

# marketer

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## Your Web Site ROI, Part 2

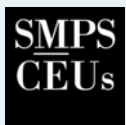
BY CRAIG PARK, FSMPS, ASSOCIATE AIA

In the June 2007 issue, I described a common scenario in which your CEO has begun to question the investment, impact, and worst of all, trust he put in you to recharge your old-school Web site, that e-brochure you put up three years ago because “everyone else has one.”

In that column, I postulated that return on investment (ROI) was dependent on two related issues. The first issue was causal actions generated by the design and the content of the site. The second issue was search-engine optimization. Too often, there is a serious disconnect between the perceptions of what a Web site can and cannot do to increase revenue. I also noted that most firms don't do those things necessary to drive valuable traffic to the site and keep it there.

In Part 1, I reviewed ways you can promote and measure the effectiveness of your Web site. I advised to make sure you set reasonable and responsible Web-analytic metrics for the ROI expected and that, in the end, you concentrate on three important factors: clickthroughs, page views, and revenue.

Now that you've got corporate buy-in on the first factor, it's time to address the second issue and ensure that the people you want are 1) finding you and 2) finding you first (i.e., before your competition).



### How to Earn CEUs Toward Recertification

To earn one CEU toward Certified Professional Services Marketer (CPSM) recertification, go to [www.smps.org](http://www.smps.org) and click on “Certification” and then “Recertification” to access questions about this article. Answer the questions on a sheet of paper titled “August 2007 *Marketer*: Your Web Site ROI, Part 2 (1 CEU).” Retain this document and submit it with your other CEU documentation by your CPSM recertification date.

If you have questions about this program, please contact SMPS National at 800.292.7677, x232.

### The seduction of technology

Unfortunately for most of us, we do our research, talk to the experts, and believe intrinsically the “latest” technology in Web site design will ensure that we are viewed as not only the best “professional service firm” in our particular niche but, because of that “way-cool” technology, that we're steps ahead of our competitors.

The problems arise because five site design technologies can make it very difficult for the search engines to list your Web pages, no matter how well you optimize and submit them. They include, in no particular order:

- frames
- dynamic URLs
- Flash
- image maps (for navigation)
- javascripts (for navigation)

The good news is that almost everything can be fixed in one way or another to help with your search-engine submissions before you submit.

### Optimizing frames

Frames are popular in Web design because they allow you to create a static “border” of information common to every page and have central areas showing information specific to only that page's topic. If your site uses frames, you've got problems as far as the search engines are concerned.

The problem is that search engines do not index framed sites very well. In fact, the search engines do such a poor job of indexing frames that we recommend redesigning your site without them if you want to get good listings in the search engines.

If your site must use frames, there are some tips to make sure you get the best listings you can. A frame is exactly what the name conveys: an HTML page that “frames” other HTML pages. If your site uses frames, each page actually has nothing that the search engine can use (i.e., page copy) to determine how to list your site.

The best thing you can do to improve your results is to use a `<noframes>` tag within your frameset, which will allow you to

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Two years ago, Skanska set a new goal for safety: zero accidents. It's an ambitious target, but Darin Ferguson is dedicated to achieving it. "Safety and productivity go hand in hand," he explains. "So do safety and quality. But the most important thing is protecting our people." To do this, Darin and his colleagues use a combination of anticipation, communication and preparation. "We anticipate potential safety issues and deal with them before they become accidents," he says. "We also instill this philosophy from day one." It's a way of working that's attracted clients who share our values and made Skanska an employer of choice nationwide.

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repeat the page's content as text and make it visible for both search engines and those viewers whose browsers don't support frames (that's not many anymore). The `<noframes>` tag belongs just before the `</frameset>` tag for your frameset.

### To meta or not to meta

There's been some controversy as to whether or not meta tags are necessary. Meta tags are often incorrectly used and misunderstood. Simply defined, a meta tag is a small piece of HTML code located between the `<HEAD></HEAD>` tags at the top of any HTML-coded page. They are designed to provide "invisible" information about your Web site. On your browser's navigation bar, click "View" and "Source," and a text window will open so you can see the root code. A meta tag will look like this: `<META [TAG NAME]=[Tag Information]>`.

Google, the predominant search engine, stopped using meta tags as a ranking tool because of the spamming potential of the "keyword" meta tag, but they didn't stop searching all. Instead, they initiated a "Google" meta tag (`<META GOOGLE="*">`) and they do index a few specific items under this tag. See [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) for their options. However, as dominant as Google has become, there are still plenty of search engines that do use meta tags for indexing, so it pays to do them well.

There are over 30 different meta tags, so it is important to know which to use. The key meta tags to include in your Web site are:

- **Meta Abstract:** This tag is important for white papers and other documents you want accessible by academic researchers.
- **Meta Content Type:** This tag causes Netscape Navigator to load the right character set. Recommended to avoid display problems with some users.
- **Meta Description:** This tag is a short, plain-language description of the site, usually 20–25 words or fewer. Search engines that support this tag will include the information following your site name. The meta description is a good place for your own tag line (not to be confused

### Reference sources for more information on good Web site design:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| ⌘ Search Engine Roundtable | <a href="http://www.seroundtable.com">www.seroundtable.com</a>           |
| ⌘ Search Engine Watch      | <a href="http://www.searchenginewatch.com">www.searchenginewatch.com</a> |
| ⌘ SEO Chat                 | <a href="http://www.seochat.com">www.seochat.com</a>                     |
| ⌘ Submit a Web Site        | <a href="http://www.submitaWebsite.com">www.submitaWebsite.com</a>       |
| ⌘ Submit Express           | <a href="http://www.submitexpress.com">www.submitexpress.com</a>         |

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with meta). This tag is important if you use a lot of Flash or non-text images on your home page.

