SEO 101:

The Complete Guide to Optimizing Your Small Business Website

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Introduction

Does your business' website sing a siren song to search engines? Unless you included search engine optimization (SEO) when you built your website, the answer is no.

If you want search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo to identify your website when crawling the internet for search results, you've got to dress it up to get their attention.

We're here to tell you that there are some simple things that you—yes, you!—can do to make your website scream, "Pick me! Pick me!"

In the chapters that follow, we share the basic building blocks to get you started on SEO. Once you've mastered these tips, our resources section will provide your next jumping off point— loaded with great information to help you take your SEO efforts even further.
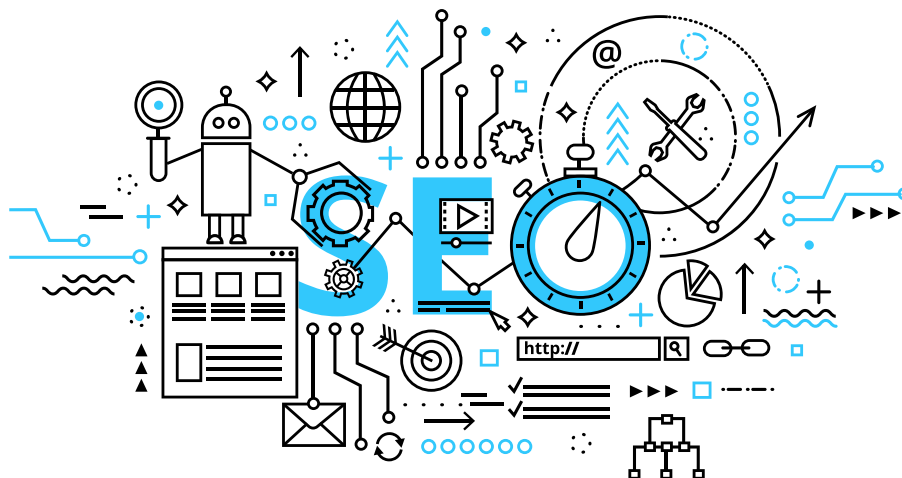
Chapter
01

What to Know About SEO to Get Started

What Is SEO?

Short for search engine optimization, SEO is the process that affects the organic visibility of a website or webpage. Search engines have "crawlers" designed to scour every page on the web to help people find exactly the information they're looking for when they type in a search query. The more optimized your website or webpage is for these search engines, the higher you'll appear in search results!

CURRENT SEO STATISTICS

Each month, **Google** processes **over 160 billion searches.**

51% of searches are **longer than 4 words.**

Approximately **75%** of marketers say **relevant content creation** is the most effective **SEO** strategy.

The **highest-ranking content** averages at about **1,200 words** in length.

95.3% of clicks go to the top **4 results.**

Websites with **WordPress** blogs see **93% more inbound links.**

70% of the links that search-engine users click on are **organic.**

93% of online experiences begin with a **search engine.**

The search-engine industry is estimated to be worth **more than $65 billion.**

Source: Plugin Group https://plugingroup.com/2017-seo-predictions-5-top-trends-search-engine-optimization/

Should I Hire an SEO Expert or Do It Myself?

SEO can be as simple or complex as you make it. Most people with a basic understanding of how their website works can take care of the suggestions we outline here, but there are hundreds of more technologically sophisticated ways to help boost your website to a higher search engine ranking.

A company that specializes in SEO will know all the tools of the trade and can implement them for you from all perspectives: design, development and content.

Like most business practices, it's usually a good idea to start simple and expand as you go—especially as a small business

owner. The more you understand about SEO, the better you'll understand its value and know what's worth investing in.

Before You Decide...

There are many SEO "experts" who increase the ranking of websites using shady practices, including creating bogus links or keyword stuffing to make a website seem more popular.

Google has a low tolerance for this type of activity and penalizes websites that try to game its system. If you hire an SEO firm, be sure to be clear on all these details beforehand.

