

SEO Copywriting White Paper

What will I be learning about SEO copywriting?

SEO copywriting is not easy. There are many things to take into account when writing good SEO copy. The tips & tricks you'll learn in this white paper answer, among others, the following questions:

- How do I write good SEO copy and which things should I take into account when writing copy for the web?
- What is the role of meta tags and how do I write them?
- What are the risks of duplicate content?

Why is writing good copy important to your visitors and search engines?

Writing good copy is primarily important for your visitors. Your visitors come to your website with a certain expectation of what they will find there. This can, for instance, be buying a particular product, finding a certain piece of information or to download a brochure. These goals lead to expectations. These expectations could be formed or influenced by your online or offline marketing, a newspaper article, a recommendation by a friend or business partner or many factors. Good SEO copywriting can help you meet these expectations or even surpass them.

When search engine spiders (the programs used by search engines to discover and index websites on the Internet) first visit your website, they do not know what your website is about. They will therefore look for clues as to what your website is about. In addition to links from other websites to your website, the content (copy, pictures, videos etc.) on your website plays an important role in this process. When all copy on your website is related to a certain topic, search engines will assume your website is about this topic.

The goal of writing good SEO copy is therefore twofold:

- 1) Making sure the expectations of your visitors are met or exceeded. This will motivate visitors to perform the actions that make you money.
- 2) Letting the search engines know what the specific pages of your website are about, so that the search engines can index your pages and let them appear in the search engine result pages when a relevant search query is entered into the search engine.

How do I write good SEO copy and which things should I take into account when writing copy for the web?

The basics

A well known saying goes 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. This might be true on many occasions, but when it comes to Search Engine Optimizations (SEO), it is not. For SEO the opposite holds true. A search engine cannot interpret a picture. It needs text. Preferably lots of it. It needs this text to get an impression of what the page is about. Partly based on this, the search engine decides how relevant your page is to a particular search query. If the relevance is high, it will be shown on the search engine result pages.

When writing web copy, please keep the following things in mind:

1) Layout of your text

Just like texts in magazines or newspapers, web copy also has an introduction, body and end/conclusions.

Introduction

In the introduction you explain what the text is about. Your conclusion, or most important point, can also be found in your introduction.

Body

In the body text, you underpin your conclusion using arguments, facts, examples etc.

End/Conclusion

At the end you repeat your most important point or conclusion.

The reason for mentioning your most important point in all three parts of the text is that most people don't actually read the entire text, but just scan it. By have you most important point

appear on multiple places in your text, the chances that you visitor reads it (and acts on it) increases.

2) Use keywords

Use the keywords from your keyword research. These are the words your potential visitors use in search queries. By using these keywords in your copy, you increase the chance of attraction visitors that use these keywords in search queries. The use of keywords in your headers, titles and meta tags will be dealt with later in this white paper.

Don't just use your top keywords. Top keywords (e.g. 'used car', if you sell cars.), on average, account for only 30% of the traffic from search engines to your website. The other 70% of the traffic to your website comes from so-called long tail keywords (for more information on this, see our Keyword Research White Paper). An example of a long tail keyword is 'used Volkswagen golf 2006?'. By adding long tail keywords from your keyword research to your copy as well, you increase the chance of attracting visitors using these queries.

The use of synonyms is also important. A search engine does not necessarily know that people who query 'bike' and a 'motorcycle' actually mean the same thing. A search engine can learn this by analysing huge numbers of search queries over time. Since it is hard to know which synonyms the search engine understands and which it doesn't, mixing synonyms and keywords can help attracting traffic when people query synonyms.

Besides using singular words, it is also advised to use plural words.

Note! A copy of 200 words in which your keyword appears 15 to 20 times does not look natural. Not for your visitors or for search engines. Be careful with the number of times you use your top keywords in your copy. Your copy has to be readable. Experts do not agree on how often keywords should be used for optimal results. Some say 3-7% of your total copy; others say 2 to 10 times, depending on the length of the copy, some say 4%. We advise you not to look at this too much and just focus your efforts on writing good copy that is easy to read and understand for your visitors. Do however; use your (top) keywords in the introductions, body and end of the copy.

3) Stay focussed and prevent keyword cannibalization

The degree of detail and focus of a webpage depends on the location of that page within the website.

Example: As an example we take a website about cars.

