

Working Well With Your SEO Firm

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The SEO industry is growing out of its adolescence into the realm of mainstream credibility. After surviving the infancy and adolescence of the industry, search engine optimization and placement is just being recognized as the essential element that can make or break an online business' bottom line. A successful SEO enriched marketing campaign will require a few simple but crucial elements: timing, organization and commitment. There are several search engine placement strategies to choose from. This SEO plan focuses on achieving traditional search engine placements and does not address pay-per-click advertising.

Timing

It happens every November. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) firms start getting phone calls from online retailers desperate for traditional Top10 placement before the Christmas shopping season moves into full swing, two weeks later. Before considering the actual work and turn-around time involved in achieving search engine placements, potential clients put their service providers in uncomfortable positions by expecting SEO's to provide results within impossible time frames. In many cases, some SEO providers take these jobs without letting the client know what to realistically expect in the hopes the placements will magically appear before the rush begins. In our case, we are forced to explain the realities of the situation.

A successful SEO promotion requires time, the amount of which is dependant upon the competitiveness of keywords your company has chosen to target, ("cars" vs. "Pintos in Iceland"), and the existing popularity of your web site. For example, if you represent a freshly designed car sales web site that has not been previously promoted (no existing online popularity) and your aim is to achieve Top10 placements under the word keyword "BMW" within 2 or even 3 months then you had better rethink your timeline.

Generally speaking a highly searched keyword with extreme competition will require between 3 and 12 months of aggressive SEO promotion to obtain desirable listings. Where your company falls into within the 3 and 12 month target will depend on just how well promoted your web site currently is. If your site is already well promoted and found under other competitive keywords then you have some power that a SEO company can leverage towards reaching newer and more competitive keyword targets and may put your placement goals within a 3-6 month range.

Companies without existing online popularity that wish to compete under highly competitive phrases will need to start from square-one. This will mean targeting less intensive search phrases to begin with as well as acquiring textual links from relevant websites. These initial tactics will serve to enhance the perceived popularity of your web site and build the leverage required to obtain your ultimate keyword goals.

Organization

The act of optimization a web site varies in complexity depending upon the technologies employed within your web site's design and the decision making structure of your company. As a result, organization plays a major role in maintaining crucial optimization and submission timelines and for achieving ultimate success.

For example, there are many web sites that are database driven and require special optimization techniques so that search engines can actually spider content. These techniques may require access to specific portions of a web site and/or authorization from specific employees of a company who are 'out of the loop'; without ensuring proper organization beforehand can causes delays and can wreak havoc with SEO timelines.

With organizations that have constantly updating web sites, there are many hurdles that may be faced by an SEO campaign.

Firstly, if whole pages are added and removed daily on a web site, then a plan may be implemented to at least basically optimize content before addition. This could mean the alteration of META tags, titles, and heading tags which, although only basic alterations, can play a key role in enhancing web site popularity. This type of Communication becomes a key issue in such cases as this and will play a major role in creating the desired environment for success.

Secondly, many online businesses require website changes made on a seasonal basis. As changes to an optimized website may put the success of the promotion in jeopardy, the company webmaster should make updating the SEO firm an important part of the process.

Thirdly, constant site updates may present a version control problem in which the site that is on the SEO's hard drive may be radically different from the modified version of the site. Again, webmasters should let the SEO provider know when a change has been made so the provider would know to download the fresh version of the website. If a webmaster is unable to contact the SEO provider, that provider should automatically download a fresh version of the site each time they prepare to work on it.

Commitment

Although this seems the simplest element to explain, there cannot be enough said here to highlight its importance.

Firstly, SEO promotions inherently take time! Initial results are not always instantaneous and will often take 1-3 months. Do not panic and change the optimization of your web site! Day-to-day tweaking has long been a thing of the past (since 1997/98 when Infoseek indexed every few hours) and such alterations could harm your search engine standings.

Secondly, should the search engines change the rules without warning (this has and can happen); your SEO representatives may need to reevaluate the current status of your promotions. At this time it is more important than ever to be calm and listen to the experienced advice that your SEO Company provides. The reality of the Internet and the major search engines is that they are ever-changing and all that an SEO can do in this situation is to provide advice and re-optimize content if necessary.

Thirdly, as a veteran SEO I have often be faced with situations where, despite our initial warnings on expectations, a client has placed all his/her eggs in one basket. It is extremely important that Search Engine Optimization is not the only advertising medium being used to promote your business! There is no question that traditional search engine promotions are a proven and effective form of promotion; to a degree, however, they are still governed by chance and Murphy's Law. This degree of chance is inevitably dependant upon the competency of the SEO Company that you have chosen in combination with the current stability of the search engines.

Finally, keep the lines of communication between your SEO's, your Webmaster, and your Marketing Staff clean and clear. This requires a commitment of at least one meeting per month where each party can ask questions or inform one another of their current status. This will serve to maintain clarity throughout the promotion and allow your SEO's to raise any concerns regarding inefficiencies in communication or to note any upcoming changes in the search engine world. It is important to note that SEO promotions require continual maintenance and if your SEO Company smells some winds of change in the major search engines then it would be a wise idea to weigh their recommendations before dismissing them.

In Summary

Planning for an effective SEO campaign should be a part of a broader marketing strategy. While top search engine placements will improve the visibility of your website, it does not translate in to instant sales. We often tell clients that we can bring customers to their door but we can't make them buy. Even in the Internet environment, brand recognition and loyalty often help consumers choose which product to purchase. It helps if they not only see your website but if they know your products as well. The easiest way to sum it all up is in a series of two-word keyword phrases. Use Timing, Good Organization, Commit Yourself, Be Patient, and Get Noticed.