PRNews

Special Report

SEO/SEM & Writing for the Web

Access Intelligence

> *[Executives] need to realize that search doesn't just happen on the major search engines.*
>
> — Jon Wegman, Vice President of Planning and Innovation, Moxie Interactive

SEO/SEM & Writing for the Web

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Search Engine Optimization: It's a Brand New PR Landscape

By Carolyn Kim

Search engine optimization (SEO) is central to the life of any organization. It's no longer a matter of simply having a good Web site or providing easily accessible and relevant content—it's about being found when there are literally millions of competitors. The result of the massive online growth over the past few years has led to PR professionals being tasked with understanding, securing and building an organization's online presence.

An SEO Primer

Before getting into why SEO is central for public relations, it's important to know exactly what SEO will (and won't) do. SEO is about "organic" listings in a search engine. An organic listing is what you'll see directly in the middle of your screen after you type in a phrase to a search engine. The listing of sites within an organic section is based on an algorithm of multiple factors (for Google, which is by far the industry leader, there are well over 200 factors at play). The paid advertising, which is purchased through a bidding system, is seen on the right-hand side and sometimes in a colored box above the organic listings.

To do well in SEO, you need to understand what search engines have as a goal. Search engines are in the business of making sure every user who comes to them finds exactly what they are searching for. If they don't deliver, users will stop coming to use their service. That's why they've developed these algorithms to measure the value of a Web site in comparison to what a user is looking for. The process of SEO, then, is one of refining your site to be the best possible result for search engines to provide to anyone who looks for your company, brand, product or service.

People often ask why they should invest in SEO when they can purchase ads online, contribute more to Web site design and online resources. The answer is two-fold.

Be Easy to Find

First, no matter how good of a Web site you've created, if people can't find it among the millions of other sites, it won't matter. You won't be reaching your publics online. About 80% of sites are found through search engines. Of every 10 people you're hoping to reach online, eight will be using a search engine to find what they're looking for.

Without SEO, your site may show up in the listing…but you could end up on page 5, 10…or maybe 500. A brief search of "Public Relations" showed that there are over 81 million pages that come up for the phrase. But in reality, most users won't ever look past the second page…probably not even the first. That's why the top listings (positions one through 10) are far more valuable than others.

If you're not found within the top 20 (or the first two pages), it's almost like you don't ex-

The process of SEO, then, is one of refining your site to be the best possible result for search engines to provide to anyone who looks for your company, brand, product or service.

ist at all. Still not convinced? Consider the last time you clicked for "more results" on a search beyond the second page. Most people don't ever do that (unless they're looking for where their own site comes up).

Building Your Online Credibility

Second, SEO is important because it builds online credibility. When your product, name, and service comes up in organic search results, people automatically associate that with level of expertise.

By placing higher in the organic listings, people assume you're a better fit than sites below you. By default, you're gaining an impression of being the best match for what they need or are looking for because they know you "earned" the position. You can't buy it.

On average, a little less than half of people even bother to read the purchased adds on the right hand side of the screen. And only about two or three out of every 10 will click on paid advertising. The others will remain in the organic listings. Not only are organic pages more likely to be clicked on, but the higher you are in the organic listings is also a factor. The closer you are to being the number-one result, the more clicks you'll receive into your site. The lower you are, the more your clicks will start decreasingly quite measurably.

No one is arguing that you don't need a strong Web site design, or user functionality, or solid and compelling content. After all, once users get to your site, that's when all of those come in to play. That's why they'll stay. But before you can get your publics to stay on your Web site, they've got to find it.

You're Not Done Yet

At this point, you may be thinking that since your name is so well known to your publics, it's not really necessary to engage in SEO. After all, everyone who needs to find you already knows who you are. This line of thinking leads to missed opportunities to engage with new publics.

You may find that you come up quite high in search engines for your company name or product title. That's good news. You absolutely need to rank for those proper nouns. But what about generic terms? If you type in the industry you're in, does your organization still come up at the top? When searching for product by its description and not name, will your brand still show in the top five?

When you employ SEO strategy, your site should start showing up not only for your brand names but generic terms. This makes sure that you reach your current publics as well as new people who are unfamiliar with your organization. (If you're not reaching people on those generic terms, your competition will be.)

The best SEO efforts involve collaboration between departments. You'll need to harmonize your

Make Keywords Work

To have strong content that helps search engines match your site with users, you'll need to make sure you have solid keywords used throughout. But this begs the question, how do you select a keyword?

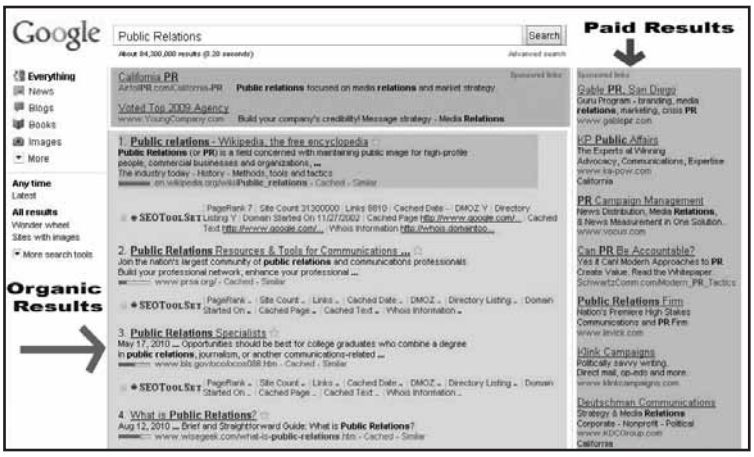
To begin with, in SEO, "keywords" doesn't necessarily mean a single word. In fact, most "keywords" are 3-5 words because few people search for only one word at a time. You'll also want to ask the question, "How will people search for us online?" This list will probably include your company name, brands, services and products. You should also include the generic terms for these. If you're having trouble, ask 5-10 people in your company to make a list of 5 terms they would put into a search engine if they wanted to find your organization.

Next, pull out a Thesaurus and make your list longer by finding possible variations for phrases and words. (If you're running analytics on your site, you can also pull up the report that shows what phrases led people to your site previously. Determine if they match your content, and, if so, include those as well).

A final way to build your list is by visiting a search engine and typing in your phrases. Often, they'll make suggestions on other ways to search for content matching your query. You can add those phrases to your list.

Over time, you'll find that not all of these keywords are ones you'll want to keep. This is a natural part of the process for SEO strategy. And taking these steps will give you a great start for your keyword list!

online messaging and design with technical jargon and specifications. It's not an easy process and usually requires people from PR, Marketing, IT and Web Development along the way—but it's well worth it. Here are some pillars of SEO to keep in mind as you begin optimizing your site.



The Pillars of SEO

1. Content: Your online content is possibly the most important aspect of your entire SEO effort. It's where search engines go to examine text and see what your site is all about. And, it's the place people will go to get all the details they need (and determine if you actually meet what they are looking for). Content needs to be crisp, original and engaging to keep people from leaving your site—what's commonly referred to as bouncing. At the same time, you'll need to ensure that your keywords are found throughout the text in a natural way. Make sure you're talking about your brand, company, product and descriptions.

2. Meta Tags: Meta tags are part of the technical side of your site—but they have a huge impact. You can find them in the code of your Web site. First, check your title tags. Each page needs a unique title (which also includes Keywords) and makes sense to people when reading it. You'll also need an individual description tag and keyword tag for each page. Check with your web developer to make sure the tags are in the proper order for the search engines to review.