- **Meta Google:** See above.
- **Meta Keywords:** This tag can include words in addition to words from the title, page body, or other areas of the site. Keywords should be relevant to your site, or you may be penalized or even blacklisted; no spamming, please.
- **Meta Title:** This tag usually has the same information contained between the <TITLE></TITLE> tags and is indexed by both MSN and Yahoo.

Just as there are tags you should use, there are tags to avoid including Content Script Type, Content Style Type, Expires, Generator, Language, Smart Tags, Publisher, Refresh, Reply To (unless you really want to get Spam), Revisit After, Resource Type, Set Cookie, and Subject. Except for Reply To, none of these are bad; they are just not used to index your site on any search engines.

## Using dynamic URLs

Your URL is the Web address for your site (e.g., www.sitename.com). Most search engines cannot or will not list what are known as dynamic URLs. Dynamic URLs are most commonly used on

database-driven sites, or sites that are running scripts. If your site's URL contains any of the following elements, it is considered a dynamic URL as far as the search engines are concerned: ?, &, %, +, =, \$, cgi-bin, or \*.cgi.

If your URL contains any of the above elements, it is unlikely that it will get listed at any of the major search engines. I recommend you submit a different URL that is not dynamic, if possible. If all of your URLs are dynamic, you should probably consider making static pages (i.e., not dynamic) with URLs that do not contain any of the elements noted above so that you can get listed in the search engines.

## Sites that use Flash

Flash is cool! Flash is "hot!" Flash let's you create active graphics and "movies" that enliven your site with changing imagery and motion. However, Flash can make it difficult for search engines to find your site.

Flash itself is not the problem. There are two major problems with how Flash is used.

First, Flash is too often used on home pages as a "splash" page. The problem with Flash-only splash pages is that search engines can't index them (like frames, there is no "content"). That

means your splash page will not get listed. Your best bet—search-engine wise—is to avoid submitting any page that is made mostly of Flash.

If you must submit a page that is mostly Flash, add as much copy to the page as you can so that the search engines have something to index. As with frames, you also should make sure you have good meta tags and a title tag.

The second problem comes from hyperlinks made with Flash that can't be spidered by the search engines. Spidering is a feature search engines employ in their ranking systems that gives great “value” (read “higher ranking”) to sites with hyperlinks to both internal and external references.

Normally, when you submit a page to a search engine, the search engine follows the links on the page and “spiders” the rest of your site, which is a good thing. Unfortunately, unless you have (or add) standard HTML code to those hyperlinks, none of your other pages will be able to be spidered by the search engines, which is a bad thing. One way to fix this problem is to create a site-map page using standard HTML links to link to every page on your site. Then add a standard HTML link on each page of your site that links to the site map.

## Sites that use image maps

Image maps are usually large “graphics” that are sliced (segmented) into the equivalent of navigation buttons. Visually cool to look at, they are a popular design element, but because of the code that makes up an image map, search engines often get trapped in them and can't spider (index) your site.

If you use image maps for your main site navigation, you should consider switching to or adding a second set of standard HTML hyperlinks. An easy way to do this is to create a site-map page using standard HTML links to link to every page on your site. Then add a standard HTML link on each page of your site that links to the site map.

## Using Javascript for navigation

JavaScript is popular with Web site programmers. It's an easy-to-use “open-source” language with a lot of pre-programmed scripts for making Web site design easier and faster. Unfortunately, like the image maps described above, search engines can't follow hyperlinks that are within a JavaScript, so your site will not get spidered unless you also have some form of standard HTML hyperlinks they can follow.


Also like the image map, adding standard HTML hyperlinks to all of your pages on each of your pages, and creating a site-map

page that uses standard HTML links to link to every page on your site, will provide the necessary code for the popular search engines to follow.

## Tricked out and ready to sell

Optimizing your Web page designs, title tags, meta tags, and page content are critical to getting your page indexed (spidered) and listed in the various Web search engines. There are a few other tricks, too lengthy to go into here, but easy to find with a little searching on your own. As noted earlier, this also assumes you've made the effort to get listed. Each search engine has its own submission system and rules, so the best advice is to check out the home page for the search engine and follow its process. There are also various other search-engine services that, for a fee, will submit your site on a regular basis to the major engines.

One last piece of advice: Make sure you communicate to your management just how long it takes to get listed. Even with the best sites, the average search engine will take four to six weeks (and up to two months) to position your site.

Now your site is tricked out to the max, and the rest is, as they say, “history” (in this case, for you to create). Your site is optimized and sits at the top of the Google, Yahoo, and MSN search sites for those terms that define your service. You can follow your clickthroughs to page views, and then convert those valuable viewers into contacts, relationships, opportunities, and revenues. Now your boss is really happy, and you can relax (a little). Happy surfing! 



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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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