

Creating Your Online Presence

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Introduction

The world of getting new clients has changed. Your online presence is more important today than it has ever been. Prospective clients are searching for professionals online and you want to appear in the results of those searches. If you rely on referrals from existing clients, your online presence is also critical because people will check you out online before deciding whether to call or e-mail you. As a solo practitioner or small firm, you don't have the resources to spend a lot of time creating or maintaining your online presence. And you need to know whether it is working for you or not.

In this highly interactive course, we will cover these areas:

- Getting found on the web
- Creating an online presence that convinces prospects to contact you
- Creating and maintaining a site with minimal effort

Course and Workbook Approach

The best way to learn the information in this course is to experience it live. We will spend a lot of time online, showing you tools and techniques that are proven to work. I will share what I suggest you do, how to do it, and, most importantly, why it is important. I encourage your participation today as I don't think I know everything in this area. I know what has worked for me and others, and how I get the vast majority of my new clients via my web presence. I would like everyone to share what is working in their practice and what their challenges are so we can help each other.

Throughout the session, I want you to be making a list of what you will do starting tomorrow. You can write the list on a notepad, or on your computer. At the end of the session, prioritize the list so you know what you will start working on tomorrow morning. I want you to learn today and start implementing tomorrow.

In this workbook I have given you notes of what I will cover, space to make your own notes for each section, and some instructions where necessary. I will direct you to online resources that I use and provide links and sites I find helpful. Note that when I include screen captures, I am doing so from sites the way they look when I created the workbook. Many of these sites update their look or functionality on a regular basis, so the screen may look differently or the functions may have changed when you look at it six months from now.

Questions to start with (there is no right answer)

What percentage of your clients currently find you first on the web?

Do clients check you out online before they contact you?

What social media sites are you listed on? What ones should you be listed on?

How do you know how well your online presence is working?

How do you compare to other practices in your area?

What does your ideal client look like? What services do they hire you for?

How much time/\$ are you willing to spend on your online presence?

Do you have teenagers/technical friends who can help you?

Should you follow every new social media trend/site in the news?

Why identifying your ideal client and the services they buy is so important

The content of your site/presence must appeal to this client.

Who are they?

- What industry are they in?
- Where do they live?
- What job do they have (role, position, title)?

What problem do they have?

- What situation are they facing?
- What problem are they looking to solve?
- What terms/phrases would they use to search for a solution?
- What proof can you offer that you can solve their problem?

Where can you find them?

- What groups are they a part of?
- What sites do they regularly visit?

Getting found on the web

Getting found in web searches

Top three search sites

According to the respected Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Winter 2012 Tracking Survey, when asked which search engine they use most often, 83% said Google, 6% said Yahoo, and 6% said other (5% didn't know). Although they did not say in the survey, I would think that a large part of the Other category is Bing.

comScore is another respected organization that measures actual searches done on the web, which gives us an idea of what people are actually using as opposed to what they say they use most often. In their August 2012 report, Google ranked first with 66.4% of searches, Microsoft's Bing came second with 15.9% and Yahoo third with 12.8%. All other search sites made up the remaining 4.9%. In mobile search, Google ranks even higher.

Given these results, it is clear you only need to focus on the three biggest search engines, Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Outside these three, you are looking at fringe search sites. Unless your target client is only in a fringe area, you can safely ignore the rest of the search sites.

Search engines rank results by relevance to the query. How do they know if your page is relevant? Example: Google this search term “effective PowerPoint presentation training”. Notice how the first page results include media such as slideshare presentations, PDF files, PPT files, and video.

Five elements of your site that help the most in ranking high in search engines

1. Page Title
2. Page description
3. Keywords
4. H1 tag
5. Page content

Plan all five for each key page on your site before the site is developed so that they are implemented properly. For most sites, the most visited page on your site will not be the home page. That is why optimization for search rankings is important for all key pages.

Techniques we will use:

