Learning SEO From The Experts

A Step-By-Step Guide

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Foreword

Search engines have become a core resource for individuals looking for businesses. Because search engines are a larger source of business referrals than the Yellow Pages, businesses no longer need to spend thousands of dollars on advertising in directories and magazines. Every business with a website has the potential to get found by more customers online. The way to do this is through **search engine optimization (SEO)**. This ebook serves as a practical, comprehensive guide to improve your SEO.

By reading this ebook, you will gain a stronger understanding of all aspects in the SEO process. SEO tactics include identifying keyword opportunities, acting on those opportunities, and continuing to improve your results over time.

This ebook features contributions from top SEO experts. It is also designed for a diverse audience. Whether you're just getting started with SEO or have been at it for years, this ebook is sure to provide some practical tips on how to improve!

This ebook will help you take actionable steps to attract more high quality traffic from search engines. We encourage you to apply these strategies to your own company website, and share them with other website owners.

Contents

I. Identifying Keyword Opportunities

Contributor: **Jeff Quipp** of **Search Engine People Inc.**

Jeff Quipp is the founder and CEO of Search Engine People Inc. (SEP), Canada's largest search and social media marketing agency. In 2009, Jeff was recognized as being one of the 20 Most Influential Marketers by Invesp.net. SEP also received Profit Magazine's 100 Fastest Growing Companies in Canada award in 2009 and 2010.

Jeff is a frequent speaker at various Internet marketing conferences worldwide and is widely recognized as one of the pre-eminent authorities on new media, mobile, search and social media marketing.

Why Keywords Are Your Foundation

The way people shop has changed in the age of search engines. People are increasingly using search engines to help them find the products or services they are looking for. To do this, they type **keywords** into sites like Google, YouTube, or Bing. The engines then rank sites related to these keywords based on **relevance** and **authority**.

Whether you know it or not, your website is already targeting certain keywords. Search engines extract these keywords from your on-page text, headers, page titles, inbound links, and other factors. However, you might not have made a conscious decision to target those keywords. Even if you did, you might not be monitoring your rankings or have a sense of how good your chances are of ranking well for those keywords.

Choosing the right keywords is often the difference between getting found in search and not getting found. As a result, keyword research is the foundation of an effective online marketing strategy.

There are several variables that impact keyword selection. These variables can be divided into two groupings -- primary selection variables and prioritization variables.

Primary Selection of Keywords

It is important to understand what aspects of keywords make them important to your business. The different variables or characteristics of a keyword help determine whether the keywords are worth consideration in your SEO strategy. Only if keywords pass the primary selection tests can they be subjected to the prioritization variable tests. Considerations for primary keyword selection are:

- Ensuring keyword terms/phrases have sufficient search volumes
- Ensuring the chosen keyword terms are *relevant*
- Assessing levels of *relative* competition

If a search term doesn't satisfy the criterion of sufficient volume, then it is removed from the list. Likewise, if it does not satisfy the relevancy criterion, it should not be considered.

Prioritization of Keywords

Two things to consider when prioritizing keywords are:

- Competitive advantage for the product/services
- Profitability of the products/services associated with the keywords

Prior to entering the vetting process, a keyword opportunity list should be generated.

Generating the Initial Keyword Opportunity List

The first phase of creating the initial keyword opportunity list involves brainstorming as many keyword ideas as possible.

a. Listing root brands and product/service names (e.g. lawyer)
b. Brainstorming variations of product and brand-related keywords
c. Talking to clients to determine what terms they use in search
d. Studying competitors' sites
e. Adding geographic variations (e.g. Miami lawyers, Dade county lawyers)
f. Adding descriptive variations (e.g. personal injury lawyers, slip and fall lawyers)
g. Taking all the variations and entering them into the [Google AdWords Keyword Tool](#), which will suggest numerous other variations.

With this list in hand, now the keyword list can be vetted.

Choosing Relevant Keyword Terms/Phrases

Once all keyword possibilities with sufficient search volumes are selected, keywords must then be filtered for relevancy. You don't just want to pull in traffic; you want to ensure that your traffic is of high quality. Quality traffic helps you convert your visitors into customers at a higher rate.

Let's demonstrate the importance of relevant traffic through an example. If a small law office in Boise, Idaho were able to achieve a ranking for the generic term 'lawyers,' they would be inundated with irrelevant calls from people in New York City, Chicago, Miami and Los Angeles. Realistically, less than 1% of the queries from the term 'lawyers' would be potential clients from the Boise area, meaning:

- It would be a tremendous distraction for the staff taking these calls or filtering out the bad leads
- It would eat up the time and resources you need to nurture your more valuable leads in the Boise area

Assessing Keyword Competitiveness

People have a tendency to emphasize traffic over relevance. You need to make sure the search terms you're targeting have sufficient traffic, but often you don't want them to have too much either. More traffic usually correlates with high competition.

Let's go back to the Boise law firm. Let's say they want to rank for the term 'lawyer.' This puts them up against almost all law firms in the English-speaking world, including larger and more powerful ones. As I'm writing this, there are 299 million Google results for 'lawyer.' Only 10 are on the first page of Google.

When picking keywords to target, you clearly need to choose your battles wisely. So how do you do that?

There are several free tools for assessing keyword competitiveness, including the Google AdWords Keyword Tool mentioned earlier. The tool classifies keywords as either low, medium, or highly competitive. The higher the competition for a keyword, the more difficult it is to rank for. Generally speaking, terms with a higher difficulty score will require much more than just on-page optimization if you want to rank on the first page of search results.

HubSpot Internet Marketing Software is a paid tool that includes a keyword monitoring component. In addition, it also helps you maintain a dashboard of relevant keywords, including their search volume, competition, your ranking and the number of visits from that keyword search.

What You Need to Beat the Competition

After picking your arena, you need to figure out how to beat the competition in that arena. The way to do this is for your site to gain **authority** and **relevance** for those terms.

Authority

Authority is assessed by understanding the link profile of your site versus those other sites ranking for the keywords you are targeting. External links from other sites are the single most powerful ranking tool amongst the major search engines of today. The three most important elements of these linking factors are:

- Number of links to a website (more from various domains is better)
- Number of links to the specific page one hopes will rank for the term in question (again, more is typically better than less)
- The anchor text of links to the specific page (see the upcoming link building chapter for more on this)

Links are the biggest factor in gaining authority and search engine rankings. HubSpot software allows companies to compare their own link profiles to those of their competitors.

As a rule of thumb, one's site could compete for rankings (in the short term) with other sites with similar link profiles. Tackling sites with more powerful link profiles requires time and dedication. The bigger the gap, the more time, effort, and budget is needed. When a large gap exists between two competing sites in the number

of inbound links, it is very difficult for the site with less links to make up ground and compete for keyword opportunities.

Relevance

Relevance, on the other hand, means looking to see if the other sites are specifically trying to rank for the term(s) in question. On-page relevancy can be quickly assessed by looking at simple elements.

- Keyword match in the title of a page
- Keyword match in a site's internal navigation
- Keyword match in the domain name

By considering both authority and relevancy, it's a relatively simple process to determine opportunities. If rankings for a given keyword term are dominated by much more powerful sites obviously targeting the term with their on-page factors, then it's likely best to look for another keyword opportunity. If, on the other hand, those same sites are powerful yet aren't specifically targeting the terms (or vice versa), then potential does exist.

At the end of this process, you should have a list of keywords that have been vetted. Now, it becomes a process of prioritizing all the remaining keywords. While the same primary assessment variables can still be utilized to determine priorities, secondary assessment variables now can also be considered.

Additional Prioritization Variables

1. **Competitive advantage** – Does the firm have a distinct competitive advantage (in terms of price, quality, delivery time) that can be leveraged to increase the likelihood of sales?

2. **Ability to scale or fulfill** – Is inventory or ability to fulfill limited? If so, other products and services with more potential might be a better priority.

3. **Profitability** – How profitable is a product or service? More profitable items are often more desirable to promote.

4. **Lifetime value of item client** – If the sale of a given item is made, the current value of the sale is not the only consideration. One should also take into account the average lifetime value of the purchaser of the item in question.

Often, the keyword terms with relatively high search volumes and low competition are the best opportunities. Of course, relevance must be factored into this equation as well.

In addition to looking at volume vs. competition, it often helps to look at the additional prioritization variables.

II.   Mastering On-Page SEO

Contributor: **Aaron Wall** of **SEO Book**

In 2003, Aaron Wall founded SEO Book, a leading guide to search engine optimization. In the 8 years since, he has offered numerous free SEO tools and created the leading online SEO training program, which comes with an exclusive member community. His site offers thousands of posts tracking the field of SEO for businesses large and small.

Why On-Page SEO Is Typically Overlooked

On-page optimization is a critical but often overlooked aspect of SEO. The problem with doing only on-page optimization is that there is a glass ceiling to it. Search engines rank websites according to their authority and relevance to the search terms as well as their authority on the web. On-page optimization creates relevance, while building inbound links generates authority.

Even though off-page optimization offers more SEO benefits, on-page optimization is really the first step to SEO improvement. Off-page SEO is about building inbound links from relevant websites. But how can search engines deem your pages relevant to your keywords if you have not even made it clear to them what your page is about?

On-page optimization is basically about two things:

- Picking the best keywords around which to base each of your pages
- Making it as clear as possible to search engines that your page is relevant to those keywords

On-Page Optimization: The Old Way

When I first got into SEO, many people took a fairly mechanical approach to on-page optimization because it was what worked back then.

Hundreds of tools littered the web that allowed you to measure the keyword density of a page. Some of them taught that more was better. As a result, webmasters would crank out keyword-stuffed text that was not interesting and was brutal to read.

How did you optimize your page content back then? Stuff your keywords everywhere:

- The URL
- The page title
- The meta description tag
- The on-page H1 heading
- Aggressively throughout the page content

Web copy on SEOed sites was dense, and it looked the part to end-users!

In 2003, Google responded to this rise in user-unfriendliness. Google got much better at looking at what it considered natural language usage patterns. At that point, old "optimization" strategies ended up getting pages filtered out of the search results for some of the keywords they were targeting.
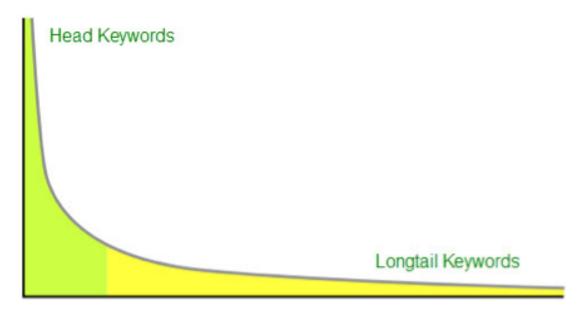
Worse yet, when some people were making their copy more keyword dense, they would strip out important keyword variations, so the page wouldn't rank as well for the related supporting keywords.

Obligatory Reference to the Long Tail

Chris Anderson wrote a popular book entitled *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*. The long tail describes how many marketplaces work in terms of statistical distribution.

In the previous chapter, we looked at keyword opportunities. The Long Tail is another way of looking at keyword competitiveness.

There are a few keywords with high search volume and traffic. At the same time, these are the more competitive keywords that are hard to rank for. Fortunately, there is a whole ocean of barely explored long tail keywords that have less traffic but for which you have a better chance of ranking.

Overlooking the Tail

When deciding which keywords to target, many webmasters focus on the big money/trophy keyword phrases. As mentioned previously, these are the hardest ones to rank for. Many of these trophy keywords actually seem more important than they are when you look at the revenues they drive.

Sure, many people who want SEO services will search terms like 'search engine optimization' or 'SEO.' But many webmasters underestimate the value of the keyword tail. For every person searching on a keyword like 'SEO,' there are likely 10 or more people searching for less common keywords such as:

- How do I rank better in Google?
- Improve Google placement
- Rank better in search engines
- Search engine ranking

These are often not the words that industry insiders use to describe their own business. But keywords are not about them – they are the words that their *customers* type into search engines.

Most search terms have many variations. If you are only focused on the most well known version, then you are up against the stiffest competition (as the most popular keywords are typically the most competitive) while you are leaving money on the tail (by neglecting other keywords).

How Long Is the Tail?

Describing the mechanism of how the market works is nowhere near as powerful as raw numbers.

- In 2007, Google's Udi Manber stated that only 20% to 25% of the search queries Google sees each day are unique.
- Demand Media runs a content mill that publishes hundreds of thousands of articles targeting long tail keywords. Their revenues are rumored to be north of $200 million, with the majority of that income coming from long tail search traffic.

Example Ranking Data

The ranking data on the right is for a page that ranked #1 for 'link building' on Google. Note that in spite of ranking well for that page, the page got over 400% more traffic from other related keywords.

Searches		Most Common Most Recent Found
Keywords	**Page**	Hits
439	▸ Free SEO Tools & Search Engine...	2,125
231	▸ SEO Book.com ~ SEO Training Made Easy	1,555
565	▾ How to Build Links Fast: 101 Tips &...	1,330
	link building	274
	seo link building	39
	linkbuilding	25
	how to get links to your website	24
	link building tips	19
	how to build links	19
	how to link build	18
	seo links	18
	best sites to link to	15
	link building strategy	14
	link building techniques	10
	get links	9
	inbound link strategy	8
	link building strategies	8
	how to get websites to link to your website	7
	how to create inbound links	7
	build links	7

On-Page Optimization: The New Way

Rather than repeating the same word over and over again, you should use a diverse set of related keywords to help you rank for a variety of long tail keywords.

Did I know the above page was going to rank for over 500 different keywords? No way! But I knew I was positioning myself to rank for many by making the page relevant to many of them. If diversity is the spice of life, then keyword diversity is SEO salsa!

If you look at the above keywords, you can see a pattern emerge amongst the sub-keywords. Many of them contain:

- 'How to'
- 'Link' or 'links'
- 'Build' or 'building'
- 'Strategy' or 'strategies'

Most long tail keywords end up being variations of the core keywords along with a common keyword modifier.

Rather than making a repetitive page title which is like…

> Link building, Link building tips, Link building strategy

…you can use a page title that includes variation in it, like…

> Link Building Strategy: How to Build Links

Just like you would use relevant modifiers in the page title, you also want to work in relevant keyword modifiers and alternate forms throughout the page text. This is one area where keyword density analysis tools can be helpful. You may also want to find common related keywords in competing pages that you may have forgotten to target. Including such keywords once or twice on your page is sufficient.

