

SEO Explained For People with Real Jobs

When talking to clients about marketing their business online I am asked "How do you get to #1 on Google?" While this article is not specially about how to become #1 - I will explain what the process is and what's involved.

Despite our widespread acceptance and use of the internet - I am always surprised by how many people really have no idea what SEO (search engine optimization) is about. They instinctively know WHY they like to click on that first listing in the natural results; but they don't have the first clue HOW it got there. Making matters worse is the fact that the internet world is largely unregulated and still being figured out - so it seems that everyone has their own "best practice" and definitions of things like SEO.

I usually tell clients that their intuitive feeling of WHY they trust that first listing is that - simply put - it's the best result for the phrase you type in. People seem to understand that. However most people don't really understand why one site would be better than another so here goes with a layman's explanation ♦

What is SEO, really?

SEO is the process of configuring a website so that it has a chance to show up in a search result for a particular phrase. In other words it is our way of telling Google, Yahoo, or MSN what we think our site is about. Many of the search engines have a slightly different formula for how they determine these results. But the short version is that they look at different factors of each website page, rank them and then give those results to you.

Why is SEO Important?

One word sums it up - competition. Depending on what study you read, there are as many as 20 billion web pages being indexed at any given time. The major search engines do their best to go through these pages and catalog them so that they can tell you about it if you use their website to search. With so many website pages out there competing for similar phrases it is absolutely critical to make sure you are using every tool at your disposal to make sure your customers can find you when they are looking.

OK, So What Should I Be Doing for SEO On My Site?

The good news is that doing SEO correctly is not complicated. The bad news is that it is time consuming and requires regular attention in order to maintain results. Our advice is to ethically follow these simple guidelines for best long-term results:

Good site structure - as simple as this sounds many people overlook this. Every day we see sites with heavy flash animation, dated frame designs, pages that don't work and broken links. The bottom line is that if you can't easily navigate a site without problems chances are the search engines can't either. And if a search engine can't go through your site you have absolutely no chance of showing up for a key phrase - no matter how pretty the flash.

Good meta-data - Clients often draw a blank with this one. Meta-data is geek-speak for the page titles, page descriptions and keywords that you enter for each page. Each page on your website should have a unique title and description that summarizes what that page is about.

We often see 2 problems with meta-data. The first is that it is simply overlooked. I am stunned at how many sites have www.yoursite.com as the page title for every page - that's wasting prime online real estate.

The 2nd problem is spam. Putting in a page title or description that does not accurately match what the page is about is considered "spamming" a search engine. Doing this will get your page thrown out of the index and ruin any

chance of showing up for a key phrase. Relevant content - People seem to understand that good content is really what they are looking for when they search for something. By "relevant" we mean that the content is specific to the topic in question and recently updated. More and more we are seeing sites that have regular updates or blogs showing up higher in the search results than sites which have larger quantities of older, "stale" content on them.

Our recommendation is to add well-written, grammatically correct and spell-checked content to your website on a regular basis. This ensures that, over time, your site will become a "resource" to those looking for phrases related to your business.

Responsible link building - This is perhaps the least understood part of SEO. In a nutshell search engines consider a link from another website to your website as a popularity vote. Think of it as power rankings for websites. In general the more sites which link to yours, the better; as this shows your site is relevant to the given topic.

Sadly though link building, like keywords and meta-data, have been abused by many site owners with schemes such as link farms where sites are setup simply to house links to other sites. We encourage careful and responsible link building with sites that are related to yours or through appropriate directories and article banks.

So there you have it - SEO explained for people with real jobs. Like most things it's not really that hard but it requires discipline which is where most people get off track. If you would like help with SEO for your website, or other online business needs we would love to hear from you.