View in browser

View in search engine

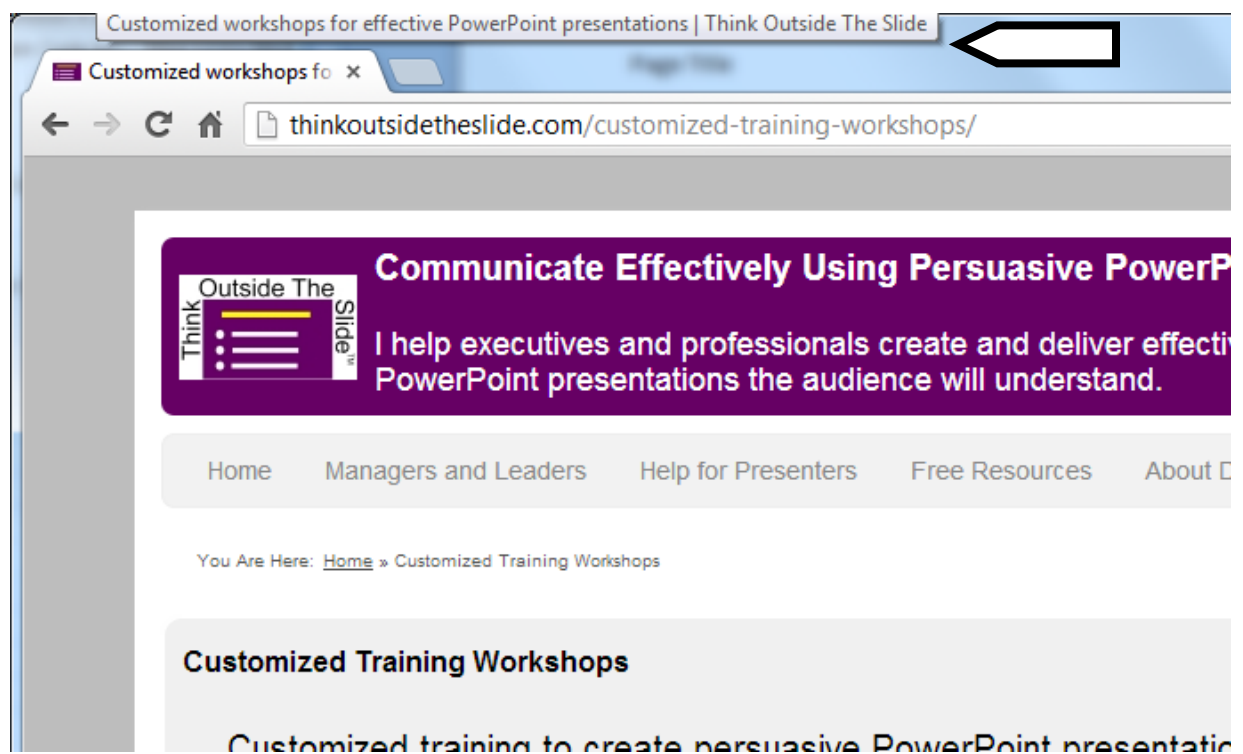
View source to look at web page (on iOS, download the Show Code app to be able to view source)

Page Title

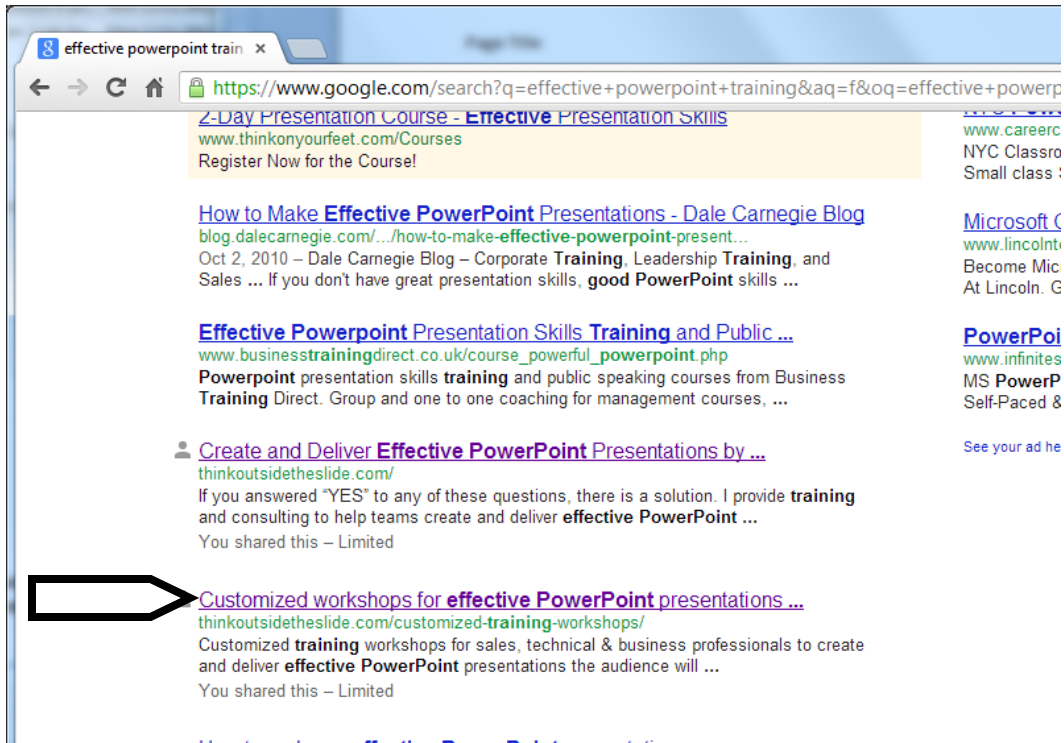
What is it? Search engines look to the page title to give them an idea of what the page is about, like the title of a book. You should usually try to keep the page title under 60 characters long.

Why is it important? Search engines look for key words or phrases in the title to determine what searches to rank this page in; if all the pages on your site have the same title, the search engine won't know which page is more relevant

