SEO for WordPress Blogs

How to use WordPress to ensure success for your weblog in the Organic Search Engine Results

Blogs, by their very nature, are search engine friendly and give you built-in advantages in optimizing for the Search Engines. For a variety of reasons, nearly all SEOs agree that **WordPress** provides optimization benefits other blog platforms do not.

By following our simple tips and using our recommended plug-ins, you can have an easy-to-use content management system which also ranks well in the Search Engines.

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Why a WordPress Blog?

Superior SEO Functionality

SEOs are enamored with WordPress because it allows them to perform Search Engine Optimization functions that most of the other blog platforms do not support. This includes elements like title tags, meta descriptions, related posts, optional excerpts, and other easy ways of making the Search Engines clearly aware of your content and what it is about.

Everybody wins with WordPress

The open source platform of WordPress encourages web developers from any corner of the world to contribute to its look and functionality by creating their own themes, plug-ins, and widgets or by improving upon those others have released. Anyone may then use them at no cost and make them better, if they can. This has created a culture of continual improvement and upgrading of all things WordPress.

Wordpress.Org catalogs these improvements and makes them available to everyone. Consequently, the platform continues to grow, contributing web developers gain recognition and links, SEOs get tools to help them with their jobs, and bloggers get web sites which rank well in the Search Engine Results Pages for relevant terms.

WordPress works for non-technical people

The platform is completely web based, and you can build and maintain your site within a simple browser window. This alleviates the need to buy and learn expensive software programs, like Dreamweaver.

Pages on your conventional site can be set up as blog pages, *or* you can design your entire web site with WordPress. Even if you have a professional do the initial design work, you can add pages, edit pages, add videos, change photos, install new plug-ins, enable RSS feeds, and add social media voting buttons yourself. Here are some examples of websites which use WordPress exclusively for their website, including content management:

Navarre Properties – Navarre Beach, FL Condo & Home Rentals

Mountain Property Management - Jackson Hole Vacation Rentals

Hotel Elements – a San Jan Islands Hotel in Washington State

There are excellent hosting companies who will load WordPress onto your domain for you, making it super simple for non-techies to get their blog set up. Try BlueHost or HostMySite for inexpensive options.

WordPress has an excellent support and resource base across the web makeing it easy for web design novices to learn more and to find help with building their blog. Some great resources we use are Lorelle on WordPress and also the Wordpress.org Support Forum.

Setting Up WordPress for SEO Success

Use the right Server
Make sure that whoever is hosting your blog installs it on a Linux server. Windows servers are basically for Windows applications and WordPress is definitely NOT a Windows application. It may cost an extra few dollars to set up your blog on Linux, but it can save you technical headaches in the future that can be difficult or impractical to correct.

Enable Pinging
Pinging sends a signal to the Search Engines to come take a look at your blog every time new content is added or changes are made. This gives you a big SEO advantage, as it ensures your content is seen immediately by Google and indexed quickly. This can help your posts rank right away for less-competitive keywords.

Take advantage of slugs
No, not the slimy garden creatures, *Post slugs* allow you to insert a topic or keyword phrase into your URL. For example, you can use www.blog.yourdomain.com/blog-setup-basics.php instead of something like www.blog.yourdomain.com/?p=187
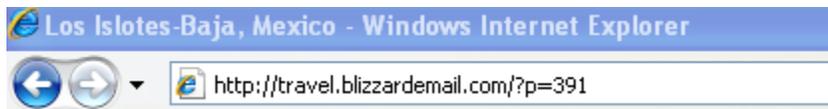
In order for post slugs to appear in your URLs, you must do some easy customization. This capability is built right into WordPress, but you need to enable it before you begin blogging. Changing your permalink structure after you've added content is tricky and it is difficult to switch when posts are already existing on a "?p=" URL.

In your WordPress **Dashboard**, go to **Options** and then to **Permalinks**.

Under *Common Options*, click on the radio button for **Custom**, **specify below** and in the *Custom Structure* field add **/%category%/%postname%/**.

