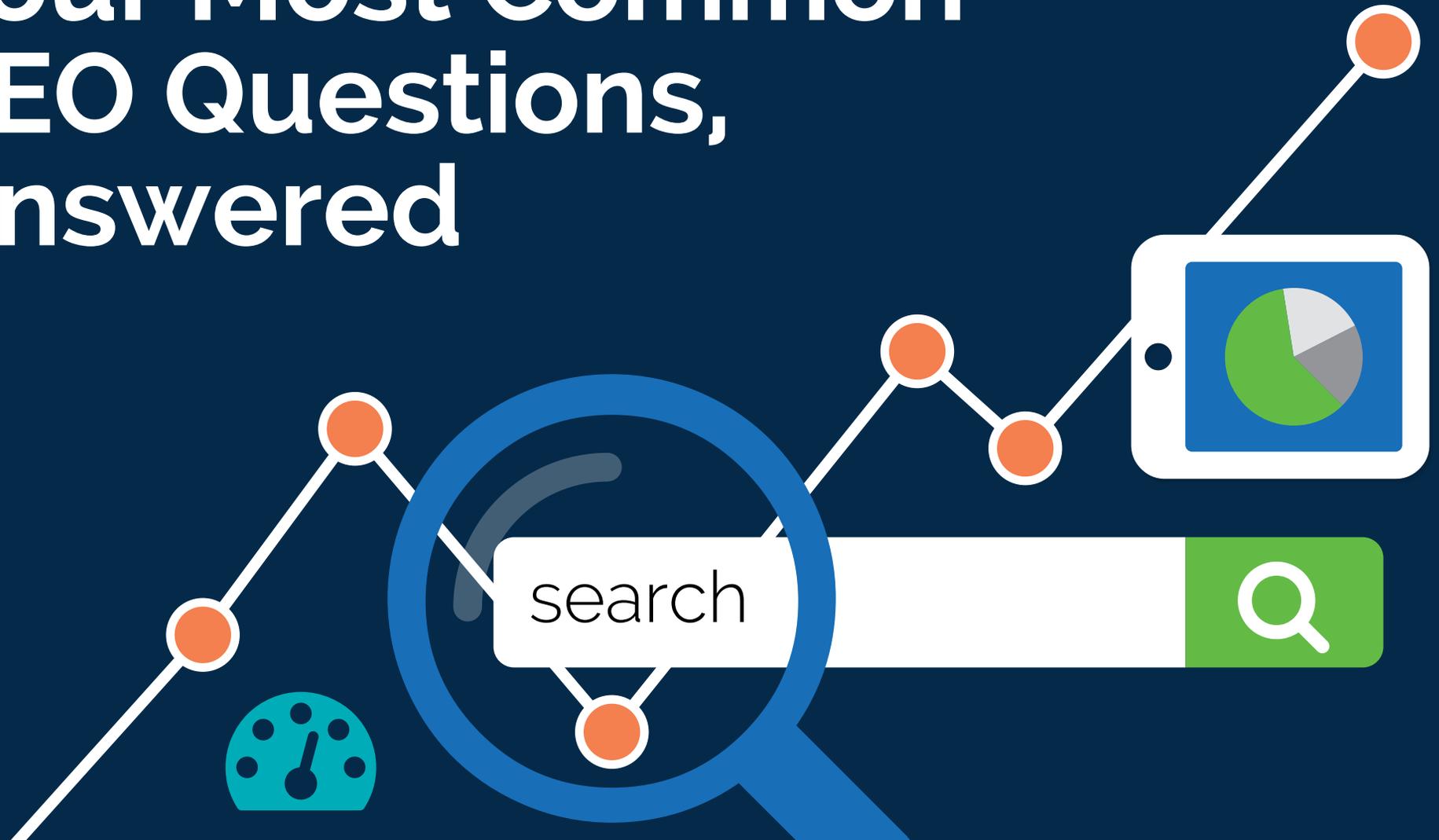


Your Most Common SEO Questions, Answered



Foreword

The goal of this eBook is to help you understand the world of search engine optimization (SEO) in practical ways, so you can build or manage effective, efficient programs that meet your own specific business objectives.

In it, we answer the SEO questions most often asked by marketers and business decision-makers. We also outline various best practices that help focus your efforts and increase results dedicated to traffic, user engagement, and conversions.

SEO: Necessary – But Complex and Confusing

SEO helps expand awareness of your brand, attract new prospects, grow your customer base, create new revenue channels, and grow existing ones – without having to invest in the hefty budgets that traditional advertising mediums require. It also can provide precise, in-depth reporting that goes far beyond potential impressions associated with subscriptions, audiences, or ratings. It is (or should be) a key pillar of your marketing strategy.

However, if managing SEO campaigns or trying to follow along with the efforts of your service provider constantly leaves you frustrated, and you just aren't sure whether or not your SEO investment is paying off, you definitely aren't alone. Many marketers feel left in the dark when it comes to SEO.

Some of the most common complaints:

- *“I have no idea what my account manager is saying; it's all industry jargon.”*
- *“My monthly reports don't show clear causational explanations for what has happened, why, or how it affects my business.”*
- *“It's always changing, there's always something new. How do I know what's going to help us rank?”*

Sound familiar? If so, this eBook is for you. What follows are the most common questions we get from marketers and business decision-makers, organized into categories of interest.

Let's begin!

“ If there is only one SEO rule you ever need to learn, it's this one: At the end of the day, Google wants to connect searchers with the best, most relevant content it can. ”

—Ryan Lunka

SEO Jargon

Like any discipline, SEO has its own language and lexicon. Knowing the meaning of the most-used terms, concepts, and strategies will help you navigate this world.

1. What Does SEO Stand For?

SEO is the acronym for search engine optimization. It refers to the manipulation of online content and website code in ways that align with the expectations and behavior of search engines and online searchers alike.

SEO is often described as “organic search” because it supports businesses and brands’ ability to rank naturally within search engines based on their relevance and authority, as it pertains to the online user’s search intentions, and on the level of visitor engagement, without payment of any kind.

2. What Does SEM mean?

SEM stands for search engine marketing. Its meaning has evolved from being an umbrella term for both paid and organic search; today, it’s generally used to refer to gaining website traffic by placing advertising on search engines. It’s often referred to as paid search. This often takes the form of text ads that look much like organic search results.

3. What Does PPC Refer To?

PPC is short for pay per click. It’s a payment method for paid search advertising, as well as other types of online ads such as banners and interstitials.

4. What Are Search Crawlers?

Search engines use programs called “bots” (short for robots) or “spiders” to scan (“crawl”) pages or content within websites (including content that does not display to the viewer) in order to evaluate and index the content. Every major search engine uses these programs in order to evaluate content and provide the most relevant information to searchers.

SEO Jargon

When you search online for particular products, concepts, services, or information, the terms you use to describe your intent are interpreted by search engines, which then pull content they have indexed from various websites. Their algorithms return content and display it to you on a search engine results page (SERP); their choice of what to display is based on many different factors.

The most important factor is which content best answers the question you have asked. If search engines get this right repeatedly they gain your loyalty, which translates into how much they can charge for advertising. It's very much in the search engine's own best interests to do the best job possible for the searcher.

5. What's a keyword? A key phrase? A long tail keyword?

A keyword is a word for which you want searchers to find your page via a search engine. People today are searching using more words, so your keyword may actually be a keyphrase of two or more words. The terms "keyword" and "keyphrase" are used somewhat interchangeably.

