

WHITE PAPER

Search Engine Optimization for Photographers

STARTER GUIDE

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What is SEO and why is it so important to my photography business?

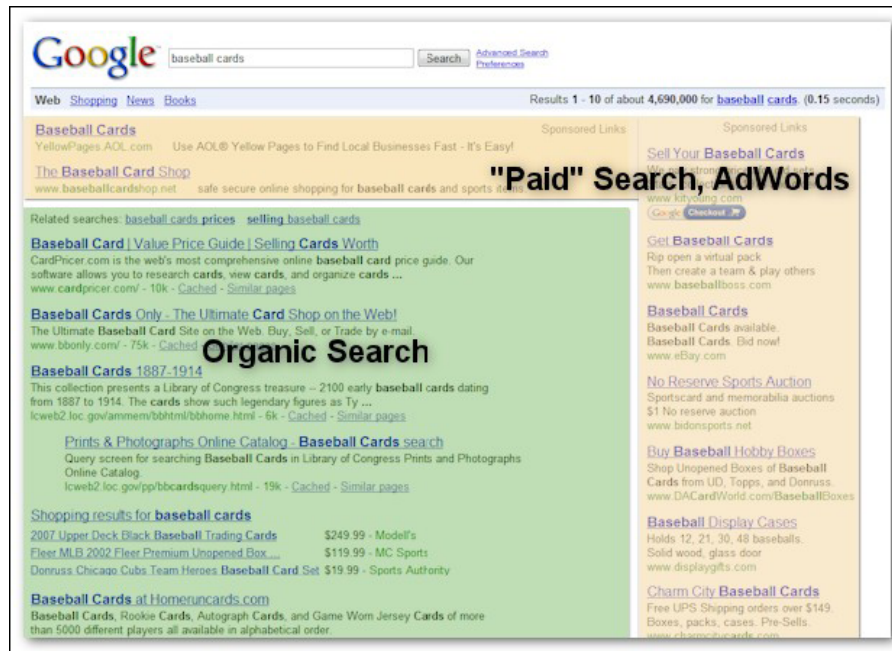
Search engines are the way most people locate and shop for services. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the art and science of achieving free organic search results.

SEO -- in other words -- means getting your web site to appear on the first page or two of any of the major search engines when a person does a search for keywords relevant to your business. For example, if a person is looking for a 'wedding photographer in Atlanta Georgia', wouldn't you love to appear on the first page of Google, Yahoo or MSN?

Well, if you can do that - for FREE - you have just harnessed the power of SEO. And guess what? You can. That is why SEO is so good for business. If done right - you can get FREE visitors to your site, over and over again. Without question, search engine optimization (SEO) is the single most effective method of affordably promoting your photography business.

Ok, now that we understand what SEO is and why it's so valuable to photographers -- let's show you how to do it. Although this guide won't tell you any secrets that'll automatically rank your site first for queries in Google (sorry!), following the best practices outlined below will make it easier for search engines to both crawl and index your content.

Search engine optimization is about making small modifications to parts of your website and constantly testing and adjusting these changes to achieve higher rankings in the search results. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic search results.



Search engine optimization affects only organic search results, not paid or "sponsored" results, such as Google AdWords

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An example may help our explanations, so we've created a fictitious website to follow throughout the guide. For each topic, we've fleshed out enough information about the site to illustrate the point being covered.

Here's some background information about the site we'll use:

- Website/business name: "Atlanta Moments Photography"
- Domain name: atlantamomentsphotography.com
- Focus: Wedding photography, portraits, portfolio, modeling, headshots, corporate photography
- Geographic location / area you provide service: Atlanta, Georgia 30102

Your focus or range of services may be vastly different, but the optimization topics we discuss below should apply to sites and businesses of all types.