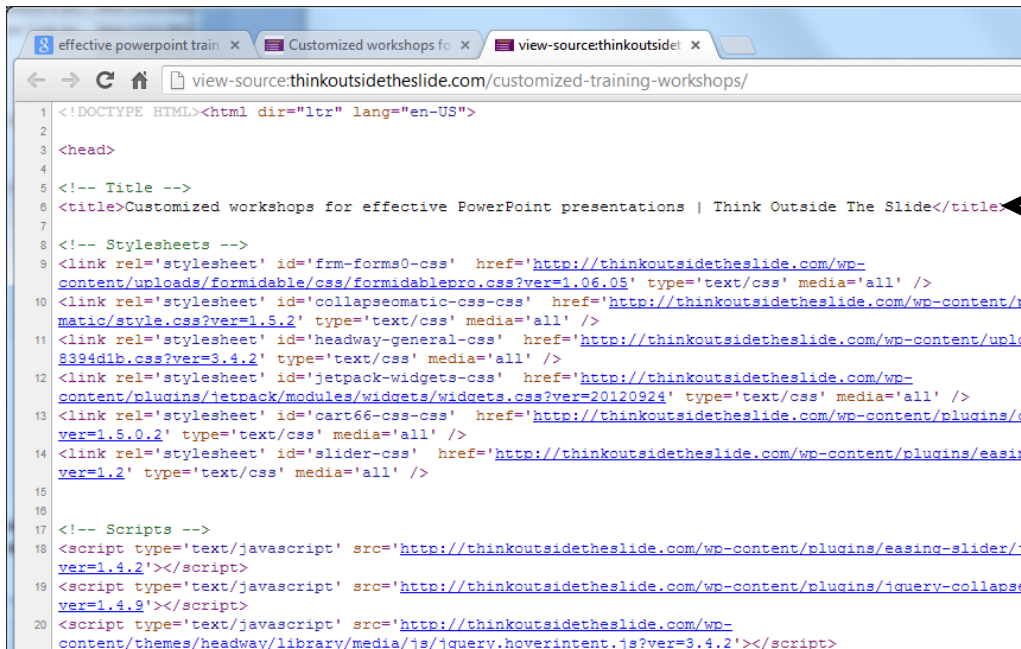
How to set/change it? In the HTML code of your site or through a Content Management System (CMS) interface.



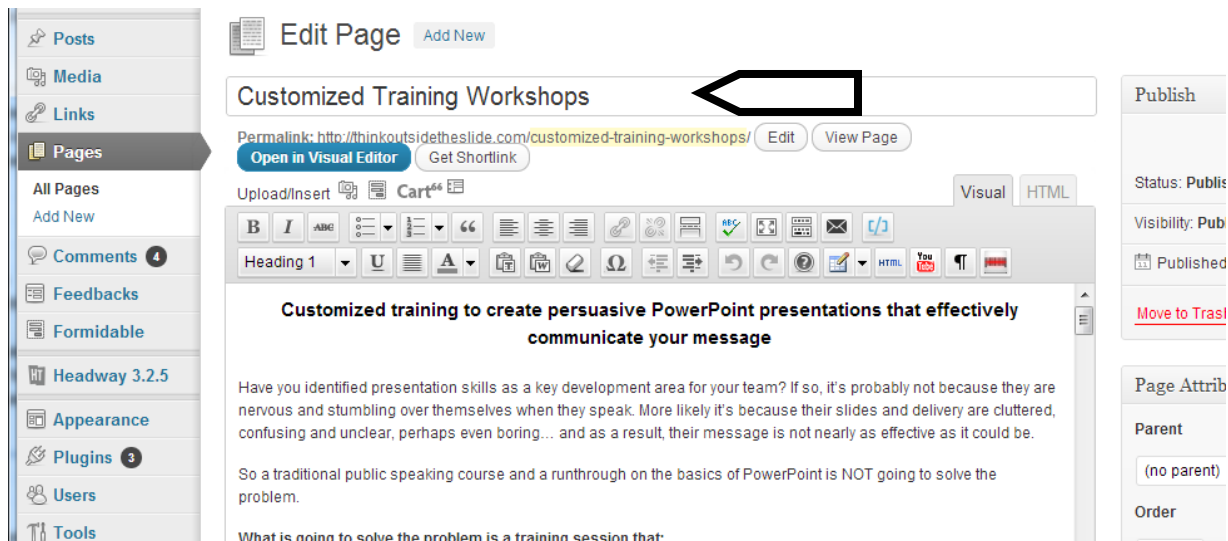
It appears in the tab of your browser. Since tabs were adopted, the text that is shown has been reduced dramatically.



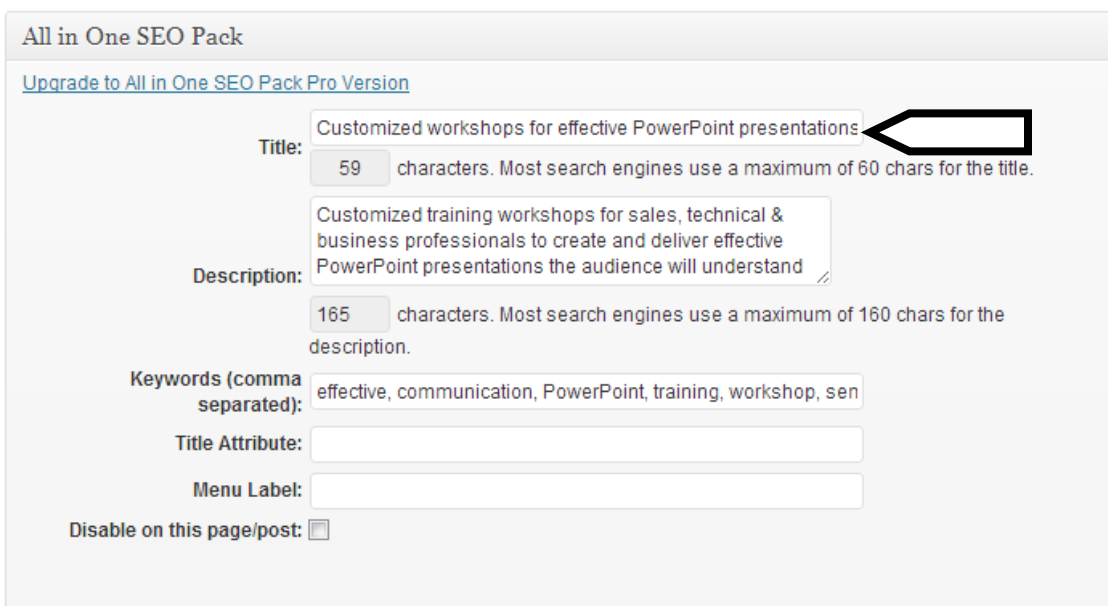
In search results, the title is the first line of the listing, and is the text that is linked to the actual page.



