



Multi Channel Marketing

FOR THE MULTI CHANNEL WORLD

Simple SEO Plan

Need Help?

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What is SEO?

Let's start with what it is not. It's not a 'get visitors fast' technique that you can do with automated bots (software programs) that do everything for you. It's not using spun or copied content. It's not buying 100s of links to 'get ranked number 1 on Google' because that will do more damage than good.

It is a steady series of things you do, regularly to build trust and credibility with both the search engines and consumers.

SEO or **S**earch **E**ngine **O**ptimisation is, at its simplest, a number of techniques used to build visibility on the web for any website/business.

To understand why SEO is necessary, no matter how ill regarded companies who provide SEO services may be, you have to understand what a search engine needs to survive.

A search engine needs users. It needs people to use its web search facility when they want information of any kind. This is because it earns its revenue from advertising, the more users it has, the more it can charge and the more money it makes for its owners/shareholders.

To make sure that more people use it than its competitors a search engine needs to provide the best results. What SEO does, or at least what good SEO does is to help the search engine provide those results.

A warning for you – as techniques prove successful, “spammers” (those people who continually try and beat the search engines to rank low value sites) will latch on to those techniques and use them in a way that contravenes search engine (and in particular Google) terms and conditions. When that happens the search engines take steps to stop them.

That means you can get caught in the crossfire. Let's take guest blogging as an example. In times past, posting an article or blog post on someone else's site and having a link pointing back to your site was a great technique to build both links and awareness for you and/or your business.

Since that time however, guest blogging has become the realm of “spammers” who're trying to do something that they're not supposed to - according to the terms & conditions of search engines and Google in particular.

Now Matt Cutts head of the anti-spam team at Google has come out and confirmed that unless you're posting on a site like CNN or BuzzFeed, then guest

blogging is no longer a good technique. Of course, guest blogging as a way of driving traffic to your site is still good, just not to gain higher rank/visibility in the search engines.

So what do you do to make your site more visible? Perhaps the first thing is to let go of the desire to rank number one on Google. True, Google gets the lion's share of the search market so you might think that without it you're dead in the water. It's also true that in an ideal world, you'd want to rank well on many keywords, which in turn would bring you many new customers, lots of profit and solve all your problems.

The first part of the problem is that Google is in a constant war with "spammers", those who manipulate rankings in ways that Google and other search engines proscribe. So anything you do can always end up being something that generates a 'Google slap' - which means your site drops in the rankings, your visitor count drops and your profits dip.

Second part of the problem is that you have no control over what your competitors do to signal to Google and other search engines their relevance to any search term.

Despite all this, SEO is a vital part of marketing your business online, which is a vital part of marketing your business off line.

Let's take a look at one technique or signal that has been important from the dawn of search.

Links

Consider a link back to your site as a combination of the following.

- Signpost leading to your site
- Vote for the content/authority of your site
- When 'keyword rich anchor text' is used it reinforces the 'theme' of your site

Google did at one point try not using links as a signal and nearly broke the web! Well OK, not nearly broke the web, but it did not end well and so they rapidly went back to using links as a signal. However, they did 'downgrade' the value of some links.

Links therefore, are still a very important component of your search marketing efforts. Important places from which you want to have links pointing to your site

include the major directories, local and niche directories and social media profiles (if they're active).

Creating great content will garner links too, as people find, read and share your content. Remember, today rank is ridiculous and visibility is vital. Rank as a metric of success is no longer viable because it's so difficult to get a true rank for any site. Search is so personalised nowadays that two people could search for similar things and get different results. Your search history plays a large part in what you get shown, as does what you do on a site. If you click on a result and then click straight back to the search page, that site is likely to drop in rank for you. A friend visiting the same site who stays on it, visits a couple of pages and either comments, fills out a form or clicks to call the business, is likely to find it ranking higher on subsequent searches.

Which is the true rank? Even Google does not assign a static rank but gives an 'average' rank to take into account where a page is in the results for different searches by different people.

So when you're measuring how successful your online marketing efforts are, try using visibility, not rank, as one of your metrics.

There are many sites online that promise to get you hundreds of 'Google safe' backlinks. A very dangerous thing to do! If you only have 10 links pointing to your site, then suddenly get 100, then get no more, Google will view this as "spammy". They will either ignore the links totally (and as those links are not going to be on highly visited sites they won't drive traffic) or send you a 'bad link' notice, making the links worthless at best and damaging at worst.

Building good links then is good, building bad links is bad.

