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Search Engine Optimization Strategies for Online Retailers

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Abstract

With the internet becoming increasingly accessible to consumers of all goods and services, search engines are becoming an important step in the online shopping process. For companies to appear on the most visited search result pages, search engine optimization (SEO) strategies are needed more than ever before. This annotated bibliography features literature published between 2007 and 2014 to help ecommerce, operations, and marketing business managers create and implement SEO strategies for online retail businesses.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 7 |
| Problem | 7 |
| Purpose | 9 |
| Research Questions | 9 |
| Audience..... | 10 |
| Search Report | 10 |
| Documentation Approach | 11 |
| Reference Evaluation Criteria | 12 |
| Annotated Bibliography..... | 14 |
| Category 1: Search engine optimization background | 14 |
| Category 2: Best practices for search engine optimization | 17 |
| Conclusion | 31 |
| Search engine optimization background | 31 |
| Best practices for search engine optimization..... | 33 |
| References..... | 36 |

Introduction

Problem

The world that Fred Meyer Jewelers (FMJ) functions within is a very unique amalgam of retail leaders. With their rival soon to be the largest fine jeweler in the United States, upon completion of the pending merger of Zale Corp. and Sterling (Graff, 2014), FMJ is struggling to gain market share in an industry that is highly fragmented. Fred Meyer Jewelers currently runs 320 of the nearly 30,000 fine jewelry retail stores in the United States (National Jeweler, 2012). Even with continual contraction of the industry through normal business cycles, the volume of locations that FMJ has leaves many areas of opportunity where customers are not aware of the FMJ brand identity. With relatively few brick and mortar locations and the ability to physically expand diminishing with the high costs of doing business and high vacancies in shopping mall locations (Hudson, 2011; Jewelers of America, 2013), FMJ needs to be able to reach potential customers in more areas beyond the reach of its physical locations.

The utilization of search engine optimization can provide the ability to reach more customers (Landers, 2014) and enables a company to continue to focus on increasing market share without needing to add store locations. Search engines have become so popular for the internet that more than half of all visitors to a specific web site are referred by a search engine rather than direct links (Dou, Lim, Su, Zhou, & Cul, 2010; Evans, 2007). With recent advancements in technology businesses have begun to reach out to potential consumers in different ways such as electronic commerce and mobile commerce, in addition to traditional brick and mortar locations (Dass & Maity, 2014). In particular, fine jewelry consumers are getting more comfortable using computers, smart phones and tablets to research products and make purchases (Lipson, 2012). By focusing on search engine technologies and approaches

related to optimization, FMJ can explore approaches to both capture market share of online consumers and expand brand awareness to those in market areas not currently served by FMJ (Adelaar, Bouwman, & Steinfeld, 2004).

Many customers rarely look at results outside of the first few pages of search results on Google or Bing (Dou, Lim, Su, Zhou, & Cul, 2010; Evans, 2007), thus pointing to the need for search engine optimization. With almost half of all purchasers of watches and fine jewelry researching these purchases online (Lipson, 2012), FMJ has an opportunity through SEO to ensure that FMJ appears in the top ranges of customer search results and thus expand their brand awareness and become a trusted online and offline retailer (Bock, Lee, Kuan, & Kim, 2012).

The focus of this research is to identify literature to inform the creation and implementation of an organization-wide plan that leads to an executable search engine optimization strategy. There is currently little to no understanding of and focus on the actions the company needs to take in order to become more relevant in search engine results which may prove a factor in why online sales have been unsuccessful for FMJ to date. “Understanding which factors can influence a page’s ranking in a search engine is therefore crucial for any web site that wishes to attract large numbers of users...” (Evans, 2007, p. 22). By working to create a successful online search strategy to be used for operational, marketing and ecommerce opportunities, FMJ should be able to reach more current and potential customers regardless of their proximity to current brick and mortar locations (Killoran, 2013). FMJ has ample resources to reach customers through paid advertisements on search rankings pages; however, the current need is to implement a strategy focused on organic or non-paid relevancy based search results (PC Magazine, 2014) that do not negatively impact the marketing or ecommerce budgets.

This problem falls within a few different aspects of information management, including system- design and data integration, technology processes and procedures, and collaboration among stakeholder groups. The research also encompasses the use of analytical systems to optimize search engine results and enable marketing data analysis.

Purpose

Search engine optimization is known as a process that can help increase website traffic but has very daunting overtones such as keeping up with algorithm changes and other muted updates (Atalla, 2014; Cui & Hu, 2011). As search engines have grown in popularity, their level of use has steadily grown and now nearly 50% of all web traffic can be attributed to their use (Dou, Lim, Su, Zhou, & Cul, 2010; Evans, 2007; Yunfeng, 2010). While increasing rankings on these websites is the ultimate goal of SEO strategies, the real success measurement is the increase in revenue that occurs as a company increases its web exposure. This realization causes more and more companies to research and implement various SEO strategies in order to increase exposure in hopes of increasing their revenue levels (Landers, 2014).

