

## **Chapter Ten: SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMAZATION (SEO)**

There is tons of information out there on the web about Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Some of it is very good, however a majority of it is not. There are many people that you can find online that do not truly understand what SEO really is and all it contains. It is very easy for someone that does not have a firm grasp of SEO to be easily steered in the wrong direction by someone claiming to be an SEO Expert. I will attempt to shed some light on the true nature SEO and give you the knowledge to be an educated consumer.

What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization is the term used to describe the efforts to have pages on a website return in a high position in the Organic Rankings in a search engine query. Organic results are the ones that appear just below the PPC ads on the results page of any search query. If your site does not rank on the first page of search results, less than 30% of searchers will ever see your page. Most people do

not venture to the second or third page of search results. As a result, having your pages rank on the first page can make a significant difference in the traffic to your website. This larger volume of traffic will make it easier to get the conversion ratio of online browsers to in-store shoppers that your store needs to be profitable.

Most people erroneously believe that search engines rank websites. They don't. Search engines rank pages. This small distinction can make large changes in one's approach to SEO. The job of a true SEO expert is not to make your entire website rank on page one, which is virtually impossible, but to sculpt pages on your site that will attain high organic rankings. Pages are ranked by search engines on a myriad of factors. The search engines are in the business of providing to their users the best possible answers to their search query. It is in the search engine's best interest to provide the most pertinent results for their users; otherwise people would no longer use that search engine. The exact algorithms used by search engines to rank pages are closely guarded secrets. However, one can make some assumptions based up empirical

research of current search results. In the field of SEO you do not have to have the perfect page for a search engine, you just need to have your page be better than the competition. As a result, focusing on broad terms and keywords will make it more difficult for your page to rank.

Bringing in long-tail keywords, phrases that show buying intent, and location clarifiers can drastically improve your ability to get your page ranked higher. Let's look at the keyword "sofa" as an example. It will be very hard to rank for just the keyword sofa. However, it will be exponentially easier to rank for the phrase, "leather sofa stores in Nashville". When it comes to furniture buying, most people will not make a purchase solely online. As a result, your best shot at converting that online customer to an in-store customer is to reach the people online in your area. Google has made large strides in recent years to improve their local search results. They have found that their users prefer dealing with local businesses, rather than large, impersonal companies. As a result, making sure that your name, address and phone number (NAP) are consistent across the Internet is very important.

If your NAP has conflicting information, search engines will be more likely to leave you out of search results, as they do not want to provide information that they are not able to confirm. Luckily, there are some great and relatively easy services that you can leverage to make sure your NAP is consistent across the web.

Site Structure is also very important in SEO. The way in which you build your pages, and link your pages together as sub pages will affect your search results. Search engines look to see how you group pages together. This give the search engine an idea of how much related material you have on any one topic. So if you have a page dedicated to sofas, you would want to make sure that you have all your product pages for sofas as sub pages supporting it. This will help your main sofa page rank better, as the search engine will determine that you have many supporting pages to your main sofa page.

Many people believe that to get the best result they need to have the keyword they are trying to rank for as many times as possible on a given page. While this may seem to make sense, it is not an advisable way to build your content. Search engines

will look at a site that has too many keywords as “keyword stuffed”. This will trigger the search engine to believe that your page is a spam page and therefore it will drop you in search ranking or even out of the results altogether. If you read a page aloud and it seems clunky to you, chances are you have stuffed too many keywords into your content.

So now you have the task in front of you to find the keywords that you wish to focus on for your pages. This may seem like a daunting task. Where do you start? The best place to start is with the competition. There are a few services out there that can give you detailed reports on what your competitors are focusing on for their keywords. This also can be accomplished by running searches of lists of keywords and seeing how your local competition ranks. You need to know what they are ranking for and how well they are ranking for it. This knowledge will allow you to work on being one step better than their page and thus attaining your goal of ranking higher.