Create unique, accurate page titles

A title tag tells both users and search engines what the topic of a particular page is. The <title> tag should be placed within the <head> tag of the HTML document. Ideally, you should create a unique title for each page on your site.

```
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Weddings, Portraits, Headshots | Atlanta Moments Photography</title>
    <meta name="description" content="Atlanta Moments Photography provides wedding,
    portrait, portfolio, and corporate photography services in Atlanta, GA area</meta>
    <meta name="keywords" content="wedding, photography, portraits, professional wedding
    photographer in Atlanta, headshots, portfolio, corporate, Woodstock, Acworth, Georgia,
    GA, 30102, Atlanta Moments Photography</meta>
  </head>
  <body>
  ...
```

The title of the homepage for our photography site, which lists the business name, three main focus areas and the geographic location

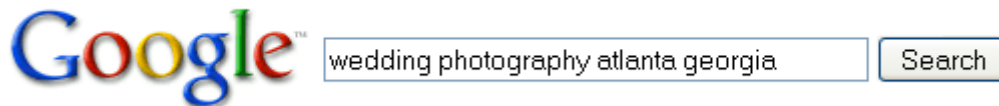
If your document appears in a search results page, the contents of the title tag will usually appear in the first line of the results. Words in the title are bolded if they appear in the user's search query. This can help users recognize if the page is likely to be relevant to their search.

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For example if a user performs the query [wedding photography atlanta georgia] ...



Our page shows up as a result, with the title listed on the first line (notice that the query terms the user searched for appear in bold):

[Weddings, Portraits, Headshots | Atlanta Moments Photography](#)

Atlanta Moments Photography provides **wedding**, portrait, portfolio, and corporate **photography** services in **Atlanta**, GA area ...

www. **atlantamomentsphotography.com/** - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

The title for your homepage should list the major services first (limit to two or three max), the geographic location and finally the name of your business. Notice how the title communicates a lot of relevant information about your business and services and is likely to get clicked by someone searching for those keywords.

Good practices for page title tags

Accurately describe the page's content - Choose a title that effectively communicates the topic of the page's content.

Avoid:

- choosing a title that has no relation to the content on the page
- using default or vague titles like "Untitled" or "New Page 1"

Create unique title tags for each page - Each of your pages should ideally have a unique title tag, which helps Google know how the page is distinct from the others on your site.

Avoid:

- using a single title tag across all of your site's pages or a large group of pages

Use brief, but descriptive titles - Titles can be both short and informative. If the title is too long, Google will show only a portion of it in the search result.

Avoid:

- using extremely lengthy titles that are unhelpful to users
- stuffing unneeded keywords in your title tags

Your site page titles can be uniquely configured on the Web Design > Advanced > Page Titles section of your account at www.moments4ever.com.

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Make use of the "description" meta tag

A page's description meta tag gives Google and other search engines a summary of what the page is about. Whereas a page's title may be a few words or a phrase, a page's description meta tag might be a sentence or two or a short paragraph. Like the <title> tag, the description meta tag is placed within the <head> tag of your HTML document.

```
<html>

  <head>

    <title>Weddings, Portraits, Headshots | Atlanta Moments Photography</title>

    <meta name="description" content=" Atlanta Moments Photography provides wedding,
    portrait, portfolio, and corporate photography services in Atlanta, GA area</meta>

    <meta name="keywords" content="wedding, photography, portraits, professional wedding
    photographer in Atlanta, headshots, portfolio, corporate, Woodstock, Acworth, Georgia,
    GA, 30102, Atlanta Moments Photography </meta>

  </head>

<body>

...

```

Description meta tag is highlighted above.

Description meta tags are important because Google might use them as snippets for your pages. Note that we say "might" because Google may choose to use a relevant section of your page's visible text if it does a good job of matching up with a user's query. Adding description meta tags to your pages is always a good practice in case Google cannot find a good selection of text to use in the snippet.

Snippets appear under a page's title and above a page's URL in a search result (highlighted below). Words in the snippet are bolded when they appear in the user's query. This gives the user clues about whether the content on the page matches with what he or she is looking for.

[Weddings, Portraits, Headshots | Atlanta Moments Photography](#)
Atlanta Moments Photography provides **wedding**, portrait, portfolio, and corporate **photography** services in Atlanta, GA area ...

www.atlantamomentsphotography.com/ - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

Good practices for description meta tags

Accurately summarize the page's content - Write a description that would both inform and interest users if they saw your description meta tag as a snippet in a search result.

Avoid:

- writing a description meta tag that has no relation to the content on the page
- filling the description with only keywords
- copy and pasting the entire content of the document into the description meta tag

You can set your meta description tags on the Web Designer>Advanced>Web Search page of your account at www.moments4ever.com.

Make use of the "keywords" meta tag

The keywords meta tag lists all of the main keywords and key phrases that are relevant to your site or page. It is used by search engines to map the relevancy of your site to a user's search query. The importance of keywords has declined recently because search engines have discovered that they are often abused; however, we still believe that in conjunction with solid page titles, descriptions, and the content within your site's pages, it can have a positive impact in search engine rankings.