The purpose of this annotated bibliography is to identify literature that addresses retail search engine optimization. A key goal of this study is to inform a strategic plan to provide Fred Meyer Jewelers with a framework to enhance their search engine results and continue to optimize the utilization of all customer-facing e-commerce websites. Implementing enhanced search engine optimization techniques allows FMJ to increase their visibility to potential customers (Dou, Lim, Su, Zhou, & Cul, 2010; Killoran, 2013), and over time should lead to increases in sales and revenue (Landers, 2014).

Research Questions

Main question. With search engines becoming such an important part of the online experience for customers (Dou, Lim, Su, Zhou, & Cul, 2010; Evans, 2007), what search engine strategies and techniques exist to drive new customer traffic to e-Commerce sites?

Audience

The intended audience for this research is the FMJ Executive Committee consisting of the company's President and Vice Presidents of Marketing and Operations, who are able to approve the project's eventual implementation. Other stakeholders are the management teams of the Ecommerce, Digital Marketing and Operations departments. These three departments work together to ensure that the online strategy of the company is implementable at the levels requested, and are the groups to implement the search strategy. The Ecommerce group is affected the most with the responsibility to implement many changes to their existing website and information content processes. In addition, the Digital Marketing team will be able to focus less on paid search and more on increasing opportunities organically, based on page content as seen by the search engine's proprietary algorithms (The Computer Language Company, 2014). The Operations team works to make sure policies and information are current and that the store location information is as accurate as possible.

Search Report

Search strategy. The search strategy is mainly focused on the journal databases from the University of Oregon Library, as well as Google Scholar. The main types of journals are business, IT and psychology based, in order to get both business and consumer input on shopping and product research strategies.

Key terms. The research focus is on different keywords in order to get specific and relevant information. The key words that are used are listed below. These terms focus on the

topics of search engine optimization, and marketing, including branding. Different combinations of these keywords and their related synonyms are suitable to find additional articles that are not returned with searches utilizing the original terms. These keywords are:

- Search Engine Optimization
- Search Engine Marketing
- Online Branding
- Ecommerce Marketing
- Branding on Google; BING; Yahoo
- Search Engine Updates
- Optimization AND Retail
- Online Retailer Trust

Search engines and databases. This literature review utilizes searches of business related databases from the University of Oregon Library system as well as Google Scholar. This search strategy includes finding articles in Business Source Complete, JSTOR, IEEE Computer Science Digital Library and Mintel Reports. These databases allow for business-based viewpoints on the search terms and include relevant articles on implementation and overall benefits.

Documentation Approach

With the entirety of the research for this literary review conducted electronically, it is paramount to properly collect and catalog the reference materials. Each article sourced is documented in a running Microsoft Word document. Each notation includes full citation information and article abstract to maximize efficiency. Sources are managed through their relevancy as defined below in this literary review and are moved between active and inactive

status as necessary. As final sources are determined, they are easily gathered for utilization for references and citations. Each reference is categorized based on its relevance in two areas: (a) best practices for search engine optimization, and (b) search engine optimization background. References identified in the best practices categories offer tips, techniques and insight into strategies that will assist in search engine optimization. Those references that are categorized as information sources have past and current information that provide a context for search engine optimization strategies.

Reference Evaluation Criteria

Each article sourced focuses on the topic of search engine optimization and is evaluated based on its authority, objectivity, quality, currency and relevancy as defined by Bell and Frantz (2013). References are determined to be authoritative when they are verified to be peer-reviewed and appear in relevant academic journals or from prominent computer science publications. Their objectivity is determined by verifying the intended purpose of the reference material, or if the material is biased in any manner, such as neglecting to present both sides of an issue (Bell & Frantz, 2013). The quality of each source is determined by the organization of the material, whether it is appropriate to the topic of search engine optimization, the lack of grammatical and typographical errors, and how well it is presented. Each article is determined to be current if it has been written and published within the last 10 years in order to keep up with frequently changing search engine optimization strategies (Lewandowski, 2008). Older information within this time range is used to provide a base level of information regarding basic SEO strategies that persist over time. Older information from this range allows a base level of knowledge, while newer information helps to understand the subtle changes that search engine algorithms have undergone in recent years. Relevancy is evaluated for each source based on

how appropriate the content is for the topic of search engine optimization and whether the source from which it comes is scholarly in nature. The references are selected from primary and secondary scholarly sources to maintain a high level of relevance (Bell & Frantz, 2013).