A keyword can be broken down into three parts: the head, modifier and tail. The head is what the search is about; the modifier adds detail and narrows the search, without changing the intent of the search. The tail adds clarity and further narrows the search:

Apple | Apple tablet | Apple tablet white

A long tail keyword is a keyword that contains multiple words, often as much as five to seven or more. People looking for something very specific tend to use long tail keywords. Example: "Goldfish" is a head keyword (31+ million results); "Can I make my own goldfish crackers at home" is a long tail keyword (128,000 results).

Long tail keywords are the holy grail of SEO because conversion rates for long tail keywords are 2.5x higher than for headwords. This is because people who have a good idea of what they're looking for (as opposed to someone doing general research) tend to use longer keyphrases, and are often closer to making a purchase. The rise of voice search contributes to this, as people tend to speak in phrases when talking to their smartphones.

SEO Jargon

Long tail queries make up over 70% of all searches. There's less competition for them, which means they're less expensive PPC choices, and they help you target people who are readier to buy. It may be worth an experiment or two to find out which long tail keywords might deliver qualified traffic to your website.

6. What Does My Account Manager Mean When They Say "Search Efficiency"?

How quickly search crawlers can recognize what your website stands for, what type of information or services it contains, and where such content exists within your website, is the level of "search efficiency" your site possesses.

Some forms of content (built with Flash, say, or containing excessive amounts of JavaScript and CSS code, such as large banner ads or videos) are difficult for search crawlers to analyze efficiently. Since the crawlers' sole purpose is to provide online users with relevant information – as fast as possible – they are inclined to pull content from competitive websites, rather than the one with hard-to-parse content.

One specific component of great search efficiency is how the information architecture of your site is set up, and how each category of content is connected to the homepage.

Other components of a website that affect search efficiency include:

- How quickly your website loads, which is referred to as "PageSpeed."
- How your site's navigation menus are positioned (e.g., vertically on the left hand side of the browser, horizontally across the top or header section, horizontally across the header and footer section of the site).
- The type of markup it uses to express prominence, authority, and priorities, as it pertains to the text and structure of individual landing pages.

SEO Jargon

7. I Was Told To Create More “CTAs” On My Website’s Homepage.

What Does That Mean?

A CTA (call to action) is an instruction to the reader, asking the online users to perform a specific action. From the user’s point of view, they click to get something they want. From the marketer’s point of view, the click is part of the website’s intended conversion funnel.

These can appear in a variety of forms, such as buttons and text phrase links, and often say things such as:

- Contact Us Today
- Give Us a Call
- Talk to Us
- Download the eBook

Shorter is usually better. CTAs are excellent elements for A/B testing. You can test the text, the button color, and the offer, among other elements.

Technical SEO

8. What Are 404 Errors?

Usually when you see some version of “Sorry you’re seeing this, but it appears the information you’re looking for no longer exists,” it’s a 404 error.

The HTTP 404 Not Found error indicates that the server could not find the page you tried to reach. This indicates that a specific page may have been removed, or it may have been relocated, but its URL was not changed accordingly. This type of error can also appear if you accidentally type in a wrong URL.

This can happen when you replace a product or service with something else, information is repurposed, and/or content is relocated to other sections of your website. It’s not a great experience for your user, but you can control the formatting of the 404 pagers, so you can soften the effect. You can add attractive graphics, for example, and provide links to pages the visitor might like to see.

9. What Are 301 Redirects?

301 redirects are communications between your website and search crawlers, which indicate that content has been moved but can still be found in another location of your website. You set them up when you have a reason to redirect the visitor to a certain page.

Redirects preserve the equity of your content so that you can maintain the type of online visibility you’re used to. And since the redirect is not obvious, most visitors will have an uninterrupted user experience and continue to engage with your brand.

10. What Is An XML Sitemap?

The best way to think of XML Sitemaps is to view them as blueprints of your website that search engines can use to locate specific forms of information, as soon as possible.

Technical SEO

While search engines are able to crawl any website on their own, being able to connect with an XML Sitemap allows them to quickly, completely understand:

- What your website represents
- What specific forms and categories of content you have
- Where your content is located
- What level of priority each category of content represents in terms of:
 - How often they should be crawled
 - What type of visibility they should have
 - Which landing pages should be accessible to online users

When websites do not have this type of sitemap to reference, search engines essentially are left to make their own decisions about your site.

11. What Is A Robots.txt File?

Webmasters and site owners create robots.txt (robots) files in order to offer specific instructions to search engines as to what areas of their website should be crawled and indexed, or accessible to online users.

Basically, when search crawlers want to pull content from your website, they refer to the robots file to see whether or not you, as the site owner, want users to be exposed to particular forms of information.

Depending on the purpose of your website, these files can vary in the types of information they protect and preserve. Most of the time, areas of a website that require users to submit a username and password are included in the robots file in order to prevent this specific type of information from being indexed or engaged by general online users.

Search Authority References and Tactics

12. What does “search authority” mean? Domain authority? Page authority?

“Authority” is how trustworthy and expert your domain or page is considered to be, as evaluated by a search engine’s algorithm. Many factors, such as the use of language, richness of syntax, links from high-ranking sites, etc., factor into perceived authority to a greater or lesser degree.

13. What Is Link Building?

Link building (or link earning) refers to the act of attracting or acquiring external links from other websites. These links signal to search engines that the content on your site is unique, meaningful to online users, and is authoritative within the digital space you occupy.

The higher the authority of the sites that link to you, the more value these incoming links have. They are also known as backlinks or inbound links. A “pingback” is a notification that someone has linked to your page, document, etc. Some content management systems deliver pingbacks automatically, others do not.

14. I Was Told I Have Duplicate Content On My Site. But, I Haven’t Copied or Plagiarized Anything, So How Can This Be?

Duplicate content is material that appears on the web in multiple locations or URLs. This could be on your own site, or it could be duplicate content across two or more disparate sites.

Search engines dislike duplicate content for several reasons. They have to choose one or the other page to return for a query, so they are forced to extend their evaluation for which version or form is more credible/meaningful to the online user who’s searching.

On your own site, this can happen if you somehow have two different URLs for the same page, for example www.mycompany.com/this-page and www.mycompany.com/this-page/.

Search Authority References and Tactics

Just the addition of the forward slash in the second URL makes it a different, unique URL to a search engine. Capitalization matters also. www.mycompany.com/this-page and www.MyCompany.com/this-page are two different URLs, so if the content on those pages is the same, they are duplicate pages.

You may also have pages that contain much the same text. If you have a woman's raincoat with a certain description on one page, and a man's raincoat with much the same description in a separate section, this could potentially be perceived as duplicate copy by a search engine.

Across multiple sites, duplicate content may be the result of channel or retail partners selling products on their site that are popular and widely distributed. If several competitors use the same description provided by the manufacturer, it can be a problem.

It's easy to see how duplicate content can quickly pile up. This environment makes it very difficult for search engines to decide who the original author is and which website they should return content from.

Over the last five years, search engines like Google have added various ranking factors in their algorithm that allow them to identify and penalize websites that have "excessive" volumes of duplicate content. These penalties can range from light warnings conveyed through your webmaster tools profile, to completely removing your company's site from search listings.

One solution: If you absolutely must use duplicate content, use a `rel=canonical` link in your meta data. This tells the search engines where the original content is hosted, so they will return that in response to a search.

