

A hand holding a magnifying glass with a gold frame and a black handle. The magnifying glass is positioned over the title text, which is written in a large, bold, serif font. The word 'Befriending' is in black, and 'The Spider' is in red. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

# Befriending The Spider

Have you ever wondered how your company, even as a market leader in its category, still happens to get buried twenty pages deep, in a Google-search by your customers? Even worse, unknown players sit on top of the results page, channelling crores of rupees in business away from you. You need help. If not from the Spiderman, then at least from a spider bot.

**S**earch Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a systematic, inexpensive, thought-intensive procedure that helps a website get a higher ranking in search engines. In simple words, effective SEO makes sure that your page appears within the top results when

somebody searches, using related keywords on Google, Yahoo!, MSN, or other such search engines. In this cyber age it is as effective a marketing tool as print and television advertising, if not more so.

In Benefit May 2006, we

presented a strong case for SEO through the success stories of Seasons India ([www.seasonsindia.com](http://www.seasonsindia.com)) and Pramod Maruti Parts ([www.pramodautomotiveparts.com](http://www.pramodautomotiveparts.com)), two companies that optimised their sites with the help of SEO companies eBrandz ([www.ebrandz.com](http://www.ebrandz.com)) and Magic Infomedia ([www.magicinfomedia.com](http://www.magicinfomedia.com)), respectively.

We also suggested that while you would prefer to entrust the task of SEO to such experts, it still was advisable to know the basics of the process, so that you can collaborate with the SEO experts and also make sure that they are moving in the right direction. Perhaps you would like to have a look at the feature “Let the world know that you exist” [www.benefitmag.com/currentissue.asp?id=19](http://www.benefitmag.com/currentissue.asp?id=19) and convince yourself of the pressing need to explore the benefits of SEO and to understand the process, before going on to see how search engines work and how to optimise your sites to obtain top rankings in search results.

### The story begins with a spider

In order to understand SEO, you first need a window into the working of search

engines. Search engine companies have thousands of computers that keep ‘crawling’ the web to identify and add Web pages to their index. These automated software programs or bots are known as Web crawlers or spiders. Some of the popular Web crawlers are WebCrawler, GoogleBot, PolyBot, GRUB crawler and WIRE.

**The first step in SEO is making your site crawler friendly**

Therefore a Web page’s first interface with the search engine is the spider. How does the spider find you? As the spider crawls over the Web, it follows links from one page to another. So, if your site is connected from other sites and the pages within your site are also well connected, the chances of your site’s pages being found are higher. Also, most search engines provide a Web page through which you can

explicitly submit your page; that is, you can invite the spider to visit your Web pages. Remember the spider has innumerable invites at any point of time, so it may take several months before it accepts yours.

Crawling is not a one-time activity; it is ongoing. The spider keeps visiting not only newly added Web pages but also existing ones over and over again, so as to update itself.

What does a spider do, apart from drinking chaai with you? When the Web crawler visits a page, it adds certain details to the search engine’s index or listing—the Web page address, important keywords, portions of its content, and other statistics and parameters, depending on the formula and policy used by the search engine for indexing.

### Love the spiders

Therefore the first step in SEO is making your site crawler friendly, so that it will be detected in the first place.

There are certain components that deter a crawler—frames, Flash animation, graphical links, and source code cluttered with JavaScript, variables, cookies, and so on. Avoid



**MILIND MODY**  
CEO, eBrandz,  
Mumbai

“Cooperation from the client is very important. We initially expect clients to give us business inputs so that we understand their business better. This also helps us in doing keyword research for their project. After this initial input, we require clients to grant us FTP (File Transfer Protocol) access to their website. FTP access allows us to directly make changes to the site. In some cases (like banks and financial institutions) we cannot get FTP access due to security reasons. In those cases, we closely work with their webmasters and expect them to have a quick turn around time for our requests. We also like to get log file access to

client websites. As noted above, it helps us generate a lot of statistics, which in turn helps us better understand the progress of the SEO campaign. Log file access depends on the website hosting company. Many Indian companies do not provide log files. In such a case, we recommend our clients to change their Website hosting company.

