

Search Engine Optimisation – A VERY Brief Guide by Julia Rai

In the 21st Century, if you want people to find you – whether you're selling your metal clay work or teaching metal clay – you have to have a website. Setting up the website is only part of the equation though. What's the point of having a website if no one can find it?

This guide introduces some of the key things you need to do to make sure people can find your website. The main ways people find websites is through the search engines – Google, Yahoo, MSN, Ask etc – so making sure these search engines can find you and categorise you is essential. This is called Search Engine Optimisation or SEO. There are thousands of websites dedicated to telling you how to do SEO and plenty who will charge you to optimise your site. This guide will give you the basics of SEO and allow you to make sure your site meets some of the criteria for being found.

1. Before we even get to the search engines, you need to make sure you use your website address on everything you produce. If you have business cards, flyers, handouts etc, your website address should be on it. Make sure your website address is on any emails you send. Create it as part of your email signature. Always enter it like this – <http://www.yoursite.co.uk>. By putting http:// before the www people can click on it and go straight to your site. If you just use www some email programmes won't convert this into an active URL.
2. Search engines like Google use spiders or robots (bots) to find and index websites. This means your page needs to be readable, not just by humans but also by machines. This readability at machine level is in the code that makes up the pages – usually HTML. When the page is coded in HTML there are numerous ways of displaying information. Make sure your navigation structure allows the spiders and bots to read them and follow them. If you use Javascript for your navigation, or pictures, the bots may not be able to follow it. Use simple text links as navigation or somewhere on the page so they can easily be followed – that way your whole site will be visible to the bots and can be indexed. You often see sites with spiffy navigation bars and then text links to the same pages at the bottom of every page.
3. Keywords. Getting your keywords right is essential for people to find you. Keywords are what people will use to search for you. Think very carefully about your customer – what words would they use to find you? These become your keywords. For instance, if you were running training in PMC, what would your potential students search for? Probably precious metal clay (or PMC, or metal clay, or silver clay...) training – or courses – or classes – or workshops. Plus, they'll probably want to do it in their own town, or city or county. So the search string in Google might be metal clay training London. But it might equally be silver clay workshops in Westminster. So you have to think carefully about all the words your customers might use to find you. Then all these words must appear on your pages.
4. Check out what your competitors are using as their keywords. You can do this by going to their site then in your browser, clicking on View, then Source. You'll then see a page of the HTML code for that page. Look at <meta name="keywords">. This will show you the keywords they're using. If they are a big, successful organisation, you know their keywords are working – steal them!
5. I cannot tell you how many times I've looked at websites submitted to go on the Metal Clay Academy website from people offering metal clay training that don't have the LOCATION of the training on every page. Saying "training is run in my well equipped studio" is useless! Always list where the training is running, clearly and on every page listing your classes. That way if someone is looking for training in your locality, they can find you.
6. Where you place your keywords is important. There is an HTML tag used in the code of the page for keywords, which is never seen by people using your page. These are important as the search engines use them to help categorise your page. But even

more important, the keywords must also appear on your page in the text. Use the most important ones near the top of your pages. Place keywords in heading tags. Use bold and italic keywords; search engines take notice of these. Put your keywords into bulleted lists – search engines take notice of these too. Use keywords multiple times on a page but not too often. This is a delicate balance. The text should be readable and make sense but re-read your text to see if you can use your keywords again without making the page read poorly.

7. Use keywords in your page-to-page links. Never use “click here” when you could use a keyword instead or include the keyword. For instance, rather than using “To see our Art Clay class schedule [click here](#)” use “To see our [Art Clay class schedule](#) [click here](#)”. This will give the bots more information about your site.
8. Make sure your site is designed to be search engine friendly. If you’re starting from scratch, this is easy. Follow these basic rules:-
 - a. Avoid using frames. You can tell a site uses frames when the URL at the top of your browser doesn’t change when you go to different pages; it always appears as the basic URL. When they are categorised the search engines can’t match the navigation to the page content so your site may not be properly indexed.
 - b. Use a good title and tag it properly. This isn’t the title on the page, it’s the HTML title of the page. The title of the page appears at the top of the browser window and is very important to search engines. I’ve lost count of the number of sites I’ve seen who have “home” or “page 1” as their titles – absolutely useless! Search engines see the title of a page as indicative of the content – which is what it should be. Your title must contain your keywords. That’s what people are looking for. Title tags should be immediately below the head tag in your code. The title should be around 40 to 60 characters including spaces. If possible, repeat your primary keyword once. For instance....Precious metal clay PMC training in My Town. Learn about PMC.
 - c. Use a good description – this is very important. The description is what often appears in the search engine results and should clearly describe what your site is about. It should also contain your keywords. The description tag should be directly below the title tag.
 - d. Make sure the text content of the pages is clear, uses your key words and is sensible and well written. The first page the search engine comes to – usually your home page, should have a clear description of what you are selling or saying. The search engines rate content – text that says something worthwhile, informative and clear – very highly. The more information you give the reader the better. So DON’T do any of the following:-
 1. Have a Flash introduction – these may look flashy but they say nothing to search engines.
 2. Embed text into images. Images can’t be read by the bots.
 3. Use the wrong keywords. Your text should be keyword rich but not overdone.
 - e. Update your site regularly. Out of date information is the quickest way to lower your ranking on the search engines. If you can, put something new on your home page at least once a week. When the bot comes and sees something’s changed it adds to the impression that yours is an active website. Take off out of date information as soon as possible.
9. How do you get the search engines to find you? Here are some ideas.
 - a. Get links to you from other websites. Actively encourage other sites relevant to what you do to link to you. Offer reciprocal links where you link to them and they link to you. And always specify what you want the links to say – remember keywords. The link should include your keywords, not just say click here.