Content

The next evergreen signal is content. It never ceases to amaze me how many people think that creating good content is somehow a new thing in search marketing. The truth is that while you could 'game' the system with poor quality content, it never worked for the long haul.

Creating quality content is about creating content for people not search engines.

Too many companies, and that includes some SEO providers, still create content that is not only useless but can be downright damaging. It's still true that you may get a short term boost from poor quality content but, Google will find it and when it does, it will punish you for it.

Creating content is about answering questions that people have, helping them to solve a problem and much more.

Content Creation and Curated Content

Every day I search for interesting content for both myself and my clients. I read a lot of different articles, some are tech based, some are lifestyle based, some are automotive, some are.... Well I guess you get the picture, I read a lot of 'stuff'!

The reason I do that is that I'm always looking for ideas on content creation, looking for content I can curate and comment on.

I came across an article today that at first I thought was a real gem. Here's the link - <http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2013/07/generating-traffic-catchy-content-ideas.html>

Now as I said, at first I thought this was going to be a great piece that I could share; one that would add value to my offerings and be of use and interest to my followers.

The first part of the article makes a lot of sense as content is indeed what you need to create on a regular basis if you want the likes of Google to pay attention to you. The problem is creating unique, compelling, entertaining and informative content. After all, how many ways can you tell someone about bottled water or mil spec packaging? Which is where content curation comes in. Instead of having to add to the millions of pages already talking about these subjects you would find and curate existing articles or other formats.

You, in effect, become the Smithsonian of your market niche because you save your followers time by presenting them the best content (in link form) on your specialist subject. Sometimes you may just come across something that you Tweet out as a link, or share on Facebook or Google+ as just a link and a quick comment. At others you may do what I'm doing and write your own take on an article you've found.

Whichever way you do it, your job is to provide not only good information but to make it easy for people to act on that information. This is where I found the article a little lacking. Yes it has some great ideas, which I'm not going to duplicate here. You can read them and decide for yourself which ones make sense for you.

It gives you ideas but doesn't, in my opinion, go far enough, because it doesn't give you any resources to help you implement those ideas.

So my first addition to this part would be tell you to go to Google and Bing and search for 'trending topics' - because you want your content to be fresh and of the moment, even though you may actually curate content that was published months or even years ago. If it's good evergreen content, especially if it ranks well, then adding it to your list of curated content is a good thing. But the subject matter has to be current.

<http://www.google.com/trends/hottrends> takes you to where Google curates the trending queries. If you can find something here that you can spin and link to your niche you could get a nice bump in traffic.

<http://www.google.com/trends/topcharts> everyone loves 'top tens' and at this link Google curates the most popular 'top ten charts' songs to space objects. Children's TV to Politicians, whisky to coffee and lots in between. It may inspire you to produce your own 'top ten'.

<http://mashable.com/category/trending-topics/> this site will always have something to offer, even if it's got nothing in your particular niche it is a sea of great content ideas.

<http://www.hashtags.org/> will give you a list of trending hashtags and <http://www.hashtags.org/trending-on-twitter/> will give you what's trending on Twitter.

<http://whatthetrend.com/> has general subjects and if you investigate you'll see how sites like Huffington Post use the hashtag to create content that could pull in visitors.

<http://www.quora.com/Trending-Topics-online#> has the trending questions, well worth mining for anything you can answer or use. Maybe even a 'top 3' questions answered for your niche?

<http://www.techspot.com/trending.html> if you're in a tech based niche then Techspot may be of use.

<http://trendspottr.com/welcome.php> is another site that can give you ideas. It also has a widget generator you can embed so that people coming to your site or blog can get the latest news direct from you.

Finally of course there's <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/trending-topics> which has an eclectic and often funny series of trending topics for you to browse through.

There are of course many more; one of which is Lumi.do which builds a page around your search habits and brings in new content as it's published.

Your challenge is to take these resources and curate some content, giving your own take or spin and make it relevant to your niche. Then share it with us on Facebook; who knows you may create the next viral phenomenon!

Apart from website configuration, these are the two most important factors affecting your rank/visibility.

Social media is important because this introduces you to potential customers. It's where you can talk to them, ask them for feedback, reward them with coupons and generally get to know each other.

Enough with the background! On to the PLAN.

Simple Local SEO Plan

Either as a start-up or small local business you need to have a plan, a plan that gives you the best chance of success in the most cost effective way. This plan from Aspect Digital Marketing give you the road map you need to do just that.

