



F r o m T e c h n o l o g i e s t o S o l u t i o n s

Drupal 6 Search Engine Optimization

Rank high in search engines with professional SEO tips, modules, and best practices for Drupal web sites

Ben Finklea

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BIRMINGHAM - MUMBAI

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Credits

Author

Ben Finklea

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Production Coordinator

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Dolly Dasilva

Drawing Coordinator

Nilesh Mohite

About the Author

Ben Finklea is the founder and CEO of Volacci, an online marketing company in Austin, Texas. It is the best job in the world.

He entered the world of online marketing in 1995, when he founded a web design company from his dormitory room at Texas A&M University. After graduation, he worked in various capacities in sales and marketing, from tiny start-ups to Apple. In 2001, he founded Sprysoft, an e-commerce store that successfully sold over \$5 million in software (online) to students, teachers, and schools. He formed SpryDev Online Marketing in 2005, to use the techniques and processes learned at Sprysoft, to help other businesses sell online. SpryDev grew quickly and changed names to Volacci in 2008.

He and the Volacci team provide Search Engine Optimization, Paid Search, and Conversions Consulting to a varied client base, ranging from local real estate agents to Fortune 500 companies. Their goal is to be the best Drupal SEO company on the planet.

You can hear him on the Volacci SEO podcasts and videos, and read his blog at www.Volacci.com. His Twitter name is BenFinklea.

He spends his free time reading, writing, volunteering at his church, and raising two sons with his wife of 14 years. He used to do cool things like collecting comic books and baseball cards, paintball, and playing video games. He's looking forward to doing all those things again when his kids get a little older.

He lives near Austin, Texas.

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About the Reviewers

John K. Murphy is a graduate of the University of West Virginia, and has been wrapped up in computers and software development since the 1980s. When he is not buried in a book or jumping out of an airplane, he works as an IT consultant.

He lives with his wife and two children in Pittsburgh, PA, and is currently obsessing about the Internet of Things.

Michael Ruoss is a consultant at Optaros. His main technical skills lie in the development of PHP/MySQL frameworks. He holds a Master's Degree in Computer Science from Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. Within the engagement at Optaros, he gained much experience in the integration of Drupal, Magento, Alfresco, and other CMS and e-commerce solutions.

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Preface

"There can be only one!" —The Highlander

*"If you are not first in Google then your competition certainly is."
—Ben Finklea*

At its heart, Drupal is a way for people to build great web sites in a short period of time. It's packaged up with some compelling features like user logins, RSS, version control, an advanced theme layer, and solid core code. There are bundled releases (Acquia Drupal and Open Atrium) that take Drupal further, faster. There are great theme web sites (www.topnotchthemes.com) that make your site look just like you want it to. There are terrific training videos (www.lullabot.com), and hundreds of forums where you can find answers to any question you might have. But, Drupal is not perfect.

Despite its advantages, many Drupal web sites suffer with poor search engine rankings. The thing that makes Drupal so powerful – its flexibility – also means that it takes some work to get it configured just the right way for the search engines.

That's where Drupal 6 Search Engine Optimization comes in.

With this book and basic Drupal 6 knowledge, that is, how to log in, create content, and install modules – you can build a perfectly optimized web site. Each chapter uses easy, step-by-step instructions to walk you through the Drupal Search Engine Optimization (SEO) modules, configurations, and content you will need. Advanced topics include things like site organization, A/B testing, and automatic content tagging to maximize SEO. If you want a significant advantage over competitors who are not using Drupal, and to maximize the return on investment of your Drupal 6 web site, then this is the book for you.

What this book covers

Chapter 1, The Tools That You'll Need, covers all the tools you're going to need for Drupal SEO. From Drupal and all the great modules available for SEO to setting up a Google account, this chapter is foundational to the rest of this book.

Chapter 2, Keyword Research, explains all the tools you're going to need to do keyword research, from Drupal stats in your own web site to all the great tools available online. Keyword research is one of the most important things you'll do in SEO, so make sure you've taken the time to do it right.

Chapter 3, On-Page Optimization, explores the most important aspects of on-page SEO for your Drupal site, which are Page Titles and Paths.

Chapter 4, More On-Page Optimization, covers more of the all-important aspects of on-page SEO for your Drupal site.

Chapter 5, Sitemaps, discusses the origin of sitemaps and how they're used to make sure your entire site is crawled by the search engines. It also teaches you how to make a user-friendly sitemap for your site visitors.

Chapter 6, robots.txt, .htaccess, and W3C Validation, teaches you some of the most technical aspects of a good SEO.