Common options:

○ Default
» http://www.marybowling.com/?p=123

○ Date and name based
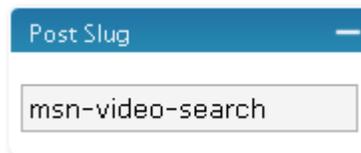» http://www.marybowling.com/2008/01/02/sample-post/

○ Numeric
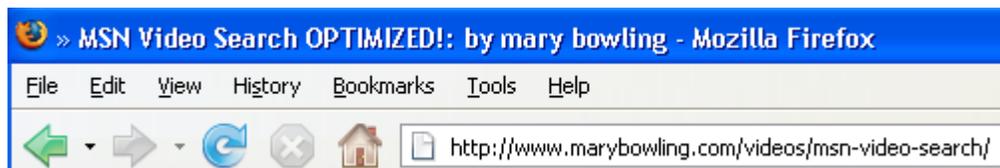» http://www.marybowling.com/archives/123

○ ...tom, specify below

Cu... /structure: /%category%/%postname%/

This will make your URLs appear as www.yourdomain.com/category/postname (where *postname* is the slug you give each post.)

For example, a post in the *videos* category of this blog, with this post slug:

Post Slug   —

msn-video-search

Will display this URL:

☺ » MSN Video Search OPTIMIZED!: by mary bowling - Mozilla Firefox

File   Edit   View   History   Bookmarks   Tools   Help

http://www.marybowling.com/videos/msn-video-search/

After setting this up, try a test post or two to make sure it is working properly prior to adding a lot of content. Using a Linux server is **key** to making sure this step works!

You can customize your URLs to display in many other ways, but this configuration gives the Search Engines and human viewers additional hints as to what the post is about, which will help with your SEO.

Start Blogging

Check your blog after making a post – always!
You need to avoid broken links, missing images, empty pages, etc., because when the Search Engines find these, they may discontinue crawling your pages. Make certain the title, description, and category display properly. Be prepared for occasional blow ups. Learning what caused the problem and figuring out how to fix it is part of the learning curve.

Pages, Categories, and Posts
Use pages to feature static content that should stay the same and in the same place, without changing frequently. We use static pages for things like *Road Condition* links and *Travel Resource Information* (passports and such).

Use categories to arrange your posts into logical themes within your blog. Categorization makes it easier for both the Search Engines and humans to tell what a post is about and to find other posts containing related information. Choose only one category for each post, whenever practical. Putting a post in more than one category creates duplicate content because the snippet or optional excerpt will display on each category page that is chosen for the post. Therefore, it's better to set up more categories on your blog and to limit the number of categories for each post to only one – never more than two.