Scenario: The same page (Page A) exists at three different URLs

- Page A has received **100 links** from unique, high-quality external pages, but these 100 links have been spread among the three versions
- Page B exists at only one URL, and has received 60 links from unique, high-quality external pages
- Search engines view Page B as having the superior link profile

| A1 (30) | A2 (30) | A3 (40) | B (60) |
|---|---|---|--|
| www.youreyeglasses.com/trendy | www.youreyeglasses.com/trendy/ | www.youreyeglasses.com/Trendy | www.theireyeglasses.com/newtrends/ |
|  |  |  |  |
| Our site has the most trendy eyeglasses | Our site has the most trendy eyeglasses | Our site has the most trendy eyeglasses | Are you looking for new trends in eyewear? |

Campaigns, Consultants, and Advertising

15. What Goes Into A Complete SEO Campaign?

The individual tactics and strategies that ultimately make up a complete SEO campaign vary per company and per industry, and change continuously.

As search engines become more sophisticated in determining what's considered to be a valuable online experience, their expectations for how websites should function and the type of experience they should offer also changes. As an example, because more people are using mobile phones for search, Google recently revised its algorithm to devalue websites that are not mobile-friendly.

For the most part, the tactics listed below continue to play a crucial role for increasing an online brand's authority, visibility, traffic and conversions.

Required pieces to the SEO puzzle:

- **Relevant content** – Create high quality landing pages, blog articles, videos, infographics, guest articles, forums, etc.
- **Internal links** – Use one relevant internal link for every 400 words. In a landing page, an internal link will (ideally) allow online users to naturally progress through your business' determined conversion funnel. In a blog post, an internal link might lead to additional relevant content or a conversion opportunity.
- **External links** – Use to cite a third party's report, study, and/or research. Try not to use more than three per page, as each external link may transfer a bit of your equity to the page it directs to.
- **Social sharing** – Share every new published form of content across all your owned social media channels.
- **Link earning** – Attract links from other websites that are relevant to your industry, speak to similar audiences, and are viewed as credible resources.
- **Onsite optimization** – Place various target key terms strategically on a web or landing page, and throughout a website.

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- **Metadata optimization** – Place specific target key terms strategically within a website’s meta descriptions, title tags, header tags, and URL structure.
- **PageSpeed** – A website’s ability to load immediately when users attempt to engage a specific page.
- **Structured data** – Use particular forms of code or rich snippets to convey to search engines your contact information, product descriptions, testimonials, and other important details of your business.
- **XML sitemaps** – Update the blueprint of your website so that search engines are constantly aware of, and able to, index all new forms of content.
- **HTML sitemaps** – Have a visitor-facing sitemap that shows online users the entire structure of your business’s website. This gives them another way to go directly where they choose, saving clicks and time.
- **Consumer behavior alignment** – Identify specific motivations and expectations of your target audiences’ online search behavior, in order to satisfy precise demands that allow for greater engagement and conversions.
- **Google Analytics** – Use this free tool to see how your website is performing in traffic acquisition, user engagement, and online conversions.
- **Google and Bing Webmaster Tools** – Use these free tools to see how your website is performing from a structural and technical point of view.

16. Can I Manage My Company’s SEO Campaign By Myself?

Maybe. Are you part of a team including specialists, or a one-person department? If you’re on a team that includes people who create content, manage social marketing, and run email campaigns, it’s going to be easier for you to turn your attention to SEO. If it’s a smaller team, or you’re flying solo, consider the robust list of services and tactics that make up a complete SEO campaign. Being able

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to maintain complete control of your organic search efforts while also running your other marketing efforts is hard. Things to consider include whether you can:

- Keep up with and adapt to ongoing industry trends
- Do ongoing keyword research, and create metadata for all new pages and content
- Help content creators infuse SEO principles into their work
- Reach out to third-party websites to exchange content for links
- Eliminate any and all broken links that naturally accumulate over time
- Create and manage redirects
- Work with structured data (such as rich snippets)
- Create and publish a new XML sitemap on a regular schedule
- Track and analyze your results

If you can't do it all, consider outsourcing all or part of your SEO management.

17. How Much Do I Need To Spend If I Hire an SEO Consultant?

This is probably one of the most difficult questions decision-makers struggle with, especially for those who are new to digital marketing or organic search.

Most agencies charge a monthly retainer based on a specific scope of services. Some well-established agencies might require a minimum fee between \$2,500 to \$5,000 a month. Younger, less-established companies might offer the same type of services for much less. Agencies in large urban areas usually charge more than agencies in smaller cities or towns.

The real question you need to ask is not how much a complete SEO campaign will cost, but what you get in return and how experienced the people working on your campaign are.

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On average, most businesses that are serious about developing their online campaigns tend to spend at least \$1,000 a month in order to get:

- 1 – 5 SEO-optimized blog articles or web pages
- Technical maintenance (metadata optimization, onsite optimization, XML sitemaps, 301 redirects, PageSpeed audits)
- Monthly reporting

Brands that spend around \$5,000 or more per month tend to receive:

- 5 – 10 SEO-optimize blog articles or web pages
- Technical maintenance
- Custom monthly reporting
- Link building campaigns
- Social sharing and engagement
- Dedicated account manager
- Keyphrase strategy
- Content audits
- Directory updates
- Scholarship campaigns
- Video optimization and/or YouTube Channel creation

And the list can go on, depending on your needs and the agency you work with.

Overall, you need to focus on how your investment is going to increase qualified traffic that can be converted into new customers or leads, and understand the cost vs. the lifetime value of your customer.

Ask your potential agency how they obtain revenue or generate leads, as opposed to how they increase traffic. It's one thing to increase traffic; it's quite another to attract highly qualified leads with specific types of content that actually solicit the highest levels of engagement and conversion. Ask for references – and be sure to check them.

Campaigns, Consultants, and Advertising

18. How Long Does It Take to Start Getting New Customers or Leads?

The answer varies based on:

- How long your website has existed or the type of equity it has built up over time
- How competitive your industry is
- How your competitors' websites rank and how aggressively they market
- How many pages your website has
- How many links your website has
- How well your website is naturally set up for conversion
- The type of information, services, and/or products your business offers
- The rest of your marketing mix

Experienced SEO strategists should be able to develop long-term authority (for higher page ranking) through link building, while they also solicit immediate conversions through intelligent content development, technical SEO maintenance, and social sharing.

If you need to see some immediate financial return on your SEO investment, you should be able to hold experienced strategists to a three-to-four month window for seeing tangible results.

19. How Do I know If SEO is the Reason More Customers are Coming to My Business?

Unlike traditional advertising or marketing (e.g. radio, TV, print), SEO offers in-depth insight around how your campaign is actually performing. Programs such as Google Analytics track many aspects of online behavior as it relates to your website.

With analytics, you can see in real time, as well as from a historical perspective, exactly:

- How online users are introduced to your website
- How users progress throughout your website
- Where and why users leave your website
- How many users actually convert into customers or leads

Campaigns, Consultants, and Advertising

You can also set up specific forms of tracking that allow you to see how much revenue your website produces or how many leads it attracts on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis.

If your phone is ringing off the hook and you're not sure why, you can purchase phone tracking software that uses vanity phone numbers to record how many individual customers called your business through your website.

20. My Business Is Successful Because of Repeat Customers; Why Would I Need SEO?

Many companies see the majority of their revenue from returning or repeat customers, and so don't see the need to invest in SEO.

- What if a competitor becomes more desirable; can you count on brand loyalty to prevent churn?
- What if the economy goes into another recession and your repeat customers can no longer afford your products or services?
- What if your customer gets restless and wants to try something new?
- What if you launch a new product and your current customers don't know about it, or aren't the target market?

