

SEO IN CHINA:

How to Rank Higher on Chinese Search Engines with the Right Web Hosting

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an important lead channel for businesses to drive traffic and grow their online presence. For companies doing business in China, a unique and localized SEO strategy is required, and web hosting is a major factor to improve search engine visibility.

With 21.1% share of the world's Internet users¹, China has an unmissable online presence. The Internet is tightly integrated into people's daily lives and Chinese search engine portals are a popular starting point to access information about traveling, studying, investing, shopping and working overseas. SEO is therefore an important consideration for foreign companies to consider in driving traffic and reaching Chinese consumers.

However, the way Chinese search engines crawl and index website pages differ from the SEO algorithms you may be accustomed to in the West.

This article will walk you through important steps to improve your SEO visibility and help you understand the role that web hosting plays in developing a successful SEO strategy for China.



Baidu, 360, Shenma and Sugou – most popular Chinese search engines

Overview of SEO in China

The most popular search portals in China are local companies, including Baidu (approx 77.0% market share), 360 (8.0%), Shenma (6.9%), and Sugou (4.6%). The aesthetics of Chinese search engines mirrors the appearance of their counterparts in the West, including a similar array of search filters for images, videos, maps, and news.

Search engines in China have the same goal as those abroad and that is to provide relevant results to users and reward content with a strong track record of user engagement.

On-site SEO factors including keyword density, backlinks, bounce rate, and time-on-page are also very important in China.

While Baidu introduced English-language search results in 2011 through a partnership with Bing, Chinese characters remain the first choice for Chinese netizens to search and digest online information.



Chinese search engines cannot register responsive mobile design

Mobile Design

One area in which Chinese search engines differ to their overseas counterparts is the indexing of mobile design. Chinese search engines do not register responsive mobile design. This being the case,

site owners need to upload a PC and mobile sitemap to Chinese search engines in order to be properly indexed.



Chinese search engines can easily index and crawl locally hosted websites

Hosting Your Website in China

Another major difference is how search engines in China index websites according to their hosting location. Chinese search engines typically allocate favorable search results to websites hosted in Mainland China. Hosting your website in China communicates to the Chinese search engines that your website is relevant to the China market.

locally, you won't have to worry about limitations to international bandwidth or high latency (caused by the physical distance between your server and end-users). As a result, your website will enjoy superior load time in China as well as high availability (which means that your website is less likely to go down). These two factors help to improve your overall search visibility.

User experience and load speed are two other important factors that Chinese search engine algorithms factor into their search rankings. Given that your website is hosted

Websites hosted in Mainland China are also easier for Chinese search engines to index and crawl on a regular basis.



Use Content Delivery Network to deliver cached content

Content Delivery Network

A Content Delivery Network (CDN) is an alternative option to deliver online content in China while still hosting your website outside of China. A CDN is a network of nodes (or servers) distributed across different geographic locations to deliver cached content from your website to end-users in various locations. A CDN allows you to continue hosting your website in your home country

and link it to CDN nodes in China or in proximity to China, such as in Hong Kong or South Korea. This will help to minimize latency, improve page load time and availability. However, this option will only bring marginal benefit to your SEO rankings based on improved load speed and is not a substitute for hosting your website in Mainland China.



Get an ICP License to host your website on a China-based server/CDN

ICP Certification

In order to deploy your website on a China-based web hosting server or CDN, you first need to obtain Chinese ICP registration. ICP (Internet Content Provider) is a registration number that allows a website to operate on a hosting server or Content Delivery Network (CDN) nodes located in China and

is a mandatory legal requirement set by the Chinese Government. The requirements for acquiring ICP registration are relatively high and international companies without a business registration in Mainland China are not eligible to apply.



Consider hosting in Hong Kong

Hosting Your Website in Hong Kong

If obtaining an ICP number for your website is not feasible, you can minimize problems associated with slow page speed by hosting your website in Hong Kong. By leveraging servers in close proximity to the

Mainland, you can reduce latency and improve the overall load speed for users in China. This strategy will also bring minor benefits to SEO rankings in China based on page speed.

