



Reprinted with permission of *Credit Union Magazine*

## Search Engine 'Oops-timization': Top 10 SEO Mistakes

By Jim Grinney, Partner, 90octane

Story posted: August 1, 2008

Do a few, quick, relevant searches for your credit union in the three most heavily trafficked search engines - [Google](#), [Yahoo](#), and [MSN](#).

Not finding yourself in the top slot? Are your competitors in the first three results, which garner the bulk of visits by Internet users? If your credit union doesn't make it into the first page of results, you have some work to do.

When your organization's Web site needs a boost through search engine optimization (SEO), one approach is to consider what you're **not** doing right.

Here are the top 10 mistakes that keep a Web site from gaining visibility and attracting visitors:

### 1. A little too "Flashy"

Does your Web site have a great design but doesn't generate the traffic (and, therefore, new members) it needs to? Sites that are developed entirely with the multimedia technology Flash tend to be eye-catching, but they're not typically search-engine friendly.

When using Flash to enhance the look and feel of your site, focus on incorporating Flash elements instead of relying on this technology to create the entire site.

### 2. Text saved as images

Search engines can't read images (i.e., jpg and gif files). Avoid placing important text, such as each page's headline, in an image. If you must, use alt tags to describe the images.

### 3. Not creating unique title and description tags

Two critical components of a site's meta data are the title and description tags. These are used to explain each of your site's pages in search results.

Create this content with both search engines and prospects in mind. Include keywords that are core to your business, and compel visits with a clear call-to-action, such as "Visit our site to use our new mortgage calculator."





#### 4. Not bot-friendly

Your site's [robots.txt](#) file instructs robots and search spiders about which files and directories to include or ignore in their assessment of your site. Don't leave it out.

#### 5. No XML sitemap

Most large Web sites are dynamically driven, meaning organizations use content management systems to streamline updates and maintenance. Because dynamic pages can stump the engines, use an [XML sitemap](#) to point them to important or regularly updated pages.

#### 6. Black hat tactics

Don't scheme when it comes to SEO. Hiding text on your site by making it the same color as your background, stuffing keywords into your content, duplicating your site, or buying inbound links to your site from "link farms" only gets you blacklisted by search engines.

#### 7. What numbers?

Ignoring program metrics is a mistake. You should not only measure the visibility of your keywords, but track traffic and conversions. You need to know that your Web site is attracting the right people—the ones who convert.

And there's no excuse when free tools such as [Google Analytics](#) help you keep score.

#### 8. Words before keywords

If you wrote the copy for your Web site before you crafted a keyword strategy, it's time for a do-over. Align your site's content with the keywords users search to boost your Web pages' presence in the search engines.

#### 9. Swapping links—and then swapping more links

There's a misconception that any outside link into your site is a good one. Focus on quality, not quantity, when trading links with other organizations.

Search engines calculate Web site relevance for a specific search term based on the quality of links. So, for example, companies in the financial sector should swap links with similar organizations.

#### 10. Google or bust

According to an April 2008 release by [comScore](#), Google accounts for 62% of Web searches. If you focus all of your optimization efforts on Google, you're leaving a significant amount of traffic at risk.

Sure, if Google delivers the lowest cost per lead or strongest conversions for your site, then it's important to focus on it. But let the metrics, not the brand, help you make that decision.

Do your best to avoid these common mistakes and monitor the metrics as you make improvements.

*[Jim Grinney](#) is a partner and co-founder of Denver-based [90octane](#). Contact him at 720-904-8169.*