3. Links: Part of being in the online community is being part of the "Web" aspect of "World Wide Web." That means, search engines like to see connections between sites: Links. When someone links to you, the search engine sees that as a "vote" for the value of your site. By creating strong and compelling content (Point #1) you'll be giving people a reason to link to you. Then, you also need to selectively choose quality sites to link out to. Make sure they are helpful in relations to the content on the page and worthy sites to be linked to.

4. Technical Aspects: Make sure your server is functioning well, which will ensure that your Web site loads quickly for users. Sometimes people share a server based on their hosting agreement. If possible, have only your site on the server. Also, make sure there are no technical instructions on the server that keep search engines from visiting your site (you can ask your IT team).

5. Monitor and Analyze: By monitoring your SEO results, you'll be able to refine your content, meta tags and links (as well as numerous other areas within SEO) for higher performance. You can also make sure your pages are indexed by search engines—or submit them for consideration if they're not included at this time.

As with many niche areas, SEO can be a full-time job and involves a plethora of tools and implementation tactics. For the modern PR professional, it's essential to understand what SEO is and the value it provides to organizations.

In today's world where more information is being created than ever before, publics are becoming increasingly difficult to reach. Breaking through the noise and conveying information is a skill that's constantly evolving. That's why reaching people right when they look for a product, service or organization is critical.

PR professionals who use SEO set their organizations above others by being in the place people are looking, at the time people are looking, with the information and service people want. PRN

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*Carolyn Kim is an account executive at **Ambassador Advertising Agency** in Orange County, CA.*

Web Writing 101: Engage SEO, Add SEM for More Online Success

By PR News Editors

Communications executives already know that online content optimization involves way more than choosing keywords and embedding hyperlinks. It is a nuanced process that ties together strategies from public relations and marketing, and—when done effectively—it embodies true integration of online and offline, SEO and SEM and marketing and communications.

The best practices below address ways in which communications executives can leverage SEO and SEM together to facilitate this ultimate integration and to reap the bottom-line benefits as a result.

■ Analyze the competition.

Keyword optimization is a critical piece of the SEO puzzle. The second part of this keyword development process is to analyze the competitive landscape to avoid choosing search terms that are already overused.

When analyzing SEO competition, Kai Blum, director of search engine marketing at **MS&L Digital,** recommends asking (and answering) the following questions:

- Who is top-ranked for your desired keyword phrases?
- Did they optimize their site?
- How many incoming links to they have? (Check www.backlinkwatch.com to find out.)
- How difficult would it be to outrank them for the selected phrase?

As for analyzing SEM competition:

- How many competitors do you have?
- What is the potential cost?
- Have you overlooked any keyword phrases? In terms of planning an SEM campaign, Blum offers communications and marketing execs a key guideline: "Don't pay for the top position in paid ads, especially if your budget is limited. The third position is very effective."

■ Create SEO and SEM strategies that are symbiotic, not cannibalistic.

SEO strategies, which center on organic search, are customer-centric, developed specifically with users' search habits in mind. SEM, or paid search, is more marketingminded (see sidebar for more on the differences between SEO and SEM).

However, both rely on keywords, which are chosen by communications and marketing executives. If these two groups don't work in tandem with one another, they could inadvertently commit keyword cannibalization.

"Keyword cannibalization is when SEO and SEM [strategies] compete against each other," says Robb Hecht, senior vice president and digital marketing strategist at imc strategy lab. "Ensuring that SEO and SEM work together will help prevent any overlaps and enable the creation of synergies that could have otherwise been missed."

Because SEM costs money—specifically in the form of pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns—competitive strategies can be wasteful. Instead, "Use PPC to supplement SEO," Blum says. "Investing in SEO will save you PPC money in the long run."

■ Don't forget to follow through with evaluations of your conversion rates.

Conversion refers to whatever goals you established for your various Web properties, including:

- Sales
- Requests for more information
- Subscriptions
- Downloads

When deciding how to revise and shape Web content, it is important to see which past strategies had the biggest impact on conversions.

"Invest in conversion rate optimization to increase ROI—your excellent search results listings will be worthless if you don't pay attention to conversion," Blum says.

"Test different versions of your conversion pages with tools like Google Web site Optimizer."

■ Marry online and offline strategies.

As always, digital and traditional strategies can't operate independently of one another. When they are two halves of the respective whole, you will end up with a sum that's greater than its parts—for the better.

Keywords—the crux of optimization—are an ideal place to start the process of integrating your online and offline strategies.

"Know your keywords and use them online and off—in media training, interviews, fact sheets, etc.," says Sarah Skerik, a vice president of **PR Newswire**. "Build traction for your brand against key terms."

■ Optimize all social media content.

"Social media optimization and SEO are becoming inextricably linked," Hecht says. "Develop tools, applications and properties to activate your brand advocates, allowing users to aggregate, tag, rank, share and comment on your content. Social input like tagging and ranking guide not only what information search engines present in response to user queries, but also the order and rankings of what they present."

Whatever you do, Hecht says, don't make your content all about you.

"To affect search results positively, give your customers tools and a reason to generate positive content about your brand," he says. PRN

Symbiotic Relationship Between SEO & SEM

To confuse SEO with SEM would be easy—with only a slight difference in their respective acronyms, some people mistakenly use them interchangeably. (Throw in SMM and SMO—social media marketing and social media optimization—and all bets are off.)

For communications and marketing executives, though, the difference should be clear, if not obvious; SEO leverages keywords and content development to boost search results organically, while SEM relies on paid methods, including pay-per-click, to drive traffic. In short, the former is PR-driven, and the latter mirrors more traditional advertising and marketing models.

Despite their differences, both models can be used in conjunction with one another to collectively enhance search strategies and to compensate for the others' weaknesses.

For example, SEO tends to be regarded more highly because of its organic nature, but Robb Hecht, SVP of imc strategy lab, points out its disadvantages:

- Unpredictable
- Takes time to see results
- Complex and dynamic
- Requires an ongoing investment
- Ill-suited for developing awareness relative to other channels

"You have to be patient about organic search results—it may take a few months," says Kai Blum, director of search engine marketing at MS&L Digital. "Run pay-per-click ads in the meantime."

SEM is certainly more immediate and controllable, so it can be used early on in an initiative while SEO efforts are gaining momentum.

Plus, insights revealed by SEM metrics can help shape optimization strategies.

"A continual evolution of your search term research is achieved by analysis of all the SEM keywords that drive clicks," Hecht says. "This can be used to find the terms that drive the highest volume and conversion rates, which can then be applied to your SEO campaign."

Don't Play Google Hide & Seek: Some Tips to Improve SEO Rankings

By Devin Davis and Karianne Stinson

Search engine optimization is a valuable tool that PR professionals can utilize to boost the effectiveness of their campaigns, and ultimately, drive greater awareness for their clients. SEO is a powerful way to generate awareness because it facilitates higher placement in the results on search engines like Google. In this article, we will give a basic overview of SEO and offer PR professionals easy-to-implement essentials of SEO for press releases and Web sites. With these SEO insights, you can advise your clients on strategies to improve their search engine ranking.

Intersection of PR and SEO Explained

Good SEO practice in PR is quickly becoming an industry standard. SEO is the process of improving the volume or quality of traffic to a Web site or a web page (such as a blog) through optimization of the sites content, text, tags, links and other elements. SEO drives traffic from search engines via "natural" or unpaid ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results. More traffic means greater visibility for your clients. This is a piece of the search engine marketing (SEM) puzzle, which also includes paid online advertising like display and pay per click (PPC) advertising.