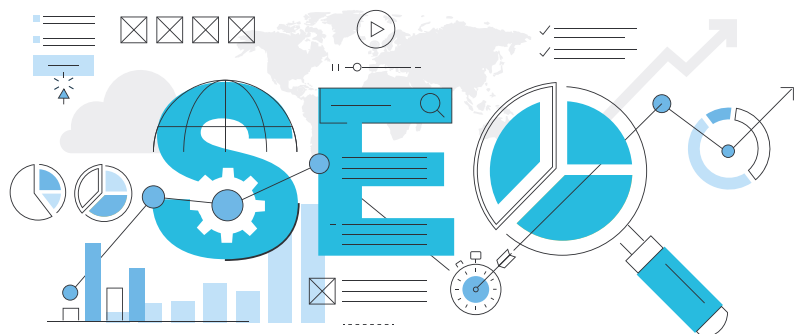


WordPress is the most popular website building option in China

Website Building Platforms

Websites built on popular international web building platforms such as WordPress, Drupal, Wix, Strikingly and Shopify are accessible to users in China. However, if you are using a website builder with integrated web hosting, you should check that they provide a web hosting option for China. Shopify and Wix, for example, cannot be integrated with local web hosting.

[WordPress](#) is one of the most popular options for building a website in China. WordPress can be used as a website builder and hosted on a third-party web hosting provider in China, including Alibaba Cloud.





Page speed is critical for ranking webpages

Page Speed

As mentioned, load speed is a major factor which Chinese search engines take into account when ranking webpages. Load speed can be optimized in a number of ways, including deploying your website on a China-based Content Delivery Network, compressing image quality, and removing JavaScript code installed for analytics such as heat maps and A/B testing.

It's important that you avoid website integration of social media platforms banned in China as this will adversely affect page load speed and user experience. Website themes that integrate Google Fonts will also slow down rendering speed in China. WordPress has numerous plugins you can install to disable Google Fonts.



Mitigate the threat of domain squatters

Competing with Domain Squatters

The final reason to strongly consider hosting your website in Mainland China - and to purchase a Chinese domain name as early as possible - is to prevent other parties from acting first. Under China's first to file policy, any Chinese party with an ICP registration number can purchase an available domain name and link to their China-based web hosting account.

If the party, known as a domain squatter, has the appropriate domain name linked to a China-based hosting server, the site is likely to appear prominently in the results pages of Chinese search engines. Domain squatters are thereby able to drive valuable online traffic to their website that would otherwise flow to your site. This can lead to negative branding repercussions for your business.

A number of foreign companies are facing a costly uphill battle to remove parties with their business name prominently featured on the results pages of Chinese search

engines. Gucci, for example, has sought legal action to [seize control of more than 100 domain names in China](#). Although only currently available in Chinese-language, [Baidu does offer a Brand Protection](#) portal to troubleshoot potential domain name abuse.

In order to minimize competition from other parties posing under your company name in the search engine results, it is recommended that you purchase numerous domain combinations of your business name.

Purchasing a Chinese domain (.cn) is relatively straightforward, and requires only passport identification. A Chinese domain name application takes approximately 2-3 days to process.

If possible, hosting your website in Mainland China will also help to mitigate the threat of domain squatters by boosting your own website's search engine visibility.



Host on Mainland
China server for
better SEO

Conclusion

While there are numerous factors to consider when implementing your SEO strategy for China, hosting on a server located in Mainland China should be a top priority. This will minimize the consequences

of competition from other parties imitating your brand, improve load speed and website availability, and enable Chinese search engines to better index and crawl your website.

Contact Alibaba Cloud to learn more about our web hosting services and other solutions for China.

References

1. Internet Live Stats, 2016,
<http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/china/>