SEO 101:

Do-It-Yourself SEO Tips & Tactics

Contents

SEO 101:

Search engine optimization has become a fundamental practice used to increase a website's ranking in search engine results, like Google. When making small adjustments to your site, they can change how a potential customer perceives your company as well as how search engines rank your business organically. (Organic refers to people arriving at your site by searching for your website via a search engine.) Most likely you are familiar with several of the topics we will be discussing, but you may not be taking full advantage of them.

This e-book has been created for people who are new to the game of SEO and are looking to improve their website relations with both search engines and potential customers. Although we can't guarantee that your business will appear on the first page of search engine results, we can say that following best practices outlined in this guide will ensure that your website has the greatest chance of being crawled and indexed by search engines, and understood by your customers.

Our ultimate goal is to provide you with the resources needed for you to improve your website's performance by educating you on proven SEO principles and practices that search engines look for. We hope this guide gives you the innovative ideas needed to successfully grow your online presence.

What is Search Engine Optimization?

SEO is the practice of improving your website using on-page and off-page techniques to increase the amount of visitors from organic search results.

This image shows the difference between organic search results and PPC (pay per click) advertising results in Google.

Simply put, Search Engine Optimization is about structuring your website so that both search engines and your website visitors can understand it.
When it comes to determining what a search engine must gather from your website in order to rank your business, it can get overwhelming. From keyword density in your content to the authority of websites linking to your business website, there are many tasks that you must do in order for your website to be considered search engine friendly. Luckily we can break these tasks down into two main categories: **Relevance** and **Trust**.

To clarify, you must first acknowledge that a search engine's job is to respond to your immediate needs. When you ask a question, a search engine is scanning through its billions of saved documents and performing two functions.

Returning only results that are relevant to what you searched for. (On-Page Optimization)

Ranking those relevant results based off of the perceived importance of value and trust. (Off-Page Optimization)

The process of SEO is meant to influence both the relevance and trust of your website in order to attract more visitors. Google has an excellent list of best practices for improving your site's ranking. You can see the full list at <link>.

Google's Best Practices to help find, crawl, and index your site.

- Create a useful, information-rich site, and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content.
- Think about the words users would type to find your pages, and make sure that your site actually includes those words within it.
- Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links. Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link.
- Monitor your site's performance and optimize load times. Google's goal is to provide users with the most relevant results and a great user experience
- Make pages primarily for users, not for search engines.

For more information, visit Google's [Webmaster Guidelines](#)

Why do I need SEO?

At Homestead, we often hear complaints that search engines should easily be able to find a website and rank it accordingly without needing some "expert" having to optimize it. In some scenarios this is true and search engines are impressively smart when it comes to crawling the web, following links, and indexing content, images, and so on. However, search engines still need help because after all, they aren't human. Consider these two different scenarios.

- You post a picture of your favorite baseball player. To a human we can see the image and know that it is Babe Ruth playing baseball with the New York Yankees. However, even the most sophisticated search engine in the world would have a very difficult time figuring out and understanding what the image is depicting.

- Throughout your website you use the term "house cooling unit." Because we're human, we know you meant air conditioner, but a search engine wouldn't put two and two together.

These are two of the more common problems, but there are hundreds of different scenarios where computers have technical limitations (videos, online forms, language subtleties, geo-targeting, etc.). Although search engines are improving every day at understanding and reading web pages, we still need to help clarify what they are actually looking at. After a search engine understands what it's

indexing, it then becomes showing the search engine how important that content, image, file, or information is.

The Benefits of SEO

- **High ROI** – SEO brings a higher return on your investment than any other comparable form of marketing.
- **Long Term** – After a site is ranking well, it will rank higher longer term compared to PPC (pay-per-click advertising) as search engines place a high deal of relevancy and importance on that page.
- **Targeted Traffic** – SEO increases the amount of visitors who are actively searching for your product or service.
- **Usability** – A properly optimized website gives users a more pleasant experience while navigating your website.
- **Higher Conversion** – With increased visibility comes more sales, phone calls, and more visitors to your site that become your customers.
- **Brand Awareness –** SEO allows for higher rankings which in turn increases brand recognition. The more people who visit your website, the more they will associate your expertise in the field.
- **24 Hours –** Even while you're sleeping, SEO is working to increase your web presence.

We could go on and on about each benefit of SEO, but in the end it's all about getting your website in front of potential customers. Because most people tend to stay on the first page of a search result, there will always be competition for highest rankings between businesses for traffic, branding,

and visibility. The question then becomes, "Where do you stand?"

The Importance of Ranking Organically

Traffic – The difference between one or two spots in a search result can make or break a company. Here are the average percentages of how people search. You'll notice that after page 1, traffic volume diminishes to be almost nonexistence.

Traffic Based Off of Google Ranking
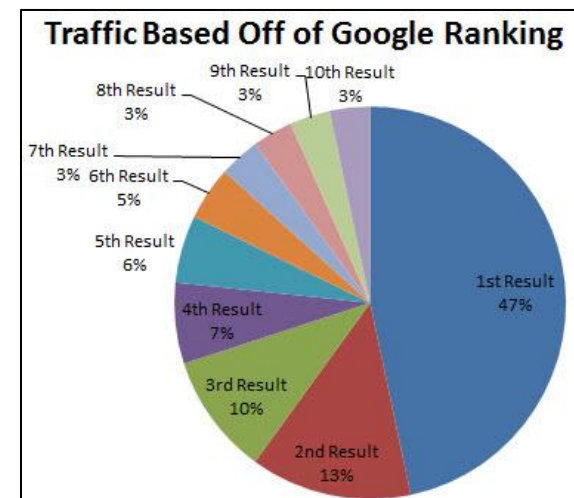
Local – For local businesses, the need to rank high is even more evident by recent data. Currently **43%** of all searches that are conducted are local (people searching for restaurants, gas stations, contractors, etc.) and a staggering **82%** follow up offline via an in-store visit or phone call.

SEO vs. Pay Per Click

Although an effective PPC (pay per click) ad campaign can yield a great ROI, **80%** of people still head straight for organic results because they are comfortable with them and are used to the listings. These numbers can fluctuate based off of your industry, but being listed organically still holds more weight over any other type of marketing.
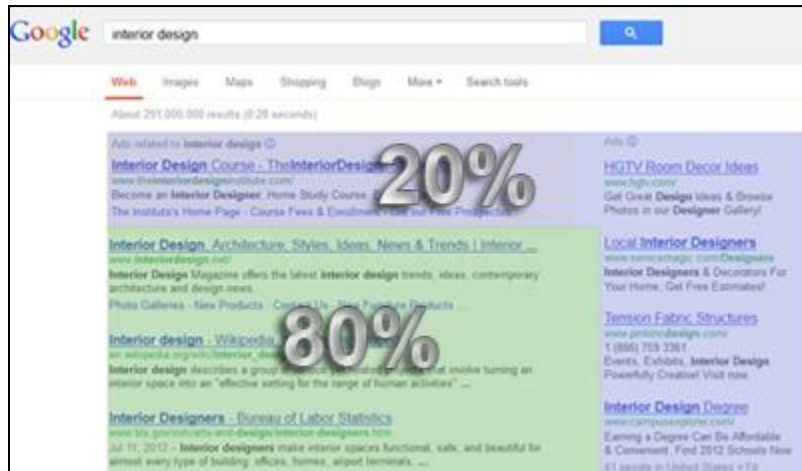
This image shows the percentage of people who click on organic results vs. PPC (pay per click) advertising results in Google.

By now you see the importance of optimizing your website and the potential it brings. The great thing about this is anyone can do SEO as long as you put in the effort. We are confident that if you can take the following steps, your website will deliver results.