Annotated Bibliography

The following annotated bibliography features 15 references that explore search engine optimization. These references offer insights from research, experience and results from empirical studies on effective search engine optimization strategies and tactics that are effective in working with top search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo. References are selected to help online business managers identify and implement certain practices and strategies to improve their search engine results and optimize key web pages and websites. These references are presented in two categories 1) search engine optimization background and 2) best practices for search engine optimization.

Each annotation consists of three sections, full bibliographic citation, author-published abstract and summary. The abstracts are taken as they are published and the summaries are created to present the relevance to search engine optimization information or tips and best practices.

Category 1: Search engine optimization background

Arnold, S. E. (2014). Will SEO manage information access? *KM World*, 1-18

Abstract. The article questions whether search engine optimization (SEO) will manage information access. It discusses issues related to the search system's locating of information including quality, response time and responsibility, as well as its longtime problem in reliability. It also presents the questions to ask anyone concerned with managing knowledge including the available software systems, required staff resources and necessary security procedures.

Summary. This article offers insight and information on search engine optimization and how it is becoming increasingly important to many different types of

businesses. Both internal and external uses for search engine optimization are discussed as well as how different types of customers use the search fields. This article acknowledges that technology doesn't necessarily answer a question a user inputs the same way another person would but instead provides the best information that the technology determines is relevant to the question asked. In some instances the phrase input by a user for a search can be a detriment to accurately finding the information for which one may be searching. Finally, the article poses five questions that business managers should ask themselves as they look into managing the information contained within their websites and the ability to be optimized for search engines.

Landers, B. (2014). The measure of SEO success is revenue not your google website ranking. *Air Conditioning Heating & Refrigeration News*, 24.

Abstract. The author informs that the gauge to search engine optimization (SEO) success is revenue and gross profit rather than the ranking of the business website. He discusses the important metrics in SEOs and tells how to track these metrics through the hierarchy of performance metrics, impressions generated every time the website appears on search results, and visibility as a factor in clicks and visits. Also discussed are tracking appointments and sales, and accurate tracking of SEO results.

Summary. The author, President/CEO of Inbound Marketing at Blue Corona and a published author in the field of SEO, discusses how to gauge the success of the implementation of a search engine optimization strategy. The author indicates that search engine optimization should lead not only to higher rankings on search engine result pages, but also to increased revenue. The author talks about different metrics that are used to determine successes of search engine optimization strategies and while outcomes

like increased traffic and clicks are good signs, success should be determined by how much revenue a company is able to create based on the increases in traffic. While many of these strategies are used to bring customers to a specific site, if a company cannot convert the searcher to a buyer then the company needs to look at what additional areas need improvement to be able to convert this increased traffic from browsers into purchasers rather than just browsers.

Moody, E. & Bates, M. (2013). PR students' perceptions and readiness for using search engine optimization. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 66-80. doi: 10.1177/1077695813478182

Abstract. Enough evidence is available to support the idea that public relations professionals must possess search engine optimization (SEO) skills to assist clients in a full-service capacity; however, little research exists on how much college students know about the tactic and best practices for incorporating SEO into course curriculum. Furthermore, much of the literature on the topic is in trade publications and blogs rather than scholarly journals. To fill this void, this study has two primary objectives. First, it seeks to shed light on definitions, trends, and current practices relating to the use of SEO in public relations. Second, the study seeks to learn how much students know about SEO and where they acquired their knowledge. Educators can incorporate this information into curricula to help students remain current with the profession. Study findings are informative not only for PR professors who are considering adding SEO elements to courses but also for PR professionals who want to learn more about the topic.

Summary. This article discusses the ideas of search engine optimization from a public relations standpoint. The authors discuss new media, primarily social media, and

how search engines have embraced them including Google who has begun to index tweets to allow Twitter results to appear when relevant. The utilization of search engine optimization techniques in public relations materials such as adding links and utilizing keywords in online press releases and other documentation has made search engine optimization a very relevant topic for public relations professionals. The authors of this article conducted research by interviewing college students majoring in public relations on their knowledge of search engine optimization strategies and where they received their knowledge. According to their research, many of these future public relations professionals didn't know what search engine optimization was or had answers that showed a lack of understanding of search engine optimization. More than 20% of participants didn't know how search engine optimization was changing the landscape of public relations and almost 34% did not know how search engine optimization could be helpful in crisis management situations. While the authors who conducted this research were hoping to find public relations students with an understanding of and eagerness for the utilization of search engine optimization, the results showed that quite a few understood what search engine optimization is but did not understand how it can be used by public relations professionals.

Category 2: Best practices for search engine optimization

Atalla, A. (2014, February 13). Eight tips for search success. *Marketing Week*, pp. 4-5.

