

In this online marketing and SEO guide: The truth about search engine optimization, search engine rankings matter, how search engine optimization works, the wrong way to do SEO, the latest trends in SEO, can search engine optimization help you?, the benefits of search engine optimization, other SEO opportunities, a sample SEO plan, an SEO campaign goes the distance!, the hard facts about SEO and online sales.

The Competitive Edge of an SEO Ready Website



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Introduction - The truth about Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization is essentially a highly optimized way to advertise services online. This organic or “algorithmic” approach to online marketing takes away the “chance” of advertising, and instead focuses efforts on targeted customers. By performing Search Engine Optimization procedures, a company can increase its website visibility in major search engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN.

Getting noticed is the most important factor in online advertising. Otherwise, a top-notch website simply waits in silence and costs the company head hundreds of dollars in webhosting fees. It's the equivalent of building a restaurant in the middle of nowhere!

In the old school of marketing, we were taught that advertising to a general audience was a necessary risk to take. **SEO advertising eliminates that risk and instead targets customers already inclined to buy products or services offered by the company.** This certainly doesn't mean that general advertising avenues are unavailable.

Pay-Per-Click online advertising and banner advertising are similar to the proverbial newspaper or TV ad, in that they very broadly target a general viewership. The difference with SEO is that you only contact those customers that are definitely interested in buying your services. You eliminate the online viewers who are casually surfing, and who would ordinarily not even glance at your ad. Think of all the money you can save by going straight for targeted advertising!

Search Engine Rankings Matter

Studies have shown that most online viewers are satisfied with the top 10 or maybe 20 search results when returned from a major search engine. You yourself can probably attest to this fact. Most of the information we need to know for a specific keyword will be answered within the top 20 websites we find. For a user to look beyond the top 20

websites would indicate a niche interest or perhaps even an obsessive quest to find specific information. In other words, the majority of the Internet population is not going to look so hard for readily available information.

If you want to boost your online presence and create a major Internet campaign, it's not enough to create a website. **That website has to make some noise.** The easiest way to do this is by climbing up the rankings, and of course finding new **keywords** that bring in new traffic.

How Search Engine Optimization Works

There are two factors to understand in SEO: performing technical optimization and publishing creative content. The first step to Search Engine Optimization is by ensuring that you know how to perform search engine optimization. While this step may seem complex to most Internet viewers, to those experienced in web publishing it's just a matter of taking a few simple steps.

SEO techniques include formatting content, inserting META tags and links, and coding the content for search engine "spidering." Since the entire foundation of SEO is built upon keyword phrases, the keywords must be carefully researched. Afterward, an SEO expert **edits the coding of a website** so that he/she can highlight specific keywords in the content, and also **remove any barriers** to proper indexing from the major search engines. These "SEO tactics" can be incorporated into a standard web design or through a content management system.

The entire process can be broken down to 6 simple steps.

- Create a series of keyword-rich articles for your company
- Optimize your website for SEO and keyword indexing
- Publish the content on your website

- Check the major search engines for your ranking.
- Read your visitor analytics to determine how well the campaign is going
- Adjust keywords and coding to increase traffic and boost sales

Of course, this is only the basic overview of SEO. The fact of the matter is that the game has changed since 1997 when SEO was a relatively simple process. Today, the major search engines use “crawlers” in order to find new content for “algorithmic” searches. Pages that are linked from other search engine indexed pages do not have to be “submitted” in order to be found. In just a matter of days, they will be picked up automatically.

Practically every search engine guarantees inclusion in their search results, though rankings themselves cannot be promised. Some companies like Yahoo charge a paid submission service. Practically every company also requires a human review of new content before it can be listed. Google Webmaster Tools allows users to submit an XML Sitemap to ensure that all new web pages can be found on a search. Not every single web page will be indexed, only the most relevant and popular pages on a site.

How do major search engines like Google and Yahoo decide what sites and what pages get listed most prominently? There are many factors taken into consideration. In general...

- Original Content
- Accurate Content
- Informative Content
- Popularity of Website and Web Page
- Quality and Quantity of Keyword Usage

- Appropriate Keyword Matches
- Distance of pages from the root directory

The Wrong Way to Do SEO

Ever since 1997, unscrupulous companies have attempted to exploit search engines for their own commercial gain. However, search engine companies have consistently fought back to keep the market fair. Unfortunately, low quality SEO firms and individual webmasters are still using underhanded tactics (black hat SEO or spamdexing) to cheat their way to the top of the list. The most common errors made in SEO include:

- Keyword Stuffing (using a keyword an absurd amount of times for a small article)
- Article Spinning (Nonsensical articles that spin keywords out for search engine purposes only)
- Link Farms (Sites that hyperlink to every other site in a group)

Major search engines no longer fall for these tactics. In fact, they look for websites that use black hat SEO techniques so they can remove their pages and possibly ban them from further submission. For well over ten years, Internet search companies have tried to help online vendors and information publishers honestly trying to move up in searches, and get rid of abusers of the system.