Let's Get Started

Before we dive in to the first topic, we decided to create a fictitious business to help showcase our explanations on various SEO concepts. We will use this example throughout our SEO guide for visual reference.

Business: Lauren's Interior Design
Domain: www.laurensinteriordesign.com
Description: Local interior design and decorator service Denver, CO and surrounding areas.

Keywords

Keywords are the foundation of SEO. And it all begins with the words a person types into a search engine. When the search engine (like Google) lists the results on the person's computer screen, it is basing the relevancy of what keywords the user typed in and matching it with the keywords it finds on particular websites. The end result is delivering the correct information so the user has a positive experience.

Deciding on which keywords to target can be one of the more challenging parts of SEO. It's not always about picking which keywords get the *most* traffic, but rather picking which keywords bring in the *right* kind of traffic.

Types of Keywords

As an interior designer in Denver, it would be great to be ranked #1 for the keyword "interior design" – or would it?

Often when people see a keyword that gets thousands of hits from searches, they immediately assume they need to also be ranked for that keyword. However, when you take a closer look at the data, you see a different trend on how people actually do search queries. Below is a graph that explains more on short tail vs. long tail key phrases.

Short Tail vs. Long Tail Keywords

*seomoz.org

A **short tail keyword** is the more popular way people search. It typically contains one to three words (example: *Interior Designer*). A **long tail keyword** is less used and typically contains four to seven words (example: *Residential Interior Designer in Denver*). Although the short tail keyword seems like the better choice, it only makes up 30% of searches performed while the other 70% goes to long tail searches. This doesn't mean that you should ignore one or the other, but it should help when it comes to focusing on

specific parts of your products or services to help drive in a wider audience.

Another key lesson to take away from long tail keywords is that they often convert better (meaning the person searching will become a real customer). Let's use the interior design example again.

Short Tail Keyword *"Interior Design Denver"* – Even though this describes your business and location, it isn't answering what exactly the user wants.

- Are they residential or commercial?
- Is this new construction or a remodeling project?
- Do they need furnishings?
- Are they looking for space planning?

People who use short tail keywords are typically known as "shoppers" because they are just browsing around looking for anything of import that's out there.

Long Tail Keyword *"kitchen remodeling decorator in Denver"* - People that type those words into a search already knows what they want and have the intent to purchase. Even though those words won't be searched as nearly as often as "Interior Design Denver," the success at converting those people into customers is much higher.

It's good to understand and research both types of phrases so you can learn about market demand and ultimately learn about your customers as a whole. In the next section we will break down the proper way to choose a keyword.

Choosing Relevant Keywords

How d you put a value on a certain keyword? To answer this you must first understand your own business. For example, if you're an interior decorator in Colorado:

- Do you make more money with new construction or remodeling?
- Are the wealthier clientele in Denver or surrounding cities?

Determine the target market you're looking to go after before deciding on which keywords are best. There is no limit to how many phrases you can optimize your website around, but focusing on a handful to start will help you keep focused and allow you to expand later on down the road.

Ask Yourself These Questions

- What keywords are relevant to your website's content?

- Will users find the information they need using the keywords you want to market your website for?

- Will the keywords bring in traffic with high conversion chances?

- What would the average user type into a search engine to find your business? (stay away from industry jargon)

Ask Others! – Even though you may know your business better than anybody, it doesn't mean you know how to search for it. If you ask friends and family members how they would find your business online, it can be very insightful when determining alternative keywords. Good example? Think about the term "soda." Depending on where you live you may call it soda, pop, soft drink, or fountain drink. Learning how potential clients may search for your site can help you discover other terms.

Forums – Every industry has discussion forums where people can go ask and answer questions. Frequenting websites like these can help you gather keywords from people of all classes. You may find ideas from the newbie who knows nothing about interior design and calls a remodel a "room upgrade" or the veteran who's been in the profession for 30 years and has a glossary of every term they've learned in the business.

Keyword Tools – There are many websites online that offer additional insight into keywords. From the average amount of search volume to how competitive the phrase is, you can make a more educated decision on whether or not a certain phrase is viable. The next section will discuss one of the more popular websites for keyword discovery – Google AdWords™ Keyword Tool.

Analyzing Keywords

When it comes to analyzing keywords, there are two variables you need to consider – *search volume* and *competitive level*. A keyword might have 10,000 monthly searches, but if the competition is too high and you can't get to page one, you won't see any of that traffic. On the other hand you may find a keyword that has no competition and you can rank for it quickly, but if nobody is searching for that phrase, what's the point? Finding a happy medium will ensure that you're targeting phrases with the greatest chance of increasing traffic.
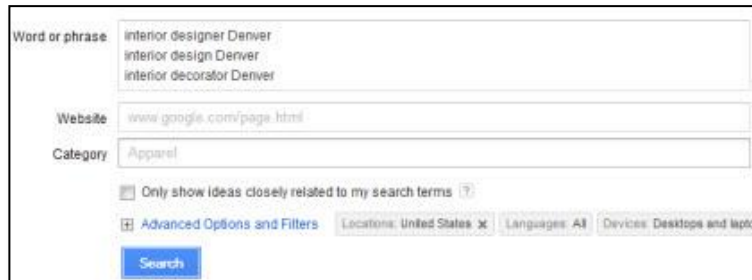
Search Volume

To get a better idea of search volume, we recommend using the Google AdWords Keyword Tool. This program is a great starting point for keyword research as it shows you both the search volume and competition levels. Although it is based off of using their pay per click program, you can get a good sense of how a keyword might perform.

https://AdWords.google.com/o/KeywordTool
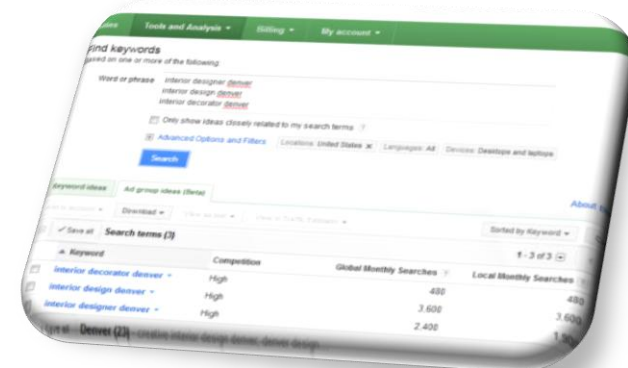
How to use Google's Keyword Tool

1. After you open the keyword tool, start by entering into the Word or phrase box a few keyword ideas you've thought of and click the **Search** button.

2. Depending on whether you have a free account with Google and are signed in, you will receive anywhere between 1 – 800 results that Google has deemed relevant to your keyword search. You are given two options on how you would like to view the keyword results.
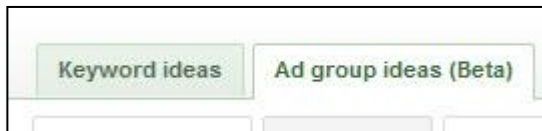
The **Ad group ideas (Beta)** is the default option and will organize all the keywords into different categories. Clicking on a category will open up the subset of keyword phrases, which makes it particularly useful if you have specific ideas in mind.

The **Keyword ideas** tab will create a list of all the keywords and sort them initially by relevance. Use this tab if you want to see all the keywords without having to click through individual categories. Either tab works well so use the one that is easiest for you to understand.

Each keyword will be broken down into competition, global monthly searches, and local monthly searches.

Competition – This is based off of the cost of using AdWords pay per click and doesn't represent the competitive level organically. We will cover research competitive levels in the next section.

Global Monthly Searches – This shows how often people everywhere in the world searches for that keyword.

