Understanding Search Engine Optimization

What does SEO actually mean?

The only mission a search engine has is to find the most relevant sites for the search terms (or keywords) you enter and bring the results back to you as quickly as possible. Out of millions of possibilities, how do search engines decide which sites best match your keywords? How do 10 particular sites end up on page one of the research results and not others?

I don’t pretend to understand the mathematics behind what search engines do, but I do know that they analyze each site for several major elements when making their decisions.

This is what search engine optimization is all about.

Onsite and Offsite SEO

We can divide SEO into two major categories: Offsite SEO and Onsite SEO. Offsite SEO accounts for approximately 75% of a search engine’s decisions about relevance. (Unfortunately for webmasters, it is the part that we have the least control over!)

What is offsite SEO? It simply describes the number and quality of links that point to your website from other websites. In other words, the more people find your content valuable and the more they create links to it from their websites, the higher your site will rank with search engines.

In contrast, onsite SEO describes all of the things a webmaster has direct control over on the site itself, such as title and description metatags. Unfortunately, onsite SEO only accounts for approximately 25% of a search engine’s decisions about relevance! Although it doesn’t carry nearly the weight with search engines that offsite SEO does, it is still extremely important to get it right.

Organic vs. Paid Searches

It is also important to understand the difference between organic and paid searches. Organic searches consist of the free results that appear in the main body of search results. Paid searches consist of the results that appear at the very top and on the right-hand column of search results. These are actually ads that companies have paid money to place online.
People are much more likely to click on a link in the organic search column (80%) than on a link in the paid search column (20%), so this is what most small business owners need to concentrate on.

**Keywords and Keyword Phrases**

What does onsite actually SEO consist of? At heart, it describes the art of using keywords in particular places on your website. These include:

- Your URL
- The title of your page
- The major headings on your page (H1 and H2 tags)
- The links on your page
- The description and keyword meta tags (These are located in the code of your page and are not visible to the casual visitor.)
- The alt tags for your images
- Your body copy

**Increasing SEO Results**

After you have incorporated all of the onsite SEO elements described above, your focus should turn to building offsite SEO. How do you do this? By creating and publishing content on a regular, consistent basis that is so valuable your readers will want to link to it and share it with others.

**Some of the best ways to increase offsite SEO include:**

- Writing a blog
- Writing and publishing content, such as online articles, news releases, white papers, ebooks and videos
- Participating actively in social media–especially Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn