



SEO: It's Not Just I.T.'s Job Anymore

By Becci Ambroe

When was the last time you used Google (or Bing or Yahoo) to perform a search? What “key words” did you type in? How many results appeared? Which link(s) did you click on? Were you happy with the results, or did you perform another search by using different “key words”? Now, think about your clients or, more specifically, your potential clients. What search words do *they* use to find the products or services *you* offer? Where does your company show up on the list of results? These are the essential questions behind the idea of [SEO, Search Engine Optimization](#).

SEO, now more than ever, should be a part of your company's marketing strategy. It's no longer a luxury or something that “we can worry about later.” Your company's SEO is just as important as your company's website, trade show exhibit, and brand. In fact, they (and the people responsible for them) should be coordinated to deliver your company's marketing messages. Put simply, good SEO is a team effort, and it's not just “the web guy's” job anymore; if you create web content or are involved in your company's marketing strategy, then you're probably also contributing to your company's SEO.

Just in Case You Didn't Know

SEO is not a new concept. The term has been around for a while, but some businesses still don't understand its importance. The idea behind a search engine is to make the internet user-friendly, and the idea behind SEO, in essence, is that the search engines use algorithms (a formula used to solve a specific problem) to help the user find what he or she is looking for in the unending world of cyberspace information. Part of the search engine's job, then, is to devise and improve these algorithms as needed. Simple, right? Not so fast. “Each year, Google changes its search algorithm around 500–600 times. While most of these changes are minor, Google occasionally rolls out a “major” algorithmic update

(such as Google Panda and Google Penguin) that affects search results in significant ways.”¹ At the end of April this year, for example, Google made a “major” algorithm change to identify sites that are mobile device-friendly, and this is where the huge problem for businesses can happen. Sometimes search engines will announce these formulaic changes; sometimes they won’t. Announced or not, what it means is that your company’s spot in the “results” can change.

In theory, every business whether big or small, should have someone who is responsible for keeping tabs on all these changes and, more importantly, for keeping your company at the top of the “results” list. This person, or persons, is known as the “webmaster.”

Who is your Webmaster?

Depending upon your company’s hierarchy, SEO may fall on the shoulders of the “web guy,” “web girl,” or “I.T.” (It’s also possible that your company has more than one webmaster or has contracted the job to a third-party). If you don’t know who your webmaster is, then who created your website, and/or who updates its content? Chances are, if you work for a larger company, then you have a webmaster. However, if you work for a smaller company, then *you* might be the webmaster, but perhaps you never considered this role as a part of your job title. Either way, understanding some basics about SEO can help you recognize your personal contribution to it.

Know the Lingo

Part of the webmaster’s job is understanding the lingo. Google has created a ["Search Engine Optimization Guide"](#) to help businesses with their SEO results; they even have free analytical tools to determine what’s going on “behind the scenes.” This 32-page resource includes best practices and tips, a glossary, and other helpful advice. Google prefaces the guide with these words, “Although this guide won't tell you any secrets that'll automatically rank your site first for queries in Google (sorry!), following the best practices [outlined below] will make it easier for search engines to crawl, index, and

¹ “Google Algorithm Change History.” *Moz.com*, n.d. <https://moz.com/google-algorithm-change>

understand your content.”² The guide was written for “webmasters,” but it can be helpful for anyone in your company who writes any website content.

Incidentally, Google literally wrote the book on SEO because they are the search engine leader. According to comScore Inc., “Google Sites led the explicit core search market in May with 65.5 percent of search queries conducted.”³ Although the research is from 2011, it’s not a bad idea to listen to their advice because Google is the go-to search engine. There’s a reason why people say, “Google it.” If, however, you aren’t a Google fan, Bing has created [SEO Analytical Tools](#), too. They’re both free, so why not take advantage of them?

It’s About the User

One of the big SEO tips in either guide is to determine the “key words” that folks might use in a web search to find your company, your products, or your services. Has anyone determined what those key words are? As you build content for your website, (a web page for your next trade show date, for example), you would want to use those key words. The idea is *not* to bombard the customer (or the search engine) with these words and messages. Joe Federbush, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Exhibit Surveys, Inc. notes, “Make sure you’re using key words that are based on terms people use, not company-specific jargon. That’s the whole point of SEO--to demonstrate that you’re an expert in your area.” Everything on your website should be purposeful and helpful to the user.

In addition to key words, SEO looks at links to other content, like a blog, a Facebook page, or a Tweet. Still, the focus is on the user. It’s not about loading your website with link after link, hoping that high SEO will equal high ROI. When it comes to trade shows, Federbush advises, “Any social media strategy will rarely have a direct ROI outcome. Instead, it should be about promoting your company’s presence, your products, your brands, or any speaking opportunities at the event. You’re not directly

² “Google Search Engine Optimization Guide,” Google.com, 2010, <http://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com/en/us/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf>

³ “comScore Releases May 2011 Search Engine Rankings,” *comScore.com*, June 10, 2011, <http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2011/6/comScore-Releases-May-2011-US-Search-Engine-Rankings>

promoting a sale. You're indirectly promoting a connection." Creating good content and good promotional links will help you build a good relationship with current and potential customers.

Why all the changes?

Is it really necessary to make 500-600 algorithm changes a year? The one thing that technology has definitely done is make us adaptable. Updates on products and apps seem to be constant, and keeping up with all of the changes can make your head spin. Articles about algorithm creation, like the true purpose, biases, etc., are all over the internet, but this article isn't about the politics of the current system. It's about the fact that the system exists, and if you haven't yet, you should be paying attention to how it's affecting your business because these updates aren't changes for the sake of change. They are usually a reflection of a new internet user trend. In this latest case, Google noticed the mobile device factor; more people have mobile devices, and more people are using them in their buying processes.

According to the Pew Research Center's latest study:

- As of May 2013, 63% of adult cell owners use their phones to go online, and 34% of adult cell internet users go online mostly using their phones, and not using some other device such as a desktop or laptop computer.⁴
- As of October 2014, 64% of American adults own a smartphone.⁴
- Half of online-connected citizens around the world have taken their shopping to cyberspace; 48% say they have used the internet in the past three months to 'buy products/services online'. Even more (61%) use the web for the research phase, saying they 'visit sites for info on products I am thinking of buying.'⁵

Because of these numbers, it makes sense that search engines would want websites to be mobile device-friendly, and that's why, at least in theory, the algorithm was updated. Plus, if 61% of customers are visiting websites to learn about products, then your website really needs to deliver that content. In other words, if your website is user-friendly with high-quality content and links, then your SEO should be a reflection of that. If your SEO is low, then it might be an indication that your website could be better.

⁴ "Mobile Technology Fact Sheet," *Pew Research Center*, October 2014, <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/mobile-technology-fact-sheet/9/>

⁵ "Interconnected World Shopping and Personal Finance." *Ipsos.com*, April 3, 2012, <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=5573>

Results

SEO relates to how people find you. The algorithms may be complicated, but the results are simple. If your company's website is the destination, then SEO is the public transportation. If your SEO is good, then search engines will deliver customers to your front door. If your SEO is bad, then search engines will take your customers to a "better" destination, also known as your competition. So, consider how you can help your webmaster boost your company's SEO because those good results come from a team effort.

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