Patience Is Key:
SEO Is a Long Game

It's important to note that SEO will not produce instant results. The newer your website is, the longer it may take to build trust and authority on the web.

What's more, owning a website isn't a "set it and forget it" proposition—neither is SEO. If you want to your site to continue to rank higher and attract more organic visitors, you should always be finding ways to improve it.

Why? SEO is an ongoing, methodical practice that requires strategic focus at the outset and regular upkeep to maintain your rankings. Search engines constantly retool their algorithms, so it's important to keep up with the advances (and keep your competitors off your heels).

Chapter
02

Get
Noticed with
Keywords

Look at your website from the
perspective of a search engine. Does
your content include search terms
that your ideal customer might use to
find your business?

How to Generate the Right Keywords

Find the precise keywords to attract search engines—and entice your ideal customers to click on your website when it appears in the search results.

Pick the Low-Hanging Fruit: Obvious Keywords

Chances are, your website naturally features some of the keywords a potential client would use to find you, but we bet you can find even more. Make a master list by completing this information:

- *Imagine how your ideal customers search for companies like yours.* What words would they type into a search engine? Be general (dog walker Toronto) and specific (dog walker for small breeds, Toronto).

- *Revisit your value proposition.* What are you known for? What do you want to be known for? Include as many variations as appropriate. E.g. Contractor, kitchens; contractor, bathrooms; contractor, carpentry, etc.

- *Ask friends and family to help you generate keywords.* If they were looking for a service like yours, how would they find you?

- *Ask customers, suppliers and employees how they found you.* If it was through a web search, what search terms did they use? Even if they didn't find you via Google, ask them what they would search.
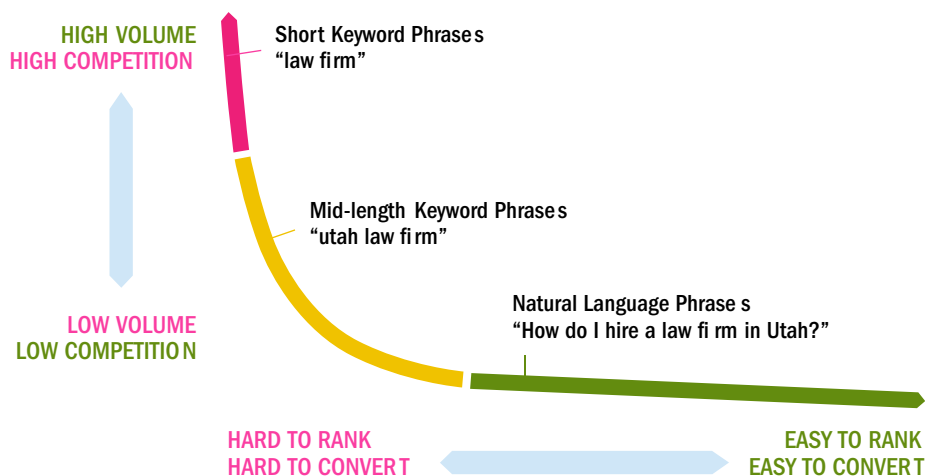
Chase 'Long Tail' Keywords

In SEO-terms, the long-tail means the use longer, more specific key words, e.g. "environmentally-friendly cleaning service for office buildings in downtown Seattle" instead of more generic ones like "cleaning services Seattle."

If you hit on the right search terms your ideal clients use, you'll appear higher in search rankings because search engines will consider your key words most relevant. Plus, since you're focusing on a smaller niche, you'll have less competition on the results page than you would for more generic terms. Another bonus? People who use narrow, specific search terms are thought to be more serious about engaging a company than ones who are just browsing the Internet.

THE "LONG TAIL" OF SEO

ARE YOU FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT KEYWORDS? A small number of keywords get searched for a lot. A lot of keywords get searched for a little. In many cases the long-tail of "natural language" searches can, in aggregate, be larger than the total volume of short keyword phrase searches. They are also less competitive (and therefore easier to rank for), and more relevant (and therefore more likely to convert).

