How to Make Your Blog Posts Both SEO and Readers Friendly

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I have worked on 40+ marketing projects and I know very well how difficult it is for most small business owners, bloggers and freelancers to make their blog posts attractive to search engines and readers alike.

If you also struggle with it - or just want to improve in this area - I am sure you will find the next pages valuable and easy to follow.

Let me get something out of the way from the start though - this white paper will *not* teach you how to write quality content. It will *not* tell you how to go about choosing your topics, writing your opening paragraphs, getting your message across, and alike. *Nor* it will help you become a better writer.

> This white paper will help you take your brilliant blog posts and make them attractive to search engines and readers alike!

This white paper has a two-fold purpose

1) to help you write readers' optimized content for your blog, and
2) to help you write SEO optimized content for your blog.

Here's the table of contents to give you a preview:

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Before you start writing your blog post

Make sure you have a clear idea what you want to achieve with it. Knowing the purpose of your blog post will help you write quality and purpose driven content. Knowing what message you want to convey *before* you write the post will help you actually write the post and truly convey that message.

Think about your readers - how will this blog post help them? Decide if you will write a how-to post, a long well-researched article on a controversial topic, analysis of some niche trends, or whatever else your readers may be interested in. Remember: think about the value your readers get - *then* write.

Think about search engines - what do people search online when trying to solve the problem your blog post tackles? You need to pick a focus keyword for your blog post so that you can get some organic search traffic.

Read on to learn how to get on the good side of search engines but before that, please do 2 things for me, would you?

1) Go check a pretty useful blog post by a fellow blogger, Ashley Faulkes, on using the free Google keywords tool to pick your focus keywords

2) If you are somewhat good with keywords and SEO, check out my review of Market Samurai - the best SEO tool I have found so far, for both keywords research and rank tracking. It's more sophisticated than the free keyword tool, hence - it's paid.

Now that you know what you will write about and why, and what your focus keyword is, it's time to start writing.

Remember - I won't tell you how to write your content. But I will give you a few tips how to make your blog posts both search engine and readers friendly.

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Some rules of thumb for utilizing the focus keyword in your blog post

- Your blog post should be at least 300 words (500 is better, 800 is superb) with 1-2% keyword (or less - don't overdo it)
- The focus keyword should be in your blog post title
- The focus keywords should appear in the first paragraph of the blog post
- The focus keyword should be in at least one heading of the post
- The title of at least one image should contain the focus keyword
- The alt tag (alternative text field tag) of at least one image should contain the focus keyword
- The focus keyword should be in your page title and meta description
- The focus keyword should be in the URL of your blog post

I will tell you more about utilizing the focus keyword while writing and formatting further in this white paper so read on - there are examples, too!

Now, let's start with your blog post title

It shouldn't be too long but it should be clear. The post title should give a clear idea to the reader what your blog post is about. Even if they don't have the full picture from it, they should suspect what's in it for them, what's the value, why they should read it.

Bad title: Free Advice to Clients
Good title: Why Not to Give Too Much Free Advice to Freelance Clients

Make your blog post titles *keywords targeted*. Put your focus keyword as early in the title as possible.

Good title: Why Not to Give Too Much Free Advice to Freelance Clients
Better title: Free Advice - Why Not to Give Too Much of It to Freelance Clients
if your focus word was 'free advice', of course

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Most importantly, the title of the blog post should be *relevant* to the blog post itself. Having relevant titles and content will help you lower the bounce rate on your blog posts.

Think through your opening paragraph

I have read a lot of recommendations, all different. Some like to start their blog posts with a quote, others - with a question, still others - with a story, and so on.

I have found it's best to start your blog post interestingly. No vague intros. Get directly to the point and on topic!

> Your first paragraph is what grabs the attention (or not) and what makes the reader scroll down and read the whole post (or leave).

Use section titles and make them headings, too

Always use at least two section titles - in the middle and in the end of the blog post. Naturally, if your blog posts are 800 words or more, you want to use more section titles - one every 300 words is a good rule of thumb.

> Using section titles is good for readers and making them headings (h2, h3, h4, etc.) is good for search engines.

The purpose of the section titles is to catch the attention of the reader. If the reader is lazy or busy or tired or whatever, he will not read through the whole blog post, no matter how interesting or important we think it is.

For such readers, we put the contextual images (to suggest what the blog post is about). For such readers we also put the section titles - the title and the section titles should tell the person the main story in the blog post.

Section titles should bring information – better state something or call the reader to action rather than ask questions in the section titles.

If a busy reader has landed for some reason on your blog post, you have 5 to 10 seconds to convince them they will benefit if they read the article. So, if they are

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scanning through the blog post, the title and the section titles must give them the whole picture – they must understand from the section titles the whole idea of the article, to understand they will find the answer to their questions and hence – stay, read it, and further browse, and eventually – hire you, buy your book, a product, or whatever else you are aiming at with your blog.

