Home Business Websites

Part 1 - Introduction to SEO

What is SEO?

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to techniques that help your website rank higher in organic (or "natural") search results, thus making your website more visible to people who are looking for your product or service via search engines.

SEO is part of the broader topic of Search Engine Marketing (SEM), a term used to describe all marketing strategies for search. SEM entails both organic and paid search. With paid search, you can pay to list your website on a search engine so that your website shows up when someone types in a specific keyword or phrase. Organic and paid listings both appear on the search engine, but they are displayed in different locations on the page.

So, why is it important for your business' website to be listed on search engines? On Google alone, there are over 694,000 searches conducted every second. Think about that. Every second that your website is not indexed on Google, you are potentially missing out on hundreds, if not thousands of opportunities for someone to visit your website, read your content, and potentially buy your product or service. Practicing SEO basics, as well as more advanced techniques after those, can drastically improve your website's ability to rank in the search engines and get found by your potential customers.

What about paid search? Yes, you can pay to have your website listed on the search engines. However, running paid search campaigns can be quite costly if you don't know what you're doing. Not to mention, that some search engine users never click on paid search ads anyway.

Because the sole purpose of a search engine is to provide you with relevant and useful information, it is in everyone's best interest (for the search engine, the searcher, and you) to ensure that your website is listed in the organic search listings. In fact, it is probably best to stay away from paid search all together until you feel you have a firm grasp on SEO and what it takes to rank organically.

Google Replaces the Phone Book

Outbound marketing as we know it is dead. It used to be that a majority of a local company's marketing budget went to yellow pages, newspaper, and radio advertisements. In order for you to get any business, you had to put your offers and advertisements in your prospect's face. Well, not anymore. The age of the Internet has made it so that consumers are now in control.

It has never been easier for consumers to tune out the plethora of advertisements and commercials they hear each day. Since you can no longer get their attention with outbound marketing, you have to switch your approach to inbound marketing and make sure you're easy to find when consumers are looking for you. When was the last time you used a phone book? Google is the new phone book. If your website is not indexed and optimized to show for keywords and phrases that are relevant to what you have to offer, all of that potential traffic is going to your competitors.

How Search Engines Work

Search engines have one objective – to provide you with the most relevant results possible in relation to your **search query**. If the search engine is successful in providing you with information that meets your needs, then you are a happy searcher. And happy searchers are more likely to come back to the same search engine time and time again because they are getting the results they need.

In order for a search engine to be able to display results when a user types in a query, they need to have an archive of available information to choose from. Every search engine has proprietary methods for gathering and prioritizing website content. Regardless of the specific tactics or methods used, this process is called **indexing**. Search engines actually attempt to scan the entire online universe and index all the information so they can show it to you when you enter a search query.

How do they do it? Every search engine has what are referred to as bots, or crawlers, that constantly scan the web, indexing websites for content and following links on each web page to other web pages. If your website has not been indexed, it is impossible for your website to appear in the search results.

So, big search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo are constantly indexing hundreds of millions, if not billions, of web pages. How do they know what to show on the SERP when you enter a search query? The search engines consider two main areas when determining what your website is about and how to prioritize it.

1. **Content on your website:** When indexing pages, the search engine bots scan each page of your website, looking for clues about what topics your

website covers and scanning your website's back-end code for SEO keywords and Meta descriptions.

2. **Who's linking to you:** As the search engine bots scan web pages for indexing, they also look for links from other websites. The more **inbound links** a website has, the more influence or authority it has. Essentially, every inbound link counts as a vote for that website's content. Also, each inbound link holds different weight. For instance, a link from a highly authoritative website like The New York Times (nytimes.com) will give a website a bigger boost than a link from a small blog site. This boost is sometimes referred to as **link juice**.

You can use the following Free online tools to check which websites are linking to yours and to see how many inbound links your website has;-
https://www.ahrefs.com/
http://www.linkody.com/
http://www.wholinks2me.com/

When a search query is entered, the search engine looks in its index for the most relevant information and displays the results on the SERP. The results are then listed in order of most relevant and authoritative.

