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Basics & Benefits of SEO

Search Engine Optimization (or SEO) can either be made very complex and hard to understand or very easy to comprehend. We'll work on making it easy in this report.

To sum up SEO in one sentence, it simply means getting your website(s) in favor with the search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo so they can send you lots of free traffic. That's it – period.

First, let's start with what exactly Search Engine traffic means. While this course is not intended to be a complete guide to SEO by any means, we'll quickly cover a bit of the basics to make sure that you do understand them.

Here is a screen shot from Google when I typed in “local online marketing austin tx” on my computer.

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the query "local online marketing austin tx". The search bar at the top indicates "About 339,000 results (0.22 seconds)". The results are categorized into "Ads" and "Place page".

- Ads (Paid listings):** Several results are marked with red arrows and labeled "Paid listings". These include:
 - "Local SEO Experts" from www.elinkdesign.com.
 - "Austin Internet Marketing" from www.internetpositions.com.
 - "Google Local Advertising" from places.google.com/tags.
 - "Local Funnel — Small Business Online Marketing" from www.localfunnelmarketing.com/.
 - "Affordable Search Engine Ranking - Local Online Marketing Austin TX" from www.moderndigitalmarketing.com/.
 - "Internet Marketing Company LeCommerce, Local Business & Mobile..." from spacechimpmedia.com/.
 - "online marketing austin.texas.internet marketing austin.local..." from www.onlinemarketingaustin.com/hello-world/?page=2.
 - "Internet Marketing Done Right" from www.constantcontact.com.
- Place page (Free listings):** A "Place page" for "Local Funnel" is shown, with a red arrow pointing to it labeled "That's us - not bad!". The listing includes the address "8901 Brodie Lane #160, Austin (512) 589-1992".
- Other results:** There are also organic search results for "Localized Web Marketing" and "Internet Marketing Firm".

I've marked the Paid (pay-per-click) listings and Free (organic) listings with red arrows.

To get your website listed in the paid listings, you must sign up with the Google Adwords program which is set up as a paid advertising program and that's an entirely different course. You trade cash for clicks, basically.

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But, we'll be talking about the FREE listings – which, once again, are FREE... if you know how to get your site there.

I'll bet you can imagine that our company, which has the second position in Google for “local online marketing Austin TX”, is working very hard to keep that spot. Free traffic is a good thing. ☺

Simplifying SEO

As I mentioned, Search Engine Optimization can be made very complex or very simple.

Unfortunately, many people in the SEO industry purposely make it all seem very complicated and mystical (which is a good way to confuse clients so they can bilk them for more money).

But the fact is, in order to get traffic from the search engines you really only need to focus on two things:

1. Making sure that your website is very clearly telling the Search Engines what it's about.
2. Making sure other people are “talking” about your website.

Telling the search engines what your site is about is what we call “on-site” SEO. It includes things like:

- Having written content on your site that is relevant to your market and industry,
- Having topically relevant media content on your site,
- And making sure your pages and other site content are optimized using words that will help Google to figure out what your website is about.

We'll talk about that more in a bit. It obviously gets more complex than that, but in the simplest sense you should look at it like a game of 20 questions...

Make sure Google, Bing, and Yahoo only have to ask only a few questions to figure out what your site is about. If it takes all twenty questions, well... you lose the game.

The second factor is often referred to as “Off-site” SEO, and is really all about getting other websites to link to your site (“inbound links”). This is often more complicated than it sounds, and is definitely the more time- and labor-intensive of the two types of SEO.

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Most website owners will focus all of their efforts on off-page SEO, doing anything and everything that gets them inbound links. This is a mistake.

Google's number one concern is to serve up RELEVANT content in the search engines. Sure, having a bunch of backlinks (another term for inbound links) to your site can help you rank higher in the search engines...

But, what if another site has just as many links, and better on-page SEO?

You guessed it – they are going to rank higher than your site in Google.

How To Get Inbound Links to Your Site

There are lots of ways to get other sites linking to your site...

For instance -

- Article marketing
- Blog commenting
- Guest blogging
- Squidoo marketing
- Twitter & Facebook marketing
- Stumble Upon marketing
- Video marketing
- Press release marketing
- Forum marketing

Anywhere you can get links to your website from quality related websites is a good thing. Having said that, you can really mess up your search engine rankings by getting links the wrong way...