- A page about 'used cars' is, in general, located in the top of the structure of the website. In this case, the focus will be on the keyword 'used cars'. The fact that the word 'used' distinguishes this page from a page with 'new' cars, means that the focus should be on 'used' rather than cars in general.
- The breadcrumbs for this page could look like: Home -> Used Cars
- A little bit deeper in the structure of the website, there might be a page about a particular brand. Let's say 'Volkswagen?'. The focus of this page should be on 'Volkswagen?' and to a lesser extent on the keyword 'used', because there is already a page dedicated to 'used cars'.
- The breadcrumbs for this page could look like: Home -> Used Cars -> Volkswagen
- If we move down yet another level, there might be a page about a specific model. Let's say 'Volkswagen Golf?'. The focus of this page should primarily be on the keyword 'Golf?' and to a lesser extent on the keyword 'Volkswagen?'.
- The breadcrumbs for this page could look like: Home -> Used Cars -> Volkswagen -> Golf
- etc.

Because every page links to the page that is located above that page in the hierarchy, the search engine understands that there is a link between the two pages.

The golden rule with regard to the focus of a webpage says: 1 subject, 1 page.

This is very important to prevent what is called keyword cannibalisation. Keyword cannibalisation means that when multiple pages on one website are dealing with the same topic, and are therefore filled with the same keywords, will compete with each other in the search engines. This is very dangerous. Suppose you have one page that only contains information about, let's say, a specific book, and you have another page that offers some information about the same book, as well as a possibility to buy the book. In this case you would want the page where you can buy the book, your money page, to be shown instead of the other page. If these pages however, contain the same copy, a search engine may decide, based on other SEO factors, to display the page that just contains information. Focus (1 subject, 1 page) is therefore extremely important, because focus prevents keyword cannibalisation.

4) Length of the copy

Search engines need copy of a certain length to be able to determine the topic of a specific webpage. The exact amount is not certain. In general, it is believed that a search engine needs at least 250 to 300 words to determine what the page is about. Having more words on

a page is of course fine as well. In this case, however, you should make sure that the copy remains easy to read for visitors.

5) Using headers

The use of headers on the web is similar to using headers in word processors like s Word (Microsoft) or Pages (Apple). You can add headers in the HTML code of your website.

The most important header is called H1. In this header you should use your most important keyword. You can very easily add a header to you webpage by placing the text of your header between `<h1>` your text `</h1>` in the HTML code of your website.

If you have a header that is a little bit less important than the H1, this header called H2. Adding an H2 header works the same way as adding and H1 header. The higher the number behind the H, the less important the header is. Some examples:

`<h1>`

`<h2>`

`<h3>`

`<h4>`

`<h5>`

etc.

6) Write copy for visitors

The most important aspect of copywriting is writing copy primarily for visitors and not for search engines.

As explained previously, you should use your (top) keywords in the copy. You should, however, do this in a way that helps the visitors. Copy that is 'stuffed' with keywords becomes very hard to read and will therefore not lead to more sales, downloads, information requests etc.

The goal of the copy should be to offer your visitors what they came to your website for. In addition, you want to stimulate them to take those actions that make you money. This last bit is also important for search engines. Search engines regularly change their algorithms to present ever more relevant search results. If you are able to satisfy more customers, this will therefore indirectly benefit the search engines.

7) Don't write copy for search engines

As explained previously, your ultimate goal is to write copy that benefits your users. There

are, however, also ways in which you can show different copy to your visitors than you show to search engines. This process is called 'cloaking'. How this works exactly is irrelevant to this white paper, because it is against the search engine guidelines and using this technique could result in a penalty. By penalty we mean that as a result of this action you could end up getting lower rankings or even getting removed from the search results altogether.

If your website is built in Flash, search engines cannot read the copy on your website. In this case you should add the same copy to the HTML code of your website. This allows search engines to view the copy anyway so that they can index your website anyway. This process is different from cloaking, since you are using the same copy.

Fonts

Using one font on your website is preferred. Fonts Verdana or Arial are easiest to read.

To stress a certain point, you could use bold face. Don't use it too much though, because it might be distracting.

9) Using colour

Using black on a white background works best. If you want to highlight something, it is best to use the colour red. Links to other pages or websites are generally blue, so it is best to use blue for links. Your visitors will recognise them as links and therefore click on them more often than if they were for instance red.

What is the role of meta tags and how do I write them?

Meta tags cannot be found on your website itself. They are meant for search engines. Search engines display them on search engine result pages. This looks something like:

The two most important meta tags are the meta title and meta description. We'll look at each one of them in more detail.

Title

The title tag, displayed in blue in the example above, shows the link to your website. You can find the title in the HTML code of your website between the code <title> and </title>.

The title tag is crucial, because you can use it to draw visitors to your website.

