



## Etsy Guide to SEO

Prepared by SEOmoz

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*Note: versions are subject to change*

## Introduction

Search engine optimization is part science and technology, as well as part artistry and creativity. Proper implementation allows a brilliant website to shine. SEO is an on-going process that you'll continue to tweak and change as the search engines are constantly changing their algorithms, just as your shop's content and items are changing.

This Guide to SEO helps sellers gain an understanding of general SEO tactics as well as how to specifically optimize their shops to improve search engine rankings. Etsy is committed to making sure sellers have the resources they need to improve their rankings in the search engines. For that reason, Etsy provides numerous ways for sellers to customize their shops for SEO purposes, including [on-page optimization](#) as well as various [link building](#) strategies.

For example, in this guide you'll learn how to develop the right keywords for your shop's home page, individual item listing pages and even your profile page. You'll also learn how to use that information to customize different areas within Etsy such as the [Shop Title](#), which is used for the [title tag](#) or the [item description](#), which is used as the [meta description](#) of the page. When implemented properly, these enhancements will not only increase your ranking in search engines, but they will increase click-through rates to your shop as well. Throughout this guide, we'll use the [EtsyLabs](#) shop as an example.

In addition to the actionable changes documented in this guide, there is also important information on how the [search engines operate](#) and why [search engine marketing](#) is necessary.



Throughout this document, wherever you see the scissors icon, you'll find links to information on how to customize your shop.

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## On-Page/Content Optimization

Optimizing your shop for search engines will increase your rankings and bring more shoppers to your site. One of the ways to do this is to optimize the “on-page” elements, of which Etsy provides many ways to manage and maintain. This section covers each of those specific on-page elements and why they’re necessary. The next section, [SEO Customizable Areas for Sellers](#) will cover where to optimize them in your shop specifically. In this guide, we’ll mention several kinds of “tags” that are part of the code used to build a web page (for example, “title tags” and “meta description tags”); these tags are different from the tags a seller attaches to an item listing on Etsy.

## Keyword Targeting

Keyword targeting is the art of identifying and prioritizing keywords that potential users type into search engines when searching for your products and services. One of the most important on-page SEO factors is keyword usage and targeting. In order to successfully optimize your shop for search engines, [keyword research](#) (see the section below for in-depth information) must be used and a keyword or keywords set as the target for each page. These keywords should not be duplicated across multiple pages on the website, but instead exist primarily on the targeted page.

To give you an example and show how keyword targeting is used, we’ll use “Etsy baby romper” as our search term. If you run this search, these are the results:



Then, when you click the link it takes you to the item page in the EtsyLabs shop for the Baby Romper:



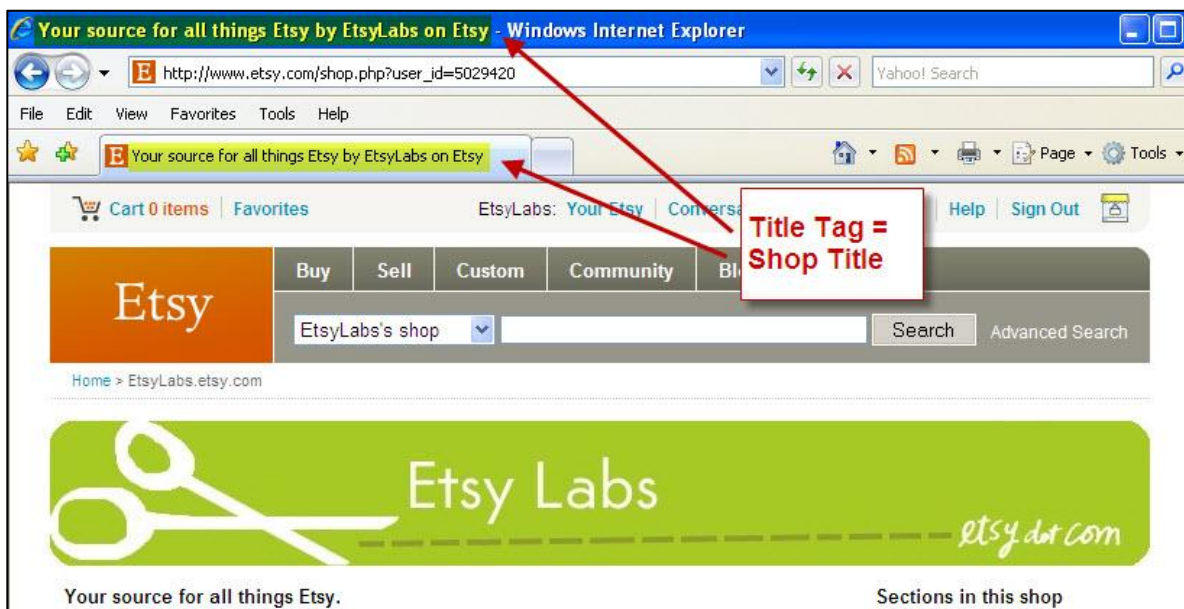
## Title Tags

The title tag is considered the most important on-page optimization element. For this reason, the title tag should include the most important keyword targeted on a given page, and the target keyword should be placed as close to the start of the title tag as possible. The title tag should also focus on the unique value of the page, not just the topic area of the website as a whole. Additionally, as title tags appear in bold text in search results, they should be thought of as ad copy and appeal to people. So even though title tags should contain target keywords for a given page, they should also reinforce your brand and provide catchy headlines that entice visitors to click on your listing.

### Title tag in a search result:



### Title tag on the Etsy site:



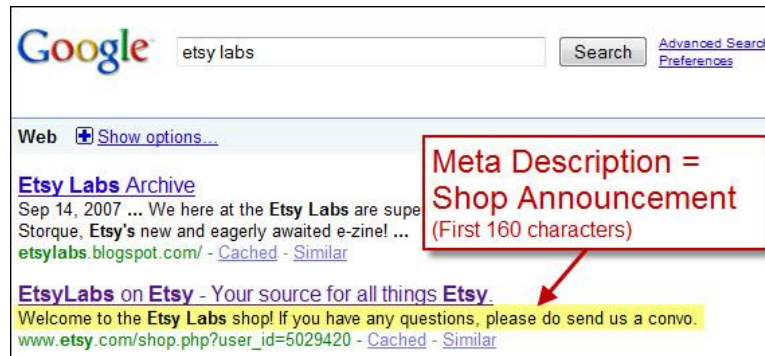
## Customize Your Shop's Title Tags

- [Shop Home Page](#)
- [Item Pages](#)
- Profile Page – not customizable

## Meta Descriptions

Meta description tags, while not as important to search engine rankings as other data, are extremely important in gaining user click-through to your site. These short paragraphs are your opportunity to advertise your content to searchers and let them know you have exactly what they're looking for. The meta description should employ the keywords intelligently, but also create a compelling description that a searcher will want to click. Direct relevance to the page and uniqueness between each page's meta description is key. The description should optimally be between 150-160 characters.