Use Keywords in your post titles
Use keywords in your post titles, but don't limit your blog posts to topics that relate to great keyword phrases. When you write your title, simply think about how you want a searcher to find that article in the Search Engine results. If your post is about the wide variety of widgets available, it is feasible someone would possibly search for "widget options" to find your article.
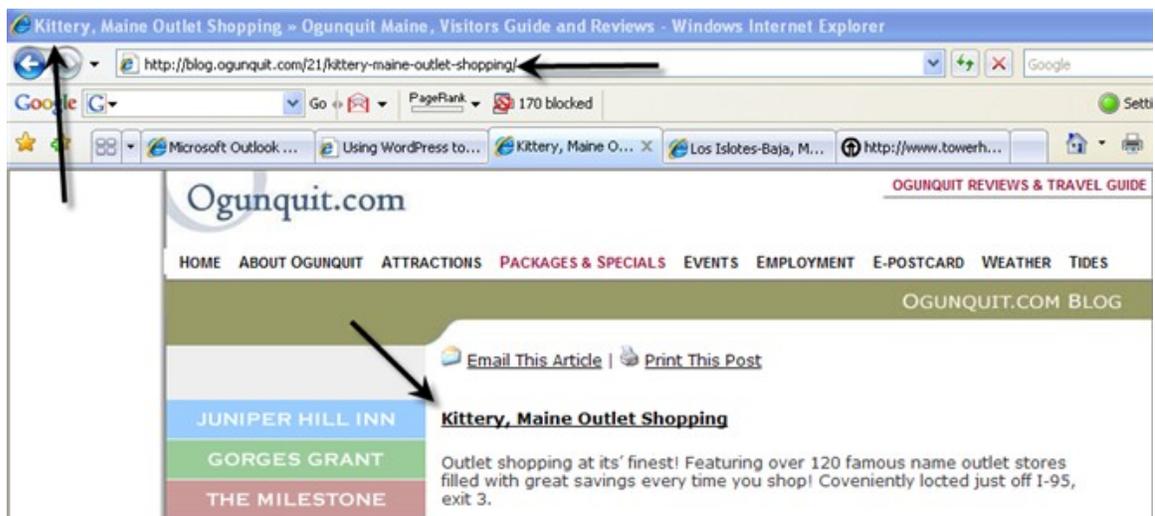
Don't build out pages until you have content for them
The Search Engines frown upon you wasting their time and resources spidering *Under Construction* pages or pages without content. So, do not create pages until you have something worthwhile to put on them.

Do not copy and paste content directly from Microsoft Word into WordPress

Microsoft's built-in formatting can cause a multitude of problems within WordPress pages and posts. In addition to "blowing out" your blog, it can create very odd URLs with things like percentage signs in them or unwanted formatting of your text. Copy your content from Word into Notepad, which strips out the Word formatting, and then put it into your blog.

Theme Your Posts

Don't just cram your keyword phrases in a post five times – think about appropriately **theming** your post using synonymous and supporting words. For example, if your post is about *travel* use words like *vacation, trip, expedition, adventure*, and *getaway* in your article.

If you have good information and insight to share with your readers, you'll find that your posts will become naturally themed as you write them. If this isn't happening for you, you may need to narrow your focus on your topic.

Link out!

It helps your readers and the Search Engines. Where useful to the reader, link from your posts to external resources. Linking to authority sites, like Wikipedia or WordPress, using good anchor text supporting the content of your page helps to theme it and establish relevance.

Spread the link love

Many of us who have been in the SEO biz for a while tend to want to direct and manipulate the PageRank on our sites. However, blogs are all about linking freely, not just to other posts and pages within your own site, but also out to other web sites and blogs. Use the **Follow** plugin in our *SEO Plugins* section to counteract the WordPress no-follow default.

People usually find out when you link to them, especially other bloggers. This often prompts them to come to your blog to find out who you are and what you said about them. They may then link back to you and become a member of your community. Spread your link love around and karma may bring it back to you!

Use a blogroll

Use the blogroll feature of WordPress to point links to other blogs on your topic you read and respect. Those bloggers will be alerted to your interest and may respond in kind. Inclusion of your link in the blog rolls of others may be an indicator of blog quality to Google.

Link Between Related Posts

Where useful to the reader, link from one post to another using good link text. This will greatly improve the SEO of your internal linking structure.

Use one Post for One Topic

The best way to keep each post relevant to its title is to write powerful, keyword-rich text about a single topic. If you find yourself straying off-topic, then write another post and link to it from the original post. This will help to keep your content focused on particular themes and make them more relevant to the Search Engines.

Use *Optional Excerpts*

Everyone knows that duplicate content is no good for SEO, so be certain to use the ***Optional Excerpt*** feature built into WordPress to make your category pages unique. Without it, category pages will contain content duplicated from the post pages in that category.

When you put text in this box for a post:

It will show up on your category page like this:

When this field is left blank, the post snippet on the category pages display duplicate text taken from the first part of the post, like this:

Your category pages are very important because they help to theme your content and to link to related posts from a powerfully on-topic page. Therefore, it is important to keep them from being ignored because they only contain content found elsewhere.

