

SEO To-Do's to Improve your Online Presence

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is a technique that helps search engines (like Google) find and rank your site. So when you work to optimize your site, you're utilizing SEO to help you get traffic from search engines.

Many people hear SEO and think it's way too complicated for them to figure out, or maybe they've recently been told that SEO doesn't matter anymore.

Well, it does matter. And the good news is it doesn't have to be complicated.

Believe it or not, with limited knowledge, you can perform actions on your own that will help you get more love from search engines, without having to read a 300 page text book, attend a fancy class or pay a company to do it for you.

I like to keep things simple (remember the KISS method?) This article will lay out some simple and easy to complete tasks that will help you optimize your site and allow you to start seeing your name show at the top of search engine result pages.

Instead of becoming overwhelmed or getting plagued by paralysis by analysis, I recommend performing some simple but key tasks. This guide will get you started in your never-ending quest to have a strong online presence.

Dive in, and good luck!

Keywords

In order to show up in search engines on the first page when people are doing online searches via Google, Bing, etc., your site will need to rank well for the keywords being used in the search.

Search engines like Google crawl the Internet, reviewing websites and determining what they might be about and what is being sold. Now this is a computer doing this, but if it's detecting keywords like shoes, soles and heels, then it's guessing that this site is all about shoes.

Because these crawling robots care so much about the interest of the general public, they want to point people to this shoe website when they ask for shoes. (After they've confirmed the site is, in fact, a website about shoes that offers shoes).

So let's say you make custom leather boots for women. You want to think about what words and phrases you want to rank for, so people will find your site when needing/wanting custom leather boots.

In today's advanced online world, it's not good enough (nor is it necessary) to just rank for "shoes".

First off, someone typing "shoes" in Google is likely not ready to buy your custom leather boots. They're probably just doing some online browsing, maybe some research. So it's not necessarily worth it to work really hard for your site to appear on top of page one when people enter that keyword. Let Zappos continue to rank first for shoes, there's no need for you to tackle a big fish.

Now picture someone who enters "cost for custom women's boots" into a search engine. Now this person is probably more likely to be interested in your website and what you have to offer and they are certainly showing an interest or intent to buy.

Identify Keywords

So now that you have a basic understanding of how search engines work and when you want your site to appear in front of potential buyers, you can start finding out the best keywords that you should use to get your site to show up at the top of the results page.

Google's Keyword Planner is a free tool you can use to help generate some keyword ideas. If you don't have a Google Adwords account, you can easily set one up for free (adwords.google.com). Under the Tools section is the Keyword Planner. Choose "Search for new keyword and ad group ideas."

Doing this will give you some ideas and a sense for how many people are searching certain keywords and phrases.

Start a list of keywords and phrases for which you'd want to rank. I suggest staying away from one-word keywords. Google's Keyword Planner will tell you how many searches different keywords and phrases get, but don't just choose the words that get a lot of traffic, as these will be more competitive. Start compiling a nice mix of low to highly searched 2-5 word keyword phrases.

I also don't recommend treating Google's Keyword Planner like gold. Use this just for ideas. This tool will naturally give you a lot of bland and non-specific keyword ideas.

You'll want most of your keyword focus to be on what are called long tail keywords. These are longer phrases that identify exactly what you are selling. Long tail keywords will not generate a ton of search traffic, however they will get you more bang for your buck. (Remember the custom boots example I just mentioned).

Because these long tail keywords are very focused and specific to your product offering, there is a better chance that the few people that find your site using these phrases will want to buy or at least engage with you.

Another example of a long tail keyword is “Italian vintage sports car.”

In order to come up with additional keyword ideas, take a look at your competitor’s sites and see what keywords they are using. Identify any category pages they might have and read through their text.

You can also right click on a webpage and select “View Source Code” to see what keywords have been added to the tags on the page. If this company is somewhat savvy, then words they are entering into the various html tags are keywords for which they’re looking to rank. This might be a good sign that you should work to rank for them as well so you can show up in search results along with your competition and of course, get visitors to notice you instead.

Read on for more information about site tags.

Add Keywords To Your Site

Now that you have keyword ideas, it’s time to add them to your site. Here are some ways to do that.

1. Edit your <title> tag

The text you have in your <title> tag on your website shows in search results as your page title, so this tag is very important.

You’ll want to make sure you have keywords in this tag that are relevant to your business, but don’t stuff keywords in here (be subtle).

Keep the title at about 6 words and ensure your keyword(s) are at the beginning. I like to use the vertical bars to make the tag look nice and clean. Here’s an example: Office Cleaning | Salem MA | Waterfront Cleaners.