Some tips:

- Put your most important keyword at the beginning of the title tag
- You should not use more than 65 characters (including spaces). If your title tag contains more than 65 characters, the search engines will cut it short
- Try to use a so-called call-to-action. Some examples of a call-to-action are: 'book here', 'save x%', 'free trial' etc.
- See what your competitors are doing to get some ideas for your own title tags
- For your homepage you could use: Your brand | The rest of your title
- For other pages on your website you could use: The service or product on that page | rest of the title

An example of a good title tag for the excursion industry could be:

Meta Description

This piece of text is displayed in black in the example presented above. Here you have more space to promote your products or services. This means you could actually see the meta description as sort of a free ad.

The goal of a meta description is to entice search engine users to visit your website. Some tips:

- Use your top keywords (see example below)
- Add a call-to-action
- Do not use more than 150 characters (including spaces). The meta description displayed above this paragraph contains more than 150 characters and has been cut short by the search engine (?).

An example of a good meta description from the excursion industry could be:

Note! If you make promises in your meta description that are not backed up on your landing page (the page the visitor lands on by clicking on the search result), chances are that the visitors will leave your website immediately. Make sure you never promise more than you can deliver.

Search engines copy both the meta title and the meta description directly. This makes them great free promotional tools for your website.

You can test various meta titles and descriptions to see which one works best. By using web analytics suite such as Google Analytics, you can test which meta title and description brings

in more visitors or leads to higher conversions.

Note! The issue with duplicate content (see chapter 'What are the risks of duplicate content?') also apply to meta texts. You should therefore make sure that your meta texts also vary for each page.

Tip! If you have thousands of pages, it is not doable to write separate meta titles and descriptions for each page. Using the same ones over and over again is not smart either, because of duplicate content issues. You can solve this problem by not filling in your meta titles and descriptions at all. If you do not have your own, search engines will create them on your behalf. Because the search engine results are generated based on relevance, most of the time the search engine will display a piece of text from your website that is relevant to the search query.

What are the risks of duplicate content?

Duplicate content is content that is located on multiple places on your website. Duplicate content can be about pieces of content or entire pages. Duplicate content leads to a few problems.

Duplicate URLs

If you have pages on your website that are accessible through multiple URLs, these will compete with each other in the search engine results. This happens, because the search engines do not know which page to include in their search results. You can prevent this by writing unique copy for each page or by telling the search engine which page is the 'real' one. This can be done using a so-called 'canonical tag'.

Example: Suppose you have a URL that looks as follows:

<http://www.exampledomain.nl/page.html?sid=klnl2342341>. By including a canonical tag in the HTML code of the page, you can tell the search engine that the original page is located somewhere else.

This looks as follows:

```
<link rel='canonical' href= 'http://www.exampledomain.nl/pagina.html'>
```

Duplicate content

Duplicate content means content that, for the most part, is similar to content that can be

found somewhere else on the same website or the internet.

This is, for instance, likely to happen on pages that contain contact details of multiple branches.

The copy on most of these pages is usually similar, with only the address being different on each page. If you have multiple branches, it is important to have a separate page for each branch. The copy on these pages should, however, be unique. This can be done by making sure the content for branch A contains those things that differentiate branch A from branch B. This should be more than just the address. Think of things like specific regional tastes or varying assortments etc.

By making your content unique, you prevent these pages from competing with each other in the search engine results. If your content isn't unique, the search engine might show a page with which you don't make any money instead of a page with which you do make money.

If you have a lot of content on your website that can also be found on other websites, you could get a penalty for that. A penalty could mean that you don't get high rankings in the search results.

The reason for this is that search engines prefer to show their users unique content. Unique is, in this case, defined as: written by humans and completely different from content on other websites. Changing a few words or adding a sentence does not make your content unique.

If you have to use content from other websites, for instance because you licence the content, you can add a tag in your HTML code. This tag looks as follows:

```
meta name = ?robots? content=?noindex, follow?
```

This shows the search engine that this content is present somewhere else on the web. The search engine will, in that case, not include the page in their search results. Your visitors can still access this page though. Other websites can still link to this page and the links can pass link juice. If you use this tag, you cannot get a penalty for duplicate content.

Conclusion

Write your copy based on your keyword research and the interests of your target group. Use

both long tail and top keywords in your copy but don't exaggerate.

Meta texts are a form of free promotion of you website in search engines. In addition, they help search engines understand what your website is about. Use keywords in these meta texts and test various ones to get the maximum out of these free ads.

If you have pages that contain content that can also be found somewhere else on your own website or on someone else's website, you should inform the search engines about this by adding a tag to the HTML code of your page.

Good copy can improve your conversion rates (the number of visitors that perform the action you want them to perform). It is therefore very important that you take your time when writing web copy.