

SEO 101 – Start With THE Basics

SEO, which stands for Search Engine Optimization, is the process of optimizing one's website to improve the position in which the website will appear within the search results obtained from a search engine based on specific keyword phrases. The exact formula for achieving this result effectively and efficiently is a much talked about and debated issue. However, there is at least consensus on the basic approach to improving position and for anyone who owns an online business it is just about imperative to follow these basic techniques for there to be any hope of appearing somewhere on the first or second page of Google, Yahoo, or Bing.

First, foremost and most importantly is the basic design and structure of the actual website itself. A carefully planned out, user friendly, logical, and straightforward landing page or home page is essential. In addition, maintaining a structured, easy to navigate, uncluttered and not overly complicated web design results in lower bounce rates. It is very useful to actually layout the design of the website on paper before any computer design work even begins. Using a graphical flowchart also greatly helps keep things organized and makes the design much easier to understand for anyone who will eventually be involved in the design, coding or implementation of the final project. A flowchart is basically just a simple graphical representation utilizing directional lines, graphical symbols and pointer arrows that is utilized to depict the design characteristics of a websites menu-flow, page-order, and logic path.

In designing the website keep in mind that as much useful, high quality, informative, data about the business or industry the website is focused on should be included throughout the site itself. A glossary of terms that relate to the industry the website specializes in would be a good place to start. Another very useful inclusion could be a FAQ (frequently asked questions) page that describes in detail the most common questions relating to the website's area of business, with descriptive answers. When it comes to SEO, there can never be too much information included in a website as long as it is all completely original unique content (unless references are duly noted).

Original content means copying pages of data from the Wikipedia, or using content pages found on other websites or even 'lifting' excerpts of content from other websites simply will not work. Plagiarized content 'lifted' from other sources without express consent can also be a source of legal concern. This is one place where Google in particular, is very good at detecting copied content and will give no SEO advancement for such material included in one's website. If a business owner is not able to author original content themselves it would be advisable to hire someone to write original content for the website. Original content is just as important if not more important than any other aspect of achieving good SEO results.

Additionally, there are many so called 'article submission' websites that are available to host uploaded content articles written about almost any subject. As a matter of fact it is very possible that you may be reading this article on an article submission site at this very moment. The purpose, in SEO, to the process of uploading and submission of articles to these types of websites is twofold: first, popular article submission sites have thousands of guests each day which is a huge potential market for readers of the submitted articles and second, as an author one is allowed to create a signature that can include a link that directs traffic back to the website of the author's choice.

This brings us to the topic of links, and more specifically 'backlinks'. The term backlink refers to a hypertext link, which is located on an external website that links, references, or points back to one's own website. A 'backlink' is made up of two parts: 1. The 'URL' of the destination site (or the site the link is pointing to), and 2. the 'anchor text' which is made up of the 'keyword phrase'. An example of a 'backlink' written in html code would look like the following:

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<*a href="http://www.yourwebsiteurl.com">Your Keyword Phrase<*/a>
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When displayed this link would appear as:

[Your Keyword Phrase](#)

'Your Keyword Phrase' would be an active link pointing to the 'url' that follows the 'href' in the link statement above. (Please be sure to remove the asterisks - I used them only to prevent the link from becoming active.)

In the early days of the Internet backlinking was the holy grail of SEO. One merely needed to acquire many, many links pointing back to one's website to achieve a very high position within the result set of a search engine. At that time it was mainly just the quantity of backlinks that determined a websites PR and not the quality of the incoming links. Those days, I'm afraid, are long, long, gone. The search engines are much 'smarter' today and the number of backlinks is not nearly as important as the 'quality' of the backlink in determining whether or not the backlink will provide a benefit to SEO at all.

To prevent the misuse of link farming and other types of link manipulation the use of the 'no follow' attribute has been implemented. When the use of the 'no follow' attribute is applied to a link it directs the search engine to award no PR or 'PageRank' (PageRank will be explained in a moment) benefit to the landing site no matter how high the 'PageRank' of the referring site may be. This has been successful in helping to reduce the amount of spamming and 'spamdexing'.

Other methods that were once popular but are no longer effective include: keyword stuffing, the use of hidden or invisible text, the use of unrelated hidden content with high search volume, and Meta tag stuffing. If you are solicited by a business that mentions any of these techniques as a means to improve your SEO be sure NOT to do business with them! None of these methods work at all anymore.

At this point it becomes necessary to discuss PR or PageRank. PageRank is the method of grading a websites 'authority' or importance on the web and the process was developed primarily by researcher Larry Page (hence the name 'Page' Rank) at Stanford University as part of a research project. Page and another researcher named Brin later founded Google and took the technology with them and it is still the basis of the Google search engine and search tools to this day.

A website's PageRank is a numerical weight ranging from 0 to 10 that is assigned to a website based upon, among other things, the quantity of and the PageRank of the external websites that link in or have inbound links that refer to the target site. A website that has many inbound links from websites that have high PageRank themselves will in turn be given a high PageRank as well. According to Google's website the PageRank is calculated by 'considering more than 500 million variables and 2 billion terms.'

Needless to say trying to understand an algorithm this complex exactly will never be possible but there are still many things that can be done to boost a sites PR and help improve its placement in search engine results.

We have discussed the importance of a high quality website design, the need for very informative original content, article submissions, backlinking and PageRank. This would be a good time to begin discussing the process of determining keywords and keyword phrases.

Selecting the correct keywords and keyword phrases to focus the SEO efforts on can determine whether or not it will be possible to successfully achieve the intended result. It is very important to take the time to do some research on competition and keyword popularity. In general the most common terms that describe a business would be the best place to start. For instance if you own a business that provides roofing contracting services keywords that you might consider focusing on might be 'Roofing Contracting' or 'Roofing Contractor'.

Google provides a tool that displays the average number of searches for selected keyword phrases. You can find this tool by searching Google for 'keyword tool'. After entering the keyword or keyword phrase and pressing the 'search' button a page of results will be displayed that indicate the number of times the particular keyword(s) has been searched for on average each month.

Also displayed are many other similar phrases that most closely match the keywords that were searched for. Take the time to scroll through this list and many good alternative phrases can be found in this way. Choosing the phrase that has the most searches and most closely matches the website's line of business is a solid practical approach.

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