If you don’t know how to edit tags on your website, ask the person who created the site and you should be able to do this on your own assuming you have access to your CMS (WordPress, etc.).

2. Content Content Content!

Use the keywords you identified in the text on your site, but not too much or in such a way it doesn’t make sense or it will look suspicious to search engines.

Content on your website will help you tremendously, but I believe in the power of really good content that is insightful, and helps your customer. So be genuine when you're adding content to your site. Here are some considerations as it relates to SEO:

Blog: If you don't have a blog, create one. Shoot to post an informative and helpful piece of content that your intended audience/buyers would enjoy once per week. Blog posts not only add relevant content but they also create more index-able pages to your website, which search engines like to see.

General Content: Beef up your content on your homepage and general pages of your site so they are descriptive. Remember, your site is being crawled to make sure you're not a fake, and that you're actually offering what you say you're offering. Add content that reflects this, including any of the general keywords you've identified and for which you want to rank.

Category Pages: Ensure that you have pages on your site that are focused on specific products or category of products you may offer. For example, if you sell cars, then have a specific page dedicated to vintage sports cars and another dedicated to safe family cars. Create content on these pages that use those long tail keywords you listed and dive into those particular categories. You'd rather have a consumer land on your sports car page when they search "Italian vintage sports car" and not your home page.

3. Add keywords to heading tags (<H1>, <H2>, etc.)

The heading tags on your page, (you'll find these in the html), are a great spot to be using your keywords. Search engines like searching these for relevant content. Heading tags look like this: <H1>, <H2>, <H3> and so on.

4. Add keywords to <alt> tags of your images

Again, in the html code of your website you'll find <alt> tags for any images on your site. Google won't be able to distinguish what your image is, but they will identify the text in your alt tag, so add a descriptive keyword to this to help search engines understand what that image might be.

5. Metatags

Metatags are less and less important these days, (they are more important today on Bing and Yahoo!) but it's still worth it to take note of the <description> and <keywords> metatags on your site. Write a good description of your site in the <description> tag. Sometimes this will pop up in the description of your site search results.

Off-Site Optimization

You can do things off of your own site to improve your SEO as well. When other sites link to your site, your rankings improve. However, make sure any sites that link to you are

reputable. The search engines will be able to tell if you paid a bunch of random, crappy sites to put your link on their page. If you have an opportunity to get a .edu or .gov website to link to you, do it, this is sheer gold.

Create a Sitemap

Sitemaps help tell search engines about pages on your website. I prioritize creating a Sitemap for Google, but it's easy to submit one to both the Google and Bing Webmaster Tools. Registering your domain on Google and Bing's Webmaster Tools is free.

A Sitemap is simply a list of the pages on your website. So by creating and submitting a Sitemap you're allowing Google to better understand all the pages on your site. This includes URL's that may not be found by Google's normal crawling process.

I like to use this free Sitemap generator: <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/>.

(If you have over 500 pages on your site, you may want to use another Sitemap generator, like this one for \$20.00: <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/standalone-google-sitemap-generator.html>).

Simply enter your website URL into the generator and your site will be completely crawled. You'll receive an XML file of the Sitemap and a link to a Sitemap file. Take that link and add it into Google and Bing Webmaster Tools. Yahoo Webmaster Tools merged with Bing so you're covering your bases by using the Bing tool.

(Links to these tools: <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/>; <http://www.bing.com/toolbox/webmaster>).

Now that you have Webmaster accounts, you'll also be able to find out when Google or Bing may find an error with one of your pages, so you can fix it to be sure people will be able to find those pages via search.

Social

Having a presence on various social media outlets can certainly feel like a necessary evil, and it sort of is just that.

If you don't have the resources and bandwidth, don't get too wrapped up in being perfect at keeping up with social outlets. Just get some sort of presence for your company; it won't cost you a thing.

Ensure you have a company Facebook page, Twitter and a Google Plus Page. If you have videos, create a YouTube page for your company.

You should also have a Google Places page. This is easy, free advertising. When you sign up, you'll be asked to verify that you are an actual company, so don't skip this step. You might as well register on Bing Places while you're at it.

Lastly, if applicable to your business, get a profile on TripAdvisor and/or Yelp, and any positive reviews obviously are helpful.

Conclusion

No matter what anyone tells you, the SEO game is truly a guessing game. Search engines don't release their algorithms for how to get your name high on the results list.

This is why I urge companies to keep things simple, and do some known things that will help increase their SEO.

If you do the items laid out in this document, you will find that your listings in search engine results will begin to improve over time.

Good luck in this never-ending game. It becomes really fun when you start seeing results!

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