SEO for Execs

A Complete Breakdown

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

We know that as an owner or executive you personally may not have the time to actually implement SEO yourself. In all likelihood, you will probably look to hire someone, or a team, to help you out. So with that said, we'll cover "need-to-knows" and what to look for when hiring an SEO professional (either as an employee, team, or even an agency).

In this guide, we'll also cover the basics: what is SEO, why it's important, and why you need it. We'll then cover the two main areas that SEO can be broken down into (On-Page and Off-Page SEO) and list best practices for each.

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Chapters

ONE
The basics of seo: why it's important & why you need to be doing it

TWO
How does google rank a page: on-page vs. Off-page seo

THREE
Need to knows & what to look for when hiring an seo professional

*Now, with that out of the way, let's get started and cover
a few of the basics of SEO...*

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THE
BASICS of SEO
Why it's important, & why you need to be doing it

What is SEO?

In its most basic form, SEO (or Search Engine Optimization) is the process of getting a website to rank highly in search engines (like Google, BING, Yahoo) and pull in organic (read: "free") traffic.

All of the techniques and work that go into improving your site's ranking is SEO. THIS IS, OF COURSE, EASIER SAID THAN DONE.
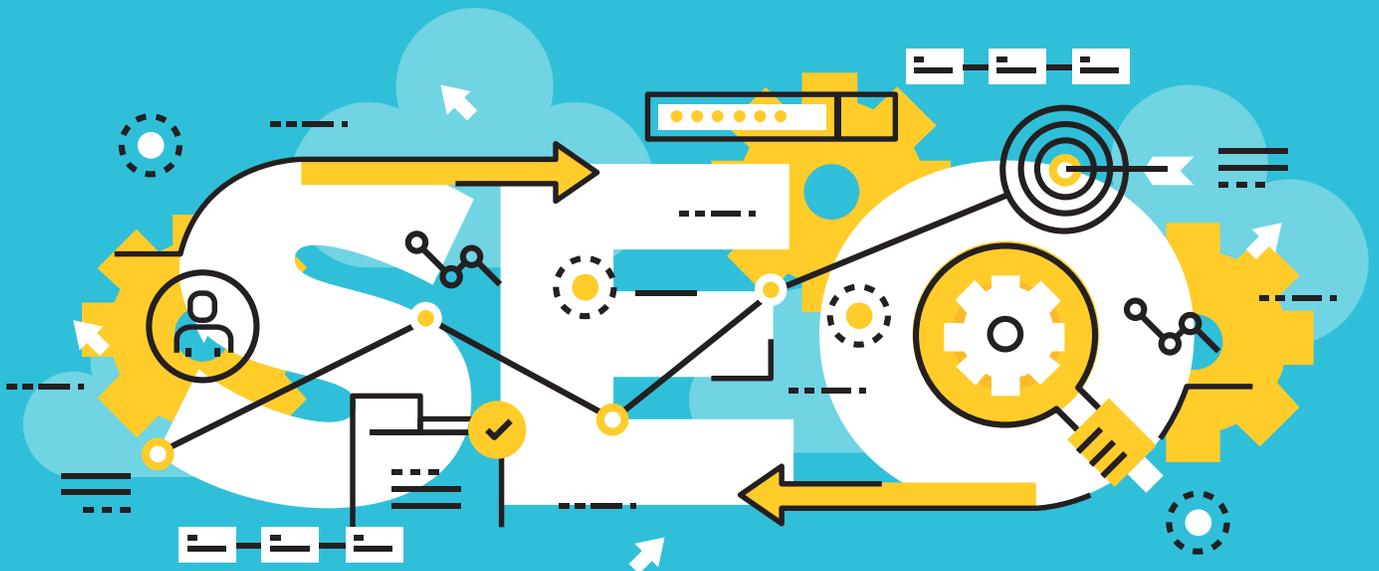
True SEO, that is ethical and organic, takes serious time. Anyone that claims otherwise is just looking to take your money and run. It can take months to see a real impact from SEO, and if your site is fairly new (ie. you just launched and have little to no content), it will take even longer to see noticeable results.