Try to make the section titles keywords targeted. As mentioned earlier, the focus keyword should appear in at least one heading and section titles are such headings.

Interlink your blog posts

Every single blog post should have *at least* 2 or 3 internal links: to other of your blog posts and website pages. All internal links should be with relevant anchor texts and leading to relevant blog posts only.

Remember also to insert links to landing pages! Once every 3-4 blog posts you should include links to a landing page with a form – subscribe to RSS feed, subscribe to a newsletter, schedule an appointment, download a white paper, sign up for a training course, buy a product, etc.

Use images in your blog posts - and use them right!

Some bloggers use small images, others large ones; some use photos, others illustrations; some purchase stock photos, others use free resources; and some draw their own. It all depends on the type of blog you are running, your budget, and your skills. In all cases though, in the beginning of each blog post you need a contextual image which meets the following requirements:

- The contextual image should be relevant to the first paragraph or the blog post content in general

Experiment with the contextual images you use and record the statistics to improve and find the best practices. Let me give you a few examples.

Maybe you will find out that your readers don't react well to cartoon images in which case you should stick to real photos only (no cartoons).

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Or maybe you'll notice you get a lot of image search traffic to your blog when using original art - in which case you should try and use more of that type of contextual images instead of stock images.

Or maybe you'll notice if you have 2 contextual images aligned to the left, your readers read your posts and browse your blog more - in which case you should stick to using at least 2 contextual images per post, aligned to the left.

> Be brave - experiment with your contextual images, record the results and change the strategy accordingly to your readers' satisfaction. Search engines will follow.

- **Write a keywords targeted title for the image**

As mentioned before, the focus keyword should be in the title of the image. And I don't mean the title you manually insert when you upload your image. The title your image has on your machine right before you upload it.

No matter how many times you change the title of your image on your website, once you upload it with the title "DC24905", that is the title it has online. That is the title you want to change before uploading the image so it contains your focus keyword.

- **Add ALT tag to each image**

For your convenience, you can copy the title of the image and paste it into the alternative text field as well. If there is more than one image in a single blog post, make sure they are not all with the same title and ALT tag.

If you decide to change the ALT tag and make it something different from your image title, make sure your image ALT tag contains the focus keyword for better SEO.

- **Insert descriptions of the images**

The description has the purpose to describe to Google and other search engines what exactly is on the image. Search engines don't have eyes like us to see - they don't see the image itself; they see the image description.

So, if you have an image with a dollar in a pocket, write that in the description - "*Close up old cash money of American one dollar in pocket*". Then search engines will see your image as you wanted them to see it.

- Watch the size of the image

This is a bit controversial topic for me and I am not exactly an expert in it. I know for a fact that large images can slow down your website - so you definitely want to optimize the size of your images. And here's where the "controversy" comes.

I use 300 px wide contextual images on my blog posts. So that is the size of my images when I upload them to my website. However, with the recent changes in Facebook image sizes, the 300 px wide image on my blog post doesn't look as good when my posts are shared on Facebook because the minimum size for that is 377 px width.

Let me show you:

A slightly larger than I need image on my blog - it displays well when the post is shared on Facebook

300 px wide image on my blog - it doesn't display so well when the post is shared on Facebook

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> Bottom line - you definitely want to optimize the size of your images to ensure fast loading of your website. But also be sure to take other factors into account when doing it.

For instance, I started uploading 400 px wide images and reducing the size of the image displayed on my blog - but they still are large enough to be fetched beautifully on my FB page ☺

- Credit the source of the image and/or link to it

Sometimes we use our own images as contextual images in the blog post - then no credit is needed, nor link. However, if you take images from other websites, make sure you state in the caption field of the image the original source.

If the contextual image was found on a website which is relevant to your scope of topics and would be interesting to your readers, you could also link the image to the specific website page where you found the image in the first place. Remember to set the link to open in a new window!

If the contextual image was found on a website which is *not* relevant to your scope of topics and may or may not be interesting to your readers, you should *not* link the image to the specific website page where you found the image in the first place. However, you should still give credit in the caption field.

On a side note - taking images from other websites which are not image banks is a grey area for plagiarism. Technically, if you have not asked the owner of the image for permission to use it on your blog and how they want you to credit the image to them - it's plagiarism. On the other hand, there are plenty of images out there of which it is hard to find the author; so there's no one to ask and credit the picture to. Maybe it's safer to use stock images or even better - use your own images.

Whatever the case, remember that you need to first download the image to your machine with proper title which contains the focus keyword and *then* upload it to your server. This way all the images you have on your blog will be

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hosted by you and you avoid having broken images in your blog posts in the long run.

How to utilize the focus keyword when writing and formatting

Remember: keywords stuffing is not an option - it is absolutely unacceptable for any type of self-respected blogger. High quality content for the reader is a must.

