The Four Layers of the SEO Model
How to Rank Higher in the Search Engines
By Steve Wiideman

Steve ✋ Wiideman
Orange County SEO Expert

The Four Layers of the SEO Model
"How to Rank Higher in the Search Engines"

By SEO Expert
Steve Wiideman

ANALYZE

OPTIMIZE

DEVELOP

PROMOTE

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Introduction

Who is This Book For?

If you have a business with or without a website, and your customers can't find you on the top 10 results in Google, MSN, Yahoo! or any of the other search engines **while searching for your product or service**, then this book for you.

Likewise, if you are on a budget that doesn't include Internet marketing, then The Four Layers of the SEO Model is the tool you need to help launch a profitable online strategy.

This book isn't for multi-million dollar corporations who already get a substantial amount of web traffic through Internet Advertising. This eBook isn't about advertising; it's about creating a search-engine friendly website at virtually no cost.

What You Should Already Know Before Reading This eBook

This eBook was created for both technical and non-technical readers. *You do not need to be tech-savvy to get through this eBook*. However, you will need a general knowledge of the Internet, including basic terms, such as Browser, Address Bar, Hyperlink or "Link", and Search Engine.

If you have never used the Internet before, you may find this guide to be perplexing. We highly recommend you discover the Internet and its use before reading on.

My Philosophy on Search Engine Optimization

I've been around since the archaic Gopher Server days and have literally "lived the Internet" for well over a decade. I hold a Bachelor of Science in E-Business Management and developed or been a major contributor to well over 100 websites. I survived the "Dot Com Crash of 2000" and remain a true believer in the long-term dependency of Internet in our lives.

That being said, here is my philosophy: I believe that through effective Search Engine Optimization, anyone (and I mean *anyone*) can build a massive presence on the Internet. The key to success in SEO is planning, executing, measuring, and not giving up. Those are the unbendable principles of this new technology, and if you abide them, they will guarantee you success.

Thank you for purchasing this eBook. I hope it will benefit you in the same lucrative way it has benefited so many other readers.

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The Four Layers of the SEO Model

When I started building this model in my head several years ago, I noticed an undeniable similarity to the basic project management structure I had used so many times before on eCommerce projects. Then I remembered the 7 Layers of the OSI Model that I'd been introduced to in my computer networking courses. These two completely different IT fields inspired me to create the Four Layers of the SEO Model, a visual representation of an effective SEO project.

In my opinion, this model is much easier to remember than those of the OSI Model, not just because there 3 less layers, but because executing on these practices can have an absolutely massive effect on sales. So here they are in all of their glory:

The Four Layers of the SEO Model

| ANALYZE |
| OPTIMIZE |
| DEVELOP |
| PROMOTE |

Pretty simple isn't it? It's easy to compare this model to the Project Management model, which normally includes planning, pre-design, design, development, testing and hypercare. Only these layers work synergistically, each fully dependent on the others.

By Analyze, we are referring to time spent on evaluating keywords and peeking in on your competitor's game book, which includes performing backlink checks on competitor websites.

To Optimize is to design a website that guides the search engines to topic-discovery, rather than having the search engines make their own guess about what your site is about. This layer involves a handful of common SEO Best Practices and a few tricks I've learned over the years that definitely make a difference.

Developing a webpage is only free when you have the time to add mass amounts of content via the SEO Best Practices of the Optimize Layer. We'll discuss this in more detail, but other low-cost tools are available to boost ranking. A few of these tools include RSS (Really Simple Syndication), web forums, and blogs.

The last layer is the Promote Layer. It's at this critical layer that you will get a few high-quality links pointing to your website.

In the sections ahead, we'll talk in detail about each of these layers as they relate to Search Engine Optimization.

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The Analyze Layer

The Analyzer layer contains two parts: Keywords and Competition. Both play an equally important part in discovering what needs to be on your website to rank #1 on the major search engines.

The Importance of Keywords

 Keywords are like puzzle pieces to the search engines, every word used on a webpage contributes to the big picture of what a site is all about. Used in the appropriate densities, it is these keywords that will ultimately determine how many people you can reach through the search engines.

Users type in keywords in the Search field to find what they are looking for. The search engine then reaches into its database to find the most relevant result. Relevant results are driven by different factors, mainly by keywords, but also by traffic and the number of links pointing in from external websites.

Getting the Right Keywords is Everything

So how do you know which keywords get searched for the most? There are literally hundreds of Keyword Analyzers on the Web. Only one has passed the test of time and to-date recognized as the authority on keyword searches: WordTracker. At the time of this writing, they are number one, not just because they have the largest following, but because their database spans 120 days, not just a single month like some others.