Local Monthly Searches – This shows the number of searches for a keyword that meets your criteria. The default criterion is people who live in the United States and are using a desktop or laptop computer.

If you live in a different country or want to see search volume for mobile users, the local criteria can be changed by clicking on the Advanced Options and Filters.

Make sure you look at Local monthly searches because they best represent your target market. Don't focus only on phrases that get 1000's of searches as those are harder to rank for due to other competitors optimizing their website for those same phrases. Consider going after one or two niche keywords that have only a couple hundred searches, but will be much less competitive and therefore allow you to rank quicker.

Competitive Level

After you have a set of keywords that you are happy with, you will want to research further into the keyword to make sure you can compete against people on the first page of Google. If big brands take up the majority of the top 10 results, you could be looking at quite the uphill battle and years of effort to compete with too many other companies. Here are a few suggestions to quickly look at a key phrase's competitiveness.

Do a search in Google for one of your key phrases and take a look at who is on page 1. How do the results match up?

- Are the search results similar to your business?
- Do you see any of your competitors?
- Are there less than 3 big name brands (for example: Wikipedia®, Amazon, Yellow Pages?)

If you can say no to any of the above questions, you may be looking at a keyword that is either too competitive or not relevant enough to your business. This isn't an exact rule, but chances are you will have to put in extra effort to try and rank well for that phrase. Our suggestion would be to move on to another phrase and come back if needed.

If you can say yes to all three, you can then move forward to the last step, which is taking a look at the actual websites on page one. Open up one of the results and see what you can find.

- Do they use the keyword within their content?
- Do they use the keyword in their Page Title and Meta Description? (Learn more about meta data)
- Do they use the keyword in their Page Name? (Learn more about page names)

The goal here is to see how relevant their website is for the key phrase. If you can only find it once or twice, that's a good sign that you have a fighting chance at outranking them.

This website is well-optimized for the phrase - "Interior Design Denver". You will notice how it is used 4 times within the content of their home page as well as in their Page Title and Meta Description

Interior Design Denver | BW Home Decor
BW Home Decor offers **Interior Design in Denver**. We are a full service commercial & residential decorating firm helping indivuals with all styles.

Take your time to make sure you choose the right keyphrases for your website. Viable keywords are the foundation for everything you're about to implement into your website, so doing it right the first time allows you to effectively optimize your website without having to come back in a few months and make major revisions.

Content

Creating "great" content is one of the best opportunities you have to distinguish yourself from other competitors. When someone does a search, there is always a purpose behind it. Whether it is to find a place, learn about a service, buy a product, or solve a problem, search engines are put in place to solve the immediate need. Developing the right type of content can not only give people what they're looking for and create a positive experience; it can also give search engines the chance to place your site in the top rankings.

Before we get into how to write relevant content, it is important to note that you are writing for your audience, not search engines. Search engines are only focused on satisfying the *searcher's* needs so optimizing solely for search engines can have a negative effect. The goal is to write content that engages the reader, increasing search engine ranking, and promotes links from other websites.

Why is Content Good for SEO?

Keywords – As search engines attempt to become more humanized, they primarily look for keywords within your text. These days it's almost impossible to rank for a key phrase if it isn't included within your website. Content is perfect for not only conveying to your audience what products or services you offer, but also to a search engine what keywords you want to be ranked for.

Ranking – As search engines crawl your website, they can find many variations of keywords based off of scraping your content. Websites have been known to rank well for long tail keywords simply by having good content. Although it takes a good content strategy, choosing effective keywords, followed up by constructing quality content, allows you to be ranked naturally for a wider range of phrases.

Importance and Trust – Quality content can also lead to achieving links from other websites. Humans are your best source for helping you reach a wider audience so communicating a clear message can help your site be referenced. As you obtain more links to your site, search engines will weigh your web pages with more authority and therefore rank you higher.

Content No-No's – Avoid at all Costs

Don't be Boring – One of the worst things you can do is write content that isn't engaging. If a person comes to your site and either doesn't understand your text or finds it unappealing, you have no chance at converting that site visitor to a customer. Make sure your content is attractive and stands out with headlines, bullet points, and is concise enough to get your point across.

Don't Duplicate Content – Although it may be easier to pull content from a credible source like Wikipedia, search engines dislike duplicate content and will penalize you for copying and pasting other people's work. Remember that search engines are businesses too and they want their

visitors to come back again so it's in their best interest to only show web pages that are unique and add relevant value.

Don't Skimp – We often see people create great looking websites, but fail to provide enough content to add any value. If you think just one paragraph will be enough, think again. Content adds relevancy to your website so we recommend adding at least **200** words per page. Within this text you can add keywords to help search engines understand your products or services.

What Constitutes Unique Content

Keywords – The whole reason why you're reading this guide is to rank for certain keywords, right? Make sure you add these keywords to your content. Each page on your website should be dedicated to a group of similar keywords (recommended 2-3 per page). As far as keyword density, your SEO content should include a keyword 1-3 percent of the time, which is equivalent to 2 times for every 100 words. However, there will be other areas to imbed keywords, so you don't have to follow this direction exactly. You can get away with having a keyphrase once for every 75 words.

Freshness – Search engines award websites that keep their content up to date and relevant. You don't want to have a static website that is unchanging, but rather a site that continues to grow. Whether this in the form of creating new pages, starting a blog, or updating existing text, it's recommend you keep your content fresh for improved rankings.

Format – Many studies have been conducted on how people view a website. Most users will quickly scan a website to find the information relevant to their search. If they don't locate this information promptly, they will move on. For this reason, it's important to format your content so it stands out:

Create bulleted or numbered lists that include the most important information.

Create headlines and sub-headlines to help navigate users to what their looking for.

Bold relevant keywords to show importance.

Spelling and Grammar – Triple check the spelling of your content to make sure it sounds professional. Even the simplest mistake such as using "your" instead of "you're" can detract people from linking to your website.

Follow these guidelines when writing your content to make sure users and search engines can interpret and understand your website. The better quality you present, the better opportunity you have to rank.

Creating Unique Content

Unless you've taken writing classes or are a professional writer, creating unique content can be a challenge. Writing doesn't come naturally for most and you may find yourself struggling to describe your business on paper. Here are several tips on getting the creative juices flowing.

Understand why people are looking for you – As mentioned earlier, when someone comes to your website, it is because they have an immediate need to fill. Figuring out what that need is and showing you relate to that need can lead people into the direction you want them to go.

This example includes a bulleted list that describes possibilities for why someone came to this website. If the person agrees with any of these scenarios the person will continue to read on.
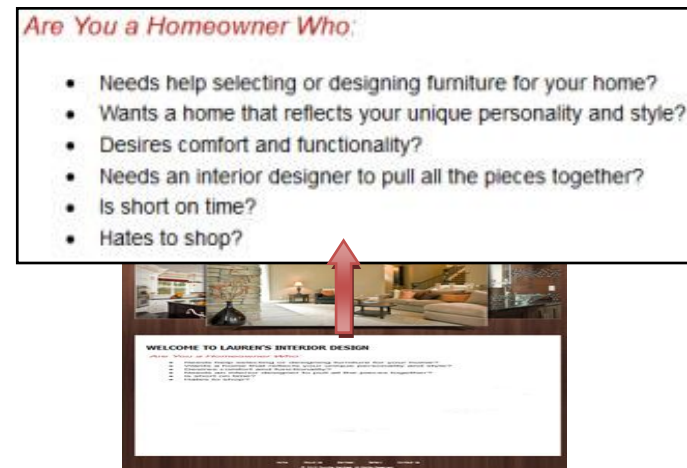
Offer a Solution – Clearly describe your products or services. Be clear, concise, and compelling to make sure you keep the user's attention. You can offer more detail on sub-pages, but

it's good to outline your more important offerings on your homepage.

