

Fighting for Ranking on Google

By Stephen E. Arnold

Search engine optimization is a booming business. Getting a site listed on the first page of Google results grows more important each day.

Look at this site on Google: TheLeasingGroup.com. Now try to find it by searching for (quotes needed, please) "The Leasing Group." This site is not on the first page of hits. What is listed is TheLeasing-Group.net. Close, but not the same.

"We paid our developer to optimize our site," company president Robert Callendar said. "I paid good money to get indexed. What do I do to fix this?"

This is a common question with many potential answers. However, there is no single fix.

One important step in improving a Web site's ranking is understanding that Google is not search.

Google is a computer. Sun Microsystems' Scott McNealy said, "The network is the computer." Google built that computer.

Like any computer, the owners tweak, upgrade and add new gizmos to it. Google is a work in progress. Anyone trying to move a site's ranking knows that the rules seem to change, usually without warning.

Look at Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>). This service could be a yellow page killer, and it offers many opportunities for advertising revenue. For Web site owners, the first step is to ensure their business is listed in Google. Click to www.google.com/help/faq_local.html listed and follow the directions in item 7. Then review your site so that you can at a minimum follow these easy and some not-so-easy tricks to improve your ranking.

1. **Dynamic URLs (universal resource locators, or Web addresses).**

Get rid of them. Content management systems like BroadVision do this. The fix may be to create a flat file of your site and change the dynamic URLs to static ones, reserving dynamic pages for "must have" situations.

Stephen E. Arnold is managing partner of search consultancy Arnold Information Technology, Harrod's Creek, KY. Reach him at sa@arnoldit.com.



2. **Invisible frames.** Google uses these in Google Maps, Google Print and Google Scholar. You aren't Google. Switch to tables.

3. **Site map.** This is not a relic. Create a flat ASCII map that lets Google's spider find the important information quickly.

4. **Indexing in meta tags.** Know a

Continued on page 46

Fighting for Ranking

Continued from page 45

librarian. You are halfway home. Get professional advice.

5. **Clean code.** Get a validation tool. These are built in to some editors like Namo Version 6, or spend \$200 for Web Position Gold or IBP8.

6. **Position the animations.**

Fancy interfaces coded in Flash are fine as long as there is a way for the Google spider to see binaries and decide to skip the site.

7. **Fresh is best.** Update your content. Stale content translates to ranking downchecks.

8. **Good content.** Useful, relevant, factual, related content means a straight semantic vector to Google. Unrelated content, tricks that try to fool Google, and copyright violations that

Google detects can send a site to the bottom of the results list or, worse, get it removed from the Google index.

9. **Can you say it to your mother?** If there is anything on your site you can't say to your mother, remove it.

10. **Work to get other high-traffic sites to link to you.** Irrelevant links or links from sites already banned by Google will do you in. An example of a good link is a listing in the Yahoo or DMOZ service. A bad link is anything that has an XXX or something equally slippery.

Improving a ranking on Google is not easy. It does pay off, even though Google is work in progress. ☺