One of the classic retention strategies for automobile brands was to create billboards and TV commercials that were aimed at current owners, not new buyers, to make owners feel good about their purchases and prime them to buy maintenance services from the dealer. Online marketing and advertising can do the same job, but are far more cost effective. And trackable.

Suppose your customer has been with you for a while, is bored with the status quo, and gets curious about your competition. They do a search and find your competitor – and see your paid search ad at the top of the results. You're more likely to look like you're on top of the game, and less likely to be forgotten.

Campaigns, Consultants, and Advertising

21. How Can I Tell the Difference Between an SEO Listing and a PPC Ad?

Often, the entries at the very top of the search engine results page you're using will be PPC ads. They also often display a yellow "Ad" icon at the beginning of the address. They may also appear in a column on the right hand side of your browser instead of, or in addition to, the top few positions of the search engine page. The search listings that follow paid ads are organic returns.

In the example to the right, the first listing is an ad, the second is organic.



22. How Can I Integrate My SEO Campaign With My PPC and Social Media Efforts?

Such an integration amplifies both your organic and paid efforts, making both more effective and cost-efficient.

Begin by identifying the range of keyphrases your audience uses when they search online for what your company offers (which should be what you would like to be found for)

Build content that optimizes those keywords and concepts, and offers rich answers to the searcher's intent when they ask search questions

Leverage the same keywords and concepts in paid ads, so you can attract new potential customers through both channels, and so your organic and paid content are consistent with each other

Share this content through your established social media profiles, using similar keyphrases that resonate with your followers helps increase your business's top-of-mind awareness, as well as catalyze immediate conversions through word-of-mouth advertising

Set up advertising tactics such as retargeting, where you are able to continuously place your business's ad and logo in front of online users who visited your website but didn't convert into a customer

When paid search tactics are complemented with organic content that aligns with the online user's expectations, you can begin to push them through your conversion funnel until they finally purchase.

Keyword Tools and Tactics

23. What Tools Are Available For Creating A Keyphrase Strategy?

Understanding what terms and phrases your business's target audience use when searching online can be fairly easy to approach, when using the right tools correctly.

Google Keyword Planner – One of the most recognized available tools online, this also happens to be free to use, as long as you have a Gmail account.

The keyword planner allows you to plug in various terms, phrases, and concepts in order to get a top-level understanding for:

- How often a term or phrase is used online each month
- What the average cost of each term or phrase might be, in terms of PPC ads
- How each term is connected to a general theme or category
- What other terms are similar in definition

Overall, Google Keyword Planner is a great way to gain an initial understanding for what terms your business should build content around in order to increase your authority for a specific concept or phrase.

A general rule of thumb is that if you're a smaller company try not to choose terms that exceed 1,500 monthly searches. Such terms are very competitive and will be extremely difficult to rank for; it would take a great deal of content and link building to accomplish.

Also, if you happen to see a "0" or a blank space connected to the monthly search volume of your researched keyphrase or statement, that doesn't actually mean that buyers aren't using that term when searching online. Rather, it indicates that Google Keyword Planner is unable to interpret the validity of usage of that particular term. This situation often takes place when trying to find the monthly search volume around a long tail keyphrase, question, or statement.

Keyword Tools and Tactics

24. How often should I use keywords in my content? What should I know about keyword density?

Keyword density (SEO) is the number of times a keyword or key phrase appears on a web page as a percentage of the total number of words on the page. There's really no optimal keyword density for your content, but if it's so dense as to look like you're stuffing keywords into your copy for the sake of optimization, you might draw a penalty. Some experts peg between 0.5% and 2.5% as good percentages to strive for and something as high as 4% as likely to draw a penalty, but that's not what really matters.

What does matter is that you write for your reader, not for the search engine. It's good if your keyword is in your headline and SEO title, and a few of your subheads, but never distort natural copy to accommodate a keyword. If you're writing naturally, you'll tend to use synonyms and vary your phrasing, and Google (among other search engines) has begun to look for this. They're getting better at understanding context – and you can help them by using well-written, informative content that includes words they would expect to find in that context.

If you're writing about German Shepherd dogs as pets, for instance, the search engine might like to see "working dog", "puppy", "black and tan", "kennel", "AKC", and so on. If you're writing about German Shepherds as police dogs, the search engine might know better what to return if you include words like "police", "police dog", "K-9", "attack dog", "bite training", and so on.

You may hear the terms "co-occurrence" and "proof words" in connection with content that includes more synonyms and related terms. These are good things, and occur naturally in well-written copy that's meant to fulfill a searcher's question.

Metrics

25. How Can I Monitor My Website's Success or Understand How Well My SEO Campaign Is Performing?

There are literally hundreds of paid programs that offer various details around your website's performance, as well as the extent of your SEO success. However, it is important to know that each paid platform does come with its own set of deltas that ultimately skew data, preventing you from truly understanding how well your campaign is performing.

Google Analytics is a baseline tool. The platform is free, as long as you have a Gmail account, and can be easily installed by even the most casual of marketers.

With Google Analytics, you can gain critical insight in real time, as well as over historical periods, about:

- How much traffic you've accumulated
- Where your traffic derives from (e.g. direct sources, organic, paid, social, e-mail)
- What type of devices your traffic uses to find you online (mobile, tablet, desktop)
- Where your traffic is located throughout the country, state, and local region

Some of the more significant metrics you'll want to stay close to are:

- Total traffic
- Organic traffic
- Direct traffic
- Referral traffic
- Mobile traffic
- Top landing pages
- Goals
- Conversions

Metrics

You will also want to set up Google Search Console, and Bing Webmaster Tools in order to stay up-to-date with the technical health of your business's website.

With these free platforms, you can review the following details that relate to your website's overall performance:

- Broken links – 404 errors, soft 404 errors, 500 server errors
- XML Sitemap status and ability to submit new ones
- Landing page appearance within search listings
- Rich snippet implementation and appearance within search listings
- Warning messages that relate to hacked servers, duplicate content, and other possible penalties related to manipulative SEO tactics

Search Engine Behavior

26. How Long Does It Take for Search Engines to Recognize When Content Is Published or When Edits Are Applied to My Website?

The rate at which search engines recognize and index website changes varies depending on what actions you take.

If you were to publish a new landing page or blog article today, and take no other action, search engines would probably take about three days to a week to find and index your content.

Now, that doesn't mean that search engines will necessarily know how this content connects to other areas of your website or how important it is compared to other categories of content. Even internal links don't necessarily inform the crawlers how this page integrates with the rest of your site.

If you want search engines to recognize new content and understand how it relates to your overall website, as well as how it supports your overall SEO efforts, you should create and implement a new XML Sitemap and submit it to your Search Console and Webmaster Tools profiles.

27. What Is Semantic Search?

"Semantic search" is the concept of a search engine applying intent and context to the results it provides the searcher. Semantic search seeks to improve search accuracy by understanding the searcher's intent and the contextual meaning of terms as they appear in the searchable dataspace.

