

# The Practitioner's Quick Guide to Effective SEO

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The following is a prioritized list of best practices for optimizing your site for Google and other search engines.

## 1) URL

The #1 influencer of position within Google organic results is your URL. The domain first, the subdomain second, the file name third, and the directory of the file being displayed fourth. So, if you're attempting to optimize on "business intelligence", these would be great URLs...

- ✓ <http://www.businessintelligence.com> – Best possible optimization for term "business intelligence".
- ✓ <http://businessintelligence.capstonec.com> – Next best thing.
- ✓ [http://www.capstonec.com/practices/business\\_intelligence.html](http://www.capstonec.com/practices/business_intelligence.html) - Third best
- ✓ <http://www.capstonec.com/businessintelligence/index.html> - Still good, but 4<sup>th</sup>

Also keep in mind that URLs which auto-redirect (either using the META-REFRESH tag or JavaScript) are of almost no value to Google.

## 2) Link Anchor Text

The next most important thing is how people like to your site. You have little control over this, but it's still worth talking about. The text displayed on the page for a link is called the "anchor text". You want the anchor text for as many links as possible to your site to contain your keyword phrases.

For example, this is bad...

```
Click <a href="http://bi.capstonec.com">here</a> for cool business intelligence stuff.
```

This, on the other hand, is awesome...

```
Visit our website for <a title="Business Intelligence" href="http://bi.capstonec.com">cool business intelligence stuff</a>.
```

Note that both the anchor text and title tag contain your keyword phrase, maximizing Google's weight of this link (which, by the way, is multiplied by the Page Rank of the linking site). The best approach here is to monitor links to your site with one of the many tools out there, and contact people with prominent sites – the higher they appear in Google's organic results list for your keywords the more important it is that they link to you and link to you well – link to you in the best way possible. Be presumptuous, and send them the HTML you want them to use. Have this HTML available on your website.

Good links with images involve the ALT and TITLE tags, as follows...

```
<a title="Business Intelligence" href="http://bi.capstonec.com"></a>.
```

This is the best possible image link another site can have to yours.

Lastly, make sure links with these keywords are to relevant pages of your site. "Relevance" is defined in the next section. It is far better to have a well-formed link on [www.businessintelligence.com](http://www.businessintelligence.com) link to the page on your site that's all about BI than it is that it links to your homepage, which mentions BI in passing.

### 3) Relevant Pages

Google is very savvy at determining if a page is relevant. It does so in many ways, using the follow prioritized indicators...

- 1) **Title of the page:** The <title> tag in your header should contain your keyword phrases. Spiders only read the first 30 characters or so, so don't try to kill too many birds with one stone on a single page.
- 2) **Header tags:** With exponentially decreasing importance, make sure your keyword phrases are in your header tags. One of the simplest, most overlooked ways to optimize your page for "Business Intelligence" is to make sure that <h1>Business Intelligence</h1> is near the top of the page. Again, keep in mind that bots are fickle and lose interest quickly, so don't expect H1's located 25,000 characters into the page to be of much value.
- 3) **Accent tags:** Use <strong> for bold and <em> for italics. Google gives text in these tags more weight than that in <p> or <div> tags. Google pretty much ignores the <b> and <i> tags, as far as we know. If possible, have your keywords appear twice on the page in each of the <strong> and <em> tags.
- 4) **Paragraphs:** Make sure your keywords appear twice in the first paragraph (the <p> tag) of your page.

### 4) Cross-linking

Make sure there is more than one page on your site that deals with your keyword phrases, even if all but one is just cursorily mentioning it, and make sure they link to one another. The classic way to do this is in a menu structure. If one of your big things is "Business Intelligence", makes sure you have a menu item or a footer link that appears on EVERY page of your site linking to your BI page. The rules for links described in section 2 apply.

### 5) Image ALT Tags

Believe it or not, Google cares about the your ALT tags. Every image on the site (within reason) should have an ALT tag that accurately describes that image, and if possible includes your keywords for that page. Evidently, this is especially true if that image links to something.

### 6) META Tags

These used to be extremely important, but Google has gotten a lot smarter. They are less relevant now. However, it's still wise to use them, because it's easy (low hanging fruit) to do so and why not use all the tools in your arsenal? Also, the META-Description tag is still used by Yahoo and other engines to describe your site in organic results, so you want to have a legitimate description filled in.

- 1) **META-Keywords:** Place all your keyword phrases for the page here in order of descending importance, separated by commas.
- 2) **META-Description:** Describe your page in no more than two sentences. Make sure your keyword phrases for that page are in those sentences.

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*We hope this list is of assistance to you. Keep in mind that the actual algorithms for Google's ranking system and sorting mechanism for organic results are two of the most well-guarded secrets on the planet. Nobody actually knows them, so this is an ongoing art/science of observation and trial-and-error. This list represents Capstone's collective experience on the topic, but is no guarantee of results.*

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