

You've heard of SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), but you know little about it, how you can do it, and whether you genuinely need it. Here's a fact, everyone needs SEO if they have any chance of making an impact with your digital marketing. Even if you only operate locally, there is still a need for online presence. At the same time, online presence demands some digital wizardry to put you above the competition. I will share some simple SEO tips that you can implement for your business.

## **What Is Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to Your Business?**

SEO is how you create an online presence, which will optimise your chances of search engines finding you, and putting your business on a page that potential clients will see. If you want people who need your services to see your business, you need to invest a little time and effort into optimising what you do online.

You don't need an SEO agency or a team of experts to make some significant improvements to your online presence.

How search engines rank businesses depends on many factors that are almost always changing. However, some rules of SEO are perennial, and you can't go wrong when you follow them.

## **Small and Medium-Sized Business SEO Focus**

As a small business owner, perhaps just starting up or trying to grow your business, you probably have very little budget for SEO advisory or too little time to learn all the essentials for yourself. However, if you want to make sure your business is and stays successful, you will need to focus your optimisation skills on the things that will make a difference to your business.

There are several areas of SEO that you can control and influence, quickly, and won't demand too much expertise or time.

### **Website**

The website is the baseline for almost ALL online presence. A website is how you talk about your business. It's a way to speak to interested clients and shows how your business is the right option for their needs. Everything you do online will lead your clients back to your website. If you have no online 'home base', you will never attract or engage any person who wants to know about your services.

Think about that for a second. When virtually every pocket, handbag or backpack has a smartphone in it how do people search for and find a business for the service they need? No, they don't check the local press or dig out the local Yellow pages; they search online.

Some people start up their businesses, relying entirely on social media to act as their online face. Social media is a fantastic tool, but it can never replace the business website. When you have a professional-looking business website, it sends a subconscious message to your clients – “I've made an effort. This company is professional and committed to success.”

You have significantly more control over the content, display and appearance of a website, so optimising for your online visibility is in your hands.

### **Content & User Intent**

Whenever anyone talks about essential SEO, they can't go anywhere without talking about content. Yes, you've heard that “Content is King!”, however, the material that you include in your website has to reflect and align with the **INTENT** of your potential clients.

You've probably heard a lot about keywords and key phrases that will help you target the search terms that people use; however, short keywords and phrases are less useful for small businesses. You need to target the people who intend to use your services with long-tail phrases that people search when researching their intentions.

**Example:** A divorce lawyer needs clients who want a divorce. Simply using “divorce” as a keyword will include not only those clients who want a divorce, it will also align with those trying to avoid divorce, searching for a definition, or looking for “the effects of divorce on family pets?”

So instead of thinking you'll get lots of web traffic based on the repeated use of the word “divorce” across all of your website pages, consider how people search for a divorce lawyer. Key phrase research is essential. Your best sources for keywords are your competitors, your inspirations (larger companies whose successes you hope to achieve) and even those that seem smaller and more insignificant than your own company.

Another excellent place to find common key phrases is your google search bar. Type in the first word of a relevant key phrase and see what Google gives in the suggested autocompletes.

## **Content Marketing**

Website content is the primary way to make your business services more interesting to search algorithms and real people alike. However, unless people know about your website, and visit often, you are unlikely to get much uptake from search engines. Another crucial aspect of SEO is content marketing.

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Marketing the content of your website is where social media channels become a vital aspect of your SEO. Social media is the perfect way to distribute your content to friends, family and customers, as well as broadening your reach with boosted posts. There are far more social media channels than Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The ones you use will depend on the people you want to reach and your location.

Beyond social media, there is also email content marketing. Email marketing has less instantaneous click rate than ads and social media; however, it also has the greatest ROI.

## **Authority & Credibility**

Industry authority and credibility are two sides of the same coin. Authority you can build from writing informative, educational, and even entertaining things about your business. Credibility is when someone else supports your authority. It's a vote of confidence that you really can't buy by traditional means.

You want to do a bit of research on your local area and your industry. Have you ever Googled "Best [insert business] in [location]"? It's not just about ratings and on-site reviews. You'll find individuals, ranking sites, and much more listing the best *whatever* in *wherever*. Now think about your potential clients using the same search terms?

Authority takes some time to build; the results are not instantaneous. However, it is worth the effort to create the content that will grow your authority in your field.

Credibility can also take time to grow, but there are some short-cuts you can use by collaborating with other businesses. There are influencers, bloggers, and companies and publishers that write these lists from their experiences, but also for exposure. Bloggers want more readers (and added reach) for their blog. Influencers are important because they already have authority. They know their stuff, so if they recommend you, people believe them. Local publications can run stories, case studies, or even spot-light features in return for cash or even a “freebie” (often used in giveaways and competitions) or a published voucher or discount code.

### **Link Building**

Both content marketing and credibility lead to link building. Many years ago, there were entire companies dedicated to creating “link farms” where companies would pay for pointless links to their companies and products in the strangest of places—search engine manipulation at its finest. Thankfully search engines have become more sophisticated, and hundreds of links from unrelated sources are not valuable in terms of SEO. The search engines have learned to distinguish between links from credible and relevant sources and those previously mentioned link farms.

Links shared between friends, families, clients and responders to ad posts are relevant and credible. A link to your beauty salon from a local make-up artist blogger is relevant and valuable. Conversely, a link to your landscaping business from an article about Mediterranean holidays, is ignored or even used as a black mark against you in search results.

### **Local Search**

For the smaller company looking to improve their online presence, their SEO MUST focus on their target audience, or they will not achieve the results they want. Small and medium-sized businesses that provide in-person and hands-on services or location-specific services will need to target their SEO on local search parameters. There’s no avoiding it. Companies that operate online only may want to reach global communities, but they’re better served by focussing on a specific region first.

Local search is an easy first step into optimised search engine results: Claiming and completing your Google Business Profile. Anyone who uses Google to search locally, whether that’s on a mobile device or PC, the first organic result will be a map and a list of local businesses matching the criteria. The map results are all businesses with Google Business profiles.

## **It's not that much SEO work, I promise**

When you look at the list of things to do, to implement SEO practises, it seems like a lot of time and effort that you just don't have. However, when you break things down into little chunks, it's not that much time at all. The best thing is that something like the website or setting up Google Business, the "big" stuff, is a one-time task. Even with things like keyword research, it will take a little time to do the initial study. Still, after that, it's just a case or occasionally updating your relevant keywords, as language varies with fashion and search engines update their algorithms.

Creating additional content need not be a formidable task, while regularly posting is advocated, you don't need a high-frequency schedule of content creation. When you are blogging about your business, we consider one new piece of content per week perfectly acceptable and enough to keep people coming back and web spiders to notice.

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