The key is to make it sound natural while covering a variety of keyword options. One of the ways to write naturally is to ignore the concept of SEO until after you have the first draft version of your page. From there, you can go back into the page, add some variation and cover additional keyword ideas.

Four common points of variation are:

- Singular vs. plural
- Alternate word order
- Synonyms and acronyms
- Keyword modifiers

How Do You Find Those Related Keywords to Target?

Variation is good, but where do I start? Traditional keyword research tools should help you, but it also turns out that the search results themselves are a fertile ground.

- When you begin to type a keyword into a Google search box on the Google homepage, Google will try to auto-complete your search query. They use aggregate search volume to power this, which tells you two things about the keywords they are recommending:
  - Those are keywords other people searched for in the past
  - Those are the keywords Google is recommending new searchers to search for, helping to drive traffic to them
- When you look at the top ranked listings in the search results, many of those websites will also include related keyword modifiers in their page titles. Clicking through to some of the better pages will also show you related keywords and concepts they are targeting in their page copy.
- Almost all major search engines offer a related searches feature on their search results pages. Look through those for additional keyword ideas.

Closing the Loop

The above process is driven off of aggregate user data. However, one of the most important lessons in SEO is that no data source is as useful as your own web analytics.

Make sure you are tracking traffic and conversion data from day one. Through your analytics data, you will uncover many ranking 'accidents' or alternate keyword ideas you may not have thought to target. If you are doing particularly well in a certain area, consider making more pages targeting related variations of those keywords.

Since conversion and user experience are also important, make sure your content is easy to read. Use generous formatting to break up the content with:

- Short paragraphs
- Bulleted or numbered lists (where relevant)
- Relevant headers and sub-headers throughout (to make scanning easier)
- Conversion-focused links within the content area of the page

III. Link Building Strategies

Contributor: **Rob Ousbey** of **Distilled**

Rob takes Distilled's number of dedicated search marketers to three. He studied engineering and management but looked forward to working in radio after graduation. Two years of producing programs for a national station later, he became a freelance web developer for four months - promoting everything from Shakespeare to sanitary pads - before being tempted back into a regular 9-5 routine by Distilled.

The Role of Inbound Links in SEO

While on-page optimization is a good first step, you will ultimately get much more leverage by having links from other sites to yours. Inbound links used to just be a source of referral traffic. Now, they influence your search engine rankings as well.

Google was the first search engine to use links as a significant ranking factor. They viewed a link from one site to another as a 'vote' for the target site. The more votes you have, the more authoritative your site is considered.

Specifically, there are two main benefits gained through each link:

1. Better SEO authority of the linked-to page and increase in authority of the site as a whole
2. More relevancy of the page for the keywords that are used in the link's anchor text

Anchor text is the clickable text of a link. To give an example, let's say a page was linked to in the following ways:

Bob's Hardware Store
Buy Power Tools at Bob's Hardware Store

The second link (often referred to as an 'anchor text rich' or an 'anchor text specific' link) is more likely to help Bob's store rank for the keyword phrase 'power tools.'

Note that not all links pass value. Webmasters can add a 'nofollow' attribute to an outbound link in order to achieve this. Links from some popular sites such as Wikipedia and many social media sites like Twitter, for example, are all nofollow. The way to verify whether a link passes value is to check its HTML. This is achievable in different ways through different browsers but is generally doable.

Link Building With Head Terms vs. Long Tail Terms

In the previous section, you learned how to identify the search terms that your site would benefit from targeting. Slightly different link building tactics may be required, depending on the competitiveness of a keyword.

Head Terms

Ranking for highly competitive head terms typically requires a more diverse source of links pointing to the appropriate page that targets the term. The links will need to use the corresponding keyword as the anchor text as often as possible.

Mid and Long Tail Terms

Pages that target less competitive mid-to-long tail terms don't typically require as many external links. Instead, sites can rank for these terms by gaining authority through strong, trusted links, often to the front page of the site. Solid information architecture and good on-page keyword targeting will then provide the relevancy signals needed to rank for these terms.

Most of the link building tactics discussed later in this chapter can be used either to target specific head terms or simply to build the authority of the site, depending on your specific needs.

Tools for Link Research

It's often useful to know about the links your site currently has. This information can help you make decisions regarding whether to aim for more links that will build site authority or to focus on deep links with specific anchor text.

Researching your competitors' links can also be valuable, particularly in identifying link opportunities or niches that could also be useful to your link building campaign.

Yahoo! Site Explorer - *http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/*

Yahoo! provides a free tool that lists up to 1,000 of the links to any site. Enter your domain name or a particular page, select the 'Inlinks' button, and change the settings to 'Show links: except from this domain.' Also select 'to: entire site' if you'd like to see links to the whole site rather than just a single page.

These links are not in any particular order, and the list will include links that do not pass any value as well as those that do.

