**COMM647  
Assignment**

In this assignment you will demonstrate your knowledge of SEO including basic concepts of SEO, keywords, content optimization, link building strategies, measuring SEO effectiveness, mobile SEO, local searches, and more. Within the Assignment forum in the discussion board, answer the following questions. Remember, this is a college level course and your writing should reflect that:

1. Discussion (10 points)  
Share which search engines you use regularly, explaining your experiences with each. Do you use certain search engines to find particular types of content?

The search engines I typically choose are Google and Bing, although I’ve also used Yahoo in the past. In my experience Google provides a better synchronization of information as well as offering up access to additional applications within its’ framework. I found that Google seems to provide more listings overall. The only real downside I’ve experienced with this search engine is that the menus can be difficult to find at times and not necessarily intuitive.

Bing has also provided a good user experience for me. The extra items in the menu bar like news, and current world events like the Olympics has been useful for the immediate filter of the search engine results in a straightforward manner. I’ve found the search results themselves equally applicable to the search keywords as Google is. The one downside I’ve observed is that there are often more informational items or notifications that appear during a session. More an annoyance than anything else.

To date I don’t have a preference of search engine for any particular content.

2. Discussion (10 points)  
How often do you conduct searches on a mobile device and how do you use those results?

I typically make searches on a mobile device when I’m away from home. Perhaps searching three or four times per day. More if traveling away from the local area. The results are typically used to find the closest locations of restaurants, stores selling particular products, and hours of operation. I’ve often used mobile searches on long road trips as a “fun-facts” distraction for driver and passengers.

3. Discussion (10 points)  
Explain the difference between organic listings and paid listings. What do you think the benefits or drawbacks are to each? Which has led to more traffic and conversion on your website?

Organic listings are listings from a search engine that appear due to their relevance to the search words typed in as well as keywords. In other words, these are basically the listings that most closely match the user’s search query based on relevance.

Paid listings on the other hand are pretty much what they sound like, paid advertising. These are typically where the site owner pays to have their page display when certain keywords are contained within a search query. These spaces may go to the “highest bidder” or include pay per click advertising. Paid listings usually reside in a specified area of the web page and are noted as such.

It is my belief that organic listings provide a more “true-to-life” result as information is based on the relevance to the search query. Granted a site can still be optimized to certain keywords and perhaps influence the consumer in certain directions. But the fact that there is what I’ll call a more “human” presence with reviews, blogs, commentary, etc. I feel organic listings are more accurate and relevant.

On the other side of the coin, paid listings indicate some specialization to me. Why would you pay money to advertise a product you know nothing about? I realize that may be a bit naïve, as there is always the “bait and switch” technique but I’ll stay with the initial statement. A user may not want to go thru each organic listing to see if it’s what they actually want. Whereas the paid listing may take them directly to a relevant site.

I don’t have a website at this time, so I can’t answer the remaining part of this question as such. However, it is my understanding that around 70% of listings are organics, so I’ll go with that.

4. Discussion (10 points)  
Consider the keywords you most frequently search for and discuss which websites you most often see in the top ten results. What characteristics do those websites share? Do different search engines display different results for the same keyword?

The keywords I most frequently search for

5. Exercise (10 points)  
Write down 10 keywords relevant to your organization, using the Google Keyword Tool at <https://adwords.google.com/o/KeywordTool> to analyze each keyword. Next to each keyword write down:

* how competitive the word is
* the number of global monthly searches for that keyword
* the number of local monthly searches

6. Discussion (10 points)  
Share three websites you regularly visit and indicate what you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of each, noting how user friendly you feel they are. Are there common characteristics "good" websites share that you can apply to your own efforts?

7. Discussion (10 points)  
Consider the three scenarios below and discuss how you’d provide clarity and quality to each of the audience groups that are visiting the "Explore California" website (shown in the lectures) for information:

* a resident of California planning a one-day backpacking trip near her home
* a father in Massachusetts planning a two-week vacation in California for a family of four
* an international visitor from Japan interested in cycling across the state

8. Exercise (10 points)  
Search one keyword using a search engine of your choice, and then identify the website that appears first in the organic listing and the website that appears 20th in the organic listing. Create two columns and add these URLs at the top of each one. In each column list as many characteristics about each website as you can easily identify.

9. Exercise (10 points)  
Search engines often discover new content by reading a website’s XML sitemap (a specially formatting listing of a the site’s pages). For this exercise, take a moment to learn more about the specific syntax and how to create XML sitemaps by visiting http://www.sitemaps.org. Now create a sitemap.xml file for your website.

10. Exercise (10 points)  
The robots.txt file allows you to control how search engines crawl through and index your website. In this step, take a moment to learn more about creating robots.txt rules by visiting http://www.robotstxt.org. Now create a robots.txt file for your website.

11. Discussion (10 points)  
When people post and share links to your content via social media or indicate its quality by clicking a button, search engines notice. Translation: social media influences SEO. Considering this, make a list of three social media tools you use, sharing your thoughts about each. Explain your experiences with each and report what impact it has made on you or your organization.

12. Discussion (10 points)  
Consider additional ways you can track and evaluate the effectiveness of your SEO efforts beyond common Keyword Performance Indicators (KPI). Are there terms and strategies specific to your industry or market segment?

13. Discussion (10 points)  
Customer product reviews and testimonials and social media sharing may improve your SEO. Knowing this, consider one ecommerce website you use, noting if it includes the functionality suggested above. If it does, which functionality? If it does not, which features would work best on it?

14. Discussion (10 points)  
Consider your experiences searching for local businesses and share insights into those you’ve found most frequently, as well as those whose listings have been the most helpful. Also, share your experiences reviewing a business using Google+ Local, Yahoo! Local, Yelp, City Search, or other similar websites. Likewise, has your business ever been reviewed?

15. Discussion (10 points)  
Is your website mobile friendly? If not, what steps could you take to improve the performance of your website on mobile devices (tablet, phone)? Also, consider the three types of configurations for improving your mobile web content. How can you apply these to get the most out of your site?