Film, Video Distributors and Producers - Make Sure You Know These Nine SEO Recommendations

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When most people talk about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) they tend to talk about getting more traffic to their website. Everyone wants more traffic. Right?

If you are like most film and video distributors, you care less about volume of traffic and much more about quality of traffic. The goal is to get the right people visiting your site. Can SEO do that for you?

Search Engine Optimization is about helping people who want to find your site, find your site. Optimize your site properly, target keywords intimately related to your business, and the high quality traffic will come.

By making a few technical improvements to your site right now, you can help search engines like Google and Yahoo understand and 'respect' what your site offers and then pass the good word on to the thousands of film and video license buyers who use search engines every business day.

Maybe a buyer only remembers a few words about a title they saw on the back of one of your sell sheets. Good SEO practice makes it possible for license buyers to find you using even the

sketchiest keywords.

We've put together a checklist of nine very basic things you can do today to make sure your website is search engine friendly. Give your site an SEO tune-up, work hard posting keyword rich content, and you will be amazed how fast you can 'own' a set of keywords related to a film/video content category or genre. This means that whenever, or wherever, a buyer searches for content related to your business, they'll find their way to your website.

This checklist is just as essential for film and video distributors as it is for indie producers and film festivals wanting to boost their exposure. Everyone can benefit from these best practices.

9. Have you announced your site to the major search engines?

Search engines can't find you if they don't know about you. The first thing you need to do (once you finish reading this article) is to make sure your website is submitted to the major search engines.

IMPORTANT: Make sure you do this manually. We don't recommend that you use auto-submitter websites that promise to do this for you. Get off on the right SEO foot and do the submitting yourself.

Check out the IPEX TV blog for an article about submitting your site to search engines.

8. Did you add your sitemap?

A sitemap is a simple document placed at the root directory of your site and informs search engines which pages on your site are available for searching. It's like one of those big maps you see at audiovisual content tradeshows: but this one is for your website, and search engines love it.

7. Do all of your web pages have titles?

At the top of your browser window (on the same level as the close, maximize, and minimize buttons) you will find the title of the page you are viewing. This is some of the most valuable real estate on your site. If the only thing in this space is your company name (or worse, it just says "Untitled"), you're wasting a great opportunity. Use this space to attract search engine attention to specific keywords by writing unique page titles for every page on your site. The trick is to write a page title that is keyword loaded, but still seems natural to your actual visitors. Don't make these titles too long, but do make sure that the keywords you use in the title appear again in the body of the page. You'll be amazed at what an improvement this can make to your search engine results.

6. Do you have your 'alt' attributes defined?

When a programmer adds an image to a website, he or she uses an HTML code called the 'img' tag.

The 'alt' attribute (sometimes, mistakenly, called an 'alt' tag) allows you to specify some text that the browser will display in case your image is missing. In this example, an image of a sell sheet is 'tagged' with some words describing it (alt="Sell Sheet, one sheet, cinefiche"). This may not seem like a big deal, but these 'alternate' labels are necessary to help search engines understand the content of your page. Search engines cannot read images, so it's important

that you help them out by specifying in the 'alt' attribute what the image contains.

5. Have you gotten your link out there?

Are you a contributing member of Wikipedia and/or the IMDb? Find places on these sites where it is appropriate to submit links. If these links make sense within the community, they offer better exposure than money can buy.

Add some of your best pages (not just your site) to social bookmarking sites like del.icio.us, ma.gnolia.com, and myYahoo.

Get your friends involved. Link to their best pages, and ask them to link back to you.

4. Do you have any content?

Wooops. So, by now you should have a site that's pretty well technically optimized and search engine friendly. But do you actually have content people are searching for? For film and video distributors, getting your catalogue titles and old sell sheets on your site is an excellent step to getting keyword-rich content online that will be relevant to a wide variety of film and video content license buyers googling for new titles.

3. Have you prepared a list of keywords you like?

Put yourself in the shoes of your audience for a moment, and imagine sitting down to your favourite search engine. What are the search terms your audience is most likely going to use? Will these search words lead them to your site? Now, imagine the search terms they might use to find your competitor's web site. Make a master list of all these keywords, and decide which keywords you want to 'own'. This list is going to be your guide to the search engine friendly content you create.

2. Do you have a blog?

Getting your catalogue titles online is great, but it's very important to have a site that is up-to-date. A lot of people in the film and video distribution industry see a corporate blog as more of a hassle than a help. But blogs are quite simply the easiest way to keep your site fresh, get lots of sexy text for search engines to search, and interact with your clients. Indie producers and film festivals have been quick to understand their value-learn from their example. The best blogs are an appealing mix of industry news and personal observations. Use your blog to keep your clients up to date on your company, showcase new titles, and share interesting ideas.

1. Have you started already?

The good news about SEO is that it's never too early or too late to start. Don't for a minute think that you need a checkmark beside all 9 of these items before you can release your site to the public. And there is no need to do them in order.

The web is dynamic and flexible. Try some things out, and check the results. Try Googling your site and see what comes up. Try again, and adjust as needed. A little bit at a time is all it takes to make big improvements. Consistency counts.