The Secrets of Search Engine Optimization

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Ivy Lee invented press release for The Pennsylvania Railroad in 1906

- Following an accident, Lee convinced the railroad “to supply the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information”

- *The New York Times* published the press release verbatim as a “Statement from the Road”
SEO-PR invented optimized press release for SEMPO in 2003

Source: Google News, Sept. 15, 2003
I’ll share the six secrets to optimizing press releases for news search engines

• Who uses news search engines?
• What search terms are they likely to use?
• Where do you put these terms in your press releases?
• When do you add links?
• Why should you optimize your press releases?
• How do you measure the results of press release optimization?
Millions of Americans use Yahoo!

Source: Nielsen Online, March 2009
More knowledge workers read press releases than trade journals

Source: InformationWeek, June 6, 2006
73.8% of journalists and bloggers use Google and/or blog search.
In many industries, online publications and blogs are the new trade press.

Source: Search Engine Watch, Dec. 18, 2007
Conduct keyword research to find the terms people are likely to use

1. Getting into the mind of the customer is the first step to keyword research.

2. Brainstorm keyword categories that address the customer’s wants.

3. Compile the brainstormed keywords for further review of traffic potential, competition, and other factors.

- Think about the words users would type to find your pages
- Brainstorm keyword categories that address your customer’s wants
- Compile the brainstormed keywords for further review of traffic potential, competition, and other factors

Conduct keyword research using one or more of these free tools

- Google AdWords Keyword Tool
  - [https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal](https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal)
- Google Insights for Search
- Google Suggest for Google News
  - [http://googlenewsblog.blogspot.com/2009/08/suggest-on-google-news.html](http://googlenewsblog.blogspot.com/2009/08/suggest-on-google-news.html)
- Microsoft adCenter Labs keyword research technologies
- WordStream’s free keyword tool*

*Disclosure: WordStream is a client
More news search interest worldwide in *press release* than *news release*.

Source: Google Insights for Search, Nov. 7, 2009
Keyword research involves more than looking up search frequencies

- Optimize each page around the top 2 or 3 phrases that you would like it to be found for
- Average search term is now 3 words long, so use longer phrases
  - Use “Russian nesting dolls” vs. “nesting dolls”

Source: Elliance, Search Engine Land, Nov. 6, 2007
Incorporate search terms into your headline and lead paragraph

• News search engines scan the headline and at least the first 100 words of news articles

• So, make sure your press release actually includes your target terms – particularly in the headline and first few sentences

Herb Kelleher went nuts when he saw *cheap* in his press release

**SOUTHWEST AIRLINES EXTENDS ITS DISCOUNT AIR FARES**

*Cheap Air Fares Systemwide are Extended*


“Our customers have overwhelmingly responded to the discount air fares,” said Joyce Rogge, senior vice president marketing for Southwest Airlines. “With this extension of our cheap air fares, customers will be able to keep enjoying travel for as little as $39 each way.”

As shown in the breakdown below, there are three different discount air fares available:

Source: Southwest Airlines, Jan. 30, 2004
Parents magazine editor offered picture taking tips instead of news
We had to violate AP Style in order to optimize Monitor’s press release

Jill Carroll to tell story of her experience as hostage in Christian Science Monitor exclusive

**Boston, MA** — Reporter Jill Carroll will tell the story of her 82 days as a hostage in Iraq in an 11-part series beginning on Monday, Aug. 14, 2006, in The Christian Science Monitor. Part One of “Hostage: The Jill Carroll Story” will appear on the Monitor’s website, [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com), on Sunday, Aug. 13, at 6:00 p.m.

Writing about her experience for the first time since her release in Baghdad on March 30, Jill Carroll will share detailed information about her time as a hostage, the daily activities of her captors, and how she struggled to stay alive.

- Moved more than a dozen times, Carroll had closer contact with Sunni insurgents – including those associated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – than any American who has lived to tell the tale.

- Though threatened with death, Carroll talked to her captors and learned she had not been their only hostage. Her captors allowed her to take notes and she learned details about the mujahideen worldview and the shadowy activities of the Iraqi insurgency.

- Carroll describes the motives of her captors, whose primary enemy, the US, was replaced by an even greater hatred for Shiites. The US military in Iraq announced on Aug. 9 that four of the men believed responsible for Carroll’s kidnapping had been arrested.

**Christian Science Monitor** reporter Peter Grier will write about efforts made by her family, the Monitor and others around the world to gain her release. And in accompanying news stories, readers will learn more about whether a ransom was paid, and about individuals kidnapped by Jill Carroll’s captors.

Add links intended to help people find interesting, related content

• The unique tracking link in this Southwest Airlines press release offered a complete list of fares
• It took people to a unique landing page, enabling Southwest to track over $80,000 in ticket sales back to this optimized release

Southwest Airlines offers its biggest discounts with its advance purchase tickets. For example, Philly fliers can take off to Boston (via Providence, R.I.) for only $29 one-way with Southwest’s 14-day advance purchase fare. The advance purchase airfare to Orlando is only $79 one-way. (For a complete list of fares, see http://www.southwest.com/about_sw/press/pr20040212_pr_nonstop2.html.)
Second link in some press releases got more clicks than the other links

Source: ConsumerReports.org log files
Head of Google’s Webspam team says main benefit is links in articles

• “I’m not against doing press releases; press releases can be a useful part of getting traffic and building a brand.
• “For ranking in Google, however, the main benefit of a press release is not direct links or PageRank from the press release directly; it’s primarily the people who decide to write an article and link because of that.”
Buzzing blogger community can be excellent place to generate interest

- Best way to get other sites to create relevant links to yours is to create unique, useful content
- Creating good content pays off: Links are usually editorial votes given by choice, and the buzzing blogger community can be an excellent place to generate interest

Sources: Technorati: State of the Blogosphere 2008, and Google Webmaster Help Center
Why should you optimize your releases for news search engines?

- Traditionally, readers first picked a publication and then look for headlines that interested them.
- News search engines offer links to several articles on every story, so readers first decide what subject interests them and then select which publishers’ accounts of each story they will read.

“Go ask your search engine.”
Harold Lasswell created classic model of communications in 1948

Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?
If things are bleak in journalism, then are they even bleaker in PR?

• America’s newspapers are getting smaller
  – 5,900 full-time newsroom jobs, 11%, cut in 2008
  – By end of 2009, newsrooms of American daily newspapers may employ 25% fewer people than in 2001

• Ad Age estimates that just under 150,000 people worked in magazines in 2008, down from about 170,000 in 2000

• In local television, news staffs, already too small to adequately cover their communities, are being cut at unprecedented rates

Source: The State of the News Media 2009
News search engines reverse classic model of communications

Who seeks what in which channel from whom with what effect?
How do you measure the results of press release optimization?

“Hold everything! The P.R. department just sent over this chart.”
4 optimized press releases linked to $2.5 million in Southwest sales

Source: Southwest Airlines, July 15, 2004
Publicity drove 450,000 visitors to Christian Science Monitor website

- Within first 24 hours, more than 450,000 unique visitors flooded CSMonitor.com, seven times its daily average in July
- Page views for the first day broke through the 1 million mark, a massive increase from the site’s July average of 121,247 page views per day
- The Huffington Post generated 3.4 times more visitors than ABC News

Queries for promoted brands up 38.9%, other brands up 5.1%
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Press release optimization reflects paradigm shift in PR and journalism

- As Columbus discovered, training the crews of the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria how to sail west was a relatively straightforward task.
- The real challenge was convincing Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand that they wouldn’t fall off the edge of the world.

The play-back for today’s PRSA event runs through January 17, 2010