

# Search Engine Optimization

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Tom Lamm  
Osage Enterprises  
<http://www.osageinc.com>

## ***The Hard Facts***

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is little understood and therefore the source of a lot of misunderstanding. It is also the source of accidental and, to often, deliberate fraud. Many "experts" in the field do not stay current. As a result, they use obsolete strategies such as link farms. Others use "Black-Hat" methods that will get you a high page ranking, until Google finds out they've been scammed. Google is leading the charge to filter out sites that use "Black-Hat" methods. In fact, they recently dropped one such offender from a page rank of eight to zero.

Keeping up with the SEO techniques requires ongoing research. The search algorithms are constantly changing, what is considered White or Black hat is shifting territory. Before you hire an SEO consultant, make sure they are ethical, and that they keep current with the technology and practices.

### **How Can They Do That to Me?**

By what right? How does Google get to decide how my site is rated?

You do not pay Google for their listing service. They are equivalent to a phone book, except that the listing is not alphabetical, it is in the order they choose. Your listing in Google, or any other web directory is at that company's whim.

### **History**

Even before the World Wide Web became part of the Internet, web directories were around.

*Yahoo!* was one of the earliest. These early sites were directories we is re organized and placed by individuals, not automated search robots ("spiders").

With the advent of the World Wide Web and HTML Links, automated software, called

"spiders", could automatically navigate from link to link, reporting what they found. If a spider records the links to the sites it finds, and if it categorizes that sites based on the text found on them, you have the beginnings of a search engine.

Some Web directories, especially the early ones, place sites by ha give the site a higher ranking nd. Humans list the sites using criteria determined by their site's policy. DMOZ is one web directory that still does this. Google and other spider based search engines use these directories as an source of high quality sites. They count on the fact that the listings have been vetted by an individual and rank the site higher.

Spiders catalog sites found by following links. Google was an early innovator in this area. Google always used "spiders", programs that crawl the web reporting what they find. Initially, Google version relied heavily on a technique that used links to rate site popularity. The theory was, if a site links to your site, that site owner must think highly of you. The more sites with links to yours, the more popular you must be. A very popular site must be high quality and therefore received a higher rating. This theory worked as long as nobody scammed the system.

Of course, that is exactly what happened. SEO experts would include a page full of links on a

client's site. However, the links were not for the site's users, they were for the SEO Expert's clients. They pointed to a bunch of other, unrelated, sites. Those sites would have a similar page. In the end, the sites all pointed to each other. The links became known as "Link Farms" and existed solely to increase the number of links that referred to each site. Because a typical user would find little or no interest in most of these links, the links were of little real value, existing only to increase the participating sites' ranking.

Google now uses an algorithm that uses other methods to determine the Page Rank, and lowers the rating for sites that use link farms.

## ***Hats - Black and White***

There are many methods used to increase a sites Page Rank. Some are quite valuable, others will actually lower your ranking. The terms used for these various techniques are "Black Hat" and "White Hat".

White-Hat SEO techniques are supported by Google and other search engines because they reflect the site's real value to a typical user. Examples are careful use of keywords in your text, making sure your site shares links with similar sites, and making sure that your site is easily scanned by a spider.

Black-Hat techniques are frowned upon by search engines. They are attempts to scam the engine's algorithm. These techniques do not reflect the sites real value to a typical user. Examples include link farms, hidden text (cloaking), or a fake layer of sites that replace the link farm, but still exist solely to increase the Page Rank of the targeted site. Many SEO experts will increase your rating use a Black technique, collect their fee, and move on. You'll be on your own when Google figures out what happened and and lowers your ranking.

A Gray technique is one that (yes, you guessed it), is marginal. Many sites, especially Real Estate Sites, have long paragraphs of text at the bottom. The text is simply a collection of key words, and not structured into sentences. The purpose is to weight the spider's keyword algorithm. The problem is, simply listing the keywords is of no real value to the user. This, and other techniques skirt the edges around what is accepted. Often, these are new techniques that SEO Experts discover as the search engine algorithms evolve. Often, these technique get moved into the Black area, and other Gray techniques emerge to replace them.

## ***What to do?***

Know that your SEO Consultant is honest. If they over-sell, show them the door. Ask for references-and then follow up. Ask for details about their plan. If it does not sound right, it might not be.

The bottom line, deal with somebody you feel you can trust, and monitor that relationship to make sure you were correct.

Need help optimizing your Search Engine Rankings?

Give us a call!

Osage Enterprises

**1-866-310-9357**