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MY SEO JOURNEY

FROM NOTHING, TO SOMETHING

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dsmarchildon.me

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Starting Point

I started my SEO journey like many others—from scratch. My portfolio site (dsmarchildon.me) simply did not exist a few months ago. I even had problems figuring out exactly what I wanted to show on my website. But from nothing, I created *something*. That something has turned into my own portfolio website that I will use as a professional outlet for my projects and career.

From the knowledge I've recently learned, I can confidently describe, analyze, and implement SEO strategies for my own site and others. I will explain my strategies and objectives in the following pages.

What is SEO?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. SEO is an important tool that allows users to leverage their website's search engine visibility. SEO strategies can help a website be seen and found more easily. Some of those strategies include utilizing <META> tags, keywords, link building, and Google Analytics. I will go into more detail on these strategies, and exactly what they are, in later sections of this playbook.

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At the beginning of my journey, I had no idea what SEO was or how it was used. I knew that search engines compiled websites in massive databases, but I didn't know how or why a certain website would appear first from a search. Leveraging SEO can help your website became a top hit on a search engine.

SERP Analysis

What is a SERP? SERP stands for Search Engine Results Page. If you have a website, you want your site to be one of the top results on a search engine. How do you better your website's chances on a SERP? By using and leveraging SEO.

My portfolio website has mixed SERP results. Searching for my name "Dan Marchildon" brings up nothing but a French-Canadian author. But when you add "KSU", my About Me page turns up fairly-high on the SERP. (See Figure 1)

Accessibility

Figure 1 Dan Marchildon KSU SERP #4 hit on Google

Accessibility is an important aspect of a website and SEO. A lot of people don't realize the importance of having your website be accessible to the visually or physically impaired. Depending on your level of website, you need to abide by the Section 508 Standards. 508-accessibility is a federal standard that requires agencies and
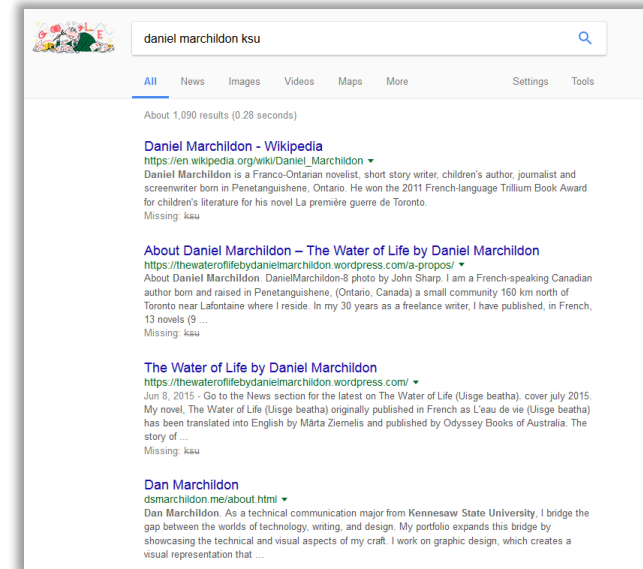
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their websites to be accessible to people with disabilities. These standards include providing things such as alt-text on images. Alt-text is alternate text that describes the image in question for text-to-speech programs. Without alt-text, many websites can be hard to navigate and understand for the visually impaired.

The big take away for accessibility is its benefit to SEO. Search engines want your website to be accessible and to follow 508 standards. You can better leverage your website's SEO by being 508 compliant. Starting out, I had no thoughts about the disabled visiting or navigating through my website—or the internet in general. Now I know that the standards exist to make life on the internet better for those with disabilities.

