

RELEVANCE OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION IN PROMOTING ONLINE BUSINESS

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Abstract

Today we are living in the world of Internet, which has overruled all the geographic barriers and communication hindrances. Internet has turned this huge world into global village and there emerges the era of Electronic Business (e-business) or online business. Electronic Business is the method of conducting business via the Internet. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is one of the most important aspects that most businesses should think about when they start to make their business online. The prospective customers in online business have no location or time constraints compared to a business within a particular locality. Thousands of business websites are created every day around the globe. To promote good sales and to improve brand awareness, just having a website is not enough. There is a need of working hard towards bringing visitors on this new website and converting those visitors to satisfied customers. If the customers are unable to find the website, the chances of making any sales are nil. In this situation the relevance of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) come into sight. SEO aims to make the e-business approachable to a good number of possible and existing customers, which will increase the revenue.

Keywords: SEO; e-business; page rank; on-page SEO; off-page SEO.

1. Introduction

SEO is an organic method of making a search engine friendly website. SEO is a set of practices to make the website and its contents noteworthy and visible to both the search engines and the web users. SEO helps in increasing a website's visibility within the search engines. This is attained by displaying the website on the first or second page of search engine results page (SERPs). A properly optimized website will be ranked high by the search engines. Such optimized websites will appear at the top of search engine results page (SERPs) which can be easily located when someone is looking for the information available on that website. This improves the volume of quality traffic to a web site from search engines and ensures a high return on investment (ROI) and global reach of the business. Majority of the web users never go beyond the first SERP while they perform their search activity ie, the chance of visiting the less ranked websites are very low.

2. Working of Search Engines

Search Engines are online software programs used for finding the relevant websites on the world wide web that contain the search information or keywords entered by the web user. The key rule of SEs is that the search engines can index only text data. Search engines store information about the web pages in an indexed table. The following are the various steps involved in the working of search engines.

- **Crawling** - SEs visits the web or sieve through text on the web pages to see the information contained in it using the program named Spider or Crawler. The frequency of crawling is not predictable and more often it depends on a collection of factors like Page Rank, frequency of updating page content, hyperlinks to a page etc. Each search engine has its own spider program which is different from others. Spider program of Google is named as Googlebot. Yahoo Slurp is the name of the Yahoo web crawler and Bingbot is the name of Microsoft's Bing webcrawler.

- **Indexing** - Information about web pages are stored in an index database for use in later queries. The keywords contained in these pages are added to the index along with the respective webpage path. If the search engine hasn't added a website to its index, it won't be displayed in the search results. SEs constantly builds and updates the index to the web.
- **Processing** - Search Engines do not examine the entire web when a user enters in a search query. Instead the search request is processed by comparing the search query with the contents in the Index. SE simply gathers information according to the search words the user has entered.
- **Relevancy Calculation**- The web pages are assigned certain weights based on page ranking algorithms. The algorithms use mathematical equations to rank them. The factors considered in ranking algorithm involve the location and frequency of keywords on a web page, quality of page content, hyperlinks etc.
- **Retrieving the result** – The search results are displayed, sorted from the most relevant to the least relevant sites, in page wise manner.

3. SEO Techniques

The SEO process includes structuring a web page so that it can be properly indexed by search engines in the most effective way. This is not a onetime approach rather it is an incessant activity for the existence of business. The SEO techniques can be broadly classified into two:

- On-page SEO
- Off-page SEO

3.1. On-page SEO Techniques

On-page optimization means optimizing each page of the website to get higher ranking and maximum visibility within search engines. It includes various techniques that are applied on the text and content of the webpage. On-page SEO includes factors that have direct control over the website; viz page titles, headings, URL names, keywords, page content etc. On-page SEO ensures that the website is search engine friendly.

On page optimization tips:

- **Keyword Optimization** – Properly included relevant keywords in web page is the most important factor in optimizing a website. Keywords are those words that are being typed into search engines by the users in their searching process. The page content must contain right amount of keywords in right places, in order to drive the users to the website. Keywords can be included in the page content, titles, headings, meta Tags, URL, anchor text, page footer etc. Thorough research should be done on selecting and placing keywords into the content. SEs penalizes or ban websites that appear to be made up entirely of keywords (keyword stuffing).
- **Page Content** – The key rule is “Content is the King”. It is strict to provide unique, relevant and useful content in all web pages. Each page contains about 250 – 600 words of unique content with 4 or 5 occurrences of keywords. Content should be easy to read and understand and should be in simple language, without spelling and grammatical mistakes. Web page size should not be more than 150 KB and ideally around 50 KB. The main thing is that the page content should be updated frequently. Never allow content duplication either within the same domain or across domains.
- **Title tag** – Title tag is the most important text on the page that SEs uses to determine what a web page is about. Page titles should be unique and appropriate and the title length should not exceed 70 characters. Always go for brief but descriptive title tag.
- **Headings Tag** - H1 tag is the primary visible page heading in a webpage. Use H1 tag once for your main topic and then use sub heads (H2 to H6) for additional emphasis.
- **Meta Tags** - <meta> tag provides metadata about the HTML document. Metadata is not displayed on the webpage, but it will be machine parsable. Various meta tags are
 - Description meta tag - provides short and unique description about a web page. It is the snippet of the text that SEs displays in the search results.
 - Keyword meta tag - specify words that identify what the page is about. It is a comma separated list of about 7 to 10 keywords.
 - Revise meta tag - defines the last revision of the webpage.
- **Anchor Text or URL naming** – Anchor text is the clickable text that is a hyperlink to another page. URLs should be simple and understandable. URLs should clearly describe what the linked pages are about. It is highly recommended that the website should contain search engine friendly URLs. Choose descriptive, but concise text for URLs and it should contain keywords for that page. Avoid using

