

Standards For Search Engine Marketing

Underlying Intent

Be sure your site is accessible & understandable to search engines and human visitors alike. Don't try to game (cheat) the search engines by using sneaky tricks, or you risk getting caught and your site penalised or banned.

Scope

The Marketing Association's eMarketing Network recognises that the adoption of industry-wide standards of best practice and ethical conduct regarding the use of Search Engines for marketing purposes, will promote consumer confidence in search engines' abilities to deliver accurate and relevant results. They will also assist companies in evaluating the practices and ethics of search engine optimisation and marketing agencies.

This document outlines guiding principles for Search Engine Marketing (SEM) in New Zealand. By adopting the principles outlined in this document, marketers should be considered ethical SEM marketers, in intent, in principle, and in action.

It is intended that this document will be reviewed on a regular basis in the light of developments internationally and locally.

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Guiding Principles for Responsible SEM Marketers

The Marketing Association's eMarketing Network have designed the 6 Guiding Principles for Responsible Search Engine Marketers. Each of the resolutions complements the next and should be taken into consideration as a collective entity. In brief they are:

- 1 Target relevant keywords**
- 2 Avoid unnecessary repetition & duplication**
- 3 Create useful, information-rich content for both human visitors and search engines**
- 4 Don't conceal, manipulate, or over-optimize content**
- 5 Links should be relevant and achieved legitimately**
- 6 Follow the rules**

Definitions

A full list of eMarketing terms can be found in the [Dictionary of Terms](http://www.emarketingnetwork.co.nz) section of www.emarketingnetwork.co.nz.

Guiding Principle One – Target Relevant Keywords

Unconditional best practice demands that communication on your site and in your paid search ads be relevant to your business activities.

Key considerations:

- Relevance is a key consideration for your search engine ranking.
- Inappropriate content or search ads that do not relate to your business activities reduces a user's confidence in search engine results, in addition to reducing your sales conversion rates.
- The best keyword choices are multiple-word phrases that are highly relevant, popular with searchers, and unambiguous in meaning.
- The "landing page" (the page that the search engine user lands on after clicking on your search engine listing) should be relevant to the user's search keywords.
- It's best to focus on just one or two keyword themes per web page. Trying to target too many keywords on a page can turn your useful content into keyword-rich gibberish.
- All recommendations within this Principle are applicable to both natural optimisation and paid search marketing.

It is acceptable for marketers to:

- target as many keywords as are relevant
- target keywords that have multiple, disparate meanings

It is NOT acceptable for marketers to:

- target keywords that are not relevant to their business activities or contain competitors' brand names
- direct search engine users to landing pages that are not relevant to the user's search keywords

Guiding Principle Two – Avoid Unnecessary Repetition and Duplication

Neither the search engines nor users appreciate redundant content appearing in search results. Affiliate programs, cloaking, and doorway pages are common marketing strategies that deliver repetitive content to the search engines.

Key considerations:

- Too much repetition of a keyword on a page can be construed by search engines as a gaming tactic and will likely result in a penalty by the search engine.
- Search engines have duplicate filters to detect identical or near-identical content. They eliminate or ignore pages and sites that are identical.

It is acceptable for marketers to:

- repeat one keyword once in a title tag
- occasionally duplicate a page at a different URL if there is good reason for it from your users' perspectives and the page differs in a non-trivial way

It is NOT acceptable for marketers to:

- repeat the same keywords across numerous pages of the site in order to manipulate the search results
- repeat the same keywords extensively throughout the page in the meta tags, title tags, alt tags, body copy, link text, etc. to the point that you wouldn't want to bring it to the attention of a search engine's representatives
- create pages tailored for each search engine
- otherwise duplicate pages in order to manipulate the search results

Guiding Principle Three – Create Useful, Information-rich Content for Both Human Visitors and Search Engines

Users rely on search engines to present valuable information to them. Content that is not useful frustrates these users and harms the search engine's credibility. And it's a ticking time bomb for you, the marketer.

Key considerations:

- Content abuse is serving content to the search engines that is incomprehensible, useless, or otherwise unsuitable for human viewing.
- Pages with a minimal amount of content aren't typically very useful. Ideally, aim to have at least several hundred words of text content on each page.