My Website: Before and After

My portfolio site started off as nothing. I had a simple index page up with a few words on it. Over time I regained skills in HTML (HyperText Markup Language) that I had previously forgotten. I did not capture the first stages of my website, but I have a comparison here that shows changes from what my site was before and what it is now:
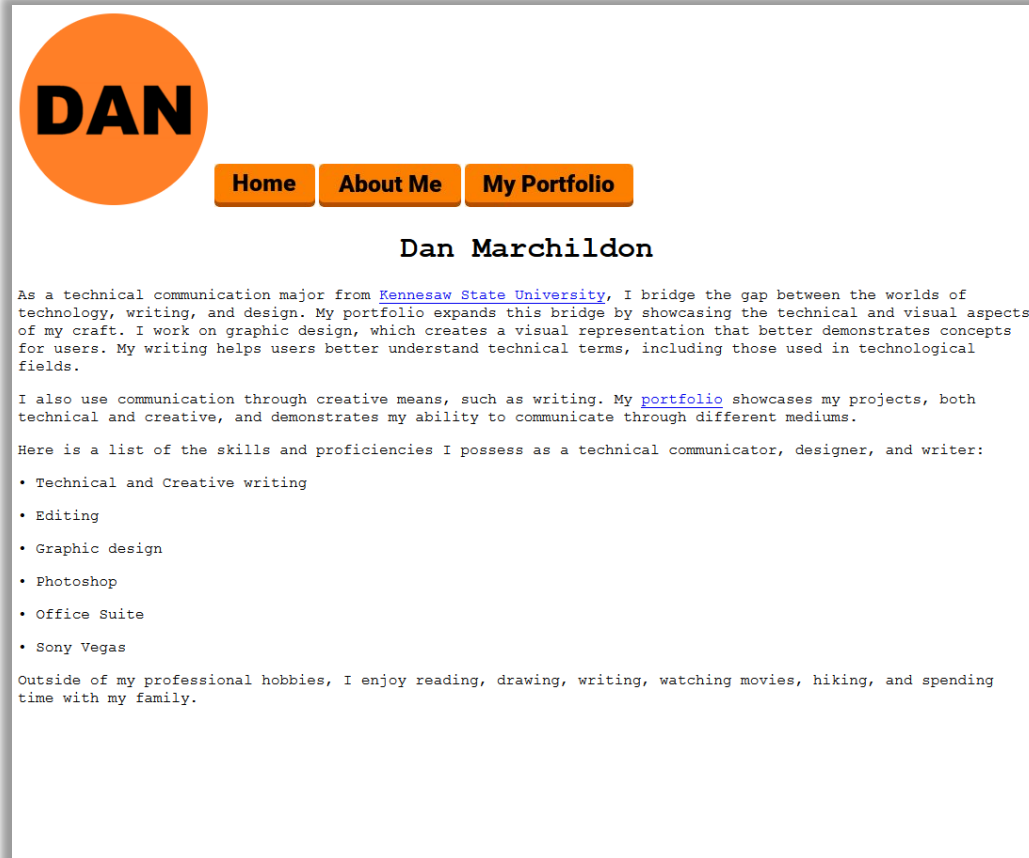
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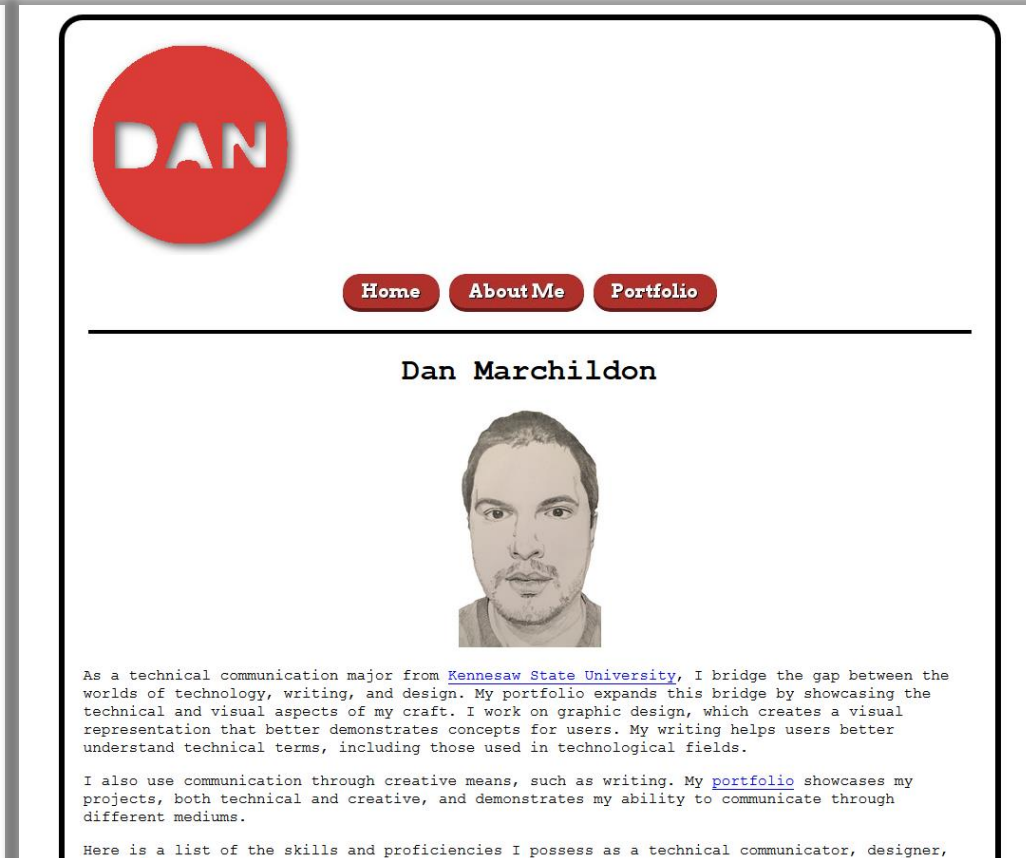*Figure 2a: dsmarchildon.me About Me Page Before*