However, there are some tips for better SEO writing and certain places where you could and should place the focus keyword, *if possible*, for better onsite optimization of each and every blog post. Here they are:

- The focus keyword should appear in the first paragraph of the article

I would even recommend it appears in the first sentence for better clarity for both the reader and the search engines. Let's take as an example one of the most visited blog posts on my blog from organic search traffic - Freelance Pricing Guide - the Rate on Your Freelance Profile.

The first paragraph goes like this:

> The discussion on my post about freelance trends in Elance indicated that there's huge need for some kind of a freelance pricing guide. So I've decided to share my insights about freelance fees in the next 3 posts in the Freelance Tips category.

You can see the focus keyword in the first sentence - I highlighted it for you. And there are a couple more things I'd like to draw your attention to in this opening paragraph.

It goes directly to the point - states why the post came into being (it was the commenters who indirectly asked for it) and it also states what is it that the reader will find in the post if he continued reading (first of 3 posts series about freelance fees).

For the record, since the post was published until the end of 2013 (roughly 5 months), compared to the websites average - this post has 7.74% more new

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visits from organic search traffic and 0.95% lower bounce rate which could be a direct result of the opening paragraph.

- Recommended keywords density is 1 to 2%.

Meaning for each 100 words, you have to mention the focus keyword once - or twice at the most. Remember that variations of the focus keyword are also counted against this limit.

If we continue our example with the above blog post, the focus keyword is "freelance pricing guide" so against the limit of 1-2% keywords density would be counted all related keywords such as freelance prices, freelance fees, freelance rates, calculating freelance rates, and so on.

Remember - this point is *not* mandatory. The only thing you need to observe when it comes to keywords density is that you do *not* overuse the focus keyword.

> If the content reads naturally and well, then you are good to go with the keywords density as well.

- The focus keyword should be in at least 1 heading (section title)

For better SEO, the focus keyword should appear in most if not all section titles which are Heading 2, 3 or 4 formatting. However, for the sake of avoiding keywords stuffing, I am stating it as a requirement to have the focus keyword in at least one of the headings and section titles of each blog post.

To continue with the example of freelance pricing guide post - let's have a look at the title and section titles - they are as follows:

- Today, I'll shed some light on the questions we ought to answer when deciding on our freelance profile rate
- First step in this freelance pricing guide is to do a quick research for your niche of expertise
- Let's make such research in the Marketing category of Elance.

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- Knowing all of this, how does a starting marketing freelancer decides on their profile rate?
- This wouldn't be a complete <mark>freelance pricing guide</mark> for determining your <mark>profile rate</mark>,
- Remember, the <mark>rate on your freelance profile</mark> is not set in stone.
- Your turn – tell me in the comments what's your field of expertise and how do you decide <mark>what price to put on your freelance profile</mark>?

As you can see, the focus keyword is mentioned in the title and two section titles; variation of the focus keyword is used in a couple of the rest section titles.

- ### The focus keyword should be in the title of the contextual image
When you save images to your machine for uploading later to your blog, make sure you save each image with an appropriate title.

If we continue the example with the freelance pricing guide blog post, a quick review will reveal that it has 3 contextual images. One of them has title "Freelance-Pricing-Guide-for-Your-Freelance-Profile-Rate.jpg" which contains the focus keyword. Another one contains a variation of the focus keyword - "freelance-fees-guide-social-media-marketing.jpeg".

- ### The focus keyword should be in the ALT tag of the contextual image
When you upload the images to the specific blog post on your blog, make sure you insert a keyword-targeted ALT tag as well. For your convenience, the title of the image could also be used for its ALT tag.

- ### The focus keyword should be in the blog post title and page title
The focus keyword should be in the page title of the blog post. The earlier in the page title, the better for SEO.

The page title should also fit in 70 characters, if possible. If the length exceeds a bit this limit (e.g. it is 75 or 80) that is not a problem.

Similarly to the ALT tag and image title, you can insert the same page title as the title of your blog post.

- The focus keyword should be in the blog post meta description tag

The meta description tag should be specific to the page it is referring to and should contain keywords and keyword phrases found in the page title, page heading and first one or two blocks of relevant page content.

It should be within 140 to 200 characters. Google shows 156 Characters (including spaces) for Meta Description so this is the recommended length.

- The focus keyword should be in the blog post URL

In most cases, the default URL will match your blog post title - unless you use wordpress for blogging and you have left the default URL structure of /?page_id=[some number].

> So first you want to customize the URLs to take after your blog posts titles. And then - you want to customize it even further - to be short and to contain the focus keyword.

If we continue the example of the freelance pricing guide post, the URL of that post contains the focus keyword - /freelance-pricing-guide-the-rate-on-your-freelance-profile/ - but it is kind of long. So it would have been better if it were /freelance-pricing-guide-profile-rate/ - it contains the focus keyword, one of its variations, and it is shorter.

Are you ready to go make your blog posts attractive to readers and search engines alike?

Keep this white paper close - read it once in a while, I am sure you'll find something new each time. Give me a shout out on the blog or on social media - I love feedback! **Oh, and remember to open my emails** ☺

**Yours,
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