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2011 SEO Insights and Tips

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February 9, 2011

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Executive Summary

Numerous changes face the future of search marketing. Literally, the only constant is change in this industry and the tempo increases daily. Besides understanding industry transformations / developments, a search partner must have strong business logic to help businesses navigate search as a marketing medium. Search is getting more sophisticated and the major channels (Google, YouTube, Bing and Yahoo) are positioning themselves for dominance. Agreements and technological advances are fueling this growth. The agreement between Facebook and Bing to return outcomes based on Facebook "Likes" from searchers' friends is just one of many great examples.¹

The continually-evolving search engine landscape is driving interactive marketers to think in a more strategic manner – more like business planners and less like search engine optimization (SEO) experts.

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The Evolution in SEO Tactics

For over ten years, search engine marketers have used a large variety of SEO techniques. Many have used a lingering inventory of tactics that have served them well, giving them a way to mysteriously improve search engine rankings for clients.

Over time, however, many SEO marketers' long lists and approaches have proven to be weak in practice by today's standards. Their techniques are inadequately modeling today's sophisticated social and mobile customer, who want a real relationship with the people they do business with. It also fails to focus on providing a great customer experience, something that the best brands of today are defined by. This is why search engines have been hard at work to keep SEO practices legitimate.

SEO marketing that focuses on the entire customer experience from beginning to end is more efficient

and more valuable to businesses. This white paper describes how SEO is changing, how to avoid shortcomings, and how LevelSet Solutions is building tools to support businesses' needs in this fast changing environment. The real SEO secret to success is in maximizing resources by defining solid principles, simplifying concepts, and deploying a team who stays abreast of the best practices in the industry.

In an industry that is constantly evolving, it helps to take a look at the biggest changes and how they will impact SEO professionals, their clients, and the everyday online experience.

There is no great secret here. People are searching for services or products. Paying attention to the changes in the SEO market will have people finding your content, not your competitors'.

Selecting an SEO Firm: Four Questions to Guarantee Success

According to Forrester's Q2 2010 Consumer Technographics^{®2}, consumers' search engine behaviors have changed. In 2004, a user would not have found a brands website or content from Twitter. This fact alone produces several good questions for businesses to ask when searching for an SEO partner. Businesses should extend far beyond any remaining SEO marketers guaranteeing search results³ or antiquated techniques. Google in 2005 is very different from the Google of today. Besides, search today is not just about Google. To apply search marketing more comprehensively, businesses should ask:

1. Are they integrating search into a business plan?

Good search marketers integrate tactics with an understanding of the overall business plan. Simply put, they need to help solve business problems. A partner applying a comprehensive search marketing plan will help define a strategy to meet business goals.

2. Are they identifying how you are found?

Customer behavior online is not linear. It is mostly impulsive, unpredictable and performed over multiple platforms and channels. People are interacting via email, mobile and the social web simultaneously. A search partner should help with customer maps to develop or maintain proximity with audiences across the best channels.

3. Are they optimizing across your customer's conversion?

Search is changing how marketers look at the marketing funnel. Many times the funnel focuses on potential customers only⁴. The objective should focus on the entire customer experience from beginning to end. Understanding searcher intent rather than just keyword use is important. Potential customers who are unaware or uninterested in a business may respond to particular content differently than current or

passionate customers. Content strategies should be more than finding good keywords. They should detail intent, behavior and effectiveness of different searchers.

4. Do they consider reporting and analysis vital?

A search partner should be able to establish a baseline and track progress with adequate tools. A solid firm will be able to make recommendations and not treat SEO as a dark science. Additionally, using cross-channel customer data and customer insight can improve the profitability of search marketing programs. A search partner should maintain multi-channel insights from their client's customers and where they choose to interact.

Target Qualified Traffic

Unless a business model simply relies on traffic, an SEO partner needs to approach search marketing from a multifaceted perspective. The goal is not aggregate traffic; it is about increasing qualified traffic.

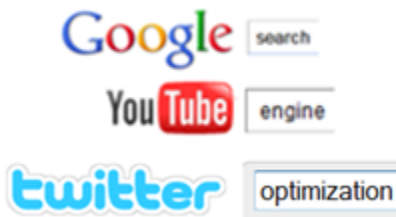
For most site owners, this means lead generation and sales, not high ranking and traffic associated with phrases. The ultimate goal is ranking well for keywords far enough along your targets' information journey to result in a request for more information, a contact or a purchase.