And finally, we expect our clients to cooperate in measuring their website sales on a month-on-month basis, so that it helps measure the success of the complete SEO campaign. It helps us clearly define the picture, before and after SEO

these. Explicitly provide a sitemap so that the spider will be able to visit all your pages when it arrives at the first one (usually your home page). Crawlers usually use a text browser like Lynx to go through your Web pages. So, try opening your Web pages in such a browser and make sure all elements are visible. Usually, when you display keywords as graphics, it will not be found by the spider, so remember to provide text links and textual headings with the keywords. Even where you are using images, provide the keywords in the ALT tag (this is the alternative text that is displayed when your image cannot be opened by a browser).

Meta tags are parts of your HTML code that communicate with the crawler. Use these judiciously to provide apt descriptions and keywords for your Web pages. You can also let the crawler know when to revisit the site. Sometimes you might have duplicate Web pages—a static one for the crawler to read and a dynamic one for the visitors; in such a case you should stop the crawler from indexing the duplicates. Remember that today's spiders are very intelligent. They compare the meta tag keywords with the content of the page, so if you try to cheat the spider with irrelevant keywords you incur its wrath.

### The math they do

That said, after a Web crawler detects your site's Web pages, it records all relevant information and adds them to

the search engine's listing. How does the search engine decide where to position your Web pages in the index. To answer this, the search engine applies an algorithm to process the information collected by the crawler and assigns a rank to each of your Web pages. Each search engine uses different parameters and algorithms to calculate the rank. They also change the algorithm once in a while.

The most common parameters used by search engines to compute a page's rank are: presence, position and prominence of keywords; and how well your site is linked from others.

In order to get your page a high ranking, you'll need to first select the most appropriate keywords and use them frequently in the headings, titles, body text, links and image ALT texts on your Web page. It would be wise to repeat your key phrase at least 3-4 times for every 100 words. Key phrases used at the beginning of the text and in prominent positions like titles and headings always get a higher weight. Key phrases in images do not serve any purpose, as the crawler can't read them anyway.

**Tip:** While selecting keywords, experts suggest that you also include common spelling mistakes of the keywords. For example it is very likely that a potential customer might type 'wireless reciever' instead of 'wireless receiver'. We don't want a customer's carelessness to cost your site a visit, do we? After all, customers rule, even if

## You may want to check out...

### Google information for Webmasters

<http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html>

### Submitting your site to Google

<http://www.google.com/addurl.html>

### Submitting your site to Yahoo

<http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>

### Submitting your site to MSN

<http://search.msn.co.in/docs/submit.aspx>

### SEO Chat (Check out their free SEO tools while you are there)

<http://www.seochat.com/>

they make spelling errors.

While Yahoo! focuses more on the internal content of your Web pages and the above-mentioned factors, Google's ranking system depends more on a Google-specific technology called PageRank, which attaches a lot of importance to how your site is linked from other quality sites. Note the word 'quality'. There are certain free-for-all sites called Link Farms and Link Exchanges that provide links to any Web page that you register with them. These are not assigned a value by Google. Your site must be linked from a genuine site, preferably related to the field or trade that your site represents. And when the link to your site is clicked from another Site A, for example, it is considered a vote for your site, from A. That's democracy, in action. The more votes you get, the higher will be your ranking. Consider requesting your friends to provide a link to your site, from theirs.

Incidentally, on April Fool's Day in 2002, Google uploaded a page on their Help section claiming that they used a PigeonRank technology—where pigeons identify new Web pages! Maybe you ought to consider leaving some breadcrumbs to attract those 'pigeons.' When you are in the mood for a good laugh, check out their notification at <http://www.google.com/technology/pigeonrank.html>. It sounds very convincing, though.