If you conduct the same search on different search engines, chances are you will see different results on the SERP. This is because each search engine uses a proprietary **algorithm** that considers multiple factors in order to determine what results to show in the SERP when a search query is entered.

A few factors that a search engine algorithm may consider when deciding what information to show in the SERP include:
• Geographic location of the searcher
• Historical performance of a listing (clicks, bounce rates, etc.)
• Link quality (reciprocal vs. one-way)
• Webpage content (keywords, tags, pictures)
• Link type (social media sharing, link from media outlet, blog, etc.)
As most people would be aware Google dominates the search engine market. Google became the leader by fundamentally revolutionizing the way search engines work and giving searchers better results with their advanced algorithm. With 64% market share, according to Compete, Inc., Google is still viewed as the primary innovator and master in the space.

Before the days of Google (circa 1997), search engines relied solely on indexing web page content and considering factors like keyword density in order to determine what results to put at the top of the SERP. This approach gave way to what are referred to as **black-hat SEO** tactics, as website engineers began intentionally stuffing their web pages with keywords so they would rank at the top of the search engines, even if their web pages were completely irrelevant to the search result.

What it Takes to Rank

It is not difficult to get your website to index and even rank on the search engines. However, getting your website to rank for specific keywords can be tricky. There are essentially 3 elements that a search engine considers when determining where to list a website on the SERP: rank, authority, and relevance.

Rank

Rank is the position that your website physically falls in on the SERP when a specific search query is entered. If you are the first website in the organic section of the SERP (don't be confused by the paid ads at the very top), then your rank is 1. If your website is in the second position, your rank is 2, and so on. As discussed previously in How Search Engines Work, your rank is an indicator of how relevant and authoritative your website is in the eyes of the search engine, as it relates to the search query entered.

Tracking how your website ranks for a specific keyword over time is a good way to determine if your SEO techniques are having an impact. However, since there are so many other factors beyond your control when it comes to ranking, do not obsess over it. If your website jumps 1-5 spots from time to time, that's to be expected. It's when you jump 10, 20, 30 spots up in the rankings that it makes sense to pat yourself on the back.

Authority

As previously discussed in the How Search Engines Work section, search engines determine how authoritative and credible a website's content is by calculating how many inbound links (links from other websites) it has. However, the number of inbound links does not necessarily correlate with higher rankings. The search engines also look at how authoritative the websites that link to you are, and other factors such as the age of your domain.

You can track over time how authoritative your website is and how important other websites are that link to you, by doing a Page Rank Check http://www.prchecker.com/

Relevance

Relevance is a one of the most critical factors of SEO. The search engines are not only looking to see that you are using certain keywords, but they are also looking for clues to determine how relevant your content is to a specific search query. Besides actual text on your web pages, the search engines will review your website's use of keywords in your URLs, page formatting (such as bolded text), and what keywords are in the product name or heading of the web page, versus those in the body text. While there is no way to track how relevant your website is, there are some SEO basics you can practice to cover your bases and make sure you are giving the search engines every possible opportunity to consider your website. We'll get to that in just a bit.

Search engines are extremely complex. Bottom line: the search engines are trying to think like human beings. It is very easy to get caught up in modifying your website's content just so you rank on the search engines. When in doubt, always err on the side of providing relevant and coherent content that your website's audience (your prospects) can digest. If you find yourself doing something solely for the search engines, you should take a moment to ask yourself why.

Long-Tail Concept & Theory

In order to get your website's content to rank on the search engines, you need to take the path of least resistance. Although trying to rank for highly trafficked keywords and terms may seem like a logical approach, it will most likely lead to a lot of frustration and wasted resources. Also, even if you end up getting traffic from these types of keywords, chances are the quality of the traffic will be low due to disinterest in what you specifically have to offer.

Think of every search query as being like a snow flake - they are all different. There are billions more unique search queries than there are generic ones. In fact, if you were to add up all search engine traffic that comes from the most popular keywords, it would not even come close to the amount of traffic that comes from searches using those more unique queries. This is called the theory of the **long-tail**.