Abstract. The article looks at business websites as marketing tools, as of 2014. It discusses strategies for search engine optimization including preparing interesting and useful website content, integrating customers' online reviews, and analyzing the websites

of other businesses in the same industry. Other topics include website coding, social media, and pay-per-click (PPC) advertisements.

Summary. This article takes the potentially daunting ideas of search engine optimization and breaks them down into eight topics that most business managers are able to implement and understand to improve their search engine results. This article focuses on practices that a company can utilize to optimize their search results for Google's search engine. The author discusses the idea of thinking like Google when creating content and links within a site rather than attempting to over-think the process. This article also discusses the common approaches that businesses implement, thinking the strategy is complete, when there is a bit more that can be done with little effort to enhance their relevance in search results. Many tools are mentioned from Google and Microsoft that can be utilized to make enhancements without causing too many headaches for business leaders. Atalla mentions that businesses need to begin to create content on their sites that is not only optimized for search engines, but optimized for their customers. It is becoming more important to consumers that the information is relevant and well conceived and executed rather than only created to cater to the needs of the search engine with a purpose of appearing higher in the search engine results page.

Cui, M., & Hu, S. (2011). Search engine optimization research for website promotion.

International Conference of Information Technology, Computer Engineering and Management Sciences, 100-103. doi:10.1109/ICM.2011.308

Abstract. In order to make the search engine transfer information efficiently and accurately and do this optimization to improve the web search ranking, beginning with understanding the principle of search engine, this paper exports the specific explanation

of search engine optimization. And then it introduces the new website building concepts and design concepts for the purpose of the construction of search engine optimization. Through an empirical research from the fields of the internal coding method, the website content realizable form and website overall architecture, the paper expounds search engine optimization tools, strategies and methods, and analysis the new thought that the enterprise and e-commerce sites with the search engine do the effective website promotion. And when the user through the search engine to search, the website can get a good rankings position in the search results, so as to improve the site traffic and finally enhance the website sales ability or advocacy capacity.

Summary. This paper looks at the concepts behind a search engine and what can be done to improve results within the search rankings. The article supports the idea that search engines are designed strategically to collect and distribute information based on specific criteria. Highly respected search engines typically have four key characteristics: they are (a) rapid, (b) accurate, (c) easy to use and (d) strong. Every search engine is designed to focus on these characteristics with different priority levels. Some focus on speed but can be a bit more difficult to use, whereas others may be very easy to use, but lack in accuracy. This paper covers the four types of search engines; full text, directory, META and vertical. Each of these different styles of search engines is useful for different types of searches and has its own strengths and weaknesses. Also discussed are the underlying processes of search engines including crawling, and processing web pages in order to provide the most relevant information when a search is initiated. The authors also discuss optimization tools, focusing on keyword, link, and usability tools. These tools along with keyword strategies and high quality linking are presented as extremely

important to search engine optimization. The article also mentions SEO friendly opportunities for businesses that make it easier for search engines to find pages within a website, including friendly URLs and directories, website navigation and cleaner coding. There are many opportunities that will directly and indirectly affect a web page's ranking and with search engines constantly updating their algorithms and processes, the authors note that businesses have to continually monitor their search engine rankings and make necessary updates to maintain their relevance.

Dou, W., Lim, K., Su, C., Zhou, N., & Cul, N. (2010). Brand positioning strategy using search engine marketing. *MIS Quarterly*, 261-279.

Abstract. Whether and how firms can employ relative rankings in search engine results pages (SERPs) to differentiate their brands from competitors in cyberspace remains a critical, puzzling issue in e-commerce research. By synthesizing relevant literature from cognitive psychology, marketing, and e-commerce, this study identifies key contextual factors that are conducive for creating brand positioning online via SERPs. In two experiments, the authors establish that when Internet users' implicit beliefs (i.e., schema) about the meaning of the display order of search engine results are activated or heightened through feature priming, they will have better recall of an unknown brand that is displayed before the well-known brands in SERPs. Further, those with low Internet search skills tend to evaluate the unknown brand more favorably along the particular brand attribute that activates the search engine ranking schema. This research has both theoretical and practical implications for understanding the effectiveness of search engine optimization techniques.

Summary. The authors of this article explore search engine optimization for e-commerce websites and the potential effect search engine result pages have on brand perception. The article discusses previous research that has been conducted about human decision-making processes and internet usage in regard to search engine result pages. The authors of this article conduct experiments to see how search engine users respond to unknown brands appearing mixed in with well known brands on search engine result pages, as well as any advantage this may have for a lesser-known brand. Also studied in this research is how customers of various search skills utilize a search engine result page. The first experiment conducted utilized college students performing searches on a Google look-alike webpage that was created to display multiple well known brands along with some lesser known brands. Participants searched for a particular term and results were augmented to show an unknown brand either first or fourth within the results page. Their research indicates that the unknown brand was selected by over half of the participants when it appeared in the #1 positioning, and was selected by less than 30% when it was in the #4 position of the search result page. The authors of this article were able to utilize the information from their own study to determine that when an unknown brand is able to appear higher in certain search engine result pages than other well-known competitors, it leads to a great improvement in visibility and willingness of consumers to explore the unknown brand. The lesser-known brands that have results appearing just after well known brands will have less of an opportunity to be seen in a similar light as the well-known competition.