Like the <title> and <description> tags, the keywords meta tag is placed within the <head> tag of your HTML document.

```
<html>

  <head>

    <title>Weddings, Portraits, Headshots | Atlanta Moments Photography</title>

    <meta name="description" content=" Atlanta Moments Photography provides wedding,
    portrait, portfolio, and corporate photography services in Atlanta, GA area</meta>

    <meta name="keywords" content=" wedding, photography, portraits, professional
    wedding photographer in Atlanta, headshots, portfolio, corporate, Woodstock, Acworth,
    Georgia, GA, 30102, Atlanta Moments Photography </meta>

  </head>

<body>

...
```

The Keywords meta tag is highlighted above.

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So, how do you determine what keywords are relevant for your site? Firstly, you need to put yourself in your potential customer's shoes to determine what words they would submit to a search engine when they are looking for you. Also, review your web site pages and pick out key phrases and words that describe your business, products or services.

Good practices for keywords meta tags

Be specific, and put the words in priority order - The more specific your keywords the better. It's important to think carefully about what makes your service special, unique - and to imagine how a customer who knows no photography jargon might be searching for that service. Choose the most important of those words and put them in order.

Use short phrases, and think of alternative keywords - Single word keywords will have a lot more competition for top ranking search results than phrases. So be sure to introduce at least a key phrase that a user will likely use to find your service. Also, alternative ways of saying the same thing or alternative spellings can sometimes be useful.

As a general rule, we recommend you start your keyword list with services like 'photography, weddings', then a phrase like 'wedding photographer in atlanta', your business name, and finish it off with the rest of keywords you deem important. Remember, keywords or phrases are separated by commas.

Avoid:

- professional photography jargon like photojournalistic style or camera types
- repeating words in your keywords meta tag if possible
- using too many keywords; after the first ten, search engines mostly ignore them
- using adjectives that are usually not relevant such as beautiful, lovely, best, etc.

You can set your meta keywords tags on the Web Designer>Advanced>Web Search page of your account at www.moments4ever.com.

Promoting your website with Search Engines and Directories

Now that you've done the work of optimizing your site, it's time to attract new customers. The first thing to do is to make sure your site is getting crawled by the major search engines. We advise against using paid submittal services, as the following three search services account for more than 90% of all search traffic and submitting to them is often free.

Google search ****FREE**** <http://www.google.com/addurl?continue=/addurl>

MSN search engine ****FREE**** <http://search.live.com/docs/submit.aspx>

Yahoo site search <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/srchsb/ssb.php>

Secondly, you'll want to get links back to your site. Links back to your site have a tremendous impact on search results. There are few easy and free ways to get links and some that require a little effort on your part. We'll start with the free ones.

Open Directory Project (DMOZ) <http://www.dmoz.org/add.html>

Google Local Business Listings www.google.com/local/add

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In addition to these large directories, there are many other ways of getting links to your site. They include industry specific directories such as photography directories (for a list of services do a Google search for the term 'photographer directories') or local business directories. There are also some paid services such as Yahoo Directory Listing which you may consider, though again, we find that free services (in coordination with other strategies mentioned in this paper) are equally effective.

Promoting your site with Blogs, Social Networking, and Press Releases

To truly harness the power of the web's organic nature, you'll want to be able to continuously create a steady stream of links back to your site. A few ways to achieve this are outlined below.

1. Set-up your own blog and blog about new content or services.

A blog post on your own site letting your customers know that you added something new is a great way to get the word out about new content or services. Include links back to the core areas of your site like new galleries or promotions, and keep your blog as updated as you can.

Google and other search engines will crawl this new content and follow those links, strengthening your search results in the process. It's a simple way to create new keyword rich and relevant content for your website and simple to integrate into your site. Moment4Ever offers seamless blogging integration into its [Photography Website Builder and Hosting](#) service.

2. Social Networking. Use your existing networks to get the word out about your work.

Be sure to provide links in your social networking profiles (facebook, myspace, friendster, linkedin, hi5) back to your site and your blog.

Outside of your existing social networks, you can also create links back to your site by engaging photography or industry conversations. Make it a weekly ritual to visit your favorite industry blogs or forums. Then on a regular basis actually contribute to the conversations by adding relevant and useful comments. Engaging your communities of interest not only builds your profile, but can also provide valuable links back to your website.