As the concepts of both the traditional news cycle and media continue to evolve, the need to make PR materials widely available via search engines is key to reach the appropriate audience and extend the life of your news. In addition to the traditional media, SEO will help client news be discovered by potential customers, bloggers and other key influencers. PR professionals must become proficient with SEO tools and tactics in order to succeed in this space. Luckily, many of the tools are already in the PR toolbelt. Just like PR, SEO is smart, effective copywriting. Learning how to incorporate SEO tactics into PR for greater visibility should be a key component of success for any forward thinking professional.



Just like PR, SEO is smart, effective copywriting.

What Search Engines Do

SEO is not about tricking search engines; it's about making the main focus of your content (a press release or Web page) friendly to search engines and readers alike. The concept is not all that different from how one would write press materials.

As PR professionals, we want to make our main point clear to the audience. In SEO, it is important to clearly state the main point using specific words or phrases that people might enter into a search engine to learn more about your topic. These are known as keywords and keyword phrases.

- **Crawl:** Search engine spiders are bits of computer code that find and analyze content on Web pages. As the spiders crawl, or go from page to page, the code reads the content to decide the topic. For example, if it is a library Web site, the spider should read content about books. Spiders also follow links from one page to the next. The text around the link, known as anchor text, will give the search engine some idea about the new site.
- **Index:** The spider is not just browsing content, but also storing it in a giant database. Spiders gauge how relevant the content is

against words searchers use (keywords). It also saves all content for future searches.

- **Rank:** Search engines follow a complex set of rules to deliver the most relevant results to searchers. The formula search engines use is kept secret to keep the ranking process fair and effective. However, we know that the content the spiders crawl is ranked for a given keyword based on the content the spider reads and the links leading to the page.

SEO for Press Releases—The Basics

An optimized news release is a regular news release but with keywords and keyword phrases specifically chosen and sprinkled appropriately throughout the headline, subhead, lead and body to ensure search engines can index it easily for the words your audience will search. Press releases optimized with keywords and linking back to the client's Web site improves search engine rankings and can help secure greater coverage in the media.

Keep in mind: SEO efforts in press releases will be just an enhancement to your client's SEO success. Good SEO is an ongoing process that draws on a broad range of factors including authority of a domain, links to a particular site and how many users click through to a given site. In essence, the best a press release can do is be a strong linkback for a bevy of important keywords.

- **Keywords:** Be sure to clearly state the main point of the release using words people actually search. These are your keywords. A press release should focus on one keyword or keyword phrase; too many keywords will clutter the copy and make it harder for search engines to identify the focus. Use keyword tools to determine the best (potentially colloquial) keywords for your announcement. For example, if your keywords are "new home" but most people search "new homes," you are missing out on the majority of relevant searches.

  Repeat your keywords a few times, but don't overuse them. Lee Odden, PR and SEO expert, suggests two to four occurrences of your keywords in a copy of about 500 words. Anything more is seen as "keyword stuffing" and will hurt the search engine rankings and readability. If keywords are used too often, search engines might think the release is spam so it will penalize the release in the rankings.

  Most importantly, the release should be written for readers and not the search engines.

There are a few tools you can use to find the appropriate keywords for your news release:

http://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal—The Google AdWords tool is the easiest to use.

http://blogpulse.com/trend—blog-specific and a good way to find trending keywords.

http://www.wordstream.com/keyword-niche-finder/—Find keywords targeted to your specific niche audience.

- **Title:** Headlines and subheads should include the most popular keywords and keyword phrases relevant to the release as these carry the most weight with search engines and potential readers. For example, if your keywords are "new homes" your headline might be, "ABC Builds New Homes in Seattle." Write like people search and speak.
- **Language:** Understand and mirror the language used by the intended audience. This will increase click-through rate and the effectiveness of the message.
- **Content:** Shorter press releases are always better for search engines. Keep announcements between 300 to 500 words if possible. Keyword-tagged rich media such as videos and images can increase the rankings, as well. Search engines break out searches for images and videos, so including and tagging these items with your keywords will open your release up to these additional searches.
- **Links:** Make sure to include anchor text (clickable text in a hyperlink) to impor-

Want to Learn More About SEO for PR?

Here are some blogs that will give you tips and effective strategies for incorporating SEO tactics into your PR plan.

- Lee Odden and the TopRank Online Marketing Blog—Posts cover search engine marketing, social media, and online public relations. http://www.toprankblog.com/
- Bruce Clay, Inc.—Topics covered include Internet marketing, search engine optimization, PPC, social media marketing, online branding and Web analytics. http://www.bruceclay.com/blog/
- Outspoken Media—Discusses news and tips in Internet marketing, search engine optimization and social media. http://outspokenmedia.com/blog/

Want to dig deeper into SEO?

To learn more about search engines and the SEO industry, here are a few blogs that cover current news and trends in the search engine industry.

- Search Engine Land—Content provides information about search marketing and how search engines work. http://searchengineland.com/
- Search Engine Journal—Topics focus on search engine industry news including search engine optimization and search engine marketing. http://www.searchenginejournal.com/
- SEOmoz Daily SEO Blog—Provides news and tips on search engine optimization and Internet marketing. http://www.seomoz.org/blog

SEO Experts on Twitter

For quick SEO tips and the latest news about Internet marketing, follow these industry leaders.

@brentdpayne

@dannysullivan

@audette

@andybeal

@seosmarty

@greywolf

@leeodden

@randfish

@ravenseo

@katemorris

tant keywords and link back to the client's Web page with a similar SEO strategy. For example, if anchor text is "accounting software" be sure to link to a page optimized for the keywords "accounting software" in the page content. So "accounting software" will be in the title and the copy will be about your accounting software.

Optimize your boilerplate to include links (including the http:// of the Web site address) and keywords. When you use anchor text, remember to use keywords. Avoid the "click here" words that tell search engine spiders nothing about the content.

Web Page Optimization

For Web page optimization, consider both the quality of content and how the content is presented. Smart, effective keyword-rich copy remains a prime concern. All PR materials should be written with SEO in mind and follow best practices to ensure the highest possible search engine ranking. Pay attention to the following details when advising your client on SEO:

- **Web site Structure:** Search engines can't see, access or index improperly posted content; thus crawl-ability is foremost on this list. This is an important technical requirement for the Web site. If the site can't be found, the content will languish no matter how high quality.
- **Content:** Like with editors and bloggers, the quality and relevancy of the content attracts interest and compels visitors to share the information elsewhere. Inbound links (links directed to your Web site from other Web pages) are a key component of Web page success. Quality content will consistently produce the highest link conversion rate (the ratio of those who visit to those who link after viewing). This increases your audience as well as your search engine ranking. The more links that lead to your Web site, especially if they use your keywords as anchor text, the higher the search engine ranking. Be sure to include

your keywords in your content, but keep the content easy to read and understand.

- **Web Page Elements:** Getting the keyword targeting right in the most important Web page elements (titles, URLs and internal links) provides a big boost in the potential ability of a page to perform well. For example, in a press release that mentions a product, make sure the key product descriptors are in the title tag, the URL and that your text links to the product.
- **User Experience:** An uncluttered, clean and fast loading site will make it easier for your visitors to find what they want. The easier your Web site is to use and understand, the more likely it is that your visitors will link back to you. While typically beyond PR professionals' control, it is good to understand the basics of good, optimized Web design.

Incorporating effective SEO techniques into your PR campaign can improve your search engine rankings and click-through rates. However, SEO certainly cannot stand alone and content is still the most important element.

Never underestimate the power of the message youcreatetodrivetraffictoaclientsite.Athoughtout and well-executed public relations campaign will always attract far more links, and results, than a bunch of well-placed keywords. PRN

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Cut Through the Competition Online With Quality PR Content

By Andrea Walker

A company's public relations/marketing plan boils down to a main objective: create public awareness, which in turn generates leads to customers/clients. As part of this objective, your company's marketing team will probably go buy radio spots, billboards, and sponsorships and conduct media outreach.

