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5 Critical Signs that Your Web Development Company Does Not Understand Search Engines

It's a beautiful website, but is it really working for you?

Many web design companies are strong on the graphic interface but weak on their understanding of technology and the Internet, leaving you with the option of hiring a separate Search Engine Optimization company down the road, or trying to do it yourself.

We have assembled a short checklist to help you evaluate the work of the companies you are considering hiring. When you visit their site, and the sites listed in their portfolio, these are the items you DON'T want to find.

1. Text embedded in images.

Why: Search engines cannot read text that is built into an image.

How to check: Place your mouse over the content areas. If your cursor does not change from the arrow into the text selector state (the elongated "I"), then the area is an image. This is acceptable for small blocks of text (for example for navigation buttons).

2. Ineffective page titles.

Why: Search engines view this as the first usable block of text on the page and most use it as the first line of the search results. Each page should have a unique, useful, and short description of the page contents.

How to check: Read the text in the very top area of your browser window - that coloured bar where it says the name of the browser ("Microsoft Internet Explorer," "Netscape Navigator," etc.).

3. Flash or Forms-based Navigation.

Why: In order for content to be included in the search engine, it must be able to access the page.

How to check: If navigation bar is a drop-down form (requires you to click a "Go" or "Submit" button) or if you use your right mouse button while hovering over the buttons and it says "About Macromedia Flash Player..." on the last line, check to see if there are also plain text links to each of the pages included within the content, or at the very bottom of the page.

These last two items are for the more experienced browser users:

4. Frames.

Why: Frames, when used properly, can be a very useful tool. Unfortunately, search engines can only index one area at a time, and when the content is returned in the search results, the link is only to a part of the page.

How to check: Go to "**View > Page Source**" and see if it contains the tag `<frameset>`.

5. JavaScript or CSS in the web page itself. (Advanced)

Why: The search engine does not view the page the way you do through your browser - it only sees the source code. With this extra text included, it sees the important content further down, and assigns it less priority.

How to check: Go to "**View > Page Source**" and see if it contains the tags `<script>` or `<style>` with a large block of data that is invisible to the final page.

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