing in keyword research tools can help improve effectiveness of SEO activities. Hitwise Search Marketing Services has experienced marketers with access to this type of valuable information and therefore able to provide recommendations for Search Engine Optimisation based on real market trends and data.

5.1 How Well is My Website Optimised?

The following checklist can be used to evaluate how well a website is optimised:

	Yes	No	Unsure
Are the website's title tags optimised with important keywords?			
Do the description meta tags contain compelling copy that encourages searchers to visit the website?			
Can search engines access links in your website's navigation menu?			
Are important words and phrases included in the content of each web page?			
Does each web page use heading tags (H1, H2, H3 and H4)?			
Do links to other web pages of the website use relevant text and descriptions?			
Can you navigate to any page within 2 or 3 clicks from the home page?			
Does the website have a Google page rank of 5 or higher?			
Does the website have more than 1000 back links?			
Do any websites with a page rank of 5 or more link to the website?			
Is the website listed in important directories such as Yahoo Directory & DMOZ.org?			

If you answered no or not sure to any of these questions, your website may not be reaching its potential and your competitors may be getting your potential customers.

If you believe your website could perform better in organic search results and would like a complimentary Search Engine Optimisation audit performed on your website, contact Hitwise Search Marketing Services today on (03) 8530 2400 or info@hitwise.com.au