Benefits – Offering a solution doesn't always close the deal. You must identify how your solutions will benefit the customer and improve their life.

Stand-Out – Unless you've created a one of a kind item, chances are your products or services will be similar to your competition. Explain what makes you special and why customers should buy from you rather than your competitor.

Be the Expert – Offering advice in your respected industry will not only help increase your website ranking (more content), but it will also add trust for visitors. Being an interior designer, it would be beneficial to offer advice on something like "how to choose the right color paint for a room."

There's no limit to the amount of content you can have on your website. If you're ever unsure on what to talk about, check out competitors sites and see what their showcasing (don't duplicate!), go to industry forums and see what topics people are discussing, or asks friends and family to look over your website and see if there is anything they don't understand or would want to know more about.

Content Optimization

Above the Fold – "Above the fold" refers to content that is visible when first looking at a webpage without scrolling down. Content in this area is weighted with more importance so it's recommended to keep your relevant information near

the top of your website. This also means you want to include good keywords early on in your sentences for search engines to discover.

Bolding/Highlighting – The bolding of a key phrase helps add extra emphasis and lets search engines know that keyword is of particular importance. It also assists in drawing attention to important terms on your website which can aid in a better customer experience. However, don't overkill your site with bolding keywords in every other sentence as it will then make your site hard and unappealing to read.

How to Bold/Highlight Text

1. Highlight the key phrase you want to bold.
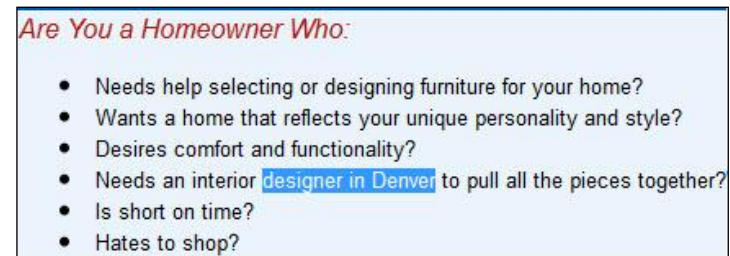
2. Click the **B** icon in the text settings on the far right.
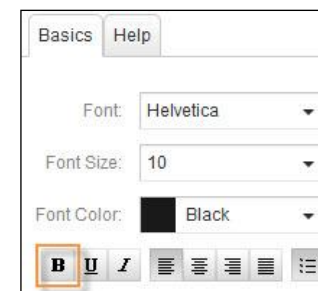
Anchor Text

Anchor text means that links are created so that people can click on them and move easily from one page to another within your website. Most often these links are keywords to also help emphasize the importance of a phrase. For example, if I'm an interior designer and I want to explain how to furnish a house, I may select and link the keyword phrase "home furnishing" to my "/homefurnishing.html" page.

When doing this you're now telling search engines and visitors that if they click on that link, they should expect to find more information on "home furnishing." This not only helps contribute to a better customer experience, it starts to give search engines a better understanding on how your website is structured.

How to Create Anchor Text

1. Highlight the keyphrase you want to link.
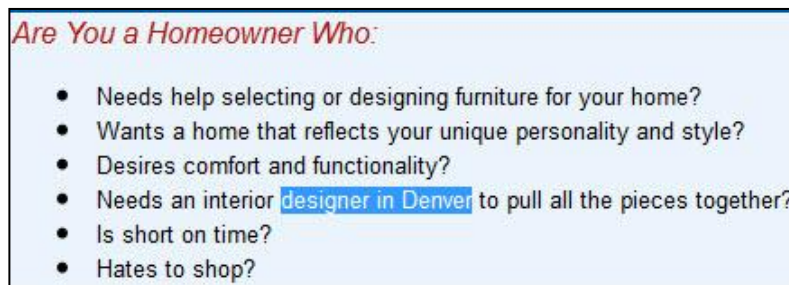
2. Click **Link** in the text settings on the far right.
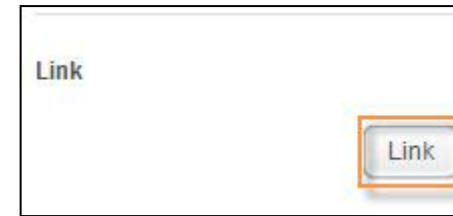
3. Click **Browse** and select the page you want to link to.

4. Click **OK** and then **OK** again to confirm changes

On-Page Optimization

There are other factors that influence the keyword relevancy on your website outside of just adding them throughout your text. On-Page optimization refers to altering key elements on your site to help influence your rankings in natural search results. The following are the most important on-page optimization techniques to generate more exposure.
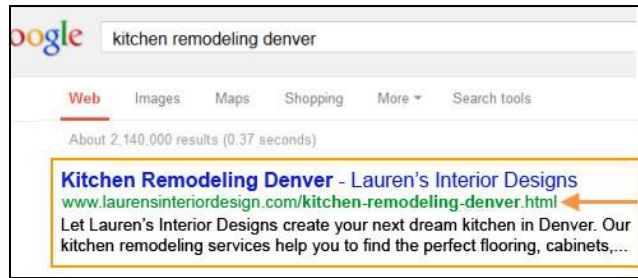
Page Names

The URL for a page on your website plays an effective role in increasing your website's rankings. When you create a page, try adding the keyword that will be most prominent into the page name.
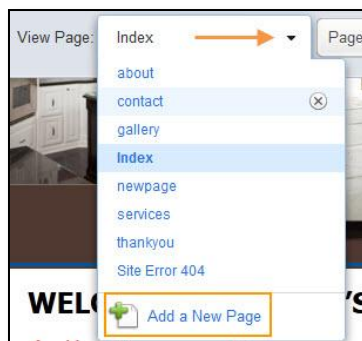
Example: Creating a page that talks about more in-depth services for kitchen remodeling.

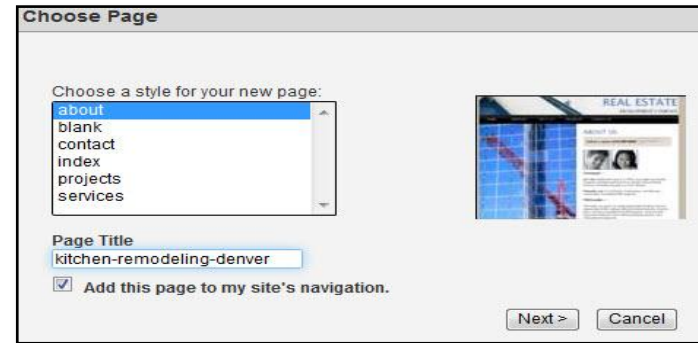http://www.laurensinteriordesign.com/kitchen-remodeling-denver.html

Creating a New Page

1. Click the dropdown menu next to **View Page** in the top toolbar and select **Add a New Page**.

2. Choose the style for your new page and type in the page name.
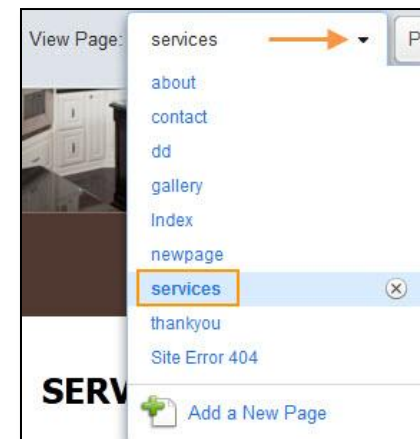

3. Select the checkbox if you would like to add your new page to your site's navigation.

4. Click **Next** to add the new page to your website.

Renaming an Existing Page

1. Click the dropdown menu next to **View Page** in the top toolbar and select the page you want to rename.

2. Click **Save As** in the top toolbar.

3. Type in the new page name and click **OK.**


File Name: kitchen-remodeling-denver

Note: If you rename an existing page, make sure to update any navigation or text links that were associated with the old page name.