In the HTML of the page, the title is enclosed inside the <title> tag.



Most content management systems, like WordPress shown here, allow you to enter a title for a page, which, by default, is used for the <title> tag.



Plug-ins for WordPress and other CMS systems can give you greater control over the individual elements that help search engine ranking. This popular plug-in, All-in-One SEO for WordPress, allows entry of the most common elements and gives suggestions on length as well.

Hands-on: Go to your website; check the page title of some of the key pages on your site; do they accurately describe the content of that page? Do they contain the key words or phrases your prospects will be searching for?

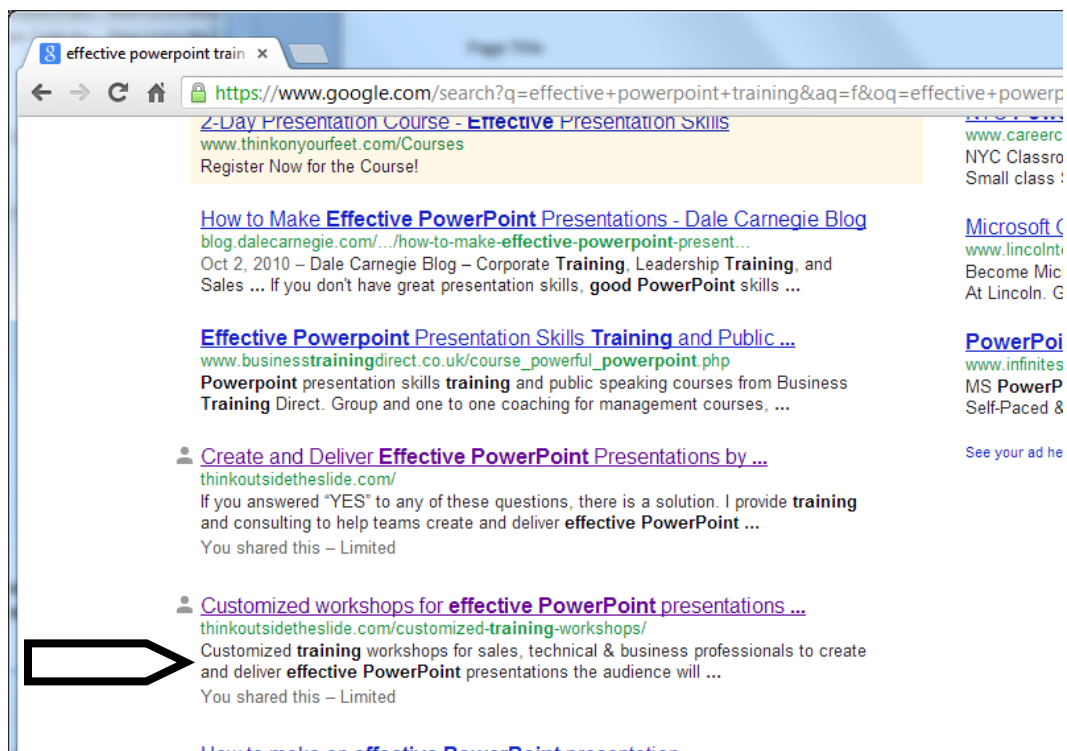
Implementation: What pages do you need to write titles for (main ones only to start)? What should those titles be?

Page Description

What is it? A longer description (usually around 160 characters at most) that gives a more detailed idea of what the page contains

Why it is important? This is the two line description that appears in a search result and what prospects use to determine whether to visit the page or not; it is not shown on your web page

How to set/change it? In the HTML code of your site or through a Content Management System (CMS) interface.



In a search result, the description appears below the page URL. It is what searchers read to decide whether to click on the link.

```
54 <!-- All in One SEO Pack 1.6.15.2 by Michael Torbert of Semper Fi Web Design[69,107] -->
55 <meta name="description" content="Customized training workshops for sales, technical & business professionals to create and deliver effective
56 PowerPoint presentations the audience will understand" />
57 <meta name="keywords" content="effective, communication, powerpoint, training, workshop, seminar, business, sales, presentation, slide,
58 visual, technical, financial, medical" />
59 <link rel="canonical" href="http://thinkoutsidetheslide.com/customized-training-workshops/" />
60 <!-- /all in one seo pack -->
```

The description is known as a “meta” tag in HTML because it is part of the <meta> tags that you can specify for any page. In this code example, you see how the description is set.

