

eBook

THE SEO SURVIVAL

guide



WEIDERTGROUP
full-service inbound marketing agency

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INTRODUCTION

With an average of **3 billion web queries every day**, internet search is critical to gaining an edge over your competition; it also puts pressure on you to optimize your website, its content and your online activity to attract search engines. Search engine optimization (SEO) has become standard practice for marketers as a way to be found in search to attract qualified traffic and leads.

In 2012, SEOmoz.com outlined some important developments in the search environment and SEO:

- ➔ Today, more than 75% of all clicks within search results are for organic versus paid links
- ➔ Content creation is becoming the predominant SEO and social media strategy because it produces the best qualitative results
- ➔ The most popular forms of marketing content are blog posts, social media, articles and guides, and press releases
- ➔ Google's search algorithm is changing between 500 and 600 times per year
- ➔ Continuous search engine research is becoming more and more important for SEO maintenance
- ➔ The correlation between social media sharing and inbound links is proof that brand social media signals are becoming a dominant force in maintaining SEO

This SEO Survival Guide is aimed at helping you understand the right questions to ask about your website's SEO and identifying the right components for your SEO strategy.

1

SEARCH ENGINE RESEARCH



*on-page SEO, keywords,
off-page SEO*

Search Engine Algorithm Bias

SEO techniques fall into two categories: White Hat strategies and Black Hat strategies.

White Hat strategies build SEO through high-quality, content-based techniques, strong keyword usage, and authoritative link building. **Black Hat strategies** are those that are gradually being outlawed by search engines, like keyword stuffing and link farming.

There are misconceptions about both categories, and combating them is a critical step in the SEO process.

"Rank is all that matters."

Although rank will always have importance in search, it's important to look beyond whether a website holds the first or second position. Today, click thru rate (CTR) in search engine results pages (SERPs) is becoming more influenced by how your position appears to the user. Great page titles, the right URL and description, and Rel=Author/Google Authorship images are some of the top factors for search engines today, and it's proven that SERP listings with an image of a real person will always trump the listing that looks built by a program.

"My content can only have one topic."

There's nothing wrong with focusing on a niche vertical with content, but all business should be open to including multiple broad topics. A larger content reach can earn online signals that can boost the entire website. Even if you're in a niche industry, there are always connections to other topics to bring in more potential leads.

"Twitter & Facebook are the only social media that matter."

This misconception stems from mainstream media's focus on them. A strong web presence is one that targets its audience effectively, and that might require targeting lesser-known social media platforms. For example, getting aggressive with StumbleUpon can yield tremendous results and Google+ is proving to have a growing importance for SEO.

"I need to target high search volume keywords."

Chunky middle and long tail keywords will yield more qualified traffic than using the head match keywords everyone is using. As an example, by targeting the search term "whey protein ingredients for commercial dairy applications," you will get more qualified traffic than people searching "whey protein."

"I only need to do SEO for my website."

Search engines weigh multiple sources on the web, including social media platforms and online press releases, so optimization must be executed for everything you do online – videos, image alt tags, Twitter updates, etc.

"Search engines only search text content."

Although textual content is important, because it's readily searchable, don't underestimate the power of video, images and other content such as SlideShare decks.

"There's no simple way to increase traffic on my website."

The Internet is full of simple, often overlooked methods for increasing traffic, like boosting your site's load speed, employing Google webmaster tools, and enhancing your social media presence with a new tool like HootSuite.

Adapting Your SEO Strategy to Search Engine Updates

With Google's Hummingbird update, Google put further emphasis on quality content, not just quantity. White Hat, or authentic, credible tactics, have been given increased importance. Google has cracked down on Black Hat tactics more than before and has issued many penalties. Many websites have found themselves in trouble due to the recent slew of updates from Google.