No-Index Your Archives
Archive pages can be useful to humans in finding information on your blog. However, these can be flagged as duplicate content, as well, since they will either duplicate text found on either your post pages (if you do not use *Optional Excerpts*) or on your category pages (if you do use *Optional Excerpts*).

Therefore, make your **Archives** pages more or less invisible to the Search Engines by placing *no index* tags on them.

Promote Your Blog

Submit to blog directories
There are a million out there – do a simple Google query for *blog directories* and start submitting. Ideally, you'll submit to directories featuring other blogs about your topic. Don't submit to a directory that doesn't accommodate your specific niche. Read the directions carefully – sometimes they only want your RSS feed URL, and not your blog URL.
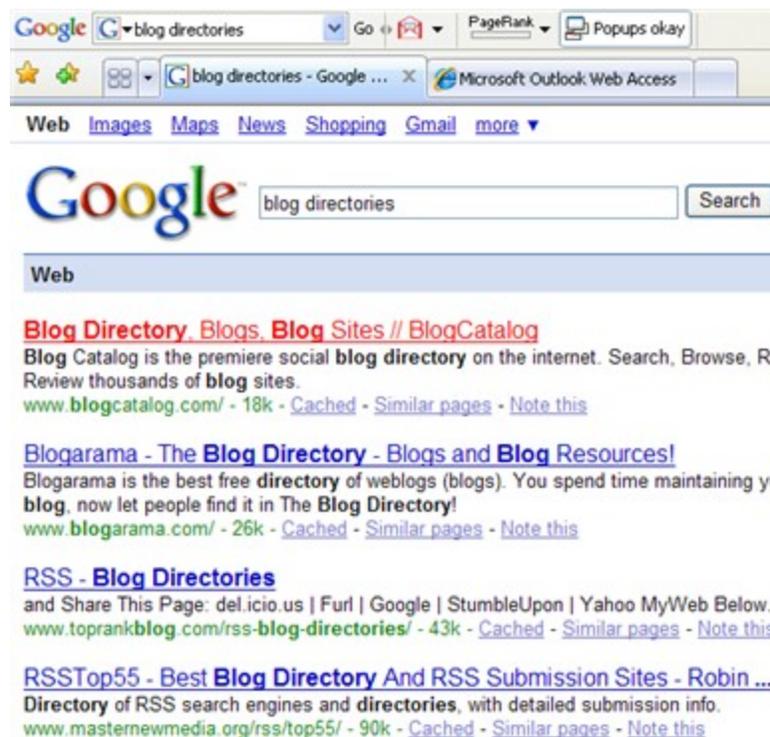
Blog frequently
Fresh content keeps both the Search Engines and human visitors coming back to your site. Without fresh content to *call* the spiders, your blog will get crawled and indexed infrequently, making it more difficult to get your pages and posts to rank.

If you cannot commit to at least two posts a week, a blog is probably not going to be very successful for you. After adding two posts a week for a few months, you can probably back off to one post a week, but fresh content is what a blog is all about. The more, the better.

Socialize your blog
These actions all make you a part of the blogging community and encourage other bloggers to link to you.

Use social sites like MyBlogLog to network your blog. You can search tags for other blogs with related topics and join communities with bloggers who have similar interests.

Provide ways for others to promote your blog. Place buttons on your site making it easy for readers to bookmark your site, tag it as a favorite, or vote for it on other sites, like Digg, Sphinn and StumbleUpon.

Stumble Upon   Google Bookmarks   Technorati   Del.icio.us

Join the conversation. Write posts on your blog commenting on interesting topics on others and link to them. Comment on other blogs and email people who may be interested in your topic.

Use Trackbacks. When commenting on posts on other blogs, you can sometimes leave a *trackback* to a post on your blog which has related subject matter. While this feature is not always enabled, you should take advantage of it when it is **and** when your post is truly relevant and adds to the conversation.

These links are valuable, even if they are no-followed, because they may draw the blogger and his readership onto your blog and into your community. This may result in links from elsewhere, such as blogrolls.