Hands-on: Do a search for a topic of interest; look at the descriptions; Based on what they say, which site would you visit first? Look at the descriptions on your own site pages using View Source.

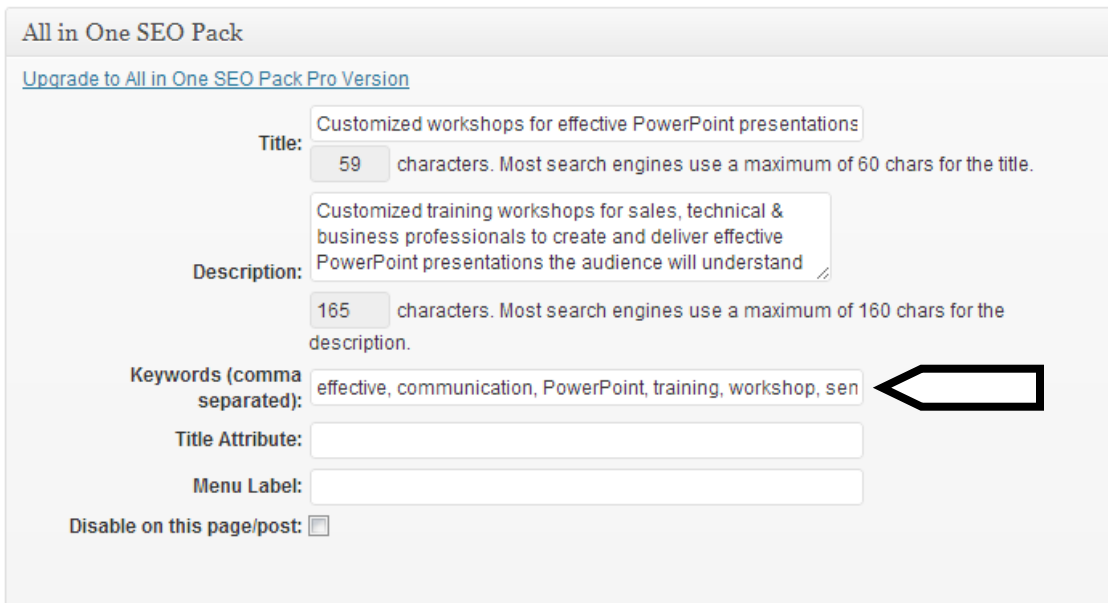
Implementation: What pages do you need to write descriptions for (main ones only to start)? What should those descriptions be?

Keywords

What is it? A list of words or phrases that may appear in a search query by a target prospect

Why it is important? It is less important than it used to be due to tricks some sites were playing. It is still worth setting to reinforce other elements of the page. These keywords are not shown on your web page

How to set/change it? In the HTML code of your site or through a Content Management System (CMS) interface.



All in One SEO Pack

[Upgrade to All in One SEO Pack Pro Version](#)

Title: Customized workshops for effective PowerPoint presentations
59 characters. Most search engines use a maximum of 60 chars for the title.

Description: Customized training workshops for sales, technical & business professionals to create and deliver effective PowerPoint presentations the audience will understand
165 characters. Most search engines use a maximum of 160 chars for the description.

Keywords (comma separated): effective, communication, PowerPoint, training, workshop, seminar

Title Attribute:

Menu Label:

Disable on this page/post:

For each page on your site, you enter the keywords separated by commas. Here the All-in-One SEO plug-in has a specific field for you to enter the keywords in.

```
54  
55 <!-- All in One SEO Pack 1.6.15.2 by Michael Torbert of Semper Fi Web Design[69,107] -->  
56 <meta name="description" content="Customized training workshops for sales, technical & business professionals to create and deliver effective  
57 PowerPoint presentations the audience will understand" />  
58 <meta name="keywords" content="effective, communication, powerpoint, training, workshop, seminar, business, sales, presentation, slide,  
59 visual, technical, financial, medical" />  
60 <link rel="canonical" href="http://thinkoutsidetheslide.com/customized-training-workshops/" />  
61 <!-- /all in one seo pack -->
```

The keywords are another “meta” tag as shown in this code example.

Hands-on: Look at the main pages on your site and see what keywords, if any, have been set. Do a search for a topic of interest. For a top ranking site, use View Source to look at the keywords on that page.