excessively keyword-filled or lengthy URLs. It is compulsory to provide only one URL to reach a page.

- Image optimizing - Image file names should reflect what is shown in the image. The "Alt" attribute of tag should specify alternative text for the image if the browser could not display images. Use brief, but descriptive filenames and Alt text. All the images in the website should be stored in a directory of their own. Always use commonly supported file types like jpeg, png, gif, bmp etc.
- Personalized 404 error page – helps in guiding user back to a working page. This 404 page is displayed when the user entered page doesn't exist on the website.
- Avoid dynamic URLs - Dynamically generated URLs contain dynamic part that is not search engine friendly. So try to create static pages whenever possible.
- Frames - Many search engines can't follow frame links.
- Internal Linking – helps users to move around the website and find all the web content. It also ensures that site gets properly crawled by the search engine.
- HTML Validation – The HTML code should be validated using the W3C HTML validator. A web page with HTML errors will not be ranked well in SERPs.
- Use <div> instead of the <table> tag.
- Use bold/strong tag to highlight text.
- Use numbered or bulleted lists to record items.
- Page footer – provide keyword rich web page footers.
- It is better use text links for navigation, rather than image or video links.
- Javascript (JS) and CSS files - Always use external JS or CSS files, instead of inline javascript or CSS in the page. External JS or CSS files make page content more visible to the Search Engine. It is good to optimize the JS and CSS to fit in 2 or 3 files only. Excess use of JS is not advisable, so apply only that code which is most important.
- Breadcrumbs - It is a navigation aid that contains a list of internal links from root to the bottom page. It has the following format: Home page > Section page > Subsection page. It facilitates easy back and forth navigation among pages.
- Robots.txt - A "robots.txt" file is placed in the root directory of the site and it tells SEs which pages are to be visited and are not to be visited.
- Sitemap.xml file – An XML file that lists all the pages in website. XML sitemap ensures that search engine discovers each and every page on the site.
- Directory structure – Create a simple directory structure with several levels of hierarchy. A maximum of 6 levels of hierarchy is sufficient. It helps in easy navigation from a general page to a content specific page. It also include additional information about each webpage, viz when it was last updated, how often content is changed etc.
- Cross - browser compatibility- ensures that the website is displayed consistent across all the browsers.

3.2. Off-page SEO techniques

Off Page SEO refers to all the things that we are not doing directly on our website. This includes techniques like social networking, link building article submission, forum & blog marketing etc to get higher ranking.

- Social Networking Sites – Start the company pages in most popular social networking sites such as; Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ etc. This helps in extending online network of contacts, interaction with friends and most importantly promoting website and thereby growing your online reputation.
- Blogs - Blogging is one of the best ways to promote online business. Keep up to date with latest posts. Post comments on other blogs and add a link to your website in the comments section.
- Social Bookmarking - Submit latest blog posts and pages to popular bookmarking sites, like Stumble Upon, Digg, Delicious, Reddit, etc. Since these sites are updated frequently there is high chance for search engines to crawl that website.
- Quality Link Building – Link Building is the process of getting incoming links for a website. Always try to get high quality links, ie, obtain backlinks from high ranking websites. Backlinks can be obtained to home page as well as internal pages.
- Video sharing - Submit free promotional videos in YouTube, Vimeo etc.
- Image Sharing – post images in Image Sharing sites like photobucket, flickr, etc.
- Online Press Releases - distribute press releases with links to the company web page.
- Article distribution - offer your expertise to other sites by writing guest articles for them with a link back to your site.
- Ask satisfied customers for a link back to your site.
- Domain registration period - Domains that are already registered for years will be valued higher.

4. Conclusion

Internet has become a vital part of our day-to-day lives. Today we can get anything from the internet; from shopping to the latest music. SEO helps in getting your website easily recognized among millions of websites used for various purposes and hence it has forever turned into an extreme requirement for most online businesses. SEO helps customers in locating the business easier and faster with less effort. SEO websites aren't a guarantee of profit, but every serious business looking to make money via online should use SEO techniques to get high page rankings. SEO ensures online presence and helps in grabbing target audience and expanding customer base. SEO facilitates in making high return on investment. Moreover it is a cost-effective way of promoting e-business. Surely businesses that employ SEO have a benefit over those who don't.

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