### Meta description in a search result:



### Meta description on the Etsy site:

The meta description is only seen in the code of the page if you do a "view source" in your browser, it is not seen on the site (although the full Shop Announcement is seen on the site). This is what the code looks like:



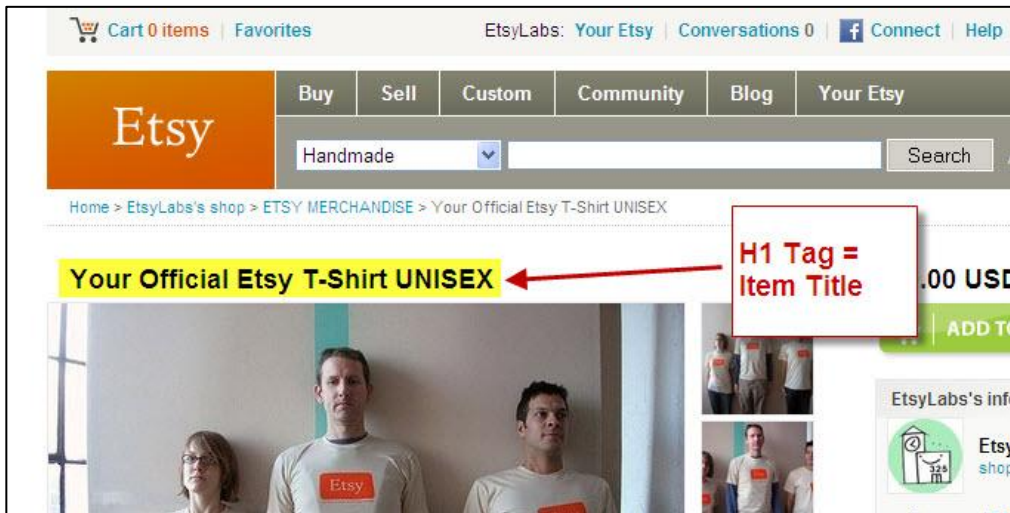
## Customize Your Shop's Meta Descriptions

- [Shop Home Page](#)
- [Item Pages](#)
- [Profile Page](#)

## H1 Tags

The H1 tag is considered the "headline" of the page in semantic markup and is important for establishing information hierarchy within the page (H2, H3, H4 are also used to show the hierarchy). Although it is not largely significant for SEO, it is helpful for users and for on-page keyword targeting.

### H1 tag on an item page:



### Customize Your Shop's H1 Tags

- [Shop Home Page](#)
- [Item Pages](#)
- Profile Page – not customizable

## Body Text Keywords

A page's targeted keywords should be placed throughout the body text a minimum of 2 to 3 times, without going overboard. You don't want the content of your page to look "spammy." One idea is to have someone unrelated to your site read the text. If it makes sense to them, and they don't ask, "Why do you say 'handmade opal earrings' 10 times?" then you are probably good.

Using the example from above with the keywords "Etsy baby romper," see where the body text keywords are used within your item pages:



### Customize Your Shop's Body Text Keywords

- [Shop Home Page](#)
- [Item Pages](#)
- [Profile Page](#)

## Image Alt Text & Filenames

Image alt tags and filenames are the primary ranking factors for image search traffic, and both can also assist with traditional optimization for web search results. Recently, we've found that the use of keyword rich **image alt text correlates with higher rankings in the search engines**. For more information on this topic, check out this [Whiteboard Friday about Correlation, Causation & SEO](#).

Alt text is what shows up when you hover over an image:



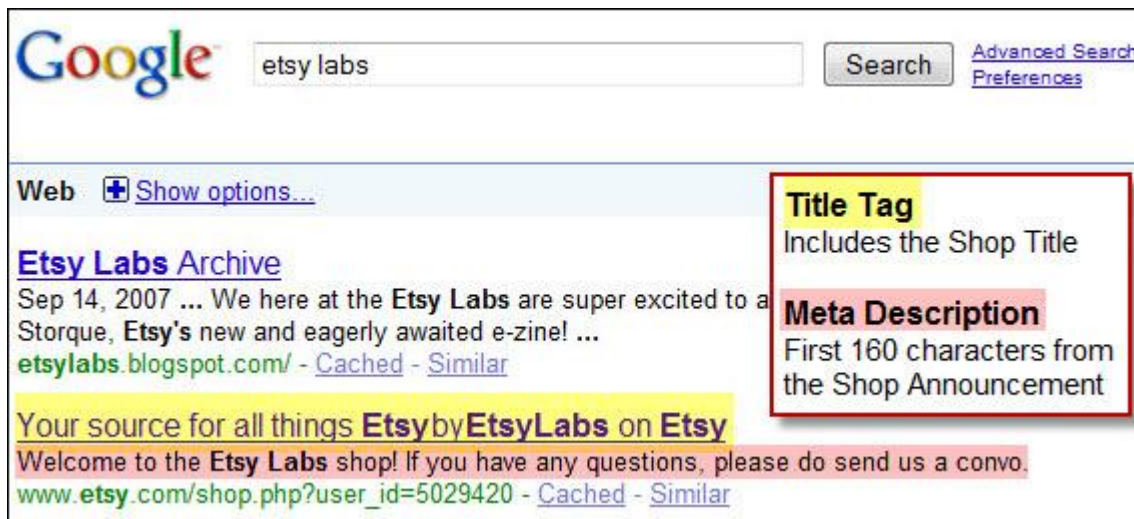
### Customize Your Shop's Alt Text & Filenames

- Shop Home Page – not customizable
- [Item Pages](#)
- Profile Page – not customizable

## SEO Customizable Areas for Sellers

Once you've done your [keyword research](#) and you understand each of the [on-page elements](#), it's time to start optimizing your shop! The pages that are customizable consist of the shop home page, item pages and the seller's profile page. This section covers each of those pages and shows you each piece that can currently be modified.

As you're going through this section, remember that not only are these elements important for on-page optimization, but they are also displayed in the search results. The title tag, meta description and URL are all displayed to users as they search in Google. It's essential to create these elements in a way that entices users to click through to your site.