Evans, M. P. (2007). Analysing Google rankings through search engine optimization data.

Internet Research, 21-37. doi:10.1108/10662240710730470

Abstract. Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to identify the most popular techniques used to rank a web page highly in Google. Design/methodology/approach - The paper presents the results of a study into 50 highly optimized web pages that were created as part of a Search Engine Optimization competition. The study focuses on the most popular techniques that were used to rank highest in this competition, and includes an analysis on the use of PageRank, number of pages, number of in-links, domain age and the use of third party sites such as directories and social bookmarking sites. A separate study was made into 50 non-optimized web pages for comparison. Findings - The paper provides insight into the techniques that successful Search Engine Optimizers use to ensure a page ranks highly in Google. Recognizes the importance of PageRank and links as well as directories and social bookmarking sites. Research limitations/implications - Only the top 50 web sites for a specific query were analyzed. Analysing more web sites and comparing with similar studies in different competition would provide more concrete results. Practical implications - The paper offers a revealing insight into the techniques used by industry experts to rank highly in Google, and the success or otherwise of those techniques. Originality/value - This paper fulfils an identified need for web sites and e-commerce sites keen to attract a wider web audience.

Summary. This article focuses on what information plays a factor in search engine rankings. While many of the specific optimization factors are closely guarded by search engine companies, such as specific algorithm language, information has been gathered to show successful search engine results that are dependent on specific back-end technology and code-based changes. The author discusses a contest held by v7n.com, a website for the search engine industry, where users were given a particular keyword and

30 days to become the #1 search ranking for that term. The insight provided by many of the contestants shows how they were able to get to the first page of search results and for some, how they were able to get to the top spot during the contest. Since this contest focused on a unique keyword, the author shows areas where the contestants focused more of their energy and some areas where they focused less, providing business managers with additional knowledge into what are important areas on which to focus daily and weekly and which areas require less monitoring.

Jones, K. B. (2010). *Search engine optimization: Your visual blueprint for effective internet marketing*. Indianapolis: John Wiley & Sons.

Abstract. Presents step-by-step instructions for a variety of search engine optimization techniques, including using and optimizing meta tags, writing effective content, building communities with blogs and forums, using Google Analytics, creating pay-per-click campaigns, and gaining exposure through social media.

Summary. This book covers many topics and strategies of search engine optimization. Its presentation is a visual, how-to guide that offers helpful tips and techniques that, when put together, can create a comprehensive strategy for any business manager to follow and implement. This book discusses basic tactics from HTML coding tweaks and the addition of metadata, to more advanced link building techniques. The book covers search engines in depth, discussing how they work and why certain techniques and tactics will work. The author covers search engine algorithms and ideas extensively to provide readers with the ability to understand the reasons behind whether a technique is effective. Other topics include keyword generation and management, internal linking, URL structure and how content is created. This book provides insights

and information that business managers can utilize to create a successful strategy that will improve their search engine standings.

Killoran, J. (2013). How to use search engine optimization techniques to increase website visibility. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communications*, 50-66.
doi:10.1109/TPC.2012.2237255

Abstract. Research questions: This tutorial aims to answer two general questions: (1) What contributes to search engine rankings? and (2) What can web content creators and webmasters do to make their content and sites easier to find by audiences using search engines? Key concepts: Search engines' rankings are shaped by three classes of participants: search engine companies and programmers, search engine optimization practitioners, and search engine users. Key lessons: By applying three key lessons, professional communicators can make it easier for audiences to find their web content through search engines: (1) consider their web content's audiences and website's competitors when analyzing keywords; (2) insert keywords into web text that will appear on search engine results pages, and (3) involve their web content and websites with other web content creators. Implications: Because successful search engine optimization requires considerable time, professional communicators should progressively apply these lessons in the sequence presented in this tutorial and should keep up to date with frequently changing ranking algorithms and with the associated changing practices of search optimization professionals.

