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SEO Content

A White Paper Discussing the Process of
Writing Search Engine Optimized Copy

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet is changing every day, and users are the driving force behind that change. From news to entertainment, technology to new ways of networking, web sites and new ideas are all competing for user clicks. Getting to the core of that change and understanding why it is happening, what its short term and long term effects are, and how to predict future change, is the most important role of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Without SEO, your web site is not fulfilling its real potential.

Unlocking the Power of SEO: Driving Traffic through Value-Driven Content

Search Engine Optimization is the process of allowing your web site to reach its potential to both current and new users. This means that no web site can stand by itself and expect to thrive in an increasingly connected business structure that stresses links, partnerships and strong active networking. Hyperlinks are the key to SEO and staying ahead of the trend. As important elements to users shift over time, links to your web site allow them to return to your site, keeping it relevant and in the limelight.

While links may keep your site relevant, content is what keeps your site fresh and is the foundation for generating more links. Links are an important piece of being vital to the community your web site is a part of online. Content that is not only informative and useful to users about your subject area, but that also provides unique value, is what differentiates your web site from competitors and from "Black Hat" sites or "Gateway" sites that depend on keywords to lure in web traffic.

Ensuring that your content is optimized for the Internet means that you need to employ tactics aimed at attracting links to your site. For example, content that is optimized for the Internet:

- Approaches a subject with a fresh perspective that is
- Reverse engineers a new product or service
- Diagnoses issues or problems with products or services
- Provides information on a subject while adding content value with insight and practical tips that users can apply right away

In contrast, web site copy that fails to attract links and plays a minor to insignificant role in the web community, ultimately relies on old SEO tactics and/or inefficient content. To avoid this, your web site should not:

- Paraphrase or plagiarize other
- Copy large blocks of content and work them into your web page

- Promote or display content that provides no value, has poor structure and organization, and does not have a solid point or argument

Additionally, writing effective SEO content involves:

- Understanding your customer or target audience
- Researching keywords
- Understanding how to implement keywords strategically
- Writing the content
- Editing the content
- Distributing the content

Each individual part builds upon another. Each part is brought into focus by understanding how content and hyperlinks are keys to driving organic traffic to your web site.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMER

Knowing your client is paramount to providing the most relevant and value-driven content for them. Otherwise, even solid on-point content will lose its effectiveness before the wrong audience. Your client is involved in many different interests, activities, organizations, social networks and habits; knowing the persona of your client is like seeing your goal clearly. Without the proper perspective on whom your content is going to reach, you can't write effective, engaging copy for your web site.

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Develop a Persona of New & Existing Clients

The first step in developing a content marketing project is to ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do your users go when they want to read or watch videos about a specific subject?
- What types of activities do they enjoy?
- What industry publications and trade shows do they read or attend?
- What products or services do your clients use?
- What is their education level?
- How old are they?

Knowing the answers to the questions above is important in developing the persona or ideal audience that you are aiming to reach. By developing a list of 10 to 15 questions, you can be more effective in visualizing and understanding your client base. If you have existing customers, they can be used to help build your new persona profile.

To get the answers to your questions, you will need to use Internet-friendly tools that can put your questions in front of as many people as possible. There are several tools to create surveys based on your persona questions, including free survey Software-As-A-Service (SAAS) sites such as:

- Google Forms (through Google Docs)
- SurveyMonkey.com
- Wufoo.com

The 10 to 15 questions you developed to identify your ideal client should be included in your next email marketing campaign with a link to your survey. The answers should give you a solid basis for understanding your client with factual details and information that is pertinent to developing your content and hyperlink strategy. To compliment your email marketing campaign, hire an intern to call your existing client base with the 10 to 15 persona questions in-hand and have them record the results.

The Importance of Knowing Your Clients

Not only is this information important in understanding who your clients are, but it also provides insight into the tone that your content needs to be written in. The style of writing will depend on the audience and determine the tone, whether that's informative, technical or persuasive. For example, if you are writing a technical document, the more scientific and factual the content is in tone and delivery, the more you will be able to connect with your audience. If the content is written in a casual tone, it may disinterest the reader, or in a worse scenario, offend the reader. In contrast, if you are writing an article on shopping in New York City, an extremely technical tone could turn the reader away almost immediately. The tone and style of your web site can either enhance your reputation or reduce it.

With the data from the email marketing campaign and from calling existing clients, you now have a solid understanding of the interests, activities, subjects, networks, and personalities that your ideal client will possess. This is an invaluable resource to help you implement the style, tone and delivery of your SEO content.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Now that you have information on who your ideal client is, you will want to develop a keyword strategy that targets the needs, desires, and interests of your client. Keywords are terms or phrases that are used when searching for content on the Internet. Since the Internet is a vastly large place, figuratively speaking, users may not know where to go to find the information they are seeking. Search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo, help users turn keywords or search queries into relevant results, effectively bringing the content they want to them in order of relevance. Keywords summarize or point to content users are looking for online.

