



Management

ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Gurneet Kaur *¹

*¹ Department of Commerce, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Khalsa College, Delhi University, India

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Abstract

Search Engines are an indispensable platform for users all over the globe to search for relevant information online. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the exercise of improving the position of a website in search engine rankings, for a chosen set of keywords. SEO is divided into two parts: On-Page and Off-Page SEO. In order to be successful, both the areas require equal attention. This paper aims to explain the functioning of the search engines along with the role and importance of search engine optimization.

Keywords: Indexing; Crawling; Search Engines; SEO; Website; On-Page; Off-Page.

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1. Introduction

Search engine is a web software program or web based script available over the Internet that searches documents and files for keywords and returns the list of results containing those keywords (Ayush, 2013). Google, Bing, Yahoo, AOL.com, Baidu are among the top search engines of the world and account for majority of the Internet traffic. Google accounts for over 76% of all global desktop search traffic, followed by Bing at 8%, Baidu at 7.5% and Yahoo at 7%. (Source: NetMarketShare, 2016)

SEO enables a business to improve its visibility online in an organic manner. Organic search means the website listings on search engines rank because of their relevance and popularity and not owing to pay per click advertising (PPC).

2. Objectives

- To understanding the functioning of Search Engines
- To examine the importance of Search Engine Optimization
- To understand how to succeed in SEO

3. Role and Importance of SEO

Every business, wanting to improve its online visibility on various search engines, has two options: paid advertising or SEO. SEO simply means improving the ranking of the website against a specific set of keywords on a specific search engine, say Google, organically. There are basically three main types of online searches¹:

- "Do" Transactional Queries: **"Which is the best insurance policy"**
- "Know" Informational Queries: **"Policy bazaar website"**
- "Go" Navigation Queries: **"Buy insurance policy online"**

When a search is performed on a search engine say Google, a user sees:

- Approximately 10 Organic Results per page
- 100s of Pages of Search Results
- Few paid results per page

All these websites are competing for attention around the same keyword! The organic results on each page get the majority of clicks and users tend to click only on the top 3-4 results as they are perceived to be the most relevant ones.

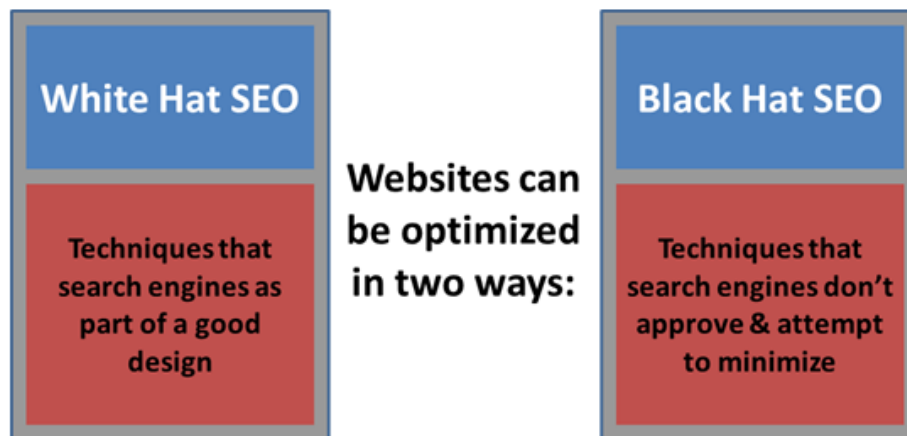


Figure 1: Ways to optimize a website

For the purpose of this study, we have focused only on the white-hat practices.

SEO techniques are of two types: ..

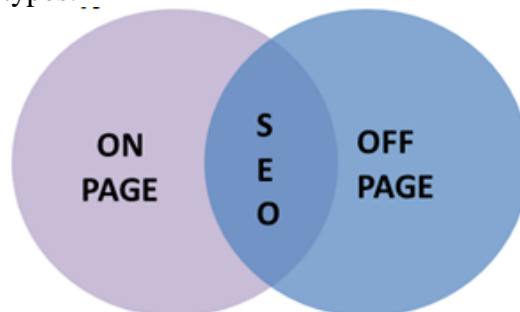


Figure 2: Types of SEO techniques

¹ <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo>

Both the techniques are equally important to maintain and improve the overall ranking of a website against a specific set of keywords.

In order to succeed at SEO, every business needs to follow these simple steps:

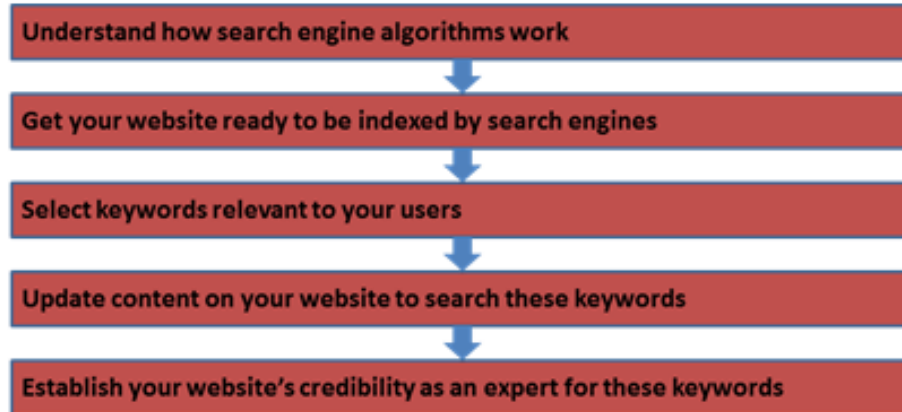


Figure 3: 5 steps to succeed at SEO

3.1. Understanding How Search Engines Work

The first step here is to understand how Search Engines work. To replicate how users would search for information on the web, Search Engines use supercomputers to scan through every page on the internet which are commonly known as ‘spiders’? These spiders perform two main functions: Crawling and Indexing. ‘Spiders’ crawl through each webpage on the Internet and index these pages and their content to provide relevant results when users search for a query.

The next important thing to understand is that how does search engines determine how pages are to be ranked? They determine the ranking of each result based on two criteria²:

i. Relevance

How relevant is the content on a website with regard to the keyword searched?

ii. Popularity

How many websites on the web refer to your website as a credible source of information?

Businesses, at this stage, should ensure:

- Web page is **discovered** on the web by the spider
- Allow the Spider to **crawl** through the website and **consume** the information on it easily
- Include **relevant** information in your website so as to help **index** your pages appropriately for relevant queries

3.2. Getting Website Ready

The next step post understanding the working of search engines is to get the website of the business ready according to the algorithm of the various search engines.

² <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo>

- i. Search engines like Google **can't read images** and only crawl and index the text listed on various WebPages online. This information is provided through alt-tags. Every image must have alt-tags in order to be crawled. Always ensure that the text that needs to be indexed is not put inside images. For example, if the company name or address is to be indexed, make sure it is not displayed inside a company logo³.
- ii. Planning the **Navigation Tab** is a very important element here because search engines read a website from left to right and top to bottom. The navigation tab needs to be planned accordingly for the spiders to crawl easily.
- iii. Having a **clear structure of how the website pages** are linked is always better. Creating a simple, easy to navigate link structure for a website allows search engines to index them easily.
- iv. The use of **Header Tags** to structure the content to suit crawling helps improve the ranking of the website. The header allows users to discover and consume the content more easily and Search Engines look at headings to understand what the content in the page is about. Always remember to never use more than 1 header per page.
- v. **Titles and Meta Descriptions** play a major role in attracting users to visit a website. One should always use a Title of less than 70 characters, and Meta description of 150-160 characters and to never use the same Meta description for 2 WebPages.
- vi. Lastly, Having a clear, well-defined **URL Structure** is a must. One should always include the most important keywords in the webpage URL by using hyphens to separate different words.

3.3. Select Keywords Relevant to Users

There are two types of keywords to target in SEO. 'Short Tail' keywords include 1-3 words. 'Long Tail' keywords are more descriptive, and more *intent-ful* when typed. Long-tail keywords make up majority of searches on the internet. A Visitor on a Website from a Long-Tail keyword is more likely to convert over a visitor from a short-tail keyword. Google's AdWords Keyword Planner tool is a common starting point for SEO keyword research. It not only suggests keywords and provides estimated search volume, but also predicts the cost of running paid campaigns for these terms(Source: Moz.com).

3.4. Updating Website Content as Per the Keywords

Website content continues to be the no.1 factor for success in SEO. The content should be simple, precise and to-the-point, speak about the company, product, or service, bring out the USPs of the business and keep a visitor interested in the website. Search Engines determine the relevance of a website's content with respect to a keyword searched based on:

- i. Does a website content include this keyword?
- ii. Is the website content relevant to the keyword?
- iii. Is the website content unique?
- iv. Does the website create fresh content often?

³ <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo>

Tailoring the content on the website contributes to on-page optimization. One should not stuff the content with keywords and as a practice should try to restrict the 'keyword density' to 5 words out of every 100 words. The focus should be on creating simple, genuine content that website users will understand.

3.5. Establishing Credibility of a Website

Search engines determine the popularity and relevance of a website in another way: the number of websites linking back to a particular website. The links to the website are called 'backlinks' The more the number of backlinks, the more shall be the credibility of the website. Creating backlinks to a website is a cornerstone of SEO and is 50% responsible for SEO results. Backlinks can be built in the following ways:

i. Directories

There are hundreds of online business directories on the web. A business should find appropriate ones and list the business there along with the website.

ii. Comments

Identifying relevant blogs related to the industry or product. Leaving comments or opinion in their comments section along with a link to the website is a very good way to build backlinks.

iii. Guest Blogs

On relevant blogs and websites, submitting a guest blog in the form of a 100-200 word limit and including a link to the website in the blog would ensure quality backlinks generation.

4. Conclusion

Search Engine Optimization is a very important element of Digital Marketing and is used widely to improve the visibility of an online business across various search engines. While undertaking various steps to ensure SEO for a particular website, blackhat practices must always be avoided as they may lead to a ban from the search engine. Backlinks must always be created on relevant websites and directories and constitute fifty percent of SEO. On-page SEO, on the other hand, primarily involves including relevant keywords across the website content to improve relevance. One should always remember that SEO is a long term practice and thus never expect immediate results.

References

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*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: gurneetkaur29@gmail.com