Which is something we're going to cover later in this report.

I could write a novel the length of *War and Peace* on getting links, but we're just covering the basics in this report.

So keep reading to learn how NOT to do things, so you don't get scammed in your quest to increase your website rankings and improve the sales and leads your site is getting. On that note, let's get started.

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SEO Mistake: Hiring SEO Companies that Spam You

Finding your way through the labyrinth of conflicting search engine optimization information can be confusing and frustrating, no matter how much experience you have.

And, because of that confusion, there have been a lot of scammers that have moved into the SEO industry in the hopes of making a quick buck selling worthless SEO services to the unknowing and unsuspecting.

So when you suddenly receive an email in your inbox promising guaranteed results...

Don't give in.

First, these emails almost always offer a scam – a way of manipulating the search engine results that either doesn't work, or can get you blacklisted from the search engines even if the method does work.

Definition of Blacklisted: Denial of access. Getting your website either banned or boycotted in the search engines. Shut out.

For example, the company may promise to submit your site to 1,000 search engines or 500 directories. Sounds good, right?

Scam: Submitting your site to thousands of search engines

The trouble is that there are only four true search engines in existence: Google, Yahoo, Ask and BING (formerly MSN/Live). Every other search site you use pulls their results from the four mentioned above.

So, if your site appears in one of the four, it will appear in the search engine results pages, known as SERPs, on any other search engine site.

Scam: Submitting your site to dozens of directories

As for the 500 directories – do your homework. The only directories that are going to do you any good are those that are related to your industry.

So if you're selling handcrafted wooden toys, a wedding directory is not going to help you any. However, a directory of American made toys would be perfect. Or a directory of natural, non-toxic toys may drive actual customers to your site.

You may think that having your site listed in unrelated directories will help your site, after all, what's one more link going to hurt, right?

The trouble with that thinking is, if you have three high-quality sites linking to you and all other links are spammy, unrelated directories, those links will actually reflect poorly on your site.

So, it's better to focus on receiving high-quality links from sites that rank well in the search engines and have actual visitors who are interested in what you have to offer.

Scam: Promising the moon

Unscrupulous SEO companies also tend to promise you #1 ranking in a particular search engine for certain keywords. The problem is that the SEO companies cannot control the results that appear in the search engines.

What they do to make it appear that you're getting results is use black hat methods to artificially affect your rankings. This is temporary, at best, because the techniques they use violate search engine terms of service, putting you at risk for getting your website banned from the search engines.

Techniques that are a violation of search engine TOS include:

- Keyword stuffing
- Hidden text and links
- Doorway and cloaked pages
- Link farming
- Blog comment spam

Avoid using these techniques, and avoid any SEO company who promises overnight results, because they are probably using these methods.

They don't care if you get blacklisted from Google, because they are going to move on to the next "mark" tomorrow. So long as they get their first payment from you, they're golden. And, there's a possibility your site might not get blacklisted...

But, they aren't taking that risk. You are.

Finally, keep this in mind: Emails that try to sell you something, that are sent *in bulk* from a company you don't have any kind of relationship with, are spam and against the law. The last company you want fiddling around with your online pride and joy is one that is willing to break the law to get your attention.

Note: Obviously, *it's perfectly acceptable to contact businesses or persons who have already given you permission to do so. This should be a cornerstone of your website marketing – collecting emails from your site visitors so you can follow up with them.*

In spite of what the spam says, when you're optimizing your website slow and steady is the way to go. NEVER do business with a company or person who spams you.

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SEO Mistake: Waiting Too Long To Worry About SEO

Whether you're setting up a new website or revamping an existing one, you have a million things on your mind. You're thinking about things like, choosing the right logo, colors and graphics and hiring the right web designer, programmer and writer. Just to name a few.

Each of the professionals you hire will tell you the one thing that is most important for your website – from their perspective.

- The designer will say that the colors and graphics must be first rate.
- The programmer will say that the site must function properly and to do so, it must have first rate coding.
- And, the writer will tell you that nothing matters but what you say. After all, if no one can read your website, no one will buy.