But hopefully, that doesn't scare you off. SEO is a long-term strategy for your business and when done correctly (with the proper amount of time and resources allocated to it), it will produce consistent long-term value in the form of higher rankings and increased traffic.

In the early days of SEO, you could get a site to rank fairly easily by buying a bunch of low-quality backlinks, keyword stuffing (including the same keyword on a page a bunch of times), or by buying a domain address (website name) that exactly matched the keyword you wanted to rank for. For example, if you wanted to rank for the term "dog bowls" you could buy the domain "dogbowls.com", add a few pages and rank for that term.

But things aren't quite so easy anymore. Google and other search engines have improved over the years and those old tactics are essentially useless these days. You can even be penalized - in the form of being dropped in ranking or removed from search entirely - by using some of those tactics (specifically, buying links). It's getting harder and harder to rank and for lack of a better word, "game the system". Search engines no longer follow the same methodology they used to.

The entire mentality of a search engine is to provide the best possible result to the searcher that satisfies their original search query. They do this by evaluating a site's content in reference to the search and the quality of the site and its content.

By continuing to create quality content that provides immense value to the searcher and satisfies their original search (whether that's answering a question, listing ideas, educating the reader, etc.), you'll be well on your way to creating content that search engines want to see and provide to searchers.

Why is SEO important?

Generally, when most people think of SEO, Google is often the next associated thought. And really, it should be. Google dominates the search engine world and has truly become the focus of SEO with the common question being,

"How do I rank higher on Google?"

IN FACT
Google controls nearly
80%

of the search engine market (meaning 80% of users choose it over other search engines like Yahoo and Bing). That number grows even higher when looking at mobile/tablet searches only and over

94%

of people using the search engine

It's not hard to see why other search engines have fallen by the wayside and are hardly an afterthought when considering SEO.

Ranking high in Google can bring you some serious traffic too. When looking at a Google results page (often referred to as Search Engine Results Page, or SERP for short), the number one result alone brings in 31% of search traffic on average. Meaning, when people search for a keyword, 31% of those searches will click the first result.

The top five results combine for 67% of overall traffic from searchers. The first page entirely (which includes 10 results) accounts for 71%. And lastly, the 2nd page as a whole accounts for just under 4%.

So it pays to be on the first page and even more so if you're that number one result.

Why do you need SEO?

There are two options to rank in Google. You can pay for search results (known as Adwords) or you can rank naturally and appear in organic search results:

ADWORDS

Adwords is a viable option for being seen in Google. The problem, however, is that Adwords can be rather expensive (especially in highly competitive industries) and it doesn't hold any long-term value. As soon as you stop paying for Adwords, your result will no longer be seen in a SERP. With Adwords, you have to continually pay to be seen for a particular keyword search.

ORGANIC

In organic search, you don't have to continually pay to be seen, and once you've reached the first page of Google (and you have quality content and a trustworthy site), you'll often stick there for a long period of time (depending on the amount of competition).

Remember, SEO is a long-term strategy and one that will create long-term value for your business.

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How does

GOOGLE
RANK a page?