Open Site Explorer - *http://www.opensiteexplorer.org/*

This tool provides information about the top 1,000 links to a site. These can be filtered to exclude links that do not pass value. Additional information about each link includes the anchor text used and the authority of each linking page.

The Open Site Explorer tool also includes reports that showcase the most popular pages on the site, the most common anchor text used to link to a page or site and other information about the strength of the page.

HubSpot- *http://hubspot.com/products/*

The HubSpot Inbound Marketing software includes a 'Page Grader' component that helps analyze the SEO value of a page, including its inbound links.
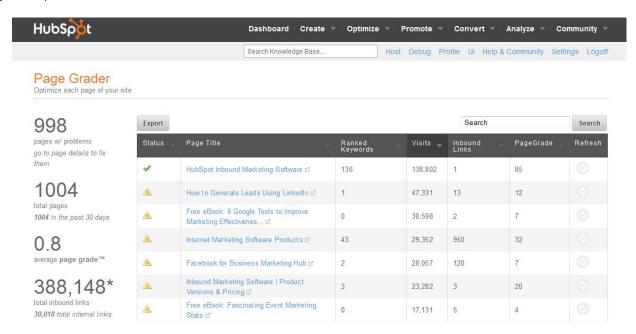
Page Grader assesses the optimization of every page in your site, making it easy for you to fine-tune pages to get the top ranking for specific keywords. Page Grader tracks the following metrics for every page on your site:

- Page Title
- Number of Ranked Keywords
- Visits
- Inbound links
- Internal links
- PageGrade

The Page Grader dashboard lists these key search engine metrics by page and makes it easy to prioritize which pages to optimize first.

The Spectrum of Link Building Tactics

Before looking at some particular link building tactics, it's worth considering how creating each link can require a different mix of input from the link builder and from the editor of the linking site. Different link building tactics require a different mix of manual input on the part of the link builder and editorial decisions on the part of the site from which the link is gained. Link building tactics can be divided into those that are:

- Completely manual
- A combination of manual input and editorial decisions
- Completely editorial

Manual Link Building

At the top of this spectrum are tactics that require input from no one but the link builder. These could include leaving links in the 'comments' section of other sites, adding links to social networking profiles or submitting a site to online directories that accept every submission.

Clearly, these can be easy ways to increase the number of links to a site. Since these links are so easy to obtain, they offer little to no value.

Mixture of Manual and Editorial Input

The center of this spectrum is where a lot of link building time and effort can (and typically does) get spent. In many cases, it involves building relationships with sites and individuals who may link to you, or contacting site editors to tell them about particular content your site has and encouraging them to link to it.

Completely Editorial

The bottom of this spectrum covers situations where a link was given unprompted. When a site has particularly high-quality content or provides useful or unique resources on a particular topic, people are more likely to link to it without needing to be asked or invited.

Link Building Techniques

Now that you know why link building is important and understand its different types, let's look at some specific tactics that have been proven successful. This is by no means an exhaustive list of techniques that are used, but it should help you get started on building links to your site and hopefully inspire you to think of ways that your site can continue to attract links in the future.

Quality Content

The purest and most fundamental form of link building is to simply create a compelling reason for people to talk about your website (or business, or organization), and then let them share it with others by linking to it. Think about your niche, and identify some sites from which you'd like to attract links. Then you can create content that would be relevant to their audience as well as yours. You can openly state that others should feel free to share your content as long as they link back to your site.

Examples of quality, viral content that could attract links include:

- A home electronics retailer's page explaining how to create a wireless home network
- An industrial window cleaning company's list of the most photogenic spots in their city
- An auto insurance company's weekly 'auto repair' video in response to questions submitted by the public

A blog is an ideal place to publish such content. It encourages you to continue producing quality content and gives incentives for others to come back to your site and share your content.

Directories

The technique of submitting to relevant directories has been maligned in recent years, typically because of the low quality of many directory sites. Search for sites in your niche or your local area that maintain some kind of directory or recommended website list. You can begin by looking at professional organizations and trusted local sites or searching online for terms such as 'furniture repair directory.' In general, it's good to target sites that have a reasonably high Page Rank and don't contain 'spam' listings.

Outreach

Traditional PR practitioners and advertisers will recognize that contacting publishers (typically journalists) to 'pitch' a story has online parallels – you can contact a website owner or blogger to introduce them to your organization, your products, or any non-commercial content you've created. Use search engines to find relevant sites to contact, or use directories such as Blogged and Blogflux to find blogs in a particular niche. When contacting people by email, be as genuine as possible and don't give the 'hard sell.' Explain why you chose to contact them (perhaps because they're very relevant or have written about or linked to similar content in the past). Invite them to take a look at your site, or point them to a particular page.

Giveaways

Competitions and prize draws are specific link building tactics that often work well. You can give away a substantial prize on your site and receive links to the competition page, or you might consider giving smaller prizes to a variety of publishers and letting them run competitions on their own sites in return for a link back to you.

