

# Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) – What Does it Involve?

The process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to your site via organic search results is called Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). Organic search results are the free listings on search engines and are not to be confused with the paid or sponsored listings (such as Google Adwords).

The image shows a Google search interface for the query "graphic design in chelmsford". The search results are divided into two sections: "Paid For Listings" and "Organic Listings".

**Paid For Listings:** This section is highlighted with a black box and labeled "Paid For Listings" with arrows. It contains three sponsored links:

- Breathe Design** ([www.breathe-design.co.uk](http://www.breathe-design.co.uk)): Graphic Design In Essex Please Call 01245 256 661
- Chelmsford Graphic Design** ([ApprovedGraphicDesigners.co.uk](http://ApprovedGraphicDesigners.co.uk)): Get fast, free no obligation Quotes from leading designers in your area
- Essex Website Designers** ([www.divadanidesign.com](http://www.divadanidesign.com)): Website design in Chelmsford. Great results. Affordable prices.

**Organic Listings:** This section is highlighted with an orange box and labeled "Organic Listings" with an arrow. It contains several natural search results:

- Vanilla Gecko Web & Graphic Design - Chelmsford, Essex**: A design company based in Chelmsford, Essex offering both website design & graphic design - whatever your goal, Vanilla Gecko offers a totally bespoke ... ([www.vanillagecko.co.uk/](http://www.vanillagecko.co.uk/)) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- Graphic Designers in Chelmsford, Essex UK**: Graphic Designers in Chelmsford - business contact details, location maps and customer reviews. Search the database for Essex business information, ... ([www.accessplace.com](http://www.accessplace.com)) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- Graphic Design Essex | Web Design Essex | Graphic Design Chelmsford**: Space and Time Design offer Graphic Design and Web Design in Chelmsford, Essex. We design Logos, Brochures, Websites and other print and design. ([www.spaceandtimedesign.com/](http://www.spaceandtimedesign.com/)) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- Graphic Designers - Identity - Branding - Graphic Design Essex**: Graphic Design Essex and Print Design services from Chelmsford based Enovate Design. ... Based in Chelmsford (Essex), Enovate Design provides graphic design ... ([www.graphic-design-essex.co.uk/](http://www.graphic-design-essex.co.uk/)) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

Achieving a high ranking for your site in these free listings involves time and a lot of hard work. Results can often take months to see.

The bare bones of SEO involves editing your website's content and coding to make it more relevant to specific keywords and ultimately make it more visible to search engines.

## It All Starts with Good Design

Good SEO starts with your web designer/developer. The way your site is coded 'behind the scenes' makes a huge difference and a good web designer will know the tricks needed to help your site get found by the search engines. Without wanting to get too technical, this would include, among other things:

- Proper use of the *title* tag.
- Proper use of *Meta* tags, especially the *description* tag.
- Correct use of *p*, *h1*, *h2*, *h3*, etc (paragraph and heading/subheading tags. For example *h1* would be the main heading, *h2* a sub heading, etc).
- Inclusion of *alt* tags for images (i.e. an image description).

- Friendly URLs – in other words,  
<http://www.vanillagecko.co.uk/articles/search-engine-optimisation-tips.html>  
is much better than  
<http://www.vanillagecko.co.uk/1/article-32.html>
- Simple site navigation.
- An xml site map, which helps the search engines find all the pages of your site.

This is the bare minimum that needs to be done to make your site not only seen by the search engines, but also accessible to all users.

Something you should also avoid at the design stage is an all flash website. Search engines just can't read the flash content and so your site won't be indexed effectively. Although some search engines are making advances in reading flash content, they're not quite there yet and an all flash site is a bad idea, especially for small businesses.

Of course there is no problem with using flash in moderation. In fact it can make your site much more exciting and is often the best solution for things like image galleries.

