**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 also 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 are usually water sports related, technical, or product related. For the keywords entered, the common characteristics of the websites are that each provided Wikipedia definitions, organic listings for equipment, lessons, destinations, and local links to shops and companies. Each also provided images and at least one video.

Google and Bing definitely provide different results for the same keyword. Bing displayed more local information actually as well as additional video content. Top 2 listing are consistent.

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

Keywords

Detectent

Smart grid

Revenue protection

Customer intelligence software solutions

Leverage customer information

Revenue savings

Electrical companies

Power

Power revenue analytics

Stop theft of electricity

I could not create account without billing!

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?

My websites are:

iKitesurf.com

audible.com

amazon.com

[www.iKitesurf.com](http://www.iKitesurf.com) is an excellent example of a site that provides massive amounts of customizable data on kiting sites, conditions, locations, as well as wind & forcasts, etc. The site has great visual appeal with lots of hi-resolution images and videos for the obsessed kiter and non-kiter alike. This site also provides a platform for classified ads where used equipment of all kinds may be searched. New equipment links to local shops and deals are also provided. Plus it’s fully responsive.

[www.audible.com](http://www.audible.com) is an amazon company providing digital audio books for download in a membership format. It’s certainly serviceable and has visual appeal in the display of audiobook covers. Rollovers provide story descriptions and reader reviews. This is very useful. The new library format works well. This used to be a list only. However, it’s missing some user interface interest. The uncluttered layout works fairly well with the book covers highlighting the product. Perhaps a bit more header/footer color would help and a responsive design would also be a plus.

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) The amazon.com site has become very busy in my opinion. The availability of previously purchased or scanned items is handy, but there is a lot of visual overload on the landing page. Obviously, they are doing something right so it’s not quite clear to me if I should be modifying my perception. Lots of great data available. They could use a responsive site.

Common characteristics of visual appeal and providing customizable formats can definitely be applied to my future 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

Our resident of California has a broader knowledge base of California in general so may typically require less detailed knowledge on the area. They will be looking for local information vs. statewide information that the father in Massachusetts or the international visitor would require. Our resident would appreciate a means to specify location via city, zip, or GPS location to customize the area of their trip. At this juncture options for backpacking trips within the specified range could be provided.

The father in Massachusetts will require far more information than our local. He will benefit from family friendly options throughout the state. Coordination of travel arrangements within the US. Selection of potential areas of interest for activities would be a must so that the entire family would have a positive experience over the vacation period. Themes might be provided such as beach, mountains, or amusement parks to further direct the information provided.

The international traveler will need information on visas or other travel document requirements to start. The supply of cycling equipment might be a key component for this traveler and the options available should be supplied. Level of difficulty for the cycling routes would be needed, as well as the desire for a tour vs. individual touring options. Individual touring would require accommodation information also.

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.

Using the keyword “kiteboarding” the first site the shows on google.com is the <https://www/kiteboarding.com> site. The 20th site is [www.ginkites.swiss/](http://www.ginkites.swiss/)

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| --- | --- |
| [https://www.kiteboarding.com](https://www.kiteboarding.com/) | [www.ginkites.swiss/](http://www.ginkites.swiss/) |
| Wide selection of kite surfing products | GIN Kiteboarding |
| Carrying Airbrush | The Swiss Kite Brand |
| Carrying Cabrinha | International athletes trust GIN Kiteboarding |
| Carrying F-One | GIN Kiteboarding has twenty different models of foil and tube kites. |
| Carrying Liquid Force |  |
| Carrying Naish |  |
| Carrying RRD |  |
| Carrying Slingshot |  |
| Sports and instruction info |  |
| Links to Kiteboarding Kites |  |
| Kiteboarding Boards |  |
| Kiteboarding Packages |  |
| Lessons |  |

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.

sitemap.xml in folder

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.

robots.txt file in folder

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.

The three social media sites I am most familiar with are Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I believe that Facebook fills a need for a certain group of people. The younger generation still Facebooks but is more taken up by Instagram or SnapChat. Somewhat of the instant gratification syndrome. I can appreciate the re-connecting with people aspect of Facebook and believe that networking as well as general connections can impact a business.

LinkedIn is a great networking site at a minimum. I’ve had some very positive connections made in the work environment that have increased the business base and introduced new customers. This is the first site I go to when I’m looking for professional connections.

Instagram is a social media format I’ve only used slightly. More in response to my younger friends and step kids. The instant aspect of the application has its’ attraction for the immediate feedback.

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?

This industry is highly focused on sponsorship of professional kiters to influence the various equipment product lines. If a particular kiter is making a name for themselves on your equipment it will most likely affect sales of that equipment. Sales are often via ecommerce only. Local shops are not always available for consultation. Thus association with keywords tied to known names might bring additional clientele to the ecommerce site for kites, boards, harnesses, etc. This additional traffic increasing the average order value and providing additional value to the bottom line. Newsletter subscribers, social followers, event or demonstration signups would also bring in an additional customer base.

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?

I chose to look at www.realwatersports.com which is a kitesurfing and watersports ecommerce site. The pages vary slightly in the social media icons available on them, but generally display Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and Pinterest. Areas are available for previous customer reviews as well as form available for immediate review input.

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?

Yelp is usually the source I go to for ratings and reviews of local businesses by real people (mostly). I’ve found that the customer reviews have been very straight forward and pretty accurate. We base many of our dining and entertainment decisions based on these reviews. I’ve also had success in following reviews for businesses like car repair, equipment rentals, and local lodging.

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?

The website I’ve worked on for the Wordpress portion of the FEWD2 program (<http://dev-in-the-wind.pantheonsite.io/>) is mobile friendly and responsive. As it is already responsive this covers the first of the three configurations. For this type of content and taking into consideration the customer base, I believe this is the most effective configuration presentation. Quality imagery is a must for the active, hands-on crowd known as kiteboarders. This entails keeping a close watch on the load times for that imagery. The current site would benefit from additional hi-res images and video. As many of the user profiles also reflect technical backgrounds it would be wise to consider the level of detail provided for equipment reviews, etc.

This is one of the challenges of this type of site. The user/customer base ranges from the younger, college crowd to the active retired senior. It’s an extremely diverse and challenging group.