3. Write and distribute web based press releases.

Web based press releases can generate instant boosts in traffic, assist in your long term search results, and in some cases get an unexpected boost if picked up on the wire or by other sites. Press releases can be about new services, promotions, or can editorially tell a story that is relevant to your business or your customers. We recommend <http://www.webwire.com/> for affordable web press releases.

Crafting search friendly links back to your site

One final but important note about getting links back to your site is how you create the actual html links back to your site. This is because how the link is constructed will help determine its effectiveness in achieving keyword search relevance. To illustrate this, consider the following two links back to our sample site, and take a guess at which one will have a positive impact on search results.

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[Atlanta Wedding Photography Services](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)

Link structure (how it's made):

```
<a href="http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com">Atlanta Wedding Photography Services</a>
```

Or

[Click here to learn more](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)

Link structure (how it's made):

```
<a href="http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com">Click here to learn more</a>
```

Both links go back to the same site, but the first one ([Atlanta Wedding Photography Services](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)) has a very descriptive, keyword relevant text within the link. This link will be followed by search engine crawlers and will create an association between the words Atlanta Wedding Photography Services and your site. The second one ([Click here to learn more](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)) is simply reinforcing an association between Click here to learn more and Atlanta Moments Photography; thus it does not help your search results on the types of keyword relevant searches your potential customers will be doing.

Recommended Links to Promote Your Site

As you go about posting your site or links to your site among the various search engines, directories, blogs, social networking sites and press releases - we recommend you adopt the following links to best reinforce key search terms to your site. Notice how they are all variations of the same keywords relevant to our sample website:

- Website/business name: "Atlanta Moments Photography"
- Domain name: atlantamomentsphotography.com
- Focus: Wedding photography, portraits, portfolio, modeling, headshots, corporate photography
- Geographic location / area you provide service: Atlanta, Georgia, 30102

[Atlanta Wedding Photography Services](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)

Link structure (how it's made):

```
<a href="http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com">Atlanta Wedding Photography Services</a>
```

This link reinforces the keywords Atlanta, Wedding, Photography, and Services.

[Portrait and Modeling Photographer in Georgia](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)

Link structure (how it's made):

```
<a href="http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com">Portrait and Modeling Photographer in Georgia</a>
```

This link reinforces the keywords Portrait, Modeling, Photographer, and Georgia.

[Headshot Photography in Atlanta, GA 30102](http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com)

Link structure (how it's made):

```
<a href="http://www.atlantamomentsphotography.com">Headshot Photography in Atlanta, GA 30102</a>
```

This link reinforces the keywords Headshot, Photography, Atlanta, GA, and 30102.

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A simple guideline for deciding what keywords to use when linking back to your site is to think: *what keywords will my customers use when searching for my services?* Be creative. Experiment, and see what works. The beautiful thing about using search engine optimization to market your business is that you can monitor exactly how users are finding your site. You can actually see what works and what doesn't. And this leads to the final piece of any successful SEO strategy, measuring results.

Measuring the Results of Your SEO Marketing

Measuring the results of your SEO and making continuous improvements is the key to any successful SEO marketing strategy. Luckily this is one of the easiest things to do. All you have to do is set up what is called Web Analytics. Web Analytics is nothing more than a little bit of code you include in your site that allows you to obtain detailed information about how users are finding your website and how many visitors you are getting.

This is possible because whenever someone clicks on a link to your site, tons of information about that customer is captured like what site she is coming from, what keywords she searched for, where she is located geographically, and more. Once you have web analytics set up on your site, you will have access to reports that allow you analyze what SEO activities are producing results and which are not. For example, you might notice that after every blog post or press release you see a spike in traffic. Or, you may see that certain keywords from a certain search engine seem to attract the most site visitors. You can then focus on those keywords and on getting included in other search engines.

Keep in mind that SEO takes time and is a cumulative effort. You will have to try many different recommendations mentioned in this article (and some others of your own) and give it time to have an impact. But we are sure that with a little patience and effort, you will soon see the huge advantages this marketing strategy has over any other.

You can set up web analytics for your Moments4Ever hosted website by going to the Web Designer>Advanced>Web Analytics page of your account at www.moments4ever.com.

Best of luck with your SEO endeavors!

Sincerely,
The Moments4Ever Team

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