Page Title

A title tag is one of the most important elements search engines use to pick up keywords as they consider the title to be a good reflection on what the webpage is about. To users, the page title is the link displayed in a search result for them to access your website. An effective page title should be keyword descriptive as well as enticing in order to distinguish yourself from your competition.

Example: How the page title Denver Interior Designer | Lauren's Interior Design Services appears in Google.
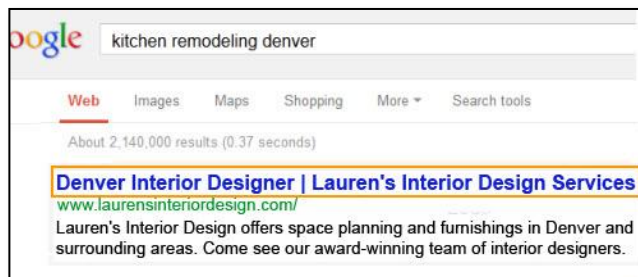

For on-page optimization, make sure to include at least one prominent keyword you plan on imbedding into the content of that specific webpage. It's best if you can use two, but don't make it awkward sounding so that it deters people from clicking on your link. Consider using a keyword followed by your business name or even your phone number. Keep in mind it's the first thing people will see so be sure to accurately describe and brand your business.

It's also important to set up an effective page title for each page on your website. Carefully think through which keywords will work best on which pages and structure your page titles accordingly. We also recommend keeping your title tags under 70 characters as that is the limit search engines will display.

Creating a Page Title

1. Click **Page Settings** in the top toolbar.
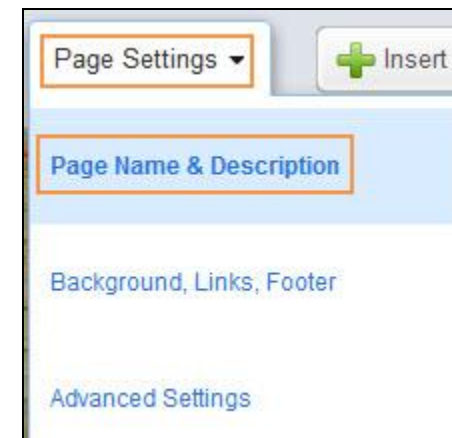
2. Add a descriptive page title to the **Page Name** text field.

Note: Although changing a page title will immediately take effect on your website, it can take search engines several weeks to update and reflect your changes in their search results.

Meta Description

Similar to the page title, a meta description is another opportunity to showcase your business in a search result before someone clicks to your website. It's used right under your page title and allows you to describe the webpage in sentence format rather than just a few keywords. This is your last chance to influence the user to click on your link so it's very important you convey the benefits while continuing to use relevant keywords.
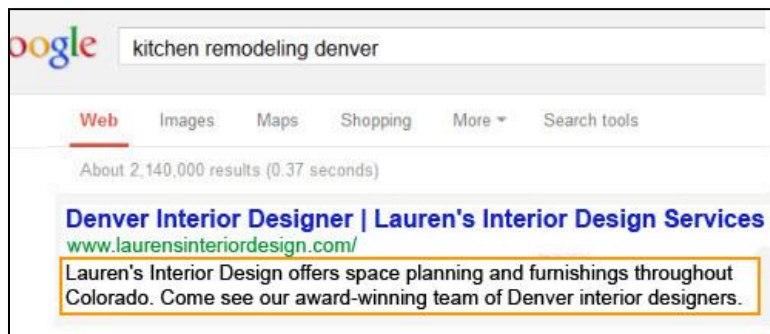

The meta description can be up to 150 characters allowing you to easily include your selling point. We recommend using the same keywords from your page title to help search engines better understand your keyword ranking objectives.

It's important to note that if you don't create a meta description, search engines will display a random snippet of text it finds on the webpage. There's no reason to leave it up to Google to describe your business, so include an effective meta tag for each one of your pages.

Creating a Meta Description

1. Click **Page Settings** in the top toolbar.
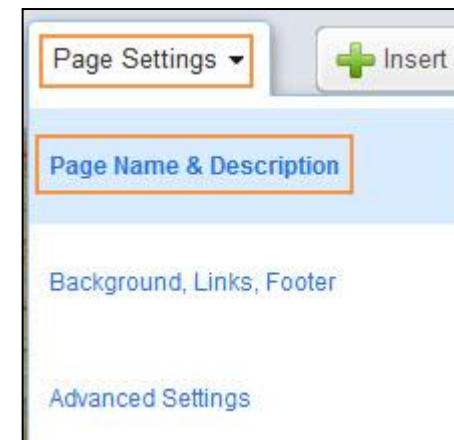
2. Add a descriptive meta description to the **Page Description** text field.

Note: Although changing a meta description will immediately take effect on your website, it can take search engines several weeks to update and reflect your changes in their search results.

Header Tag

Header tags, also known as H1, H2, H3, etc., are beneficial to both search engines and visitors as it places emphasize and helps your visitors find what's important on the web page. Because you indicate which header and header tag is more important, search engines will give more weight to that text and to its relevant keywords.

The most important header tag is the H1 and should be used near the top of the page to indicate the title for the content. Because it's html code, you will want to match it up to the same font style as your text.

The H1 tag is a sentence or headline that contains, at the very least, your primary keyword. You want it to sound natural when read aloud so give a clear understanding as to what kind of content is to follow.

Creating a Header Tag

1. Click **Insert** in the top toolbar.

2. Select **More** from the dropdown and click the **HTML** icon.
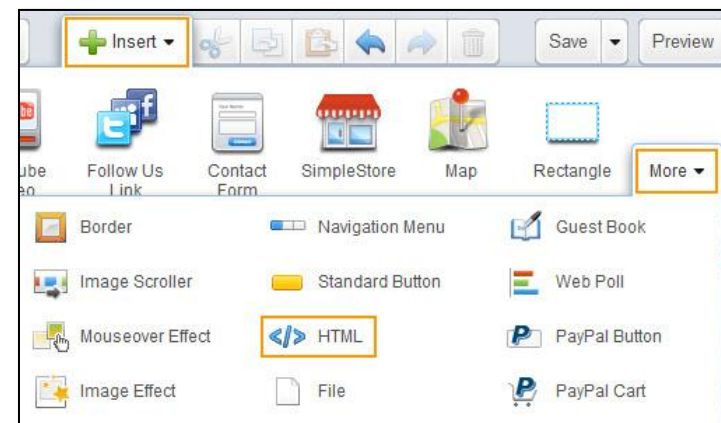
3. Drag the html element to the section on your webpage where you would like the heading displayed.