## Write Quality Content that is Relevant

To really maximise your site's potential, there is more to SEO than what your designer can do for you. This starts with good quality, relevant content. In fact, compelling content is more likely to influence the success of your website than anything else. Not only will your visitors like it, but they will be more likely to direct others to your site too.

Here are a few pointers:

1. **Write for your visitor, not the search engines** – It is so easy to get caught up in making your site visible to search engines that you forget your content is going to be read by real people! Once you've got people to your site, you need to keep them there...and keep them coming back for more.
2. **Well written copy** – Grammatically correct copy that is easy for your visitors to follow is important. It should be enjoyable to read.
3. **Make it relevant to the reader** – When you write your copy, you should consider the actual keywords your visitors are likely to use when searching for your site. If you scatter these keywords throughout your copy, you are likely to produce positive results in your search rankings. Also, think about the type of language that different visitors use: for example, a more seasoned photographer might search for an *IS lens* while someone less experienced may search for *image stabilizer lens*. You should try and account for this while writing your content, dropping in both keywords if you can.
4. **Keep your content fresh** – So you've had your site designed, but you can't just sit back and hope for the best. Keeping your content fresh by updating it or adding new things regularly will keep your visitors interested.

## Don't Get Burned!

Of course, it is important to point out that there are two sides to SEO and it must be done properly for it to work, as you can be penalised if you go about it the wrong way. At the very least, bad SEO will hurt your rankings but in extreme cases, you could be banned from the search results all together!

Although it is good to drop your keywords into your content as much as possible, it is important to keep the content relevant for your visitors and of course keep it legible and realistic. Overstuffing your copy with keywords (keyword stuffing) is counter-productive so you must maintain a delicate balance, keeping the copy flowing naturally and only inserting the keywords where appropriate. Not only will you not dash your chances with the search engines, but your visitors will appreciate it too.

Some unscrupulous SEO companies may encourage you to employ underhand tactics, but you should refuse as ultimately you will end up paying for it. Things to avoid are:

- Hidden text or text that is the same colour as the background will not go down well with the search engines. Your visitors may not be able to see all those extra keywords, but the search engines will and they won't like it one bit.
- Don't duplicate your content. Duplicate pages will not be ranked.
- Don't obsessively exchange links. Linking to a site just because they linked to you is never a good idea. Only link to sites that would be useful to your visitors and only link *from* sites that are relevant, useful and something you'd actually like to be associated with.
- Avoid link farms like the plague. Link farms are sites with the sole purpose of linking to other sites...lots of them and not necessarily to sites that have any connection with your subject matter at all. It is a misconception that the more sites that link to you, the higher you rank in the search results.

Generally, any 'secret' strategies that have no benefit to your visitors should be avoided at all costs.

## No One can Guarantee a #1 Ranking on Google

It is so important that you are aware of this. We get many calls from SEO companies (yes, even though we are a web design company!) claiming that they can guarantee to get us at the very top of the organic search results and it concerns us how many people may fall for it. The key to good SEO is to understand how the search engines work – and even that is always changing. Anyone that claims they can guarantee the top spot in Google's organic results is being untruthful. There are no "special relationships" with Google and no "priority submissions", so beware.

## In Conclusion

The key to Search Engine Optimisation is providing a quality website with good content that caters exactly to the needs of your visitors. SEO should be employed right from the start at the design stage continue as you develop and expand your website. There is no magical secret - writing relevant, compelling copy is the way to go if you

want to rank high in the organic search results and keeping it fresh and up to date is what keeps you there.

Google and other search engines will list sites in the order they see fit according to their ranking criteria. Only genuine SEO attempts will make a difference to your sites rankings.

For more articles on how to promote your website, visit [www.vanillagecko.co.uk/articles](http://www.vanillagecko.co.uk/articles)

To discuss your website design with Vanilla Gecko or request a FREE, no obligation quote phone 07879 815753 or visit our website at [www.vanillagecko.co.uk](http://www.vanillagecko.co.uk)