Summary. This article discusses what information is used by search engine companies to create their search engine result pages, and what companies can do to make sure that they are maximizing the information that they are displaying on their web pages

and websites for optimal search results. The author covers the ideas of black hat or deceptive tactics, and white hat or more acceptable tactics. The article discusses how the black hat tactics can help obtain higher rankings, but are continually being phased out by search engine companies, and in some instances search engine companies are penalizing companies that use these tactics for their deceptive tactics. The article discusses the idea of considering how the customer will act when looking for a product rather than just optimizing based on how a company wants to be found. By focusing on the customer and search engine user, the author indicates that there is a greater success rate in the long term. It is important to write web page content in a way that will be in-line with how a customer will be searching on a search engine, rather than just how a business wants their brand to appear. Similar to the optimization strategies, the content strategies that are more customer-based have a tendency to be more successful over time, allowing for companies to spend less time on the same areas.

Malaga, R. A. (2007). The value of search engine optimization: An action research project at a new e-commerce site. *Journal of Electronic Commerce in Organizations*, 68-82.

Abstract. A Web site that wants to increase its number of visitors can pay for search engine ads or attempt to improve its natural search engine ranking. Nobody really knows, which, if either, of these methods provides a positive return on investment (ROI). A search engine optimization (SEO) project was undertaken at a new e-commerce site. The site's search engine rankings and traffic were measured after each phase in the project. The results indicate that SEO is an effective method for improving search engine rankings and site traffic. In addition, the costs and benefits of the SEO project are

compared with a pay-per-click (PPC) search marketing campaign. The SEO project proved more cost effective than the PPC campaign.

Summary. This article discusses the implementation and research behind a successful search engine optimization strategy. The author looks at SEO from a task point of view, indicating what result needs to be part of a strategy and how to work towards that desired result. The author focuses on initial indexing on search engines and then on how to improve rankings on search engine result pages. The author demonstrates the success that getting indexed and improving search rankings by showing a 500% increase in traffic for the tested website. The focus of the author's research is on an e-commerce based website, and the return on investment for organic search engine optimization is determined to be more favorable than the results of a potential pay-per-click advertising program that was explored as an option to increase traffic. This article shows the basics that are needed for a newer website to become established and slowly gain within the search engine rankings. The author indicates that there is additional work that is needed to maintain and continue the growth patterns that are displayed with the initial search engine indexing.

Soat, M. (2014). More pluses than minuses. *Marketing News*, 12-13.

Abstract. The article discusses the use of the social network site Google+ by companies for marketing purposes, focusing on advice on how to use the site for search engine optimization (SEO). Topics include the top status of the Google online search engine, sharing content on Google+ from other company resources such as blogs, and seeking out followers to build brand awareness.

Summary. This article presents the benefits that companies can obtain by utilizing Google+ for Marketing and customer interaction in addition to other social media channels. While Google+ is still well behind Facebook and Twitter in the realm of social media, it has one important connection that the other two do not, it is run by Google, the world's most utilized search engine. The article mentions that while it is currently unknown how much impact Google+ has on search engine results pages, that information and links from Google+ to a company's website definitely cannot hurt. The article includes five tactics on how to leverage a Google+ business profile in hopes of future search engine optimization gains. These tactics are being thorough, repurposing existing content, creating a company's 'face', going local and seeking out followers. By using a Google+ profile companies give their brand an identity to which consumers can connect, a place where customers can talk about the gifts they received or have given and a voice where trends and industry topics can be discussed with everyone. All of these tactics will help to create a better environment online for customers, but may not immediately have an impact on search engine optimization.

Spencer, S. (2012, April/May). Best practices, bad practices. *Multichannel Merchant*, 8(2), pp. 6-8.

Abstract. The article discusses the best practices in search engine optimization (SEO) in 2012. It states that one's home page is crucial and must have an indexable text written for humans, that content in inbound links should be attractive and have viral potential to maximize connections, and that uniform resource locators (URL) must be made short and reader-friendly. Customer reviews should reportedly be in hypertext markup language (HTML) for better visibility.

Summary. This article discusses a few of the easier search engine optimization standards a company can apply to their own website without venturing into potentially daunting technical territory. Key ideas that are suggested within the article are to include text on a company's home page but avoiding copy that is written just for the search engines. Additionally, companies should work on providing content that has the ability to be shared from customer to customer and gain as much traction on its own as possible, through social media and other media sharing websites. Best practices discussed within this article include cleaning up URLs and back-end coding that the search engines see as they crawl various websites, avoiding the utilization of duplicate data that is usually discarded, and learning from what a company's competitors are doing.

Sullivan, E. A. (2010). 10 minutes with...Duane Forrester. *Marketing News*, 26-27.

Abstract. The article presents an interview with Duane Forrester who is the senior manager of Microsoft Corp.'s search engine optimization program. Forrester answers questions about the Bing search engine and the best practices for search engine marketing. Topics include keyword search, title and alt tags, keyword names on images, robot.txt files, rich media, and the Uniform Resource Locators or URL structure.

