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Why SEO Alone is Not Enough Anymore

When it comes to search engine optimization, one thing is true: shift happens. The landscape is continually changing, as evidenced by recent movement in the search engine industry. Will the partnership between Microsoft Bing and Yahoo! impact search or create a long-term competitor to Google? And will the new initiatives that Google rolls out in response impact the search placement of other companies? These are all questions that have been raised in recent years.

It's instructive to look at a typical Google search result to see how much things have changed recently. For example, when you do a search for the "xbox 360" on Google, you get more than just organic results from sites that mention those words. What you see is a broad range of content including news, paid advertising, product feeds and social media results (see image below). This means that you need to concentrate on more than just increasing your organic search placement if you want your Internet marketing plan to succeed.

There is something we like to call the Golden Triangle of SEO: three key areas that must be addressed in order for any SEO campaign to succeed. The first one is On-Site Factors, which takes into account how "search engine friendly" a site's overall structure is. This involves many site architecture factors including how easily the site can be indexed, if it uses Flash vs. HTML and if shopping carts are search-engine friendly.

The second side of the Golden Triangle of SEO is site content. It's still true that content is king: it's important to have content on your site that is impactful, effective and draws the attention of search engines. This means having a proper keyword density along with making sure that the keywords are also used in titles and meta tags. It's also important to have the right keywords highlighted: striking a balance of keywords in different competitive ranges will allow you to see short-term and long-term SEO growth.

The final side of the Golden Triangle of SEO is link building. Having both in-bound and out-bound links adds strength to your site in the eyes of search engines -- it gives your site credibility and respect. However, this doesn't mean that you should concentrate on just having the highest number of links possible! It's critical to think about the quality of your links as well. In many cases, one high-level link can be more effective than several lower-level links.

There are several new factors that are changing the SEO field -- shifts that happen -- and none are more important than social media. Every day, millions of people communicate with social media tools like Facebook and Twitter. Reaching these people can be a critical component of any online marketing campaign. However, any social media strategy needs to be more sophisticated than simply starting a Twitter page and posting your company's latest specials.

Ideally, social media and SEO marketing programs can work together to strengthen each other. A high-quality social media campaign that is interactive and engages audiences can increase in-bound links and improve search engine rankings. At the same time, applying smart SEO practices to social media content will increase the reach and visibility of your social media outreach.

Another relatively new concept is Video SEO. In the example we provided earlier, there were no video results, but often times Youtube videos may show up on the first page of Google results.. Applying SEO concepts to videos not only can increase their placement in various searches but also improve the overall ranking of a site.

Search engines like Google have been looking for ways to differentiate themselves from the competition, and one way has been to attempt to deliver individual users with as much personalized content as possible. The new Google Personalized Search is just one example of this. Not only are search engines taking factors such as location into account when delivering results, they are also considering previous search history and other sites you have visited in the past. The reality is that in many cases, no two searches will produce exactly the same results.

The bottom line is that basic SEO concepts are still critical -- just not by themselves. In order for SEO campaigns to be truly effective, they need to be paired with smart marketing campaigns that involve every aspect of a company's online brand. As with any marketing campaign, it's very important to think about your target audience when you are doing an SEO campaign and how you can most effectively reach them with messages that resonate with them.

Nielsen Reports February U.S. Search Rankings

Americans conducted more than 9.17 billion searches in February 2010, according to recent data from the Nielsen Company. Google Search accounted for 65.2 percent of the market share with a total of 5.98 billion searches. Trailing far behind, Yahoo! Search came in second with 14.1 percent of the market share with a total 1.29 billion searches.

MSN/WindowsLive/Bing snagged third place with 12.5 percent, while AOL Search accounted for 2.3 percent of the market share.

Although Google Search came in as the top U.S. Search provider once again, Bing accounted for a notable 15 percent increase in market share from its January market share. In contrast, both Google Search and Yahoo! Search experienced slight drops in market share in February compared to the previous month. Google Search fell from 66.3 percent market share in January to 65.2 percent in February, while Yahoo! Search fell from 14.5 percent to 14.1 during the same time period.

Landing Pages:

What You Need to Explain to your Website Design Company

By Colette Mason (c) 2010

The definition of a landing page is simply "the first page that visitors hit on your site," so it is not strictly a certain page but any page that a user "lands" on. All websites have landing pages, whether they like it or not, even if it was not specifically designed as such.

Landing pages can have a substantial impact on your e- commerce website. A poorly-developed one can hasten its breakdown just as an effective landing page can drive traffic to your site, respond to calls to action and make your business website a success.

