

SEO Strategies - Getting the Basics Right

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TripAdvisor-branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, with more than 25 million monthly visitors, 10 million registered members, and 23 million reviews and opinions of properties and destinations.

Almost everyone who finds your web site starts with a search engine, most likely Google. Whether they want to find you specifically, or find a great place to stay or dine in your town, you need to make sure your website pops up as the answer to their question. Try these tips to start attracting your share of free search engine traffic.

Simply stated, a search engine like Google wants to find all the websites in the world, and determine which are the best for each search query that visitors enter. Your job, then, is simple. First, think about the phrases your guests will use to search for you. Next, make sure Google can find those search phrases when it looks at your site.

1. Determine your key search phrases

What phrase might someone use to find you? Your business name is a good choice. If a traveler types your business name (say, "Mountainside Inn") into Google, you would sure like to come up first in the rankings. You may want to add the name of your city, too. "Mountainside Inn" might be the name of your property, but if there are hundreds of similarly named properties, "Mountainside Inn, Killington" is the phrase you want.

The more specific your key search phrases, the better chance you have of appearing at the top of a list of search results.

2. Optimize your home page for your key search phrases

Now, review your website and make sure the home page is targeted, or optimized, for these top phrases. Essentially, you are showing Google that your home page is all about the search phrase(s) you have chosen.

The page title is the most important thing to target. On the web, the title is the text that appears in the very top of the browser window, above the browser menus.

Here's where you want to use your key search phrases. A title such as "Beautiful Inn by the Mountain - A joy to behold" might be inspiring, but it won't help users searching for "Mountainside Inn" or "Killington Inns", because you haven't used those exact words.

A title of "Mountainside Inn, Killington, VT - Walk to the slopes" is better. It includes the name of the property, the city, and a nice marketing message about what sets your property apart from the rest.

Another good title might be, "Mountainside Inn, Killington, VT - Inns near Killington." This title attempts to capture search traffic that might type in "Inns near Killington," in addition to the visitor who is already looking for your property by name.

Next, create some big, bold section headings on the home page that repeat the key phrases in the title. You can look at TripAdvisor's page for Boston Marriott Long Wharf for an example of how we do this.



The title is "Boston Marriott Long Wharf (Boston, MA) - Hotel Reviews - TripAdvisor" And the big text in bold font in the center of the page has the name of the property.

3. Optimize additional pages for your key search phrases

Review the other main pages on your web site. Do they also have effective, descriptive titles that include your key search phrases? Each title can mention that page's function while still including your key phrase, for instance, "Rates and Availability - Mountainside Inn, Killington," or "Directions to the Mountainside Inn, Killington."

Finally, two important don'ts:

1. Don't have a beautiful website that is built in Flash or Ajax only. Search engines like Google can't index the information in animation or graphics. Instead, make sure the home page, and most every other page on the site, is "normal," with text and pictures. It is fine to have some flash or fancy stuff, but most of the page should be normal text. Google can't read the text in pictures, so when you think about making sure your key search phrases are prominent on your web pages, the text in the images don't count.

How can you tell what Google sees? Use your mouse and try to select all of the words on your home page. Then press Ctrl-C to copy the text you have selected, and then paste (Ctrl-V) that text into a MS-Word document. That is the text that Google will see when it indexes your home page. If you weren't able to select/copy/paste any text, then your site is effectively invisible to search engines.

2. Don't use "SEO experts" who try to fool Google with tricks. They usually don't work, and can get your site banned. If someone promises you "top listings in Google," either they're offering to bid on paid advertising terms for you, or they are making claims that they cannot substantiate.

Got questions for my SEO team? [Send them our way](#). We can't promise to answer them all, but we'll choose the best to answer in our next issue of *Trade Talk*.

About TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel community with 25+ million unique monthly visitors, more than half of them coming from outside the United States. TripAdvisor features more user-generated content than any other travel site: more than 10 million members have contributed 23 million reviews and opinions, and nearly 1.5 million traveler photos, on more than 817,000 hotels, attractions, and restaurants in 61,000 cities.

TripAdvisor operates in the following countries:

- U.S. (www.tripadvisor.com)
- U.K. (www.tripadvisor.co.uk)
- Ireland (www.tripadvisor.ie)
- France (www.tripadvisor.fr)
- Germany (www.tripadvisor.de)
- Italy (www.tripadvisor.it)
- Spain (www.tripadvisor.es)
- India (www.tripadvisor.in)
- Japan (www.tripadvisor.jp)
- China (www.daodao.com)
- Sweden (www.tripadvisor.se)
- The Netherlands (nl.tripadvisor.com)
- Portugal and Brazil (www.tripadvisor.br)