



**SEO Challenge:** A 100% Flash site, with all content and navigation contained within a single Flash movie embedded in a single HTML page. (If your website was built with multiple HTML pages with some embedded Flash components, your situation is significantly less difficult.)

**Why is this a problem?** A pure Flash site is a major disadvantage for SEO. For one, search engines will see the entire website as a single page. That means that you don't have the opportunity to optimize different pages for different target keywords. And you also will not gain the inherent SEO advantage that having multiple pages brings to a website: every unique web page has, by default, some degree of search engine status.

Secondly, outside websites cannot link to interior pages within your site - they are forced to link to your top page. Some marketers think this is great: your visitors will always be led to your home page. But you will not be able to take advantage of "deep links" that could bring more visitors to your site and improve your search engine ranks. Deep linking is when other websites link to pages within your site other than your home page. For websites with an online shopping component, deep linking is much better than home page linking because users do not have to navigate (and risk getting lost!) on their way to making a purchase.

Last, while it is true that all the major search engines can index Flash, the content that a search engine spider will be able to extract from your Flash file will probably bear little relation to what your site visitors are seeing (Read our Ask the Experts response, <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2007/07/best-uses-of-flash.html> to learn how to find out what your Flash site looks like to search engines). For example, consider a simple Flash animation showing a line of text moving across the screen. Your human visitors read it as a single instance of the text. But to a search engine spider, it may look like the same words repeated hundreds of times. This is just one example of the many ways that your text optimization can be thrown off in Flash.

**What can be done.** Here are some possible SEO strategies to improve the optimization of a purely Flash website.

- **Break apart the site.** You *could* rebuild your site, breaking up your Flash file and moving each of the major sections to its own HTML page. Flash elements would then be included as-needed on each separate page. From an SEO perspective, this would be a big help. But if you're like most Flash website owners we know, you probably adore your website and spent a bundle on it, and there's no way you're going to break it up and rebuild it as a hybrid HTML/Flash website. At the very least, think about this approach next time you do a redesign!

- **Focus on off-page factors.** "Off-page" factors, which have nothing to do with the optimization of your on-page content, are a major element of search engine ranking algorithms today. Without making any changes to your Flash site, you can still improve your search engine presence by convincing lots of other websites to link to your site. The clickable text that other sites use when they link to your site will affect your rankings for that text. For example, if you wanted to rank well when people search for the term "Flash Goddess," then you would ask other websites to link to your site like this: "Mary is a true Flash Goddess." for a hint at the right way to ask for links - or read our book, for more in-depth advice!)
- **Take advantage of accessibility features.** Your Flash files can be set up with accessibility features to enhance the user experience of disabled site visitors. These same features may also improve the search engine visibility of your content inside Flash. For example, accessibility features in Flash 8 allow the developer to specify a Name and Description for any element in a Flash movie. See Macromedia.com [Flash 8 Accessibility](#) **Create an HTML alternative.** Experts agree an HTML alternative is the best option for Flash SEO today. Making alternative content in HTML is not only helpful to the search engines, it's also great for people without the Flash plugin and for disabled site visitors. Making an alternate site might be easier than you think, especially if you are using XML to feed into your Flash files. (Next time you're redesigning your website, you can build your site with XML or XHTML *first* and then feed that very same content into Flash files.)

Once an alternate site exists (We know you're busy. Even a simple "About Us" page is a good start if you don't have time to build an entire alternate site), set up your Flash file to check for Flash viewing capabilities and point to the alternate site if the visitor does not have Flash (this will include search engine spiders). Specifics of how to set this up can get a little technical - see [deconcept.com](#), "A Modern Approach to SEO for Flash" for detailed instructions.

- **Create an HTML addendum.** If you don't wish to, or can't, get your Flash file to automatically point visitors without the Flash plugin to an HTML alternate page, at least create some alternate pages that users can manually click on. Beneath your Flash movie, add a standard HTML link or links to your most important content in HTML pages such as "Our Products," "About Us" and "Contact Us."

A Flash website has features that you just can't get from other technologies. Follow the tips above and you just might be able to enjoy the benefits of Flash without suffering a major SEO downside.

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