(Note: That's why working with us speeds up the process of getting your site online. We handle the designing, coding, and copywriting, all in-house.)

They're all right, of course.

But none of what they say will matter if no one arrives at your website. In order to drive new visitors to your site, you need search engines.

Customer First, SEO Second

Unfortunately, many small business owners find themselves in a situation where they've spent thousands of dollars on a site their customers won't even be able to find.

Why? Customers can't find the site because it can't be indexed by the search engines.

What does this mean?

Search engines use programs called robots or spiders that "crawl" the Internet. Basically, these automated programs follow links from one web page or website to another. When they find new content or a new website, they index, or save, what they find.

Then, when a visitor to the search engine results page (SERP) types in a keyword, the information that is in the search engine's index, and that is most relevant to the keyword

phrase, is displayed to the visitor. The visitor then clicks on the result that he thinks will best meet his needs.

You can make sure your site is easy to index by following these 5 guidelines:

1. Make SEO your first priority. Find a reputable SEO professional who can advise you on what your website needs in order to be search engine friendly.
2. Stay involved in the website building process and make sure you know exactly what methods each professional is using in the construction of your site.
3. Avoid website that are built in Flash or Ajax or that hide the bulk of your written content in a graphic. Spiders can't read content that is hidden in Flash, Ajax or a graphic. Even worse, these websites can be hard for your customers to use.
4. Avoid using session IDs in addresses to your website. This is particularly important if you have a forum or shopping cart on your site. If you take a look at the address bar of your site as you navigate through it, make sure that the address is not followed by a long string of numbers. This is typically a session ID and they tend to confuse the spiders. A confused search engine spider is not going to index your site properly.
5. Avoid using frames in your site coding. Not only do they hide your content from the spiders if not setup properly -- they make your site look like it's from 1999. ☺

Follow through with SEO

The guidelines above will help you make sure that the site you setup or revamp will be built in a search engine friendly manner. This will go a long way towards making your site easily index-able.

But, you can't stop there.

Just like a building contractor can't stop when the foundation is complete, and a golfer can't stop his swing the moment his club hits the ball, you need to follow through on your SEO efforts.

Following through with keyword research, onsite and offsite SEO efforts will ensure that your customers can and will find their way to your website for years to come.

SEO Mistake: Spreading Your Content Over Multiple Domains

Domain names are practically a dime a dozen these days. And who doesn't know someone who has at least that many in their portfolio?

Purchasing a new domain is as easy as hopping out of bed at 3 a.m., doing a quick search to see if it's available and whipping out your credit card.

Setting up a new site to go along with your shiny new domain name is as easy as getting a free blog, setting it up with your domain, and then you're ready to go...

But hang on. Yes, it's easy to do... seductively easy, in fact.

But from an SEO perspective, is it really the smart thing to do?

When You Should Use a New Domain Name or Sub-Domain

Sometimes it does make sense to use a new domain name or to setup a sub-domain. (For those who don't know, a sub-domain is a part of a larger domain, e.g. subdomain.domain.com.)

If you're selling a single product, such as an e-book, and you have an army of affiliates that will want to send their customers to a single domain and sales letter page that has nothing but the product to purchase on it, then multiple domains is a good idea.

Or, if your company provides information on multiple, unrelated topics, you may want to setup a website for each topic. For example, if you're providing information on parenting and fish keeping, those sites would benefit from separate domain names.

Using a sub-domain makes sense if you're setting up a monstrous website like About.com with multiple content categories that need to be completely separate from one another – but still under the same domain name.

Sub-domains are also useful if your company offers several completely different products. For example, Google uses sub-domains in this manner: maps.google.com, news.google.com, mail.google.com.

When You Should NOT Use Multiple Domain Names or Sub-Domains

That said; you need to make sure your customers or visitors can navigate your site easily and that you consider the impact of a separate domain or sub-domain on your SEO efforts before you start building.

The first question you need to ask yourself before you start building is why you need more than one domain name or sub-domain.

If your reasoning is so that you can take over the search engine results pages (SERPs) with several websites, go back to the drawing board.