More complex online marketing goals need to be defined early on in the strategy. If an SEO strategy results in more traffic but the call to action is buried deep within a site and results in few conversions, the success will be minimal. Also, improving organic rankings is not a quick fix. It is an investment that will pay off over the long run. Search partners should offer scalable solutions for any size website because there are numerous factors that impact a sites rank in organic results. Some of these are shown in **Figure 1** in four main areas to focus on for search engine success.

Figure 1: SEO Search Success

<p>1 Research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand audience behaviors, preferences, methods of publishing and sharing • Identify keywords, where conversations are taking place and influencers • Identify and learn from what are their competitors doing or not doing right • Define objectives and targets that are specific to the client company and identify problems/challenges
<p>2 Technical Optimization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that web stats/analytics are installed and configured • Check site for W3C compliance and issues with domain configuration, redirects, site architecture, navigation (and fix errors) • Review / update text to ensure that there is no outdated information
<p>3 Processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared to change the method, not the mission (search engines change their methods and continue to evolve everyday) • Establish a content strategy, writing, creative guidelines and maintain an editorial calendar
<p>4 Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you have a plan in place to review web stats regularly and measure goals • Ensure that goals roll up to specific objectives and specific measurement tools to monitor search engine performance of SEO efforts • Mine data for actionable insights in an ongoing SEO effort

What's Coming Next to Transform the SEO Industry



SEO professionals have to stay informed in the latest search innovations that affect placement strategies. There will be changes to the way SEO professionals run their clients' campaigns in 2011 and beyond. There will always be technical advances that affect the industry as a whole, and we believe SEO professionals and businesses will need to adapt to compete successfully in the ever-evolving online world.

Industry on the Move

1. Social Search will continue to transform the SEO Industry. During the summer in 2010, Facebook alone reached 500 million users⁵. In 2010 we saw certain Twitter feeds included in Google search results. Results may integrate other social networking sites, like Foursquare, Gowalla, Brightkite and numerous other sites that have not even been developed yet. Changes highlight the need to integrate social networking if they have not already for SEO professionals.
2. Google will continue to increase its efforts to remove user⁶ results of search spam that are created by aggregation sites, content farms, and automated blogs.
3. Google and Microsoft will continue to battle it out for ways to gain market share.⁷
4. Software and tools have always been a beneficial part of successful SEO programs. There are several SEO software companies growing to critical mass based on the market's demand. As search marketers advance, so are the tools used to conduct the work. New SEO tools, like Conductor's Searchlight technology⁸, rid the user of having to do the SEO work manually. This technology tracks and values site content changes that influence natural search rankings.

Summary

The choice to adapt to the ever-changing landscape that is social media and SEO can effectively decide the lifespan of a business. With the vast differences between search engines in the past and search engines now, there are several questions that businesses need to ask when it comes down to selecting a SEO firm. Creating a solid business model that optimizes qualified, not aggregate, traffic will allow for success in the long-term plans of the business.

Endnotes

- ¹ Facebook announced a partnership with Bing on October 13, 2010, which gives users a way to bring friends' recommendations to online search, "[Bringing Your Friends to Bing: Search Now More Social](#)" blog post on The Facebook Blog.
- ² North American Technographics® Interactive Marketing Online Benchmark Recontact Survey, Q2 2010 (US)
- ³ "[No one can guarantee a #1 ranking on Google.](#)" Google Webmaster Central
- ⁴ [The Future of Search Marketing](#) – Shar VanBoskirk, Forrester Research
- ⁵ [It's Official: Facebook Passes 500 Million Users](#) Mashable
- ⁶ [Google Search and Search Engine Spam](#) Official Google Blog
- ⁷ [Microsoft and Google executives traded barbs at the Farsight Summit over Google's accusations that Bing is copying its Web-search results.](#) CIO Insight
- ⁸ The Emergence of the SEO Platform: How First Movers Are Gaining the Upper Hand in Natural Search - [Conductor's Searchlight](#)



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About LevelSet Solutions

LevelSet Solutions is a collection of highly experienced and talented professionals who joined forces because of their passion to help companies grow and succeed. Over 60 years combined business-technology and marketing expertise has provided LevelSet Solutions with experience across virtually every industry from small, nimble organizations up to Fortune 500 companies. Its vision is to provide superior planning, execution, and success. LevelSet Solutions suite of services includes Internet marketing, business technology solutions and custom software. Its passion coupled with its exceptional project management and ability to execute on smart plans makes LevelSet Solutions an asset and unique partner. Our team consists of business technology professionals, marketing experts and digital strategists combining a holistic view of the digital landscape.

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