ON-PAGE VS. OFF-PAGE SEO
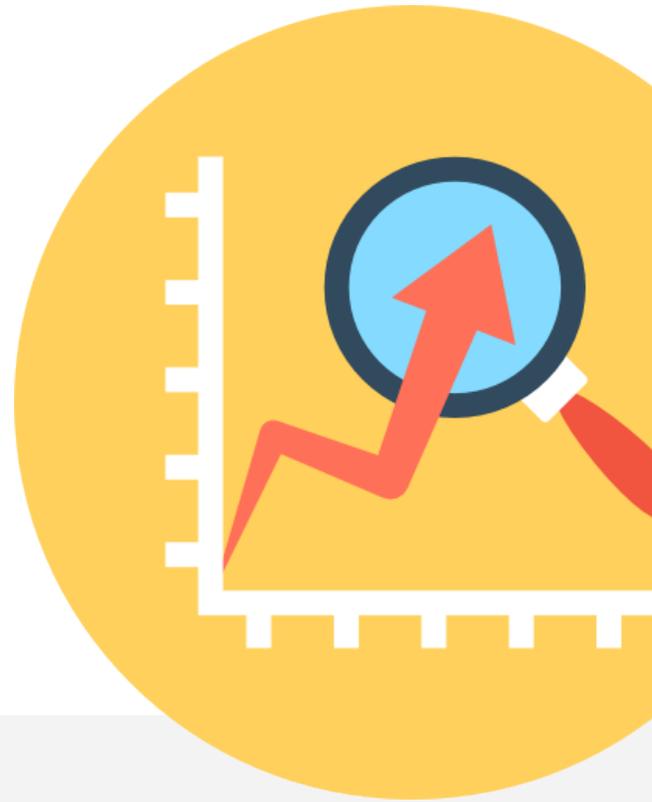
THERE ARE OVER
200
FACTORS ▶

that Google uses to rank a page in a search result. No one knows for sure how Google values each of these factors and we won't waste your time going through all of them. However, there are a few that are seen by many SEO professionals as being the most important. Think about how Google works from your own personal experience. If you search for something, let's say "shoes" for example.

When you search for that phrase, what do you see?
YOU GET A LIST OF RESULTS FROM COMPANIES SELLING SHOES, RIGHT?

Google is determining the results basically by the following criteria:

1. **THE RELEVANCE OF CONTENT ON THAT COMPANY'S PAGE**
2. **THE RELEVANCE OF THE COMPANY'S WEBSITE AS A WHOLE**
3. **THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THAT COMPANY'S WEBSITE**
4. **THE QUALITY OF THE CONTENT ON THAT COMPANY'S**

Obviously, this is a very basic way to look at it. But, this is essentially the criteria Google is using in order to show you a result for your search. Google wants to show you a page that is relevant to your search, will satisfy your search query, provide value, and won't be a spammy site.

THIS CRITERIA IS DETERMINED BY THOSE 200+ FACTORS AND BOILS DOWN INTO TWO CATEGORIES:

ON PAGE & OFF PAGE

SEO

ON PAGE SEO BEST PRACTICES

On-Page SEO is made up of everything that you can control on your page and your website as a whole.

These include things like...

This is one of, if not the, most important places of your page's content. A title tag is the first thing Google sees when it reads your page and it places a ton of value in it. It immediately lets Google know what your page is about. It's also the title that is displayed in a Google search result.

BEST PRACTICE

USE A catchy title WITH YOUR TARGET KEYWORD

TITLE TAGS

A Title Tag is an HTML element that declares the title of your page. Simply, it's your page title.

You want your page title to accurately describe what your page is about but you also want it to be "clickable". Meaning, you want it to draw a searcher's attention in a search result and entice them to click on it. On top of that, your page title should include your target keyword.
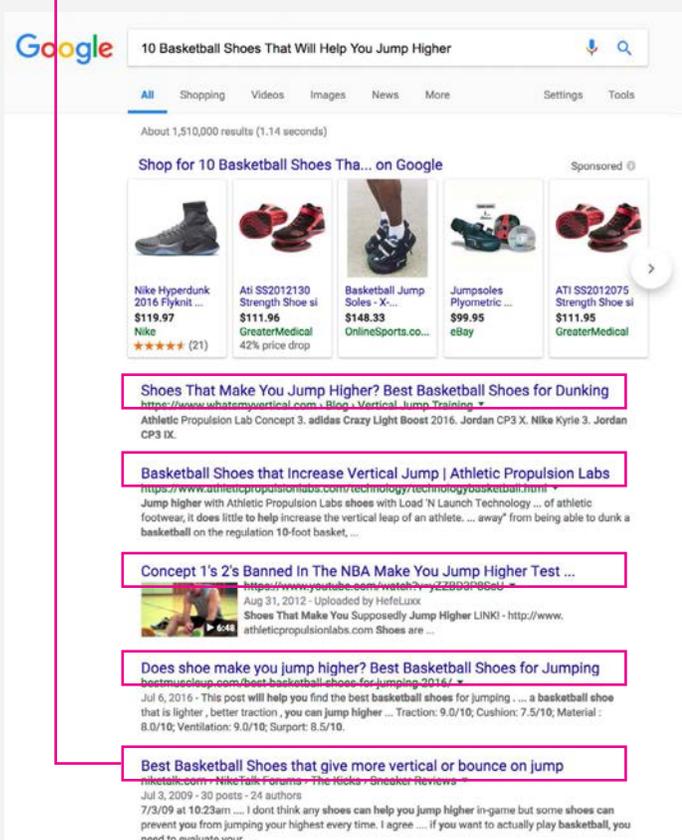
A popular practice, and thought to be best for SEO, is to include your target keyword as close to the start of the page title as reasonably possible (so that it still makes sense).