This plan is for local businesses who want customers to walk in the door, book online, donate, or signup to a newsletter, course or other local interaction. Ecommerce websites need a slightly different approach but this plan lays a great foundation for them too.

The plan is broken down into four parts.

- Introducing your business to consumers and search engines
- Allowing both consumers and search engines to get to know you
- Educating both consumers and search engines about what you do and how
- Converting consumers into customers.

Each part is integral to your success and you need to pay attention to all of them.



Introduction

This consists of two prongs of approach. The first is introducing yourself to the search engines. After all, if they don't know about you, anyone searching won't find you.

Second, is introducing yourself to consumers. Again, if they don't know about you, they won't look for you. This is 'branding' because a brand search, even locally, converts at a much higher level than a generic search.

Introducing your business to the search engines.

Before we get onto how you introduce yourself to the search engines, let's briefly touch on the way your website is built. By this I mean, is it straight HTML, PHP, ASP. Is it on the WordPress or Drupal platform? Ask your website designer/developer which platform you're on and ensure that they've given you the following.

- The design must be responsive, fast loading and mobile phone compliant
- Unique keyword targeted page titles (the URL of the page)

- Unique and enticing page descriptions (what encourages people to click)
- All images must have an alt text tag (your developer will know what this is)
- At least 500 words per page, no keyword stuffing
- H1 tags – like a newspaper headline. Only one per page
- H2 and H3 tags to enable readers to quickly ‘scan’ a page to check it’s what they want
- At least one link to either another page on the site or a non-competing resource
- A strong call to action (CTA) tell your site visitor exactly what to do next

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As an example 😊

Pages you must have on the site include

- About Us – info about you and your business – including photos of key staff
- Contact Us – a page dedicated to your contact details showing how people reach you.
- Privacy Policy if you’re collecting information
- Services or product page
- Your NAP (Name, Address, Phone) should be created with micro-formats from Schema.org

Now that you have your website squared away it’s time to start introducing your business to the search engines. It’s worth remembering that SEs prefer to find you by following links from sites they already know and trust.

personal blogs. Again, this is to provide visibility, reinforce locality and build trust.

Introducing Yourself and Your Business to the Consumer

Once you have the above established and have good content on your site, it's time to start introducing yourself and your business to the consumer. For that, you need social media.



Facebook is the place to start, because quite frankly it's the biggest, with the most engaged users. For a small business, if you only use one social platform to talk to people, this would be the one.

Create a business page; make sure the contact/location details match your NAP. Once you're happy with the look of the page, it's time to start posting.

The biggest mistake people make here is that they think of their Facebook page as 'advertising' and just post sales messages. This is a recipe for disaster. Social media is a place where people hang out, chat, get to know each other, ask and give advice, rant or rave about things. In other words, it's **social** and to get the best out of it, you need to be social.

Just for a moment imagine you were in your local coffee shop and a local business owner came in. Then without engaging in any sort of conversation, just started shouting out variations on "Buy Now, Buy From Me, Buy Now" would you want to buy?

No, and neither will anyone else. A social situation is not where you do that sort of thing. Instead, imagine that this local business owner introduced himself and his business, then asked "What can I do to help you?" Or listened to your conversation and offered some advice on how you could solve a problem. Perhaps they might tell a funny story or share an inspiring one.

This is how you proceed on social media platforms like Facebook. Once people start to listen to you (by liking your page) you can post offers or news about what's going on in your business. Not every day (unless something interesting to consumers is happening in your business or industry every day), just once or twice a week.

Share posts from other pages; share videos that make you smile; share inspiring quotes. Ask questions, conduct polls, run competitions. All of these will help people get to know and like you, and you know what they say... people buy from people they like.

Now you've introduced yourself and your business to consumers and search engines, what next?

Getting to Know You - Getting to Know All About You.

This is where you consistently continue to do the things that introduced you. So for the search engines it means continuing to build your local citations and links, as well as links in general. It also means producing great content (that will encourage others to link to it). Don't think that one piece of content a year is going to do it, because it won't.

Search engines don't want you to produce 'thin' content, only there to try and rank well for a particular keyword.

They want you to produce useful interesting content that people (not search engines) value by liking, sharing or commenting on.

So research what questions people ask about your industry or products or services. Sites like Quora and Yahoo Answers will help, as will forums and social media. Find out

what questions people are asking, what their concerns are and what they love about your products or services and build content around that. If you find some questions are very similar, group them together and answer very comprehensively; don't create pieces that answer those similar questions separately. Search engines won't like it, neither will consumers.

