

DON'T FALL BEHIND:

SEO TIPS



FOR 2017

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THE GAME'S THE SAME, BUT THE RULES HAVE CHANGED

The web is a chorus of competing voices. **Is yours being heard?** Leaders in content marketing achieve nearly 8 times more annual website traffic growth than other content marketers. Search engine optimization plays a major role in their success, as it is what allows content to be discovered online in the first place.

“As we get into 2017, one of the bigger pieces in play is how many competitors are out there,” said Braffton Consulting Manager Andrew Walters. “Everyone has a website. Does yours stand apart? Is it healthy? That will give you a leg up over competitors. The content you’re creating won’t be seen if your site isn’t healthy.”

How search engines rank websites is constantly evolving, incorporating data and techniques that can quickly change your placement on search engine results pages. You have to keep your tactics current to stay on top.

Move beyond the basics to understand which factors most impact SEO, as well as how to leverage them, to keep your site visible in 2017 and beyond.



RESPONSIVE DESIGN FOR MOBILE SUCCESS

The number of mobile phone users worldwide is forecast to reach **4.77 billion in 2017**. And a growing number of people access the internet solely through mobile devices.

Google has gone out of its way to reward mobile-friendliness by increasing its significance as a ranking signal, indexing mobile results first. If you want to be relevant, you have little choice but to make mobile part of your SEO strategy.

Responsive design involves developing websites to account for the screen size and load time differences found on mobile devices. This ensures solid user experience for everyone. Reduced screen sizes make it essential to use brief, descriptive text for elements like title tags and meta descriptions.

Other SEO best practices for mobile include:



Maximizing page speed.



Avoiding design choices that may increase bounce rates, such as:



Pop-ups.



Auto-playing videos.



Excessive advertisements.





RESPONSIVE VS. MOBILE-FIRST: WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

As opposed to a responsive approach, mobile-first design involves creating websites with a mobile audience in mind, then later enhancing the existing site to run on larger platforms.

Mobile screens are inherently more complex to design for, and an increasing number of both design and marketing experts believe it works well to design mobile sites first instead of adapting desktop designs to fit smaller screens.

This option makes sense for websites that cater specifically to mobile users. For instance, a brick-and-mortar business that knows the vast majority of its customers will search for it via mobile devices may want to opt for a mobile-first approach.

However, if you already have a website with responsive design, developing a new website with mobile-first design is unnecessary.





———— PART 2 ————

LOCAL SEARCH

INCREASE LOCAL VISIBILITY

Search engines are increasingly focused on user intent, so it makes sense that locality has become an integral part of SEO. Higher percentages of consumers are using search engines to find local businesses.

The proliferation of smartphones and wearable devices is also making it easier for individuals to use geographic location to make purchasing decisions. Considering **80 percent of smartphone users conduct mobile searches to find businesses nearby**, this is a key SEO tactic if you have a brick-and-mortar location.

You should ensure:



Your business is listed correctly on everything from local business directories to review websites.



Every relevant online platform, including social media and official business websites, contains details such as:



Business name.



Address.



Phone Number.



THE POWER OF REVIEWS

Reviews are vital in terms of local SEO. If you're hoping to capitalize on a local geo-targeted customer base, encourage customers to post reviews on websites such as Yelp. Google and social media reviews are also an excellent way to enhance local SEO.

You can encourage reviews from customers by offering discounted goods or services in return for participation.

Listings in local directories, such as Yellow Pages, and localized social media accounts, particularly Google+, will also assist with regional visibility. Consistency in contact information is essential, as search engines may rank businesses lower if they detect informational discrepancies between different listings.

Creating geographically focused content will boost local SEO as well. Content marketing that includes specific regional information or city names will make content more relevant in terms of local search. Content that refers to popular regional events or trends is also helpful.



LOCAL IN THE AGE OF POSSUM

Google's most recent local algorithm update - code-named "Possum" by SEO experts - also demands attention. Implemented in 2016, Possum impacted local results as well as Google Maps results by changing the way local businesses are filtered.

Arguably the biggest change is how searcher location now impacts results. Google's update pays much more attention to the physical location of searchers when generating SERPs.

You should:



Test a wide variety of search terms to see which best assist local SEO.



Employ multiple variations of keywords and targeted phrases.





———— PART 3 ————

SOCIAL MEDIA



ACCOUNT FOR SOCIAL SIGNALS

While a strong social media presence may correlate with high search ranking, Google has not officially stated social signals are ranking factors. However, evidence such as Tweets being indexed for search indicates it helps. Additionally, social media can be an invaluable tool for building credibility and driving traffic back to websites, both of which ultimately enhance SEO.