All these outreach methods are fine as long as they meet your company's marketing goals. Outbound marketing can still be effective but people (not consumers) are also likely to be better leads if they come seek you out. Also, think about the amount of time it takes to send press releases, follow up with media, secure interviews while waiting for those phone calls your outbound advertising should be generating.

Content creation is a proactive approach for your company to build brand recognition and credibility while being a part of the communication process. Communicators need to understand their marketing message and be active in helping craft a plan to communicate your message.

Content creation should be part of any company's marketing plan. It is more time-consuming on the front end to craft various types of content. But from a long-term perspective you will spend less time searching for business. Instead, the business will come to you.

Content creation is a proactive approach for your company to build brand recognition and credibility while being a part of the communication process.

Choosing Your Content

Before we talk about your company's different types of content creation, we need to figure out what kinds of content people would find interesting or informative about your company. Basically, people read content that is interesting, informative or entertaining. Your content can have one or all three of these values. People that generally like the content will then seek out the author to learn more about them or their company. Content that provides value will connect with people and keep your company top of mind.

To reach people, you have to figure out not only what your content will be, but also how to distribute it to your audience. Also, think about how your content can provide value and whom it can help. Your content will be ineffective if it comes across as self-serving or promotional.

Content that is authentic and helpful will build better brand relationships. This can even apply to articles about your company in print media. The more transparent and authentic your company is, the easier time you will have getting people's attention. This boils down to how you want your company's message to be perceived by the public. All your content has to reflect back to your company's brand.

Make Your Content Stand Out

What types of content does your company already produce? Press releases, brochures, e-mails or even direct mail? This type of content is more or less information about your company. This is a good building block.

Our Web content, including words and the assets our words describe (i.e., images, video, audio, ecommerce transactions and downloadable material), must strategically support our purpose, our reason for being, our promise of value. In marketing, our brand is the entire experience we convey to our audience(s). It's what we stand for, our promise of value. Whether we're a commercial enterprise, a non-profit organization or even an individual looking for a job, everything we say in any communication—including a Web page—must align with our promise of value.

Our brand promise must live in the words of our Web copy and on the pages of our Web site, whether it's in a product or service description, or as a headline for a call to action or online donation area.

If I'm a manufacturer of PCs and my promise of value is to help every customer succeed through technological expertise and innovation, then I want to make sure that every page of every piece of marketing communications material aligns with this promise of value.

Similarly, each page of your Web site must communicate, on some level, your promise of value and help differentiate your organization from a crowded field of competitors—whether you're a cause-driven nonprofit or a product- or service-driven commercial enterprise.

A strategic approach to Web content, one that aligns all pages with an overarching brand promise of value, provides the contextual foundation we need to understand the experiential aspects of our brand and define the organizational persona in concrete, unambiguous terms.

Ultimately, a Web site and all associated copy and assets must deliver value and encourage our audience to take action, whether that action is to purchase, donate, join, agree, read more, etc.

A strategic approach to our site (or page) means that when we write, we take a step back and ask objectively: "Am I presenting information or am I providing, in clear terms, value that will engage my audience and prompt action?" This important distinction is crucial to delivering on our brand and promise of value.

We rely on the Web as the ultimate repository of information. When we want to learn more about a topic, we visit Wikipedia or "google" it, but information delivered in a readable format is not enough. What we write on our Web sites, and the words we use to support the assets we provide must serve a singular purpose—to provide a clear and valuable brand experience that encourages action. PRN

Align Your Web Copy With Strategic Goals

Is your Web copy communicating your brand? A strategic approach to writing Web copy replaces any ambiguity across all product and/or service areas with strategic clarity. When planning your site, or when adding content to an existing site, this checklist will help ensure that your words deliver value and align with your brand strategy:

1. What is the purpose of this site (or page, or new content area), and does it align with my promise of value?
2. To what audience am I communicating and does my message align with that audience's needs?
3. Am I providing my audience something of value, something that they can't get elsewhere?
4. Is the content benefits-driven or features-driven?
5. What is my call to action? What do I want my visitor to do and how does that action align with my promise of value?

*Andrea Walker is CEO/owner of **W. Social Marketing**, an integrated public relations/marketing firm.*

Put Brand Strategy in the Driver's Seat When It Comes to Web Copy

By Alex S. Kasten

For anyone venturing into creative Web content, one simple Google search will unearth hundreds of "top ten tips" articles on effective Web writing. Most of these lists establish two things right off the bat:

1) Studies of Web use suggest that you have just a few seconds to capture your reader's attention, and

2) Web site visitors will read about 20% of the content on your page—you need to write and organize information accordingly.

Writing for the Web, we're told, flies in the face of everything we ever learned about composition. On the Web, for example, we're taught to repeat, repeat, repeat because repeating key words "optimizes" a search engine's ability to scan and pick up these words. We're advised to eschew formal prose and conventional narrative in favor of short bites of information driven by action-oriented headlines, bullet lists and hooks because if you don't engage your audience in three to five seconds, you'll lose them. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The common theme throughout all the articles we read is how vastly different writing copy for the Web is from writing for print publication.

Focusing on the tactical details for successful Web copy is certainly important, but if, in the process, we lose sight of our strategic goals, we will confuse or, worse yet, lose our audience.

Often, when I evaluate corporate or non-profit Web sites, I find that they may be easy to read, but fail on a much larger, strategic level. The pages lack consistent messaging, don't represent the brand effectively, don't deliver value to the reader, and, arguably most critically, don't communicate a clear and compelling call to action that aligns with the organizational goals.

In essence, the essay strategy is not unlike a brand strategy, and an effective Web content strategy relies on a similar approach.

Back to Basics

Ironically, if we really want to engage our audiences effectively and deliver real, sustainable value, then I maintain that conceptualizing and writing for (and more generally, providing content for) a Web site is vastly more akin to what we learned in school than not. Let's turn to the conventional essay. For the essay, we're taught to pick a topic and then decide what we want to accomplish—our purpose—i.e. to inform or to persuade. Then we plan how we'll go about getting from point A to point B.

To do this, we develop an outline that includes our thesis, our supporting ideas, our introduction and our conclusion. In short, we develop a strategy that aligns everything we write with one goal. In essence, the essay strategy is not unlike a brand strategy, and an effective Web content strategy relies on a similar approach.

Your brand lives in every interaction you have with your audience(s). Much more than a logo and identity package, your brand is also conveyed in the content you deliver—in sales presentations, marketing material, proposals, and the words on your Web site.

Now, let's build another value into your company's content. How can you make your content stand out from competitors or other similar information? Interesting content can involve positioning your company as a thought leader in your industry, which also helps with brand credibility. Or, you could look at creating content that shows off how innovative your staff or company is in your industry. If your company is more general consumer or lifestyle oriented, find an entertaining angle to your products or services.

Sometimes, your own great content can even spawn more business ideas for your company. There are some companies that produce such compelling content they are more known for their forward-thinking ideas as well as what the company provides. To get your creative juices flowing, write down unique adjectives that describe your company's brand. Now, think about how your content can reflect those keywords.

Now that you constructed your content's values, evaluate the content you already produce for your company. In the previous paragraph, I mentioned a few examples of typical company content. Are you currently measuring your content's effectiveness? How many leads or referrals have you garnered? To make it a little easier, you can start with what you already have and build more content ideas from there.