Another reason I recommend WordTracker is because of the results you generate from running queries on their database. The results return a Keyword Effective Index (KEI) that not only calculates the number of estimated searches, but also includes competition numbers in the calculation. In other words, Number of Searches / Number of Competing Websites = KEI.

Hint to Using Keyword Analyzers:

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Your Competition Can Run, but They Can't Hide

There are several things we are going to need to analyze when it comes to competitor websites, but as with any project there is a specific sequencing you're going to need to follow in order to achieve quality results. Here is an outline of the tasks and sequence, which we'll elaborate on in a moment:

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1. Obtain a hefty list of potential keywords using a Keyword Analyzer.
2. Perform searches to see who is in the top 5 results.
3. List the competitors in the top 5 of your most valuable keyword searches.
4. Run a backlink check to count inbound links and to find out what keywords they are targeting.
5. List any keywords you discover that weren't tested in the Keyword Analyzer.
6. Analyze the top competitor sites using an SEO Best Practices List.
7. List the best practices and keyword densities used by your competitors. (we'll revisit this item later as well).

When you're done, you'll know what keywords to use. You'll know which competitors you'll be competing against and where they stand in the search engine results. I know this seems like a lot of work, and take it from me, it's worth every minute.

There are tools available that perform ALL of the 7 items above and could save you hundreds of hours. Regardless of what you think you are worth per hour, it is definitely worth the investment to chip in for one of these all-in-one applications.

If you choose to go this route, here are our software recommendations:

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Analyzing Backlinks

Item 4 above (running backlink checks) involves using simple or sophisticated software to run queries on the major search engines. These queries return results that include how many external web pages are linking to the competitor, what keywords are used in the actual text of the links, what PageRank the inbound links come from, what keywords are in the title of the page holding the inbound links, and more.

The best tool, of course it isn't the free one, is:

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The Proof is in the Searching

To fully appreciate the value of the backlinks, perform a search on Google for the phrase "click here". Notice that Adobe's download page is the first result. Yet, nowhere on the page is there any text containing the phrase "click here". So how do you explain the phenomenon? With backlinks, that's how. Use your Backlink Analyzer to see how many sites use the words "click here" in their link text.

http://www.stevewiideman.com/

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Analyzing the SEO Best Practices of Your Competitors

We'll talk in more detail in later sections about the specific Best Practices I use personally. For the purpose of this simple competitor analysis, I recommend using an automated tool to save you hours of time. A terrific free tool you could use can be found at:

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The Optimize Layer

There are several hundred things you can do that would be considered "optimizing a webpage", but for the scope of this eBook I'm only going to cover the ones that have the largest impact to your ranking. You can find more optimization tips at my website (www.stevewiideman.com) and at www.ocinternetadvertising.com.

Optimization involves using the right keywords, in the right locations, and in the right densities. It also involves creating source code that is intuitive to the search engine robots. In other words, only displaying what you want them to see by hiding programming and formatting as much as possible.

First, we'll discuss the Pre-Design Phase of the Optimization Layer, which involves using the keywords you uncovered in the Analyze Layer to help you develop "relevant content" (seen as relevant to the search engines and users).

Second, we'll look at the actual coding of your website and things you can do to clean up (Optimize) your web pages. It's here that we'll be analyzing keyword densities, Meta tags, link text, and other criteria for an optimized website.

See **Appendix A** for a condensed version of my detailed SEO Best Practices Model. Use this guideline as your checklist for best results. This is the checklist I personally use for my clients to do search engine optimization work. You may also want to refer to Google's Webmaster Guidelines for more tips.

Pre-Design Phase

This phase could consume you, so I highly recommend using MS Project or Excel to map out your strategy and tasks in terms of milestones and deadlines. Trust me, if I didn't set deadlines, I could easily spend a month on a phase that I could get the most important pieces from in about a week.

First, have all your applicable keywords in hand before starting the design. These are the keywords we dug up in the Analyze Layer. Using "assumed keywords" is the worse possible gamble you could make; take the time to uncover the most valuable keywords for your website.

Second, use a program like

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Linking to External Websites

I consider the first 5 bullets of my Best Practices List fairly intuitive, but the six one (creating external links) might raise your eyebrow. Let's discuss this step in greater detail so you can fully understand where I'm coming from.

Authority sites provide huge amounts of information, but without linking to other websites they can become a "spider trap", meaning the webcrawlers cannot leave the site to continue their journey. Everything you can think of is analyzed by the search engines, including these external links, so I can't emphasis enough how important it is to create at least 1-3 per page.