So if you hope to rank for the keyword, "basketball shoes", an example title might be "10 Basketball Shoes That Will Help You Jump Higher".

This title includes your target keyword, it's close to the start of the title and is enticing enough that a searcher would want to click on it.

Finally, the ideal lengthfor a page title is within 60 to 70 characters. After 70 characters, the title will be cut off.

META DESCRIPTION

A meta description is that little snippet below a title in a search result:

PSSST
CTR
Stands for

▼

CLICK
THROUGH
RATE

A meta description is used by Google to judge what the page is about but it's also important in enticing a searcher to click a result.

BEST PRACTICE

Set an accurate, intent-based META DESCRIPTION with your target keyword

A search result with a high CTR can often be given a boost by Google because it's seen as attractive and relevant. You can increase your CTR by giving your page a custom meta description. This can be done from the page's HTML or if you're using WordPress, you could use a plugin like Yoast SEO to do this.

To increase your CTR, create a custom description that describes what your page is about and what the reader can expect to get out of visiting your page. You also want to include your target keyword. Think about the earcher's intent when crafting this description.

For instance, a person searching "basketball shoes" is probably looking to buy basketball shoes. In your description, you may want to include something like "Browse hundreds of basketball shoes from top brands like Nike, Jordan, Lebron, and more".

Again, Google will only show so much of your meta description. After 160 to 170 characters, Google will cut off the rest of the description in the search result (using "..."). So be sure to keep your description under this length.

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Appropriate use of headers are not only helpful to the reader in structuring and breaking up content, but they also let Google know what the key information on that page is and what is most important.

BEST PRACTICE | Break up your content using HEADERS

USAGE OF HEADERS

EXAMPLE

H1: 10 Basketball Shoes That Will Help You Jump Higher
H2: Nike Basketball Shoes
H3: High-Top Shoes

There are 6 header styles in basic HTML (h1, h2,...h6). Header ones (h1) are the most important and are usually used for your page's title. From there, headers are judged in order of importance starting with header two (h2) as the next most important, then header three (h3), and so on.

So when structuring your content, use appropriate headers to break up your content and declare what's most important on the page. Start with the highest available header and filter down.

KEYWORD USAGE

BEST PRACTICE | Use keywords in headers & utilize LSI keywords

Keyword usage on a page is much more complicated these days. SEO professionals used to go as far as calculating the number of times a keyword appeared on a page to try to be in some kind of ideal percentage.

That's simply not applicable anymore and search engines are much smarter at deciphering what a page is about beyond seeing the same keyword used a bunch of times. Keyword stuffing (including the exact same keyword on a page as much as possible)

doesn't work anymore. However, keyword usage and where you place your keywords is still important.

General guidelines include making sure your keyword is in your page title, in the page content, in a header or two, and using LSI Keywords. LSI keywords are terms that are related to your target keyword.

