

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Best Practices

1. **Use both Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) together to drive increased traffic volume from search pages.** Search Engine Optimization (“natural search”) is the ability to enhance your native content on the www search engines. SEO and SEM are effective when used together. When executing SEO, make sure to also consider SEM, as results drive off the performance success of both tools.
2. **SEO is not free – it takes time and effort.** Even though SEO, or natural search can be referred to as “free clicks”, those clicks aren’t really free. Many, many hours are required to achieve and maintain high rankings for the most relevant terms through natural search. Most retailers underestimate the cost of this time.
3. **Optimize your website content.** The content on your pages drives much of the SEO ranking. Add text content to at the highest-level pages on your site first (the ones that are most likely to be seen by customers): your homepage, department/category, subcategory, product and static pages that contain keywords which convert the most. Make sure your content includes visible text on pages, anchor, alt text, and the META description tag. Matching the content on your pages to the search terms entered is the key factor in achieving high rankings.
4. **Duplicate Content.** If your products are in multiple categories and have the same content on each, make sure that the search engines recognize only one. Duplicate content can negatively impact rankings. Using “No index and No follow” within the link to those duplicate pages is one way to prevent being penalized for duplicate content.
5. **Replace Meta Keywords with Tagging.** The age of Meta Keywords is over; instead, start tagging your pages with relevant tags. The more that relevant keywords show up, the better for natural search optimization.
6. **Brainstorm relevant keywords.** Utilize Google keyword tools to locate the best keywords and phrases that your customers may use to find your products. These are sometime referred to long-tail key phrases. Check Google resources to see if it makes sense to include these keywords on your site.
7. **Use Social Media Optimization (SMO) to build content and rankings.** SMO is a good way for retailers to leverage their content through customers’ reviews, blogs, shares and other social media tools in order to increase relevant content and links. Although the customer does most of the work, retailers need to monitor and include this in their SEO strategy. Consider tools like feeds and Google alerts to ensure your content is showing up for users.
8. **Use site maps and video site maps to improve SEO rankings.** Site maps (both the HTML customer-friendly and the XML search engine types) and links to and from your site are important for rankings. It is not just number of links, which is important to determine ranking, but also the quality of the links.
9. **Create custom landing pages for top searched keywords to drive relevancy.** People who search with your top keywords are hot prospects that expect to get to a page that is relevant. Creating a custom landing page for those keywords targets the user to a specific showcase of your assortment that is relevant to them. This will land higher conversion rates from inbound traffic.

For 1000s of Best Practices and Advice across 100s of topics:
Join eCommerceKnow-How.com!

eCommerce Diligence™ Checklist

SEO Key Questions to Ask Providers

Company

1. How long have you been in this business?
2. How many clients have you sold? Lost, why?
3. What size or types of clients fall into your "sweet spot"?
4. Do they have clients in your vertical?

Products/Services

1. Do you offer the entire suite of services around the search arena (SEO, SEM, pay-per-click management, website design, consulting, social marketing, web development, etc.) or a subset?
2. Is your service based on the expertise of one or two key individuals whose attention I'll only have for a short period? Or is it based on scalable systems and techniques independent of your subject-matter experts?
3. Which segment does your product better serve, enterprise-level business or small to mid-sized business?
4. Is Search Engine Optimization your primary business or a subset offered to support other services?
5. What happens when I discontinue service with your company? Will I be able to manage SEO myself or will it be impossible for me to take over? Will my SEO rankings plummet? How do I retain the SEO content data?
6. What does "Big Data" mean to my business? (Don't be afraid to ask!)

Solution Features

1. Where is your competitive advantage?
2. What can you do to improve conversion rates? Do you use any third-party tools?
3. How can you demonstrate ROI for your efforts?
4. Which analytic packages have you integrated?
5. Do your services tend more towards statistical analyses that rely on the laws of big numbers or more of an agency approach, requiring new content creation at many levels?
6. Which search engines do you work with currently? Which do you recommend? Why?
7. Do you provide SEO services or a solution?
If services:
 - a. Who modifies my eCommerce site? Who writes the content?
- b. How do you become an expert to understand the nuances of my product positioning to get good search rankings?
- c. How many keywords/key phrases will you guarantee will reach the first page? Can I give you the ones I really care about as well as "CEO" terms?
If solution:
 - a. What methods does your solution use to enable high SEO rankings?
 - b. What guidance do you give to help me use your solution effectively?
 - c. What reporting is available? Is it real-time, batch, ad hoc? Please provide a list of reports.

Pricing

1. SEO pricing usually involves an upfront payment and monthly maintenance retainer fee. Does that monthly maintenance decline as your efforts taper off?
2. How do you justify fees after the start-up effort?
3. Are you incented to get me to maximize clicks, not conversions?
4. Do you offer any pay-for-performance approaches? Cost per qualified lead? Cost per sale?

For 1000s of Best Practices and Advice across 100s of topics:
Join eCommerceKnow-How.com!