Figure 3b: dsmarchildon.me About Me Page After

Moving Forward

With the final redesign of my site, it was time to move forward with my own content development. My portfolio site needed information badly, not only of myself, but also about my projects and how to get in contact with me. It also needed development in terms of HTML. The initial focus of my code was the <META> tags.

<META> Tags

<META> tags are important snippets of code in the HTML on every webpage that describes its content. The most crucial <META> tag is the description. With the description, you create up to 160 characters that summarizes and describes your website or webpage. This shows up on the SERP and is useful when leveraging your SEO.

Other <META> tags include keyword, which is a list of words that describes your site's content. The author tag provides who created the page/site. There are also geo tags which can be used to show your regional location.


```
13    <meta charset="UTF-8">
14    <meta name="description" content="Dan Marchildon's personal website of professional,
      technical, and creative needs for potential employers. This site showcases himself, his
      portfolio, and how to get in contact with him.">
15    <meta name="keywords" content="Dan Marchildon,Personal Site,Contact,About
      Me,Portfolio,Kennesaw State University,Facebook,Showcase,Projects,Professional,Technical
      Communication,Editing,Design">
16    <meta name="author" content="Dan Marchildon">
17    <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0">
18    <meta name="geo.region" content="US-GA">
19    <meta name="geo.placename" content="Kennesaw">
```

Figure 4: dsmarchildon.me Home Page <META> Tags

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Content Development

Content for my portfolio site revolves around projects from my college, Kennesaw State University (KSU). But that's not all the content on my site. My About Me page details who I am professionally and how I reflect myself in my work. I used that opportunity of describing myself to use certain keywords. These keywords are throughout my site and are also beneficial in terms of SEO leverage.

Keywords

Figure 5: Example of Content on my Portfolio Page

Keywords are specific words that are used throughout a website to affect the outcome of SEO and the SERP. The more keywords you use effectively in your website, the more chances you have of being searched for and found in a search engine.

In my own content paragraphs, I tried to leverage certain keywords that described myself and what I do on my site. Terms such as Technical communication, Technical editing, Writing, Visual, Design, even words such as Professional and Portfolio.

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The more terms you use and tie yourself to, the better it is for your website to be found by employers looking for those qualities and qualifications.

Writing

Writing is an important aspect of any website's content. It is essentially the "meat" of your content. Without enough paragraphs and words, your site will be lacking an essential key to SEO. Website's need writing *content*. The more text on a page means the more potential words and keywords a search engine can search through.

The writing on my portfolio site isn't as robust as I would like it to be, but it is a start. My journey is not completed in that regard. More paragraphs and more content is always needed.

Social Signals

As obvious as it seems, social media is a major part of linking with others and getting you and your website out there and seen. Social media such as facebook, and the more professional approach of LinkedIn, help connect you with potential employers.

On my own site, I personally link to my facebook page.

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Linking

Linking and link building is a crucial step of SEO. The more outbound links you have, to respected and trusted website domains (such as .edu and .gov) the better.

I link to various websites on my website pages. Mainly, I link to my school KSU. I also linked to various sites that I did projects for in my portfolio webpage. It is also advisable to link to certain organizations you are apart of and other high-value sites. The more respected and popular the site, the better the SEO potential becomes.

Results

For my results section, I'll go over my website's traffic and the various stats that Google Analytics and the Search Console provides. They are both powerful tools when you need to know statistics concerning your traffic flow.