Keywords Provide Insight into What is Relevant and Important

Keyword research is about effectively finding the keywords and phrases that users type in when searching for a particular subject or topic. Tools available online, such as the Google Keyword Tool, allow you to see the exact words that people are searching for. When evaluating the effectiveness of keyword research, it's important to examine Cost per Click (CPC) rates and exact search terms versus broad terms or phrases. Another tool, Google Insights, allows you to see where searches are being performed geographically and how they are trending. This is particularly useful in honing in on keywords that are specific to your target areas, especially for service-based businesses that are limited by geography.

Keyword Research by Topic

A web site like Twitter, which allows you to see tweets for subject areas relevant to your business, product or service, can point you to relevant keywords that occur in real-time. The advantage of being a part of a site like Twitter is that not only are you aware of what is trending at that very moment, but you are a part of a community that is also aware of these trends and are exposed to the same breaking news and fast-paced delivery of information. This can be a great resource in helping to hone in on keywords and for developing potential content ideas.

Searching News for Trends, Facts and Figures

Searching new trends, facts and figures through the online news sites can also reveal what the most relevant and trending words are on the Internet through a tool like Google News, which allows you to search for specific keywords that relate to your business, product or service.

Be Aware of Developing News as it Happens

Subscribing to news alerts through Google Alerts, which allows you to see what content is being developed and what kinds of conversations are happening around that content, will also send articles to your inbox on an automated basis. This will give you a general feel for what is happening online and what kinds of keywords and content is being produced on a daily basis.

Run a CPC Campaign First for Optimal Results

Now that you have identified the keywords you are going to go after, it's important that you analyze those keywords before writing your SEO content. In order to focus on the keywords that will perform the best for your audience, run a basic CPC campaign first before choosing your final keyword list. By doing this, you will know which words and phrases provide the best Return on Investment (ROI) in terms of what you spend to get a lead in and converted to a sale.

When using the Google Keyword Tool, you can view CPC rates of exact search terms and compare them to broad terms or phrases.

When combined, these data points create a powerful way to analyze and determine effective keywords for your web site. As part of your overall SEO content strategy, it's imperative to understand the importance of your keywords when structuring your content and creating boundaries that help shape the purpose of each article, copy, and SEO content block.

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HOW TO USE KEYWORDS

Keywords are Only Effective If You Know How to Use Them

Knowing which keywords are effective is only useful if you know how to use the keywords and leverage them for maximum effect. Understanding how web sites are structured within the context of HTML helps shed light on the effectiveness of keywords and its relationship with search engines.

Search engines “crawl” the web, going from web site to web site to scan for content that is relevant to certain keywords and phrases. They do this in a way that is most efficient and time-saving for them. Since they are not humans, but programs, they can't tell whether a web site is related to a keyword if these phrases are missing from crucial HTML tags, such as titles, headings and Meta data.

Keywords, including the title of every page and every piece of content, will help search engines find your page or article. Heading tags, image titles and descriptions, video titles and descriptions, page descriptions and Meta data are all

important locations for keyword placement. In addition, placing keywords at the beginning of content blocks can also help search engines find your web site more relevant.

Keywords are Effective in Combination

Keywords are also effective when used in combination with other words. When writing keywords, use other words to build combinations of longer tail keyword phrase searches. For example, if the title of your article is “How to Locate Cheap Family Medical Insurance Plans,” the main keywords that can be derived from this title are:

- Cheap family medical insurance
- Family medical insurance
- Family medical insurance plans
- Family insurance plans

By creating keyword phrases that consider different combinations of words, you can cast a wider net over the web with phrases that are worded slightly differently. Users enter phrases that appear in commonly found clusters into search engines looking for specific information. By including clusters of keywords together, you ensure that users find your web site no matter how they phrase the search.

Optimizing titles with keywords is an important part of making your content “search engine friendly.” Titles that are limited to 65 characters in length will display in a Search Engine Result Page optimally (SERP) , but also allow search engines to find and catalog your site quickly. Also, by adding commonly used search phrases in your titles, you will be able to position your site for additional keyword phrases. Commonly used search phrases to consider would be "how to..." or "discount" for example.

Striking the Right Balance between Keywords and Content

While keywords in the HTML and titles facilitate relevant matches for search engines crawling the web, keywords in your content also help to drive traffic. An effective tool to populating your content with keywords is using a Keyword Distribution Ratio (KDR). This formula takes into account the number of words in a given article, page or content block, and sets a specific distribution ratio (for example, 1% or 2%) in which keywords appear in the content. Search engines take both factors – keyword placement in titles and HTML tags, and content distribution ratio - into account when ranking web sites.