What Search Engines Are Looking For On-Page:

- ➔ **Quality content** – Authentic, print-quality content that is written with the reader in mind, not Google, is highly valued. Google's focus has drastically shifted towards linking quality content with questions that searches have
- ➔ **Site architecture** – Simple, usable architectures that allow search engines to easily "crawl" through your content scores big points with the Panda algorithm. If a search engine cannot find your content, a human browser probably can't either
- ➔ **Page titles & descriptions** – HTML titles and tags help crawlers identify the content on each of your site's pages. Make sure the titles contain relevant keywords to clearly identify to search engines (and visitors) what content will be covered on each page, and keep them clean. No keyword stuffing!
- ➔ **Answered questions** – Google is now looking for answers to questions that users enter into the search engine. Keywords are just one aspect to this. Your writing must be informative and educational, not stuffed with keywords. Natural writing is seen as a plus to Google now since readers value that content much more than anything written with Google in mind

The on-page content is just the first 25% of what the Panda algorithm is looking for. The other 75% is all about off-page SEO techniques.

What Search Engines Are Looking For Off-Page:

- 1. Quality links** – When trusted, quality and respected websites create links to a company's website, these links tell Google that credible sources find your content valuable
- 2. Link text** – Links with keyword-rich link text can still be used, but it's important to use variations of this text that users are looking for. For lower quality links, it's better not to use keyword rich link text and instead use your brand name.
- 3. Link authority** – Link authority is a roughly quantified measure of whether a website is a truly trusted authority or not in a given field or area. By building content and producing a strong brand that people trust, using strategic inbound marketing, companies can gradually gain stronger trust authority.

The other key to understanding Google's algorithm updates is to keep track of negative practices that you will be penalized for. Here are some of the most important updates:

- ➔ **Paid links** – Purchasing links in hopes of better rankings is now a major violation. Of course, there are ways to get around this rule. Specifically, pay-per-click links via Google AdWords or other credible options are exceptions. The links that Google targets the most are those that are created for free between websites that normally wouldn't have any business with each other
- ➔ **Blocking** – If your site has been blocked from search results by any person or organization, Google sees this as a hit to your trustworthiness and credibility
- ➔ **Duplicate content** – Google is now on the hunt for duplicate content on the web. Penalties are being handed out to sites that have duplicate content either on their site or on other sites. It doesn't matter in the eyes of Google if this has been done deliberately or not

Organizations that play by the rules and focus on improving their SEO by following Google's guidelines will improve their likelihood of being found by just the right audiences.



Over-optimized Sites

Google's updates are also aimed at penalizing over-optimized websites to put an end to web spam, focusing on websites that:

- ➔ Use keyword stuffing
- ➔ Use content from an original content source without attribution or credit for original source
- ➔ Present different content to visitors than what was shown to search engines
- ➔ Use too many unnatural or paid inbound links

Every organization with a site should make sure they weren't affected by this change in the search rules. Google's Webmaster Tools is the best resource to check and see if your site has been negatively affected by Google's updates.

Keyword Research

Since the latest Google update, Hummingbird, the role of keywords in SEO has been reduced. Google no longer values individual sets of entered in the metadata. Instead, Google places an emphasis on the content of each page.

Keywords should still have a role in your SEO work, specifically for the on-page copy of your website. Unfortunately, Google has made keyword search data unavailable to users. Google also eliminated their free Keyword Tool and made other keyword tools obsolete.

The best place to gauge keyword traffic is now the Google Keyword Planner. This is a free tool that caters toward pay-per-click (PPC) advertisers but can still be utilized for organic keyword research. The Google Keyword Planner is similar to the previous Keyword Tool and shows you a keyword's monthly search volume, both globally and locally (local meaning U.S. searches). It also provides information on the competitiveness of the keyword (in relation to PPC campaigns) and Google's recommended alternatives.

The goal with Google's Keyword Planner is to target relevant keywords for a specific product or service while ensuring that selections are receiving a good level of monthly search volume.

You can also utilize the keyword tool offered by Bing once you create an account. Bing's tool is for PPC campaigns similar to Google's but can still be adapted for organic keyword research. The keyword data from Bing is usually similar to the results of Google even though Bing uses a different search algorithm.

Whichever keyword tool you decide to go with is the one you should stick with. Bouncing between different keyword tools will muddle your results and have you running in circles. The varied keyword traffic numbers will be confusing since each keyword tool is sampling from different servers and algorithms.