This is a bad idea from an SEO standpoint because the search engines frowns upon the practice of having multiple sites with essentially the same content. Anytime you're attempting to deceive the search engines, you're walking on thin ice with your site's credibility in the eyes of the search engines.

That's just the SEO perspective. Unless you have an army of website updaters and content writers, keeping each of your sites fresh and meeting the needs of your visitors is going to be nearly impossible.

It's best to keep similar content, or content that targets the same market, on one site and in one sub-domain. Think long and hard about what impact you'll have and what your motives are before you branch out.

Most local businesses typically do not need to have multiple domains and websites. However, if you serve or market to vastly different markets, you might have a legitimate purpose for using multiple sites and domains.

When in doubt, your best bet is to speak with someone who is experienced in local online marketing to help you choose the best course of action to take for your business.

SEO Mistake: Submitting Your Site to Hundreds Search Engines

Chances are, if you've been a member of an online business or SEO related forum for long, you'll have witnessed a heated discussion about whether or not you should submit your site to the search engines. If you're really new to the Internet, you might not have a clue what this means.

Submitting your site to a search engine is a process in which you go to the search engine's website and fill out a form, telling the search engine what the address is to your website and what keywords are relevant to it.

Sounds simple, fast and harmless, right? That's exactly what proponents of submitting will tell you.

"Submitting doesn't hurt anything."

"It's best to make sure you're covering all your bases."

Unfortunately, some new website owners, desperate for traffic and motivated by spammy services that promise to submit the new site to thousands of search engines, or hundreds of directories, buy into this idea and find themselves separated from hundreds of dollars with no real return on investment.

Why?

The Truth about Search Engines

First, there are only four search engines. Any other site that calls itself a search engine these days simply returns results from one of the big four – Google, Yahoo, Ask and Bing. Submitting your site to any other "search engine" is a waste of time.

Second, search engines use programs called robots or spiders to crawl the web. This means that the spiders follow links from one web page to another and from one website to another. And when the spider encounters new content, a new page or a new site, it indexes the information. In other words, it sends the new content and its location back to the search engine.

Then, when someone searches a keyword phrase on the search engine's site or in their browser toolbar, the visitor is given a list of relevant results on the search engine results page (SERP).

Once your website is known to be trustworthy and has aged a bit, your pages will appear in the SERPs for relevant keyword phrases. This happens even if you never

submit your site to a search engine. By the way, submitting will not speed up the process.

Impact on Your Business

So what does this mean for you, the small business owner who just wants to earn a living?

This means:

1. Don't waste your time or money submitting your site to search engines.
2. Focus your efforts on developing quality content for your site and for other people's sites. Call it search engine food.
3. Work on developing relationships with the owners of high ranking websites in your industry or relevant industries. A website owner who knows, likes and trusts you is more likely to link to you in the content of his website.
4. Make sure you're meeting your customers' needs first.
5. Never do anything for SEO purposes alone.

Keep these five guidelines in mind when making changes or additions to your site or building your new site. Educate yourself on each search engine's terms of services and webmaster guidelines. Oh, and don't waste your time arguing SEO.

SEO Mistake: Obsessing Over Your Site's Google PageRank

Google Page Rank has little impact on how your website ranks.

Even so, you'll still find a few web designers, programmers and unscrupulous SEO "professionals" who'll insist that you must keep an eye on your PageRank in order to determine how your site will rank.

Stop the presses!

If you're new to this search engine optimization business, you probably have no idea what a meta tag or PageRank is...

PageRank: This is Google's link analysis algorithm that measures the importance, relevance and value of a web page based on the quality of the pages linking to it.

Basically, PageRank will tell you, on a scale of 0 to 10, how important your site is in the overall scheme of the Internet. It will not tell you how well your page will rank for the keyword phrases your customers are going to use to find your page.

What does this mean?

In a nutshell, this means that you're wasting your time if you obsess with looking at your PageRank. PageRank is not an accurate measure of where your page appears in the SERPs for your keyword phrases.

You're better off spending your time writing quality content, developing relationships with the owners of high ranking sites in your industry or relevant industries and making sure your site is search engine friendly.