One vital measure of the effectiveness of your website is the "bounce rate," or the percentage of visitors who immediately leave your site without making any other click. The bounce rate is inversely proportional to the effectiveness of the landing page. Basically, this means that a high bounce rate indicates that your landing page isn't compelling enough for the visitor to pursue his interest or take some other action.

Normally, the home page is the primary landing page of most typical websites. But more and more, site owners are designing landing pages outside of the home page, and for good reason.

Most users prefer to skip information which is irrelevant to their needs. They want to get directly to their search, hence the need for a landing page that delivers just that. They can avoid the delays caused by having to click through pages and pages of information when they already have something in mind.

Landing pages serve their purpose when the site owner knows the kind of visitor they are targeting. This is determined by knowing what the visitor clicked on to arrive at your site. A visitor who clicks on an ad for your product would not want to go through other pages to get the information about the product. Webinars, other event registrations and special presentations make use of this same principle.

Not all visitors are looking for the same information. One may click on your link after reading an article you submitted to a consumer review site while another may arrive at your site after viewing your infomercial ad.

For each specific visitor, you can design a landing page that will cater to his needs and contain the information he is looking for. For example, infomercial viewers can be directed to www.yoursite.com/infomercial, while visitors who clicked on your banner ads for this month's special will be directed to www.yoursite.com/specials.

These landing pages should be evaluated for their effectiveness. The bounce rate is a key measurement for determining the effectiveness of landing pages.

Another measure for landing pages is the success of a "next action." It might be purchasing the product, requesting more information, signing up for a free product tryout, etc.

Determine your conversion rate by dividing the number of action takers into the number of visitors. A typical conversion rate is 3 to 5 percent for lead generation pages and 1 to 2 percent for e-commerce sites. If your site is successful, you should be getting twice those numbers.

A concept that is intrinsic in creating effective landing pages is "alignment." This is the connection between your source (where the visitor came from) and your landing page. The more connected they are, the higher the success of conversion.

A good example is a banner ad for a specific product from a beauty products company. Clicking on the banner ad and being directed to a landing page showing the exact same product yields a higher conversion rate. If the alignment is not present, on the other hand, there will be a significant reduction in conversion rates.

In general, a landing page must stir these positive emotions in a visitor for it to be effective:

Credibility

Your page must be able to capture the visitor's trust by presenting a credible appearance. Drop anything that can cause a negative effect in the minds of your visitors, such as a lack of contact information, grammatical errors and typos, buzzwords, "marketese" and jargon, fuzzy or blocky graphics and too much use of serif fonts, like Times New Roman.

Recognition

Your page must provide your visitor a "This is what I'm looking for!" moment upon landing.

Persuasiveness

Your page must be able to convince visitors that your product or service can help them achieve their goal. Keep in mind what attracted the visitor to your product in the first place so you will understand what he is looking for.

Action

You must highlight an action for the visitor to take while he is on your landing page.

Techniques to Use with Landing Pages

Here are some major principles to guide you in the process of developing an effective landing page:

Make the Visitor Feel an Instant Affinity With Your Page

The top half of the first screen should be effective in making the visitor feel that he has come to the right place. The use of the right taglines, images and a position statement (usually about 12 to 15 words) can help to establish your declaration and inform your visitor what the site is about.

Use Specific Headlines and Sub-headings

Throughout your page, include relevant headings and sub-headings so that as the visitor skim reads the page they can see what a particular paragraph or section is all about. This helps him decide whether he will read the text or which section he is interested in. The longer the page, the more you should be using sub-headings. The headline should be aligned as closely as possible with the banner ad or whatever the visitor clicked on to arrive on your landing page.

Focus on a Primary Goal

A landing page can achieve only one primary goal. Examples of these goals are a lead capture mechanism, such as a free demo or product trial, or to lure the visitor to go further and view your main site. The best results come about when you focus on your goal. However, a secondary goal is possible in a landing page. For example, if your primary goal is to make the visitor purchase your product, your secondary goal would be to entice them to sign up for newsletters or emails to receive choice offers.

Use Multiple Calls to Action

Using multiple calls to the same action supports the one primary goal principle. This holds true on a long landing page. A page that

doesn't go below the fold may need only one call to action. Overall, one call to action above the fold and another at the bottom of the page are good.

About The Author

Colette Mason has written her unique, step-by-step guide to making business websites more user-friendly and effective, available at WebsiteSuccessSystem.com . Colette teaches website owners how to apply usability principles to improve online sales. She also writes a usability blog, "Think Like a User", to help businesses make their websites more customer-focused and easy to use.

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