Keep Your Site Current

Also, every company has a Web site. Think about updating your site's content on a more regular basis with articles, buyer personas, and white papers or even embedding your company's e-newsletter. This will keep people coming

Think Like an Online Journalist

Try following these six tips to create potent online PR content:

1. No Waiting Around
Media is great but it's not the only way to tell your story. Create content you can share with the public as well as distribute through traditional & online platforms.

2. What's Your Story?
Figure out what kind of story you want to tell about your company. Does company news center around…

- Company accomplishments & milestones?
- New products?
- Company developments?
- Company expertise?

3. Is Your Story Interesting?

- Think about your story's relevance to your audience.
- Does your story provide some kind of value to the public? For example, does the story inform, entertain or both?
- Know what, when, where & why when crafting your story.

4. Package Your Story
Think about elements you can incorporate to bring your story to life and add more depth. These include:

- Video;
- Photos;
- Graphics; and
- Sidebars—polls, quizzes, contests

5. Share Your Story
Send your press release to media contacts, but post a longer press release on your Web site. This also helps with the Web site's search engine optimization. Also share company news on the following:

- Blogs—keep content conversational;
- Social networking sites;
- Video press release;
- Newswire services;
- RSS & Subscribe widgets; and
- Web site & project partner sites.

6. Don't Be Afraid to Ask

- Ask customers/fans to share content on their own social networking sites or blogs.
- Also, tap into your professional network & friends for help in sharing your company news.
- Encourage company employees to help promote.

back to your site regularly for fresh content as well as help with your SEO. Post your media release on the company site, as well. When people (or even journalists) search for keywords related to press release's content, they will have an easier time coming across the press release and your Web site. This is a little easier and less time-consuming than sending out press releases and hoping to get a journalist to jump on the story.

If your company produces a newsletter, include action items in your newsletter that can be "how-to" tips or even personal stories or thoughts from company staff and CEO. Be creative with this approach and create themed content for your newsletter if it's published regularly.

Before You Branch Out

If you want to venture into other types of content, make sure it fits into your content strategy and whom you want to target. If your company is thinking about blogging, have some ideas in place on what kind of blog you want to write and then create a content timeline that will keep you focused on your writing and help generate blog ideas. Do some research and find company blogs you like to read. Figure out what your targeted audience would like to read and start writing.

As far as content distribution, post and link your content to social media sites, newswires, your site and other content hosting sites like **Flickr** or **Slideshare**.

Have good tracking tools in place to see how many people are clicking to your content, length of time spent consuming content and then sharing your content to their networks. Track where your prospects are coming from in terms of how they are finding your content. Ultimately, everything needs to link back to your Web site so prospects can take the next step to find out more about your company and want to talk with you. PRN

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*Alex S. Kasten is lead strategist and writer for **Kasten Consulting.** Previously, he was director of communications for the **Building Wellness Institute**.*

Get Your Company 'Found' With Robust Content and SEO Strategy

By Veronica Fielding

Long gone are the days when link swapping, paid submissions and link farms worked towards a site's search engine rankings. Today's link building—a critical component of real SEO—is both a science and an art. It requires a robust content strategy that incorporates many aspects of the corporate communications spectrum, as well as a thorough understanding of how to leverage social media as a link-building tool.

Once your team has devoted the time and resources necessary to build an engaging and user-friendly Web site, it's time to plan a content strategy that drives links, site visits and, ultimately, more business.

Links Aren't Given, They're Earned

Before developing your link building strategy, first take a hard look at the Web site you are optimizing. If a Web site is aesthetically unattractive or the content is largely geared towards "selling," people will be less inclined to link to it than they would a well-designed site filled with interesting and regularly updated content. Once your team has devoted the time and resources necessary to build an engaging and user-friendly Web site, it's time to plan a content strategy that drives links, site visits and, ultimately, more business.

Create Compelling Content

Follow these three important steps to ensure that you're creating compelling Web content that supports your SEO program:

1. **Work toward creating both optimized and link-worthy content.** Content that is written to support your link building program should always provide some type of value to your target audience. That value can be educational, entertaining or thought-provoking.

2. **Utilize buzz-worthy formats.** The format of SEO and link building content is important, as it needs to attract readers. The process of creating compelling content in many ways mirrors public relations' challenge of creating content that results in media pickup. Some types of content that are likely to generate interest include:

   - Lists
   - Videos
   - Case Studies
   - Reviews
   - Infographics
   - Interviews
   - Polls/surveys
   - Contests

3. **Make it easy to share.** To encourage posting of your content across multiple platforms, include a message that says, "If you enjoyed this, please consider sharing it" at the bottom of the page. Facilitate social sharing by including a "Like" or "Share This" button on each page piece of content you create.

Keep Your Content Updated

With the launch of Google's Caffeine indexing system, Web sites are crawled quicker and more frequently than in the past. To make the most of Caffeine, update your Web site content regularly. The more often the content is refreshed, the more often Google will visit. In addition, the freshness and relevancy of your inbound links is more important than ever as Google is also discovering new links at a faster rate. This means that attracting inbound links should be an ongoing activity, not a one-time event.

Social Media and Link Building

Think of social media as digital word-of-mouth marketing. The original content starts with you, and because you've created something deemed "share-worthy," your content is passed along—links and all—to blogs, Web sites, other social media sites, etc. Sharing content is one of the most popular aspects of social media participation, making the entire medium a powerful tool full of potential for gaining valuable links that support your optimization efforts.

Just relying on posting links within your own corporate social media content on other blogs and outposts is not enough, since many social media sites apply the NoFollow attribute to links (see sidebar).

Incorporate Links Into Your Content

When developing content, embed hyperlinks directly on relevant keywords that link to optimized pages of your Web site. For example, a fashion Web site writing about the **Emmy Awards** might hyperlink the words "Jimmy Choo pumps" in the sentence "Heidi Klum looked amazing in her Jimmy Choo pumps and Lorraine Schwartz necklace." The link in this example would point directly to the page on the fashion Web site about Jimmy Choo shoes.

Search engines give the most value to links within content that follow this general format, as this supports their mission of serving up Web sites highly relevant to search queries.

As a general best practice, aim to embed one link within the first 250 words of the content you are optimizing, and, if applicable, another link in your boilerplate, "About the Company" or "About the Author" section. These links should point to two different pages of your Web site as research indicates that Google only considers the anchor text of the first link to a page from a given URL. Instead of having multiple links pointing to a single page of your Web site, it is better to have multiple links pointing to multiple pages of your Web site.

Also, post relevant links in the profile content of each of your social media properties, and include links back to your Web site in your posts and updates. If you upload product images on Facebook or Flickr, include a link to the product page in the image description. When uploading videos to YouTube, include links to related pages of your Web site in the video description.

Whether the site utilizes the NoFollow attribute or not, it's a good idea to post links with your content. Once you've posted content that someone else finds interesting, entertaining or valuable, it may be posted on other sites that do pass along "link juice." These links also help drive traffic to your Web site, a goal in and of itself, but also a way to capture valuable brand fans. People who visit your Web site are more likely to link to it from their own Web sites, blogs or social media profiles if they like what you have to offer.

Encourage Online Conversations Around Your Brand

Certain types of content inspire people to, essentially, work for your brand—sharing links and launching discussions about your products, services or Web site within the online communities to which they belong. Contests, special offers, interesting/exciting promotions, etc., are all techniques you can use to build a buzz around your brand online, encouraging user-generated content and links that support your link-building program as well as your branding and marketing efforts.

Plan For Multipurpose Content

Clearly link building and social media are not

just activities for the SEO team—these tactics should be well integrated into your overall marketing and communications strategy. In fact, almost any type of content created by the company can be made to work for link building and optimization purposes.

Your marketing, public relations and product teams should be incorporating optimized anchor text links into the body of press releases, blog posts, multimedia content descriptions, etc. The key is to keep these teams educated about the target keyword/phrases that are important to your brand and ensure they are all supported through everyone's link building and social media communications.

When looking for publicity opportunities, target publications that have a strong Web presence. A media outlet that is active online will have a Web site with a strong link profile and social media outposts set up to promote their articles. These Web-friendly publications understand the value of links within content. They will likely allow you to build strategically placed links into the content you provide them in bylined articles and will keep links active in your company description when writing about your company or interviewing someone employed there.

The most important thing to remember when strategizing for your link-building program is that there are no shortcuts. Links are tied directly to quality content. PRN

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*Veronica Fielding is the president/CEO of **Digital Brand Expressions**, which specializes in findability marketing solutions, as well as brand-aligned, integrated SEO, paid search, and social media marketing programs.*

The No-Follow Attribute

The No-Follow attribute was created to combat black-hat optimization techniques that were designed to trick the search engines into assessing the value of a Web site higher based on the mere quantity of inbound links it had amassed.

It is an HTML attribute that webmasters can assign to links which signals to the search engines that credit should not be given to the linked site in a way that influences its ranking.

Used to prevent blog spam and other spam content posted for the sole purpose of gaining inbound links, the No-Follow attribute is a way for webmasters to discourage off-topic and self-promotional content from being posted on the site, taking away from the original purpose and value of the site for its visitors.

Many social media Web sites utilize the No-Follow attribute for this same reason.

Google also encourages webmasters who are selling ad space on their sites to include the No-Follow attribute for all paid ads, ensuring that the advertisers are not "buying" link value.

Sites that utilize the No-Follow attribute include Twitter, LinkedIn and most social bookmarking sites. Digg has an interesting approach to No-Follow, removing the attribute once a user gets enough "Diggs" on their content.

While the No-Follow attribute can frustrate optimizers, it serves an important purpose and does not usually have a negative effect on a quality optimization and link building program.

White hat optimizers with a solid content strategy don't have to depend on comment links, artificial promotion of links through social bookmarking sites, or a steady stream of link-filled Twitter posts.

Develop Your Digital Identity With a Savvy Online Style Guide

By Adrienne Lea

You did all the requisite research before starting a rebranding effort, carefully reviewed logo designs and selected the perfect logo to help move your organization forward. With that behind you, it's essential that the language in all company material supports the rebranding initiative, and that's hard to do:

- The logo change and rebranding may result from a merger or acquisition and two organizations often possess different cultures and styles.
- The current style, and current style guide, are outdated but pervasive and everyone is comfortable with them.
- A lot of employees produce material for your organization; many of these people are content experts, not professional writers and style guides bore them.

Logo and graphic guidelines are usually produced by a third party; the style guide should be produced internally. That way it will fully reflect the philosophy of rebranding, your organization's culture and the specific needs and skill levels of your employees.

Why Bother?

Do the rules of grammar change? Your style guide centers on the basics and still seems useful.

The new logo won't rebrand the company on its own, it just signals a change. The current style guide doesn't reflect rebranding, and was probably written before the digital age. While some specific elements may remain unchanged, creating a new one will emphasize that rebranding the organization requires full participation of all staff members, and goes far beyond changing

Keeping the Focus Tight

Focus your style guide on your employees and what they need.

Correspondence, presentations and reports:

- Identify the reader and point of view.
- Know why you are writing; is your most important point obvious? Don't bury the lead.
- Keep it brief, simple and specific.
- Maintain a professional tone.
- Avoid improper or confusing jargon.
- Tell the reader what outcome to expect; will the reader know what to do next or what will happen next?
- As the writer, it is your job to make reading easy. Don't try to impress with flowery writing; the more technical or complicated the subject, the more plain and understandable the written explanation should be. Avoid unnecessary words and syllables.
- Read what you have written out loud and see if it sounds cluttered or pretentious.
- Is the spelling and punctuation correct?
- Are you using the right word, since spell check doesn't know you wrote "kiddy" but meant "kidney."

E-Mail messages:

- Make e-mail messages easy to read.
- Start with the most important point.
- Use standard writing conventions: complete sentences, correct spelling and grammar.
- Use a subject line that will help recipients find the e-mail later.
- Be careful with your tone; in business e-mails stay away from too chatty, abrupt, or abrasive.
- Avoid ALL CAPS at all costs.
- Slow down.
- Proofread.
- Check recipient list before sending.

Help Employees Avoid Common Mistakes

Avoid clichés:

- A heartbeat away
- Add insult to injury
- Bite off more than you can chew
- Easier said than done
- Handwriting on the wall
- Make a long story short
- Worth its weight in gold

Avoid empty expressions:

- As previously stated in the introduction
- As you can see from the above
- By virtue of the fact that
- Came to the realization that
- Concerning the matter of
- For the purpose of
- For the reason that
- Hopefully
- In the final analysis
- It is obvious that
- It is often the case that
- In the event that
- In the final analysis
- It is often the case that
- Needless to say
- Of the opinion that
- Regardless of the fact that
- The fact that
- Until such time as
- Well aware
- Whole new
- With regards to this matter
- Eliminate redundancies:
- Add back to
- Attached together
- Basic fundamentals
- Combine together
- Connected together
- Continue to remain
- Each and every
- Exact same
- Final completion
- Final result
- First and foremost
- Focus in
- Free gift
- Permeate throughout
- Prove conclusively
- Repeat again
- Rarely ever
- Round in shape
- Resulting effect
- Revert back
- Separate out
- True fact
- Yellow in color

logo, typeface and color palette.

Most important, whatever drove your organization's decision to update its brand must drive your organization's use of language. While the use of paper declines, we rely more on the "written" word than ever before: e-mails have replaced many phone calls and often convey the first image people receive of your organization.

Promotional material we put online is usually longer than paper versions, without printing costs driving size. We send broadcast e-mails with ever-increasing frequency, leading people to "more information available online."

Think About Your Users

You've researched the interests and perceptions of customers, potential customers, members of your organization, stockholders. And you've conveyed to all employees the purpose and philosophy of the rebranding initiative. For the style guide to work, you have to add another layer: your employees. Employees must carry out these philosophical changes daily, and must have tools they can use to do the job.

Some larger organizations employ professional writers and editors or use a cadre of freelancers. If this describes your organization, your new style guide can be more technical since writers and editors are conversant with the rules of grammar and regard language as craft. In some ways that's easier, you can rely on professional style guides and just add the information specific to your company, and worry less about the basics.

However, using professionals requires you to over-emphasize when the rebranding philosophy trumps grammar and syntax. If you use freelancers you must include in the style guide information that makes the brand identity clear to people who work for other organizations. In either case you should emphasize two seemingly contradictory goals:

- Flexibility: this is a transition, and not every effort to reflect the organization's identity will work.
- Consistency: the material produced for the company must convey the organization's identity, not the writer's or editor's identity.

Someone in the company who worked closely with rebranding and understands the philosophical changes should supervise the work of these writers and editors to ensure they make the transi-

tion to the new brand identity. In addition, many professional writers and editors were trained before widespread use of electronic communication; they must adjust their perceptions of the written word to the electronic age. And you must require that they resist the most common fault of writers and editors: putting rules ahead of content.

Other organizations use staff members to produce almost all materials. If the majority of your users are not professional writers and editors, make the style guide something that they can digest. Forget some of the most technical questions of grammar and syntax—including all those questions will bore most employees and prevent them opening the style guide a second time.

Think about the common mistakes staff members make, and include those in the style guide [see box below]. Think of employees who are awkward or inept writers and write the style guide for them.

