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# smart **Business** matters™

**Advice for Success!**

## SEO: Search Engine Optimization

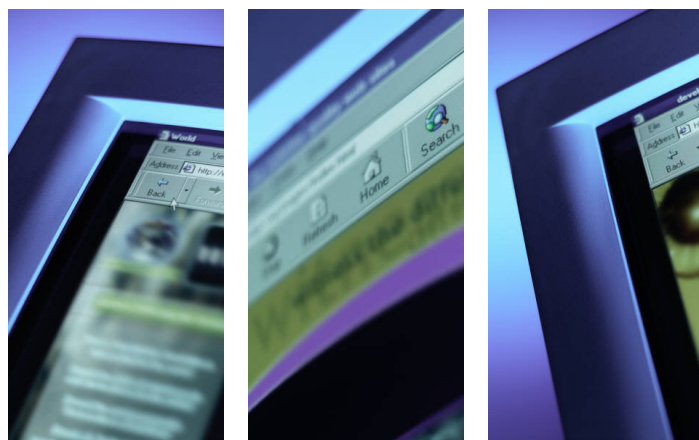
What it Is, What it Does, And, what YOU can do to help!

### SEO: What it is. What it Does.

If you have a website or are researching websites, you're sure to have heard the term SEO bandied about quite a bit. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. SEO techniques are used to improve the visibility and ranking of a website when people conduct a search on search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing.

Generally speaking, the higher on the search page that a website displays and the more frequently a page appears in searches, the more visitors it will receive from search engine users. How optimal is it to appear on the first page of a search? Very. Up to 42% of search users click the top-ranking link, as few as 8% click the second-ranking link. Click-through rate (CTR) drops thereafter. Sixty-two percent of users click a link on the first page of search results, 23 percent go to the second page.

The drive to come up on the first page of a search — and in the first, second, or third place — is one determined by traffic and relevance and can be an expensive one. Most small businesses may not be able to justify the time and money spent to come first in search engines that continually change their algorithms, and to outrank similar, larger companies with more traffic. However, there are some things you can do that will help.



### First Steps

When optimizing a website, you must first consider how search engines work and what search engines are used more often by your target customer. Also, think about how people conduct a search. What actual search terms might they enter when searching for a business or service such as yours?

The next step is for you, or your website developer, to edit website content to increase its relevance to specific keywords and to be sure everything is properly coded to remove barriers that may prevent search engine "spiders" from crawling through and indexing your site.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

# Is it Time to Adjust Your Price?

Feeling the pinch from soaring prices for raw products, energy needs, or services that keep your business running? As much as you may want to avoid passing along those costs to your customers, it may be time to raise your prices.

**Hitting rock bottom?** Rock bottom prices can fuel sales, but more often than not, they prevent a business from sustaining profitability. If you are caught between passing costs along to your customers or watching your profits fall and putting your business at risk, it's time to take a hard look at your costs and your pricing structure. To make an informed decision, examine management, your fixed and variable costs, the marketplace, the quality of your products and services, and your value proposition.

**Manage efficiently.** Raising prices is not the only way to increase profitability. Consider management improvements that may boost the bottom line immediately. Look for inaccurate billing and time keeping, high accounts receivable, workflow bottlenecks, high employee turnover, poor cash flow predictions, and other indicators.

**Calculate your fixed and variable costs.** Know your costs and price accordingly. The price of your products or services must reflect a realistic calculation of your costs. The cost of everything from rent to energy has climbed significantly. If your costs have gone up but prices have not, you're working just as hard for less money. Examine the costs of labor and overhead and make sure your pricing reflects today's reality. What margin do you need in order to make money?

**Research the marketplace and competitive price points.** You may not have to increase all your prices. Be judicious in your choices. Compare yourself to your competitors. How do your prices stack up against their prices? If yours are significantly lower for a product or

service of comparable value, make an adjustment. Consider quality! A BMW and a Chevy don't sell for the same amount for a reason. Quality, perhaps more than any other variable, determines price. In fact, you may lose sales to competitors if your price is too low—customers may assume your quality is lower. If you have invested in quality improvements without adjusting your price, you may be cheating yourself. If you offer a higher standard

of service than competitors, at a much lower cost, it's time to change.

**Develop your selling proposition.** What differentiates you from your competitors? Add value. Always. Point out the advantages of your services, your products. Be prepared to point out the advantages of your services and products to justify an increase in price.

**Just do it.** If you decide to raise prices, don't be defensive—be prepared. Price increases are a fact of life, a legitimate response to increases in costs or innovations in quality. Reasonable customers will understand. Depending on the nature of your business and your relationships with certain customers, you may want to provide advanced notice of a price increase. If you do notify them in advance, explain the reasons for the change.

Remember, there's always someone cheaper. Clients looking for lower prices can find them. Remind clients that they cannot find the same level of quality, service, and dependability elsewhere at your price. If increased costs or improvements in quality justify a price increase for your business – do it. Chances are that it will be more significant to you than to customers.