Guest Blogging

If you have particular expertise or insight in your niche, many sites may be interested in having you create content for them. They get the benefit of having some useful content on their site, and you can be credited with one or more links back to your site. Additional benefits of guest posting are that you may get exposure to a new audience, and you may have better control over the anchor text used in your links. To begin guest blogging, try talking directly to other site owners who you know and who may be interested in having you create content for them. Alternatively, you can search online using specific terms. For example, a telescope manufacturer might search for opportunities using 'astronomy blog.'
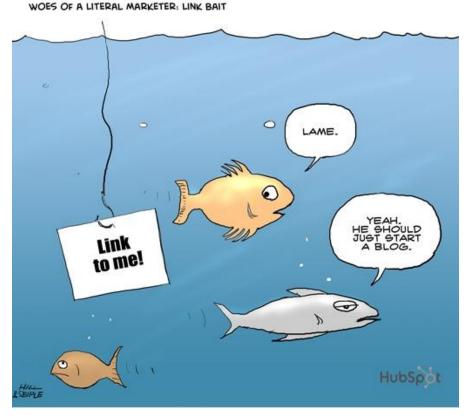
Use Your Community or Customers

The people who already interact with or have purchased from your site may be a useful source of links. Perhaps consider the following:

- Ask your existing, satisfied customers to promote you. Email them to invite any that have a blog or website to help you by reviewing or linking to you. You might include the HTML code for the link in the email, so they can simply copy-and-paste the snippet into their site.
- Many community sites create badges or buttons for members to place on their own sites. This allows users to show their allegiance, while also linking back to you.

Link Bait

Defining this term as 'content designed to attract links' makes it sound a lot like anything else described here. In fact, the term is typically reserved for content that is also highly shareable. Such content often reaches success by being shared widely throughout social media sites first before being linked to by bloggers and other site owners. Examples could include a clever information visualization, creative videos, useful resources, breaking news, quizzes or amusing cartoons. Link bait doesn't necessarily need to be 'flashy' as long as it is creative: a well written 'Top 10' list or a simple piece of controversial content could get 15 minutes of fame as the web's 'hottest thing' and get many links from a variety of sources.

WOES OF A LITERAL MARKETER: LINK BAIT

LENNY WAS A HOPELESS MARKETER WHO TOOK THE TERM "LINK BAIT" A LITTLE TOO LITERALLY.

IV. Integrating Search and Social

Inbound links are quickly becoming a broken metric. At the same time, social media is quickly escalating as a ranking factor for search engines. While inbound links still matter and are a decent factor for judging the authority of a website or page, social media provides search engines with key data points that they have long been lacking.

Look around you. Social media content is everywhere. You have probably taken countless breaks from reading this ebook to tweet, check Facebook, or organize your Google+ circles. Social media has created both an opportunity and a problem for search engines.

Thanks to social media, the web has more fresh and timely content. This is great for search engines. However, it also poses some challenges. Inbound links are a good measure of authority, but they are slow. In a social media world, a relevant piece of content on a subject could become outdated in minutes.

Let's examine how search engines are changing so you can better leverage social media and learn how your business can take advantage of these changes.

Google's New Search Algorithm

In February of 2011, Google updated its search algorithm to move better quality content to the top of its search rankings. Content farms, or websites that produce a lot of content to serve the sole purpose of satisfying Google's SEO requirements, now get penalized with lower rankings.

This update, also known as Panda, is concerned with what users think about a site; not just keywords. The update affected 11.8% of all of Google's search queries.

So What Is Considered 'Quality Content'?

Quality content in a post-Panda world is fresh and original. Sounds a lot like social media content, doesn't it?

Social Authority Matters Too

Both Google and Bing also care about the quality of the people sharing links to your site. Google calls this author authority. As an example, a link shared from Twitter is also weighed by who tweeted it (i.e. How many followers do they have? What is the quality of those followers?).

The Search and Social Soap Opera

Before we get into the details of how your business should be using social media to increase traffic from search engines, you first need to understand the biggest drama happening in Silicon Valley. With more angst than an episode of "Days of Our Lives," Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Twitter are battling over the future of search. It is clear to all of these internet giants that social search is the future.
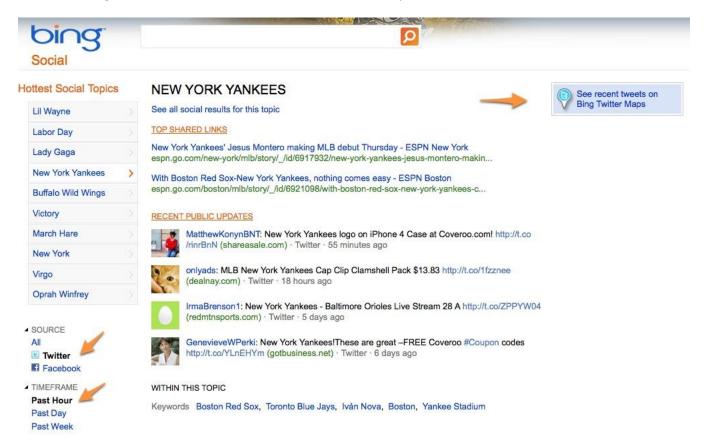
Google used to have a deal in place with Twitter to use tweets in real-time search engine result listings. However, that contracted has ended with no renewal in sight. Since the end of this contract, Google has