Another note to remember is that the changes will show up automatically on the Etsy website once you've done your optimization. However, they won't show up in the search engines until those pages are crawled again. This could take anywhere from a few days to even a few weeks. So be patient! It will happen.

## Shop Home Page

The home page represents the shop as a whole. Make sure to keep this in mind as you determine the right keywords to use throughout your shop home page. For example, if you make various types of handmade greeting cards, you'll want to focus on this and not on the specific cards. We'll keep the specifics for the individual product pages. The Shop Title and Shop Announcement are the two elements that you can modify in order to enhance the SEO of the page.

### Title Tag

The Shop Title is used for both the title tag and the H1 tag. Make sure to optimize the first 30 characters of the Shop Title since those will show up in the title tag. Plus, as mentioned above, having the keywords closer to the beginning of the title helps in search engine rankings and users clicking through to your site.

The [Title tag](#) format is "<Shop Title> by <username> on Etsy "

Because you have limited space in titles it's best to include the most important keywords at the beginning of your <Shop Title> and to focus on the unique value of your shop.

It's important to note that your <Shop Title> will only be truncated in the page title, which is visible to search engines, on search engine search results pages, and at the top of web browser windows. Your full <Shop Title> will still appear on your shop homepage on Etsy.

In order to keep the page title tag to 66 characters or fewer, we created rules for how the content will be truncated. The rules ensure that the full username is in the title tag, remove "on Etsy" if the <shop title> is too long, and truncate the <shop title> if it's still too long after "on Etsy" is removed.

1. If "<Shop Title> by <username>" is greater than 54 characters, but less than 62 characters, "on Etsy" will be removed.
2. If "<Shop Title> by <username>" is greater than 62 characters, "on Etsy" will be removed and the <Shop Title> will be truncated to the end of the last complete word, up to 42 characters + (20 - <username>). If your username is less than 20 characters, there's more room for a longer <shop title>.

### **Example of a Good Shop Title**

"Homemade Soap: Lavender, Oatmeal & more"

**Title tag** becomes: "Homemade Soap: Lavender, Oatmeal & more by myusername on Etsy" (61 characters)

This gives you the most bang for the buck, by putting the relevant keywords "Handmade Soap" + "Lavender" and "Oatmeal" right up front. If a user searches for "oatmeal handmade soap" for example, this will be a clear indicator that this page is exactly what they're looking for.

### **Example of a Bad Shop Title**

"Betsy Lou's Shop in Denver, CO"

**Title tag** becomes: "Betsy Lou's Shop in Denver, CO by myusername on Etsy" (52 characters)

This doesn't tell a user what the shop or page is about at all. Searchers will have no idea that your page has exactly what they want to purchase. Your page probably won't show up in results for keywords specific to your shop and items.

### **H1 Tag**

The [H1 tag](#) is the area of your Shop Home Page that displays the full <Shop Title>.

## Meta Description

The first 160 characters of the Shop Announcement are used as the [meta description](#). Be sure to optimize these first sentences for the [body text](#) of the shop as well as the meta description.

### Example of a Good Shop Announcement

“Looking for homemade soaps made with lavender, oatmeal, lemongrass & other ingredients? Check out our full selection of handmade soaps, all are made naturally! We make many different kinds of soap and can customize any order for you. These homemade soaps are perfect as gifts, for use in the guest bedroom, or as a personal luxury. Contact us if you don’t see the exact soap you’re looking for, we can help get the right soap for your needs!”

**Meta description** becomes: “Looking for homemade soaps made with lavender, oatmeal, lemongrass & other ingredients? Check out our full selection of handmade soaps, all are made naturally!”

This Shop Announcement is excellent because the first 160 characters are specifically optimized to be displayed in the search engine results page and entice users to click to your site. Additionally the use of keywords throughout the body text will help the search engines to prioritize your site correctly because it’s easily identifiable as to what the page is about.

### Example of a Bad Shop Announcement

“Thanks for coming to Betsy Lou’s shop, which is based in Denver, CO. Let us know if you don’t find what you need, we’re happy to customize. Our soaps are handmade and we use all kinds of ingredients like lavender, oatmeal and lemongrass. We hope you like our soaps!”

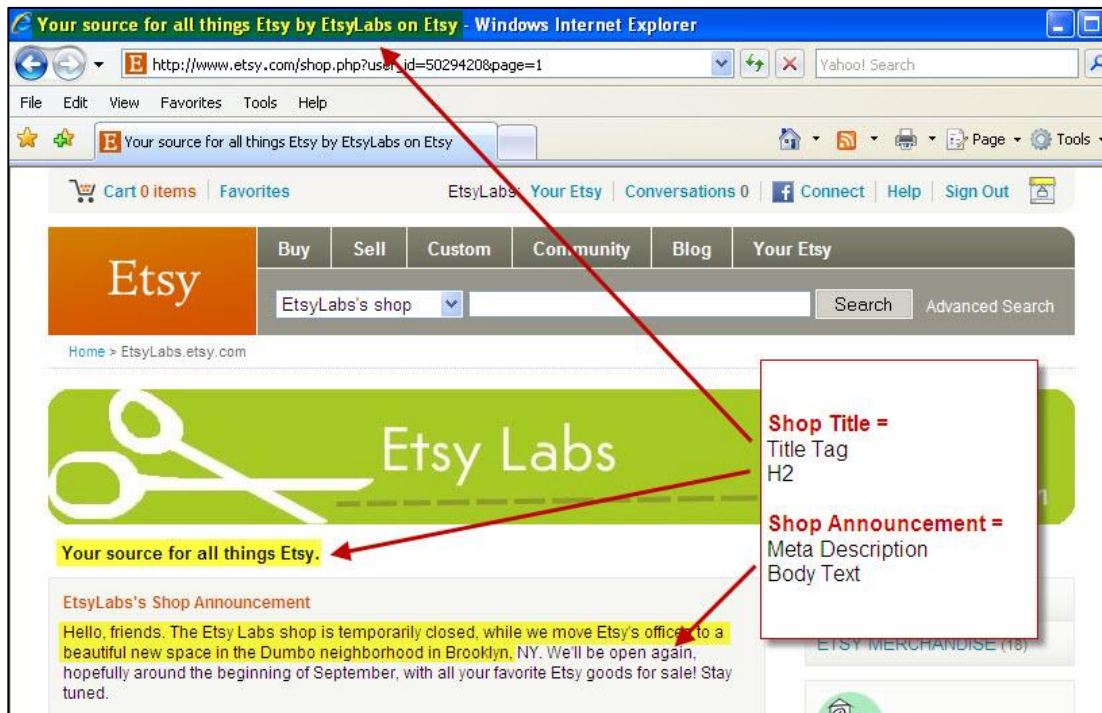
**Meta description** becomes: “Thanks for coming to Betsy Lou’s shop, which is based in Denver, CO. Let us know if you don’t find what you need, we’re happy to customize. Our soaps are handma...”

