

You Have a Website. Great! But, Can Anyone Find It?
How optimizing your website can increase traffic and grow your business.

By

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About the Author

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By now, most businesses and organizations understand the importance of having a website. Many spend thousands of dollars to design a beautiful site with professional photography, state-of-the-art graphics and Flash animation. They complete the design, launch the site, breathe a sigh of relief and check that off the “To-Do” list.

Not so fast. Just because a company has a website, doesn’t mean anyone knows about it or can even find it for that matter. Before we dig deeper into what makes a website effective, let’s think about who we’d like to visit our site and what route they are traveling through cyberspace to land there.

Most people who visit a website have reached that destination in one of two ways:

#1 – They were directly driven to the site by typing in the URL address, provided to them through some marketing piece like a link in an email blast, a business card or a brochure. Most likely, these people are existing clients, contacts already in your database or direct referrals. In other words, you already have access to these people in one way or another.

#2 – Other people, the ones who could potentially be the most valuable visitors to your website, find you by searching keywords or phrases that are relevant to your business/organization on Google and other search engines. I say these folks could be the most valuable because they are the coveted “new leads,” those potential clients that you didn’t have access to before.

Websites are a great resource for new business, but only if web surfers can easily find your site through search engines. That means your site should ideally come up in the first 10 search listings on search engine results pages.

That’s where Search Engine Optimization (SEO) comes into play. You can easily test your site’s “searchability” by plugging in relevant keywords in Google to see how you rank. Always remember to ask yourself what words or phrases the average person might search if looking for information about your type of business.

For example, if you own a brake repair shop in Spokane, Washington, you could assume someone might search the phrase “Spokane brake repair.” If you test out a few key phrases and find that your business doesn’t show up on the first page (or any page) of the major search engines, then you know you need to do a little SEO tweaking on your website.

SEO can get pretty complicated and, depending on your level of knowledge, interest and available time, you can try to educate yourself and tackle it personally or employ a consultant to help you.

Whether you do it yourself or get help, you should understand how search engines work. In a nutshell, search engines send out bits of computer code called spiders that crawl around the web looking for information on web pages. The spiders read the information and then store it in a giant database for the future benefit of searchers. This is called

“indexing.” Sophisticated algorithmic functions determine the most relevant results to deliver based on the search term.

There are two major factors that impact your search engine rankings: On Page and Off Page elements.

On Page elements are things you can actually see on your website, like the page title or Title Tag (which is visible in the area above the URL window), the headlines and the copy. All of these On Page elements should contain keywords, those key phrases used by the “Average Joe” on Google. The more you use keywords (appropriately) on your site, the more likely your site will show up in the search engines.

While On Page elements are important and a more tangible concept to grasp; Off Page factors now have the greatest impact on search engine ranking. Once people got wise to the magic of keywords, some unethical webmasters started “stuffing” their sites with these phrases – even when it didn’t make sense. Google caught on and modified its algorithm for determining search relevance. Now, instead of ranking based solely on the copy on your site, Google places a heavier emphasis on how others promote your site as a resource. That’s what Off Page SEO refers to. It’s looking at the general trust and authority of a domain based on the quality of incoming links and the sheer number of links to a specific page from other sites. It’s also looking at the Anchor Text, which are the words used in the clickable portion of a link that appears on another website.

You can increase your Off Page SEO by encouraging other businesses in your industry to link to your site as a resource. This could be accomplished by a link building email blast campaign. Be sure to send the complete link you want displayed on their page, along with Anchor Text. Publishing a blog is another effective way to get people to visit your site. It also helps position you as an expert in your industry, as long as your postings are worthwhile.

There’s much more involved in increasing a site’s search engine ranking and it takes time; but the results are measurable. Just be sure to take note of your ranking when you get started so you can document your progress. In addition to ranking, you should also track the number of visitors to your site each month, using a tool like Google Analytics.

Increasing your web traffic means nothing if you don’t capture the contact information of your visitors so you can convert surfers to customers. Add a “subscribe to our blog or newsletter” feature so you can add their email addresses to your database for ongoing communication and cultivation.

By optimizing your website, you’ve transformed it into an active marketing tool that is constantly attracting and adding new business leads to your arsenal. If you keep your content fresh and compelling and you continue to monitor your ranking and traffic, your site could do more for you than a team of high-paid sales people.