As you build brand awareness on your social channels, the odds of more people searching specifically for your website increases. This alerts search engines that your site is popular or well-known, which assists with ranking.

Take advantage of all pertinent social media platforms and ensure you're consistently producing, sharing and promoting high-quality, relevant content to build brand awareness.



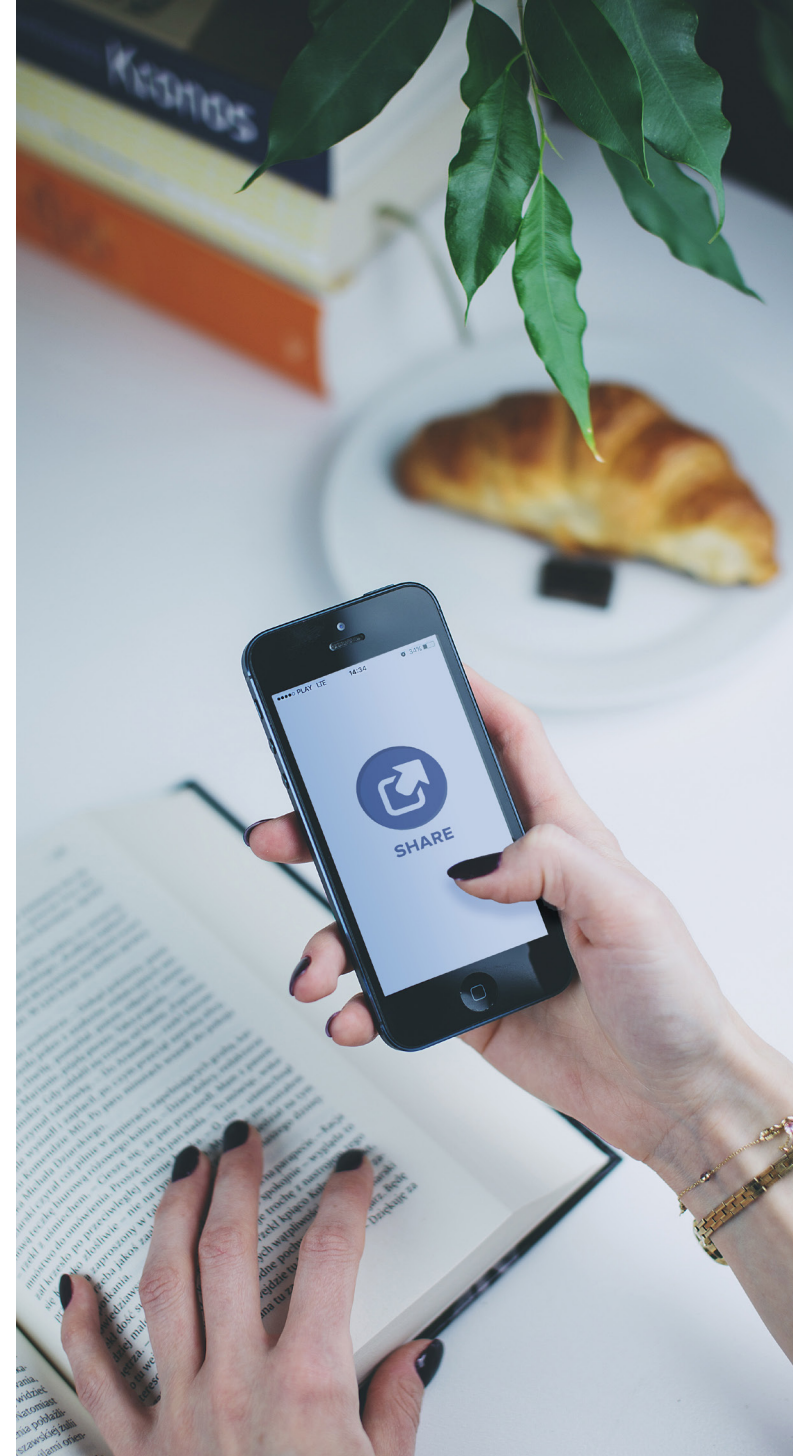
LINK-BUILDING THROUGH SOCIAL

Content shared on social media increases the chances of other websites linking to it. This is a vital SEO factor.

Leverage the outreach opportunities provided by social media to build up links. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn make it easy to connect with industry thought leaders who may link back to your content.

To increase the likelihood of organic social sharing, produce relevant, valuable content related to industry news and events, and then leverage your social network to share it with popular influencers.

