

The History of SEO



Part I: The beginning

SEO or *search engine optimization* is the process of optimizing websites for achieving high rankings in major search engine like Google, Yahoo and MSN. Hailed as a brand new service, search engine optimization has been around for over 10 years, the first appearance of the term “**search engine optimization**” was on the popular internet discussion system of the time called Usenet. The message was entitled *The Truth About Internet Marketing* and went on to explain various methods of advertising on the internet. [1]

There is a lot of speculation as to why *search engine optimization* was created in the first place. The reason it was invented is the same reason everything else in the world was invented: necessity. When the internet was first getting started in the early 90's search engines were an entirely different monster than they are today. [2] Back then, hardly anybody was using the internet and it certainly was not user friendly. As internet popularity began to grow, so did the use amount of *websites* in existence. Invariably as the amount of websites grew so did the need for organization and the search engine was born. With a never-ending increase of users and need for relevant web pages, the search engine optimization industry was born.

Starting as an elite group of web designers and internet guru is the SEO field was small and information was difficult to get. However, despite this fact businesses in the know were starting to recognize the internet as a medium for advertisements. Business owners began to realize that people are spending more time and money on the internet, and if they could rank highly in any given search engine, then their traffic and ultimately their customer base would increase. Then, the gaming began, internet marketers began optimizing and in certain cases deceiving, the search engines into a high rank. The few who knew about it had amazing results, which increased the “WOW” effect of SEO. In the early days something as simple as having accurate and keyword rich meta tags was enough to rank highly, even for a competitive keyword. However, one barrier prevented the industry from gaining any speed. The fact that there was still limited **search engine** technology, limited user base and limited profit making ability led many companies to prefer the mass medium to the internet.

Part II: The Evolution

After the dot-com bubble burst in 2001 businesses wouldn't touch internet services with a 10 ft pole, the world was in a skeptical frame of mind, cautious apprehensive and unwilling to take unnecessary risks.[3] This mindset was reflected in every sector most notably the business sector. It took a few years but eventually internet spending began to increase and so did the public's trust in the

American economy. With the money flowing everyone began looking for market opportunities, and the internet was the opportunity. Those lucky enough to have top spots on major search engines gained a huge portion of business and web traffic. People and businesses started to see through the dotcom haze, internet marketing was not only viable but also lucrative.

Search engines have become integral to the internet experience and about 91% of all internet users, use search engines. It is surprising that 100% of internet users do not use them. However, as usage has grown, methods have changed. Things like Meta tags no longer worked and were useless. Competition for popular keywords or phrases grew substantially, and some deceitful users began to realize that there were methods of manipulating search engines. As popularity for **SEO services** and internet marketing grew so did the need for more talented and knowledgeable employees.

As the industry grew the tried and true SEO's began to differentiate themselves from the ones using deceitful or manipulative techniques, a metaphor for this dichotomy was created and is known as White hat and Black hat SEO's. Later on, most Black Hat SEO's were shunned and regarded as spammers and even referred to as Spamdexers. Many regard this as an inappropriate metaphor and contend that there are either SEO's or spammers.

Part III: Google – We Are Here To Stay

In a brave new world there were many competitors vying for #1 most used search engine, the one that succeeded went against all previous search engine technology and has changed the way everything works: Google. The way search engines originally worked was they would search through everything on a page like keywords or *Meta data*. There were many factors then as now but in those days the keywords were enough. However, Google decided that to defeat manipulation and increase the relevancy of search results they would base their results in part off link popularity. The amount of one way inward links or (back links) the topical relevancy, the Page Rank of the back link website, the amount of outward links and many other factors all influence the way that a search engine determines which website is most relevant to a keyword.

As it turned out the decision to give more weight to **back links** then meta-data proved to be good for Google. Taking their place as the most popular search engine of the day Google has become a juggernaut of technology and advertising profits, giving it the ability to compete with huge corporations like

Microsoft. With one main search engine to focus on SEO became a huge industry that began to branch out. What started out as a few simple web page edits became an industry with a multitude of techniques, technologies and careers. Words that pioneered the search engine optimization industry like Meta-Data and keywords fell behind in usage as *link building*; *social networking* and Local all took their place.

It was in 2002 that SEO professionals started gaining recognition and the industry as whole became mainstream. Starting with a string of legal troubles such as KinderStart.com LLC vs. Google Inc, [4] in this groundbreaking case, the LLC Kinder Start sued Google Inc because Google was practicing unfair business practices by using spam filters, which ultimately led to the removal of Kinderstart.com from Google's index. Ultimately, Google won the lawsuit and even motioned for Rule 11 Sanctions, which required Kinderstarts lawyer John Yu to pay for part of Google's legal expenses. The countries eyes were on news that was more important but this case began exposing legal precedence for something that would become very important as the years progressed.

Since it's inception in 1996 **search engine optimization** went from all but unknown to one of the fastest growing and most profitable career choices in modern society. Starting on a simple Usenet message and surviving through the Dot-com bust of the 90's, SEO is modern vernacular, something that is no longer fringe but instead necessary. Really when it comes to the line *SEO* is a subset of *marketing*, the only difference is the technology and procedures that work most effectively. One thing is clear as long as there are products to be sold marketing will always exist, and as long as the internet exists, there will always be SEO. The question is not whether **SEO** has made or will make a difference but instead what difference it will make in the lives of billions of people.

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