**HIGH VOLUME
HIGH COMPETITION**

Short Keyword Phrases
"law firm"

Mid-length Keyword Phrases
"utah law firm"

Natural Language Phrases
"How do I hire a law firm in Utah?"

**LOW VOLUME
LOW COMPETITION**

**HARD TO RANK
HARD TO CONVERT**

**EASY TO RANK
EASY TO CONVERT**

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Scope Out Your Competition

Want to find out your biggest competitors online? Here's a simple test: Choose a handful of what you consider your "top keywords" and, one by one, pop them into a search engine. The first 10 websites/businesses on each results page are your main search engine competition.

Study the way these super sites use keywords—in their page titles and in their page content. High-ranking websites are intentional and subtle about where and how they place keywords throughout their copy. Make notes about what you observe.

Applying Your Keywords

Now that you've identified your keywords, it's time to put them to use on your website (and do it right!)

Keyword Placement #1: Page Titles

This is the most obvious spot. We'll walk you through it step by step.

Why Should I Add Page Titles?

Content management systems (CMS) like WordPress or Squarespace, will have a field for you to enter a page title each time you create a new page. It will likely look like this: <title>enter title here<title> and is typically invisible on your website, but will appear on your browser's tab.

It's worth the effort because search engines favor page titles. Crawlers scan for keywords in page titles to locate the most relevant information to search queries. Here's where your keywords come in: Page titles that contain the keywords you've identified in Step 1 will help your website get noticed by search engines.

How to Write Page Titles That Get Noticed

- *Keep your titles under 60 characters.* Google typically displays the first 50–60 characters of a title tag.

- *Write for both your audience and search engines.* Your title will be the first thing potential clients see upon their search in the search engine results page. Make a good impression by providing the information they want to know in a friendly way, but not too flowery that search engines won't pick it up.

- *Frontload your page title with keywords.* Put the important keywords first. For example, "Media Relations Services – All in One Media Inc." is better than "All in One Media Inc. – Media Relations Services."

- *Don't stuff your title with keywords.* A list of keywords jammed into a page title reads badly. And Google will suspect what you're trying to do. Be subtle and reader-friendly.

- *Name every page on your website.* Your website is more likely to be picked up by search engines if each page has a title. In your CMS, the default names of your page titles may be things like "Home," "New Page" or "New Post." Rename them using the keywords relevant to the content on that page.

Page Titles in Action!

In this example, freelance writer Simone Banks is creating page titles based on the following keywords:

white paper writer   *freelance writer*   *IT industry*

A Good Example of Page Titles

Page Title	Why It's Helpful
White paper writer | Simone Banks *or* Simone Banks – White paper writer *or* Simone Banks – freelance white paper writer	The | and – are commonly used to separate two words or names without the abruptness of punctuation like commas or periods.
White paper writer – freelance writer | Simone Banks	The most important keywords are at the beginning of the page title and connect them with her name.
Experienced white paper writer delivers results | Simone Banks *or* White paper writer | Freelance writer Simone Banks delivers results for the IT industry	These are good page title options for her home page. They succinctly communicate her specialty.
Experienced white paper writer for the IT industry | Simone Banks	Adds more details about her niche and the industry in which she works.
White paper writer – freelance writer	This would be a good page title for a White Pages Services page of her website.

A Bad Example of Page Titles

Page Title	Why It's Not Helpful
Home	Doesn't relate to the website's content.
www.simonebanks.com	The most important keywords are at the beginning of the page title and connect them with her name.
Simone Banks	Only works if a user is searching "Simone Banks".
White paper writer freelance writer	No punctuation gives away that she's key word stuffing.
White paper writer freelance writer IT industry	Looks like a string of key words.

Keyword Placement #2: H1 Headers

In addition to a field for a page title, your CMS will also have a field for an H1 Header for each of your web pages. This is a heading that appears directly on your webpage and often acts as a title or headline for the content on your page. It doesn't typically show up on search engine results pages, but search engines will look for it.