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The key to keyword distribution is striking the proper balance. Too much saturation of a keyword will tip a search engine spider into discovering the content as a fake or gateway site designed to fool the engine. Further, too little keyword saturation will result in a lower ranking by search engines. When strategizing around keyword distribution, weave the phrases into the content so that it provides the most SEO effectiveness while remaining pertinent and natural to the reader.

WRITING THE CONTENT

With the data collected from email marketing and phone surveys, and having found the best keywords that provide optimum ROI, you are now ready to write your SEO content. As mentioned with keyword saturation, writing the content for your site is about striking the right balance while creating the most value for your users. Implementing keywords into the content requires knowledge of how to obtain optimal results for search engine rankings.

Structuring Content for Success

In addition to using proper keyword distribution ratios, placing the main keyword in the first sentence of the first paragraph is an effective way to establish relevancy. Incorporating the keyword into the first sentence also provides the structure and focus for the rest of the content that follows. The content should be written in a way that allows the reader to easily understand the copy, and structured in a manner that makes it easy to read. Typically, shorter sentences and shorter paragraphs lend themselves well for easier reading where screen space is limited. Scrolling down to read lengthy paragraphs can detract from a user-friendly reading experience. Since users have a quick hook when it comes to searching for content that is relevant to them, the easier it is to read, the more attention-grabbing the content will be.

The structure of your web site and content will also determine how useful and relevant these sources will be for your audience. Sections with headings point to information in the content that readers will find useful and easy to identify. If they are looking for specific tips, insight or instructions, sections with headings will break down the information into easily digestible pieces and provide a navigable road map for where to find data within the content or page.

Using Tone and Style to Appeal to Your Audience

To write effectively, you should consider the length and structure of the content in addition to the style and tone as it relates to the ideal client or target reader. For example, ESPN.com has used tone and style to appeal to a certain demographic – young, professional, sports-loving enthusiasts who are at the core of their audience. The tone on ESPN

web sites is witty, humorous, self-deprecating and often includes references to popular cultural icons and events that a young professional audience would immediately relate to and understand. Appealing to your audience can be an extremely powerful way of building a core base of readers.

Site Organization and Link Placement Leads to Success

A single link placed at the top of the page that links to another page on your site can go a long way. Links make it easy for readers to navigate your site and provide a way to introduce readers to other relevant content they may find useful or interesting. Additionally, ensuring that the link is in the full URL structure (including the hypertext protocol, http://) can deter third-party sites from picking up content on your site without tracing it back to your web site.

Links that contain “No Follow” tags on other less important links on the page where content will be placed, can be an important SEO strategy. If some pages have minimal content, you may want to link it with a “No Follow” tag so that search engines do not include it in their ranking of your web site.

Value-Driven Content Creates Traffic

A strong content structure with sections and headings can be an extremely powerful way to reach an audience. Coupled with strong writing in a tone and style appropriate for your audience, the basic foundation for SEO content has been set. For the content to be set apart and unique, it will need to provide value to its audience in a way that isn't already readily available on the Internet. Providing value also means that you bring together the data culled from surveys and persona definitions, keyword research, and content structuring to bring the reader a unique experience that can't be found anywhere else. Writing effective SEO content is about recognizing these pieces and writing with a tone and style specifically for your target audience.

EDIT YOUR CONTENT

Having your writing reviewed by an expert editor can transform your content from looking semi-decent to looking professional. An editor checks for spelling, sentence structure, grammar, consistency in tone and style, adherence to style guides or standards, and relevancy of keyword content. Editors can polish weak sentences and transform passive verbs and sentences into active phrases that engage the reader in a more compelling way.

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Editors Ensure Your SEO Strategy is in Place

Editors can also check for Keyword Distribution Ratios (KDR), the placement of keywords in H1 and H2 heading tags and title tags, and the placement of keywords in key places within content such as the first sentence of the first paragraph. Ensuring that each metric is met and that content is written professionally and geared toward SEO is an invaluable step that can add credibility and professionalism to your web site.

DISTRIBUTE YOUR CONTENT

Making your content distributable further extends the reach of your web site. Developing a simple URL structure (such as www.sample.com/amazing-content.html) makes it easy for users and other web sites to link to your content. Further, adding keywords into the URL structure is also a good practice and helpful in identifying pages for relevancy.

Successful Distribution Increases Web Site Traffic

Due to the nature of web browsers and the difference in Internet connections, it is also sound web programming practice to provide content in a number of different channels and mediums. For those with slow Internet connections, an alternate page with simple HTML and text without graphics, videos, and diagrams can prove to be beneficial. Also, providing content in downloadable forms, such as a PDF, also increases the distribution of your content. Sometimes readers may want to print out content, save it for later, or view it on another portable device or mobile phone. The increase in device options and output displays means that your content needs to be even more flexible than ever before.

