

**Working Musician**

# **Search Engine Optimization for Musician Websites**

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Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of organizing the content of a website in a way that will be most easily understood and indexed by search engines. If you do it right, you will be closer to the top of the list when strangers search for terms relating to your website. For instance, if you are a punk bluegrass accordion trio, you want to be at the top of the listings whenever anybody searches for that genre of music.

First off, I don't believe musicians should become overly concerned with SEO if they are providing a mostly promotional website. If you are an independent band with a small website, you'll most likely never be able to compete with mega websites from major record labels, large content sites, or the go-to music websites like Rhapsody. These sites spend huge sums of money on website optimization and battle each other for leading result positions on big-money keywords, like when someone searches the terms "hip-hop" or "hard rock." If you are a hip-hop or hard rock band, the truth is you'll probably never be able to reach the top of the results on general searches like that.

Nevertheless, there are several SEO goals that musicians should set for their websites:

- If someone looks up the name of your band, your website should be the very first result.
- If you have a niche musical style like, again, punk bluegrass accordion trio, your website should be the first result.
- If you have a popular song, your website should come up first if someone searches for the song title.
- If someone looks up the names of your band members, your website should come up in the first 10 results (i.e., the first page

or screen of results).

Let's talk about how to do this. SEO is actually a very straight forward thing. The thing you should always keep in mind is: search engines want to find and supply their customers with the websites that have the best content. It's very likely that if you create the best available content about your specific topic, you will be rewarded with favorable rankings in search engine results.

You must remember, though, that search engines are machines, and thus, are not able to intelligently comprehend language. In other words, they can't read. Search engines compensate for this by analyzing the words you use, where you place these words, and how many other websites are linking to your website.

## **Keywords**

First, search engines scan the words on your website for "keywords." These are words or phrases that people frequently look up, like "accordion trio" or "bluegrass accordion." If you are a punk bluegrass accordion trio, you should say that as many times as is possible without seeming like a broken record. Do you notice that I have already used that phrase four times in this article? That's how you do it. I wouldn't be surprised if soon this post came up in search results for "punk bluegrass accordion trio." Try it! See? I just repeated it again.

You can fit keywords in tastefully. Here's an example. Below are two versions of the same band bio, one poorly optimized for keywords, and the second is well optimized.

Bad: Our band formed four years ago when Chuck got a gig at a bar and he needed to put something together really quickly. Our first performance was pretty good, and we ended up getting other gigs by word of mouth. Now we play all over and we have three guys in the band. Give us a call if you want us to play!

Better: The Bluegrass Accordion All-stars formed in 2004 with Charles Adelaide, Edgar Potenza, and Robert McKenzie, and remains the only punk bluegrass accordion trio in Chester County. The Bluegrass Accordion All-stars, or BAA if you're a goat, has played at many illustrious live music venues throughout the greater Chester County area, and we're always looking for more opportunities to play for our fans. If you are looking for live music for your event or venue, call Charles at

(899) 555-5786 or e-mail us at [live-music@baa.com](mailto:live-music@baa.com).

Now, look at these two bios. The first one talks generally about the band without even mentioning the name of the band! There is virtually nothing in that bio that search engines would recognize as a keyword, and if this kind of writing were all over your site, no one would ever find it.

The second bio is keyword rich. In only 85 words it mentions the name of the band, the niche genre, as well as the names of the band members. It also has "live music" and the geographic target area for gigs (greater Chester County). With this bio people would likely find the website if they searched for any of the following:

- live music chester county
- accordion trio bluegrass
- edgar potenza accordion
- charles adelaide music
- punk accordion trio

If the website contained small, tasteful, keyword-rich blocks of text, there could be all kinds of website searches that would bring up this site. And notice that not all of these keyword searches are specific to the trio. For example, with the first search (live music chester county), someone looking for live music in Chester County might find the Bluegrass Accordion All-stars website. Maybe the group could find a new fan that way!

## **Placement**

Where you place these keywords is also very important. To excel at this part of SEO, it's necessary to know some basic HyperText Markup Language (HTML). HTML is the code that websites are written in. When you put text into a web page, you can't just click a button that specifies a sentence as bold like you can in a word processing program. In HTML, you have to surround the text you want to format with tags like "strong" for bold or "h1" for the largest heading size.

It turns out that search engines pay special attention to the text that you designate as bold, or as a heading, a title, a link, or special in some other way. So learn a little HTML and pay attention to where you put your most important keywords. It matters!

## Incoming Links

The third way search engines compensate for not being able to read is by counting the number of external links to your site. In other words, websites that have links to your site “vouch” for your site and these links act like recommendations. If a search engine sees that you have a keyword rich website, and also sees that other websites think enough of your site to link to it, you'll go up in the search results.

Getting more incoming links is difficult, but the best way to do it is organically. If you join “link farms” or other linking schemes, search engines will know something is fishy, and they will sometimes take you completely out of their search results.

A better way is to ask your friends and fans to link to you—other band sites, websites of venues, and other music sites like CDBaby.com. You can also include your website URL in your signature on website forums. Not all links are equal though, and generally speaking, you will want links from sites that either have a lot of clout—for example, NYTimes.com or Yahoo.com—or from sites that are similar to yours (sites about music, musicians, bands, etc.).

## Summary

Follow this advice and you will be on your way to optimizing your website for search engines. Certainly, though, this guide is just the tip of the SEO iceberg, and you should continue to look up SEO advice and always try to improve the SEO of your website. With the right techniques, you can ensure that fans and strangers alike will be able to find and enjoy your music!

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