The Latest Trends in SEO

In recent years, there have been greater efforts by webmasters and SEO specialists to increase rankings based on the number of back links. The popularity of article directories sites allows web companies to increase their own popularity through back linking while also establishing expert credibility. Even if a website itself has no instant

popularity, it can slowly but surely earn traffic and higher rankings by consistently publishing new content on its own blog and on a popular article directory.

Another development affecting SEO is the advent of social media networking. Popular websites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are monsters when it comes to SEO-friendly coding. Many webmasters and SEO companies are finding it advantageous to publish new content on these popular and active websites.

The content management system (CMS) is quickly earning a reputation for having SEO-friendly coding for search engines, more so than just a website with META tags. This explains why many companies are redesigning their current web pages with CMS software like Drupal, WordPress and Joomla. All these new SEO techniques aside, the best way to ensure a just ranking is to publish high quality content with frequently searched keyword phrases.

Can Search Engine Optimization Help You?

Can Search Engine Optimization help you? It's definitely worth considering, regardless of what business you are in. Practically any online or brick and mortar business can benefit from an SEO-ready website. One of the basic rules of business is that there should always be something happening.

New products are released and so the market talks about them. New services are offered and so questions are asked and answered. New trends are developing and new information has to be passed along. Why, even a mom and pop bakery can benefit from a greater online presence! Doesn't it make sense to publish a menu showing the latest desserts? The online updates makes local customers eager to come out and see the store.

One of the most egregious misconceptions about SEO is the idea that only national or international businesses can benefit from it. In fact, local business owners have an even greater opportunity to succeed since they are competing with a much smaller market.

At the same time, it's hard to deny that effective search engine optimization helps to make sales across the country and even across the world. SEO outsourcing is a growing trend, especially when you consider the fact that Google is the #1 search engine worldwide and performs 75% of all searches—and even more overseas. In fact, some highly industrialized countries have only recently learned about the value of SEO. In 2006, Germany had only five SEO firms while Google had a 90% market share. Can you imagine the success an American or English business owner could have had with some adept multinational marketing?

The Benefits of Search Engine Optimization

There are many benefits to investing in SEO. Search Engine Optimization already has a tremendous advantage over traditional advertising venues. TV, radio and print advertising is expensive and there is no guarantee of reaching your targeted audience. With SEO, you are only reaching your targeted audience—people who are looking for information or products that concern your business. Let's review 5 benefits of using SEO.

1. You receive targeted advertising at no extra expense.

You can reach your audience without having to worry about impressions, rent, fees or any other headaches. You only pay for the content and SEO work. The copy you publish lasts forever.

2. This is a subtler approach to sales.

Most other forms of marketing you see are “push” marketing. Traditional marketers push sales and quickly alienate anyone that doesn't like their product or their message. Search Engine Optimization does not involve writing copy or going for the big sale. Instead, you are imparting helpful information to the online community. You will earn a web viewers respect for the free help you provided and maybe earn his business, if the price is right.

3. When you work with SEO, you embrace the future.

The future of all human communication is the Internet. More people use email for fast communication than postal mail. People are watching movies and TV programs on an Internet-ready TV. When you plan an SEO campaign, you are strengthening your online presence. When you advertise in any other medium, you are taking a chance, hoping that viewers will some day find you. When you advertise online, with so many new marketing devices and strategies designed to push viral marketing, you know it's only a matter of time before they discover your name.

4. You can easily change your marketing campaign or plan numerous campaigns without much expense.

By doing **keyword research**, you can try a variety of approaches to finding new customers and then track their response via web analytics. If you create multiple landing pages to correspond with your keywords, you can actually run several campaigns at once—perhaps each one just a little different so as to appeal to the right type of reader. Since you own the web space, there is no extra expense involved.

5. It's far easier with SEO to track your marketing campaign and keep customers.

Ordinarily, analyzing your marketing strategy would depend on customer interaction and a hard break down of sales. With SEO, you can actually measure a variety of interaction including total web viewers, conversion rates, key indicators, successful keywords, overall traffic and other statistics. You can also quickly and easily create a mailing list for all of your online visitors, ensuring that you will get another opportunity to make your pitch.

Other SEO Opportunities

Remember that just as Search Engine Optimization evolved from Internet advertising, so is general SEO now branching off into specific venues. We have local searches, industry-specific searches and even image and video searches. A search engine-friendly website is truly competitive because it involves a variety of venues and channels all coming together to establish a strong online presence.

Even when it comes to web design, webmasters must carefully address several areas involved in SEO: website designs, menus, CMS, shopping carts, domain names and more. Search Engine Optimization encompasses many individual processes, all of which work towards effective brand promotion.

A Sample SEO Plan

Sometimes the best way to understand the competitive edge of an SEO-ready company is to consider specific examples of how SEO can help just one business. How about a sample plan to demonstrate the effect SEO can have on your company?

