

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, for your online store

We don't sell a package or service to help you with search engine optimization, but we felt it is important to your online business' success, so we wanted to create an SEO podcast for you.

Take note that SEO is not a stand-alone process. SEO encompasses just about every single component of your website---from design to content to quality, and more. If you have your website designed correctly, building your SEO should be fairly straightforward.

I know you know what a search engine is, but I want to cover all the bases, so please bear with me because we have all levels of experience in the audience. A search engine is a web application that scours, trolls and "searches" the internet for specific keywords that users type into the search box of their browsers, then groups the keywords by relevance. It's like when you want to find the best burger in Pittsburgh, you type in "best burger in Pittsburgh" in the search box and a list of choices appears. But why does one burger joint have higher placement on the search engine results page (SERP)? SEO. Keywords. Relevant content. Length of time you'd been online.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the art of preparing and maintaining your website to be search engine relevant so that your site will appear, hopefully, on the first page of a search and continue to climb toward the top of the search page. Being at the top of the search page means you will get more potential customers visiting your website before they start going down the page to look at your competitors. But getting there takes time, understanding and patience. And once you are there, you don't always stay there!

First understand that search engine spiders "crawl" the raw data (websites) on the internet, categorizing it, removing duplicate information and organizing it in general. This is called indexing. This is how Google, or other search engines spread the word about your business, products and services. And, just so we don't get complacent, Google regularly changes its algorithm that drives the indexing---and a change in an algorithm can mean a change in your search engine ranking. (An algorithm is the long, complicated, secret set of formulas that a search engine uses to figure out where sites should rank.) This is another good reason to stay on top of your SEO.

Most of the indexed content is organized by keywords, so you need to know what your best keywords are so your site will get the best possible rankings. Keywords provide the strongest influence for your site's relevance to the user's search. When identifying keywords, select words and phrases in the content of your website that someone is most likely to use when searching for your online business or website. Think of it this way, if the internet was a dictionary, what words would you look up to find your business? Those words should be peppered throughout your site. The spiders crawl your site, index your keywords and use the indexing for future search relevance.

Keywords can make or break your search engine ranking. Adding keywords to the content of your website can improve its ranking, but overusing them can cause your site to be banned for spamming---

so don't overdo it. Google has some great, and free, webmaster tools to help you determine your best keywords and to provide some level-headed guidance.

But don't think keywords are the only things ranking your site. Ultimately, you need to build a website that search engines will deem as quality. It's like building a house; there are no short cuts---you must have a strong foundation. Here are a few attributes (strengths) a website needs to be considered quality by a search engine:

- The page or website is relevant to the terms being searched for
- The website is considered an authority about its topic (business, service)
- The website has good, useful content that is updated regularly (The frequency with which the content of the site changes is also important to SEO. This includes an average time between the changes, a number of changes in a time period, and a comparison of a rate of change in a current time period with a rate of change in a previous time period. Yes, it's complicated.)
- The page or website has been around for a while
- Pages load quickly
- Few, if any, broken links
- No use of cheap keyword lists
- Register your site with Google, Bing, Yahoo
- Start a Facebook Fan Page, get a Twitter account, use video and post it on YouTube and create a blog. All of the posts, tweets, videos and blog posts are indexed and contribute to your search engine rankings (you can use your keywords in each of them).
- Backlinks. You need other well designed, content rich websites to link back to yours. Becoming the expert or authority in your field or business will help you achieve such links. For example, if you have a website selling costume jewelry, be sure to create content on every aspect of the costume jewelry business and history. Tell a story. Tell several stories. Include links to other industry experts. Write about experts, their successes, etc. This is a path to building your credibility with others in your industry where you will hopefully share reciprocal links, also known as backlinks. There are other ways to create backlinks---some people buy them. It might be a good idea for you to Google backlinks to better understand the process. Google's spiders love backlinks, and they do make a difference in your SERP.
- Use Google Analytics. It's a free service that allows you to monitor the key aspects of SEO regarding your website. You'll learn what keywords have taken visitors to your site, what pages they stay on the longest, what pages have high bounce rates (leaving the page), etc. It is a wealth of information and acts like a progress chart with insights for you to make changes and adjustments to get more traffic and conversions.

There are many, many free tools online to help you better understand SEO. Consider this podcast a launching point for you to get more involved in SEO. I suggest you Google SEO and read all that you can to become an expert in SEO---because that's what will help build your business! And be sure to get Google Analytics!!

A word of warning. Be careful of the vultures who will be calling you, sending emails and texts to sell you their "SEO Package," guaranteed to build your SEO ranking and traffic. Carefully vet these offers and be sure to get references if you choose a company to help you, because there are SEO scammers out there.

Well, I think that's about it. Thank you for tuning in to our podcast today. I hope you learned something or are inspired to learn more. I sincerely hope you commit the time and resources toward SEO so your business flourishes.