Finding quality external websites to link to is a simple task. Just go to:

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The Design Phase: Finding the Best CSS Template

The next bullet in my SEO Best Practices Checklist is obtaining a soft-color website template that strictly uses Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). CSS helps keep your page's file size down; it centralizes text and page formatting, and ultimately provides the search engines with output that is easier to interpret.

Avoid the temptation to use Flash or heavy JavaScript. Not only do they increase the page's load time, but can include a lot of code, which is measured with the text on your page to determine the overall usefulness. Once your site is generating traffic and has a healthy number of incoming links, you can safely (and gradually) start adding more content.

Here are a few sites I have used in the past on my quest for the Best Template:

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Explaining My Page Guidelines

If you've read my guidelines in the appendix you're probably thinking "if I'm using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), then why are you having me add all of these old HTML tags?" This is the true magic of SEO and may be the most important part of the Optimization Layer. See, once you've formatted the webpage using CSS, there is

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virtually nothing left on the page other than META tags and a few DIV tags; basically you've got a clean slate to work from.

At this point the search engines see your site as containing lots of text, but they don't know how to translate it, and they don't know what points your site is trying to make. This is where the heading tags come in:

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Explaining the Title and META Tag Guidelines

META Tags aren't being used nearly as much as they once were. In fact, Google doesn't give any weight to the Keywords META tag whatsoever. However, nearly all search engines use the Title and Description tags in determining relevance and as the text that will appear in the search engine results.

Misuse of these tags could result in ranking penalties; not using them at all could result in not being included in the search results page. Therefore the guidelines should be strictly followed.

Keyword Density Explained

In my eyes there are really 3 different keyword densities I need to be concerned about: one-word, two-word, and three-word densities. You could find keyword densities in everything from the title to the content. Basically what we're talking about here is how many times your keywords appear in the page in proportion to other text used on the page.

I've found that the best tool for analyzing keyword density is actually a free tool on:

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The robots.txt File

This simple little file can get you listed or keep you from ever being listed. The robots.txt file tells the search engines whether or not you would like to be indexed, and if so, which pages on your website you would not like to be indexed.

Here are some examples of how to use the robots.txt file:

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Using Google Sitemap Technology

Google is now offering a way to exclusively list every page you would like indexed in one file, called **sitemap.xml**. Pages not listed in the sitemap.xml can still be indexed during the Googlebot's normal monthly crawl; this is just a way to almost guarantee inclusion in the Google directory.

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Testing the Site for CSS and HTML Corrections

There are hundreds of tools and websites that offer free CSS and HTML validation tools. What I use most of the time comes with the Web Position software. I like using this tool because I can setup a schedule and run weekly or monthly reports. This insures that I will know what needs to be fixed without proactively having to run a report when I have time.

If you're on a budget and can't afford such a tool, the World Wide Web Consortium offers free tools to validate both CSS and HTML. Depending on the size of your website (and the number of pages), using these free tools could take a very long time. Here are the links to the free validation tools:

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Performing Broken Links Tests

Broken links on a website can get you penalized, so be sure to run a broken link check anytime you make a change to your website. Search engine spiders hate broken links because they act as sort of a deceiving dead-end; in other words, avoid them all costs!

I use Web Position to schedule and run weekly link validations for all of my websites. If the e-mail Web Position sends me is empty, I know my site is fine. If there are bad links, I can see what pages they are on, make the necessary corrections.

A free tool is offered by:

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Find an Editor for Syntax and Readability

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My wife is my biggest critic and she loves to tell me I'm wrong. So when I asked her for help with content editing she pulled out her red marker and really let me have it. She never hesitates to include "I don't understand" in areas that require clarification. Now I know my sites are not only without spelling errors, but are understandable as well.

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The Develop Layer

As I mentioned at the end of the last section, the Develop Layer is by far the most technical part of this eBook. Don't get discouraged though. You can still get the ranking you desire without this section, but it is a great "organic" method of maintaining your ranking without spending extra time on the next layer, the Promote Layer. At the end of this section, I'll help you setup a Requirements document for your developer (if you choose to hire one).

Developing your website is both for your visitors and for the search engines. It pleases the visitors to have fresh content to read and interact with and is a good reference point for up-to-date information. Development impresses the search engines, because it increases your keyword densities, heightens your relevancy, and provides a continuum of fresh content for the webcrawlers to gobble up.