Even better, spend time getting to know your customers or site visitors and find out what terms they use to search, what they are looking for when they arrive at your site and what they think you can do to improve their experiences while browsing your site.

This information will be more valuable to you than your PageRank, and the content you put on your site in response to your customers experiences will go much further in getting your site ranked well.

SEO Mistake: Outsourcing Your SEO the Wrong Way

If you've spent any time online, you'll know that you shouldn't hire the first SEO company that offers to take thousands of dollars and guarantee you a #1 Google ranking for Wonderful Wubber Widgets.

Making wise SEO decisions goes beyond just finding the right company. While making the right hiring choice is crucial, your leadership and presence during the project is even more important.

Getting Started On the Right Foot

Before you ever hire an SEO company, you first need to educate yourself. Read the Google webmaster guidelines. Find out what Yahoo, Ask and Bing expect from website owners in terms of best practices.

Ultimately, the responsibility for making sure your website follows the rules lands on your shoulders. If your site gets banned from a search engine, it is you who will suffer the consequences, not the black hat SEO company that disappears into the night. Here are some tips to ensure that you choose the right company:

1. Check the search engines for reviews of the company you're considering hiring. Smaller, local SEO companies may not have reviews, but unscrupulous companies tend to rack up negative reviews over time.
2. Ask the company representative for a list of happy customers that you can contact.
3. Discuss the tactics the company plans to use to promote your website. These tactics are NOT secrets; they are part of your website's marketing plan and should be discussed, much like you'd discuss construction methods and building materials if you were building a house.
4. Ask for referrals from your colleagues who have demonstrated SEO success.
5. Review the company's portfolio of sites they are managing, looking for signs of improper tactics. For example, if a site has a bunch of keywords listed at the bottom, stay away from whoever is optimizing it.

Staying On Track

Now that you've hired the right SEO company, does that mean you can head off to the Bahamas and kick back for a few months. No! (Not that you'd really try that...)

As with any vendor or employee, your SEO company will need your leadership. You know your business and your market the best (at least you should), so your guidance will be invaluable.

Not only will you need to make sure that the company doesn't slip in any high-risk tactics, you'll need to be able to keep even the best company apprised of your business goals.

Here are some tips to help you keep in touch with your SEO company:

1. Meet regularly to discuss goals and tactics.
2. Request regular written reports from the company, explaining exactly what they have done and the impact it has had.
3. Keep track of your own statistics through Google Analytics or other stats.
4. If HTML and SEO are all Greek to you, have another expert check progress periodically, just to make sure everything is on track.
5. If you notice anything amiss, find out what is going on immediately.

Outsourcing SEO is a wonderful way for busy or technologically challenged business owners to remain competitive during tough economic times. But that doesn't mean you can sit back on your laurels while someone else handles the project. Educate yourself and stay involved.

SEO Mistake: Which Hat Are You Going To Wear?

Flirting with the dark side can be fun and enticing, especially after reading those long sales letters that promise millions of dollars in just a few hours. It doesn't help that some SEO "experts" and a few unscrupulous design firms play into your need for results right now. They are convincing you that unethical or against-the-rules tactics will get you what you want.

Of course, there lies the problem.

Do you want to build a business that might make a lot of money now, but is dead this time next year? Or do you want to build a business model that continues to thrive and grow for the next five or ten years – even though it may seem like slow going in the beginning?

I hope you said that you want to build a long term business model that will be sustainable and continue growth over the long term. Otherwise, you'll have spent a lot of time working for not a lot of return.

That said, how does your business model affect the type of SEO you choose?

First, let's talk about the definition of white and black hat SEO.

Black hat search engine optimization encompasses those techniques that attempt to acquire higher search engine rankings in an unethical manner. These techniques can be categorized as:

- Breaking rules and regulations defined by the search engines
- Create a negative user experience as a result of the tactics themselves
- Unethical presents one set of content to the search engines and another to the user

White hat SEO includes techniques that are sanctioned by the search engines, create positive user experiences on the website (or at least don't negatively impact users) and present the same content to users as it does to the search engines.

Examples of black hat SEO include:

Keyword stuffing – This is where keywords are "stuffed" into your meta tags, image tags and the content of your pages. Even just a paragraph of text on your site with a list of keywords (like the lists of states or cities at the bottom of some websites) is considered keyword stuffing.