**"The most successful marketer becomes part of the lives of their followers. They follow back. They wish happy birthday. They handle problems their customers have with products or service. They grow their businesses and brands by involving themselves in their own communities."** – Marsha Collier, speaker and business author

# Ask Smart Questions to Hire Great Employees

If the interview process is a struggle for you or your staff, you can improve your chances of hiring the right employee by asking questions designed to reveal the qualities and skills they possess, as well as their competencies, that are the best fit for your company.



**Create a job description.** Define the requirements of the position and identify the required output and performance success factors for the position. Create a simple job description from this list that outlines the measurable tasks that the new hire will be expected to perform.

**List qualities and skills you would like an employee to possess.** The ability for a new hire to meet the competencies required for the position is important, but focusing solely on the competencies can yield inadequate information on key behaviors and skills. We often define the tasks we want a new hire to perform to create a job description, but stop short of considering the talents, skills, and personal qualities that may be the best match for the position and for the company. What qualities and skills are you looking for in a prospective new hire? List the characteristics and traits of the individual you see succeeding in this position or exhibited by current valued employees. Narrow that list down to a few key behavioral traits you believe the candidate requires.

**Create questions that yield information.** Use open-ended questions that allow for an explanation

of how a behavior was exhibited. For example, if you are seeking a candidate who can set and meet goals, is detail-oriented, and excels at project management, ask, "Give me an example of a time you set a goal for yourself and tell me how you accomplished it." Looking for an innovative thinker? You might want to ask for an example of a time when the candidate improved a task or job that he or she was working on. Do you need an employee who is flexible and adjusts well to constant change? Try asking for a specific occasion when the candidate worked to complete a task but was asked to stop before its completion to start a different task.

**Ask the same questions of all candidates.** While some questions to potential candidates will differ as you explore their specific experience and work history, questions that reveal behavioral traits should be asked of each candidate. In that way, you will be better able to assess and compare their behavioral characteristics as well as their ability to perform the requirements of the job. Asking similar questions also helps to avoid asking illegal interview questions. As always, review the legality of the questions you plan to ask potential candidates!

## What are some behavioral traits you may want in a new hire?

- Excellent attendance
- Dependability
- Self-Starter
- Team Player
- Detail-Oriented
- Assertive
- Honest
- Flexible
- Goal-Oriented
- Positive
- Communicative



Since effective SEO often requires changes to the HTML source code of a website and to a website's content, SEO tactics can, and should, be incorporated into web design and development.

### Five Things You Can Do for Better SEO

- 1. Title Tags** – Each page should have a unique, descriptive title tag. A description relative to the content on the page helps people who are searching for you, your product, or your services.
- 2. Content** – Content is King. Unique, informative, and relevant site content helps SEO. Use keywords within that content that you feel best describe your business and will be words customers will search for when looking for services that your business supplies.
- 3. Links** – Build working links between the pages of your website and with other trusted websites. Ask business affiliates and other trusted businesses to link to your site as well. You should also use Social Media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs to create links to your website and encourage followers to visit.
- 4. Keywords** – When your website developer lists keywords in the HTML files of your pages, be sure that those same words appear with frequency in the content on your site.
- 5. Updates** – Fresh content will bring search engine “spiders” back to index your site, and will bring your customers back as well, so update your site as frequently as possible. You may want to update some pages once or twice a month, and others less frequently. The more traffic you receive, the higher you will come up in searches.

### Content makes a difference

When the top two links on a page are switched artificially, not as determined by the search terms, CTR of the first link tends to drop and the CTR of the second rises.

## Plan Now for Holiday Sales!

Summer's here and thoughts of year-end holiday sales may not be dancing in your head. But they should be.

**Plan to succeed.** For some of us the holiday season can provide 40 to 50% of our revenue for the year. The summer months are the time to step back, assess your business, and plan to make the most of November and December. Be sure you have the right mix of products (or services) and price points going into the season. What do you anticipate people will need or want? Talk to vendors to get a handle on product availability, special deals, and loss leaders. Be prepared to beef up equipment and staffing in the fall to meet the demands of the season.

**Design your marketing campaign.** Having the right stuff to do business is one thing, and promoting it is another. Develop a strategy to market your business and your products or services for the holidays. Determine the best marketing mix—brochures, newspaper, tv, or radio advertising, e-mail campaigns, and social media campaigns—for your products and services. Create a calendar for marketing tasks. During the summer months you can meet with advertising, design, and marketing specialists to work on brochure, sell sheet, and ad designs. You can create a calendar for press releases and social media posts, develop templates and a schedule for e-mail news, and investigate ad rates for newspapers, radio, or television.

**Get your database in order.** If you depend upon a clean customer database in order to reach your marketing and sales goals, make sure it is clean and accurate before you begin to ratchet up your holiday marketing.

**Gifts and cards are a great way to say “thanks”.** Begin to think about card and gift-giving now. Order unique cards or gifts for clients ahead of time. Ordering early may save you money, and it will be one less chore to complete during a busy season. Think of sending a special seasonal greeting or gift to potential customers as well!