The Most Effective Ways to Develop Your Site for SEO

1. Automating your Google Sitemap.
2. Add RSS for others to borrow content and to pull content from other sites.
3. Include Blogs and Web Forums to feed fresh content to search engine spiders.
4. Install an integrated Affiliate System to pay visitors for sharing your website.
5. Install web site analytics via software or online provider.
6. SSI and dynamic content.

Automating Your Google Sitemap

In the Optimize Layer we looked at creating a simple one-page xml file to help Google index all the important pages of your website. Believe it or not, Google has a program you can actually install on your web server that will automatically index every page on your website and feed it to Google for you. All you have to do is install the tool and run it.

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Explaining RSS

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Feeds are snippets of information pulled via RSS. Though for me, learning RSS wasn't so simple and if you Google search for it, you'll see that the developers using it like to keep it that way. The philosophy behind RSS is to provide a way for other websites to borrow content from one another.

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The Power of Blogs and Web Forums

Blogs are simple pages that look similar to a journal. Normally the site owner and site staff will post messages to the blog. Visitors are usually able to post comments if they like. Having a blog adds clean, simple-to-write content for your site.

A Web Forum is an environment where users can interact on your website, leaving behind a potentially large amount of keywords and content for the search engine spiders to gobble up. It's a way to get users to want to revisit your website (responding to posts) while adding free content for you at the same time.

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Effective Forum Example:

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Installing an Affiliate System

This new trend in marketing has become a real phenomenon in recent times. An Affiliate System allows users to sign up as an "affiliate" and make money through sales commissions. The programming creates an Affiliate ID and hands the user a custom URL to send out via e-mail or to post on a website(s). Once installed, all you have to do post a link on your site and periodically monitor your Affiliate Control Panel.

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Installing Web Analytics

The only way to track user-behavior on your site is through web analytics. Sure, you can get some basic info from your control panel, such as how many visitors you had, which browser they are using, what page they left from, etc. But the true value of web analytics can only be leveraged through a professional provider or sophisticated software.

Here are my recommended Web Analytics providers:

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SSI and Dynamic Content

So you've got some time on your hands and you become CSharp, ASP or PHP savvy. All of these programming languages are fundamental to creating Server Side Includes (SSI). What you see when you open a website in your browser is the rendered HTML page. It's also what the search engines see. What you and the search engine don't see is the programming and code before the page is rendered. The code is hidden.

Here's an example of how this works:

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Developing Your Project Proposal (Requirements)

If you are planning to hire a programmer to do the above work for you, it's important that you have a very detailed Project Proposal assembled. This proposal protects you and provides the programmer with a clear view of what's expected of him or her.

To keep this simple, your proposal should include the following:

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My recommendations for finding quality programmers:

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The Promote Layer

Regardless of how wonderful you have done on the first three layers, your website may still be isolated from the rest of the Web if you don't spend any time on this last extremely important layer. The Promote Layer is about developing a strategy to drive a continuum of traffic to your website.

A Little History on Website Promotion

Web site promotion went from being a free exchange of links to being an unbelievably expensive industry. It use to only take a quick e-mail to get a link put up on someone else's site. Everything was friendly back when the Internet first started taking off. Then came Google.

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A Quick Review of PageRank

There are only two main ranking mediums you need to be concerned about:

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Don't Get Lost in Internet Marketing

There are several thousand Internet marketing agencies out there that would love to take your money. They'll brag about their "network" and their "reach" and entice you by showing you some of their big-wig clients. Don't fall for it. Most of these companies will simply add a page for you on one or more of their websites, send out a quick online press release, possibly send a few thousand fake visits your way, and then tell you it's not their fault that you're not selling anything.

Internet marketing isn't brain science. You just need a good strategy and a basic understanding of accepted Internet marketing principles…

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Develop a Strategy

Using Excel or MS Project, map out the phases of your Promotion Plan. Give yourself plenty of time, especially if you are an entrepreneur with a day job. My strategies all have durations of 6 months to 2 years depending on competition and client goals.

Your strategy should include the mediums you plan to utilize (which we'll discuss in the next few sections), the time you plan to spend on each phase, and the budget (if any) you plan to allocate for each phase.

Here's a quick generic sample of a 1 year strategy I've used. Keep in mind that we don't start the Promotion Layer strategies until we have completed the first three layers of the model.

Sample Strategy (Generic)
Start Date 01/01/05

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Start with the Basics

Submit to Free Directories

There are literally thousands of free places to post your link; you just need to know where to find them. Here's my list:

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Pay the Piper

Paying for submissions will definitely give your site a quick boost in ranking, but you have to keep in mind a variable most SEO's forget about: Link Aging. After awhile the value of a one-way link diminishes. Search engines are looking for fresh content so if you're going to pay-to-play, do it sparingly and at intervals.

