

Search Engine Optimization Basics for Content Marketing

1. Decide what to optimize for – finding a keyword phrase that will connect with your audience.

Questions to consider:

- a. Who is my audience?
- b. What do they want – what are their fears/desires?
- c. What phrases are they using to find answers/solutions?
- d. The more you can create content your audience is passionate about, the more you will increase reader satisfaction/user experience, which is a key component in search engine ranking.

Example – one way to find out what your audience is interested in:

- Log out of your Google account and type your industry into Google. Look at the suggestions in the drop down list of the search box – these are topics people are actually seeking information about when they enter a search term related to your industry.
- Which of the top items is more likely to strike an emotional connection with the audience? That's the one to search for related keywords about.

Quick Keyword Research:

- Create a list of relevant keywords or use a tool, such as Google's Adwords Keyword Tool to help you create a list.
- Find words that have high search and low competition. For local search keywords, the exact local monthly search volume should be at the very least 500 per month, preferably 1000.
- Go back to Google search and type the phrases you've selected using quotes. Make a list of exact match phrases that have less than 10,000 competing pages.
- Once you've found a keyword with good search volume and low competition, it is a good candidate to use for optimizing an article.

2. Optimize for your desired keyword phrase

Now that you know your topic and have chosen a keyword phrase, it's time to optimize your story for search engines. Do not skip the first step – finding what your audience wants to know. It doesn't take long once you get used to it.

Search Engines (especially Google) now give more weight to the user experience than ever before. Google's goal is to match the searcher with the most relevant, useful content with their search term. When the end-user lands on a page with content closely matched to their search, they will stay on the site longer and likely will return. They are also more likely to share your content via social media. Because this type of sharing is more natural than mass backlink building, it is gaining more and more weight in the search engine algorithms.

Today, SEO is ALL about user experience – delivering high-quality, relevant content that matches what your audience is looking for. If you consistently create that, your site will do well, which will in turn increase traffic and subsequently allow you more revenue opportunities.

There are a number of on-page optimization tactics to help Google match your content with their searchers.

Here's a basic on-page SEO checklist:

- Put keyword phrase in the Page Title Tag
- Put keyword phrase in the permalink (URL)
- Put keyword phrase in the description that will be used in Google. The default description is the first 160 characters of the story, but most content management systems allow you to overwrite this description with a compelling description to increase your click through rate when your story shows up in the search engines (think back cover copy of books). Higher click-through-rate from Google Search will increase your site's authority and typically decrease your bounce rate as the searcher is getting the content they are looking for.
- Front-load the story headline with your keyword phrase, but, even more importantly, ensure the headline is compelling enough to get the reader to click on it from the search engine. Web headlines are different than print.



Make sure both the reader and the search engines understand exactly what the topic is. Use questions to engage the reader. Include the audience's

dread or desire in the headline. Example: Will sleep apnea be the death of you? (Questions automatically engage reader's brain, the problem is the seriousness of this health issue, and readers who have sleep apnea or have a loved one who does will be highly likely to click through to read the article. Plus, search engines are aware that the article topic is sleep apnea.)

- Include a compelling image. Name the image file with your keyword before uploading it and make sure the image alt tag has the keyword in it.
- Keyword placement – use the keyword phrase in the first sentence of the story and again in the last sentence.
- Make sure the keyword density doesn't exceed 3 percent of the story content.
- Use keyword in subheadings with H2 and H3 tags
- Use variations of your keyword phrase within the story. Typically, over half of your traffic will come from related keyword phrases, not just the phrase you're optimizing for.
- Use your keyword in the story's tags.

The above list is for individual stories/keywords – here are things to help the entire site with search engine optimization and online marketing in general:

- Put your primary local search term in your root domain name.
- Ensure your site is cross-browser compatible.
- Install Google analytics on your site. Monitor which keywords are driving the most traffic and create more content using those topics. Do keyword research within those topics to determine which keywords to optimize individual stories for.
- Optimize your 404 page. Don't use a standard 404 page. Make it fun and engaging or include a list of most popular articles or a search function or a funny image – anything to keep them on your site so they won't get annoyed and leave your site if they land on your 404 page.
- Use Google's site search and capture the search terms your audience is using. Create more content on frequently searched items.
- Make sure your site loads fast.
- Avoid flash.
- Optimize videos with descriptions and compelling headlines.
- Use tags on your videos.