Now that you know the keywords that you want to focus on, you can begin to create quality content for your site. Each of your targeted keywords

should have their own pages. These pages will be focused around their individual keywords. Here are some do's and don'ts when it comes to content creation.

### **Do's**

- Make it original.
- Make it natural.
- Utilize bulleted lists for easy scanning.
- Utilize images to convey concepts visually.

### **Don'ts**

- Keyword stuff.
- Duplicate content on multiple pages.
- Hide text from site visitors.

Once you have created your content and have properly structured the pages on your site you need to create proper sitemaps for your site. There are two different types of sitemaps. The one you are most familiar with generally is linked in the footer of a website and gives you a listing of all the pages on the site. This is a good resource to have and every site should include one. However, there is another type of sitemap, called an XML sitemap,

which is meant for search engines. This sitemap will help the search engines index your entire site and make sure that they account for all of your pages, images, videos etc. on your site. Each piece of media on your site is able to be individually index by the search engines. This is why with some results you will get image or video results for a search query. Making sure that the search engines are able to fully index your site ensures that all the work you have done will not be in vain.

After your website has been submitted and indexed by search engines, you need to work on link building in order to enhance your sites stature in the eyes of the search engines. Linking to know authorities on subjects is a good start and this can be incorporated in you content creation. Getting links is another story. For years many "SEO experts" thought SEO was just getting links for your site. Today, its about getting the right links for your site and making sure that you do not get the wrong types of links. Bad links from link farms will give you a short spike in ranking and then can lead to you getting a penalty from the search engines and being removed from the results. The best way to go

about getting links is to create some content that will garner links. This sounds fairly straightforward, but in practice it can be difficult. The best way I have heard it described is by Jon Ball of Page One Power, a leading link building company. Your website is like an amusement park. Your contact information, company profile, etc. are like the streets and toilets at Disney World. You need to create content that are the rollercoasters. These types of content "rollercoasters" are what will bring attention and links to your site. These can be in the form of blog articles, infographics, and even interactive games. "Rollercoaster" content will also be easily shareable via social media outlets.

How many times today have you searched for something on your cellphone? If you had to track the number of searches you do a day on your cellphone or tablet vs. your desktop where do you think the majority of your searches would end up? For the majority of potential consumers, the number skews heavily towards mobile devices. As a result, search engines have made some dramatic shifts over the past year that greatly affect rankings based on mobile search. Many websites in the past

employed separate mobile friendly sites as a way to serve their content to people on smaller screens. This created a problem for the search engines. They had to index sites twice - once for the main website and again for the mobile site. As you can imagine, with the explosion of mobile use in the past 5 years, this created a storage problem for search engines. How would they be able to continually index two versions of the same content and store that data? Ultimately, they decided not to. As of this past year Google will no longer be indexing separate mobile and desktop sites. The search engines have put the responsibility on the site owners to create responsive sites. Responsive sites can change and adapt to any screen size, thus allowing the search engines to only have to index and store one version of the website. This drastically cuts down on the storage needed by the search engines. However, if your site is not responsive, you can find yourself dropped from the search results index. As a website owner you must make sure that your website is fully responsive for mobile. Taking it one step further, you should make sure that your user experience on mobile does not suffer from being on the smaller screen. There are many different

ways that this can be achieved. Working with a web designer is one way, utilizing site structures like Wordpress or Joomla are most times more cost effective.

Lather. Rinse. Repeat. You see that on the directions on every bottle of shampoo. It is very similar in SEO. You have to consistently be checking your rankings, updating your site with fresh, relevant content and making sure that your link building is moving in the right direction. SEO is not a race to the finish line; it is a constant battle over the long term to maintain your position in line. Hopefully, you now have a larger understanding of Search Engine Optimization. You are now empowered to make the proper decisions for your website going forward. But remember, SEO is ever changing; you need to keep up with it to maintain your edge over your competition.

