



Search Marketing Solutions, LLC

Search Optimization Primer

What is SEO/SEM?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a segment of Search Engine Marketing (SEM), a key component of marketing success in the Internet age. SEO is based upon the growing audience of Internet users and their reliance of search engines to produce relevant results to their questions. Since the birth of search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, MSN (now called Live Search) and AOL, individuals have sought to gain top rankings--to make their website list ahead their competitors in hope to increase traffic. However, the days of simply "playing" the system through sneaky technical tricks and other "black-hat" methodologies are over. Search engines have become much more sophisticated and have realized that in order to stay competitive they must provide valid and quality results. An SEO's aim is to increase the accessibility of a website to the search engine data collectors (called spiders or crawlers), so that your site has the best chance possible to be considered for a top ranking, a key factor in increasing web traffic. As known today, there are over 100 factors considered by a search engines' algorithm, and each factor can help or hurt a sites' position on search engine result pages (SERPs). Through experience and experimentation, an SEO can identify how your website scores on these factors and how you can optimize each page in order to become easily accessible by search engines and potential customers.

Why SEO?

How many times a day do you use a search engine? Have you heard somebody use the phrase "I Googled it"? The ease and transparency of search engines have made the value of search engine visibility clear. However, it is a common misconception (fueled by many unscrupulous SEOs) that the main goal of SEO is to increase search index rankings. A successful SEO program should increase *qualified* traffic to a site that in turn increases sales or branding. Rankings are a key component of traffic, however, position alone can often be misleading and worthless in increasing your ROI. You could be ranked #1 for a term that nobody looks for, or has a low conversion rate! Successful SEO is about building **trust**, not only with search engines, but also with clients and potential customers.

Measuring Success

Never has there been a medium in marketing that was so responsive or trackable as the Internet. A large role of an SEO is to be able to quantify results and react to constantly changing industry factors. SEOs can even give insight to traditional marketing programs based upon current trends seen on the Internet. SEO reporting is customizable to the ultimate goals of each client. Tracking movements in search engine-based traffic in conjunction with an overall traffic data represent core reporting. Other metrics such as CPC (Cost per click), CTR (Click Through Rate), and ROI of marketing dollars are also detailed in PPC (Pay per Click) campaign. The benefit to you is being able to show definitive ROI and creating a customer feedback loop that can continuously be modified to suit market or individual needs.

FAQs

How do I get my web site to be ranked in the #x position on Google/Yahoo/MSN with "y" search term?

Such a basic question has never had a more complicated answer. The short answer is that if you build a site that answers the question to "y", you will be successful in ranking well among your peers *with proper optimization*.

How long does an SEO program last?

Because the factors driving the search engines and industry markets are constantly evolving, so must your SEO tactics. Competition is the driving force in any SEO program. More competition often requires more aggressive tactics and more time to see results. Typically, a quality baseline level of SEO can be established in three to six months depending on the complexity and objectives of the site. Continuous analysis and adjustments may be required to stay competitive beyond standard maintenance and reporting.

When can I see results?

Search Index position changes can be seen as quickly as one week or as slowly as a year depending on many factors, the most important being search-term competitiveness. SEO reports demonstrating program effectiveness are usually released monthly and industry market findings are updated quarterly.

My cousin knows a guy who can "beat" the system...can you do that?

Unethical SEO practices used to be very successful in "gaming" search engines as the technology was fairly new and unsophisticated. Today, these practices are still used but effectiveness is short lived and can often cause a site to be "blacklisted" (manually removed) from the entire search index--a consequence that can take months to recover from. Search engines strive to create a level playing field, so if your site has value (why else would you have one?) then you can achieve excellent results with proper optimization and the right SEO program.

When should I start considering SEO for my web site?

The earlier in the web development process SEO is considered, the easier it is to address proper technical and content-based concerns. There are many technical factors such as the use of JavaScript, Flash and graphics in an initial web site design that can have a huge impact on search accessibility. All of these factors can affect search traffic and rankings. Keeping SEO in mind while developing a new site can greatly reduce costs in the future and will generate greater results faster.