Doorway pages – (Different from landing pages) These pages are optimized to specific keyword phrases and programmed so they are only seen by certain

search engines. The trick is that the search engine will see the doorway page, ranking it highly for a specific keyword phrase. Then, when the visitor clicks the link to the page on the search engine results page (SERP), he is immediately redirected to the real website. This site may have nothing to do with the search term the visitor entered.

Invisible text – This is similar to keyword stuffing, only the paragraphs of useless keywords are “hidden” in white text on a white background. Or black text on a black background. You get the picture. Again, this is another attempt to fool the search engines into ranking a page highly for search terms it does not merit.

If these techniques are so bad, you may wonder, why do you see them all over the place? Why are they such a problem? Black hat SEO is so tempting and so prevalent because it does work – at least in the short term.

Website owners see the results they receive and naturally, they want more. So what faster way to get what you want, right? Of course, that works until the site is banned from the search engines. Many career black hat specialists will even setup hundreds of sites, fully expecting that they will all get banned soon. Then he or she simply sets up hundreds more when that happens.

Now, if you're trying to build a legitimate business that relies on positive customer experiences, repeat business, brand-building and long-term viability - black hat SEO should be avoided at all costs.

Black hat SEO “experts” view your site’s rankings as a game. For a business owner supporting a family, attracting real customers and earning a real income, SEO is not a game. It’s a vitally important tool to growing a business and connecting with potential customers.

SEO Mistake: Forgetting Your Customers Are #1

With all the talk of search engine optimization, techniques for increasing your business income and better ways to outsource, it's easy to forget what's most important: Your customers. If you choose to forget about your customers, about their experience on your site, and no amount of SEO will help your business.

So, how do you know if you've forgotten about your customers? Consider these symptoms:

1. You have lots of traffic, but no sales. Your stats show people searching your keyword phrases and arriving at your site, but visitors rarely click past the home page and sales are weak at best.
2. Customers arrive at your site from the search engines, click around and then leave. When you talk to people about your site, they express confusion about how it's setup. Hey, you may even be confused about where to find products or information on your site!
3. When you talk to customers about your site, they are often frustrated with your website. Some may not be able to find the site. Others can't find what they're looking for on the site. They express dissatisfaction with the navigation, content, checkout process, etc.

If your website suffers from even one of these problems, it's time to put down the SEO tools and look at the usability of your website.

You've often heard people say, "If you build it, they will come." Now, often, this isn't true, because there is a lot more to building a business than setting up shop on a street corner, or on a website.

That said, you have to actually build it before you start promoting it. Once you've built it, then you can work towards getting your customers to come to it. Some of the things your customers will need in order for your SEO efforts to be successful include:

- Proper site structure
- Logical navigation
- Descriptive link text

Proper site structure means that you've built your site in a way that your customers and the search engines can effectively navigate through it. A properly built site can be read by customers as well as the search engines.

Things to avoid include building the site in Flash, creating pages as one big graphic and hiding your content in frames or iframes.

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Logical navigation includes structuring your site in a way that makes sense to someone who is trying to find information or products. This includes putting a static main navigation area on each page.

If you have a large site, you may even want to put relevant sub-navigation in each section of your site. Make your site easy for customers to navigate and the search engines will follow right along.

Description text links are those that use keyword phrases relevant to the link they are pointing to. Don't just link to a site by saying "click here" with those words being the links. Use a phrase that actually describes what the visitor will find when he clicks.

In general, when you are building your site, keep your customers number one. The search engines will follow.

SEO Mistake: Forgetting It's All About Content

Follow only your SEO expert's advice, and you'll spend all your time researching keyword phrases and looking for possible backlinks.

Follow your web designer and you'll be immersed in building the right image for your site.

Ignore everyone but your programmer and your site's code will be a thing of beauty. But no one will ever see it.

While each of these experts have a point -- after all, your site must be optimized for search engines, have a professional image and be coded properly – they're all missing one key element in the equation: Content.

Why is content so important?

To answer that question, you'll need a little perspective.