This Shop Announcement is bad for SEO because it doesn’t attract users to your page by telling them exactly what the shop is about. Additionally because the Shop Announcement will get cut off at 160 characters for the meta description it’s essential to optimize to that length. Or, as you can see above a word will get cut off and the “...” gets added to the end.

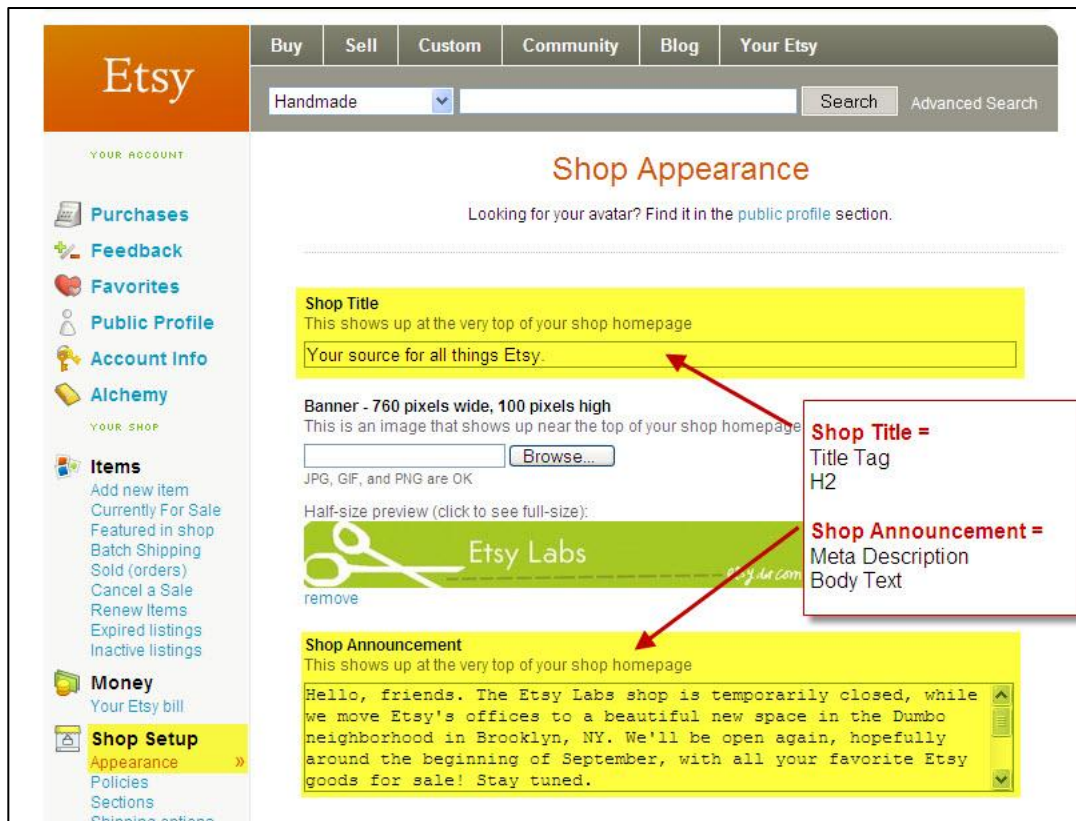
## Body Text

The full Shop Announcement is used for the [body text](#). Remember to do your [keyword research](#) and create a Shop Announcement that utilizes the keywords throughout the entire announcement.

The image below shows how each of the elements discussed above affect your Shop Home Page:



To optimize the Shop Title and Announcement, select "Appearance" under "Shop Setup" in the left navigation.



## Item Pages

This is where you'll want to get more specific with your keywords. The item pages should be focused on each product individually and not on the shop as a whole.

The item title is used in a number of ways. You'll want to optimize it for the title and H1 tags as well as the image alt text. As with the Shop Title, focus on the first 30 words for optimization. This will ensure that the most optimized keywords will be displayed for each of the elements below.

The item description is used for the meta description as well as the body text of the page.

## Title Tag

The [title tag](#) format is "<Item Title> by <username> on Etsy"

The rules are similar to the way the title tags are created for the Shop Home Page.

1. If "<Item Title> by <username>" is greater than 54 characters but less than 62 characters, "on Etsy" will be removed.
2. If "<Item Title> by <username>" is greater than 62 characters, "on Etsy" will be removed and the <Item Title> will be truncated to the end of the last complete word up to 42 characters + (20 - <username>).

### Example of a Good Item Title

"Oatmeal Bar Soap – Handmade with Vanilla"

**Title tag** becomes: "Oatmeal Bar Soap – Handmade with Vanilla by myusername on Etsy" (62 characters)

This title displays the important keywords first which will allow users to find it easier and will help with ranking this page higher for those search terms.

### Example of a Bad Item Title

"beautiful , rose colored with the scent of fresh vanilla – soaps all made by hand and using organic oatmeal and vanilla"

**Title tag** becomes: "beautiful , rose colored with the scent of fresh by myusername" (62 characters + "on Etsy" has been removed and Item Title has been truncated)

Since having the keywords closest to the beginning of the Title Tag helps with your page's ranking in the search engines, this title tag would not help for SEO purposes. This title doesn't mention the word "soap" at all and would be easily overlooked if it came up in the search results because a searcher wouldn't know the product was specifically "oatmeal bar soap" as with the example above. Additionally, remember that the searched keywords are bolded in the search results.

## H1 Tag

The [H1 tag](#) displays the <Item Title> in full.

### Image Alt Text

The <Item Title> is displayed in full for the [Image alt text](#) for each image on the page.

### Meta Description

The first 160 characters of the Item Description are used for the [meta description](#).



#### Example of a Good Item Description

“This Oatmeal Bar Soap is handmade using organic vanilla and oatmeal. Not only is this oatmeal soap a perfect gift but a portion of the sales benefits a charity. Learn more about it in my profile. The use of organic vanilla and oatmeal makes this bar soap quite luxurious. The vanilla scent helps keep bathroom odors at bay.

The soap is oval shaped and weighs approximately ¼ lb. If you’re interested in other shapes or colors of soap, please let me know as we can customize your order.”

**Meta Description** becomes: “This Oatmeal Bar Soap is handmade using organic vanilla and oatmeal. Not only is this oatmeal soap a perfect gift but a portion of the sales benefits a charity.”

