

Grow with SEO: Using Organic Search to Drive Business Results

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is fast becoming an integral part of the corporate lexicon, yet it is still not widely understood. Its desired outcome of driving business performance via search queries, however, is abundantly clear. Knowledgeable businesses realize the importance of reaching a larger and more targeted audience. The objective of SEO is to get people to go on your website, engage with your brand, and, in many cases, to make a purchase. As a method of marketing, organic search — query results that are generated without any paid advertising — are trending¹ as a popular vehicle of generating traffic. Unsurprisingly, the market has responded to this demand as evidenced by the growing number of providers who offer a diverse array of SEO services. While there are reputable SEO providers with proven track records, in an industry devoid of standards and regulations, there are far too many businesses that feel short-changed by SEO agencies and freelancers who take advantage of the ambiguities surrounding this dynamic and fast-moving search landscape.

Businesses that covet the pseudo-free organic search source of acquiring customers can succeed by understanding what to expect from SEO service providers. Even though SEO results cannot be predicted with a great deal of accuracy, understanding some basic SEO principles can help you make better projections. It can also help you avoid costly mistakes and make the right choice in selecting an SEO provider. Here are some principles that you may want to consider if you are new to SEO or are looking to improve your ranking with search engines.

Identify the Right Keywords

Keywords — single words or short phrases that are input to find relevant information — are search engine fodder used to direct traffic to websites. It is a tightly-held secret on exactly how search engines do this. Experienced SEO providers have danced around Google's algorithmic changes for years. They have come to realize that activities that lead to positive online user experiences are vital to achieving a high keyword ranking. Search engines reward such activities, and successful SEO providers oblige. Providing relevant content for a particular keyword search, for example, enhances the user's experience by matching their intent to what they find. A worthy keyword is one that generates traffic with the right audiences who engage with your brand.

Your SEO provider should produce a benchmarking report that shows the relative competitiveness of keywords along with the associated number of searches for each one. Such a report makes it possible to prioritize the most relevant keywords for people to engage with your brand. It also helps balance the feasibility of achieving a top search result. For example, it is probably not realistic for a local used car shop to have the keyword “used car” rank nationally on Google’s page one search results. Rather, if this used car dealership is in Mayberry, then “Mayberry used cars” would be a keyword phrase with a much higher probability of ranking high in less time. Since it takes time and effort for Google to associate and rank a keyword or keyword phrase for your website, it is essential that the right keywords be selected and prioritized. Be wary of SEO providers who promise quantity over a few well-chosen keywords.

The Need for Speed

People are no longer willing to wait for a website to load. For each millisecond past two seconds, the number of visitors who will “bounce” away from your website rises exponentially. These people are unwilling to tolerate a poor user experience. Google and other search engines are equally intolerant when it comes to slow-loading websites, and if yours takes a while to load, your ranking will surely suffer. There are a plethora of causes — for example, unnecessarily large images and unintended movement of content — that can contribute to a slow load time, some of which can easily be fixed, while others require more time and expertise. Other common speed impediments may include plugin-in conflicts, caching issues, and problems related to coding errors. In some cases, a simple optimization may speed things up. In other cases, getting a qualified optimization expert may be required. A reputable SEO company can and should help you identify action steps to improve speed-related issues, and some may even get involved in this optimization themselves. If the speed issue is with your host, either upgrade your plan or get a new host.

Content is King

It is essential to have content that matches your visitors’ search intentions. Since a keyword is a proxy for search intent, the content should be contextually related to the keywords. Moreover, search engines give brownie points when the keywords are woven into the fabric of your original content. To improve the user experience, your content must engage your visitors. You can measure engagement — for example, downloading an article or requesting more information — by assessing the time spent on a page and the level of interactivity. Content should be contextual and make visitors curious, and hopefully, keep them coming back for more. If visitors don’t quickly find the relevant information, they will conduct another search seconds after abandoning your site, likely never to return. Whether your website is e-commerce enabled, or

it serves as a front-end for offline sales, the quality of your content is key to driving key performance metrics like visitor numbers, time spent on your site, interactions, conversions, and revenue. While your SEO provider should point out content-related issues, it is normally beyond their scope to write the content. This makes sense as they are not subject matter experts of your business. No one knows your business like you do.

Demand Transparency

It is tempting to expect your SEO provider to make you an expert in SEO or educate you on how the proverbial SEO clock is built. To be sure, this is not their role. Rather, they should be accountable for generating results: keyword ranking, traffic to your website, and to some extent higher-funnel calls-to-action and various types of conversions. Whatever the size of your marketing budget allocated to organic search, your SEO provider should be fully transparent about what they perform on behalf of your business. It is your responsibility to understand the basics so you can confirm that the work you paid for has been done.