Let's take a local company like A-1 Auto Center. (Don't bother looking it up, there's about 20,000 companies with the same name) Local sales are dwindling. The company owner knows he needs to either invest in a brand new direction or close up the lot. He knows that Internet advertising is the way of the future, but doesn't understand enough about modern technology to justify the expense.

Step 1: The owner works with a website design and SEO firm to start a new campaign. After the SEO-ready website is coded and published, the creation of new auto articles is ordered. In order to save time and expense, a CMS program is used to make regular site updates and to publish new features. Without spending any money on advertising expenses, (only on content production) the owner is able to advertise locally for free using carefully chosen keywords.

Step 2: Because the owner creates several landing pages each with popular keywords, a variety of campaigns are employed and all available vehicles can be showcased.

Step 3: Web analytics software is installed allowing for easy analysis of all website visitors. At this point in time, traffic is promising but no sales conversions have been made. Based on the compiled reports, changes are made in keyword phrasing and more articles are written.

Step 4: The owner studies the competition as well as popular keyword searches within the local and nationwide industry. He experiments with a new campaign and new keywords.

Step 5: Sales conversions are promising, with the addition of an online store and with the special “mention the website” discount. However, the owner and the SEO expert agree that more popularity is needed if sales are to boom. They start on a link building campaign by targeting article directories. They research top article directories as well as a few niche sites.

Step 6: After a few weeks of link building, traffic increases by 70%, a major increase. By creating links to specially targeted pages, the company owner is in effect telling the search engines what is important on the website. The company owner and SEO specialist conclude that the anchor text was highly successful, and provided most of the incoming traffic.

Step 7: As local business improves, and more articles are submitted on behalf of the company, the company owner establishes a reputation as a local and nationwide expert. The blog regularly brings in comments and much of the blog content is circulated around thanks to social bookmarks. Meanwhile web analysis continues on index links, individual pages and rankings.

Step 8: The final step is perhaps the most difficult. The owner must follow through on his initial efforts and continue to invest in Search Engine Optimization, **establishing a long-term Internet presence.**

An SEO Campaign Goes the Distance!

Understand that the web is a constantly changing, constantly updated environment. What is new one day is old news in just a matter of days. Within an hour, many websites will update with the latest information on their respective industries.

In order for you to truly conquer the SEO world, you must establish a **long-term plan**. Internet search engines must be regularly fed quality content. The only reason that the top 10 and top 20 websites are so prominently listed for their keywords is because they are constantly feeding the search engines with new and popular content.

You cannot expect dramatic results if you buy only one SEO package. Search Engine Optimization is not a bag of cheap traffic tricks—it's an entire campaign that must be seen from beginning to end. Once a website stops producing content, it falls back down in the rankings—especially if it has limited popularity to begin with.

Did you know that most press releases are only searchable online for about a month? That's a good standard to remember for all of your online articles, blogs and web content. Some websites actually update daily. It all depends on the market and just how committed you are to "living your business."

The Hard Facts About SEO and Online Sales

You've read the logic behind SEO competition. Now it's time to consider the hard facts. What are some SEO statistics that can really inspire confidence from a new website owner?

According to studies by E-Consultancy™ and Exact Target™, 46% of all responding businesses stated they were planning to increase their marketing budget for 2010. The least important avenues to these companies were newspaper ads and print publication ads. Meanwhile, up to 70% of all surveyed companies stated they were increasing their budget for off-site social media as well as SEO.

Over at EntrepreneurWeb.com™, it was revealed that 77.4% of all responding companies were achieving their SEO objectives through blogging. Many companies expressed interest in creating more SEO-friendly blog content and about 95% of all respondents stated they regularly use blogs for SEO purposes.

SearchEngineOptimizationFirm.ca™ revealed a particularly interesting trend in SEO and online marketing. Most of the internet based companies investing in SEO marketing were using “long tail keywords” for their targeted keyword categories. This may be in contrast to what you’ve read about focusing on short, general keywords and competing against larger companies. The “niche” approach is winning. Long-tail keywords are much less expensive and far more targeted—an ideal entry point for small business owners.

Want one more startling statistic that will jumpstart your competitive spirit? Studies have reveal that out of all the Fortune 500 companies in the market, half had no search engine visibility and their targeted keywords were not even ranked in the top 100 research results. Only 2% of Fortune 500-owned web domains showed a “significant number of their terms in the top results.”

That tells you, the small business owner, that the largest companies are still clueless about how to use SEO. SEO is not understood by everyone, especially by companies that are used to paying their way to the top, rather than producing quality content for the community’s benefit.

Now is your chance to get out there and **grab a piece of that market**. Make yourself known. Be a friend to your industry and your customers long before you ask for payment. **Search Engine Optimization** favors small to medium sized companies that are willing to work hard and spend very little in exchange for targeted customers.

Start thinking competitively. Here’s the new truth of the matter: the competitive edge of any company is measured by its online presence. Because if you’re not online establishing your reputation by now, you haven’t been following the market!