

# The 10 Minute Homepage Tune-Up

By Dan Thies

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Is your site's home page search engine friendly? Think so, eh? The vast majority of websites, even those belonging to Fortune 500 companies, are far from optimized.

I use a simple four-step process to find the most common errors. Using this to do a quick tune-up on your homepage takes about 10 minutes, and it will pay off for years to come.

## Step One: Identify Your Keywords

The first step, and often an overlooked one, is deciding which keywords and phrases you're targeting with your home page. What you want to identify are the 4-7 top keywords or phrases that you will use on your homepage.

## Step Two: Keyword Placement Review

Once you know which keywords you're targeting, pick the most important 1 or 2 keywords or phrases, and make sure they're loaded into the right places on the page.

- TITLE tag: keyword phrase | more keywords if possible  
The optimal title tag starts with a keyword or keyword phrase, followed by a vertical bar (should be above the Enter key), then as many more keywords as you can work in. Limit your page titles to 5-8 words if you can. Make sure your page title still makes sense to someone who reads it, because search engines will display the title in your site's listing.

- META Description & Keywords  
Your top keyword or phrase should appear as early as possible in these tags - "Welcome to..." is not the right way to do it! Your Description still has to make sense, since many search engines will display it in your site's listing.

- H1 or H2 Heading  
The first text on your page should include your top 1 or 2 keywords or phrases wrapped inside of an H1 tag. In addition,

I like to work my other keywords into H2 headings (2-3 of them) farther down the page.

#### - First Paragraph and Body Text

The first paragraph of text should include your top 1 or 2 keywords, as early as possible, preferable within the first few words. Additional keywords can be worked into the rest of the text, under the H2 heading where they appear.

#### - Hyperlinks

For best results, all of your top keywords should appear in hyperlinks on your home page, leading to internal pages on your site. If you use images for your navigation links, use the ALT property of those images to contain the appropriate keywords for that link.

#### - Closing Text & Site Map

If it makes sense to have your top 1-2 keywords appear again at the bottom of the page, use them again here, but don't make nonsense out of your homepage over it. If you have a site map, put a text link to it at the bottom of your page.

#### - Page Size:

Your home page should be as small as possible. Move any Javascript or CSS you're using into external files, and do what you can to move your important keyword content toward the top of the file. Using layers instead of tables for layout makes the latter task a lot easier.

#### Step Three: Check Your Links

It should go without saying, but you should check every link on your homepage to make sure it's working and active.

#### Step Four: Validate Your HTML

Finally, run your homepage through an HTML validator. Invalid HTML can make it impossible for the search engines to read your page correctly. Here's a link to an online validator you can use for free:

<http://www.htmlhelp.com/tools/validator/>

There you have it - ten minutes to a higher ranking homepage!

I wish you success...

Dan Thies is the author of "Search Engine Fast Start," a concise, step-by-step guide to search engine positioning, for the beginner to intermediate level webmaster - available now at [www.cannedbooks.com](http://www.cannedbooks.com)

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