Your SEO provider should also be transparent in terms of how financial expectations are set. Since SEO takes time to work, a sketchier provider will hide behind an undefined and malleable timeline for the desired ranking instead of being bound to their clients. While there is no definitive timeframe dictating when SEO will bear fruit (or if it does at all), at some point, a decision should be made to stay the course or to shift strategies. This is the obligation, if not responsibility, of your SEO provider. By evaluating key diagnostic and performance metrics, it should be evident whether their efforts are likely to pay off. In digital media, results are relatively self-evident. Compared to traditional marketing, digital marketing campaigns are traceable and, therefore, attributable. For organic search, the lag between SEO and keyword rankings makes it less direct, however, than other digital media like paid search advertising.

Be Number One or Nada

Most businesses aspire to be associated with Google's page-one search results for their prioritized keywords. Unfortunately, many settle for lower rankings because of a mistaken belief that achieving a spot on the first page of a Google query is simply unattainable. In fact, a ranking on page two or beyond is more likely than not to be a waste of money. Research has shown that most people do not view search results after the first page. Moreover, the average Internet user does not spend more than 14 seconds reading the Google results of their query. Here's what typically happens:

- Users take a few seconds to scan the top part of the page. Barring the use of ad-blocking software, this is where the advertised results appear.
- Users typically give the organic search results their attention until reaching the bottom of the page where they encounter even more advertised results.
- After they give the entire first page a glance, they scroll back to the top to scrutinize the organic search results (non-paid).

An exception to the above happens when paid ads on the first page outnumber the quality organic results. In such cases, searchers may check out the second page, but they still aren't likely to move beyond that. In this scenario, the second page acts more like a normal first page since people will think of that initial page as just a bunch of ads. At the time of this writing, 27%² of searchers in the United States have installed ad blockers to prevent different forms of ads from appearing in their search results. Users are 8.5 times more likely to click on an organic search link than a paid link, and 33% more likely to convert³.

SEO Has No Shortcuts

An exhaustive approach that considers the latest algorithmic changes of search engines – to the extent possible – is required for successful SEO campaigns. As alluring as shortcuts might seem to be, they rarely exist at this time. Also, don't be enticed by deals that are too good to be true. No partial solutions exist to jump to the top of search engine results. All on-page and off-page activities must be performed with near perfection to ensure SEO success, and since organic search is a long-term play, you are advised to exercise some patience. Too many businesses invest in SEO but end up jumping ship or realize positive results but cease investment in SEO. Like rust, SEO never sleeps.

This hasn't always been the case. A decade ago, a website could get by with minimal effort and still see a considerable amount of traffic. Practitioners would embed or even "stuff" multiple keywords such as "car sales auto Philadelphia," which search engines used to determine the site's ranking, despite how jarring to read it is for a human.. This "keyword stuffing" issue has largely been rectified in today's SEO because Google started to recognize and penalize this and other undesirable practices such as toxic backlinking. This also means that these days it takes a lot more finesse to drive traffic to your site.

Show Me the Money

Accurately predicting when a keyword will rise to a top position, if at all, is close to impossible. However, if results are not produced within roughly six months, it may be a red flag. In general, highly competitive keywords take effort and time to appear on Google's page one search results. When your competitor has a deeply entrenched, high-ranking keyword, it may make sense to cut bait and consider replacing the keyword with a less competitive alternative. Knowing when to dig in your heels and when to reevaluate your strategy requires both technical ability and intuition. Experienced SEO strategists actively monitor the shifting search engine landscape and gain this intuition about timing and positioning of their clients' keywords.

Make a Real Financial Commitment

A compelling SEO implementation requires a solid financial commitment. However, like any investment, the buyer must choose wisely where to place this investment to get the desired results. There are plenty of polished agencies that know how to present themselves as professional but fall short when it comes to getting results. You may be tempted to select the least or most expensive companies available to you, but it is important to consider factors other than price too. At a minimum, you should know what SEO work your provider has executed, and there should be a clear strategy to maintain and increase your keyword ranking. You want experts who will continue to pay attention to what is trending. The cost should reflect this dedication to ensuring your content remains up-to-date and relevant to your brand. If the SEO search is conducted successfully inhouse, it may still be prudent to partner with an SEO firm who can further scale their efforts.

Conclusion

SEO strategy takes the past and future into account simultaneously. It requires attention to detail, vigilance, and proactiveness. If you only bring traffic to your website but fail to engage them, then the SEO effort is meaningless. At the end of the day, you must be able to convert traffic into paying customers. It is the job of SEO to attract the right audiences who ultimately help increase your revenue, but you must use SEO in a way that will engage people once they get to your site. This means using keywords and phrases in a way that increases your site's ranking on Google, as well as giving your website the best user experience possible to keep people there. The more time potential customers spend on your site, the more likely it is they will make a purchase of a service or product and recommend your site to others. This only happens when the visitor has a positive online experience, the real goal of SEO.

1. Google Trends: "SEO" United States, 2004 – present
2. [Statista 2021](#)
3. [electricmarketing.com](#)