The Internet started in the late 1950s by the U.S. government as a small network to decentralize information, thereby protecting the information and communications during a possible nuclear attack.

As the Internet grew, it became a way for scientists to share information.

What do these two groups have in common? Information!

Information, of course, is content. Without anything to send from one computer to another, there would have been no reason to start the Internet.

And today, the main reason people get online is to find or exchange information, otherwise known as content. Think about it. The three main reasons people get online are:

1. To find information
2. To find a product or service
3. To find other people with similar interests

What this means for you is this: *If you want people to find your website, you need to be providing them with content that falls into one or more of the above categories.*

For example, if you're building an informational website for people interested in tropical fish, you'll need to include lots of information on how to setup aquariums, how to maintain proper water conditions, how to feed fish, etc.

Or, if you're building an ecommerce site for the same people, you'll need to include at least one product and lots of information about it – how to use the product, answers to questions about the product, customer feedback on the product, etc.

In addition, if you want to build a community website for people interested in tropical fish, you'll need to set up a way for site visitors to exchange content that includes general information, product reviews, stories, etc.

What does all this mean for the busy website owner?

It explains why some of the ugliest sites on the Internet have tons of traffic. It explains why some websites that cannot be found on a search engine have tons of traffic and it explains why some sites that don't always work properly have lots of fans.

It's all about content. You can be the most comprehensive source of information in your niche. Or you can have the most products, or the best product. Or you can provide the largest active community in your industry.

Provide the content your customers or site visitors are looking for and search engine optimization will be the easy part. It will almost take care of itself.

SEO Mistake: Losing Sight of Your Goals as You Develop Your Battle Plan

As you consider your SEO options, you may wonder which techniques are the best to use for your website. Is it better to focus your efforts on optimizing your website itself or on getting back links from other sites? Is it better to focus on keyword density or customer needs?

None of this matters if you don't know what your goals are. You know the old adage: You aren't going to be able to get where you're going if you don't know where you're going. You wouldn't start out on a road trip, without knowing where you're going. (Well, some college students might, but we're assuming you're trying to run a business, not escape from exams.)

So, the first thing you need to do is determine exactly what your goal is:

- Is your goal to get as many visitors to your site as possible, even if they don't stick around?
- Is your goal to attract visitors who want the information, product or service you provide?

Not knowing the answer to that question can lead you down many dead ends. Choosing the wrong answer can lead you to lots of work with relatively little return. Once you know the right answer for a long-term, sustainable business, you can then start creating your battle plan.

Like a military commander doesn't wake up one morning and decide to go into battle, you'll need to put on the brakes and evaluate the situation.

A military commander will determine what his goals are, will evaluate his resources, research the enemy, observe the lay of the land and select a target.

Only after he has completed all the necessary research and planning will he go into battle. The military commander will send his troops in to capture a hill, rescue a hostage or force an enemy to retreat, but only after careful planning.

As a website owner, you determine what your business goals are, evaluate your resources, research your market and competition, observe the lay of the search engine land and select your keyword phrases. As you implement your SEO strategy, you'll know immediately if a specific technique fits into your plan.

For example, you'll know that your customers don't want to arrive at a page that is full of hidden keyword phrases. You'll know that your site visitor wants to find specific information on a certain topic, specific group of products or services, or maybe other people with his interests.

Knowing your goals and the best ways to achieve them will help you avoid the minefields of black hat SEO, unethical “experts,” and uninformed but well-meaning friends.

Know where you’re going and how you’re going to get there, of course, is only half the battle. The other half is putting your plans into action and adjusting those plans as you go. After all, your market changes, the search engines change and the Internet itself is in a constant state of flux.

Conclusion

As you’ve learned, there are a lot of mistakes that you can make, but the #1 mistake is in getting overwhelmed and doing nothing.

If you’re looking for a trusted partner to work with in your local online marketing efforts – someone who can take the pain and confusion out of the process – I encourage you to contact me to discuss your online marketing needs.

I’ll clear up any questions you may have, help you develop clear online marketing goals based on your specific situation, and provide you with easy-to-understand solutions to solve your online marketing challenges.

Your first consultation with me is free, so *call me today*.

I look forward to speaking with you!

Sincerely,

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