

HOW DOES YOUR WEBSITE RANK?



You've spent thousands of dollars on your company's Web site. Now what? How are you going to drive traffic to the site? With most customers using the Internet to actively look for solu-

tions, products and services, search engine optimization, or SEO, is the way to go. And if your company relies on search engines to bring visitors to your business Web site, your business will lag behind its competitors unless your site is optimized for search engine results.

SEO is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a Web site from search engines via unpaid search results as opposed to search engine marketing, or SEM, which deals with paid results. Typically placement at or near the top of the rankings increases the number of searchers who will visit a site.

So what is the value of an SEO program?

Sales and Leads – Increasing keyword rankings on search engines where customers are actively searching for products and services can increase traffic and sales.

Customer Service – A lot of SEO is focused on acquiring customers; many marketers lose sight of customer service after the sale. Making information easier to find through major search engines can increase customer service levels or potentially reduce costs associated with customer service support.

Employee Recruiting – Optimizing job listings can make it easier for potential candidates or those who would refer a candidate to discover opportunities with your company. Being able to fill just one or two positions because candidates were able to find your company's job listings through search could save substantial recruiting costs.

Public Relations – Journalists, analysts and many bloggers use search engines as an initial tool for finding subject matter experts, researching companies and stories. Major search engines as well as blog, news, image and social media search channels are all tools that journalists use to do their jobs. Making it easier for the media to find news content substantially increases unsolicited pickups. It also elicits requests for contributed articles and interviews.

Social Media – Most social networks grow through members inviting their friends to join. SEO applied to social content can make such networks easier to find through searches by people who are looking for information or communities to network with.

Naming Research – Using keyword research often associated with SEO can help brand marketers gain insight into the different words/phrases customers use to search for certain products/services. Because search is a significant portion of what drives marketing, it's important to utilize keyword research to name products and write taglines.

Most often a company's marketing department or agency spearheads the SEO effort. But there are several ways for companies to engage in do-it-yourself SEO.

First and foremost, you want to always make sure that you are building a site for your visitors. Good SEO results in increased traffic without the cost and time spent on advertising. However, it's important to know what not to do when implementing a SEO campaign.

Based on antiquated practices, you may think SEO is simply loading long lists of keywords into your Web site's meta tags or blending them into your site's background. But such activities known as "keyword stuffing" and "page cloaking", both unethical SEO techniques, can hurt your site ranking.

Keyword stuffing refers to the practice of loading a webpage with keywords in an attempt to manipulate a site's ranking in search engine results. Keyword stuffing occurs when a Web page is loaded with keywords in the meta tags or in content. Filling pages with keywords results in a negative user experience. Companies need to focus on creating useful, information-rich content that uses keywords appropriately and in context.

Page cloaking is when the content presented to the search engine robot is different than content presented to the user's browser. The purpose of cloaking is to deceive search engines so they display the page when it would not otherwise be displayed. The search engines don't like it, and will probably ban your site from their index if they find out that your site uses cloaking.

So what are ethical techniques that can be used in SEO?

You can easily make your site search engine optimized by following these easy steps that will make sure everything is ready for search engines to go through and understand what your Web site is about.

1. Content

This is the golden rule for any search engine marketing strategy. Your site must have content worth viewing. Without this one simple step everything else is useless.

2. Incoming Links

Great SEO will do little to help your search engine rankings if other Web sites are not linking to you. The more links you have the more often you are going to be crawled (indexing a web site to provide faster searches). Just as important is making sure that you have the proper anchor text for your incoming links. The easiest way to gain quality links from other sites is to link to sites to let them know your site is there and hope that they link to you in return. Of course, make sure that you have content that is worth linking to on your site.

3. Web Site Title

Making sure that you have the right Web site titles for your pages is extremely important. The keywords you place in your title are important in order to ensure that your topic is understood by search engines. Having a title that is on-topic with the search results, is one of the primary factors for a site's ranking. Using great titles and topics on your site will bring you more traffic than a number one listing. Most of the time it is within the first page, but many searchers skim through the titles to see which looks to be more on-topic for their search.

4. Internal Linking

Making sure that your internal linking helps search robots and visitors find the content on your site is key. Using relevant copy throughout your site will tell searchers more effectively what to expect on that page.

5. Keyword Tool

Before you begin creating copy for your Web site, you need to know what keywords and phrases Internet readers are using in search engines to find content related to yours. There are various keyword tools, like Google AdWords that can show you the approximate number of searches conducted on Google for keywords and phrases that you enter.

6. Sitemaps

It is always a good idea to give search engines a helping hand to find the content that is on your site. Making sure that you create and maintain a sitemap for all of the pages on your site will help the search robots to find all of the pages in your site and index them. All major search engines support sitemaps and most of them offer a great way to ensure that it is finding your sitemap. Most of the time you can simply name it `sitemap.xml` and the search robot will find the file effectively.

7. Meta Tags

If you hear that meta tags don't matter, don't listen. They matter for click-through and many times, Google will use your meta description as the copy that gets pulled with your search listing. This can help to attract the visitor to visit your Web site if it is related to their search query. A good description can help lure a visitor to your site over others, including ones that rank ahead of you on the page.

8. URL Structure

Making sure that your URL structure complies with the content that is on the corresponding page is very important. Of course, search engines value the use of keywords in URLs. If you've got them in your Web site's domain, you get bonus points. However, keywords in the directory path or file name of the URL provide a major boost, as well. Rather than use numbers or nonsense text in article URLs, opt for using real words, ideally keywords for which readers will be searching.

By looking at why and how to engage in SEO, companies can see more clearly how keyword optimization and promotion of content for better search visibility can result in not only increased lead generation, but also positively effect sales and business goals.

Effective agencies are incorporating SEO into all aspects of content publishing online for their clients. Companies that don't are putting themselves at a disadvantage over those competitors that do. Even if you outsource SEO or do it in-house, just remember the golden rule: Content is king. Once you rank well, you need to make sure that you are persuading the visitors to actually click on your search listing.

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