

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Strategy

Last month we talked about [SEO Keyword Research](#) and provided some tools for researching and finding an initial set of keywords for your business. While this is a great start, understanding your SEO strategy and how it fits into your overall marketing plan and programs will further refine just which keywords are most valuable to you and how to execute on them.

SEO Strategy Considerations

Customer Journey – Understanding how and when your target audience searches and what role that plays throughout their decision process is critical. People search differently based on where they are in their [customer journey or decision process](#). They often use more generic keywords at the beginning but more specific or even branded ones later in their journey. Understanding this and knowing which words align to each phase will inform content topics, placement and keywords used across all channels and tactics.

SEO Focus Area and Roadmap – There are a lot of activities and tactics involved in SEO. Make sure you have a focus and roadmap on how you will attack these. First, list out all the areas where SEO can be impacted: mobile, video, voice, local SEO, technical SEO, backlinks, site titles and tags, internal sitelinks and much more. Listing out the potential action areas, you can prioritize and map out how you will attack them and when. Always keeping in mind to build tracking and performance mechanisms so you can evaluate your success for each tactic and over time.

Integration – Like all marketing, SEO efforts need to be integrated with all other marketing tactics. For instance, when building integrated marketing campaigns, your strategic keywords should be built into your other areas of marketing. Once you've identified a primary keyword for SEO, are you using it in paid search? Do you use it consistently in all copy you write? Is it featured in your off-line ads, on signage, in store and everywhere else your target audience sees your content and brand? Doing this is important to help your audience associate your key term with your brand.

Marketing Budgets – Depending on your marketing budgets and spend, SEO may hold a smaller or larger place in your overall plan and spend. Some businesses have very limited budgets and rely heavily on SEO while others spend significantly more in other areas such as [Paid Search](#) or other advertising. In this case, SEO may have a different role as supporter of and contributor to these other tactics.

SEO Implementation

SEO is NOT Free – While you don't put a budget in place like for paid search, there is a cost for SEO. This can be in the form of paying external partners to run your SEO, software tools, hiring and paying team members to do SEO as well as the opportunity costs of doing something else.

SEO needs to be ongoing – SEO is not something that you can turn on and off or leave unattended. The search engine algorithms change regularly, there is seasonality to search terms and search terms change over time. In addition, the search engines change the presentation and format of SEO results. Consider how search results pages have changed over time. Have regular measurements and focus on SEO and the value it delivers for your business.

SEO is ever changing – Close your eyes and something changes. The search engines continually work to improve relevance of results to their users. Plus, the way users search also evolves – at one point most users searched for a few related words, then they began searching phrases and questions and, more recently, users ask verbal, more conversational-type questions to execute a search. This means your SEO team needs to stay abreast of what is going on. Attend conferences, subscribe to newsletters on SEO, read blogs, twitter feeds of SEO experts and watch for major releases from the providers. Stay attuned and be prepared to act.

SEO doesn't happen overnight – Unlike paid search or other advertising where you can turn on an ad or drop a direct mail piece, SEO is a long-term, cumulative process. Changing something on your website doesn't automatically mean you will see results immediately. Measure SEO over time and watch for anomalies. Set specific metrics such as percent of traffic from SEO, overall site traffic increases over time, quality of SEO traffic and more. Make sure you have a core set of SEO metrics and measure longitudinally. While the search engines mostly mask specific keyword results, you can still follow page views and visits that contain your core keywords and overall metrics to understand what your efforts are delivering.

Summary

SEO can be a great value in driving results. Be methodical, maintain an ongoing focus and measure longitudinally to ensure you gain the most benefit out of SEO and its impact on your business success.

Sharon Swendner is VP of dealer relations at Cirrus Solutions, a dealer management system and marketing program provider built by dealers for dealers.