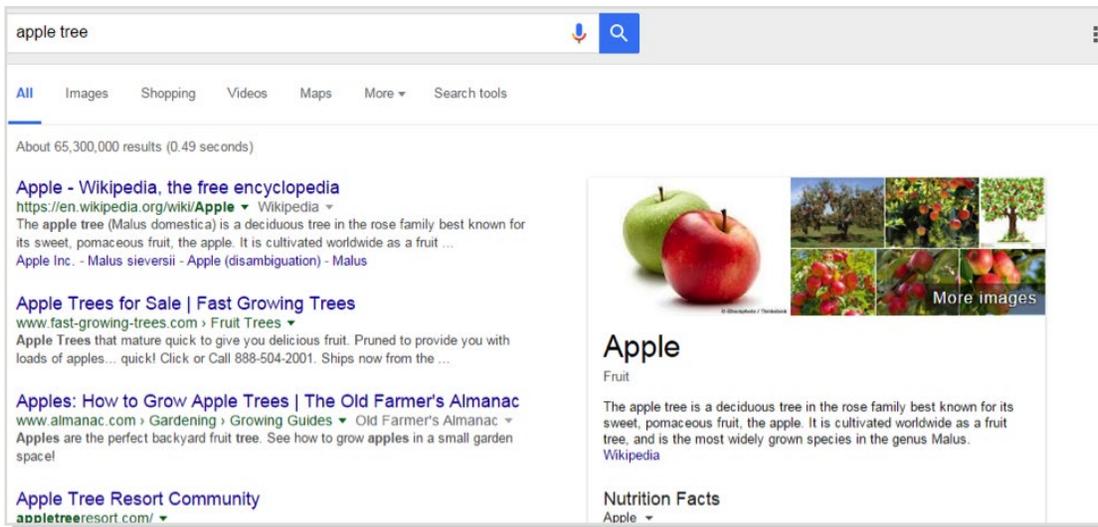
With the release of the Hummingbird algorithm in 2013, Google became more able to analyze full questions (as opposed to analyzing searches on a word-by-word basis). The search engine also understood that any single word could have multiple meanings, and it used context to discern which

Search Engine Behavior

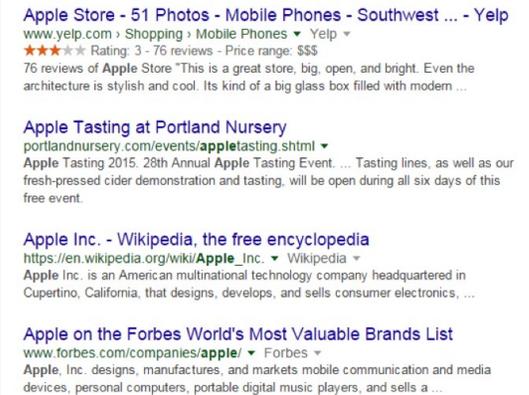
meaning might be accurate, often using a searcher's own history to provide context. That's one reason why you and I might get different results for the same search, or you might get two different results if you use two different browsers for the same search. It also takes into account what other people click on in search results using the same term.

Here's a screenshot of the results I get on Chrome for the search term "apple":

Because the Apple brand is often searched for, and I do a lot of tech-related searches, this result makes sense for me. I've also been to the Portland Nursery site numerous times over the last year, so that result makes sense as well. If I'd given Google a bit of semantic help by including another word or two (such as "phone," "watch," "tree," "Granny Smith", etc.) the results would have been very different:



Semantic search helps engines offer searchers content from multiple authoritative sources that align with their expectations and perceived needs.



Search Engine Behavior

28. Does Google Prefer One Type of Content Over Another?

No. Creating blog articles instead of image-based content does not necessarily dictate the type of organic success your business's website will achieve. While studies show that video content is more engaging for general online searchers, what's most important for SEO success is that the content you create is in line with (and fulfills) your target audience's expectations.

If your online visitors convert into customers after being educated about the history, benefits, and uses of your services, you might want to invest in lengthier content that focuses on presenting as much detail as possible.

If your audience converts based on the experiences your brand offered other like-minded buyers, video testimonials should be an effective component of your content mix.

Optimizing your content's title, description, images (if included), and metadata are also a part of what makes your content SEO-friendly. But creating content that is meaningful to your specific online audience is the only way to ensure organic success for the long haul.

Metadata Optimization

29. What Is metadata?

It's data about data. For search purposes, it's the data that tells the search engine and the searcher what a page is about.

In general, every listing within a search engine results page (SERP) contains a page title drawn from metadata (the SEO Page Title), which links to the page. Each listing also contains a brief description (often, but not always, the meta description you create) that behaves like a trailer for the page's content. It's the job of these bits of metadata to give concise information to the search engine and to the searcher. They don't show on the page itself; that's not their job.

The strategy for metadata is to convey a page's content as accurately and attractively as possible, so that the search engine can make the best choice among the many pages it could return, and that the searcher's expectations will be fulfilled as satisfactorily as possible.

The same principle accounts for other forms of metadata, such as:

- **Header tags.** These apply to the headlines and subheads or category titles on a page
- **URL structures.** A page's URL should be created deliberately, not left to default. It's good to have at least the headword in the URL, and entire keyword if possible, near the front
- **Image alt. tags.** This is text that's embedded on the back end of an image, which allows search engines to understand what the images represent. These also help searchers with impaired vision



Metadata Optimization

30. What's the value of metadata, as It Relates to SEO?

The days of stuffing keywords into your website's metadata in order to outrank your competitors are long over. Today's search engines are much more sophisticated in how they pull content, and are more interested in connecting with websites that offer a superior user experience than one that has perfect page titles.

That's not to say that metadata doesn't still have an important role in building a successful SEO campaign, it just shouldn't be regarded as a singular means for increasing your rankings or monthly conversions.

To understand the value of each relevant form of metadata, take a look at the following considerations, as they relate to SEO:

- **Page titles** – Still contain slight influence for supporting rankings. Important because they show on the SERP, and are the first thing searchers see when searching online
- **Meta descriptions** – Don't support search rankings, but they're important because they show on the SERP and so they influence click-through rate, they sell the story
- **Header tags** – Minimal influence on keyword rankings, but when built properly, can support landing page visibility
- **URL structure** – Supports search efficiency and keyword rankings to a slight degree
- **Image alt. Tags** – Support visibility and click-through rate

Metadata Optimization

31. How Do You Create Each Form of Metadata?

- **Page Title**

- Include the target keyphrase
- Separate concepts or categories by using a pipe filter (“|”) instead of dashes or underscores, e.g. SEO Services In Portland | Digital Marketing Solutions
- End each Page Title with your brand’s name. Doing so allows you to properly convey to search engines that the keyword or phrase you used at the beginning of the title are connected to your business, e.g. SEO Services In Portland | Digital Marketing Solutions | Anvil Media
- Don’t exceed 65- 70 characters, depending on the type of CMS your website uses

- **Meta description**

- Use the target keywords associated with each web page as they would occur naturally within a brief summary for what the page represents; this copy sets your audience’s expectations
- Try not to use punctuation marks, or any type of symbol such as ampersands or quotations. These characters tend to skew a search engine’s ability to understand what is being described
- Don’t exceed 156 characters
- If you’re unsure how to describe each page, just think about the elevator pitch you would use to convince a qualified prospect to read this page
- Align the tone with the subject of each page. Some industries and companies (entertainment, retail) can use a lighter tone, more casual language, and more emotional punctuation, such as exclamation points. Others (health care, financial services, legal, etc.) should probably be less casual, and more respectful or more conservative

Metadata Optimization

- **Header tags**

- Used to convey priority of meaning and subjects on a particular landing page:

- H1 tags – title of each landing page – SEO Services
- H2 tags – secondary title – SEO Services In Portland
- H3 tags – subheadings – Contact Us Today, Hear From Our Clients, Read Our Case Studies

- **URL structure**

- Separate each category with a forward slash "/" in order to properly organize the content of your website e.g. www.anvilmediainc.com/the-work/marketing-services/

- Don't use underscores to separate terms, as search engines treat them like letters and so regard your "my_company_rocks" URLs as one long, unrecognizable string of letters. They cannot parse the string to understand each individual keyword. Use dashes instead: "my-company-rocks". Do not use blank spaces

- Don't exceed 115 characters

- Don't capitalize the first letter of each word

- Don't include articles like:

- "A" or "an"
- "Or"
- "And"
- "In"
- "If"
- "The"
- "On"

- **Image alt tags**

- State what each image represents, using specific key terms that your business is trying to increase its online authority for, e.g., Chart-SEO-Effectiveness

- End each tag with a pipe filter, followed by your business's name, e.g., Chart-SEO-Effectiveness | Offering SEO Services To Businesses Throughout Portland, OR | Anvil Media

Content Marketing & Optimization

32. How Many Links Should I Have On Each Landing Page or Blog Article?

A general rule of thumb is to have no more than one link for every 400–450 words. Use external links only when citing an external source, such as for a statistic. If you're offering multiple citations within a small amount of text, forego a few of the external links and just name the source.

