



THE STARTER GUIDE FOR:

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION



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::: Let's Talk SEO

Pretty much everyone knows how important it is for a business to have a robust and agile SEO strategy to remain viable and profitable. But if you're like a lot of businesses out there, you may not know just how vital a comprehensive SEO strategy is. Consider these stats from Search Engine Journal and Hubspot:

- Nearly three-quarters of the links consumers click on are organic; that means they're derived from searches they conduct, rather than PPC ads that pop up on a page.
- More than 60 percent of mobile searches result in purchases of goods or services.
- Nearly half of all consumers (including small business owners) start their quest for the best deal by visiting search engines.
- Three-quarters of Internet users never bother to go beyond the first page of search results.

Pretty amazing, given how important SEO is in driving businesses of all kinds to greater levels of success.

::: What is SEO

SEO stands for search engine optimization, but what does that really mean? In a nutshell, it means making sure your website is optimized to be found – and found quickly – by search engines when your target audience is looking for the goods or services you sell. You want your SEO to be strong enough to ensure your site appear high up on the list of results – ideally in the first few spots – to get the most click-throughs. SEO comprises all the strategies and techniques to help you achieve that.

Now it's time to ask yourself: is my SEO campaign all it could – and should – be?



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:: Why Is SEO Important?

The statistics from Search Engine Journal and Hubspot say it all: SEO is important because it's what's going to help you get site visitors – and not only that, it will bring you qualified visitors. This means that the traffic that comes to your site is going to be more ready to convert to a paying customer, because they were actually able to find what they were looking for. SEO improves your search engine rankings so you're more visible and more relevant to the people you're trying to reach. It's not just important – it's essential. Here's a quick rundown of what you need to know:

Keyword Research

Lots of people think they know what SEO is about: Just fit in as many keywords as possible and you're good to go, right? If that's the approach you have been taking, you're not alone – but you are way off base. How many times have you seen “Triad Web Design” agency just casually drop into a sentence where it does not fit? When you

go about keywords that way, you may be doing more harm than good. A few things to consider for keyword research:

- **Traffic, relevance and competition:**

Ideally, you want to choose the keywords that are most relevant to your target audience when it comes to looking for your product or service. It does not matter what you think is most relevant – it's all about the customers. And you want to consider how competitive a term is – that is, how difficult it's going to be to gain ranking from using it: More popular keywords are used a lot, which means it's more difficult to rank highly for them. In general it's good to use a mix of broad keywords (i.e. web design) which may be high in competition AND long-tail keywords (i.e. responsive web design agency in Greensboro).

- **Tools:** Fortunately, there are tools you can use to see which keywords would be best for your needs. Google's AdWords program offers a free keyword search tool; HubSpot and Moz also offer tools in their paid services. Any of these tools can help you determine what keywords are right for you based on relevance, traffic and competition.



The nebulous goal of “creating content” can be overwhelming for some teams. For other teams it is oftentimes written off and handled as a cleanup to-do when finishing a site.

:: Creating Content

Once you have identified your keywords, it’s time to create content.

Include Keywords

- Don’t stuff them in; make sure you use them in a natural way that’s easy to read.

Headings

- Using different sizes of headings not only makes the page easier to read, but it can also help your page be found faster and more often by search engines, especially if the headings contain your keywords.

Quality

- Most importantly, when it comes to content, make sure it’s high quality. There’s a lot of information on the Internet; make yours stand out by providing something of value that uses proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.



Google Analytics is a phenomenal tool for measuring the value of different keywords and content, and nobody likes to see downturn, but it can be very valuable for shifting your content to something more effective.

⚡ Creating Content

Now it's time to "tweak" your site with a few techniques aimed at improving search engine rankings even more:

- **Title tags:** Next to content, your title tags may be the most important element on your page. Title tags appear on the search engine results page, the browser bar and external websites, so you need to make sure they're as descriptive and relevant as possible. Ideally keywords should be placed at the beginning of the title tag. If we were doing title tags for our Product Development page, it might look something like "Product Development | Services | CRS Websites"
- **Meta tags:** Ever see someone handing out flyers on the street to advertise a business? That's kind of what your meta tags do. Meta tags draw in visitors from the search results page, so they need to be relevant and interesting to get results. While meta tags don't actually impact your organic ranking, a well written one will increase your click through rate. Keywords will show up as bolder and grab the reader's attention.
- **Headings:** Headings of different sizes denote relative importance on a page, and therefore help both humans and search bots make sense of the way content flows. Place relevant keywords in your H1 tags.

- **Sitemaps:** Kind of like headings, sitemaps help search engines understand how to crawl your site, drawing attention to pages that might otherwise be overlooked. Tip: Submit your sitemap to Google Webmaster tools.
- **Domain name:** Your domain name is like a little business card; it needs to be memorable and, when possible, use or relate to your keywords.
- **URL structure:** Your URL provides a brief description of your site to both search engines and human visitors, so it's important to craft a structure that's relevant and descriptive but still brief. Again, when possible try to get a keyword in there.
- **Site structure:** Optimizing site structure ideally means getting the best and most relevant information in front of your users in the fewest clicks or most logical progression to make navigating your site easier for both people and bots. It's all about the user experience.
- **Alt tags:** Often used to describe images, alt tags provide another opportunity to optimize your images for your chosen keywords and show up in image searches.



That's why many people hire digital marketing companies to handle their site SEO in order to maximize ROI.

:: Inbound and outbound

Links help search engines and customers determine how different sites and pages are related, and they can really help increase your visibility when used correctly.

- **Quality vs. quantity:** having high-quality links – for instance, from reputable sources, is much more important than having lots of links; in fact, if you have too many links, search engines may actually penalize you.
- **Black hat vs. white hat:** Likewise, if you're buying links, hiding links, linking to advertorials or using other "black hat" techniques, your site can be banned from engines like Google.

As you can see, designing and implementing an effective SEO strategy is no easy task. And because your business, your target audience and search engine preferences change so often, it's also a task that needs to be revisited on a fairly frequent basis to remain optimized. That's why many people opt to hire digital marketing companies like CRS Websites to handle their site SEO in order to maximize ROI. If you'd like to learn more about what we offer, give us a call at 336-394-6770 or send us an email. We love to talk shop.