For example, using the keyword "shoes", LSI keywords might include sneakers, sandals, boots, walking, running, etc. These LSI keywords should appear in your page content naturally and not be awkwardly forced into the text.

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IMAGE NAMES

BEST PRACTICE | Use an accurate & relevant name for your images

Often times, companies use images with irrelevant image names like "DSC0160" or "image-1" and so on. Instead, you want to accurately name your image to something more descriptive.

So if you have an image of a computer, the name of the image should be "computer" or "computer-screen". This helps Google to decipher what the image is as it relates to the content on the page, but it also makes those images searchable so they can show up in a Google image search.

While not the top factor, image names are a still an important On-Page SEO factor, particularly for image search.

EXAMPLE

~~DSC0160~~

~~image-1~~

computer-screen

ALT TAGS

BEST PRACTICE | Use an accurate & relevant alt tag

Alt tags are basically a snippet of code associated with an image. They're best used to give a short description of the image. This also lets Google know what the image is and how it's related to your page content.

Similar to the image name above, you want to use an appropriate name for your image's alt tag. Many times, companies or websites don't use alt tags on their images and this is simply poor SEO. So be sure to use a relevant alt tag that describes your image. It can be the same as the image name, just make sure it's relevant and describes the image.

So if it's an image of a computer, the alt tag might look like this:

alt = "computer"

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BEST PRACTICE | Ensure your site is mobile friendly/ optimized

MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

Mobile is becoming more and more the primary way people search, thus Google has placed a huge importance on mobile optimization, generally favoring pages that are mobile-optimized/friendly (especially in mobile search).

Mobile optimized basically means that your website looks good and functions correctly on phones, tablets, and other mobile devices. This might mean you have an entirely separate mobile site (usually in the form of a subdomain) or you simply have CSS for styling your site to look better and be easier to use on mobile (for instance including larger buttons).

With mobile search continuing to grow and Google favoring mobile-friendly sites, you can't sit around and allow your site not to be optimized on mobile. Not sure if your site is optimized for mobile? You can check if your site is seen as mobile-friendly by using Google's Mobile-Friendly Test Tool.

URL STRUCTURE

BEST PRACTICE | Use short URL with target keywords

Using a clean URL structure also helps Google identify what your page is about. Google prefers a URL that is readable.

The first URL is easier for Google to read (and people too) and it lets Google know what the page is about.

The second example is confusing and harder to read. This is a common default website structure when using a CMS like WordPress.

Short URLs tend to perform better in Google's search

results, so when creating new pages on your site, try to use a short URL. You also want to include your target keyword in your URL. So let's use that example from earlier, *"10 Basketball Shoes That Will Help You Jump Higher".* The target keyword, in this case, is likely *"basketball shoes".*

So instead of having a URL that reads "www.example.com/10-basketball-shoes-that-will-help-you-jump-higher", you want to use a short URL with your keyword like "www.example.com/basketball-shoes". This is cleaner, helps let Google know what your page is about, and tends to perform better.

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BEST | Make sure you can get
PRACTICE | to any page on your
site within 3 clicks

SITE STRUCTURE & NAVIGATION

Google prefers sites that are easy to navigate. This means having solid navigation in your top menu and other places on your site (like your sidebar and footer). It also allows Google to easily find related pages on your site.

Your site navigation should be present and easily identifiable. Visitors should be able to navigate your site with ease, and ideally, be able to get to any page on your site with no more than 3 clicks. This provides a quick and easy user experience and ensures visitors don't have to spend an eternity trying to find what they're looking for.

SITE SPEED

Google also takes into account the amount of time a page takes to load when considering which pages to show on a search results page.

BEST | Use smaller images
PRACTICE | and/or image
compression

Google knows that if a page takes too long to load, visitors are likely to click away or go back. Now, Google tends to place other factors above site speed, but while it's not the number one factor, if your site loads slowly it's definitely something you will want to address. Large media files (like large images) and plugins and code like JQuery can have an impact on site speed. However, one of the biggest cause of slow speeds is your web hosting (specifically if you're using shared hosting).