SAURABH  
JUNEJA Proprietor,  
Magic Infomedia,  
New Delhi

“To assess the effectiveness of our hard work and to plan additional SEO tactics, we continually analyse a client website's ranking on an engine-by-engine basis, provide monthly search engine tracking and analysis reports, and monitor and analyse the site's position on search engines and directories.”

## Let the magic begin

Milind Mody, CEO, eBrandz, explains the steps involved in SEO once a client seeks their services. “We first have a look at the client’s website. We check out whether the structure of the site is SEO friendly. For example, if the site is designed in frames, we advice our clients to change the frames-based structure. This is because the concept of frames is not search engine friendly and it affects the results of the website in popular search engines like Google, Yahoo! and MSN. Similarly we check the development and programming of the website. For example, if the website is using more than one variable in programming, it reflects in the website URL. If there are more than two variables in the website URL, search engines take a very long time to index the site. In such cases, we offer them custom solutions based on their website hosting or programming.

“Once we analyse the client website, we take inputs from the client as to what their business is all about. We also learn the names of few of their competitors and analyse their sites. Based on these, our research team comes up with a possible list of keywords that are applicable to the client’s website.

“Once the keyword research is complete, we submit it to the client for approval, after which we benchmark their current results in search engines. Then, we ask the client for FTP access and log file access on their website. The FTP access enables us to change and tweak their HTML source code, whereas the log file access gives us their raw log files. We process these files to come up with statistics like the number of page hits per day, number of unique visitors per day, main traffic sources, traffic from major search engines, major keywords from each search engine, traffic from each state in the USA, traffic from top 50 cities around the world, traffic from top 50 organisations of the world, the number of times major search engine robots visit the client website, the number of

times the site has been bookmarked by visitors, and so on.

“After this we begin working on the website source code. That is, we tweak their website title, meta tags, description tags, image files, ALT tags, keyword density, and so on, to include our keyword research.

“We also begin working on getting links from other related websites to our client’s website. This increases their link popularity and helps them in their overall rankings.

“By following the traffic and rankings on a monthly basis, we have a fair idea about the progress of the SEO campaign. As the rankings increase, we then closely follow the competition. We also analyse and try to better understand the trends and changes in search engine algorithms. This helps us to devise better strategies that will hopefully sustain multiple search algorithm updates.”

Saurabh Juneja, proprietor, Magic Infomedia, also agrees on the importance of constantly monitoring results. “To assess the effectiveness of our hard work and to strategically plan additional SEO tactics, we continually analyse a client website’s ranking on an engine-by-engine basis, provide monthly search engine tracking and analysis reports, and monitor and analyse the site’s position on search engines and directories,” he says.

## Say “No!” to shortcuts

SEO is a marketing technique, and in a frenzy to get their site a top ranking at any cost, some people adopt unethical practices. One such technique is keyword stuffing, which entails overloading the meta tags with popular key terms like ‘sex,’ ‘pizzas,’ ‘world cup cricket,’ and so on, which are not relevant to the site. Another gimmick is hidden text, which involves loading keywords into the page in the form of hidden text that will be read by the crawler but will not be visible to the reader. Doorway pages are another trick. These are keyword-loaded pages with a high ranking, created solely for

the purpose of search engine ranking, and these again will not be visible to the users who will instantaneously be redirected to the relevant page as soon as they enter. Then there is cloaking, where the page delivered to the search engine is totally different from that served to other visitors, and a whole lot more.

Stay away from all such techniques. The current generation of spiders are very smart and can detect

“We use a combination of keyword research tools to ensure that a lot of people are searching for these keywords on search engines.”

malpractices. And if malpractices are detected, your website will be penalised and de-listed. The BMW Germany fiasco is a lesson to remember.

## Deliver true value

Remember that the only way to attract visitors to your site and keep them coming, is to provide really valuable content that delivers all the information that your customers might look for. With useful content and ethical, well-planned and well-executed SEO, your site is bound to be a rocking success. ■

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