launched its own social network, Google+. Since its release, Google+ has become the fastest growing social network ever, growing to more than 20 million users in its first three weeks of operation. Google+ is Google's way of getting social search data without relying on Twitter and Facebook.

Microsoft is an investor in Facebook, so obviously it has access to Facebook's data for use in Bing. Additionally, Microsoft is paying Twitter for access to use tweets in search results as well. Microsoft is working to leverage some of social networking's biggest players, while Google has realized that the only way not to be stabbed in the back in the long term is to use its own data, for which it has complete control.

7 Ways to Use Twitter Get More Search Traffic

Even though Google recently ended its Realtime Search deal with Twitter, which means Twitter's fire hose is no longer catalogued and used in real-time search results, there's still a good deal of SEO benefit to be gleaned from Twitter.

Basically, Twitter is a natural complement to your site and a way to gain some additional spots on organic search engine results pages (SERPs), helping your website and its content get found. So how can you best leverage your Twitter account for search? Here are 7 tips to help you get started.

1. Use Your Real Name Wisely

It's important to note that your Twitter "Real Name" doesn't have to be your actual name, unlike with Facebook. Instead, it can be virtually anything as long as it comes in under the 20-character limit Twitter imposes.

As such, your Twitter "Real Name" is perhaps the most important thing you can set on your Twitter profile. It appears in the title tag for both your Twitter profile and your individual tweet pages. It's highly searchable, and it's something that will appear in Google's link to your profile.

This means you need to make sure your real name is both relevant to you, a keyword people are likely to search for, and something that will make people want to click.

2. Make Your Username Count

Like your real name, your Twitter username is crucial content that will be displayed in the title of your Twitter profile page and, in some cases, your individual tweet pages. Also like your real name, it can be anything you want as long as it comes in under the 15-character limit Twitter places on usernames. It is best to use this space wisely with an easily remembered, keyword-rich Twitter username that will get the attention of anyone searching for related keywords.

It may seem like an impossible task. Fifteen characters certainly isn't a lot to work with, but a few quick Google searches for keywords related to your site can reveal what kinds of Twitter handles are ranking well, giving you a template for success.

3. Focus on Your Bio Next

After your real name and username, your bio is the next most important thing you can edit. At 160 characters, it's longer than a tweet, and it can be crucial to your SEO as it is both highly indexable content, and the first few words of it also appear in your Twitter page's description.

It is important to make your bio count. Make the first few words an interesting teaser that draws searchers to click and ensure that the entire bio has at least one or two of the keywords you're targeting.

4. Link, Link and Link Some More

To be strong in search engines, your Twitter profile needs the same thing any other site needs: lots and lots of links. Link to your profile everywhere you can, and do so with strong keywords in the anchor text.

This works well because, even though your Twitter profile is closely related to your site, it is hosted on a different domain, meaning you can pass along a great deal of trust to it from your site. This makes your links to it much more valuable.

You can further this benefit by encouraging others to link to your Twitter profile as well, such as including it in an author byline when you do guest blogging, which will improve the amount of authority it receives from search engines.

5. Get Followers, Build Recognition

Every follower you get is more than just a person reading your tweets. It's a link to your Twitter profile on their "Following" page and possibly retweets and mentions of your profile, which also include a link to you.

Although these links are "internal" in nature (meaning they are all links from within Twitter.com), they can help you compete with other Twitter profiles that might be on the same or a similar topic, giving you an additional edge. Since many searchers who land on Twitter profiles were doing Twitter-specific searches, this could be a very powerful advantage to have.

6. Stay Focused With Your Tweets

While it's certainly fine and maybe even a good thing to have some fun with your Twitter account and go off-topic from time to time, you need to stay focused and regularly publish tweets that are on-topic and keyword-rich.

It's important to remember that your main Twitter profile, in Google's eyes, is very much like any other page with a headline, body copy, and links. As with any other page, if that content is keyword-rich, it's more likely to be ranked well.

Keeping your tweets focused lets you keep that copy keyword-dense, giving Google exactly what it wants to see and encouraging it to rank your Twitter page higher than other, less-focused accounts.

7. Don't Forget Your URL

While it's true that your URL doesn't actually pass on any SEO authority due to Twitter's use of the "nofollow" tag, it's still an important tool for directing the traffic your Twitter profile gets back to your site.