A critical component of SEO is choosing the right keywords for optimization. If you sell shoes, you may want your website to rank for "shoe store," (a **head term**), but chances are you are going to have some trouble there. However, if you optimize multiple pages on your website for each specific pair of shoes that you sell, you are going to have much more success and it will be easier to rank on the SERP. A keyword like "red tennis shoes with Velcro" (a **long-tail keyword or term**) is a good example. Sure, the number of people that search for this keyword will be much lower than the number that search for "shoe store," but you can almost bet that those searchers are much farther down the sales funnel and may be ready to buy.

This is why long-tail keywords are so effective. They target people who are looking to perform a specific action, like buy something, or looking for a specific piece of information, like a how-to or a service that can solve their problem. By choosing to optimize with long-tail keywords, you will find it easier to rank on the search engines, drive qualified traffic, and turn that traffic into leads and customers.

Content is King

We've all heard it - when it comes to SEO, content is king. Without content, you will find it difficult to rank for specific keywords and drive traffic to your website. Additionally, if your content does not provide value or engage users, you will be far less likely to drive leads and customers.

It is impossible to predict how people will search for content and exactly what keywords they are going to use. The only way to combat this is to generate content and lots of it. The more content you include on your website, the more chances you have at ranking in the search engines. Lottery tickets are a good analogy here. The more lottery tickets you have, the higher the odds are that you will win. Imagine that every webpage you create is a lottery ticket. The more web pages you have, the higher your chances are of ranking in the search engines.

As you already know, the search engines are smart. If you create multiple web pages about the same exact topic, you are wasting your time. You need to create lots of content that covers lots of topics. There are multiple ways you can use content to expand your online presence and increase your chances of ranking. Here are few examples:

Homepage: Use your home page welcome text area to include generic and general keywords about your products and services.

Information Pages: Include details about your details and your products in your website information pages, such as 'About Us' page.

Blog / Latest News / Articles: Blogging or writing Articles is an incredible way to keep your website content current and fresh while making it really easy to generate tons of content. Blogging on a regular basis (once per week is ideal) can have a dramatic impact on SEO because every blog post is a new web page that can target more keywords. All blog and article pages are indexed as individual pages.

HTML Content Box: Used in addition to your home page welcome text, a great way to include additional text and images (content) on the bottom of your home page.

Summary: By including HTML Content, a Blog, Latest News or Articles on your website, this allows you to easily add text, stories, articles, comments and images to your website and to keep it fresh. This not only keeps your customers engaged, but as mentioned it will really assist with Google and search engine rankings.

Using 'keywords' within your stories and articles is very beneficial.

As an example if you have a mums & bubs website, including articles or blog posts that contain relevant and related keywords such as; baby products, baby products online, bargain baby products, discounted baby products etc within your text, will assist with your website being indexed for these particular keywords and search terms.

Tips:
Use keywords in your blog post titles & headings and article titles & headings
Use keywords throughout your blog posts and article text
Use keywords in your HTML Content areas
Use keywords 'naturally' and ensure that your text reads properly
Avoid 'keyword' stuffing eg: writing an article that makes no sense and does not ready properly, due to being stuffed full of keywords.

Free Google Keyword Tool
Google has a free Keyword Tool that offers a great way to learn the popularity of keywords in terms of traffic. Additionally, when you enter a keyword into the search tool, a list of related keywords is returned to you as well, making it easy to select other keywords and also to find the best keywords for your blogs, articles or content.

To access and use Google's Free Keyword tool, you will need to sign up for a Free Google Adwords account.

https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner

You can view tutorials on using Google's Keyword Planner tool below;

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlYqQMikojA
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnaWbQYuh4A
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxREkVhzEkw

While conducting SEO research, you may come across articles that discuss being mindful of **keyword density** (how often you mention a keyword on a page). Although following an approach like this may seem technically sound, it is not recommended. Remember: do not write content for the search engines. Write content for your customers and everything else will follow.

How to Approach Your SEO Strategy
When developing an SEO strategy, it is best to split your initiatives into two buckets: on-page SEO and off-page SEO. On-page SEO covers everything you can control on each specific webpage and across your website to make it easy for the search engines to find, index, and understand the topical nature of your content. Off-page SEO covers all aspects of SEO that happen off your website to garner quality inbound links.