It is acceptable for marketers to:

- deliver content that is overtly sales oriented
- customise the site's error pages to make them more intelligible and navigable

It is NOT acceptable for marketers to:

- create pages of dubious value to humans and whose sole function is to obtain high search engine rankings then to direct the user elsewhere (i.e. doorway pages, gateway pages, bridge pages, jump pages)
- create pages that link to such above-mentioned pages of dubious value (i.e. hallway pages)
- stuff keywords into alt tags so they are not friendly to visually impaired users on audible browsers
- machine-generate content to chosen keyword densities
- write or otherwise prepare content that is incomprehensible, useless, or otherwise unsuitable for human viewing but meant solely for the search engines

Guiding Principle Four – Do Not Conceal, Manipulate, or Over-Optimise Content

All types of actions intended to boost ranking, without improving the true value of a page, are considered spamming.

Key considerations:

- All content on your web pages are meant to be seen or detected at all times by your target audience. Poor quality content is content not meant for human viewing.
- Diminishing the value of content by concealing, manipulating or over-optimising it is not good practice. Search engines scrutinise pages that show signs of potential deception, such as no-archive tags or cloaking.

It is acceptable for marketers to:

- optimise content for better search engine rankings when it doesn't diminish the value of it for users
- employ no-archive tags if there is a justifiable reason that users shouldn't be able to access cached pages
- employ cloaking for the sole purpose of sanitising links that are search engine unfriendly (e.g. with session IDs, user IDs or ? & = in the URL)

It is NOT acceptable for marketers to:

- employ cloaking or sneaky redirects to present content to the search engines that does not match the content displayed to the users
- apply optimisation tactics that you would feel uncomfortable revealing to a search engine's representatives
- conceal keyword-rich text within the HTML of a page that is not meant to be visible and/or used at any time (e.g. within comment tags, noscript tags, noframes tags), or obscure keyword-rich text on the page (e.g. white text on a white background, tiny font sizes, layers)
- make overly keyword-rich and/or long H1 tags, title tags, link text, etc. if it detracts from the user experience

Guiding Principle Five – Links Should Be Relevant and Achieved Legitimately

Link farming, the process of creating multiple Web sites whose sole purpose is to link to each other (commonly called free-for-all or FFA websites), does not support Principle One relating to relevance.

Key considerations:

- Relevance is critical.
- A shotgun approach based on "pay, spray and pray" marketing will deliver unqualified 'visitors.'
- Search engines have sophisticated algorithms to detect devious link schemes.

It is acceptable for marketers to:

- buy text ads on sites with high PageRank scores if it's not solely for purposes of artificially manipulating your PageRank
- trade reciprocal links with another website if the users of both sites would find the links relevant and useful

It is NOT acceptable for marketers to:

- buy expired domains that have high PageRank scores for the purpose of funneling that PageRank score to your site
- participate in link farms or free-for-all websites
- turn to the black market of link buying/selling/trading/brokering for purposes of gaming the PageRank algorithm
- post to websites' guestbooks, blogs, or forums with keyword-rich text links for the purposes of gaming the PageRank algorithm

Guiding Principle Six – Follow the Rules

Each search engine has its own Terms of Use and guidelines. Abide by them, or you risk being penalised or banned. Abide by the governing laws too (e.g. trademark, copyright, etc.), or you risk litigation.

Key considerations:

- The search engines expect marketers to adhere to their quality guidelines (e.g. as Google details in its [Guidelines for Webmasters](#) and Yahoo! in [its guidelines](#)). Violators can be doxed in (e.g. via [Google's form](#) or [Yahoo's form](#)) or caught via the engines' sophisticated spam-catching algorithms, at which point the violators may be penalised or banned.
- In compliance with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), Google provides an [Infringement Notification](#) form for copyright owners to enforce their copyright against infringers by removing the infringing pages or disabling access to them. DMCA infringement notices can be submitted to other search engines per these [DMCA notification instructions](#).
- Paid ads should be truthful, representative of your content, and use appropriate language, in accordance with the [Google AdWords Editorial Guidelines](#) and [Overture's Listing Guidelines](#).
- Google's [Terms of Service](#) strictly prohibit automated querying of Google's websites

It is acceptable for marketers to:

- buy text ads on sites with high PageRank scores if it's not solely for purposes of artificially raising PageRank
- submit the main URL of your site within the search engine's submission guidelines

It is NOT acceptable for marketers to:

- infringe on others' copyrights or trademarks
- use competitor trademarks in your meta tags without permission
- buy competitor trademarks as keywords
- wrap another website's content within an invisible frameset (e.g. by an affiliate program participant)
- conduct automated querying to check positions
- post deceiving search ads
- submit a URL using an automated tool or service
- submit numerous pages of one website
- frequently re-submit the same URL