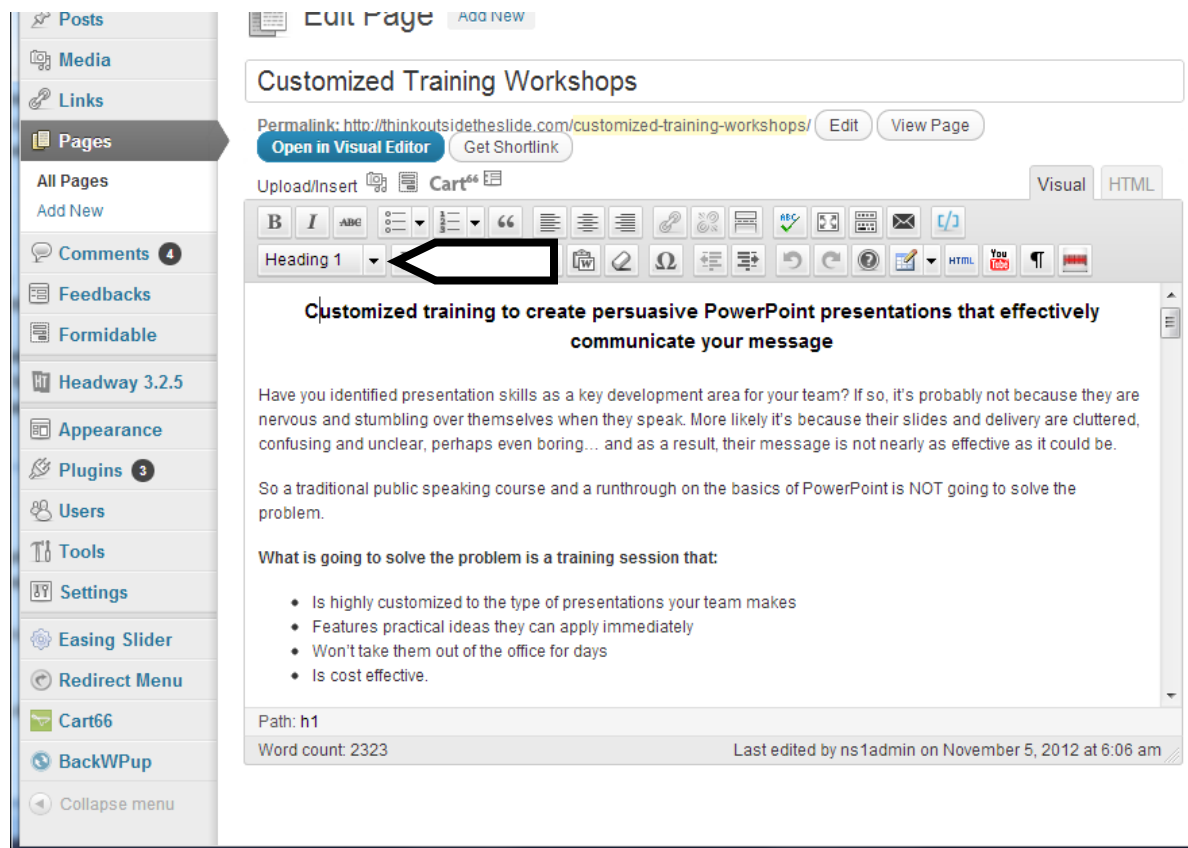
Implementation: What pages do you need to write keywords for (main ones only to start)? What should those keywords be?

H1 tag

What is it? This HTML tag indicates the top level headline on a page

Why it is important? Search engines place weight on the text that you determine is the most important through looking at what text is inside the H1 tag on a page. They consider it similar to the headline in a newspaper. Then they use the words or phrases in this text to determine what the page is about and how well it should rank.

How to set/change it? In the HTML code of your site or through a Content Management System (CMS) interface. This may be more complicated if the site designer has pre-set the format for the H1 tag text and it makes the site look strange

A screenshot of a CMS interface for editing a page. The page title is "Customized Training Workshops". The editor shows a rich text editor with a toolbar. A black arrow points to the "Heading 1" dropdown menu in the toolbar. The main content area displays the text: "Customized training to create persuasive PowerPoint presentations that effectively communicate your message". Below this, there is a paragraph of text and a bulleted list. The interface includes a sidebar with navigation options like Posts, Media, Links, Pages, Comments, Feedbacks, and Settings. At the bottom, it shows the path as "h1", a word count of 2323, and the last edited date as November 5, 2012 at 6:06 am.

If your CMS allows, you can usually select the Heading 1 tag as you would select any style or font. You can also add the tag manually to a page in an HTML editor.

```
184 <section class="column column-1 grid-width-18 grid-left-0">
185 <div id="block-20" class="block block-type-content block-fluid-height"><div class="block-content"><div class="loop"><div id="post-534"
class="post-534 page type-page status-publish hentry author-nsiadmin"><h1 class="entry-title">Customized Training Workshops</h1><div
class="entry-content"><h1 align="center">Customized training to create persuasive PowerPoint presentations that effectively communicate your
message</h1>
186 <p>Have you identified presentation skills as a key development area for your team? If so, it's probably not because they are nervous and
stumbling over themselves when they speak. More likely it's because their slides and delivery are cluttered, confusing and unclear, perhaps
even boring... and as a result, their message is not nearly as effective as it could be.</p>
187 <p>So a traditional public speaking course and a runthrough on the basics of PowerPoint is NOT going to solve the problem.</p>
188 <p><strong>What is going to solve the problem is a training session that:</strong></p>
```

The `<h1>` tag is shown in this code example.

Hands-on: Look at the main pages on your site and see what H1 heading, if any, has been set. Do a search for a topic of interest. For a top ranking site, use View Source to look at the H1 tag, if any, on that page.

Implementation: You likely already have a headline for each page on your site, you just may need to place it inside an H1 tag

Page content

What is it? This is simply the content of each page

Why it is important? Search engines place weight on the text on each page, especially the first 50-100 words and the last 50-100 words, with the thinking being that the first paragraph introduces the topic and the last paragraph sums it up. They look at all the text to determine what the page is about and for which search terms it is relevant. It helps to have key words or phrases used a number of times on a certain page, without making it appear to be “keyword stuffing”, which will get you dropped in search rankings. It is important that the text on your site is readable by a search engine and not an image of text. Search engines also like to see new content on a regular basis, which indicates an active site.