Google Analytics

Google Analytics (GA) is a *powerful* webtool provided by Google that is a must for any website looking to leverage and expand their SEO reach. GA gives users insights into their web traffic and audience. That includes the demographics of that audience and their geo location. You can see in real-time where your traffic is coming from and how they are accessing your website.

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One can easily leverage these stats to figure out where their website is lacking and where they are doing good in terms of SEO.

Now, I will go over a few important statistics regarding my site and the traffic it has received over the previous months:
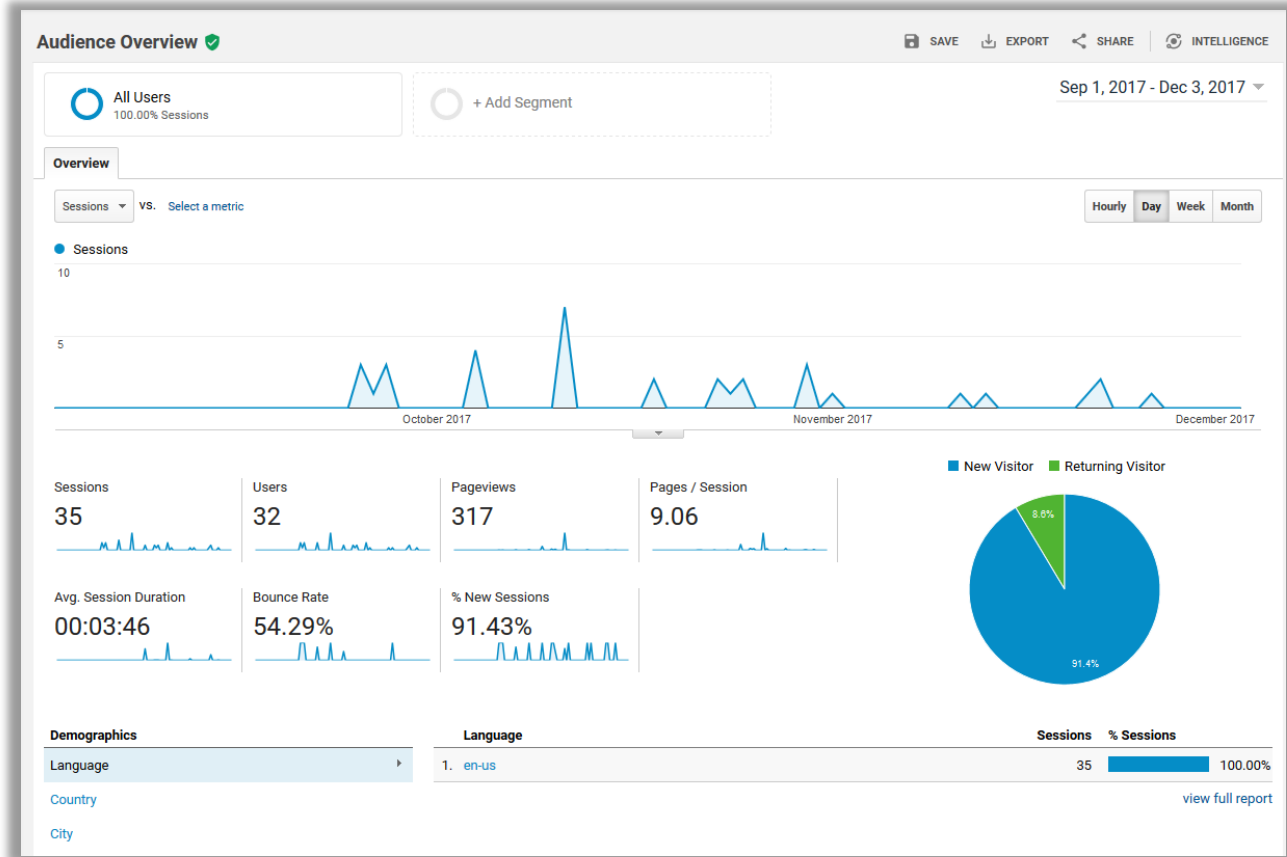
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Figure 6: Google Analytics Audience Overview for dsmarchildon.me

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The above graphic is my website's GA general audience overview. It showcases stats such as how many sessions I've had, users, pageviews, how many pages a user visited per session, average session duration, bounce rate, and the percent of new sessions. The bounce rate, in the case of GA, means how quickly a user leaves your webpage. The lower your bounce rate, the better. For my portfolio site, I had a bounce rate of 54 %—which is average at best.