4. Click **Enter or Paste HTML** on the far right in the HTML settings.
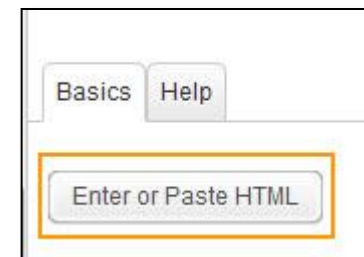
5. Enter header text in this format:

> <h1>Welcome to Lauren's Interior Design in Denver, CO</h1>

When entering your HTML, do not embed tables within other tables. Doing so may cause problems when your page is viewed.
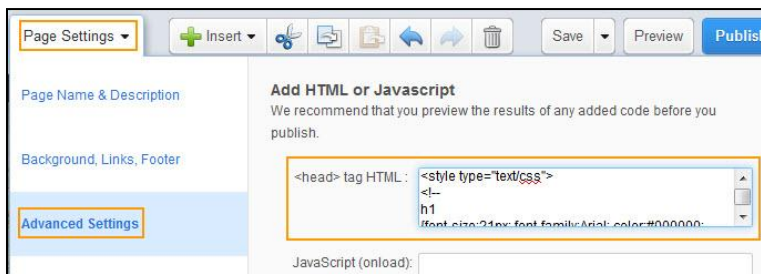
HTML:

<h1>Welcome to Lauren's Interior Design in Denver, CO</h1>

6. Click **Page Settings** in the top toolbar and select the **Advanced Settings** tab.

7. Add the following html code to the **<head> tag HTML** text field.

```
<style type="text/css">
<!--
h1
{font-size:21px; font-family:Arial;
color:#000000; font-weight: normal;
margin:0px; padding:0px;}
-->
</style>
```

8. Manipulate the html code to be consistent with your font. You may have to preview your website several times until you can get the H1 tag to appear correctly.

Font Size – The higher the number the bigger the font size and vice versa.

Font Family – Change to the font style your currently using.

Color – Change to desired color (see http://www.colorpicker.com/ for hex value).

Images

Search engines have difficulty understanding images. However with the use of proper image names and alternative text, you have the ability to let both visitors and search engines better understand what their looking at.

Image Name

When adding an image to your website, make sure to use relevant keywords in the image name. Search engines don't understand an image, for example, with the name"DSC2992.jpg," but they can take an educated guess when a name like "denver-living-room-design.jpg" is used.
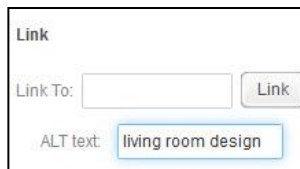
ALT Tag

Alternative text allows you to give a relevant description to an image. If a user was to mouse over that image, they would see the ALT tag appear.

ALT tags are meant to be meaningful but short. Don't just add keyword after keyword and think Google won't notice you spamming. Make sure to use a relevant description (1-5 words including a keyphrase) that best represents the image. For optimal SEO, try making the image name and ALT tag the same.

How to Create an ALT Tag

1. Click on the image you want to create an ALT tag for.
2. Add the alternative text into the ALT text field within the Image Settings on the far right.
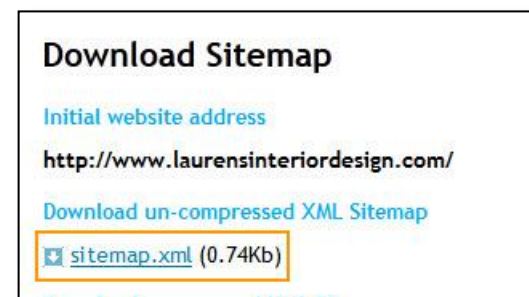

Sitemap

A sitemap is a way to help search engines discover and index every page on your website. For SEO purposes, you will want to create a XML sitemap (format used by search engine spiders) which contains the URL for each active page and may include information such as the last time a page was edited or the importance of a page on a scale of 0 to 1.

Once you've created a sitemap, we recommend you not only upload it to your website (instructions below), but also upload it into Google and Bing's webmaster tools. Each major search engine has a free service where you can verify your account and get access to free reports, tools, and resources.

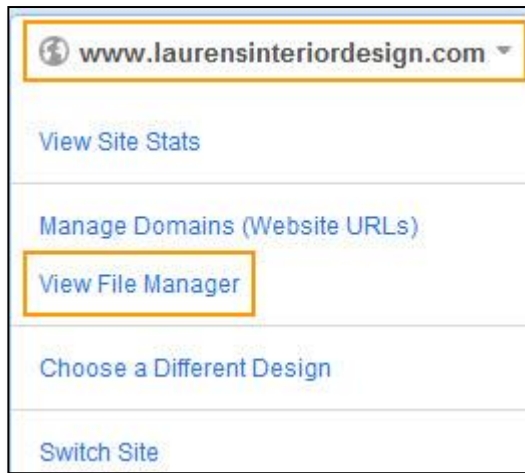## How to Create a Sitemap

1. Go to: www.**xml-sitemaps**.com.

2. Enter your domain and click **Start.**

Wait several seconds and the page will reload letting you know the sitemap is ready. Click **sitemap.xml** under **Download un-compressed XML sitemap.**

3. Save the file to your computer.

4. In SiteBuilder, click your **domain name** at the top and select **View File Manager** from the dropdown.

5. Click the **Import** icon in the top toolbar and find the sitemap.xml file you downloaded to your computer.

6. **Publish** your website.

With the above techniques in place you have officially completed the first stage of making your website keyword relevant using content and on-page optimization. However, as search engines continue to improve and adapt, you'll never be 100% done with your website and should continually add fresh content and keywords.

Off-Page Optimization

With your website now optimized for relevant keywords, it's time to start building **trust**. Off-page optimization is all about getting people to "vote" for your website by a process called backlinking. Each "vote" helps with your popularity and the more popular you are, the higher your website will rank.

Backlinks have become one of the main building blocks to effective SEO. The next section in this guide will cover off-page optimization and the different ways you can build inbound links to your website.

What is a Backlink?

A backlink, also known as an inbound link, are links from other websites directed toward yours. The number of backlinks is an indication to search engines the importance or trust of that website. These days, search engines like Google put a lot of weight on the quantity and quality of links going to your website as it can help distinguish your website from your competition.

This image shows backlinks from other websites going to laurensinteriordesign.com. The more links you can obtain, the better you will rank organically.

Value of Link Building

In the early stages of search engines, simple on-page optimization was all you needed to rank well in search results. However, as more and more websites appeared, search engines needed to find a way to weed out the low quality sites and return only the relevant and reliable results.

Through links, search engines were able to calculate a value for every website. The more links a website could obtain, the higher trust value a search engine gave to that website. Simply put, if you had more links than your competitors, you were guaranteed to outrank them.

As people tried to manipulate the system, search engines have gotten smarter determining what constitutes a strong

backlink. Some of the key factors that contribute to the strength of a link are:

- Relevancy of a site
- Anchor text
- Backlinks of a site
- Domain authority

Relevancy of a Site

Recently search engines have given more credit to the quality of backlinks a website has because it is harder to manipulate a search engine with links from other relevant websites. If backlinks are found from sites with unrelated content, they are considered less relevant and therefore will take you longer to achieve high ranking.

For example, if you have an interior design company, it's more beneficial to obtain a backlink from another website about interior designers such as www.i-d-d.com (Interior Design Directory) rather than a link from a site about puppies. Ultimately, make sure you look for appropriate websites to build strong backlinks. Even just having a few high quality links from relevant websites will net you better search engine rankings compared to having a lot of low quality links from unrelated sites.

Anchor Text

Very similar to anchor links for on-page optimization, it's important to have keywords linking back to your website. Anchor text gives search engines a better understanding to the subject matter of the linked page. If someone was to create a link back to your home page with the text *best interior designer,* search engines will take that text into consideration for the ranking of that page. The next time a user does a search for "best interior designer" your website will have a greater chance of appearing because of the backlink with that exact phrase.

When creating backlinks, determine the anchor text you want to use to link back to specific pages on your website. If your services page is optimized for the keyphrase "Denver interior decorating services," try creating an anchor link back to your services page with that exact phrase. The more consistent messaging you can give to a search engine, the greater chance you have at high rankings.

Backlinks from a Site

Obtaining links from a website with many backlinks of their own is another opportunity to increase your search engine rankings. Sites with thousands of backlinks are considered high authoritative websites and give more positive influence on your ranking. On the other hand, sites that are deemed spammy (gambling, prescription, etc.) or of low quality (no backlinks) won't provide much value and can even hurt your rankings.