When creating an H1 Header, you'll use the same best practices you did when writing a great page title, including limiting characters to under 60 and using keywords early in the title. As a challenge, try to make your page title and H1 headers slightly different.

Keyword Placement #3: Sprinkle in Your Website Content

When it comes to reviewing your content with an eye for SEO, look for subtle ways to include your keywords within the first 200 words of copy. You only need to mention a keyword or phrase once, but you can use it more often if it comes up naturally (not overly stuffed).

Be aware: Google's algorithms can detect when keywords don't appear naturally—and will penalize your website for being keyword stuffed and lower its ranking.

When you know your value proposition and what your customers value from you, you'll write copy that naturally includes your keywords.

Some SEO experts advise dedicating one page of your website to each keyword you're targeting. This makes it easy for search engines to find, categorize and rank your pages.

For example, a marketing or PR firm might create four distinct Services pages rather than just one, including:

• Media Relations
• Social Media
• Marketing
• Brand Strategy

Each of these pages will have a proper keyword-focused page title, H1 Header and the keyword or phrase used effectively in the copy—making it much more noticeable to search engines.

Keyword Placement #4: Image Tags

Do you have images or photographs on your website? A quick and easy way to inject SEO into your website is to insert keywords into the alternative text in your images. This text won't appear on the page, so you don't have to be subtle with your keywords.

You can ask your web developer to help you do this—or consult your CMS if you're not sure how to name an image in your website builder.

PRO-TIP: Dedicate a page for every keyword

Chapter 03

Create a Link Strategy For Your Keywords

Congratulations on conquering keywords—you're well on your way to an optimized website!

So Far You've Learned:

1. How to choose the best keywords to suit your business
2. How to used them to name your page titles, headers, website copy and alternative text on images

Next, we're going to look at links—from external websites and between your own pages. Search engines pay attention to the number of times webpages are referenced through links, so it's worthwhile to demonstrate that your website is actively being used as a resource.

Basically, the more popular it appears, the higher your search ranking will be. (There are a couple of caveats to this, but we'll explain those later.)

Step 1

Create Internal Links

Most websites insert links across different places of their website. For instance: We could do it right here by suggesting you check out our Step-By-Step Guide to Building a Small Website for Your Small Business.

Basically, an internal link is one that links from one page on a website to another page on that same website. You might link to your Services page on your home page or, in your blog posts, link to older blog posts on a related topic.

5 Effective Ways to Link Internally

- *Include links on all pages.*
  Some SEO experts say every page of your website should be linked to or from at least one other page.

- *Link evergreen content to promote timely events.* Not only are you giving your ideal customers more information, you're inviting them to extend their stay on your website and promoting more aspects of your business on one page.

- *Use your keywords.* Whenever possible, use keywords in the text link to another page.

- *Less is more.* Each web page should include 1-2 internal links—you should try not to link to the same page or article more than a couple of times.

- *Give important pages xxtra love.* Make sure you link to pages of high-importance on your website (e.g. popular blog post vs. an expired event listing). You'll be giving your internal pages extra ranking power by linking from your most high-traffic page.

Jason McGovern,

**Associate Director, SEO, at
Starcom MediaVest Group told
searchenginewatch.com:**

" Internal linking is easily one of the most important and most overlooked factors in hitting your rankings goals. I think it tends to be overlooked as an SEO tactic because many SEOs simply believe it's not an issue anymore because sites today have such complex navigation menus… even today I have been able to drive significant results for clients purely on the back of optimizing internal navigation structures. "

Seek Backlinks (a.k.a. Inbound Links)

Links to your website from other relevant, high-quality websites are SEO gold. In fact, some experts say it's the number one ranking factor for SEO. Plainly said, search engines look at links as recommendations.

Remember…Not all backlinks are created equal

Some of the shiftier SEO companies have tried to boost clients' ranking by creating a network of websites and posting low-quality articles, barely relevant blog posts and other content that link back to their client's website.

