

SEO 101

By Tom Herald

My eyes have recently been opened to a whole new world of social media, and the importance it plays in commerce and information today. Just last week the world's only real source for news about the uprising in Iran came through the internet portals of YouTube, FaceBook, and Twitter. Every major news network was tuned in to the web for their updates.

Whether it's the latest news, updates, consumer reports or if you want to research the origin of sliced bread, we have an entire world of information available at our fingertips. We can literally reach and connect to tens of thousands of people in a matter of seconds which has completely changed the way we get and send information. As a result, the natural laws of advertising have changed as well.

Talk with any advertising agency or marketing firm. Or, take a close look at the results from your own ads over the past couple of years. Traditional advertising methods are much less effective today. Invasive campaigns like noisy TV/radio commercials, direct mail, eMail blasts, and even outbound telemarketing, turn people off. We don't want to be interrupted! When we want information, we want it on our terms and when we're ready.

People don't need marketing today! They don't even want it. TiVo, Sirius satellite radio, call screening telephones, and "pop-up" blockers are all highly successful businesses because they help us, as consumers, avoid unsolicited ads. Initiatives like the Can-SPAM Act of 2003 and "Do Not Call" lists now have much stricter provisions and are as important for car dealers to monitor as the OFAC list of terrorists. The rules for advertising have forever changed.

To understand why, take some notes from the two Stanford geeks who revolutionized the world without spending a dime on advertising. Sergy Binn and Larry Page launched Google from their dorm rooms about ten years ago and today, "Googling" is a household term. These two visionaries own the most valuable domain on the planet because they understand what people want when it comes to information. They believe that the most effective form of advertising is simply helping people find the most relevant version of what they're looking for, fast. That's why you won't find any distracting ads when you visit google.com.

Today, outbound marketing is out. The impact it has on prospective consumers has been diluted by a more "permission based" style of "inbound" marketing such as social media sites, blogging, RSS, viral videos, free web based tools, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

To help simplify the exponential evolution and complexities of internet advertising, I have put together a brief overview on Search Engine Optimization that I call **SEO 101**. Because no matter how fancy your website is, if people can't find it or even worse, they don't respond to it, you've just wasted a load of money and lost a lot of ground to your competition. The good news, it's not rocket science. Instead, if

you understand the terms, mechanisms, purposes and intent of Google, SEO is relatively simple and inexpensive to do yourself.

SEO 101

- SEO is a process of “optimizing” techniques that help your website rank higher in the organic/natural results for specific search phrases with search engines like Google
- The cornerstone of all searches is **Keywords** – Words or phrases people use whenever conducting a search.
- Millions of people use Google every day looking for a product, service or information and there are two ways for you to reach them when they search keywords.
 1. **Paid advertising** where you pay to be listed in the sponsored section of the search results. But, think about where you look when you do a search. For most of us, it’s not necessarily the sponsored section.
 - Keyword phrases are auctioned to the highest bidder and once the money runs out for the month, so does your presence on the list
 2. **“Organic” Searches.** The natural rank of your search based on keyword phrases. The most important difference is that the organic list is free. Paid placement, otherwise known as pay-per-click, however is not.
 - Google estimates of how relevant and credible your website is and that process determines your placement on the results page. This “optimization” of your website’s relevance is what is called SEO.

Websites are written in HTML (Hypertext Mark-up Language) which is scripting code that describes the structure of text based information by labeling the text as links, headings, paragraphs, lists and content, called “tags” and is completely blind to cool graphics and pictures. Search engines quickly read, prioritize, and rank the HTML text on the web and display it in “Search Results.”

“Search Volume” is how many people search specific keywords and is the overall size of the list of results. Google only really knows the exact numbers; it’s a sort of secret sauce for how their engine works. But, you can get a good idea whenever you search by looking at the results section. Or, you can go to Google/Adwords and get an even better idea for free.


There are two main factors that determine your place on the list of organic searches:

1. **Relevance** – The measure of how your website (or more accurately one of your web pages) *matches* the keywords the user has entered. Measuring relevance is a relatively sophisticated process, but it boils down to some fundamentals like the title of the page, words on the page and how frequently these words occur on the page. A good metric to track and review is your

conversion ratio – the number of visitors to your site that respond to your site based on specific keyword searches.

Google figures out what your page is “about” by looking at its title and content, and by looking at other sites with similar content. It then uses this to figure out how relevant you are for that particular search phrase. Your relevance is based solely on your content and, content is King. For an example, if you google “BHPH Sales Training” you will see our firm at the top of the list. But, we would have absolutely no relevance at all for a search on “copper plumbing.”

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2. **Page Rank** - PageRank on the other hand is much more important than Relevance. It is an *independent* measure of Google’s perception of the quality/authority/credibility of a single web page and does not depend on any particular search phrase. For all of us, Google conveniently reports this as a number on a logarithmic scale from 0-10, and is primarily determined by how many other web pages are *linking* into you. Google considers an inbound link as a vote of confidence or more like an endorsement. So web pages with more credibility (i.e. a higher page rank) that link to you have more “value” to your PageRank than those with less credibility.

- 0-3: Newer sites with very minimal links
- 4-5: Popular sites with a fair amount of inbound links
- 6: Very popular sites with hundreds of quality links
- 7-10: Usually media brands (CNN.com), global companies or the top blogging sites.

** (If you want to measure the PageRank of your site the Google Tool Bar has a setting that will display the ranking of whatever site you are viewing.)

Search Engine Optimization is like getting tens of thousands of dollars worth of free advertising in the most relevant newspapers or television in your market if done correctly. To rank high you should do two things: First, make sure your site has the right *relevant* content for the types of searches your prospective customers are conducting. Second, try to get the highest PageRank possible. To do this, you need to get as many inbound links from as many high PageRank web pages as possible. Social media sites like FaceBook, LinkedIn, Twitter and AutoDealerPeople can help you tremendously with this.