The more active you are in expanding your social reach and interacting with others in your industry, the more effective you will be at encouraging others to link to your content.





PART 4

EXTERNAL LINKS

CAPTURE EXTERNAL LINKS

External links that point to your site are the most important factor for achieving high rankings based on Google's core search algorithm. Any website linking to your content counts as an external link, and the more authoritative the site, the better.

The simplest way to capture external links is to produce worthy content. Valuable, actionable content will encourage other websites to link to it. Of course, it falls on you to build a buzz around the content you create.

Strategies include:



Regularly sharing content through various outreach efforts.



Repurposing content or sharing links to content on LinkedIn.



Sharing content with members of an industry trade organization.





LEVERAGE BRAND AWARENESS

The best course of action to boost brand awareness is to strike a balance. Craft useful, noteworthy content, generate awareness of it and take advantage of opportunities to associate with other established sites and thought leaders.

Contact bloggers in your industry and submit content for guest blogs on more established websites to garner authoritative external links. Also look for mentions of your website and its content that may exist without links. Encourage these sites to include links.

While commenting on popular industry forums and targeted website blog posts provides the opportunity to link back to content, these types of external links hold less value in the eyes of search engines and may be viewed as deceptive. The same goes for paying for listings on other websites.





PART 5

CONTENT PRUNING

DELETE LOW-QUALITY CONTENT

Shallow, uninformative content can damage SEO prospects as long as it remains on a website. Content pruning involves identifying and removing or de-indexing this content to boost search engine ranking.

While keyword stuffing or quantity-over-quality SEO tactics were common in the past, crafting quality content that serves searcher intent is now standard practice. If older blog posts that incorporated now-obsolete strategies still exist on a website, they may be dragging down ranking scores.

Pruning goes beyond blog content, however. Some experts believe search engines like Google score websites based on an average of all their pages. Since some web scripts automatically generate indexable URLs, it creates the perception that a website actually has more pages than it really does. Deleting or hiding these URLs will narrow the scope of search engine indexing, making it easier for websites to maximize the value of their high-quality pages.



PERFORM DUE DILIGENCE

Successfully pruning content requires a thorough website audit. **Steps include:**



Creating a list of all blog post URLs.



Examining content performance metrics, including total views and backlinks.



Ranking blogs based on performance.



Analyzing the lowest-performing blogs to measure content quality.



Determining which content should be de-indexed, updated or repurposed.



Deleting all low-quality, underperforming and irrelevant content.

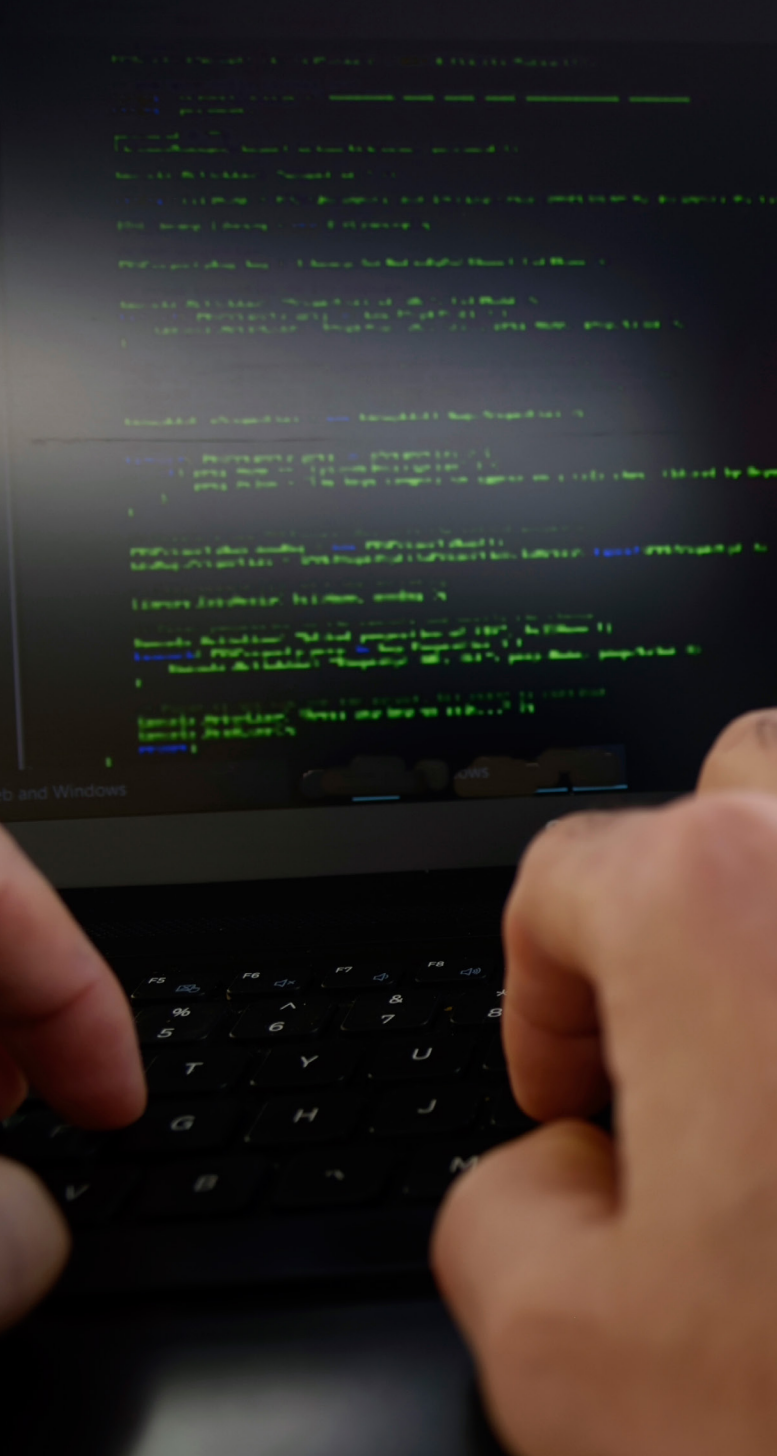
One thing to keep in mind is that deleting posts will lead to URLs that no longer function - a major obstacle for backlinks. It's vital to redirect any and all deleted posts to either a different but equally relevant piece of content or an appropriate internal page.