In all cases, professional writers and editors, freelancers, or full-time employees, use before and after examples to make your point [see box below]. This is the easiest and least judgmental way to bring everyone on board, to help all employees see how much more clearly the new graphic designs and appropriate use of language reflect the image of your organization.

What's Online and What's Not

This is the digital age. Most style guides give a nod to electronic communication but it deserves more than that. Address the following with specificity:

- How to write e-mails that convey your company's image and stay within professional bounds;
- When not to use e-mail;
- How electronic communication is different: your message must hit people immediately, shouldn't make them scroll down the page, and should take into account shorter online attention spans;
- How and when to use broadcast e-mails;
- Use of graphics online vs. graphics in print; and
- Online fonts vs print fonts.

Guide Not Gospel

Finally, you will not bring employees on board by turning into the style police. Make it clear in the style guide why the changes in language are necessary and important, recognize your organization's limitations when rolling out widespread changes, and emphasize repeatedly that rebranding is an important and ongoing process dependent on everyone's support. PRN

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Provide Before and After Examples

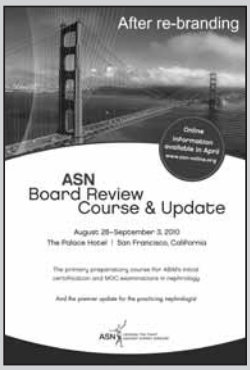
Instead of:
"The American Society of Nephrology, in partnership with the National Kidney Foundation and Dialysis Patient Citizens celebrates World Kidney Day on Thursday, March 12, 2009."

Why not try…
"ASN will host a Congressional Reception on March 12 to celebrate World Kidney Day. ASN is educating lawmakers on the need for increased research funds for studying chronic kidney disease and its known causes. The event is being held in partnership with the National Kidney Foundation and Dialysis Patient Citizens and will feature special guests…"

Before



After



For Best SEO Results, Think Outside The Usual Search Engine Suspects

By PR News Editors

One needn't look far to identify the crux of SEO—after all, it's embedded into its very name. Search engines' primary raison d'être is to account for all Web content and, in turn, provide results pertinent to specific search queries. These engines, known more ubiquitously by their names—Google, Yahoo and Bing, to name a few—acted as stopover points that delivered users to their desired destinations.

This remains search engines' main function, but their integration with other social media platforms has expanded their applications exponentially. This in turn requires communications professionals to broaden their own horizons when shaping and executing SEO and SEM strategies.

Search Is Everywhere

"[Executives] need to realize that search doesn't just happen on the major search engines," says Jon Wegman, vice president of planning and innovation at **Moxie Interactive.** "It happens as consumers look for movies, books, locations, reviews, options and facts across social networks, technology platforms, media and mobile devices."

As such, communicators must consider this evolving paradigm not just when optimizing all online content for search, but also when putting together the best mix of platforms for marketing efforts. Plus, they need to equip their own Web properties—corporate Web site, online newsroom, etc.—with robust search capabilities that connect users with the information they want in the click of a mouse.

With that in mind, the following strategies and recommendations will help them do so effectively.

Start by Developing Keyword Strategies

Search may be evolving, but keywords are still a founding pillar of any optimization effort.

"Keyword phrases are the core of SEO," says Lee Odden, CEO of **TopRank Online Marketing**, outlining the following steps to choosing the best keywords:

- Create a keyword glossary: Structure should include categories, primary phrases, derivatives, permutations, popularity, relevance and competitiveness.
- Brainstorm phrases.
- Use a keyword research tool: Google Keyword Tool, Google Insights & Trends, SEMRush, WordTracker, Keyword Discovery, etc.
- Find popularity and variations.

Think Links

Keywords are the basis of SEO strategies, but links—specially, inbound links—make online content shoot to the top of research results.

"Links electrify content in search," Odden says, recommending the following best practices:

- Earn links with content;
- Promote socially;
- Link up with partners;
- Cross-link internally;
- Embed links in news releases;
- Social bookmark pickup; and
- Use keywords in link text.

Think Beyond Google

Keywords and links optimize content for

search of any kind, so why only apply keyword and link strategies solely to "Google-able" results, such as news releases? Instead, Wegman says, think more broadly to include newsroom optimization, PR optimization and even people optimization.

He offers the following examples of each:

- Newsroom optimization and **Target**: Target has created an easy-to-navigate and resource-rich destination for consumers and journalists alike. Features include detailed search functionality, distilled content areas, result filters a multimedia library, deep links and more.
- PR optimization and **Taylor Guitars**: United Airlines' "United Breaks Guitars" YouTube fiasco helped increase singer Dave Carroll's visibility, but the incident spawned another, more unlikely celebrity: Taylor Guitars, the maker of the instrument that careless United baggage handlers destroyed.

  The company attached itself to the viral video craze started by Carroll by optimizing content on its corporate Web site and newsroom to include popular search terms like "Dave Carroll," "video" and "United Breaks Guitars." The result: It became the third-highest result on Google when a user searched "united airlines."
- People optimization and **Whole Foods**: Whole Foods has operationalized their approach to social media, PR and people optimization. Wegman points to the company's robust portfolio of inter-connected social media platforms. Individual stores and categories have dedicated personnel to break news, respond to questions and engage with the public.

Measure, Share Results and Adapt

Measuring the outcome of SEO initiatives can be done by considering a number of available metrics, including:

- Newswire service metrics;
- Google and Yahoo alerts;
- Rankings;
- Social media monitoring;
- Inbound links;
- Pickups on blogs, publications, Web sites, etc.;
- Web analytics for landing pages;
- Monitoring blog search engines via RSS; and,
- Press release landing page conversion tracking.

Tell the Right People

Then, Odden says, it's all about communicating that value to the appropriate audiences, be it top management, marketing, etc., to help inform their efforts moving forward.

Two effective means of making a point to these audiences are demonstrating cost/savings, and demonstrating what's lacking.

"Set keyword ranking goals and estimate the cost of achieving the same goals with PPC (pay per click)," says Odden. "Then demonstrate the cost of organic search traffic versus PPC traffic."

As for demonstrating what's lacking, research a keyword glossary and run a ranking report on those phrases to show the lack of search visibility. Run a test of a few news items, take benchmark measurements and then show progress. PRN

So, You Think You Know SEO? A PR News Pop Quiz

By PR News Editors

Though critical to any organization looking to drive online eyeballs and sales, search engine optimization tactics and terminology can confound the smartest PR pros. *PR News* asked SEO expert Lee Odden, CEO of **TopRank Online Marketing**, to create a quiz that would seriously test your SEO acumen. Here goes:

True or False

1. Search engine optimization (SEO) is best managed by the corporate IT department.

2. Google, Yahoo and Bing each have their own crawlers and algorithms and should be optimized separately.

3. Google Caffeine is an infrastructure update that involves increasing Google's ability to index larger amounts of content more quickly and has little to do with rankings.

4. The MayDay update on Google was focused on adding a third column of faceted search options to the left side of Google search results.

5. How fast your Web pages load in a browser can affect the ranking of those pages in search results.

Multiple Choice

6. What are the two least effective methods of researching keywords?

a. Use content from advertising and marketing materials

b. Analyze competitor Web sites

c. Use exact matches for proper product and service names

d. Survey customers, sales and customer service staff

e. Leverage research tools like Google Keyword Tool, WordTracker or WordStream.

