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CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

## SEO and social media strategies

What are the best ways to optimise your online content for search purposes?

**1,722,071,000,000**

That's how many searches Google processed in 2011.

From this, two things are clear:

1. Search engines (especially Google) are critically important online marketing tools
2. Targeting the right people online and increasing your visibility to them requires astute search engine optimisation (SEO) strategies.

### Optimise your website for people, not robots

The purpose of SEO is to design web pages to attract the attention of search engine robots so that they will index the page and, hopefully, assign it a high ranking on the results pages that they return in response to keyword enquiries.

All too often in the past, this has meant writing contrived content that is of little value to the reader but which conforms with the algorithm used by the search engine.

Fortunately for those of us searching for useful and relevant information, it is now

much more difficult to attract web traffic with 'thin' or misleading content.

Recent updates to the Google algorithm, for example, have resulted in sites being penalised and incurring a serious loss of ranking if they are assessed, among other things, to be:

- of poor quality
- offering little added value to the visitor
- rehashing content from other sites.

Conversely, sites that offer strong, original content that's rich in information, useful advice or considered opinion have seen their rankings improve.

The moral is that it is time to stop writing web content for robots and start writing for people, providing them with interesting and useful information about issues that concern them. In other words, sites need to be optimised not for search engines but for clients and prospects.

### Optimisation strategies

At its most basic, online marketing has three main objectives:

1. Find people who have a potential interest in your product or service

2. Direct them to an appropriate page on your website where you can cultivate that interest
3. Present them with a call to action such as a purchase, an enquiry, or a subscription to your email list, social media channel or blog.

### On-site optimisation in four easy steps

#### 1. Research your market

Good marketing involves identifying people's needs, wishes, questions and concerns that relate to your business and addressing them.

The simplest way to do this is by researching words or phrases people are using in their online searches that are relevant to your business, product or service. These are known as 'keywords'.

There are a number of free keyword research tools available online that will help you do this, such as the Google Keyword Tool. Alternatively you can outsource the task to a professional agency that specialises in website optimisation.

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## 2. Address the needs of your market

Having identified relevant topics that people are searching on and that you have something interesting to say about, prepare a web page of at least 300 words for each topic.

Write strong content that is *original, informed, interesting and useful* to your target market. Use the keywords you have identified for each topic sensibly, avoiding any contrived use that might incur search engine penalties.

These pages are called 'landing pages' because they are where you want the visitor to land on your website when they follow a link from a search engine results page.

The content does not always have to be highbrow, technical, or even serious but it has to catch attention. Where appropriate you can use humour, surveys, quizzes and approaches such as 'Three Things You Should Know About...'

Remember, what people want to read about is not how wonderful your business is but how what you have to say addresses their concerns.

Be sure to research keywords and write landing pages for prospects at all stages of the buying cycle - *attention, interest, desire, action* - and not just for those you think are ready to make a purchase.

SEO is not about using keywords that include your brand, such as 'Daniel's Celebration Birthday Cake'. The purpose of SEO is to use broad but effective industry keywords such as, in this case, 'birthday', 'party', 'cakes' and 'confectionery' to capture the *attention* of people at the early stage of the buying cycle and bring them to your site where you can then increase their *interest*, develop and strengthen a *desire* and finally encourage them to commit to an *action*, such as making a purchase.

## 3. Fine tune your web pages

Although strong content is the single most important element in successful SEO, it is still important to optimise your web pages using traditional SEO tactics such as titles, H1 tags, keyword density and on-site links. These all help to fine tune your pages to make them more visible to search engines.

But avoid at all costs using irrelevant or exaggerated content, keyword stuffing or link farming. These are more likely to result in a loss of ranking rather than an improvement.

## 4. Track results

Every landing page should have a specific call to action with built-in ways to measure responses, such as the number of conversions to a sale or enquiries that it returns.

Set goals and track and review them on a regular basis. Again, there are a number of free online tools that help you do this, the most popular being Google Analytics.

Finally, remember that an increasing number of clients, customers and prospects are now using mobile devices to access online material and conduct online searches. It is essential that your website and email newsletters are optimised for these devices.

## Don't get caught napping

Your business name, address and phone number (NAP) is part of your online identity and crucial to your visibility. Make sure your NAP has a conspicuous and consistent presence both on your site and elsewhere on the web.

And if your prospects, customers or clients are primarily or largely local don't forget to localise your site using Google Places - and include your location in your keywords.

## Off-site optimisation and social media

Off-site optimisation involves driving qualified traffic to your website using off-site methods such as:

- social media
- email marketing
- syndicated web content
- guest blog posting
- involvement in relevant online forums
- social bookmarking
- RSS feeds.

You cannot afford to ignore social media, with channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube and Pinterest seeing rapid growth in recent years.

Which media you choose depends to a large extent on factors such as where your target audience gather and brand compatibility. In each case, you need to understand your audience's wishes and provide them with appropriate content at appropriate intervals. Used skilfully, social media provides a unique opportunity to establish and build relationships with either a very wide or a very specific audience.

Social media also offers powerful and relatively inexpensive advertising opportunities with the ability to target very specific demographics. This can be especially helpful for small businesses.

## Paid search

Besides optimising your website for organic searches, you might also choose to invest in paid or sponsored search, where you place adverts on a search engine results page and pay according to the number of click-throughs you receive.

The basic principles of search engine marketing also apply to paid search - do your research using relevant industry keywords and compose your landing pages using original, informed, interesting and useful content.

## How we can help

We would be happy to provide help and advice on:

- Setting realistic marketing goals
- Measuring and interpreting results
- Setting and managing a marketing budget
- Referrals to specialists in particular fields



Call today to discuss how we can help you improve your online marketing.