Chapter 7, RSS Feeds, Site Speed, and SEO Testing, helps you get your web site Search Engine Optimized. It teaches you about RSS Feeds, PageRank, Drupal's built-in caching, and checking your site with SEOMoz.

Chapter 8, Content is King, teaches you how to get good content and search engine optimize it. It also teaches you how to maintain the content and keep it search engine-optimized.

Chapter 9, Taking Control of Your Content, teaches how to maintain your content and gain control over it. It also teaches how to keep your content compliant and free from spam with the use of various modules.

Chapter 10, Increasing the Conversion Rate of Your Drupal Web site, explores the three main types of web sites and their conversion goals. It also covers the Usability and A/B testing techniques.

Appendix A explains how to avoid ten common SEO mistakes.

Appendix B provides you with the Drupal SEO Checklist.

Appendix C covers the Drupal SEO case study for the Acquia product launch.

What you need for this book

A basic understanding of Drupal will be helpful – what a node is, how to create nodes, how to log in to the admin sections of your Drupal site, and how to properly install and enable a module. No knowledge of SEO will be assumed, but a basic knowledge of search engines is expected.

Who this book is for

Maybe you're a web site owner who wants to get more leads and sales from his web site. Maybe you're a Drupal web developer and your customers are asking you how to increase the return on investment of their web site. Or perhaps you're a non-profit, that is looking for more donations and volunteers. Maybe you're someone else entirely, there are almost as many good reasons to rank well in Google as there are web sites.


No matter your reason, you hold in your hands the knowledge that you need to rank at the top of the search engines, and turn visitors into paying customers for your business. Each page of this book tells you exactly what you'll need to do, to properly search engine optimize your web site. If you're relatively new to Drupal, just follow the easy, step-by-step instructions and screenshots. If you're an old hand, skip past the basic steps and review the best configuration options for each module. I've boiled down years of experience in Drupal, online marketing, monetization, dozens of modules, some tips, and a few tricks into a powerful potion of Drupal SEO goodness.

Conventions

In this book, you will find a number of styles of text that distinguish between different kinds of information. Here are some examples of these styles, and an explanation of their meaning.

Code words in text are shown as follows: "Let's take a deeper look at each directive used in the Drupal `robots.txt` file".

New terms and **important words** are shown in bold. Words that you see on the screen, in menus or dialog boxes for example, appear in our text like this: " I added the site logo file into the **Test URLs** box".

 Warnings or important notes appear in a box like this.]

 Tips and tricks appear like this.]

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1

The Tools You'll Need

Congratulations! You're about to embark on a fun and interesting journey into the world of online marketing. Whether you're trying to sell more products, generate leads, or get more pageviews on your sponsors ads, **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** will take you where you want to go.

And, you're using Drupal 6! You've picked a great platform for building your web site. It's widely held that Drupal is one of the best choices if you want to rank well in the search engines. I personally believe that it's hands-down the best possible platform for SEO. I've seen clients triple their traffic within a few weeks of switching from a lesser platform. Believe it – Drupal is the best! But, you already knew that, didn't you? In this chapter, we're going to dive right in and cover some of the top tips for Drupal SEO:

- Drupal – which version you should use
- How to install 99% of modules
- The essential SEO modules that you'll need for your Drupal site
- Installing and using the SEO Checklist module
- Setting up a Google account
- Installing Google analytics and Webmaster Tools on your site
- Some great paid tools to help you with your SEO



Helpful web sites:

There are some great resources online to help you along:

www.DrupalSEObook.com: The web site of this book. Visit for additional tips, updates, module suggestions, and to discuss Drupal SEO. The author often participates here so it's a great place to ask questions.

groups.drupal.org/search-engine-optimization: The Drupal SEO group on www.Drupal.org.

tips.webdesign10.com/drupal-seo: Another resource for Drupal SEO tips.

The right tools make the project go smoothly. When you decide to SEO your Drupal 6 web site, you'll need the following:

Drupal 6

You can download Drupal 6 from two sources:

- Drupal.org: This is where you can get the latest release of the open-source Drupal 6.
- Acquia.com: Acquia is a company co-founded by Dries Buytart (the founder of Drupal) and Jay Batson. Acquia has produced a corporate version of Drupal, creatively called Acquia Drupal. Acquia Drupal has some of the better modules pre-installed and provides some great extra services like uptime monitoring, version updates, and advanced support to your installation and modules. Downloading and installing it is free but the services do cost a bit extra – starting at a few hundred dollars per year. That's well worth the extras you get.