7. Which types of files are indexed and ranked by search engines?

a. Flash

b. JavaScript

c. Ajax

d. PDF

e. MS Office documents

f. All of the above

8. Which link-building tactics represent best practices for competitive keywords?

a. Submit the company Web site to directories and search engines once

b. Publish a blog, interact with other blogs, promote content on social sites each week

c. Perform backlink analysis on sites already ranking well and solicit links from the same sources

d. Include links in press releases, cross link between pages, microsites and partner sites

e. Solicit links in media placements, contributed articles and guest blog posts that use keywords to company content

f. All of the above

9. What are the three most significant influences on search engine rankings?

a. Meta keyword tag

b. Meta description tag

c. Title tag

d. Keywords on the page

e. Links using keywords from other relevant Web sites

10. Which list represents the top 3 search engines according to comScore?

a. Google, YouTube, Yahoo

b. Google, Yahoo, Bing

c. Google, YouTube, Bing

Writing for the Web: Some Best Practices

According to Jon Wegman, associate director of Moxie Interactive, there are a handful of tried-and-true best practices when it comes to writing for the Web, and they all hinge on the three R's: recency, responsiveness and relevancy. With that as a backdrop, consider his specific recommendations:

- Provide open access to assets, resources and content.
- Cross-promote, link and utilize social media properties to spread news.
- Use automated opt-in feeds to deliver content to users on the fly.
- Provide links across your organization for contact and escalation points.
- Provide assets in mixed-media format in a simple and intuitive way.
- Proactively make contact with journalists and influential consumers.
- Allow users to choose the format and category for the information they want.
- Measure and track usage and assets, and solicit feedback.

ANSWERS TO THE PR NEWS POP QUIZ

1. **False**: For most organizations, IT will help implement technical and on-page SEO changes, but a partnership between marketing, PR and IT should set the direction, strategy and oversight of implementation of keyword research, optimized copywriting, link building and analysis of Web site visitor data.

2. **False**: While each search engine is different, Google has over 65 % of market share and warrants the most attention. Yahoo and Bing will soon blend their technologies, thus reducing the major search engines to two. For most sites, best practice content optimization and link building are productive for any major search engine.

3. **True**: Google's ability to find fresh content and deliver it in search results has improved greatly and will scale as increasing content sources publish online. Caffeine has little to do with sorting or ranking search results, but may mean your content gets into Google search results pages quicker.

4. **False**: Google made a significant algorithm update that occurred in early May 2010 affecting large numbers of Web pages containing minimal content that previously ranked well for long-tail keywords (three or more words). The MayDay update reinforces the need for improved Web content quality. The third column added to the Google search results page design is not related to the algorithm change.

5. **True**: Google announced in April 2010 the addition of Web page load time as a ranking factor. Faster-loading pages equate to a better user experience and increase in the number of clicks.

6. **A & C**: What companies name products are not always what customers or the media will use to search for those products.

7. **A, D & E**

8. **F**: There are literally hundreds of link-building tactics, and any activity that results in an inbound link from another topically relevant Web site is good for users and for SEO.

9. **C, D & E**

10. **A**

PRN

Achieve Online Excellence With Tailor-Made SEO, SEM & Content

By Jasmine Sandler

Developing an effective online campaign is harder than most want to admit. PR professionals who are used to the typical ways of delivering a brand will benefit from an online marketing lens in order to balance messaging efforts across search marketing platforms. Following are some guidelines for SEO, Paid Search and writing for the Web as ways to reach client PR goals.

Keyword Development

Keyword development is the single most important thing you can do when planning an online campaign. If your clients do not have 20-30 keywords, ask them for service keywords, executive management names, branded products/service, and phrases they know their clients use when searching for their types of products/services.

Additionally, you can refine keywords based on where they operate. Then, you will need to get two or three of their competitors to assess what keywords they are competing for and winning in. You will also be able to see if their competitors are investing in Paid or Natural Search by reviewing keywords in Google Keyword Estimator, doing manual searches by keyword and by using some of the paid, but effective tools like www.keywordspy.com. Always make sure that you use your top keyword phrases throughout any copy you develop for your client.

Search Engine Optimization

Keywords need to include "long-tail" keywords and "short-tail" keywords. "Online marketing" is an example of a short-tail keyword, while "Online marketing for professional services firms" is a long-tail keyword. Short-tail keywords get more hits but are less focused and associated with research. Long-tail keywords get fewer hits but are associated with the buying phase.

Keyword phrases can be many and varied. The buying behavior keywords can contain exact matches to product/service names, descriptions, exact locations or names of people.

SEO keywords tell the search engines what you do; therefore, the more your keyword phrases represent that, the better. Once you have your SEO keyword list, you must ensure they are populated and tagged on all of your clients' content.

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Paid Search Marketing

Paid Search is buying ad space on search engines based on keywords and is a fast and easy way to drive leads. For better ROI, you should focus your efforts on long-tail keywords. If your site is new or has little to no traffic, it is worthwhile to buy short-tail keyword in Paid Search while your SEO program takes effect. To determine the costs per click you will be charged in Google and other search engines, use this tool http://www.google.com/sktool/# to yield suggestive keywords and related price bids.

Beyond having the right mix of keywords to drive interest and direct response in Paid Search, your web copy within the Paid ads must be relevant to the search and drive action. Guidelines for writing for Paid Search:

- The ad title should have the search term in it.
- The first line should include the keyword term and the value proposition.
- The final line should include the value differentiator (either type of service, product or price point).

See the example below.

Search term: "Boxing Classes"
Ad
Boxing Classes
Taught by pro trained boxers. Intro and Advanced.
Only $20/pp. Taught daily. All boroughs.
www.vfitnessonline.com/boxingclasses

Writing for The Web

Writing for the Web has rules you must follow to enhance search visibility and engagement.

Search Visibility

1. SEO works not only by keywords on your site, but it is also heavily influenced by relevant and quality web sites where your business is linked to, via a listing, article submission, or video /image submission that is tagged.

2. On your site, you want to make sure that you are continually adding content with primary keywords infused into the copy. Make sure you do not overload your copy with keywords. This can be referred to as keyword spamming and it is not appreciated by users or search engines.

3. Link internal pages.

4. Each page should be dedicated to a specific offering or benefit and have a keyword strategy. Again, make sure that you are developing a few keyword phrases per page.

5. Use primary keyword phrases in all your headings.

6. Test keyword phrase density to assess the keyword density. You need to have a density of 3% to 5%. You can find analysis tools at http://webdesign.about.com/od/seo/tp/keyword_density_analyzers.htm.

Resources and Key Points

- Developing keywords for your writing is a pivotal part of your online strategy used in all facets of content. Using free tools like **http://www.google.com/sktool/#** and paid tools like **Keywordspy.com** is helpful in this endeavor.
- Press releases should include images and videos tagged with appropriate keywords to help increase their appeal to readers and for SEO purposes.
- Optimal keyword densities are 3% to 5%.
- When doing bullet points or lists, mentally satisfying numbers such as 3, 5, and 10 work best.

Engaging Web Writing

Effective article writing and placement is important for two reasons: SEO and brand building.

1. KISS—Keep It Simple Stupid—is a must in writing for the Web. Content should not be intellectually void, but it should *not* contain complex sentences and *should* be easy to understand.

2. The key to writing engaging articles beyond research and creating an angle, is to put all your important messaging at the head of the page—summary should come before introduction. Web users scan, not read.

3. Press releases and most online content now is made attractive through the use of multi-media. Audiences now expect this. Press releases therefore, should contain a short video, an image and quote. Further, tagging multimedia with keywords always boosts SEO ranking.

4. Blogs are a more personal form of writing and work well when creating a personal branding story or when it is based on a designated subject or theme. Images increase the appeal of a blog post and should always be tagged with keyword phrases for SEO purposes. PRN

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