Make sure to always create backlinks from trusted sites that have backlinks of their own. To check on the amount of backlinks a website has, go to Open Site Explorer at http://www.opensiteexplorer.org/ . After you enter the link's domain name, you'll see link metrics that include the website's authority and amount of total backlinks.

Domain Authority

Backlinks to older domains or certain extensions can also influence positive rankings. Search engines like older domains because they have had a longer time to establish themselves in their industry and build relevant content throughout their website.

You don't always have to research each and every website you link to, but for websites you don't see coming up in the top pages of a search result, take a quick look to see if the backlink is worth it. For more information on the age of a

domain, go to www.seologs.com/dns/domain-check.html and enter in the URL.

Websites with the extension .edu or .gov are usually more highly trusted sites because they aren't publicly available for purchase. If you have the chance to earn one, take advantage. Things such as sponsoring a university career fair, supporting an event, or creating quality resource pages have had success at acquiring these great backlinks.

Knowing these important factors will help you better understand the kinds of inbound links you should strive for. From here it's time to go and search for potential link opportunities.

Creating Backlinks

There are several ways you can create quality backlinks to your website. The most common are:

- Directories
- Article Sites
- Social Bookmarking
- Blogs
- Forums
- Competitors

Directories

A directory is a website that lists individual sites by category. Unlike a search engine, website entries are created and submitted by users, not spiders. Most directories will allow a site owner to submit their site with relevant keywords for inclusion.

Directory submissions are an easy way to build backlinks as you can find thousands of them online. However, because there are so many, you need to be careful in deciding which ones you want to submit to. A few of the common features you will encounter:

- Free Submission
- Paid Submission – One-time fee for inclusion.
- Reciprocal Link – Directory asks you to place a link on your website back to theirs before inclusion.
- Featured – Fee to be placed in a premium position within the business category

When choosing a directory, make sure you think about how the directory will serve your site's best interest. Remember that just because it's free doesn't mean it's a quality backlink. On the other hand, because there are so many directories out there, you don't have to pay for a backlink if you don't want to. The main things to look for are directories that are similar to your industry. If you're an interior designer, search for phrases such as "interior designer directory," "home improvement directory," "home construction directory," "home furnishings directory," etc.

We don't recommend submitting your website to any directories that require a reciprocal link. Adding a lot of outbound links to your site can look like a "link farm" and have a negative impact. There are plenty of great directories out there, so stick to the free or premium listings. Here's a list of popular directories to get you started.

www.webuildlink.com/top-100-free-directory-list-1.html

Article Sites

Articles are a great way to build backlinks and show of your expertise by creating written work on tips, tricks, case-studies, opinions, or whatever you would like to talk about. Here are several guidelines when it comes to creating a quality article.

- Articles should be more than 500 words so you aren't limited to submitting it to certain sites.
- Be informative and show why you're the expert. Great articles can often lead to people referencing it and thus more backlinks.
- Create anchor text back to your website. Many article sites don't allow links in the body of your content so create a signature to reference your website.

Similar to directories, there are a lot of articles sites that are free or one time paid submission. Below is a list of the more popular article sites you can submit to:

http://www.vretoolbar.com/articles/directories.php

Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarks have recently become a great way to drive traffic and backlinks to your website. Some of the more widespread sites such as Reddit, Digg, or StumbleUpon offer hundreds of new stories every minute, making them popular with the fast paced internet users.

Social Bookmarking is essentially a library that stores website links that are bookmarked into different categories. Visitors come to the site to find websites relevant to what they need and "vote" on usefulness. As soon as you make a post, you can expect to have the backlink registered with search engines in a matter of hours (compared to directories or article sites which can take days).

Some of the more popular social bookmarking sites you should begin with are:

- Stumbleupon
- Reddit
- Posterous
- Plaxo
- Jumptags
- Delicious
- Digg

Blogs

With content being king of SEO, blogs are another way to add value to your website through additional text and backlinks. Blogging gives you the opportunity to be more personal and post articles that explain further knowledge about your products or services. Whether you want to promote an event or create a how to guide, here are some tips on effective blogging.

- **Write only relevant articles about your industry.** As you continue growing your audience, keeping consistent posts will keep your target market coming back.

- **Post often.** We recommend making a blog post once a week or more to start. Not only do search engines like fresh content, but your users will come to expect regular updates. If you can't think of topics to write about, frequent article directories such as ezinearticles.com or goarticles.com and see what's trending in your industry.

- **Optimize each page name, title, and content with relevant keywords.** Setting up anchor text back to your website is vital for the backlinks.

- **Promote your blog.** Find online communities such as forums or other similar blogs to exchange conversations and links. You can also post your blog into social bookmarks for added exposure.

If you don't have a blog yet, we recommend setting one up with either blogger.com or wordpress.com. Both have easy to use tools to find a theme and get setup in minutes.

Forums

Forums are a useful way to build backlinks and generate relevant traffic to your website. Forums are often high trafficked sites for users to post questions or find answers to their problems. A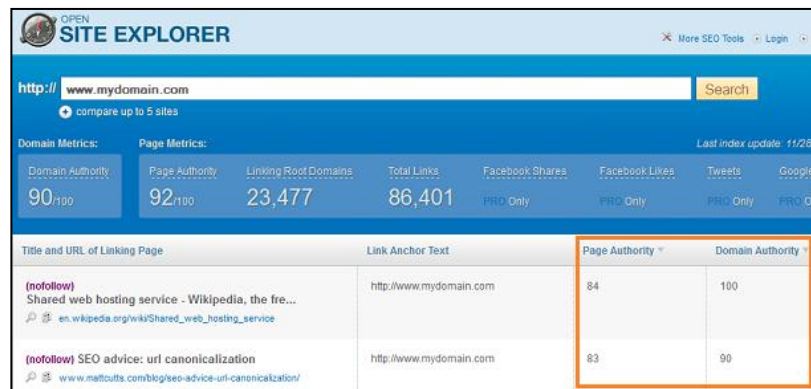 relevant forum is a great way to show off your knowledge and build a reputation for your business. Here are tips when it comes to posting in forums.

- **Create a great signature**. Most forums won't allow you to create a backlink in your question or answer thread, but will permit backlinks in your signature. Craft something that entices people to go to your website to learn more about your products or services.

- **Be informative**. Often people get caught up with just creating backlinks and forget about the overall objective in engaging with readers. A well written forum post not only increases the chance that other people will reference it (backlinks), but it gives you more credibility so that people will want to go to your website for further information.

- **Search for forums in your industry and start posting with backlinks to your pages**. These quick and easy links can boost your ranking for multiple pages within your site.

Competitors

It's always good to start with your competition when discovering what sites to link from. People who are on page one of a search engine have most likely done some form of SEO themselves and can alleviate some of your research. The tool discussed earlier, www.opensiteexplorer.org/, can also show you what sites your competitors have linked to.

After you enter their domain name, Open Site Explorer will return results that show you both page authority and domain authority. The higher the number, the higher the quality of the backlink.

We recommend researching several competitors and see if you can't copy of their success.

Backlinks are everywhere, but it will take time and effort in your part to research and submit your links to various websites. Your competitors are likely doing the same thing so finding links isn't a one-time solution. Set aside time every week and keep a consistent effort to take full advantage of SEO.

Social Media

It's no secret that social media has become an important factor in reaching your target market. Social signals such as likes, shares, tweets, etc… are being incorporated into search engines ranking algorithms making it vital for your business to be part of it.