- b. Some sites allow you to register with them directly. One, the Open Directory Project is very important for you to get listed on. It is a site edited by humans who review all pages submitted and decide if they are good enough to be listed. It feeds results to Google Directory and hundreds of other sites, all of which are crawled by the major search engine spiders. A link from Open Directory Project can show up as links all over the Internet.
 - 1. Open Directory Project – <http://www.dmoz.org>
 It may take a while for your site to be assessed and added as the editors of the Open Directory Project are volunteers but you should submit it as soon as possible.
- c. Google, Yahoo! Web Search, MSN and Ask.com have a more complicated sign up process so the quickest way to get listed on these is to have links from other websites that are already listed. If you have a link from an indexed website, the bots will be visiting that site on a regular basis to check what's changed. When it finds your link it has to follow it and hey presto! You're listed! Sites with no one linking to them are deemed not worth the effort by search engines – so GET LINKED! The more links you have coming to your site, the more important you will appear to search engines. And the more important the site that's linked to you is, the higher your ranking will be. So make sure you get listed on the PMC Guild website and/or the Art Clay Society website.
- d. If you want to submit your site to the main search engines, here's the way to do it...
 - 1. Google – <http://www.google.com/addurl.html>
 - 2. Yahoo – <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>
 - 3. MSN – <http://search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx>
 But it's quicker to use the linking method!

10. Build up your web site by adding pages of relevant information. More pages tell the search engine bots that you are more important but the information on the pages must be useful and relevant to your keywords. Good ways to build pages are:-

- a. List each class you run on a new page with lots of useful information.
- b. Write articles about metal clay, jewellery making or anything else that uses your key words and is useful.
- c. Information about you, your influences, what attracted you to metal clay etc is useful and interesting. Create a page about you with a picture. People often like to see who they're dealing with.
- d. If you live in a nice place, show it off. Create a page about your location with links to local places to stay and things of interest.
- e. Create PDF's of your pages. The search engines count PDF's in the same way as pages. So if you have a downloadable PDF of your class information, these get listed and boost the 'page' count of your site. No need to buy expensive Adobe software to create PDF's. Use Fast PDF - <http://www.fastpdf.com/>. This site allows you to upload a word document and then emails you the PDF. It's free if you allow them to put a small watermark advertising their service on the page.
- f. Create tutorials, projects, handouts or anything you're happy for people to access free. Put these up as web pages and PDF's. Some of the top US teachers have tutorials on their pages that are very useful. These teachers still run classes because for many people, there's nothing like working with the teacher. If you do create any useful resources, email me through the contact page on the Metal Clay Academy website and I'll link to them.
- g. Create a gallery of your student's work or your own work. As a teacher, it's great for students to see your work. And it instils confidence in prospective students to see the work of others.

11. Other ways to get noticed on the Internet

- a. Write a blog. Blogs are very useful tools for increasing your profile on the Internet. But beware, they are a BIG commitment and to be successful you have to update them regularly and have really good, useful content. If you visit the Metal Clay Academy website and look at the Blogs page under the Resources tab, you'll find some great ones. These have high rankings from Google because they are looked at regularly (high traffic), have valuable content and are updated often.
- b. Join the Yahoo Metal Clay Group and post regularly. Remember to have your website address below your signature every time you post. Join other Internet forums or groups that are relevant to your interests and make sure you keep up with them. You can also write articles for sites like Ganoksin. Anything that gets a link to your website, especially if it's a large and busy site will help to boost your ranking.
- c. Use Google Adwords to advertise your site. This will cost you money but if you can afford it, it'll help to get you noticed. Be selective about the keywords you use so you only attract people who are looking for the specific thing you do. There are lots of tutorials for Google Adwords on the Internet.
- d. Create videos and upload them to You Tube. Again, you'll get a link back to your website and if you create something really good, you'll also get lots of visitors to your site. After you've uploaded your video to You Tube, embed it in your site. That way you can create another page on your site and encourage people to visit your page. And if you do this, let me know and I'll link to you from the Metal Clay Academy.
- e. Join a metal clay or jewellery-making group on Facebook or MySpace. This gives you exposure to a large amount of people and helps to drive more traffic to your site.
- f. Make sure you're listed on the Metal Clay Academy and that you tell your students about it. And link back to us!
- g. Do all you can to attract traffic to your site. Get yourself listed on craft directories, jewellery making sites, anything that's relevant. Do a Google search for these sites and then find out how to get listed. The more sites linking to you the better and also the higher the traffic coming to your site the more important it will appear. Don't forget your local business resources – the Federation of Small Businesses, Chamber of Commerce, anything that lists local businesses. Be everywhere!

Further Reading and Useful Tools

Search Engine Optimisation for Dummies – Peter Kent

SEO Quake – <http://www.seoquake.com> - download the SEO Quake toolbar and use the tools to find out useful information about websites.

Alexa – <http://www.alexa.com> - this site collects traffic information about every site on the internet. Find out the rankings of other website and your own, who's linking to them and lots of other useful information.

Google – <http://www.google.co.uk/services/> - webmaster tools, analysis of website traffic etc.