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One of the advantages of the Internet is that it is global, making your products, services, and content available in a broader international market. Content that is translated into other languages, such as Spanish, Mandarin, German, or French, can extend the reach of your web site and introduce your products and services to new markets. This will not only increase your market presence, but also expose your site to searches in other languages.

To increase exposure on the Internet and reach a wider audience, link press releases to your content for added visibility and credibility. Sites like PRWeb.com can distribute your content to a new audience, often with heavy media exposure to online news sites that compile headlines. The more sites that pick up your press release the better, as each one will now be sending a link back to your domain.

Added Value to Distributing Your Content

Distributing your content not only has the positive net effect of drawing traffic to your site and boosting credibility and visibility, but it can also be a way to gather information about clients and prospective clients. By creating a landing page, you can have users enter their email address and phone number or other pertinent information in order to download your content. Your content is not only what drives users to your web site and what keeps them coming back, but a tool to further expand your market reach, understand your clients or consumers better, and to establish relationships beyond the extent of your web site.

SUMMARY

SEO Works When All the Individual Parts Work Together

Search engine optimization is a complex process that involves many different components working effectively together to produce a comprehensive SEO strategy. Most web sites simply provide information about their services or information regarding their products and/or industry. Small businesses who can't afford marketing or PR campaigns often fall into this category, as can some mid-sized and large companies that lack knowledge of how SEO can help maximize the potential of their web site and online presence. The difference, however, between web sites that capitalize on their online presence and market share isn't the size of their PR campaign or budget; rather, it's how effective their SEO content is – starting with understanding their client, to analyzing the keywords that have proven to work for them, and how to comprehensively write, edit, and distribute their content.

Increasing web traffic, as stated previously, isn't just about optimizing one aspect of your web site. For example, good content alone won't position your web site above your competitors. In fact, a site with good content might be buried underneath sites with less compelling content but with better SEO. Strong, unique content in tandem with relevant keywords, smart keyword placement, web site structuring, and organization can help your web site achieve top ranking by search engines. After all, SEO is no different than the basic principles of what your business practices on an every day basis. SEO content is about understanding the fundamentals of what drives your business – knowing your clients and providing them with exceptional service and products that add value to their experience. Knowing how to do that within the context of the Internet is what makes SEO content a truly unique challenge.

The good news is that SEO content does not necessarily require a vast budget or heavy spending on marketing. The rise and popularity of social networks have proven that word of mouth and links can be as effective, or even more effective, than spending money on big budget ad campaigns. While social networking has provided a unique platform for businesses to cater their web sites to, it has also created a challenge for web sites in regards to optimizing their search engine results.

Links play an even more important role in this new social networking environment as Internet users spread the word on good businesses and products for free, referring friends and colleagues to a web site they find informative and useful. Being a part of burgeoning social communities is now an integral part of SEO. As links open new opportunities for users to visit your web site, good content will attract them and retain them as recurring visitors. Over time, they may start to feel brand loyalty or trust your web site because of the content. However, to get to that point, it begins with understanding your audience.

Information gathered from identifying personas and understanding your target demographic is essential to laying the foundation for your SEO strategy. Without knowing this key component of what your audience is looking for and who your audience is, keywords and content are limited in their impact. However, once you understand who your ideal client is, researching keywords that are effective and based on overall search traffic can lead to selecting those that provide the most ROI for your business.

Placing your keywords in strategic locations, such as in titles, headings, page descriptions and relevant areas within your content maximizes the effectiveness of these phrases. By placing keywords in URLs, the first sentence of first paragraphs, and in HTML tags, you position your web site to be a top ranked site by search engines. Additionally, placing keywords within content in a balanced way helps you to identify whether or not your content is over-saturated or under saturated. Proper KDRs prime your content for maximum exposure over the Internet.

Developing awareness, reputation, and attention to your website is effectively done through creating press releases. PRWeb.com, for instance, links a press release to your site drawing even more traffic and establishing a basis for networking with other sites as part of a larger Internet community.

Polishing your content with the aid of a professional editor ensures that your SEO strategy is being executed exactly as you intended it to – from tight, engaging copy to properly placed keywords, KDRs, structure, and organization. A professional editor ties up loose ends and gives your web site an air of professionalism that distinguishes it from amateur sites.

Strategically distributing your content through multiple platforms and channels helps give your web site a more flexible and robust approach to a dynamically changing Internet landscape. As users and technology change, it is imperative that you adapt to those modifications to ensure that your web site will maintain its relevancy and continue to appeal to a wider audience.

The power of writing SEO content is compounding. The more these strategies work together, the more effective they become. As your web site experiences higher traffic levels and conversion rates, that success will likely continue to build upon itself. However, in order to get there, it all begins with understanding how SEO content can transform your web site and how it can be an integral part of your overall business strategy.



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