

SEO: Not as scary as you think

Editor's note: This article is a follow-up to our July feature about marketing; it takes a more in-depth look at the search engine optimization strategies mentioned there.

Have you ever Googled yourself? What about your organization or publication? If you search by name, you should be at the top of the list. But what if you search by your specialty instead? Your magazine, company or organization may not be as high on the list as you'd like.

This is where search engine optimization (SEO) comes into the picture, and if it's not on your radar yet, it should be. "For small businesses especially, it is so important to have a good looking and compelling search engine optimized website," said Ashley Sweren, owner of Firework Writing in San Jose, Calif. "You can have a David and Goliath situation



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and outrank bigger businesses. Your search engine ranking can build credibility and clout.”

It's cheap and effective

For a publication, SEO can play an important role in building a brand, said Anatoly Zadorozhyy, owner of Los Angeles-based Marketing1on1, which specializes in SEO services. “If a magazine is putting out quality content, it should be found on Google,” he said. “It’s probably the cheapest and most effective marketing you can do.”

What does the process involve? “Search engine optimization is taking measures to ensure your website ranks highly when individuals in your target audience conduct relevant searches,” said Sweren, who provides freelance writing and editing services in addition to SEO consulting.

That “relevant search” aspect of SEO is an important piece of the puzzle. “I get a lot of hits from people looking for fireworks. I really want people searching for freelance writers and editors.” Fortunately, SEO has helped her attract those people, too.

Business owners sometimes are intimidated by SEO, or they assume they can't afford it. That's just not true. “A lot of people think it's advertising,” Sweren said. “When you do a search and businesses pop up on the side of your screen, those are advertisements.” Most people understand the difference between a paid search result and an organic one, she said. “The organic search results tend to have a little more clout.”

So how do you improve your website's searchability? It starts by understanding those “search engine spiders” or programs that silently move from link to link on the Internet, grabbing content and depositing it onto search engine indexes. They

depend on the carefully chosen keywords and phrases they find on your site to determine how to list it. Therefore, it's worth taking time to think about the words that best describe the things your target audience wants from you.

“There are actually a lot of free tools on the Internet to help you find the best keyword,” Sweren said. On the Google Adwords Keyword Planner (<https://adwords.google.com/Keyword-Planner>) for instance, you can enter your website's URL (Internet address), and the site will suggest keywords. You also can play with keywords you're considering, and it will show you the number of people who search for that word along with suggestions for other words that may be more effective.

Placement is key

Once you finalize your keywords, you'll want to add them to three places on your website. First of all, work them into your website copy. You also should add your keywords to your title tag, which shows the title that will show up in search results. “Most companies put their company name there,” Sweren said. “That's a waste of real estate. It's actually more beneficial to put keywords there.”

Sweren also suggests adding keywords to your site's meta description tags, which provide a brief description of web pages. If someone runs a doggy daycare, for instance, people searching for it online might find the name of the business followed by a short descriptor: “daycare and dog boarding.”


Other strategies to consider: optimize the images on your site by placing keywords on your image alt tags, which will boost your page rank and allow your images to appear in image searches. Don't forget to work keywords in your website address as well. Even if you

don't have the services of a website designer, many web design programs allow users to customize these areas of their sites.

Once guests arrive at your site, they should find it helpful and easy to use. It should be easy to find your contact information. Another helpful tool, Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics>), allows you to look up visits to your site and see where people are spending their time. “If I see people are spending a lot of time on the upper right corner, I need to make sure there's important information there,” Sweren said.

While increasing your exposure is critical, you have to be careful not to overdo it. Don't link your site to link farms, sites that exist for the sole purpose of increasing other sites' search rankings. It's little more than a random listing of hyperlinks. Not only are links to these kinds of sites ineffective, they actually can harm a site's rating. “Google penalizes what it calls unnatural inbound links,” Zadorozhyy said.

It helps to read up on the best approach to SEO and Google policies, Zadorozhyy added, because they're constantly evolving. “SEO changes every four to six months.”

Sweren acknowledges that SEO does require a time investment, but it's worth it, she said. “Only 1 percent of searches go beyond the second page. SEO is more important than ever.” 



One on one

JPA profile: Larry Bradshaw, Prepress/Desktop
Number of years with JPA: One (34 years in industry)

Why he loves JPA: "It seems like everybody takes ownership of what they do, and they take pride in doing their jobs correctly," Bradshaw said. During his first year with JPA, Bradshaw was hospitalized after a motorcycle accident. He was impressed with the support he received from his colleagues. "The camaraderie here is like a family."



Larry Bradshaw



Larry jamming out.

One cool fact: In the early 1990s, Bradshaw was trapped in an Illinois gas station restroom with former heavyweight boxing champion Leon Spinks. Bradshaw was on a road trip, and Ryan needed to make a stop. They were in the restroom and heard a loud ruckus before four very large men walked in. Spinks also was headed to the restroom, but a group of fans had crowded him. The guards kept the door shut until the crowd dispersed. Bradshaw, meanwhile, was able to talk to Spinks about boxing and family. The boxer's son had recently been shot to death. "He was pretty sad, so we talked about it. I'll never forget that." 📷

Family life: Bradshaw and his wife, Candi Bradshaw, have been married for 32 years and have two grown children: Ryan, 30, and Carissa, 27. When Ryan and Carissa were children, the family was heavily involved in baseball and softball. These days, the couple gardens and cooks together.

Hobbies: Bradshaw also enjoys bass and crappie fishing, along with taking care of the crepe myrtle trees thriving in his yard. "They're not supposed to grow in this part of the country, so I take a lot of pride in that," he said. Up to last year, Bradshaw was a bass guitarist, too, but he has suffered memory loss since the accident and no longer plays.



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RECIPE

Crawfish or Shrimp Etouffee

- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 pound seasoned crawfish or shrimp tail meat
- 1 stick butter
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 large bell pepper, chopped
- ¼ cup celery, chopped

In a sauce pan or cast iron skillet, heat ½ cup vegetable oil with ½ cup flour to make a roux. Stir constantly over medium heat to a light brown color. It should have a peanut butter smell. Remove from heat and reserve.

Melt butter in a large pot over medium heat. Saute onions, bell pepper and celery until tender. Add 1 cup water, the crawfish or shrimp, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and cook for 10-15 minutes uncovered. Add the reserved roux and a small amount of water if needed. Cook for 20 minutes or until desired consistency. Pour over cooked white rice and serve.

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