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SEO: Essential to Survival

Companies that rely on the web for sales have two choices. Embrace SEO or don't embrace SEO. And one's not really a viable option.

By Chandler Harris | February 04, 2009

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In the realm of e-commerce, one of the top **marketing** tools a company has is a Google ranking. The difference between a page 1 or page 2 search engine ranking can be the difference of tens of thousands of dollars of revenue for a company.

Because of this, companies are allocating more budget space than ever toward search engine optimization (SEO), the strategy and process of improving the volume of traffic to a **website** by improving the search rankings of various search engines like Google, Yahoo!, AOL, Ask and MSN.

For many **online** companies like My1Stop.com, an online printing company, using SEO techniques to achieve a high search engine ranking is essential for survival.

"Our website is our complete livelihood, since 99 percent of every penny that comes into our pockets is from our website," says Michael Del Chiaro, president of My1Stop.com. "If we're not getting a good [search engine] ranking, we're **starting** to atrophy as a company."

But SEO isn't as easy as it may seem. It requires a host of strategies to help climb the search engine ladder to page 1, including content revision, link building, coding, and even social networking. Some companies elect to do in-house SEO. Yet if they lack proper knowledge of the way search engines work and are evolving, they might be limited.

For Del Chiaro, it took two unsuccessful attempts with SEO companies (see sidebar) before he found MoreVisibility, a search engine marketing, optimization and design firm. MoreVisibility has helped My1Stop.com gain invaluable ranking exposure, increasing the company's visitors through "organic" search results--search-engine-directed visits--from 30 percent to 90 percent.

Search engine results used to measure progress and modify strategy for My1Stop.com are provided by MoreVisibility and Google analytics, which are essential to any organization engaging in SEO practices, Del Chiaro says.

"If you engage with an SEO firm or hire programmers or experts yourself, if you don't have analytics, it's like driving blind," Del Chiaro says.

Find the Right SEO Firm

Michael Del Chiaro went through two unsuccessful attempts at SEO for My1Stop.com before finding an SEO company that worked. For his first attempt, a small regional firm failed to do one of the most important SEO tasks: use analytics tools to find keywords for website content.

For his second attempt he hired a national SEO firm that worked with Fortune 500 clients. While this SEO firm used analytics, it didn't take enough time to understand My1Stop.com's business; therefore, analytics didn't yield the intended results.

Del Chiaro now has a collaborative partnership with MoreVisibility, which takes the time to understand My1Stop.com's **business** and use the analytics and SEO tools that have helped My1Stop.com achieve high search engine rankings.

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Using analytics, Del Chiaro is able to track where visitors to My1Stop.com arrived from, what keywords were entered, what customers ordered, how long they stayed, how many pages were viewed, how many quotes were requested and other useful information. Knowing what keywords customers entered to find a website is important because search engines primarily search for content when ranking websites.

"The SEO factors that matter today, over and above the coding piece of a website, include the content on a website," says Andrew Wetzler, president of MoreVisibility. "If you want to show up under the phrase 'working capital loans,' you need to build out a website that speaks with a significant depth to that keyword. The more content a website is able to publish on a particular keyword, industry or phrase, the greater likelihood the site's rankings will increase."

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The Nevada Commission on Tourism found that revamping its website with more content oriented toward specific searches yielded dramatic results. With the help of MoreVisibility, the NCOT went from having 224 indexed web pages with 2,796 keywords, to more than 1,000 pages and 14,000 keywords. In December 2008, the website had 29,000 organic visits, compared to just 9,000 the year before.

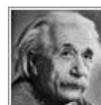
The return on the NCOT's investment has been significant. In the past, the organization relied on sponsored links through pay-per-click advertising, which cost an estimated 65 cents every time somebody linked to its site. With the drastic increase in traffic to its new website, NCOT estimates a savings of nearly \$19,000 based on what PPC would have cost.

The NCOT also used social media outlets to increase search engine rankings. Search engines are now recognizing social media websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as important content, Wetzler says. The NCOT created its own YouTube channel, posted travel videos on Viddler.com, created a mobile ski site and has an online press room on Twitter.

"If you Google 'ski travel Nevada,' the entire first page of results is us, with the exception of one," NCOT spokesperson Bethany Drysdale says. "If we didn't use social media, those results wouldn't be there; they'd be replaced by something else."

With the internet changing at a rapid clip, it's important for companies to understand how search engines work and modify their websites as new advances occur. The introduction of social media is a more recent example how quickly search engines can change their protocol.

In terms of SEO, "If you don't view social network sites as something you have to put daily resources into for your business, you're failing," Del Chiaro says. "The internet is always changing. When Google hiccups, everything changes."



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