Are there statistics around your industry that would make a great infographic? Can you make a 'how to' video. Are there people you could interview? Do you have a strong opinion about something that affects your business? Like new government guidelines or laws.

All of these make great and (hopefully) compelling content. Remember this is something that needs to happen regularly not intermittently with long gaps in



between. Once a month is better than once or twice a year. Once a week is better than once a month, once a day is fantastic. It's difficult for most small businesses to find something compelling to post on their blog every day, but once a month should be achievable. Think of the stories you tell your friends and family about what happens every day in your business. If it interests them, it will probably make good content somewhere.

Persistence here will pay off in the long run and that's what you want; you want your business to be viable for the long term.

Education

Now that people are getting to know you and hopefully liking what they see, it's time to educate them about what you do and how you do it.

This is where, for consumers, your blog comes in. Does your product have special features that you can demonstrate? Does your service do more than people might at first assume? Do you have testimonials from satisfied clients? If so, can you make a blog post from a testimonial with an explanation of what and why the client found the product or service so helpful?

Have you asked customers what they think, how they use it, have they any insights? All of these can help you write good content that can help you educate consumers and turn them into customers.

But what about the search engines? How do you 'educate' them about your business and site? The same way you do consumers really, providing content that engages people who then, like, share and comment about the content.

Let's take a local coffee shop; it's a small local business and has a Starbucks and a Costa Coffee to compete with. How does it educate consumers? After all, the two established chains have very deep pockets but, they have a centralised marketing system. Meaning that the local branches are probably not doing much locally or on Facebook. Yes, they'll have a presence on Facebook but it's usually going to be the corporate page, not the local one.

So, for our independent local coffee shop we could have 'coffee tastings' because unlike the big chains, a smaller coffee shop could try different types of coffee. They could have 'specials' built around a particular coffee and educate people about the coffees they offer on the blog. How about 'barista' training?

Showing people how to make pretty patterns in the foam. Or how to brew the perfect cup of coffee in a French press or drip coffee machine. How about Turkish Coffee? Show people how to do that, what's the difference, how much caffeine is in different coffees, how brewing affects the amount of caffeine.

Then there's the food offered by the local shop, is it home made, made on the premises, bought in? You can find lots of ideas here and can use them to educate your potential customers. Take photos of happy customers (with their permission of course) and use those.

If you're passionate about what you do, about offering a great service to people, you'll find it easy to talk about it and that will educate people and build trust. If, on the other hand, you're not passionate about what you do, well that's going to be a little harder. Start with why you decided to open your own business, think about the steps you had to go through and how they could be turned into content. What happens in the everyday life of the business? Is there something there that you can use?

Press Releases

One thing I've not included here under any section is Press Releases. A well written Press Release can do many things. It can get you in front of journalists who may do an article on you or your business. It builds visibility as your PR gets syndicated. Each placement of your PR on a news site creates a link back to your site as well as providing contact details. So why haven't I mentioned it? Because of the cost, sometimes for a small local business the cost is just not something they can justify.

However, for the business that does pull the money out of the hat, PRs can be a great way to promote your business and get you noticed.

Implementation

Now you have your very simple plan. This is the least you should be doing to gain good visibility across the web. Now you have to implement it and to do that you need to do your research.

Keywords!

At the heart of your strategic plans are the keywords that are relevant to your industry, your customers and your location. When looking at the keywords for

your industry, don't focus too much on the 'vanity' or seed keywords. If you're a small local business in any industry, having too many global visitors who 'bounce' away from your site immediately they see your location could dampen your visibility.

This is because the search engines will monitor how long people stay on your site after finding it via one of those seed keywords. For example: you're a local auto repair shop/garage and you are based in a small place we'll call 'Local Town'. Local Town is based on the west coast of a country. There are two auto repair businesses based here and one goes after the 'seed' keyword 'auto repair' which is high volume and the top keyword for the industry.

Your SEO team, whether in house or outsourced, have shown you the number of searches on average per month. They've given you an 'estimate' of how many visitors ranking for that keyword will bring (around 30% +/- of all searches) and you get excited about the amount of business you're going to get. Sadly, this is not the true picture of search volume for YOUR business.

Here are the figures for the USA that I've just run.

Keyword	Avg Monthly Volume	Location
Auto repair	49500	For all of USA
Auto repair	30	For Local Town

As you can clearly see, going for 'auto repair' isn't going to bring in a huge number of visitors that are actually useful to you. It is true that there are people who live outside 'Local Town' but still search for and would use a repair shop in Local Town. So we can extend our search to include the entire state or county and that gives us a search volume of 4400 average searches per month.