Page titles and page descriptions are still important to Google. Instead of writing them to cater towards Google, write your page descriptions and page titles for the user. Google's algorithm reads pages similar to how an actual person reads and will penalize pages for keyword stuffing and awkward writing just to fit keywords in. You want to be descriptive and honest, but you still need to stand out.

The next step is to investigate how your website or blog ranks for specific keywords in the SERP for that particular search query. This technique will help clarify which keywords need to be targeted to rise in the page rankings. Using Google, it's important to be logged out of any Google account when looking for the accurate SERP. When a Google user is logged in, SERPs change to reflect his or her past searches.

These tips are the beginning of a keyword research strategy. By continuing to tune and adjust to new information, you'll build a more targeted collection of keywords that will grow and shape your SEO strategy.



2

CONTENT CREATION



*blogs, eBooks,
visual content, etc.*

Creating Optimized Content

The paramount best practice in SEO today is strong content creation. Regardless of the impact of off-page techniques like consistent link-building and keyword maintenance, all search algorithms look for a foundation of high-quality, relevant content that users can use to answer their questions.

Content aimed at optimizing for SEO should follow five key parameters:

- 1. Content is always important.** Fresh content (i.e. text, video, images) on a website or blog encourages search engines to visit more frequently, increasing the number of website pages that become indexed. Each indexed page is then an opportunity for your target to find your site when conducting a search.
- 2. When businesses produce fresh content frequently, search performance accelerates quickly.** New blog articles, page content, landing pages videos, etc., all draw search engine's attention.
- 3. The best way for a website to gain organic, non-paid links is by creating quality content that people want to reference and link to.** Blogs are a format that many users find valuable, as well as strong landing pages, downloadable content offers, or multimedia. These type of natural, **"earned links" improve SEO credibility.**
- 4. SEO is becoming increasingly reliant on social media.** By orienting content toward targeted social media, marketers make it easier for users to share. LinkedIn, Google+ and Twitter are particularly strong devices for promoting good content and building social links.
- 5. Websites are meant to convert traffic into leads** and leads into new business, and advanced content can be the ticket to capturing those leads and sales. By requiring users to complete a form in exchange for content, business can also learn what those leads' needs and challenges are and get good, qualitative data about their content strengths and weaknesses. Lead conversion may be aimed at the eventual sale, but it can also serve marketers' SEO needs.

Optimizing Content for SEO and the Web

Once a content strategy is established, companies usually see a significant acceleration in SEO improvement and traffic. One of the keys to making on-page content impact SEO, is to ensure that the website's speed keeps up with the rest of the world's fast pace.

Web users have become accustomed to web pages loading quickly. If they don't, people move on. Search engines understand this, so when their crawlers get held up dissecting a website's content because of page load speed, it works against the overall search rank.

There are four content optimization techniques that will help boost a site's load speed:

- 1. Large, high res images slow load time.** Using the main photo editor on your computer or a free tool such as Smush.it, photos and custom graphics should be reduced to 72 DPI, with pixel dimensions set for the approximate size needed. Downsizing an image using a standard HTML editor will only change the appearance on the screen; the browser still has to load the full image, which can be 3x as large.
- 2. An image's file type can help decrease its file size and load time.** Stick with compressed image file types like JPG, PNG, and GIF. Your web design should not include unnecessary graphic elements. There are times when it's necessary to use a custom graphic to display stylized text (i.e. a logo, special header, or ads), but the more you leverage CSS for displaying specific fonts, the faster the page will load.
- 3. Never keep video footage in its original recorded format if it's not optimized for the web.** Even the simplest editing software, such as iMovie or Windows Movie Maker, can optimize video content effectively. Another option is to host it on a site like Vimeo or YouTube. This option keeps your website loading quickly and stores the content on the host site.
- 4. If you're using a social video host (e.g. Youtube), the options for SEO expand immensely.** Starting up a YouTube account really means opening another content channel and social media hub – both require regular maintenance. Companies making that choice for the first time have to be sure to do the right kind of keyword research for YouTube optimization, carefully describing each video with keyword-rich tags, promoting the YouTube channel by actively promoting videos, and securing inbound links just like another webpage.