How to set/change it? However you create your web pages

Hands-on: Look at the main pages on your site and see if you have an introductory and summary paragraph that clearly indicates what the page is about with key words or phrases in them.

Implementation: Think about how you might rewrite the text on your key pages to include more of the keywords and phrases that you want prospects to find. When was the last time you posted new content to your site? How often could you commit to posting new content?

Getting found via Social Media

Social media is not the “magic bullet” that will solve all your online problems. It may actually cause more issues than it solves.

Randall Craig (<http://www.randallcraig.com>) has a good strategy with regards to using social media effectively to build your online presence. I will share how I think you can adapt his ideas to make social media work for you as a solo practitioner or small firm.

First, decide which social media sites make sense for you to have a presence on. Remember that every site will take time to set up and update. Answer these questions before deciding to set up a profile on a social media site:

- Does the purpose of this site make sense for my business (is it social or business oriented, what is the focus)?
- Are my prospective clients using this site for professional purposes (as opposed to recreational reasons)?
- Will I spend the time to provide updates on this site?
- Are my competitors active on this site? (it doesn't mean necessarily that you should be there too)
- Do I use this site to research possible providers?

Second, separate the sites into two categories, primary sites where you will have regular updates on the site, and static listings where you only intend to set up a profile once and never change it. In both cases, the best approach is to have all links, updates, or posts point back to your main website. This way, you drive traffic back to the one site you will update regularly.

For the static sites, set up a profile listing with your contact information and a link to your website. Let people know that all updates will be on your website, so they know where to go to get the latest information.

For the sites you want to actively update, determine what schedule of updates you can commit to and what content you will post. I suggest using a tool like Hootsuite to automatically post an update to multiple sites at once. All the posts are short and link back to your website. If you find that you have chosen too many primary sites and it will take too much time to update them regularly, reduce the number of sites in this category using the criteria above of which ones will reach the greatest number of prospective clients. Whenever you provide an update to social media sites, remember that you can provide a link to existing content that you haven't profiled recently, instead of always creating new content. This can save time and effort.

Hands-on: How many social media sites are you on? How often do you update them? Which ones bring you business (if any)? Which ones have the potential to bring you business?

Implementation: Determine the primary and static social media sites for your business. Create a plan for setting up/revising your profile. Create a plan for updates to your primary sites.

Creating an online presence that convinces prospects to contact you

Design your site so it is easy to find the information a prospect is looking for.

Take some time to consider the sections on your site, what the headings should be, what the menus should contain. Every time someone can't find what they are looking for, the chance they will click away from your site increases. Look at your site from the prospect's perspective and honestly evaluate whether they could easily find what they are looking for.

Clearly show you solve certain problems.

You have narrowed down the problems that you solve, and you need to clearly articulate those in language that people can relate to and understand. They need to immediately recognize that they have found a solution to their problem. Demonstrate your expertise through examples, case studies, and testimonials. Remember that if they aren't convinced you can solve their problem from reading your website, you won't even get a chance to speak to them, because they will move on to another provider.

Be clear about what you do & don't do, and who you work best with

While you want to attract prospects, you don't want to spend time with the wrong prospects, ones who don't have the problem you can solve, those who don't see the value in your services, and those who aren't a good fit. Make it clear who should be contacting you. When a target prospect reads your site, you want them to conclude that this would be a perfect match. Don't be afraid to be very explicit in how you state this – the clearer you are, the quicker they will come to the conclusion that you are the right person for them.

Explain how you are different from others they may be considering

It is likely that a prospect will be looking at many possible providers to solve the problem they have. If everyone sounds the same, it will be hard for them to even remember your name. You are unique and you need to articulate this on your website. Compare what you do to the typical provider, contrast your approach to the approach they are likely to see from others. Make it clear how you stand out in the crowd of providers that they are looking at.

Have a lot of great content

People today want to hire an expert, not just any provider who can do the job. Experts get compensated at a higher level than commodity providers. Someone who has come to your website needs to come to the conclusion that you are an expert from the depth of content on your site and the insight that they don't hear from anyone but you. Plan to regularly share new ideas and examples on your site. Not only will this show that you are constantly moving forward and not stagnating, but it also helps raise your rankings in search engines.

Use video to help them get to know you before they meet you

If you don't have video on your website, you are missing a key element that convinces visitors that you are the right solution for their problem. I am told over and over that it was my video that convinced my clients to call me and hire me. Video works in a way that words just cannot. Studies show that top decision makers are watching video online and using it to help make their decisions.

You don't need a fancy production or need to spend a lot of money to create video for your website. Today's smartphones and cameras take high quality video that will work well on your site. Visitors to your site will actually trust a lower production value video more since they figure it is more truthful than a slickly produced promo. You can record the video and edit it yourself using free tools like Windows Movie Maker or iMovie. If you have never used these tools before, plenty of tutorials are available online.