- Link related stories throughout your site. Use your keyword phrases as anchor text while creating deep links.
- Make your navigation easy to use and link all important pages directly from the home page.
- Make your content readable. The typical US reader is at an 8th-grade level.
- Make your content compelling. Avoid use of prepositional phrases. Write in active voice. Take a little extra time to make sure the story isn't boring or bland. Include something useful and unique in every story – something the read won't be able to find just anywhere.
- Update your site frequently, more than once per day if possible.
- Use no-follow tags on non-relevant links.
- Write "link bait" posts – such as Top Ten Lists, How-To posts, controversial posts (opinion), etc.
- Make your site easy to engage with your audience through comments.
- Include the most popular social media share links – Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Google-Plus. (Note: A "share" has much more weight than a "like" with search engines.) Also make it easy to share content via email. (Google monitors links shared via Gmail.) The content must be compelling so readers will want to share it.
- Include a Privacy Policy, Contact Us, About, and Terms of Service page.
- Avoid multi-page stories. These only annoy readers.
- Interact with your audience in your story comment areas as well as on your company's social media properties – this is the best way to grow an active, engaged community.
- Set up Google Alerts for your company name and monitor your online reputation. Quickly respond to any negative comments on social media sites. Ignoring them only makes it worse.
- Make sure your site is attractive. Avoid dark colors. Use an easy to read font in a size large enough for people to read easily (at least 12 point).
- Repair all broken links – these affect your SEO and the reader experience.
- Use relevant tags on all stories.
- Create an XML site map, and for media sites, create a sitemap for Google News as well (this is different than the regular XML site map – check Google's publisher helps for information about how to set this up)
- Open your archives to all users. (This can also increase your advertising inventory if you sell impression-based advertising.)
- Don't have forced registration – Google can penalize for this because it hampers the user experience.



- Think outside the box when it comes to revenue generation. Today’s consumer is more web savvy and most have developed “banner blindness,” which means they largely ignore banner ads. More effective ways than run-of-site ads include highly targeted content sponsors for niche pages. One example – a Florida paper started a “What’s for Lunch?” page and invited local restaurants to tweet their daily lunch specials. The paper set up a Twitter aggregator with the specials and sold page sponsor slots to restaurants. This concept could be applied to any niche.
- Interactive content, such as polls, slideshows, and contests draw more visitors and keep the community engaged and excited to come to the site.
- The number one thing to remember is User Experience – providing quality, unique content on a consistent basis is the best thing you can do to increase your site’s authority and rankings.
- Things to NEVER do:
 - Don’t use invisible or hidden text
 - Don’t use cloaked redirects
 - Don’t use negative div tags
 - Don’t use any duplicate content on your site
 - Don’t scrap content from other sites – if you have story feeds, at the very least, change the headlines
 - Don’t use reciprocal links (cross-linking)

Top 10 Ranking Factors for 2011

1. Category Authority (Brand) – i.e. ESPN = Sports
2. Keyword in Story Headline
3. Domain Authority (domain age, PageRank, etc.)
4. Social Sharing of Content
5. First to Publish Content
6. Citations
7. Unique Content – low- or no-use of other sites’ content
8. High Click-through-Rate from Google Search
9. High-quality Content
10. Use of Google Sitemap

Top 10 Negative Ranking Factors for 2011

1. Duplicate Content (including plagiarized and scraped content)
2. Vague Headlines
3. No Google Sitemap
4. Poor Quality Content
5. Blocking Content from Googlebots and Users
6. Slow Loading Pages
7. Poor Citation Rank
8. Low PageRank Domain
9. New Site
10. Using same title as source for syndicated content