Use feeds. Submit your RSS feeds. Subscribe to other feeds. Place tools on your site that make subscribing to your feeds easy:

Add to Google   MY YAHOO!   newsgator   SUB BLOGLINES   PAGEFLAKES   netvibes
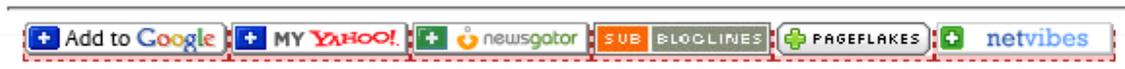
We recommend managing your feeds via Feedburner. This has been purchased by Google and is now a free and robust way to track and analyze who is subscribing to your feeds and what is attracting them.

Subscribe via RSS   Subscribe via Email

Become a resource
Nothing gets people to link to you better than fresh, unique content that is entertaining and/or useful. Think about your recent searches on your topic. Did you find useful information? If it was less than informative, chances are others have had the same experience. Provide the missing information in your blog and let people know you've done so. Submit the information to various niche web sites and talk about your posts in the forums you belong to. Great resources often get placed in *Top 10 lists* or *Best Of* articles, which can make them even more popular and linkworthy.

WordPress SEO Plug-ins

Plug-ins are small files of code, considered "hacks," that can add fun and useful features to your blog.

There are vast numbers of open source plug-ins available. You can usually choose from two or three that will do essentially the same thing. You may have to try several plug-ins before you find the one that works for you.

Generally, adding a plug-in to your blog after it is set up and running isn't a problem, but sometimes you can run into issues. We suggest researching what you want your blog to do and finding the right plug-ins to make it happen. Take a look at our recommended list of plug-ins for SEO and then search the WordPress Codex for more ideas.

SEO Title Tag

Since page titles are very powerful in the Search Engines, this plug-in really helps your WordPress blog's optimization. It allows you to give each post its own unique title tag – one that is uncoupled from the title of the post. This enables you to write a title tag that's good for the Search Engines while keeping a post title that will appeal to humans.

SEO Title Tag was built by the developers at NetConcepts. Don't forget to follow their instructions for modifying the code in Theme Editor or it won't work exactly right.

Ultimate Tag Warrior

This plug-in creates a tag cloud for your blog by enabling you to group posts together based on "tags" you include when you write your posts. Tag clouds help your SEO by creating internal links to relevant pages using good keywords.

Ultimate Tag Warrior is not compatible with WordPress 2.0 **BY ITSELF** – so be sure you download the Compatibility Thing here. This one's from Neato.co.nz Caution: This plugin may be a bit difficult for non-coders to get working right.

Add-Meta-Tags

This add-on makes it easy for you to add meta keywords and meta descriptions to each post and page on your blog. While these may not help in Google, they do still have some influence in other Search Engines.

Follow URL

By default, every link placed within the WordPress *comments* section is automatically no-followed. Although this makes it much easier to control spam comments, it also discourages legitimate comments on your blog. Allowing those who share good information to gain a link from your blog encourages more good comments and will likely attract links to your site.

Contextual Related Posts

This plug-in will display five contextually related post titles at the end of your post. It shows readers where they can find more information about the topic they're already reading about. This can prompt your visitors to spend more time on your site, viewing more pages.

It's also a great way to theme your blog and to direct the Search Engines, via good link text, to other pages on your site about the same topic. Some of these may be old posts that are now buried deep within your blog and linking to them from a new post can bring the attention of your readers and the Search Engines back to them.

Social Bookmarking

There are quite a few plug-ins available to enable social bookmarking on your WordPress blog. This one from Apostolos Dountsis is fairly comprehensive.

However, the easiest way to add buttons to **just the sites you want** to your sidebar is with a text box widget. Many of the newer WordPress themes have easy widget selection built right into them and offer several text boxes you can place in your sidebar(s).

Once the text box is enabled, you can go to your favorite social sites, grab the code for the displays you prefer, and add them in the box.