Since the eventual goal of any Twitter presence is to turn that traffic back to your site and your business, forgetting to use your URL is a misstep you can't afford to make.

Facebook's Full-Court Press for Search Relevancy

Facebook's current share of the search engine market is minuscule. It's not really even worth measuring compared to the dominance of search leaders Google and Bing. This is actually pretty shocking considering Facebook boasts 800 million users. How do they not have at least a negligible portion of the search market? Simple: private data.

Since the beginning, Facebook has had a lot of data, but it has been private. You could only see a person's wall posts, for example, if you were friends with them. The limitations of private data made Facebook a weak search engine and subsequently resulted in very little usage.

Recently, Facebook has made a string of announcements that makes it clear Facebook is making it a priority to solve this problem. Facebook has made changes to users' profiles to empower users with different sharing options. Now, on a message by message basis, users can select if they want an update to be shared with only one person, all of their friends, or the entire PUBLIC. That last option is huge. It makes the available pool of data and results available for Facebook search much greater.

For Facebook, to stand any chance in the battle for search engine usage, it has to encourage more users to share public data.

More 'Likes' Are Critical to Leveraging Facebook for SEO

One of the best default functions of Facebook is that data for business pages is public and open to everyone by default. However, there is more to leveraging Facebook for SEO beyond simply creating a Facebook Business Page.

Social search is really about more personalized search engine results. By analyzing information that your friends, followers, and connections have looked at online, search engines can not only provide better recommendations for a keyword you entered, but it can also tell you that a certain connection found this content valuable.

Because search in the future will be personalized and results will be based on social recommendations, it is important to start building reach today. Sure, all businesses want more people to like their Facebook page. These Likes are worth far more than vanity in a popularity contest between you and your competitors. Likes are also your pathway to getting more people to see and recommend your content. More importantly, in the world of social search, Likes are the new inbound links and will help search engines recommend your content to more people attracting new visitors and leads to your website.

Social Search Is Only Getting Started

Social search is young. It can't even crawl yet. A lot is going to change as Google, Bing, Microsoft, Twitter, and companies that we haven't even heard of yet battle in the years to come. One thing that *won't* change is that search is only going to continue to get more personal. Social media will be the major source of data that drives search personalization.

As a marketer, your priority need to be building reach across social media sites to be well positioned for more searches to a more personal and social world.

V.   Tips for Ongoing SEO Improvement

So you've gone through the initial SEO improvement steps. You've assessed your current standing, identified keyword opportunities, optimized around your keywords, started integrating search and social, and begun a link building campaign. Rather than looking at this as the end of your SEO improvement, look at it as the beginning! Now you know what's important, how to identify opportunities, and how to act on them.

The following are some tips for monitoring and continuing to improve SEO.

Set Up a Ranking Dashboard

To help monitor your rankings, you can set up a dashboard as shown below. Note that the +/- marks under 'Ranking' indicate an increase or decrease in ranking since the last time you checked. You should monitor such a dashboard in regular intervals, such as bi-weekly or monthly.

Keyword	Target Page	Conversion Rate	Monthly Searches	Keyword Difficulty	Ranking
Boston PR Agencies	YourSite.com/	10%	480	64	11 (+2)
Public Relations Consulting	YourSite.com/consulting	5%	2,400	63	6 (-3)
Branding Service	YourSite.com/branding	12%	4,400	64	2 (+1)

Keep in mind that each of these keywords will have a corresponding 'keyword family' that contains all the modifiers of the keyword. The search volume within this keyword family is likely many times larger than that of the keyword itself. If you want to get more granular, you can monitor keyword families instead of keywords themselves.

Experiment with Keywords

The keywords you are currently targeting may not be the best ones at drawing in traffic and converting traffic into customers. If data on search volume, difficulty or relevance tells you that another keyword would do better in any of these metrics, test it out.

Maintain On-Page Optimization

On-page optimization should be maintained alongside your keyword experiments. Additionally, you should not modify the content of any page without keywords in mind. Changing basic elements such as your page title or even on-page text can change your rankings.

Maintain a Focus on External Link Building

Regularly invest in link building, since this will help your SEO like nothing else. It also requires more long-term commitment and networking.

Continue to Look for Opportunities

By constantly working to improve your SEO, your site itself will evolve. You may need to explore new keywords or create new pages targeting different keyword families.

VI. Additional Information and Resources

Many websites are sitting on big opportunities to get found by more people online. Search engine optimization is an effective way of getting more traffic your website and improving the quality of that traffic.

While many have trouble getting started with SEO, we hope that this ebook will serve as a helpful guide to generate more traffic and improve the quality of that traffic.

Want **personalized feedback** on your website or SEO?

Run your website through Website Grader, a free SEO tool from HubSpot.

Sign up for a HubSpot Website Assessment.

Additional Online Marketing Resources:

HubSpot Marketing Blog

HubSpot Marketing Webinars

HubSpot Search Engine Optimization Kit

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