

Introduction

Successful web sites are a combination of happiness and horror for the average online entrepreneur. On one hand, you are glad to see another's achievements; on the other, you wonder why your website is not generating the same results. Trust us when we say the scenario is more than common.

If the above situation applies to you, it is highly probable your site is experiencing a lack of operative SEO. What is SEO? We'll explain in time; for now, the only thing that needs to be your focus is what you think needs to improve in order to boost your sales, or, as we like to call them, Conversion Rates. Don't worry about the technical mumbo-jumbo, at least not yet. Your vocabulary will build as we progress through the chapters.

While the journey to a better website can be arduous, it is important you know you are not alone in the struggle. As in the resolution of other conflicts, you are brave for admitting you need help, to begin. In the long run, the help you have sought may, indeed, push you ahead of your successful counterparts, so both of you can share the glory of your realized dreams.

Enough with the small talk, to embark on your quest to an optimized domain, all you have to do is turn the page.

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Chapter 1: What is SEO?

SEO is an abbreviation of the much-more-technical term “Search Engine Optimization,” which allows a website to appear higher on a search engine’s unpaid rankings. When done correctly, the process has the potential to exponentially increase online traffic, which in turn carves the path for successful sales and a raving reputation among consumers.

Search engines, as a whole, are based on the foundation of the algorithm. An algorithm is a long, mathematical function that serves as a “selector” of the best sites for the search. In the beginning, it was difficult to find anything unless you were lucky enough to have remembered the exact name of the website for which you were searching. The limited bandwidth of the early World Wide Web, too, made it almost impossible to trust the information that was hidden behind the link. To maximize the number of results, primitive engines eschewed the inclusion of basic website details and left only the URL up for initial judgment, which caused the web surfers of yore to question every click.

The search engine industry had recognized its flaws by the mid-1990s, and had improved its algorithms accordingly. The invention of a program called the “spider,” which permitted engines to search other web pages, made headway in the search organization revolution. The program would “crawl,” or scan, pages of various web sites and categorize them according to the frequency of key words pertinent to a certain topic. Web sites that had more keywords relating to the category were moved toward the top of the list, or ranking, and those that appeared less relevant were moved toward the bottom. AltaVista was the first search engine to put this form of ranking technology into use, which made way for modern web giants such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

This rudimentary form of analysis, though able to make a web search more effective than requiring the knowledge of an entire URL, proved futile as websites like LookSmart and HotBot turned their attention toward pay-per-click searching. The method made entrepreneurs desperate, and thus gave rise to two brands of SEO: “white hat,” and “black hat.” “White hat” SEO, also known as the “good” SEO, used the process in a way that did not violate the guidelines of any major search engine, provided

appropriate outside links, and proved reliable with customers. Today, the companies that embraced “white hat” SEO are still considered reputable, secure domains for both business and entertainment. “Black hat” SEO, on the other hand, put into practice the flooding of pages with certain keywords, some irrelevant to the topic of the website. In addition, the sites networked to websites that were either blank or vulnerable to attack, and provided next to no information regarding the search. In the present day, these nefarious attention-seekers would be filtered as spam before they even appeared upon the results. Furthermore, engines have optimized their algorithms to a level that gives credit to sites that associate with dependable sources, like Amazon, the New York Times, and the Mayo Clinic.

You may think search engine optimization is rather simple, upon first glance. It is not that difficult to keep a website out of the “black hat” category, especially if you are genuinely concerned with helping your audience. However, sustaining a positive online reputation is only the beginning. There are several other factors involved in placing a website among the elite.

Presently, there are three features that lead in aiding one’s ability to place his or her website at the forefront of Google’s rankings.

- **Sitemaps**

Sitemaps are a standard on any well-made site, and are basically a list of every URL and link featured within the domain. The simplified layout of a sitemap allows spiders to crawl a page more easily, which makes for quicker indexing of a website and your company. As long as you make sure to update your sitemap as you update your web pages, the effort can earn more views and more service in the future.

- **Robots.txt**

Like a sitemap, a robots.txt file allows spiders to do their crawling rapidly and efficiently. In the interest of time, Google and its competitors have placed a limit on how many pages of a site can be scanned at one moment.

You can ensure they look at all that needs to be observed, however, with this simple file.

There are exceptions to this rule, however, as there are web scanners that are looking for security vulnerabilities as well as spam advertising websites.

The robots.txt file is public, as well, which means any individual holds the key to viewing what a webmaster does and does not wish to be scanned.

You should still make sure you are posting only legal, safe information online; as one slip could cost you your reputation, or perhaps even earn you a stay in prison.

- **Google Analytics**

If you're looking to market something, Google Analytics is a must. With an account, one can quickly analyze the traffic coming to his or her website, in real time. The owner is also able to break down statistics by demographic, operating system, and social network status in order to determine what is the next business move.

Google analytics has the added benefit of acting as your SEO coach, making sure your endeavors have an increased likelihood of rising in the ranks of the world's favorite search engines. Such a feature takes a majority of the guesswork out of publicity, and allows you to be associated with one of the largest corporations on the planet.

As knowledge becomes universal and search engines compete for the best results on the net, it is best to have a few tricks up your sleeve that will make for the most favorable outcome regarding your success. Through the careful application of SEO techniques, you can ensure your website will be defined as both trustworthy and secure; both currently and years down the road. In the long run, the optimization of a domain for search engine use will save you, the ambitious webmaster, a bundle in advertising, as well as increased revenue and successful endeavors that will build on a more fruitful tomorrow.