Plug-ins and Updates

After a major WordPress update is released, we recommend waiting before upgrading. This gives the coders time to make sure there are no bugs in the update. Also, some plug-ins may need to be reconfigured to work properly, and it gives plug-in programmers time to update their code hacks to work with the latest version.

Want a Link? Give Us Some Feedback!

If you have any other **good tips** (*we get to judge what's good*) you'd like to share for optimizing WordPress blogs, please email them to us at **editor@blizzardinternet.com** and we'll add them to our Blizzard Newsletter Blog, complete with a citation and a link!

Glossary

Blog - A **blog** (a portmanteau of **web log**) is a web site where entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning *to maintain or add content to a blog.*

Plug-in - A **Plug-in** is a group of php functions that can extend the functionality present in a standard WordPress weblog. A plug-in is a .php file that can be uploaded to the "wp-content/plug-ins" directory on your server, where you have installed WordPress. Once you have uploaded the plug-in file, you should be able to "turn it on" or enable it from the "Plug-ins" page in the administration interface of your weblog.

Extension - In a computing context, "extension" most commonly refers to a computer program that, although not useful or functional in its own right, is designed to be incorporated into another piece of software in order to enhance, or *extend*, the functionality.

Ping – Otherwise known in WordPress as a Pingback or Trackback**. Pingback** lets you notify the author of an article if you link to his article (article on a blog, of course). If the links you include in an article you write on a blog lead to a blog which is pingback-enabled, then the author of that blog gets a notification in the form of a pingback that you linked to his article. You can also "Ping" a search engine to let them know you've added new content.

Slug - A **slug** is a few words describing a post or a page. Slugs are usually a URL-friendly version of the post title (which has been automatically generated by WordPress), but a slug can be anything you like. Slugs are meant to be used with permalinks as they help to describe what the content at the URL is.

Linux Server - Linux is a free Unix-type operating system originally created by Linus Torvalds with the assistance of developers around the world. Developed under the GNU General Public License, the source code for Linux is freely available to everyone.

Blizzard Internet Marketing, Inc.

Blizzard Internet Marketing, Inc. specializes in web site design, hosting, and promotion for hospitality, travel, and tourism industry clients across North, Central, and South America, and in the Caribbean.

Named one of the Top 50 Family-Owned Companies in Colorado in 2005, Blizzard's focus is on delivering high return-on-investment online marketing solutions to the hospitality industry. By specializing in hotel, resort, and vacation rental properties, we increase our depth of research and work to utilize our findings for all of our clients.

About the Authors

Mary Bowling is the senior SEO Consultant at Blizzard Internet Marketing, Inc. and is certified in Advanced Search Engine Strategies through Search Engine Workshops. She also performs web site promotion for hospitality industry clients and researches and develops new products and strategies for the company and has developed specialized expertise in optimizing for Local Search.

Mary feels Blizzard Internet Marketing's strength lies in its commitment to: serve one industry, to be the best within its chosen niche, and to provide complete Search Engine Marketing services – hosting, design, development, tracking, and promotion - to its clients.

Originally from Northern Minnesota, **Carrie Hill** moved to Colorado in 1986 and to the Glenwood Springs area eight years later. She and her husband, Todd, have two children, Madison and Aerik. As a Marketing Consultant with Blizzard, her work carries an emphasis in on-page optimization, brand management, and mapping. Carrie has received Advanced Search Engine Marketing Strategies Certification from the Search Engine Workshops Workshop Resource Center and is a regular columnist for SearchEngineWatch.com, where she helps small business owners navigate the world of online marketing. Carrie is actively involved with Research and Development at Blizzard and has established herself as a leader in online marketing for Travel & Tourism web sites.

Both Carrie and Mary presented and moderated at the inaugural Search Engine Strategies – Travel conference in June 2007. They have been guests on the EMarketing Talk Show and frequently moderate online chats. Download their free whitepapers here.