Are you running a corporate site and you're not quite up to speed on Drupal? Consider signing up for Acquia's support services. Acquia Network subscriptions provide commercial-grade support and network services for all Drupal 6.x web sites (not just Acquia Drupal) to help you implement Drupal with confidence. Visit <http://acquia.com/> for more information.

Modules

A module is a community-created plugin that enhances Drupal's core functionality. From XML sitemaps to better page titles, modules are crucial to the search engine optimization of any Drupal site. Installing modules is easy and once you know how to install one, you probably know how to install them all.



For a complete explanation of installing modules, check out the following links: <http://drupal.org/node/120641> and <http://drupal.org/node/120642>.

Installing 99% of Drupal modules:

In the upcoming chapters, you'll come across a lot of Drupal modules. You need to carry out the following steps in order to install 99% of Drupal modules:

1. Download the module from <http://drupal.org/project/Modules> and extract it.
2. FTP to your Drupal site. Drop the extracted module folder into the `sites/all/modules` folder (if that directory is not there then create it).
3. Using your browser, visit <http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/user> and log in.
4. Now visit <http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin/build/modules/>. If you forget this URL, just go to the admin page and click the **Modules** link.
5. Select the checkbox next to the module that you just installed. If needed, also tick any sub-modules that you just installed.
6. Click on the **Save Configuration** button. In a couple of seconds, the newly selected module will install itself. Any errors will appear in red.
7. Go to <http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin/user/permissions> and set the permissions for that module so that different **roles** can use or administer the new functionality that the module has added (not required for all modules).
8. Go to <http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin> and you'll see links to customize the settings of your newly installed module.

Installing the remaining 1% Drupal modules

If the module isn't working, be sure to read the `README.txt` file that came with the module. Sometimes, there are extra steps required to fully install a module.



Drush: The alternative to manual Drupal module installation

If you're comfortable with using the Unix command line, you should consider **Drush**. Drush is a module created by Moshe Weitzman that provides a command line shell and Unix scripting interface for Drupal. After you install it, you'll be able to use commands like `drush dl modulename` and `drush enable modulename` to install and enable modules. No trips to drupal.org and no admin screens so it's very fast.

Essential SEO modules

Now that you know how to install modules, there are several that you'll need in order to optimize your Drupal site.

What follows is a list of the non-core Drupal modules you'll use most often for SEO. (Non-core means not included in the base Drupal installation. However, something might be included in Acquia Drupal so check your Modules admin screen first!) We'll cover almost all of these in more detail later in the book. You can either download them all and install them on your site or grab them one at a time as you work on each SEO task. Either way, don't enable them until you're clear what they do and how to configure them. Sometimes, careful setup is required to get the optimal benefit from a module.

- **SEO Checklist:** It provides a checklist with download links and admin shortcuts to most modules and tasks needed during the SEO process.
 - To download this module, follow this link:
http://drupal.org/project/seo_checklist
 - To configure this module's settings, follow this link: <http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin/settings/seochecklist>
 - Step-by-step configuration instructions have been provided in this chapter



The SEO Checklist will help you save time

The Drupal SEO Checklist module helps you keep track of the SEO tasks needed for your site. It doesn't do any SEO by itself – it's a checklist that follows along nicely with this book. Links to download and configure most of the modules listed here are built into the SEO Checklist module. It also puts a date stamp on each task as you complete it so it's very handy if you're working on more than one site or you would like to report the work you've done to a boss or client.

- **Google Analytics:** It helps you keep track of visitors.
 - To download this module, follow this link:
http://drupal.org/project/google_analytics
 - To configure this module's settings, follow this link:
<http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin/settings/googleanalytics>
 - Step-by-step configuration instructions have been provided in this chapter
- **Page title:** It allows you to set <title> tags for nodes throughout your site.
 - To download this module, follow this link:
http://drupal.org/project/page_title
 - Note: The Page title requires the Token module to function
Download: <http://drupal.org/project/token>
 - To configure this module's settings, follow this link: http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin/settings/page_title
 - Step-by-step configuration instructions have been provided in Chapter 3, *On-Page Optimization*
- **Pathauto:** It automatically creates search engine friendly URLs based on the title of your content.
 - To download this module, follow this link:
<http://drupal.org/project/pathauto>
 - To configure this module's settings, follow this link: <http://www.yourDrupalsite.com/admin/settings/pathauto>
 - Step-by-step configuration instructions have been provided in Chapter 3, *On-Page Optimization*