Taking Stock of The Private Pay Revolution
Use SEO (Search Engine Optimization) to be found on the Internet

By Merrily Orsini

Hopefully, by now, you have created a Web site with the goal of generating referrals that can lead to new business. What next? With an increasingly over-trafficked and over-built Internet, you need to ensure that your home care Web site is found at the top of search results. Search engine optimization (or SEO) is one tool your Web site developer will need to achieve this goal.

What is SEO? As defined by wikipe-dia.com, it is a subset of search engine marketing, and is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a Web site from search engines via “natural” (“organic” or “algorithmic”) search results. SEO can also target specialized searches such as image search, local search, and industry-specific vertical search engines.

Simply put, SEO is the process of increasing the amount of visitors to a Web site by ranking high in the search results of a search engine. The higher a Web site ranks in the results of a search, the greater the chance that that site will be visited by a user. “Ranking high” means being found on the first one or two pages of a search engine like Google or MSN. It is common practice for Internet users to only click through the first, second, and maybe third page of search results. So, where a site ranks in a search for terms is essential for directing more traffic toward your Web site.

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A search engine is an online program that searches Web sites, documents, news, images, and blogs for specified keywords, and returns a list of the links to where these keywords were found. Typically, a search engine works by sending out a web crawler to fetch as many links as possible. Another program, called an indexer, then reads these links and creates an index based on the words contained in each. Each search engine uses a proprietary algorithm to create its indices such that, ideally, only meaningful results are returned for each query. (Source: webopedia.com).

Keyword selection is the first step in optimizing for the search engines. You need to research and find out what your customers are using when searching for home care. Utilize the following to help optimize your Web pages:

• AdWords or Pay Per Click (PPC) to immediately find out what words customers and your competition are actually using.
• Brainstorm words and phrases with clients, employees, and friends.
• Use www.wordtracker.com to see how many searches on what words are actually completed.

Remember to:
• Pick popular words that are actually being used for searches for home care.
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In a nutshell, creating a process to develop a great search engine optimization strategy for your Web site is a combination of design, user friendliness, and content. Everything the viewer wants to know on your Web site should be no more than three clicks away. Important information, like contact information, should always be one click away.

The biggest mistake most people/companies make when optimizing a site is overdoing it, such as repeating keywords, duplicating image tags, flooding the backend with descriptive code, and trying to fit as many keywords/terms into the meta tags as possible. When optimizing your Web site, think first of your potential customer and what you want their experience to be on your Web site. Achieving search engine optimization results in a clear, informative experience for your users, and a friendly experience for your Web crawler.

About the Author: Merrily Orsini, MSSW, is Managing Director of evreecubed, an integrated marketing communications company that specializes in home care and home health industries. Orsini has been active in Internet marketing since 1999. She is an 18 year veteran of the private duty industry and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Private Duty Homecare Association of America.