It isn't hard to get the video on your site either. The easiest way to have a video on your site is to use one of the video hosting sites, like YouTube, Vimeo, or MyBrainshark. After you have edited your video, you upload it to their site. With YouTube, you can even make it private if you don't want it showing up in web searches (but most of the time you will want to leave it public). Then use the code they give you to embed it in your website. It is as simple as that. If you use YouTube, it could help your website search rankings since YouTube is owned by Google.

What should your video contain? I think you can create a video that is two minutes or less that will have an impact on your website visitors. Start by introducing yourself and let people know what problems you solve and what type of person you work best with. Use some of the content you developed earlier to help write the script. Invite them to learn more by suggesting they visit certain sections of your website, and ask them to contact you in your preferred manner. You can easily say all that in two minutes or less. Now you have an introduction video for your site. You can add other videos to your site on specific topics or to showcase situations where your advice made a big difference.

Hands-on: Look at your current site content. How easy is it for visitors to find what they are looking for? Do you clearly state the problems you solve? Are you clear about what you do, don't do, and who you work best with? Do you differentiate yourself from other professionals who solve the same problems? How much content do you have? Do you use video? If so, how effectively?

Implementation: Make a list of content changes you want to make.

Creating and maintaining a site with minimal effort

Start with a site plan

Earlier I mentioned creating your site so it is easy for people to find the information they are looking for. This is especially important for planning the menus on your website. Realize that many people will not enter your website on the home page. The search they use will likely lead them to an interior page of your site. Your website visitor needs an easy way to navigate to the rest of the information you want them to see.

Create a hierarchical plan for your site. The top level should be set up either by the categories of problems people are looking to solve, or the type of visitors that will come to the site. If you set up the site based on the problem categories, someone can quickly identify the area of the site that will help them solve the problem they have. If you set the site up based on the type of visitor, someone will quickly identify with a section and follow the path for them. Which route you use will be determined by how your clients approach you.

One easy way to create this plan is to use a landscape Word document that contains one column for each top level category. In addition to the visitor focused categories, you should always have a category that contains more information about you so they can get the background information they need. You don't need more than five or six high level categories. Under each category heading, list the specific pages you want in that category.

Demo: Example of site plan

In any project, it is likely that there is more than we have time, resources, or money to do. In your plan, note which pages or sections will be done now and which will be left to later. This is a decision that must be made carefully, as some pages or sections are crucial for visitors and some are interlinked.

For each key page, write out the page title, description, keywords, heading, and an outline of the content. This will help in focusing each key page and the overall site. It also helps in implementation because your site will launch with the key search engine elements already built in.

Select a tool that will be easy to use

The days of hand coding your site in HTML are over. There is no need to learn this or other programming languages now that so many easy web tools exist. The selection of which web tool you choose will have a significant impact on how easy it is to manage your website in the future.

There are many open source web development tools such as WordPress, Joomla, and others. These tools are content management systems because they allow you to focus on managing the content of your site and they look after the “under the hood” work of displaying the site. These tools are easy to use and are well supported, so if you need help, there will be many consultants available to help. These tools are not created by a company, but are supported by a group of interested individuals who contribute their time and expertise to the effort. I think that by using a popular, well-supported open source tool, you can have a professional looking website that is easy to build and maintain. If you opt for a proprietary tool from a developer, you are tied to that firm or individual and won't be able to make changes easily. My preference is WordPress because it is so popular and has many additional modules, known as plug-ins, that extend the functionality.

Considerations when selecting a developer

If you talk with other solo practitioners or owners of small firms, it is easy to find someone who has a horror story to tell about a web development project gone wrong. Are there good developers out there? Yes. Here are some questions to ask or aspects to consider when evaluating web developers:

- Will they develop the site that you have planned, or do they force you in to a model they use?
- Make sure they understand the role your site will play in marketing your practice. Share with them your ideal client and the problems you solve. If they don't understand marketing, this may be a challenge.
- Do they understand solo practices and small practices? It doesn't have to be in your industry necessarily. Ask to see examples of their work. Would you hire that person/firm?
- Make sure you understand what they are saying. Do they speak the language of business or do they speak techno-geek that is like a foreign language?
- Do you have control of the site? Can you easily make changes without any complicated software? Do you own the website address? Do you control the hosting account?

- Will the site use standard technology that gives you maximum flexibility for the future?
- Do they understand how to have a site rank well in the search engines? Can they explain what needs to be done in order to raise your site's rankings? Will they implement the search engine ranking elements that you have created for each key page?
- Will you get a site launched in a couple of months (or sooner) so you can make changes as your business changes? Be wary of a long project timeframe where the needs will have changed by the time the project is over. Get a project plan and make sure it is realistic.
- Will you have tools to monitor how the site is doing? Will you be taught how to interpret the statistics so you know what they mean?
- Will you be taught how to make changes to your site? Will they be there to help you if needed? How will changes be billed?

No developer will likely score perfect on every criteria. Make sure you understand their answers to your questions and you feel that you will be able to develop a good working relationship with them. Not every relationship will work out, so that is why you need to make sure that you will have control of your website and can move it to another consultant if necessary.

Regularly check how the site is doing

Use tools such as Google's Webmaster Tools and Analytics to check for any errors, how your site is appearing to search engines, where your traffic is coming from, how visitors interact with your site, which pages are most popular, and other statistics that may indicate changes that you should make on your site.

Prioritizing your Action List