Setting up Social Media

You can't be devoted to every social media site so do some research in order to determine which ones will be most effective. Does your target market prefer articles (blogs), videos (YouTube), pictures (Pinterest), or daily updates relevant to your industry (Facebook & Twitter)? Decide which ones you want to be a part of and formulate a game plan.

Start your community off right

- Design a professional looking social media page to attract and retain users.
- Add social media icons to your website to allow users the chance to join your community.

Broadcast

Tweet, blog, post, etc.

- Case Studies
- Product Comparison
- Top 10 Lists
- How to Guides
- Controversial Writing
- Ask Questions
- Humor

Engage

Respond to every comment or thread that mentions your business. The goal is to get people talking about you.

Here is a list of the more popular social media sites. We won't get into the process of how to post to each one, because there are a lot of online guides, but we can offer several recommendations.

- **Twitter** – 53% of all twitter users recommend companies in a tweet. Be human and tweet 3-7 times per week. Make sure to reply to those who follow you.

- **Facebook** – With over 4 billion shares a day, Facebook is definitely a website you need to associate your business with. Set up a company name (facebook.com/companyname) and post 3+ times a week. You can also add videos, pictures, polls, etc. to keep your followers engaged.

- **YouTube** – 2nd largest search engine with over 4 billion views a day. The video market is one of the fastest growing areas for attracting customers as a video is 53 times more likely to appear on the first page of a search engine for a keyword. Create a professional YouTube channel and post 1-3 minute videos at least once a month.

- **LinkedIn** – This social network is great for finding jobs, people, and business opportunities. With over 100 million members, you can list contacts you have had some level of relationship with. We recommend starting a group to educate your target market and update your company profile 3-5 times a week.

- **Pinterest** – Voted the fastest growing social network, Pinterest is a photo sharing website. Be sure to follow relevant businesses and add the "pin it" button to your website for visitors to build backlinks on your behalf.

- **Google+** - Similar to Facebook, Google created their own social media site allowing you to connect with people and share videos, pictures, and posts. Although it hasn't taken off like Facebook, you should create an account and make posts due to the fact that Google owns it.

- **Craigslist (Local Business)** - Promote your business on Craigslist and see how your target market reacts. You'll be surprised on the amount of queries you receive.

- **Google Places (Local Maps)** – If you're a local business, it's crucial to have your company listed in Google Places. These days anytime you do a local search, Google displays their map results first. You can submit your website for free and gain a competitive advantage over your competition.

The thing to remember is to choose one or two to focus on so you don't burn yourself out. Social media can be a full time job so make sure you are taking advantage of the ones that will be most effective.

BONUS: Google Analytics

Search Engine Optimization isn't only about on-page and off-page optimization, but also about tracking results. In order to stay competitive in the online market, you must make sure that your website is performing as it should.

Google provides a free tool to help analyze your website's statistics. Some of the more important features they provide are:

- Determine which marketing initiatives are most effective

- Help you decide which customer segments are most valuable

- Tell you where visitors come from and what they do on your website

- Give you ways to improve website conversion

- Let you know where people enter and leave the website

- Tell you what search terms people are using to find your site

Setting up Google Analytics

Add a Tracking Code – Before you can gain insight into your websites statistics, you must first add their tracking code. Google Analytics will provide html code that needs to be added to each one of your pages using the html element.

Understanding the options

View Analytics – With the tracking code installed you can now start viewing insights into how your website is performing.

Audience

The audience tab gives you clarity into who visits your website. The subpages are as follows:

- **Overview** – General information regarding the amount of traffic you've received, average time someone stays on your website, bounce rate, demographics, and language.

- **Demographics** – Learn where in the world people have found your website from and the language they speak. This is especially useful for local businesses to see if they are attracting visitors in their area.

- **Behavior** – Learn how people engage your website with how long they stay and if they come back.

- **Browser –** Gain insight into which browser is most popular. If you see a lot of mobile activity, make sure you website is mobile friendly.

- **Mobile** – See which mobile devices frequent your website. If you see a certain device that spends less time than average, figure out what may be causing the quick exit.

Advertising

This section is for people who use Google AdWords and want to keep track on how their PPC keywords are performing. We won't go into this part of Google Analytics as there are prior steps involved with the AdWords platform before seeing data.

Traffic Sources

The traffic sources tab helps to determine what people are typing into search engines and landing on your website.

Overview – Quickly see how much traffic you've received, what sources they came from, and top keywords you've been found for. You can click on any of the data for a better analysis.

Sources – Break down the different avenues people have found your website from.

Direct – Direct traffic is someone who types in your domain name into their browser's address bar rather than doing a search for you. At one point in time, they would have had to learn of your domain name in order to directly go to your website.

Referral – Referral traffic is people who find your website through other avenues other than a search engine. This could be from a directory, blog, forum, Facebook, etc… This is very useful if you do social media as you can track the effectiveness of your campaign.

Search – Learn what keywords people have found your website for. Hopefully you will see the keyphrases you optimized around, but also take notice of the different variations and long-tailed keywords your site has been picked up for. As we said before, SEO is always ongoing so if you see keywords that aren't particularly relevant on your website, try adding them through the creation of a new page or blog post. Finding keyword trends is a great way to stay on top of your competition.

Search Engine Optimization – If you setup Google Webmaster Tools as previously mentioned in the sitemap section of this guide, you can link it to your analytics account for more insight into search queries and average ranking position. These queries show you which pages are performing and which pages may need additional attention (better content or relevant keyphrases).

Social – Identify networks and communities where people are engaging with your content. You can compare traffic patterns from social visitors.

Content

The content tab will allow you to see how each one of your pages are performing, top landing and exit pages, as well as load times.

All pages – Learn which pages are showing up most in search results and which ones need improvement. You should be able match up your best performing keywords to your best performing pages; otherwise you may not be sending people to the correct page their looking for (causing higher bounce rates and early exits).

Landing/Exit Pages – Track how people navigate through your website. It's especially important to focus on exit pages and what might be causing someone to leave your site. Test different scenarios such as call to actions (having your phone number at the top of the page or a button to direct people to your contact form) to see if that improves conversion.

Site Speed – Page load times are another factor that search engines take in account when ranking your website. Make sure you site loads quickly otherwise you could deter people away. Elements such as videos and high resolution images can cause slower speeds so limit the amount of these per page.

Conversion

The conversion tab allows you to set up specific goals to track and monitor. This is useful if you want to see the path someone takes from entry to conversion (for example: sale, or phone call.)

Overview – If you have already set up goals, the overview page will display the amount of completions for that specific goal.

Goal URLs – If you consider a certain page of your website to be a conversion, you can add the URL into Google Analytics to track. Common examples of when you would use this are:

- You want to track how many people fill out your contact form. If you add the URL of your thank you page into Google Analytics, you track how many times people got to that page by clicking the submit button.
- You create a landing page for a promotion your running and want to see how many people go to it from Facebook. Add the URL to Google Analytics and announce the promotion.

Goal Flow – With certain goals you can see the path someone took from the page they entered to conversion. Use this report to answer questions like:

- Are there a lot of unexpected exits from a step in the middle?
- Is there a place where traffic loops back to a previous step?

- Is there a segment of traffic that converts more or less than others?

Take your time and go through Google Analytics to see which tabs and sections will be most useful to track. One of the most important steps in online marketing is to always be monitoring how your website is performing so you can adapt to your target audience.

Conclusion

Now that you read this guide, the worst thing you could do is try and tackle everything at once. Rest assured that today, tomorrow, and even a year from now, people will still be using search engines to find products and services. SEO is a game of patience, so take it step by step and build the relevancy and trust needed to rank high in search results.

At Homestead, we wish you all the best and success in increasing your web presence, earning more visitors, and ultimately driving new sales.