Too many links may lead Google and other search engines to conclude that you're creating an excessive amount of links as a means of increasing your keyword rankings. Worse, they can be distracting to the reader. Make sure the links are relevant, and add value.

33. How Does Word Count Affect SEO?

Google and other search engines do not require websites to have a tremendous amount of text in order to achieve superior visibility. However, there are plenty of studies that show a direct correlation between lengthier content (content that has 1,500 words or more) and:

- Increased visibility
- Increased user engagement
- Increased social shares
- Increased conversions
- Increased revenue

This doesn't mean you have to make sure that every page on your website has that much content. But when you have relevant information your target audience is looking for, in rich detail, that will go a long way in supporting your website's overall SEO goals – partly because it's more likely to satisfy your readers.

Local SEO

34. What is Local SEO?

Local SEO is the process of optimizing your business website so that you can gain more visibility within the specific community or locations that your company operates within.

35. How is Local SEO Different than National SEO?

Most of the tactics used to produce a successful national SEO campaign (good content, technical optimization, on-page factors, link earning, social engagement, etc.) are relevant and useful for increasing local rankings. However, there are three specific concepts that are used primarily for supporting and increase a company's local online authority:

- Google+ Business Page
- Citations
- Reviews

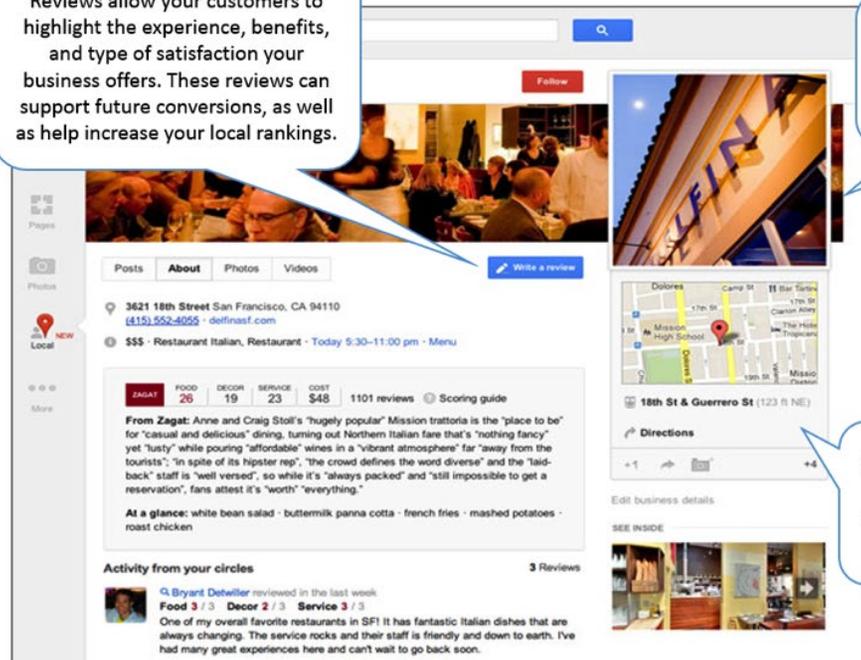
Google Business Pages tend to populate within localized search results, which is why most small to midsize companies are encouraged to create and claim one.

These pages typically include a variety of top-level details, including:

- Hours of operation
- Location
- Contact information
- Testimonials/reviews
- Product/service offerings

Reviews allow your customers to highlight the experience, benefits, and type of satisfaction your business offers. These reviews can support future conversions, as well as help increase your local rankings.

Images are used to highlight the look and feel of your business.



Creating/claiming your business listing allows users to understand where you are located and how to find you when using a mobile device.

Local SEO

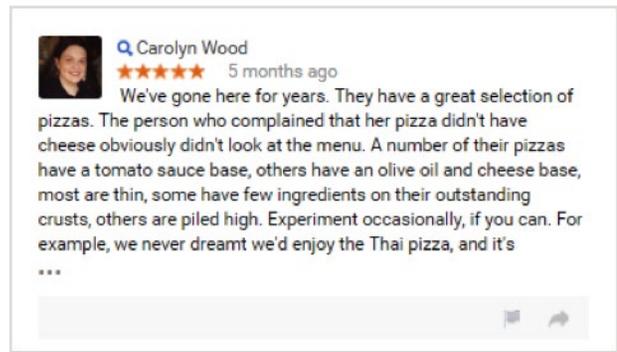
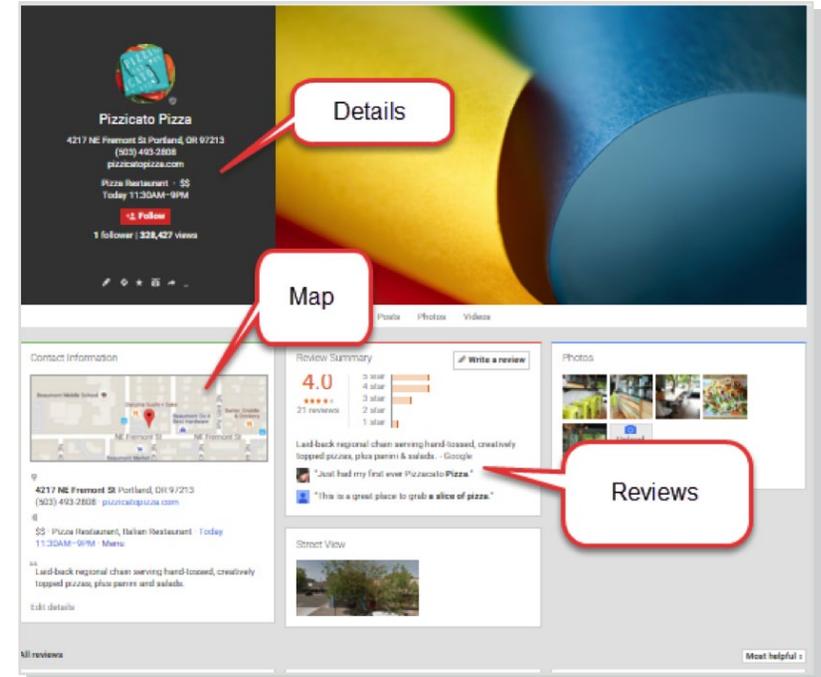
Citations reference any place online that allows you to input your business's name, address, and phone number (NAP) on one web page, in the same format as your Google+ Business Page.

Keeping all of your business's details identical is critical for local SEO, as Google needs to see consistency in order to understand what information it needs to or should produce for local online users.