Summary. This article contains the results of an interview conducted with Duane Forrester, the SEO Senior Program Manager at Microsoft. Within the interview he discusses topics of search engine optimization that help or hurt companies. Mr. Forrester mentions that age is a definite factor in all search engine algorithms, giving more credence to websites that have been around longer, rather than those that are brand new. The search engines equate a website's age with its stability, meaning that older websites are deemed more stable than newer ones. The article also indicates that if a company's

strategy follows typical best practices, the company will be successful across all search engines, rather than having to focus on certain key areas for Google, Bing and Yahoo separately. The article notes that research is the most important factor when it comes to search engine optimization. Forrester states that the first thing that should be done in any search engine optimization strategy is keyword research. Another basic feature that is commonly missed is that image file names and their alt text are not necessarily keyword rich. The more keywords that can be utilized in areas where the content is not text based, the better the search results will be.

Wang, F., Li, Y., & Zhang, Y. (2011). An empirical study on the search engine optimization technique and its outcomes. *Artificial Intelligence, Management Science and Electronic Commerce*, 2767-2770. doi:10.1109/AIMSEC.2011.6011361

Abstract. Techniques of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) are observed from four aspects: structure optimization, keywords optimization, content optimization, and link optimization. This paper seeks to analyze the impact of SEO techniques on the effectiveness of SEO, to figure out which technique strategy is most effective, and furthermore, to test the possible influence of SEO techniques on Page Interest. Different from previous relevant research, this paper attempts to evaluate the techniques of SEO by means of the third-party measuring tool based on the data collected from 116 websites.

Summary. This article discusses various techniques that can be used to create and implement a successful search engine optimization strategy. The authors focus on four key areas where optimization can be most beneficial: (a) website structure, (b) keywords, (c) content and (d) linking. The authors discuss how each of these areas impact an overall search engine optimization strategy and work to determine which are

the most effective at enhancing search engine results. The researchers look at the effectiveness of many websites and their search engine optimization strategies to determine the best methods that companies should use on their websites. The authors utilized a third-party statistical program to catalog the retrieved data and determine the effectiveness of each category of changes that they researched. By showing this information, they are able to tie in the specific results with each corresponding hypothesis that they set out to determine at the beginning of their study.

Yunfeng, M. (2010). A study on tactics for corporate website development aiming at search engine optimization. *Second International Workshop on Education Technology and Computer Science*, 673-675. doi:10.1109/ETCS.2010.230

Abstract. Along with the rapid growth of network information, using search engines to search information has become an integral part of one's life everyday. In recent years, there is a research focus on the search engine optimization technologies used to quickly publish business information onto the search engines by which higher rankings can be kept. The present paper analyzes the impact of receiving and recording of search engines and ranking rules to get understanding of the features of search engine algorithms commonly used and proposes the optimization tactics for the development of a website.

Summary. This paper discusses some of the more technical ideologies behind search engine optimization including different PageRank, Hilltop and newer algorithms that are utilized by search companies. The authors state that in order to appear higher on search result pages, companies need to understand the basic algorithms that are used in order to create websites that cater to the information for which the user is looking when a

site is crawled by a search engine. This paper discusses the regional successes that have been seen in China, specifically with implementing a regional domain name suffix such as .com.cn or just .cn. Different tactics for content and keywords are also discussed such as the need to have relevant, well-defined keywords that are injected specifically into content pages. High-tech graphics or text embedded into images on content pages can be completely missed when a search engine crawls a website, since the spider is specifically looking for text and only text. Having keywords and sections of copy that are relevant to the page and website overall will improve search opportunities.

Conclusion

This annotated bibliography presents sources that combine insight and strategic techniques to help ecommerce, marketing and operations business managers create and implement search engine optimization strategies for companies selling products online. These techniques can be used independently or combined into larger strategies, depending on what suits the department or company that is implementing them. Ideas presented by search engine optimization experts as well as data from empirical studies demonstrate potential best practices for businesses to increase their online reach and gain new customers (Landers, 2014). The literature presented in the Annotated Bibliography is organized into two themes: (a) search engine optimization background and (b) best practices for search engine optimization.

Search engine optimization background

As customers use search engine result pages to qualify companies from whom they are choosing to make purchases (Arnold, 2014; Killoran, 2013), understanding the basics of search engines is helpful to decision-makers of companies who sell online. Information on how these search engines work and how they are utilized by customers provides business managers with the

knowledge to create and implement strategies that will ultimately prove to be successful in generating not only increased traffic but also increased revenue as well (Landers, 2014).

There are known challenges with search engine optimization (Arnold, 2014). Customers use search engines differently depending on the information they are hoping to retrieve from the searches. Some customers are seeking product information, while others may search for the best deal available on a specific product or service. Arnold (2014) identifies one of the more difficult tasks related to using search engines as determining on which search results to focus.