If you have a budget and can afford a reasonable amount of initial spending, here is where I would put my money:

Pay to Play Directories

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Post Where Your Competitors Post

In the Analyze Layer, you created an index of websites where your competitors are listed. Hopefully you used:

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Post Where Your Competitors Don't

Believe it or not, most of your competitors are not yet investing in Link Development. Chances are they're paying some advertising company thousands of dollars for rich media or banner ads, and not getting the results they had hoped for. So you've already got an edge, and here's how to exploit it:

Three Places to Get Awesome Linkage

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Allow Others to Sell For You

By offering an affiliate program to your guests you open a whole new window of opportunity. The obvious downside is that you'll have to pay a commission for each sale made through an affiliate link. Depending on your particular industry, you may want to consider increasing your cost to compensate for the overhead.

Nearly every successful website built from the ground up by people like you and I offers an affiliate program. Your affiliates want to make some easy cash, so they signup and blast your URL on every website they can think of; from MySpace and TagWorld to their own homepages. Some affiliates even use pay-per-click advertising, depending on the demand and return.

I like to use this tool:

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Send Out Press Releases at Least Once Per Month

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How can writing a press release help you drive traffic? Simple, online press releases are designed for mass distribution and for acquiring a huge amount of one-way links. Every time someone syndicates (RSS) content from a website holding your press release, the syndicated site is making your content (including links) viewable to their entire audience.

Whether they are syndicating from your website or from a third party site such as:

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If you're taking the manual route, here's a few websites you can submit your press release to:

A Few Press Release Websites

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Purchase Text Links

If you're reading up on SEO, you should know that there is a lot of controversy around the buying of text links. In the past, Google has frowned on webmasters purchasing links just for the sake of positioning in their search results. After all, they are trying to display only the most relevant results to their patrons, as opposed to confusing or non-relevant sites.

We covered Google Bombs in the Analyze Layer, but I'd like to go over a few other principles you should keep in mind when purchasing links. I call these my 4 Principles of Link Buying.

4 Principles of Link Buying

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A Few Popular Link Brokers

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A Couple Link Development Firms

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E-mail Marketing

If you're not sending out e-mails to your customers or offering a free newsletter on your website, you're losing out on potential traffic. With effective e-mail marketing, you're only marketing to people who have asked to marketed to (it's called Opt-In). In other words, they want you to send them information periodically. Think push versus pull.

In my newsletters I put a few sentences of:

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Advertising Offline

When you advertise offline you're touching a whole different market. Many people today aren't very computer savvy; some have never even been to Google or MSN.com. By advertising offline, you're influencing non-web users to try something new. My advice: offer a substantial discount in your offline ads, such as a free item. Also try the "register online to win" sweepstakes strategy. That seems to be a growing trend to get people to start using the Web.

Where to Advertise Offline

Here are my suggestions for getting started with offline advertising:

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Recap

The Promotion Layer is the driving force behind the long-term effectiveness of your website, in regards to driving and sustaining traffic growth. There are many ways to promote your site, but by far the most effective is through link development **with your keywords in the link text**. Other mediums that also have an impact on residual promotion include e-mail marketing campaigns and distributing press releases.

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The four layers of the SEO model are: Analyze, Optimize, Develop and Promote. Each layer builds on the previous one and together these layers can help you rank at the top of all the search engine results pages.

SEO isn't brain surgery; all it takes is a good strategy and proper execution. Try networking with other entrepreneurs on sites like WebmasterWorld.com and YoungEntrepreneur.com. Keep notes of everything you try so when the project is over you can go back and adjust your strategy for next time.

Feel free to also visit my homepage at SteveWiideman.com and my Internet marketing site, OC Internet Advertising, for more articles, tools and support. Thank you for purchasing my eBook and good luck with your Search Engine Optimization!

Copywriter

Steve Wiideman

Steve Wiideman is an IBM Global Services veteran with over 10 years of IT background. Steve holds a Bachelor of Science in E-Business Management and won the 2006 CCA National G.R.E.A.T. Award.

Steve has built and marketed several successful websites for clients and his own organization. With over a decade of web design and e-commerce experience, Steve now does individual and group training on Search Engine Optimization strategies.

The Four Layers of the SEO Model
How to Rank Higher in the Search Engines
By Steve Wiideman

Steve Wiideman's Best Practices of Search Engine Optimization Checklist

☑ Use a spreadsheet and write out your anticipated milestone dates
☑ Have all applicable keywords in hand before starting the design

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