There are many ways to optimize your site to load faster. Some are very technical like using a CDN,

caching, and minimizing Javascript. You will need to consult with a Technical SEO Expert to address those methods but before you do that, one simple technique you can use to increase page speed is to use smaller images on your webpages.

Large images can take a long time to download, thus causing your site to load slowly. By using the smallest image size you can (within reason) you can speed up your page's load time.

For instance, many digital cameras take images that are 6000 x 4000 pixels. These should be cropped down to a smaller size (for example, 600 x 400 pixels) before being uploaded to your site. If you use WordPress, you can use an image compression plugin to automatically compress your images to a smaller size.

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BEST PRACTICE | Use internal links strategically & sparingly

INTERNAL LINKING

Mobile is becoming more and more the primary way people search, thus Google has placed a huge importance on mobile optimization, generally favoring pages that are mobile-optimized/friendly (especially in mobile search).

Internal linking is the process of linking one page to another on your site. This is done in a few ways including your navigation menu, sidebar links, and links inside page content to other pages on your site.

This lets Google know which pages are relevant to each other.

By using internal linking strategically, you can boost the ranking of other pages on your website. Say you have a popular page that is ranking highly in Google and receiving a lot of traffic. By strategically placing a link on that page to another on your site that you want to rank, you can pass "authority" to that page. This lets search engines know that the linked page is related to the original page and it is a credible source. This can sometimes result in a slight boost in search ranking for the newly linked page.

QUALITY & RELEVANCE OF CONTENT

Google wants to make sure it shows users quality content when they visit a search result. The search engine evaluates this based on the content on the page and its relevancy.

But, it also uses engagement statistics to evaluate if visitors are finding the content useful and essentially satisfying their original search query. This is judged in a few ways including Off-Page SEO indicators like social shares and backlinks.

However, Google also judges visitor engagement stats like time on page (how long visitors stay on the page) and the number of pages visited on your site. Google defines duplicate content as large blocks of text

BEST PRACTICE | Use original long-form content and include a lot of engaging media

used across multiple pages, or even other websites, that are exactly the same or very similar. Simply put, you don't want to use large blocks of the same text on more than one page of your website.

In a study by Backlinko (a popular SEO website), it was found that the average Google first page result contained 1,890 words.

Part of the reason this works is that longer content usually provides more value to the reader. So it's not only shared more often, but visitors also tend to stay on the page longer. Using a lot of engaging media like helpful graphics, interesting (and related) images, and videos can also help to provide more value and keep visitors more engaged. Thus, keeping them around longer.

OFF PAGE SEO BEST PRACTICES

Off-Page SEO is made up of everything away from your site that you technically can't control
(although, you can influence) and affects how Google sees your page
(particularly how authoritative and trustworthy it sees your page).

These include things like...

A site's age has an influence on that site's ranking. A site that has been around for a long time can be seen as more reputable. Plus, it gives Google a background in determining a site's trustworthiness. Basically, site age lets Google know your site is legit.

SITE HISTORY/
AGE

NUMBER & QUALITY OF
BACKLINKS

A backlink is a link to your site from another website. Google uses backlinks to judge the credibility of a site, the quality, and its popularity.

BEST
PRACTICE

Focus on quality & relevant backlinks

Backlinks are commonly referred to as one of the top factors Google uses in deciding what sites to show in a search result.

If a site, or specific page, has a lot of backlinks pointing to it, Google then sees this page or site as credible.

This is only true, though, if those backlinks are coming from quality, reputable sources, and it's even better when those sites are relevant to your site. For instance, a backlink coming from Forbes is much more valuable than a small business website. But, relevancy also plays a role and a backlink from a site in the same industry as yours can have tremendous value too.

While you can't always control who links to you, successful SEO often includes promotion and outreach. This includes reaching out to other sites, influencers, and bloggers in your industry to check out your content and hopefully share or link to it.