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SCHEMA MARKUP



SIMPLIFY WEBSITE COMPLEXITIES

Schema markup code is intended to help search engines provide more pertinent results for users by better understanding the intricacies of websites.

Incorporating schema markup is a matter of including this vocabulary in HTML microdata. Doing so helps search engines better understand the meaning of content on a website, making it easier for relevant content to rank on SERPs.

Schema.org provides information on how to mark up content, as well as common types of schema markup to use. The more content that features schema code, the more effective this strategy becomes.

Keep in mind schema markup is most essential for websites that traffic in numerous physical, real-world items, such as people, places, products and locations. Sites like IMDb and Amazon benefit greatly from schema markup code.





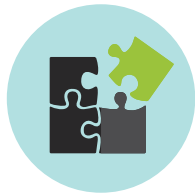
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TARGETED LANDING PAGES

A/B TESTING FOR OPTIMIZATION

Beyond catering to search engines' focus on relevant results, specifically targeted landing pages are essential for converting visitors into customers. While many people associate targeting with location-specific content, audience targeting is equally important. To accomplish this, you must understand your customers and what type of content they will find engaging.

This means producing landing page content that:



Fits with industry standards.



Uses market-specific language.



Addresses the right target audience.

A/B testing allows you to see what type of landing page content resonates best with website visitors. Even subtle changes can significantly impact how landing pages perform. Beyond major factors like keywords and call-to-action placement, **test out components such as:**



Font size.



Color schemes.



Images used.



Inclusion of video.



UNDERSTAND HYPER-SPECIFICITY

Retargeting is another way to tailor landing page content to specific audiences. It's possible to use HTML coding to change landing pages based on a visitor's Internet Protocol address.

For instance, organizations that want to appeal to web users in specific geographic locations can ensure content is specific to that region. The language can also change based on the visitor's IP address origin.

Landing page targeting can be refined further with account-based marketing. Put simply, account-based marketing means focusing on individual customers instead of taking a regional or industry-wide approach. This translates to content that changes based on the specific visitor.

Landing pages can be set to dynamically change, specifically targeting certain audiences. In addition to copy, this includes constantly shifting calls to action and download links based on who's viewing the content.





CONTENT REMAINS KING FOR SEO SUCCESS

Even the most comprehensive SEO guide is only relevant until the next search engine algorithm update takes effect.

However, based on how SEO has evolved since computer technology became the go-to marketing tool for companies, it's clear some strategies never go out of style.

High-quality content that provides substantial information delivers value to both website visitors and the search engines that serve them. Content marketing lends itself to nearly every facet of SEO, from local search to schema markup.

In short, quality content must remain a cornerstone of any cutting-edge SEO strategy.





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