This creates an enticing meta description that will be displayed in the search engines, as well as gives the users all the information they need about the product on the page.



#### Example of a Bad Item Description

“Shape: Oval

Weight: ¼ lb

Color: Rose

Ingredients: Oatmeal, vanilla

A portion of the sales benefits a charity, learn more about it in my profile. If you need any other shapes or colors please let us know. We can customize your order to fit your needs”

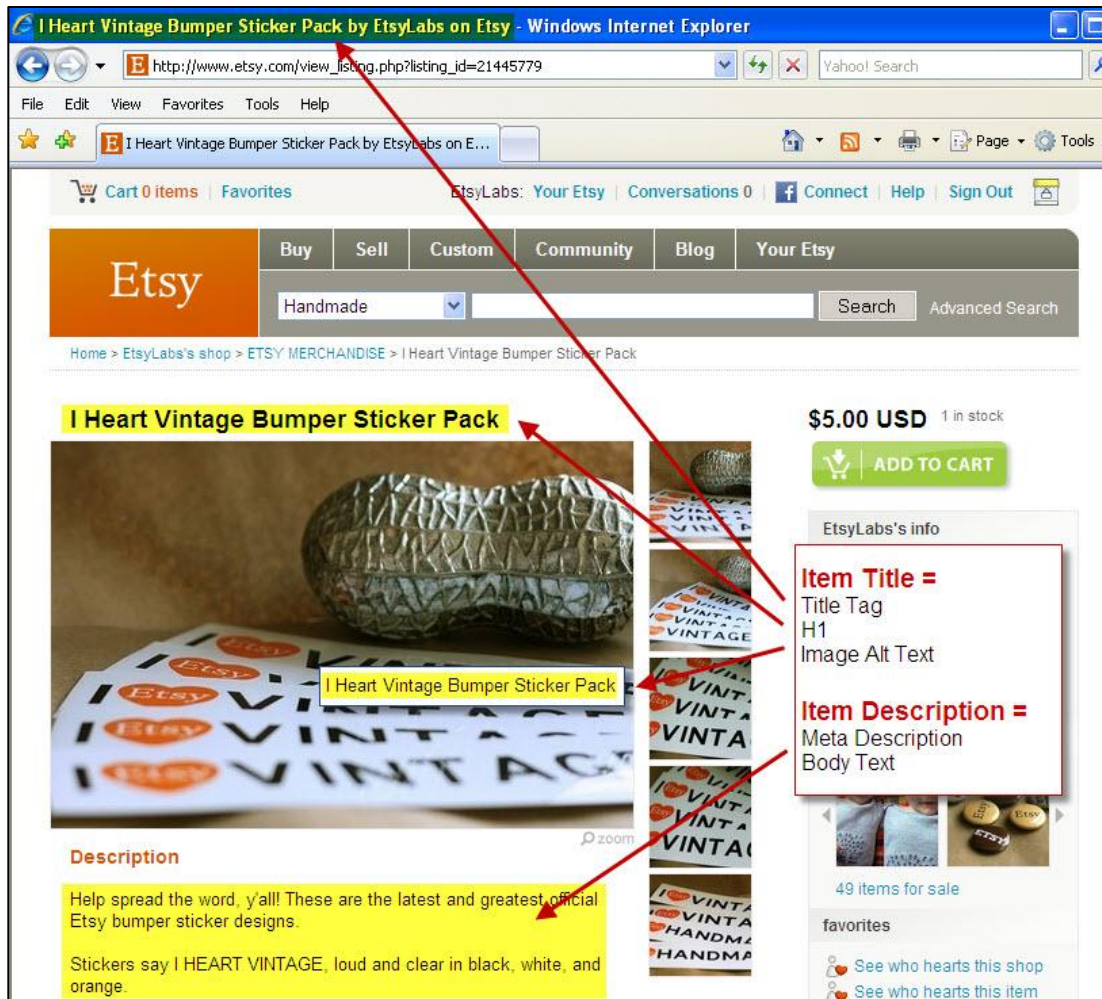
**Meta Description** becomes: “Shape: Oval Weight: ¼ lb Color: Rose Ingredients: Oatmeal, vanilla A portion of the sales benefits a charity, learn more about it in my profile. If you need any...”

Notice that this meta description doesn’t even mention that this page is about soap. Additionally, with the body text this way, the search engines won’t be able to determine that this page is about soap either. Remember to make sure it’s obvious what the page is about without going overboard.

### Body Text

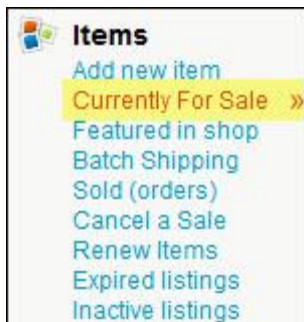
The full Item Description is used for the [body text](#). Remember to add your keywords throughout the content for [keyword targeting](#) as well.

The image below shows how each of the elements discussed above affect an Item Page:



To optimize the item title and description for a particular item follow the following steps:

1. Select "Currently for Sale" under the "Items" section in the left navigation.



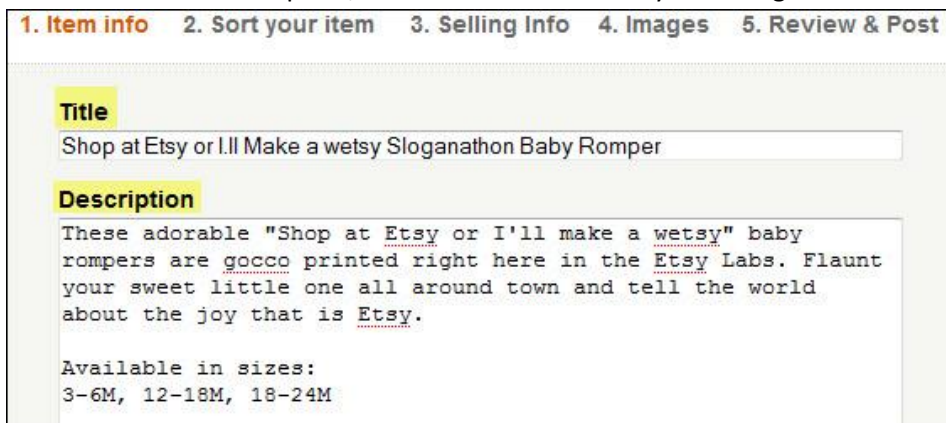
2. Find the product you want to optimize
3. Select "edit" next to the image



- Once you get to the edit page, you can make changes to many different elements. Select the “edit” button right next to the title of the item



- Edit the Title and Description, then click “Last” to save your changes



## Seller's Profile Page

Your Profile Page is where you can add personal information about yourself, how to contact you and any other information that didn't fit in other sections. The main area that is customizable on this page is the Bio, which is used as both the meta description and body text.

