

SEO for Affiliates, Demystified

What is Search Engine Optimization?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of implementing tactics to help search engines find your website and move it up the rankings. The closer you get to the top ranking for certain search terms, the more likely you are to increase site traffic and sales. Search engines have a system they use to rank your website. First, they crawl by deploying software (spiders) to scan through the content and links of your website. Then, the spiders index your pages by transferring their content into a giant database. Finally, pages are ranked according to relevancy when search engines dip into the database to determine which site delivers the most relevant information for a particular search.



How Does SEO Differ From Pay Per Click (PPC)?

Internet marketing has many different facets. PPC (which we learned about last month) is a great way to get immediate traffic to a website and target specific demographics. It's a fast and affordable way to get sales and build brand awareness. SEO, on the other hand, is a long-term investment that can be done on a website or on other sites that link back. Here are a couple of ways in which SEO differs from PPC:

- **PPC is immediate, SEO takes time**—ranking well in search engines doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to build a reputation and create a web of links to your site. Patience is a virtue with SEO, but the return will be well worth it. Think of SEO as a long-term marketing activity.
- **PPC is paid advertising, SEO is free**—the word free can be misleading. It does take a lot of time and possibly some investment into directory listings, but you aren't paying for advertising in the traditional sense. You can write and share content for free, post links for free, optimize your website with keywords for free and create social buzz for free.

10 Things You Should Know about SEO:

1. SEO is a marketing practice, not a magic bullet. A common misconception is that SEO involves attempting to outsmart search engines. When best practices are honored, SEO is a form of marketing that helps increase a site's online presence over time.
2. A guarantee of first page rankings is not an SEO deliverable. With 200+ factors considered by Google in ranking web pages, no company can ethically make such a guarantee. Since organic rankings are unique to each user, there's simply no way to deliver on such a lofty promise.
3. Rankings are personalized for each search. The rankings you see may not be the rankings others see. Search engine rankings for any given keyword are not static – they vary from user to user, and even across multiple searches on the same computer.

4. Research is (more than) half the battle. Effective research is integral to a successful SEO campaign. Incorporating keywords in all the right places and crafting extraordinary content around those keywords is futile if the wrong keywords are selected from the start.
5. SEO doesn't start and end with filling out Title and Meta tags. SEO requires more than filling in these fields. In-depth research is critical to choosing the right keywords to include on each page. Ask yourself these questions: Are the keywords highly searched? Are they specific enough? Is there opportunity to capture traffic from under-represented search terms rather than targeting over-saturated ones?
6. Content matters. Search engines rely mostly on text content in determining the topic of a given page. The page must contain a sufficient amount of text related to its subject in order to stand a chance against competing pages that are chock full of unique, informative text.
7. Link building is essential. On-page optimization creates an essential foundation that any site needs for visibility in search engines, but links are another critical factor to competing online. Relevant links that are acquired over time have the greatest impact, and publishing quality content establishes the groundwork for others to find and link to your site.
8. It's not just about the home page. While a domain name can impact each page of a site, search engines rank pages individually, not entire sites. Each page creates a new opportunity to earn qualified traffic for a specific topic.
9. Illicit practices can get a site in trouble. Any site not adhering to search engines' guidelines runs the risk of getting penalized or even banned from search results. For example, hiding text or links on your site can result in penalization.
10. SEO is an investment. Just like any other investment, results take time to achieve. SEO inherently takes time, both to implement changes and to achieve results.

Tips on SEO for Affiliates:

As an affiliate, you have the opportunity to make yourself visible through SEO. Using on-page and off-page techniques can help you build your reputation to move up in organic search rankings. Here are a few tips on how to help your site's ranking in search engines:

Link Building: Promote your content through social networking, blogging, industry-related forums, articles and press releases. Write content that educates and informs so others will want to link back to your site.

Use Analytics for Research: There are a lot of great tools for keyword research, but the easiest and most obvious is analytics. Check your reports to see which keywords are most relevant and what people are searching to get to your site. Figure out what keywords will bring the most traffic and use those within your site.

Keywords on Your Site: After doing high-level keyword research, use keywords within your web pages. Be careful not to cannibalize yourself by only using the same few keywords on every page. Individual pages should have unique keywords that are relevant for that specific page.