

“I know my business and I have a website, but I don’t understand SEO.” Does this sound like you?

For many small businesses it’s a big job just to keep up sales, maintain customer satisfaction, and grow year-by-year without having to consider the regular optimization of a website. Particularly for businesses that do not sell online, the small business SEO strategy that it pursues is often limited to creating a Facebook page, posting, and hoping that it somehow works.

The bad news is that it won’t work. But the good news is that it need not take a long time or a lot of effort to keep your small business website optimized and attract potential customers to your site.

Small businesses usually lack something that bigger businesses don’t: a large budget. When money is tight and spending on SEO means cutting back on some other essential area of business, it can be tough to make that call. In fact, a recent survey found that most small business have a ceiling of \$500 on their SEO spending and for that amount of money, they are expecting some huge results. Considering that SEO has become almost synonymous with content marketing for most agencies, even that amount of money may not allow a small business website to move up the search rankings with the speed that business is seeking.

Luckily, there are SEO tactics that one can employ that won’t cost a cent. Most do not take much time. Others take a little more of an investment in time and effort, but need not involve the spending of hundreds of dollars on improving a search ranking.

Tips for Small Business SEO

Be original

Anything you put on your website should be your own. Search engines hate duplicate content and will penalize sites that reuse content from other places online. By all means, allow yourself to be inspired by a competitor, or attempt to emulate the success of a bigger business, but ensure that everything you place on your website is created just for you. This also goes for the text that you write for your site. Avoid copying the text on your ‘About Us’ page onto your ‘Contact Us’ page: duplicate content hurts your ranking no matter where it is on your site.

Use descriptive titles and headlines

Getting the title or headline right for every page on your site is essential. You should consider what your customer is likely to be looking for and what they would expect to find elsewhere. Hence, ‘Contact’ is a better page title candidate than ‘Drop Us A Line’ or ‘Let’s Talk’.

Compose effective meta-descriptions

Every page of your website should have an associated meta-description. These short, 160-character summaries of the page are presented to people who search for keywords beneath the link that they will click. How do you convince them to click your link? Ensure that you have used the targeted keyword in your meta-description and that it clearly summarizes the content on the page. If your headline or page title is relevant, and your meta-description is effective, there is a far greater chance that a visitor will click through to your site.

Use your keywords in the right place

Search engines crawl all your content but weight certain areas of your pages more heavily than others when determining relevance to a certain keyword. You should concentrate your efforts on using the targeted keyword in the URL of your page, the title of the page, the meta-description (as described above), in the headings and sub-headings on a page, and in the alt-tags on images. This doesn't mean you shouldn't use the keyword term elsewhere, just that you should always use it in those places.

Add your address

Most small businesses work locally, and most customers are looking for their locality in search engines using a search that is simply [keyword] [city] or [keyword] [zipcode]. It's obvious, then, that making sure you identify your location is part of your SEO strategy. Make sure that your address and contact information (including phone number) are prominent on key pages on your site (home, about, contact) but also consider including them in the footer of all of your pages.

Add social sharing buttons

Improving your on-site SEO can be a lot of work for one person. But what if you could harness the power of others to spread the word about your site and its great content? By encouraging visitors to share your content and making it easy for them to do so, you'll have a great chance of being found by those who might not otherwise click on your search result entry. With research suggesting that many consumers value the advice and recommendations of friends and family, even over the first rank entry on a Google results page, adding social sharing buttons to your site and encouraging people to click is a great way of improving your online visibility without spending a cent.

Create and upload videos

Creating videos will cost you time – most of it spent editing rather than filming– but the payoff is worth it. The advantage of video as content is two-fold: first, they keep people on your site longer as they'll watch a compelling video through to the end; second, by uploading that video to places such as YouTube or Vimeo, you can drive potential customers to your site. You shouldn't be thinking Hollywood-style productions and the videos should be related to your business. Film how you complete a task from start-to-finish, film yourself offering a tip that will save a customer time and money, or film yourself reviewing one of your new products. Interesting videos that are relevant to your business and relevant to your customers' needs are sure to help you improve your online positioning.

Backup your site

Finally, a tip that will only take a few minutes to implement but will save you days or weeks of headaches. You should always ensure that you have backed up your website: every page, every post, every picture – the whole thing. Search engines regularly crawl your site and, if for some reason it goes down and you don't notice, it will quickly be deleted from the search engine results that are served. All that work, all that time, and all that effort you put in to improving your SEO will be lost unless you back up regularly. It's easy to do and most services cost only a couple dollars per month– they'll even email you if your site goes down so you can be proactive in solving any downtime issues. As the maxim goes, better to be safe than sorry: backup regularly so all your SEO hard work is not wasted.

Maria L. Novak Dugan is president of Marketing Solutions & Business Development, a firm in West Chester, PA, offering creative marketing services and goal implementation for small & medium sized businesses. For more information, contact Maria at 610-405-0633 or MariaNovak001@yahoo.com or visit www.Maria-L-Novak.com