Your bio is used for the meta description and body text of the page. The title tag on this page is automatically formatted as “<username>'s Profile on Etsy”

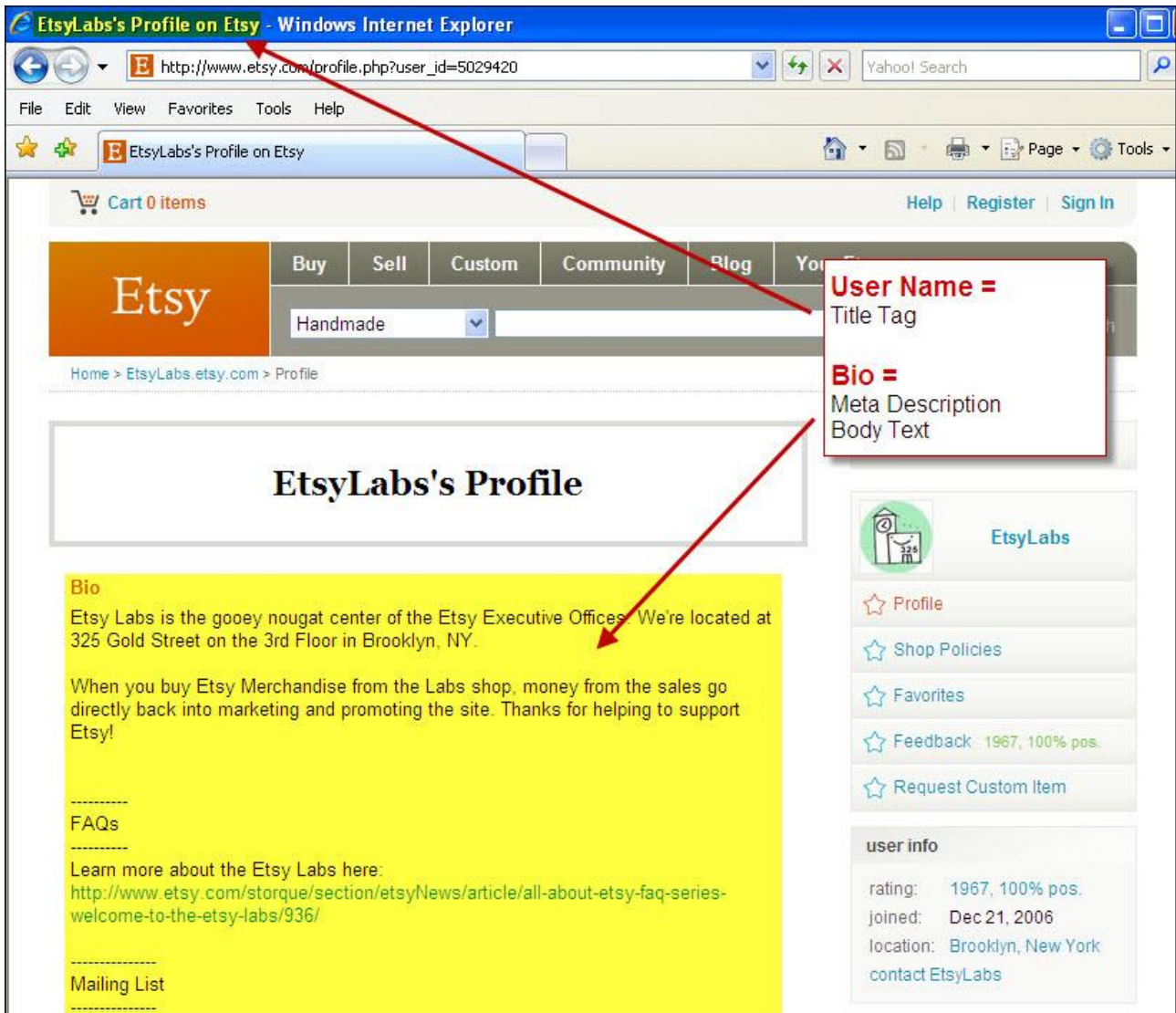
### Meta Description

The first 160 characters of your Bio show up as the [meta description](#).

### Body Text

The full Bio is used for the [body text](#), this is a perfect place to strategically place your keywords in a relevant manner throughout the copy.

The image below shows how each of the elements discussed above affect your Profile:



To optimize the Bio, select “Public Profile” from the left navigation, then make your changes in the “Bio” section. Don’t forget to save your changes!

## Keyword Research

Millions of arts and crafts enthusiasts use search engines to look for items related to products sold on Etsy. But which search terms have the greatest volume? And on which search terms is there the highest potential for you to turn a searcher into a customer? Keyword research is a great way to answer these questions. So before you optimize your pages, you should first do keyword research to identify what terms you want to target.

### How to Judge the Value of a Keyword

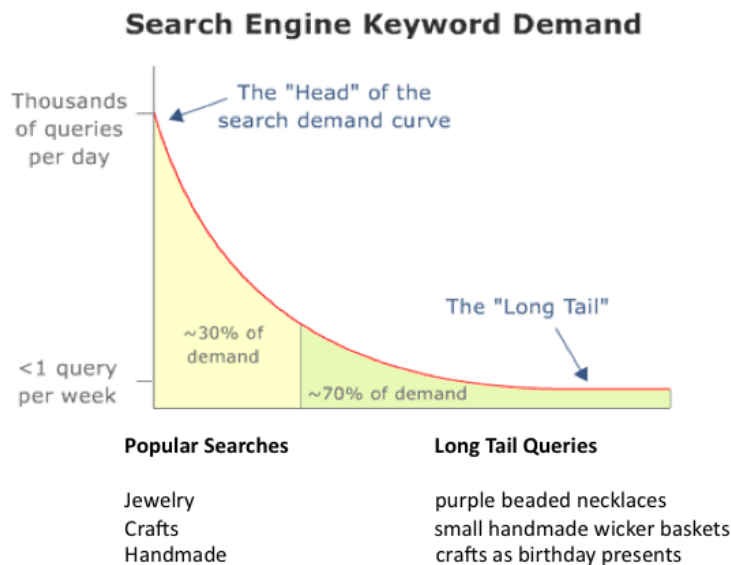
1) Volume -- The first factor to look at when determining the value of a keyword is **volume**. Are there enough people searching for a term to justify optimizing for it? (See the [Keyword Research example](#) below to find out). If the answer is yes, ask yourself whether or not it is realistic that you will rank for that term? In other words, you probably will not rank for a high volume term such as 'jewelry,' but there's a good chance you could rank for less competitive 2-3 word search terms such as 'handmade gold necklaces.'