This cheat has become such a problem that Google is now very selective about which links it considers to be high-quality and help boost your search ranking. E.g. A link from The New York Times or a big brand like Toyota = top-tier. A link from a blogger with a low readership or a content marketing company specializing in SEO = poor-quality. The higher quality the website that links to your site, the higher your search engine ranking.
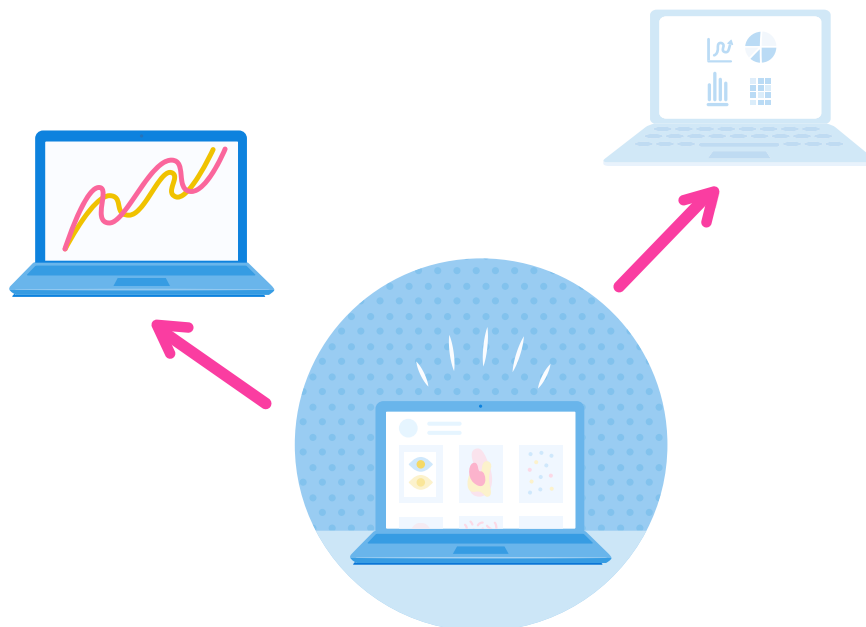
6 Ways to Get High-Quality Backlinks

- *Ask your partners, contractors and customers to link to your website.* Most business owners are happy to provide referrals and links with respected associates.

- *Create a resources, referrals or favorites page on your website.* Add the websites of businesses, media outlets, journalists, bloggers or other industry experts from whom you'd love a link. If you avoid sounding needy, there's a good chance they'll reciprocate!

- *Match your competitors' backlinks.* If there's an industry journalist, blogger or expert that lists a competitor's website on their site, ask them to consider adding you. Offer to write a guest blog, be available for interviews or link to them.

- *Accept links from trustworthy sources only.* Similar to how you don't accept friend requests on Facebook from just anyone, don't ask for a link from a company you don't plan on building a rapport with.

- *Ask customers to write reviews and link to your website.* Reviews improve your rankings in Google's local listings and often appear in search results. After you complete a project, kindly ask your customers to review your services on relevant merchant sites, review sites or local directories.

- *Find media exposure.* Position yourself as an industry expert or ask a popular blogger in your industry if you can write a guest post. These classic marketing tactics will give you an opportunity to link back to your website.

Chapter 04

Best Practices for Creating SEO-Friendly Content

Good News. The Hard Part Is Over!

So far, you've:

- Identified your keywords for your website and implemented them

- Created internal links and made a plan to collect more backlinks.

Now it's time to work on optimizing some SEO best practices. Here's a breakdown of best practices.

- *Set up a free Google My Business account.* Tell Google your business details so you will appear in local search results, e.g. house painter, Kansas City. Include your address if you work outside your home. Don't forget other search engines too! Set up a local business page on Bing and Yahoo.

- *Ensure your website is mobile-friendly and fast.* Search engines notice well-oiled machinery—and they avoid sites that are slow or clunky.