If we now add a location to our keyword research we get a different result, we get 40 searches a month. So do you see the difference? Going for 'auto repair local town' is much more cost effective. Plus, the people who do find you are more likely to stay on the page, which is good for search engines to see.

Now, when you're doing your keyword research in Google Adwords Keyword Tool it will show you related keywords like 'oil change' or 'transmission repair'.

These are also keywords you'd want to target when creating content for your site and for posting on social media.

Your research shouldn't stop there, because when creating content you ideally want that content to be useful and interesting to people - not search engines.

Why are car repairs so expensive?
How do I save money on car repairs?
How do I know my mechanic is not overcharging me?

By doing this you send a strong message to search engines that **your content is relevant and useful to people.**

In the '*Getting To Know You*' section above I mention sites like Quora and Yahoo Answers as well as related forums. These are places where people are asking questions, making comments and voting for those answers. So you can see what particular things people are concerned about and create content that addresses those concerns.

Find groups on sites like Facebook and see what people are talking about there, what they're sharing, liking and commenting on. Again, these show you what people are interested in and what sort of content they like.

You will find that the questions will fall into broad groups, people asking the same question slightly differently. Don't make the mistake of trying to answer each different question within separate pieces of content. Search engines and Google in particular frown on this and it's likely to get you penalised under the 'Panda' rules.

Instead, create a well-rounded piece of content that uses a combination of the questions.

These are a selection of questions that might get asked. They deal with basically the same thing, which is the **cost** of repairing a car.

You could, therefore, write (or get written) a piece of content that deals with the pricing of car repairs, including overheads etc. - answering all the questions that relate to the cost of car repairs. Use real life stories to show why cheaper is not always better. How savings can be made and where. Answer a perennial question about auto repairs by including the answer to 'how do I find a good mechanic?' in the same piece.

You now have a great piece of content that answers questions people have; targets a high volume keyword in a way that will help anyone, no matter where

they live. At this point you may be asking yourself why that's important if most readers are not going to use your service. The answer is simple. Engagement, this is what search engines want your content to do, engage people. If someone from the other side of the country reads this, it's still relevant to them and the time they spend reading (and hopefully commenting) on your content will boost visibility.

Content Distribution

Now that you have some great content you need to get it in front of people. You've listed your site in major and local directories, you've created your social media profiles, you've sent out a press release. How do you go about getting the content you produce regularly in front of people?

Use social media. You've now created a great piece of content that answers questions you know people are asking. Now it's time to tell them it's there. Post a link to the article on your social media and ask people to share it. Boost the post with a small amount of money to ensure it gets seen.

If you've joined the forum, Quora or Yahoo Answers, and joined the conversation in a helpful way, you can post a link to the article in your answer. If you've joined a Facebook group you can post a link to the article or, share the Facebook post that links to the article as a 'resource' for the group.

A note on using Groups, Forums, Answer Sites. There is an etiquette to using all these resources and you should be aware of it.

- Join and watch the group without commenting for a while to get a feel for how the group works.
- Start to engage with people by commenting on their posts, liking their answers etc.
- Do not start to post 'sales' messages at all; use your signature (where appropriate) to link back to your site or Facebook page.
- Only when you've established yourself as a genuine contributor to the group should you link to your content as a 'resource'. Ask for feedback and edit the content accordingly.

Month by Month

Now you have everything in place to keep going and increase your visibility.

- Every month you should research some keywords.
- Create content around those keywords.
- Post to your blog or on social media.
- Look for and create new local citations every month.
- Keep up with what's happening in the world of search so you always use 'best practices'.
- Create different content, video, whitepapers, eBooks, Podcasts.

Finally

Although it may be tempting to stop doing the above list every month, especially as you get busier, do not succumb. It will start to ruin all your hard work. Search engines and in particular Google want to see regular efforts from you, it builds trust and credibility with both search engines and consumers.

If you don't provide consumers with fresh content, they have no reason to keep coming back to your site.

And finally, really finally 😊

Find a good local charity and support it. This makes great content to share on social media, shows you are a caring company, helps the local community and promotes your business locally.

Consult with staff so that you get a consensus of opinion that everyone can get behind. This way everyone will be engaged and that will show in every post, article, video and face to face interaction.

Good luck and much profit

Jacqui Cooper

For Aspect Digital Marketing Ltd

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