2) Intent -- The second, and most important factor to look at when determining the value of a keyword is **intent**. Target the keywords that people looking for what you sell are most likely to search for. In other words, you might find many people search for the terms 'cheap jewelry' or 'jewelry cleaner,' but if these terms don't align with the products you sell, you should not target these keywords because these visitors will not become customers.

So when you do your keyword research, first identify what people are searching for the most, then think about what the people making those searches are looking for. If you can provide a relevant page for someone searching for a given term, and the term has reasonable volume, target your page with those keywords.

## Understanding the Long Tail of the Keyword Demand Curve

As important as high volume search terms are, they comprise less than 30% of the overall searches on the web. So, not to be forgotten is the remaining 70%, which is commonly referred to as the "long tail." For Etsy sellers the search long tail contains many thousands of unique searches that might be conducted only a small number of times each month, but in aggregate, comprise the majority of the search demand. And with such a wide array of niche items, these low volume, impossible to predict searches provide a major opportunity.



## Keyword Research Sources

SEOMoz has a [Professional's Guide to Keyword Research](#), but to get volume and demand data for your target keywords, there are numerous resources at your disposal. Google's free tool is among the most popular, but here's a full list keyword research tools for you to choose from:

- [Google Adwords' Keyword Estimator Tool](#)
- [Google Trends Keyword Demand Prediction Tool](#)
- [Microsoft AdCenter Keyword Forecasting Tool](#)
- [Wordtracker's Free Basic Keyword Demand Tool](#)
- [KeywordDiscovery Free Basic Keyword Demand Tool](#)
- [Enquisite's amazing long tail KW referral tracking](#)

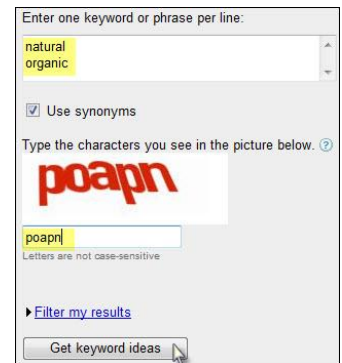
## Keyword Research Example

Now that we've talked a bit about volume and intent, let's check out an example of how to research keywords for your shop homepage! For this example we'll use [Google's Adwords Keyword Estimator Tool](#), which lets you input a few keywords, then returns the number of searches for those keywords and similar searches. Here is how it works:

**Step 1.** Enter "natural" and "organic" into the form, fill out the CAPTCHA form (the random letters) then hit "Get keyword ideas."

**Step 2.** When the results show up, there are 3 main columns you care about: Keywords, Local Search Volume: [Month] and Global Monthly Search Volume. Sort by Global Monthly Search Volume, the results should look like this:

Keywords	Advertiser Competition	Local Search Volume: July	Global Monthly Search Volume	
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sort by relevance				
natural		20,400,000	20,400,000	Add
organic		9,140,000	6,120,000	Add
all natural		550,000	450,000	Add
organics		673,000	450,000	Add
organic food		450,000	368,000	Add
natural food		368,000	246,000	Add
natural health		368,000	246,000	Add
natural products		301,000	246,000	Add



This is quite a difference! This tells us that the average number of search queries for the past 12 months for the keyword "natural" is 20,400,000 and for "organic" is 6,120,000. Although both are very significant numbers, obviously "natural" is a much higher searched term. The question now is 'How does this relate to your specific product?' Now let's do another search, this time getting a bit more specific.

**Step 3.** Enter "natural soap" into the search box and hit "Get keyword ideas." Make sure you are still filtering by the Global Monthly Search Volume. This shows you that "natural soap" has an average number of search queries in Google at 110,000. If you scroll down the list you'll see other variations of the same words. For example, "pure natural soap" is high in the list as does "natural soaps" and "natural soap bar".

**Step 4.** Scroll down the page to the section "Additional keywords to consider." This area shows you other keywords that have searched on. This is helpful as you may find a keyword in there that matches your product specifically.

Additional keywords to consider - sort by relevance			
soap		7,480,000	6,120,000
bar soap		246,000	201,000
soap making		201,000	201,000
liquid soap		201,000	165,000
bath soap		165,000	110,000
castile soap		110,000	74,000
handmade soap		74,000	74,000
make soap		110,000	74,000
homemade soap		60,500	49,500
milk soap		74,000	49,500
natural cosmetics		74,000	49,500
natural shampoo		60,500	49,500
organic soap		49,500	49,500
soap recipe		60,500	49,500
lavender soap		49,500	40,500

Now you can take the information you've found from your keyword research and put it into practice. Implement new Title tags and meta descriptions based on your research.

## Growing Popularity and Links

Links on the web are like citations of a book. Just as scholars use the number of times a book is referenced, and by whom, to measure the popularity and credibility of a book, the engines use links to measure the importance of a page on the web.

But when the engine's look at links, they do not weigh all of them with the same importance. Links from credible domains, that have many links themselves, carry much more weight than spammy links from domains with little credibility. In this sense, you can think about links to a website as coins in a piggy bank. A full piggy bank is great, but a piggy bank full of quarters is going to be worth a lot more than a piggy bank full of pennies. Links to a website work very much the same way. It's great to have lots of links, but the most benefit will come from having lots of high quality links.

There are many other nuances to the search engine algorithms and for more details you can read SEOmoz's survey data of top [Search Engine Ranking Factors](#), but inbound links are clearly among the most important. Getting a high number of links, and specifically getting links with high credibility (or [TrustRank](#)) are essential to rank on target search terms.

Also, as important as inbound links are for getting organic traffic, the SEO benefit you get from links is really difficult to measure. The engines have precise, mathematical metrics, but this data is not easily accessible. For more detailed information about link building, check out the [Professional's Guide to Link Building](#).

## Four Sample Link Building Strategies

Search for sites like yours in the search engines by using keywords and phrases directly relevant to your shop. When you locate sites that aren't directly competitive, you can email them, use their online forms, call them on the phone, or even send them a letter by mail to start a conversation about getting a link. Check out this [blog post on email link requests](#) for more detail. Additionally, Etsy provides a great way to build links externally and internally right within the Etsy site, using Etsy mini and the Storque.