- *Know your ideal customer.* Are they avid Facebook users or will you mostly find them on Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn? Show up where they are and link back to relevant content on your website as much as possible.

- *Encourage your visitors to stay awhile.* Write engaging content, including images and video and create shareable content. When ranking, search engines consider how long people stay on a website and how often they visit it.

- *Keep your website in tip-top shape.* Check that your site loads well on different browsers, audit for broken links and remove pages that don't provide relevant information for your users.

- *Have a maintenance plan.* Search engines favor websites that constantly provide fresh, engaging content. For instance, a weekly blog is an ideal way to accomplish this.

Chapter 05

Handy SEO-Tools to Keep You on Top of Your Game

Need Help Generating Keywords?

Want to see how your website is really performing for SEO? Looking for customized tips to help you tweak your site? Here are some invaluable tools to keep in your SEO toolkit.

Google Search Console. Enter your URL and this handy tool will offer a bunch of information about your website's performance in Google searches. It'll even show you any errors that are on your site and recommend how you might address issues it identifies.

Bing SEO Analyzer. Similar to Google Search Console, this one helps you optimize your site for Bing, including a key word search tool and recommendations to improve your site for SEO. Note that Bing and Yahoo are aligned, so what works for Bing should work for Yahoo as well.

Google Analytics. For a slightly more sophisticated solution, turn to Google Analytics, which will help you get to know your customers' habits better and provide insights on how you can address their pain points with your website and/or services.

Google Webmaster Guidelines. If you find yourself stumped about how to use some of the Google resources, check out their guidelines and videos. They're made for regular folks, not IT masters.

Screaming Frog SEO Spider. This free tool will identify any SEO-unfriendly features on your website, including broken links and duplicate content. It can even analyze page titles and meta descriptions and let you know if they're missing any important elements.

Quick Sprout. Another free but invaluable tool that will "help you make sense of Google Analytics" and alert you when it detects an improvement you could make on your website. It also has a social media analysis tool that helps bring your most popular content to light.

Ahrefs. To get an in-depth look at your competitor's SEO strategy and learn how you can outrank them, try this tool. It breaks down all the factors that lead to a website's SEO success, including revealing their key words. Though Ahrefs costs from $99-$999/month, but you can get started with their free trial.

Google Keyword Planner. Designed for Google advertising campaigns, this tool allows you to search for keywords that are relevant to your service. You'll also get historical statistics like search volume and traffic forecasts to help you choose the ideal key words. You'll need to set up a Google Adwords account to access the free Keyword Planner.

SEO Plug-Ins. No matter which CMS you use, there are SEO plug-ins or built-in solutions that make it easy to incorporate all the tips you'll learn here. Some popular ones include WordPress: Yoast SEO, Squarespace: built-in SEO features, Wix: Site Booster.

PRO-TIP: Stay on top of SEO news—Google constantly changes!

Google is constantly changes its algorithms—and you won't hear from them if you're in violation of a new rule. The easiest way to stay on top of Google rules is to log into Google Search Console regularly. If you've received a penalty, the details will be communicated there.

Resources

Now that we've set you on the right foot with this eBook, you can take further steps to optimize your business website at your leisure. We've curated some of the best resources for business owners who want to take SEO to the next level.

Strategy-Building Tips

- 11 Effective SEO Strategies to Achieve Higher Organic Rankings and Free Website Traffic

- Bing, Yahoo and Google: Can Your SEO Strategy Remain the Same For All Three?

- 7 Reasons Why Your Business Should Invest in SEO

SEO Guides

- SEO is Not Hard—A step-by-step SEO Tutorial for beginners that will get you ranked every single time

- The Beginners' Guide to SEO

- SEOmark

- WikiHow: How to Optimize Your Website For Search Engine Use

SEO Trends

- 2017 SEO Predictions: 5 Top Trends in Search Engine Optimization [Infographic]

- 18 SEO Myths You Should Leave Behind in 2017

- Search Engine Ranking Factors 2015