With 35 sessions, 32 users, 317 pageviews, and around 4 minutes of session duration, my site is doing alright so far in terms of GA. I can look at these statistics again over time and compare them to see how much I have grown.

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Search Console

The Google Search Console is another tool a person can use to help dissect and analyze their website's search data and indexing. You can check your indexing status with the search engines, such as Google, through this tool.

Here is my current indexing status as of today: (See Figure 7)

As you can see, my site is only been indexed 3 times by Google. A lot more improvement can be made on this front in the future. As more time passes by, and more site traffic occurs, more indexing will happen.

Figure 7: Google Search Console Index Status of dsmarchildon.me

Data Stories

Data stores are an important exercise in writing and Google Analytics. The goal of a data story is to take your website's GA

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data, and transfer that information into a streamlined narrative. This makes it easier to digest in some ways as it is in the form of a story—rather than cold hard numbers.

I did a couple data stories recently, my first one being about an employer looking for a KSU alumni to hire. This employer wanted someone to redesign and leverage their website for SEO—they just so happened to come across my portfolio site and decided to hire me!

Data stories are important exercises to do, and they can be illuminating in some interesting ways.

Here is an example of a data story I did:

Data Story I

John Henderson is a 38-year old small business owner from the Metro Atlanta area. His business is called the Raven's Nest, a gaming store in Marietta which specializes in tabletop and trading card games. John is looking to expand the digital outreach of his store to bring in new customers. Recently, sales have been dropping off during the most crucial holiday seasons. John needs his store's website up-to-date with a brand-new redesign and competent SEO practices put in place. He believes that an updated look for his site, and leveraging the tools of SEO, can help his business stand out and get recognized.

John, being a KSU alumnus himself, decides to start his journey by looking for current undergraduates at Kennesaw State University. John knows that the untapped talent of students who are trying to prove their worth is nothing to disregard—he too was once a student who was given a job. Somebody took a chance on him, so he would like to return the favor. After searching through a few portfolio pages, John stumbles upon the site of Dan Marchildon. At first glance it's rough around the edges, undeveloped, and entirely unimpressive. But something makes John stay on the webpage. He clicks around the site, checking out the other pages, and without further hesitation declares this is the student he's going to take a chance on.

Little does John know, behind the scenes there is a snippet of code in the HTML of Dan's site—the Google Analytics code. This code helps Google track virtually everything that happens with the website. Who is visiting the site, how long do they stay, what pages do they view, and are they new or returning visitors? If John could look into the Google Analytics profile of Dan's site, he would find statistics just as unimpressive as the design of his current site. Only one user in the last 7 days with a bounce rate of 0%! Very few users ever return, and only 7 in total have visited the site. The site duration is a healthy 2 minutes and 15 seconds—but John would easily suspect this is due to Dan himself staying on his own webpage.

After getting in contact with Dan, John lays out his website's redesign plan and presents it in full. Dan happily accepts the proposal and quickly gets to designing, using his fresh-faced enthusiasm to power through the sudden reality of being paid for work.

Figure 8: Data Story I

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Future Directions

The future of my portfolio site is bright, but it still needs a lot of work currently. I need more content development and more "meat" in terms of writing and paragraphs. A lot more content will come when I get to do more school projects—and hopefully more professional projects in the future that I can showcase. I hope I can take my portfolio site to an even more professional level and make it my "base of operations." I also need to work on my link building, both in and outbound oriented.

In terms of Google Analytics, I hope to see more growth over time with my site traffic. I hope GA will tell me that my bounce rate stays low and that my average duration continues to increase! I can hopefully accomplish these GA goals by leveraging my SEO more with better and refined keywords.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want my website to be the best that it can be. To do that, I need to leverage SEO to the best of my ability. I'm always learning new tricks and better ways to implement HTML, <META> tags, and keywords. I need to continue my path of

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learning SEO and how to use it more wisely. In the end, hopefully I can have a portfolio sight that is both professionally designed and leveraged in terms of SEO. There's a lot of work to be done on both of those fronts.

I'll state again that SEO is a powerful tool, a tool that is easily overlooked and misunderstood. Learning how to control and guide that tool can mean the difference of that employer finding your site.