1. **Etsy Mini** - Etsy Mini is a way to create links for your store, which you can use to post in numerous places to build links back to your site. You can customize the mini based on the type of items to show, image size and layout. After selecting your options, and previewing that it looks ok, copy the code that's created and paste it into your blog, MySpace, Facebook or other website. The links to the products and the link at the bottom of the widget all point back to your shop. Voila! You've just built inbound links to your Etsy shop.
2. **The Storque** – Contributing to the Etsy blog and commenting on other's posts will help you to build links to your shop. Not only will you create excellent internal links from the Storque to your shop, but other users will see your links and site and can create listings and inbound links from other blogs, including blogrolls and blog directories as well. Blogs in general are a great way to create fresh content on a consistent basis. Users participate in conversations, set up feeds, and like to read and link to fresh content.

3. **Linkbait** - Create products that inspire viral sharing and natural linking. In the SEO world, this is often called "linkbait." Good examples might include quirky wedding jewelry or unique pet clothing. You want a product that users will want to share with friends by linking to it from their website (or social media site). This often creates a viral effect, which in turn creates many valuable links directly to your most prized products, building your shops trust, authority and rankings potential.

Linkbait examples: Following are some of the highest linked to products on the site. Some of these are old or out of stock, but you get the idea. People are interested and will link to these kinds of products:

- HTML earrings: [http://www.etsy.com/view\\_listing.php?listing\\_id=6045947](http://www.etsy.com/view_listing.php?listing_id=6045947) (114 inbound links from different domains)
  - Cat 5 wedding rings: [http://www.etsy.com/view\\_listing.php?listing\\_id=10501732](http://www.etsy.com/view_listing.php?listing_id=10501732) (76 inbound links from different domains)
  - Alt Ctrl Del pillows: [http://www.etsy.com/view\\_listing.php?listing\\_id=23153648](http://www.etsy.com/view_listing.php?listing_id=23153648) (55 inbound links from different domains)
  - Bacon Scarf: [http://www.etsy.com/view\\_listing.php?listing\\_id=9330217](http://www.etsy.com/view_listing.php?listing_id=9330217) (42 inbound links from different domains)
4. **Directories** - Many sites offer directories or listings of relevant resources. You can find hundreds of these on SEOMoz's [Directory List](#) or use the search engines themselves to find lists of pages that offer outbound links in this fashion (for example, try searching for [allintitle: resources directory](#) at Google and notice the millions of results). For more detail see this post on [what makes a good directory](#) and this one on the [role of directories in link building](#).

## An Aside on Buying Links

Though buying links can be an important part of a link building campaign, strong negative action can be taken, particularly by Google, against sites that engage in buying or selling links through link brokers. At SEOMoz, we still will recommend paid links in some instances for some clients, but given Etsy's potential for natural linkbait, we are not recommending paid link campaigns at the present time. For a more thorough evaluation of the subject, see blog posts on [The Quizzical Duality of Paid Links](#) and The [Art of Buying Links Under the Radar](#).

## Appendix I - How Search Engines Operate

There are many search engines out there, including Google, Yahoo!, Bing, Baidu, Naver, & Ask.com, just to name a few. But for this guide, we are going to focus primarily on the ones that are the three largest in the US and other English speaking countries: Google, Yahoo! and Bing.

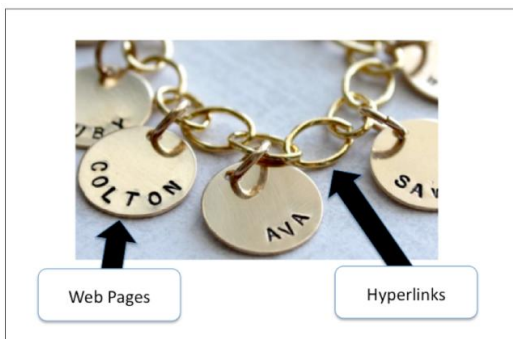
The search engines have several major goals and functions. These include:

- Crawling and indexing the billions of documents (pages & files) accessible on the Web
- Providing answers to user searches, most frequently by providing lists of relevant pages

In this section we will walk through the basics of how search engines work.

### Crawling & Indexing

Think of the World Wide Web as a collection of charm bracelets and each web page as a charm. The search engines need a way to identify people, so they sort through each bracelet and indentify relationships such as which children have similar names or which children are related to the same grandparent. To pick out these relationships, the engines use one of the best indicators they have: links.



**Picture:** A charm bracelet serves as an apt analogy for how search engines index the world wide web. The above [Charm Bracelet](#) image is courtesy of Etsy seller [Amy Cornwell Designs](#).

To extend the charm bracelet analogy further, each link to a website is like a charm on a bracelet. It represents a connection. And just as seeing that both Colton and Ava are linked to the same grandmother helps a person identify which grandchildren are related, seeing which web pages are linked to one another helps Google identify which pages and sites are related to one another on the web.

Essentially it is through the link structure of the web, and seeing which pages bind together through links, that search engines' automated robots, called "crawlers" or "spiders" make associations between billions of interconnected documents. (Note: for those looking for a piece of nerd trivia, Google's robot is affectionately called Googlebot. 😊)

Once the engines have crawled the pages on the web, they have a second job: storing every name in massive hard drives or baby name databases, if you will. And in order to answer every search, and remember every name, the engines have to be able to access billions of pages in a fraction of a second.

So even though no search engine can tell stories or bake quite like your grandmother (sadly, not even Googlebot can), with datacenters that hold thousands of machines that process unimaginably large quantities of information, the search engines are able to remember the names of every child on every charm bracelet at a rate that would impress even the sharpest of Grandmothers.

## Appendix II - Why Search Engine Marketing is Necessary

While many have a Field of Dreams view of website creation, the reality is that just because you build it does not mean they will come. And just as this type of misconception has never been more true than around organic search engine traffic, with 80-90% of search result clicks going to the organic listings (not the paid ads on the right), the need for proactive search engine optimization has never been more prevalent.

One very common mistake goes something like this:

No smart engineer would ever build a search engine that requires websites to follow certain rules or principles in order to be ranked or indexed. Anyone would want a system that can crawl through any architecture, parse any amount of complex or imperfect code and still find a way to return the best and most relevant results, not the ones that have been "optimized" by unlicensed search marketing experts.

Initially, this can seem like a tough obstacle to overcome, but the more you understand about the details of how the engines work, the more apparent it becomes that search traffic does not just magically appear. More often than not, it requires more work than simply building a site. In other words, the odds that searchers will just show up are slim. It's much more likely that you will first have to do some work to help visitors navigate through the cornfields.