If you create directory entries on Yelp and on FourSquare, and a Google Business page, and the details across these three are inconsistent, search engines won't be able to understand which version is correct. This makes it more likely that they will move on and pull content from a competitive business.

Reviews play a pivotal role in supporting local online visibility as they provide meaningful information to other local, like-minded buyers about how effective, responsive, and beneficial your business is. Nothing is as powerful as a word-of-mouth reference.

Having quality reviews on your Google Business Page is considered to be one of the most important local ranking factors by experienced SEO strategists.



Local SEO

36. Do Metadata and On-site Optimization Strategies Change When Trying to Rank Locally?

The same principles that we covered in Question 30 apply to local SEO when it comes to the parameters around creating page titles, meta descriptions, and other forms of metadata.

In addition, local SEO calls for:

- The inclusion of your business's NAP within the universal footer section of your website
- The addition of keywords within your page titles, header tags, and meta descriptions that include the city and state your business operates in
- The use of rich snippets or Schema markup that allows search engines to understand and display your location more easily
- The inclusion of a Keyhole Markup Language (KML) file on your website. This is an XML- based file format that helps search engines display data about your immediate location in Internet-based, two-dimensional maps and three-dimensional Earth browsers, including:
 - Google Earth
 - Google Maps
 - Google Maps for mobile

37. How Do I Go About Attracting Local Citations?

There are tools available, such as the [WhiteSpark local citation finder](#), which can help you identify the best citation sources within your community.

Connecting with other businesses that are similar to yours or cater to the same audiences is another way to attract local links. If they have a blog, try contributing your own guest posts to expand your local reach, while also increasing your online authority, visibility, and rankings.

Local SEO

38. How Can I Solicit Reviews from Customers?

The best way to attract reviews from your customers is to ask them for reviews, as well as advertise how they can do so. Set up alerts, if you can, so you know when a review has been posted. This lets you respond and thank them; an unacknowledged review can turn an advocate into a less enthusiastic customer.

Two simple ways you can do this are:

- Post the logos of your Google+ Business Page and other owned social media profiles on the windows of your business
- Include profile links in all your customer-facing material, such as email, direct mail items, flyers, receipts, etc.

Search engines such as Google and Bing, along with particular directory websites, are good at identifying fake or fabricated reviews and are likely to penalize your company's website by lowering its rankings or completely banishing your directory entry.

39. Are There Specific Websites or Tools I Can Use to Support My Company's Local SEO?

The previously mentioned WhiteSpark local citation finder is going to be one of your best friends when it comes to supporting your own local SEO efforts. It's affordable (about \$16 per month) and will go a long way to help you build your local authority and rankings.

You can also check out [MySEOTool](#) to track and monitor your localized rankings (using keywords that include some type of geo modifier).

Local SEO

Directory aggregators like Moz Local and [Yext](#) help local search engines and online customers find your business by pushing your NAP to a variety of recognized, popular directory sites like:

- Yelp
- FourSquare
- Yellowpages
- Ezlocal
- Showmelocal
- 8coupons
- Citysearch

Just like a company marketing nationally or globally, you should set up Google Analytics, Google and Bing Webmaster Tools to monitor the health and validity of your website.

40. How Can My Small Local Company Compete with National Brands?

If the idea of competing with national brands online seems impossible, think again.

Today's buyers are heavily connected to the Internet, no matter where they're located, what they're buying, or what type of device they use. And the vast majority of people refuse to buy a product or service without doing some level of research, often looking for reviews from other like-minded buyers. This is where your SEO work pays off most.

Consider these consumer trends :

- [70% - 80% of buyers ignore paid ads and click on organic listings](#)
- ["Near me" interest searches have multiplied 34x since 2014](#)
- [94% of smartphone users search for location information](#)
- [51% of mobile local searches result in a store visit](#)
- [48% of mobile local searches called a store](#)

Local SEO

Tactics for you to consider for regional authority and greater visibility within local search listings include:

- Create multiple social media channels that include the name of your community, your business, and its address in all appropriate fields
- Set up various business profiles on some of the more popular directories like Yelp, FourSquare, and Whitepages.
- Implement rich snippets on the back end of your website, around your:
 - Contact information
 - Products/services
 - Testimonials/reviews
 - Employee bios

Note: rich snippets are a type of structured data that require a bit of specialized expertise. This might be a good tactic to outsource.

- Publish article or video content that includes the name of your community in the title and description.

41. Does Local SEO Demand Ongoing Attention or Can I Set It Up and Leave It Be?

It's ongoing. Searchers appreciate fresh content, and they don't trust reviews that are dated. You should show that your company is alive and well by continuously attracting new citations, reviews, links, and social mentions. Search engines notice this too, in a good way.

If you stop, your potential customers might wonder if you're still in business. And your competition is likely to overcome and surpass the level of local authority you've built up, and take over the rankings your business used to fulfill.

Mobile SEO

42. What Does Mobile SEO Refer To?

“Mobile SEO” or “mobile optimization” describes the effort of applying search engine optimization elements that help increase your website’s visibility in mobile search queries.

Consider that [search](#) is the leading web-based activity performed on mobile devices. Mobile SEO can have a profound impact on your retail business by attracting on-the-go consumers. For B2B, remember that people looking for business information are also increasingly using smart phones and tablets to get it. Make sure that their questions can be answered by your website –however they choose to access it.

43. What Is A Mobile-Friendly Web

Page? Google is steadily moving to a mobile-only world. In fact, Google announced in November that it would shift to mobile-first indexing. For a web page to be considered “mobile-friendly,” it needs it either be built with responsive design or as a separate, mobile-specific website (“m.” websites).



The most effective way to ensure that your entire website can be found and engaged by mobile searchers is to have a responsive website.

44. What Is Responsive Design?

This is a fluid-grid design that determines what type of device is accessing it, and responds by displaying the most appropriate layout for that device. This results in high-quality, interactive experiences, and allows readers to:

- 45. Easily read copy
- 46. Immediately navigate to the most desired web page
- 47. Easily scroll without having to adjust screen settings
- 48. Easily pan in and out

The page layout does not shrink; it changes, leaving out many elements that would display on a larger screen. Responsive websites align with the parameters of each and every single type of smartphone, tablet, and desktop device, ensuring that your website will display as your prefer in each instance.

Mobile SEO

45. How Can I Tell If My Website Is Mobile-Friendly?

You can enter your website into Google's [mobile-friendly testing platform](#) to see:

- How well it displays on mobile devices
- How search crawlers view your website/web page
- How you can improve your existing environment

46. What the Best Practices For Optimizing My Mobile Presence?

There are three specific considerations to be aware of when optimizing your mobile web pages.

- **Don't use Flash elements**
Flash is infamous for security flaws, malware, and bugs. It's also slow, clumsy, and power-draining. What's more important is that Apple devices don't support it, including phones and tablets. The new standard is the HTML5 Canvas element.
- **Remove all popups that block or prevent site access**
If you mobile users confront full-page popup ads, it diminishes their experience and might motivate them to leave your website right away.
- **Make sure that your content is the same for mobile and desktop searchers**

Both Google and online users expect to be able to do anything on their mobile devices that they can do on the desktop version.

Using responsive design automatically allows for this to happen. However, if you own an "m." website, you'll need to manually apply any and all adjustments that take place on the desktop version of your website.