When doing this, you want to focus on sites that are authoritative (they have a high Domain Authority which can be checked using Moz's Open Site Explorer) and are relevant to your industry.

BEST PRACTICE | Create amazing content

NUMBER OF SOCIAL SHARES

Social shares are also another factor Google uses to judge whether your page is seen as being reputable, of high quality, and useful/relevant to visitors. Backlinks are commonly referred to as one of the top factors Google uses in deciding what sites to show in a search result.

While they don't carry the same weight that backlinks do, a high number of social shares can help a page rank higher in Google.

Easier said than done, but content that gets shared is often content that embodies a "wow factor". So that when someone sees/reads your page, they are compelled to share it.

This can be done by creating truly epic and amazing content. Epic content can be created by developing the best resources available on a given subject, making you a thought leader in your industry.

Need to knows
and what to
LOOK FOR
WHEN HIRING AN
SEO EXPERT

SEO Takes time

We mentioned this earlier but we want to mention it again because it's that important. If there was one thing that we could get across to those unfamiliar with SEO, it's that it takes time. You should expect at a minimum a few months to 6 months before you see any noticeable results. That length of time grows even longer if you have a new site, little authority, and a small amount of content.

SEO is a long-term strategy and when you think of it that way and don't try to look for short-term wins, you will be successful.

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NEVER TRUST someone who **can promise you** short term results

Remember, real SEO takes time. Companies that claim they are able to get you results in a few weeks are likely engaging in unethical practices like buying links, linking to low quality or irrelevant websites, or spamming comments.

These shady business practices can result in a slight boost for a short period of time, but sooner or later, search engines are likely to catch on. Not only could Google remove your site entirely, these types of tactics can ultimately destroy your online reputation.

In short, stay away from people or companies that promise you amazing results in such a short time span.

True SEO is long-term. You should seek out professionals with solid experience, excellent writing skills, and those that continually stay up-to-date with the ever-changing world that is SEO.

First, you need a strong coder. Someone who has a solid understanding of web development so they can address issues like site structure, site navigation, and user experience. In short, an experienced professional that can handle the technical side of SEO.

Second, you need someone who can create quality content for your site. They need to be creative, have exceptional copywriting skills, and a mind for strategy. This person will be responsible for attracting visitors to your site through compelling content and ultimately turning those visitors into leads. Additionally, this role is typically responsible for building relationships and reaching out to influencers in your industry (bloggers, authoritative figures, etc.) to promote your content.

SEO takes more than one skill or person

SEO can't really be pinned to any one activity. Both technical and creative skills are required.

Third, you need a strong designer. Someone that can create beautiful, intriguing graphics that engage your visitors (again, keeping them on your site and moving them further along).

SEO takes more than just optimization **it needs promotion**

With all the factors that go into creating a "perfectly optimized page", it can be easy to lose sight of promotion. But proper SEO is made up of so many factors. It's simply not enough to correctly format a page, create amazing content, and hit publish - then expect that page to rank highly and bring in a bunch of search traffic immediately.

SEO takes promotion. Backlinks are a huge part of ranking in Google and in order to attract backlinks (and even social shares) your content needs to be seen (and it needs to amazing).

Without shares, backlinks, authority, Google won't notice your page and you won't rank. So you need to get out there and promote your content. This means promoting to your social media accounts, sending out to your email list, reaching out to bloggers and influencers in your industry to check out your content, advertising, and more.

CONCLUSION

As you've probably identified at this point, SEO is incredibly detailed. But, it doesn't need to be complicated. As search engines like Google continually improve and try to show the best results they can to users, their focus is to provide quality and relevant results.

SHOULD BE ON SO YOUR FOCUS

creating quality resources that provide immense value and satisfy the searcher's original query.

With that said, proper SEO does take a lot of work, requires a large set of skills, and takes time. But, by investing in SEO now, and allocating the proper time and resources to it, you can begin to create serious, long-term value for your business. Thus, taking advantage of the huge potential of traffic and sales from organic search.

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