Making Money

search engine optimisation

Stay online not inline for business

DESPITE ORGANIC SEARCH TAKING A BACK SEAT DURING THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, IT'S STILL A VITAL COMPONENT OF A SMALL COMPANY'S MARKETING MIX, DAVE HOWELL SAYS

For many small businesses, using the leading search engines to attract customers is still a fundamental component of their marketing strategies.

The focus over the last few years may have shifted to building Facebook 'Likes' or expanding followers on Twitter, but ultimately small businesses are discovered via traditional organic search. Google has continued to develop and refine its search algorithm to the point where well targeted keywords can now be highly effective at increasing traffic to a website.

EFFECTIVE COMPONENT

Once thought of as a black art, search engine optimisation is now a well understood set of principles any business owner can apply to their online marketing activities. Indeed, when integrated into a comprehensive marketing campaign, SEO can be one of the most highly effective components they appear.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Any discussion about SEO must take social media into consideration. Google now includes any Google+ content in its search results, making this social media network a key property for small businesses to exploit.

"There is a lot to be said for embracing Google+," Charlie Southwell, head of digital at communications specialist Flagship Consulting, says. "It is important for local search rankings for businesses, while the Authorship tags on articles - which place your Google+ avatar next to your listing in Google

"Search marketing is still

your activities, so you can prove value, Moz offers SEO diagnostics, as does Screaming Frog, while Barracuda's Panguin Tool enables you to see how each update Google makes to its search tool impacts on your site's traffic.

TOP TIPS FROM CATHERINE GLUCKSTEIN, PRESIDENT OF DATA ANALYTICS SPECIALIST SUMALL

- Use data to gain insights into how your social media and marketing activity affects customer activity, sales trends and other correlations. Then let that information influence your next marketing move.
- Use insights from data to drive your SEO. Strive to reach the point where a brief but highly insightful glance at your metrics helps you refine - and then refine again - your key search terms.
- Share your most compelling content on

of a promotion.

It is still the case that companies claiming to be able to get your business to the top of a Google search page can't guarantee this in any shape or form. Google states there is no 'priority submit' service that gives any kind of favour to one company over another. When it comes to SEO, content is still king. The Google search spider that indexes your site is looking for high quality content that other sites have linked to. If your business is going to spend resources on SEO, developing engaging content should be your number one priority.

"Small businesses should first work out what they want to achieve from having a site and work backwards from these goals," James Doncaster, search marketing manager at public relations firm White Space, says. "Too often people will jump upon the latest marketing trend without thinking about the end game, which is usually about making money. Work out these goals and be careful not to rely on one or two marketing channels. If you blend offline and digital, you'll often see the best of both worlds."

Search marketing is still a cost-effective method of reaching an audience. All marketers are increasing their spend across digital channels, including search, so keeping up to date with the changes made to how it works is critical. Luckily SEO website Moz.com has done all the hard work for you, providing an update on changes as

a cost-effective method of reaching an audience"

search results - can increase click throughs from search pages. I believe if you are well connected on Google+ it has a correlation to improved rankings for articles on your topic too."

In addition, businesses that rely on search should pay close attention to recent developments that look set to transform how search is used. Caragh McKenna, group account director of SEO at internet firm The Search Agency, explains the changes:

"Google has recently taken the broad scope of results one step further with the release of Hummingbird. Hummingbird is the largest algorithm change since 2010 and sees Google presenting semantic results that no longer force the user to search in 'robot keywords', but instead allows the user to ask questions where a variety of answers may prove applicable. This not only integrates deeper search, but also facilitates voice search - the next frontier for all the major search engines."

Small business owners have a range of tools they can use to leverage search to its best advantage. Google Analytics allows you to measure

social media to not only gain traffic from your audiences on each channel, but from search engines over time. In the end, engaging with real people is what social media helps you do on a daily basis. This gives you the opportunity to build the trust of your audience.

- Keep your website updated with fresh and relevant content on a frequent basis. If the social media profiles associated with your website are active with frequent, quality updates, the search engines take into consideration that your business is authentic, engaged and valuable to readers.
- Create emails that reach your customers directly and keep providing points of interest that will tempt users back to your site, as these are the biggest drivers of traffic. Often current and potential customers just need a prompt to return, but it should offer some added value so as not to end up deleted without that coveted site visit.

COMPELLING CONTENT

"Businesses must work on creating unique and

compelling content that people want to read and share and work on earning links from relevant sites," Simon Burslem of digital marketing specialist SiteVisibility says. "There are good reasons Google rolls out its updates as the search engine continues in its quest to make sure it is delivering the most relevant content and sites to their users."

Kathryn Dawson, creative director at web company Strategy Internet Marketing, says there are no short cuts to SEO success: "It is all about genuine, old-fashioned marketing principles - having a great product or service you sell at the right price to the right target audience with outstanding customer service." **MM**

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