3

LINK BUILDING TECHNIQUES



*directory links, social
links, trade links, etc.*

Link Building: **75% of SEO depends on it**

While every page on the website should be optimized, incorporating the right long-tail keyword phrases, these strategies really account for just 25% of SERP performance. The other 75% of SEO is all about having strong, reliable links. While your control over outside links is somewhat limited, there are five main principles of link-building that can boost a website's page rank if applied correctly.

- ➔ **Submit your website's URL to appropriate online directories.** Start with the common local directory listings such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing. Then Focus on high-quality niche directories within your industry. It's safer to now use your brand name as the link text, but for higher-quality directories, varied keyword-rich link text is a good move.
- ➔ **Content creation has a huge impact on link-building too.** Every piece of content on a website has the potential to be linked, whether it's a blog, an online newsroom, or some other frequently updated page. Based on a single year of high-quality daily blogging alone, Weidert Group experienced an increase of 200% in linking domains. In that same time period, the site's link credibility score jumped from 4.1 to 5.4.
- ➔ **Another key business strategy in link-building is utilizing B2B and personal networks.** These relationships build credible links across many online sources, including networks like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. In particular, posting comments on other blogs, making helpful remarks that indicate thought leadership, and remembering to share content reciprocally are all important networking actions that can really build SEO-enhancing links.

By using Google Alerts or other social monitoring tools for specific terms related to your industry, you can monitor when others are posting questions or discussions related to these terms and then join in the conversation with helpful insights – even share a link to a blog post or article from your company in relation to the topic within your comment.

- ➔ **Active participation in blogs** through commentary is a way to actively network while generating the possibility of growing link opportunities. Often, regular interaction can earn active bloggers the opportunity to write as a guest blogger on other sites. In guest-writing opportunities, it's important to incorporate strong keyword strategy while subtly taking advantage of the opportunity to link to one's own site. Guest bloggers are typically seen as authorities on a subject, so readers view their links as very credible
- ➔ **Repurposing your blogs and other content to create advanced content** can lead to huge improvements in SEO. Whitepapers, videos, presentations, eBooks, and infographics are standard options for advancing content for interested audiences. The potential for these types of content to gather links is high, especially if they are accessible, well designed, and unique

Keep in mind that not all links are created equal. There are good reasons why directory links are only the first step – they are not nearly as valuable as strong, social links built on good content. Links from media, trade associations, powerful brands, education sites or government are key to gaining great SERP rank quickly.

Geographic SEO

For many small or local businesses, global domination of SERPs is not the goal. Instead, geography plays a large part in determining which customers they serve. The on-page aspects of geographic SEO are obvious, and many businesses already use them well: local terms within the on-page meta data and page content, ongoing blogging efforts, etc. However, to ensure a business is reaching the right audience within a specific target region, it's important to have a solid strategy in place for localized link-building.

Within a specific geographic scope, directory usage can be a real advantage. There are three tips for targeting a specific geographic area with directories:

- ➔ **Register with Google+.** It's the staple for securing the local search for any business. Creating an account on the site is free, and it usually only requires 15 minutes for the profile to be complete
- ➔ While Google+ is probably the most important local directory option, **Yahoo! Local and Bing Business Portal are also important geographic SEO boosters.** Both offer free listing options and the additional inbound link can help raise a website's credibility, even if the search is through Google
- ➔ **Niche directories really make the difference for localizing SEO strategy.** There are a variety of resources readily available, outlining how to select directories strategically based on specific business characteristics
- ➔ In addition to directories, **review sites offer a huge advantage to local businesses** because search engines place a lot of weight on customer reviews (as do prospective customers). In fact, 77% of online shoppers use online reviews to make a purchasing decision. Like directories, many review sites allow businesses to make profiles, which encourage their customers to share their experience. Review sites have the potential to grow links a bit more because customers can actively share their experience in social media and in commentary.
- ➔ **Foursquare can also be a valuable platform,** especially for local retailers and restaurants. Already, Facebook is a common medium for businesses to grow a loyal customer base. Any of these signals can improve geographic links, especially when there are clear connections between social efforts and the home website.