Understanding how customers will utilize a search engine allows businesses to tailor their search engine optimization strategies to the topics and thus will yield the best results that will increase a business' ability to appear near the top of the search engine's search results page.

One train of thought is that SEO success is characterized by profits and revenues, not by search rankings (Landers, 2014). While many companies strive to attain the #1 ranking on a particular search engine, there are still many other options from which a customer can choose. Some customers choose the first result, some choose the second, and others choose the third. There are many factors that cause a customer to choose one search result over another, but regardless of the reasons, a company does not benefit from appearing #1 in a search result if the company does not realize an increase in revenue. According to Landers (2014), nearly 90% of consumers don't move beyond the first search results page, which indicates that it is beneficial to appear on the first page, but not necessarily as the top result. Generating qualified traffic based on search terms will increase the opportunity for customers to visit a business' website, but the end goal is to turn that potential shopper into a converted sale and increase revenue as a result of the company's search engine optimization investment.

One subset of SEO research is the idea of using SEO as a public relations tool. Moody and Bates (2013) discuss current public relations students' knowledge regarding search engine optimization and how companies have been successful in combining SEO with other new media opportunities such as social media. Many students are unaware of how search engine optimization could benefit them in their future careers, such as improving results pertaining to positive situations during a troubling time or event for their companies. Search engine optimization, when added to other forms of new media, can be of great public relations benefit to companies, especially in the face of negative publicity or a crisis; unfortunately, many incoming public relations professionals lack the knowledge of and comfort with performing many SEO tasks.

Best practices for search engine optimization

Organic search, defined as non-paid search results (White, 2008) allows companies to increase their ability to reach new customers through search engine result pages and therefore increase online revenues (Landers, 2014). Utilizing best practices for search engine optimization requires an investment of time and effort, but can yield profitable results. Some of the recommendations include making changes in social media outlets such as Google + (Soat, 2014), and making changes ranging from simple online content changes (Atalla, 2014; Spencer, 2012; Sullivan, 2010; Yungfeng, 2010) to more complex website coding changes (Cui & Hu, 2011; Killoran, 2012; Malaga, 2007).

Understanding the basic concepts of how a search engine 'crawls' and processes web pages can aid in devising optimization strategies. In addition, understanding the underlying characteristics of search engines – rapid, accurate, easy to use, and strong – will aid those who are attempting to optimize their search engine results (Cui & Hu, 2011). Evans (2007) discusses

techniques of analysis that breakdown successful, high ranking results and how companies can learn what search engines are finding relevant based on the current search result rankings. Firms like Google and Yahoo work to continually evolve their search engine algorithms and rarely disclose all of the changes. However, some of these changes can be determined by continually watching specific search results and monitoring what changes the companies are making in order to adjust the website content to move up (Evans, 2007).

Many experts in the field recommend making website content interesting and useful for potential customers in order appeal to those looking for information and those looking to make a purchase (Atalla, 2014; Cui & Hu, 2011; Jones, 2010; Wang & Zhang, 2011). Some companies choose to insert particular keywords into content wherever they can in order to attempt to rank highly for that term. While this approach can work, it is reliant on customers only searching for a specific term to find a specific site. Jones (2010) discusses the need for a cohesive content strategy while others like Atalla (2014) and Cui and Hu (2011) mention that just having relevant content for the customer will be successful in returning search results for customers who may use a phrase rather than just a keyword to narrow search results. Wang and Zhang (2011) show that just making content relevant is not going to make drastic improvements in a search page ranking, but when tied together with other techniques like structure and linking optimization, improving the relevancy of the content will likely result in a successful and improving search engine outcome.

Many researchers focus specifically on how to increase web page rankings in Google (Evans, 2007; Jones, 2010; Soat, 2014). As Google is the largest and most used search engine in the world, it makes sense to focus efforts on SEO for this search engine. In Sullivan's (2010) interview with Duane Forrester, one key point that emerged is that focusing on just one search

engine is not necessary and that following many of the best practices will be helpful in returning higher search result rankings for all search engines. Forrester mentions that all of the data is typically collected in a similar fashion, but the differences between the search engines are in how the data is catalogued and indexed. This commonality allows companies to focus on blanket SEO strategies without having to worry about taking certain actions for Google, other actions for Bing and making even more changes for Yahoo. Google's success as the top search engine has led many researchers to explore its intricacies instead of the approaches used by Google's competitors. Evans (2007), Jones (2010) and Soat (2014) all specifically tailor their research to making changes that will improve Google search result rankings, without any mention of competing search engines. A key finding from research in this area is the fact that becoming a top result for a keyword search on Google does not mean the same keyword search will result in a similar high ranking for Bing and Yahoo.

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