

15-POINT CHECKLIST FOR NATURAL SEARCH ENGINE RANKINGS, PART 1

There is a lot of talk out there about how a site should be built to rank in the search engines. Search engine portals like Google, Yahoo! and Bing are everyday tools that people use to do their research, get information and even make their buying decisions.

Agents and brokers alike ask me all the time, "Tricia, what do I need to do to get my site on the front page of the search engines?" Although no search engine optimization company can guarantee first-page rankings outside of pay per click, there are strategies that can help your site have the best chance of ranking high on the search engines.

I think the best analogy I can use is this. Think about building a brand new house. Would you just build the house and not think about the use of each room, where the phone lines and Internet lines were located or not worry about the electrical sockets? Since we are in the real estate industry you would say to me, "Tricia, of course I would. I am not going to knock down sheet rock to put in more wiring. Why not just plan where I may want these now while the walls are exposed. It will save me money in the long run and the house will be better established for add-ons and such."

This is how we need to think about our websites. The better the foundation is laid with core elements throughout, the better a search engine strategy will work for you in the long run. Here are the first five in a 15-point checklist to ensure that your website is built for search engine success and is competitive against others in your market. Watch for the remaining ten next month.

1 Make sure your home page is focused on a specific target for maximum exposure. It's the first thing a client and the search engines read. If your home page is targeted specifically to your market, both will find your website to be a more

valuable resource in comparison to other real estate websites that haven't dedicated text, images and information to your market.

2 Prove it to the search engines that your site is a resource (Content, Content, Content!). If you specialize in several towns or cities, devote a navigation element on your home page, as well as an individual page, for each one in your website. The standard of "content is king" still stands today.

3 Have unique Title tags for each individual page. Some sites you visit will have just one generic Title (located in the top left-hand side in blue on the Internet Explorer bar) that will be for the entire site regardless of what page the visitor is on. You must have a unique Title tag for each page instead of one for the entire site. This is a very powerful field for search engine optimization and, if done correctly, can serve as a "call to action" in the search engine results.

4 Unique Meta keywords and descriptions for each individual page. The search engines once used this as a major field but it's not as important as it once was. However, it should still be done, particularly the description, which will show up in the actual search results as a "call to action."

5 Make sure you have links on the home page to specific content pages. Think of the analogy of putting open house signs at every major intersection to direct them to the location of the house. The links allow the search engines to crawl to other pages within your site and get to the information that shows you have important content for people visiting your site. The easier you make it for linking deeply within the site, the better. **RE**

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