The screenshot shows the Google Mobile-Friendly Test interface. At the top, the URL 'http://www.act-on.com/' is entered in the search bar, with an 'ANALYZE' button to the right. Below the search bar, a green banner displays the message 'Awesome! This page is mobile-friendly.' The main content area is divided into three columns. The first column, titled 'How Googlebot sees this page', contains text about resources blocked by robots.txt and a link to 'Show resources'. The second column, titled 'Learn more about mobile-friendly pages', provides links to 'Webmaster's Mobile Guide' and 'Principles of Site Design on Web Fundamentals'. The third column, titled 'Do you use Google Search Console?', explains how to check for mobile-friendliness and includes a 'Give feedback' section. On the left side of the main content area, there is a mobile device simulator showing a smartphone displaying the 'act-on' website. The website content on the phone includes the 'act-on' logo, a hamburger menu icon, and a main heading 'Marketing Automation for the Real World.' followed by a sub-heading and a 'See it in action' button.

Mobile SEO

47. My website already looks okay on mobile devices. Do I really need to make it as attractive and slick as possible for smartphones and tablets?

Yes. Mobile search is no longer a trend; it's become a critical component of our culture and how we, as consumers and business buyers, find information that allows us to make qualified purchase decisions. And as a marketer, you want to optimize everything that drives revenue that can be optimized.

Here are a few statistics* to keep in mind when evaluating the need to invest in an attractive, seamless mobile experience:

- Mobile Internet usage surpassed desktop in 2014
- 70% of mobile searches lead to an online action within an hour
- 80% of local searches performed on mobile phones convert into transactions*

48. Is It Possible To Have Part of My Website "Mobile Friendly" So That I Don't Have To Spend As Much Time and Money Optimizing My Entire Site?

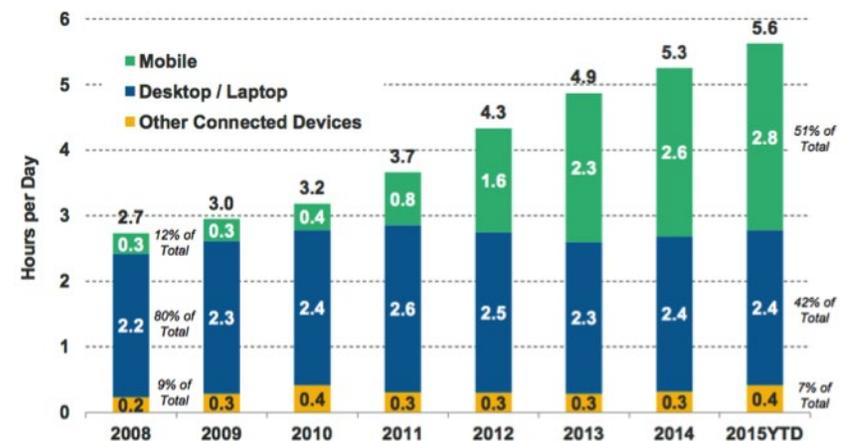
For Google and other search engines, your website is either mobile friendly, or it isn't. You can see if your site passes Google's criteria for a complete mobile-friendly environment by using this recommended [tool](#).

49. Should I Try to Optimize My Mobile Website Myself or Delegate It To Someone Else?

If you're a business owner or marketer, you've got a lot of things on your to-do list, and becoming a mobile SEO optimization expert may not be one of them. You certainly can research, learn, and apply various mobile optimization tactics/strategies, but consider that it may not be the best use of your time. In most cities, you can hire a local search marketing agency to manage your mobile campaign for as little as a few hundred dollars per month, depending on the extent of your needs.

Internet Usage (Engagement) Growth Solid
+11% Y/Y = Mobile @ 3 Hours / Day per User vs. <1 Five Years Ago, USA

Time Spent per Adult User per Day with Digital Media, USA, 2008 – 2015YTD



@KPCB Source: eMarketer 9/14 (2008-2010), eMarketer 4/15 (2011-2015). Note: Other connected devices include OTT and game consoles. Mobile includes smartphone and tablet. Usage includes both home and work. Ages 18+; time spent with each medium includes all time spent with that medium, regardless of multitasking. 14

* <http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2012/9/Retailers-Carving-Out-Space-in-the-M-Commerce-Market>

* <http://searchenginewatch.com/sew/study/2339085/80-of-local-searches-on-mobile-phones-convert-study>

Mobile SEO

50. What Are Some of The Key, Must-Have Features My Mobile Site Should Include?

B2C: If you own a brick-and-mortar retail business, you will want to make sure that your address, hours of operation, and driving directions are presented prominently through the footer and header sections of your site. If you offer goods or products, consider adding an e-commerce feature to your site, such as a shopping cart or checkout section.

Including a “click-to-call” phone number that allows mobile users to immediately contact your business (without having to key in your phone number) is a great way to drive immediate conversions.

B2B: Make sure your mobile site is able to adapt to the parameters associated with various types of smartphones and tablet devices; making it responsive is the best bet. Be mindful of how your design feels and how it supports your ability to attract, retain, and convert new potential customers.

- Consider including features that allow for voice search
- Use keywords that align with semantic search to attract users who verbally search with statements, questions, and long tail phrases
- Make sure that the call-to-actions on your mobile site are clearly visible, can be used without having to adjust the size of the screen, and can be clicked without hitting another link
- Don't use popup ads that ask for contact information, as users are likely to bounce from your site

51. How Can I Track The Success of My Mobile Campaign?

The most popular, user-friendly website traffic and user engagement monitoring system is Google Analytics. This is a free website monitoring tool that allows you to gain tremendous insight around traffic patterns and consumer behavior.

Whichever platform(s) you choose to use, make sure that you are able to review the following metrics that support your ability to maximize monthly opportunities dedicated to mobile traffic and conversions:

- Sessions
- Location
- Devices used
- New vs Returning sessions
- Mobile vs. Tablet sessions
- Conversions/transactions

Mobile SEO

52. Do I need to do SEO for Voice Search?

Voice recognition software and assistants like Siri, Cortana, Google Voice and Google Home, and Amazon Echo have become incredibly sophisticated, resulting in their increasing popularity and more of us using voice search to find information. By 2020, it is estimated that 50% of all searches will come from voice commands. As a result, how you think about SEO when it comes to voice search will need to change. There will be more emphasis on optimizing web pages and other content for conversational searches, and for answering questions.

53. What is AMP and Do I need it?

Accelerated Mobile Pages are an initiative led by Google to speed up web browsing on mobile devices by offering stripped-down versions websites that don't have JavaScript and that are cached on Google servers.

Beginning in September 2016, Google announced it would return AMP results for all mobile searches. Technically, they are not a ranking factor ... yet. There is no requirement to convert to your website to AMP pages, but it should be researched and considered. The process would be technical, and you would need to involve your webmaster or hire outside expertise to execute.

54. What is PWA or Progressive Web Apps?

The theme here is mobile first, mobile first. Progressive Web Apps is another Google led initiative that creates an app-like user experience on a mobile browser. The end result for your business is that your mobile website becomes your app. They will have extremely fast load times due to ongoing advances in the various technologies that power your website and smart phones. You may not implement PWA in 2017, but you should begin reading up on it.

55. Do I Need to Have a Secure HTTPS Website?

Secure, or HTTPS, is a Google ranking factor and the search engine recognizes and gives priority to websites that apply an SSL or the newer TLS encryption. Beginning in January 2017, the Google Chrome browser began labeling non-HTTPS websites as "Not Secure" in the in the web address area. You should consider adding HTTPS to your website. For more information, check out Google's suggested best practices for implementing HTTPS.

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