

The Business Owner's Guide to SEO Basics:

The What, Why, and How of Using SEO to Better Your Business

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Introduction

The What, Why, and How of Using SEO to Better Your Business

Whether you've just started your own company or you've been at it for a while, you need a strong digital marketing strategy to grow your business. A crucial component of that strategy is search engine optimization (SEO). Maybe you've seen SEO mentioned in a marketing blog or business-related article. So, what is SEO?

SEO is a marketing channel, which is a platform for getting people to see and interact with your brand. Other marketing channels include email marketing, print ads, and social media. In this ebook, you'll learn how SEO works and, more importantly, how you can use it to grow your business.

First, you'll receive a primer on what SEO is, the advantages of SEO over other online marketing channels, and the potential benefits it can provide. Then, you'll get a more comprehensive look at the key components of SEO, as well as the what constitutes good SEO versus bad SEO.

After reading this ebook, you'll be better equipped to make informed decisions about the direction of your company's SEO and overall marketing strategy. Then, you can make the most of your marketing budget and secure sustained growth for your organization.



What Is SEO?

How Do Search Engines Work?

As you know from your own experiences using Google, Yahoo, Ask, or Bing, a search engine is a tool for finding information. It pulls this information from its index, the archive of pages it collects through a process called indexing. This process is carried out by a program called a “crawler” or “bot”. The bot follows links and combs websites for information, sorting content into the archive along the way.

Each search engine has its own algorithm for sorting information to display the most relevant results first. Every one of these algorithms considers a different set of ranking factors to determine where content appears on the search engine results pages, or SERPs. Google’s search bot analyzes over 900 different factors to determine how relevant a website is to your search query. These factors include:

- The content on the page
- The structure of the site
- The links on the site and where they lead
- The geographic location of the user making the search query
- How well the page is optimized for mobile devices
- How quickly the page loads
- How accessible the server is
- How many links there are to this site from social networks (aka social signals)

These are just a few of the biggest factors we know about. Search engine don’t typically make their algorithms publicly available. They don’t want to encourage marketers to exploit them, and instead want to be able to curate results that appear naturally. They’re also constantly tweaking these algorithms. Google, for example, makes over 500 changes per year according to the SEO experts at Moz. Some are major changes that come with announcements, while many others are subtle and shrouded in mystery.

These frequently shifting goalposts make it essential for marketers to stay up-to-date on current best practices. This is exactly why it’s so valuable to have an online marketing firm like Frontier Marketing that specializes in doing exactly that.



What Is SEO?

How Do People Use Them?

As you know probably know from your own experiences, people input various keywords and phrases that describe what they're searching for online. If they don't immediately get what they wanted, they'll modify the search terms until something produces the right results. If "what is search" didn't return relevant links, maybe next the user will try "what's a search engine" or "search engine optimization how to" or something similar.

What you should keep in mind is that the searcher is always seeking an answer to a problem or question. They aren't browsing aimlessly, stumbling onto your site, and realizing they need your product or service. They're looking to fulfill a specific need. It's up to you to offer a solution, so that they'll know at first glance that they've found exactly what they were searching for.

What's the point, though? Why are you trying to please these anonymous internet users?



What Is SEO?

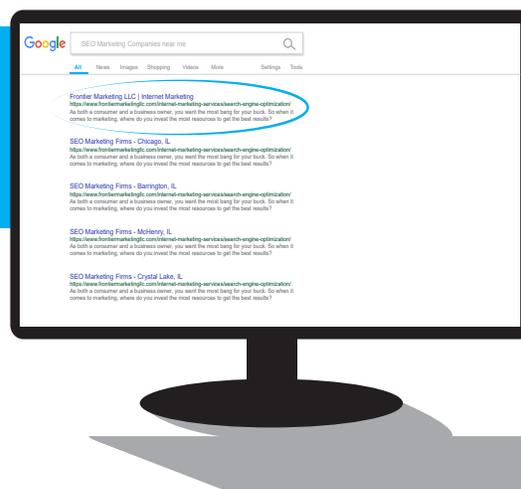
What is the End Goal of SEO?

When you've gone through the trouble of creating a website, you want it to be seen. How do you get visitors? Well, a large portion of internet activity these days goes through a search engine. SEO is the art of bringing users from the search engine to your site. Once they're there, you can convert them into customers.

The mechanics of this revolve around optimizing your content with the criteria encouraged by the search engine. This way, the content is indexed, and the search engine can determine its relevance to different keywords, find it more easily, and place it into search results.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of SEO is to get your content to appear as early and often as possible in the search results seen by your potential clients.

For example, if Frontier Marketing's customers are searching the phrase "search engine optimization," our goal would be to appear as early as possible in the results. Ideally, Frontier Marketing's page would rank first for that search query in the geographic area that we serve. This maximizes the chances that the searcher will see our website.



"SEO is the art of bringing users from the search engine to your site. Once they're there, you can convert them into customers".



Why Is SEO Important?

SEO's Role in Your Marketing Strategy

With social media campaigns, infographics, and other exciting new marketing channels, you might not be investing much in your SEO. That's a mistake. Over the years, SEO has grown to become a top contender among online marketing channels in terms of return on investment and other factors.

The main way that SEO drives business is through keywords, search traffic, and conversions. SEO starts with keyword research, where you figure out what terms your customer base is searching online. This yields customer insights that help you build your strategy and bring in more search traffic. Since SEO attracts people already interested in your products or services, this traffic includes high-quality leads. You can then convert those leads into paying customers.



What role does SEO play in your overall marketing strategy, though? Well, if you're going to utilize SEO to its fullest potential, the first thing to understand is that it's a long-term investment.

Contrast SEO-optimized content with paid ads. When you purchase a pay-per-click ad, that ad stays in place for a bit and then expires. Once that happens, you stop gaining any future benefits from that investment. Paid ads also don't integrate with your other channels. The same goes for traditional marketing channels like yellow pages, radio and TV ads, etc. They don't tie in together, and once you stop paying they're gone. In contrast, SEO is the gift that keeps on giving. It also plays into your other digital marketing channels.

For these reasons, SEO is a superior marketing channel that represents a serious investment in your business's marketing strategy. Implement a strong SEO strategy, and your content will generate leads and conversions, as well as support your other marketing channels.

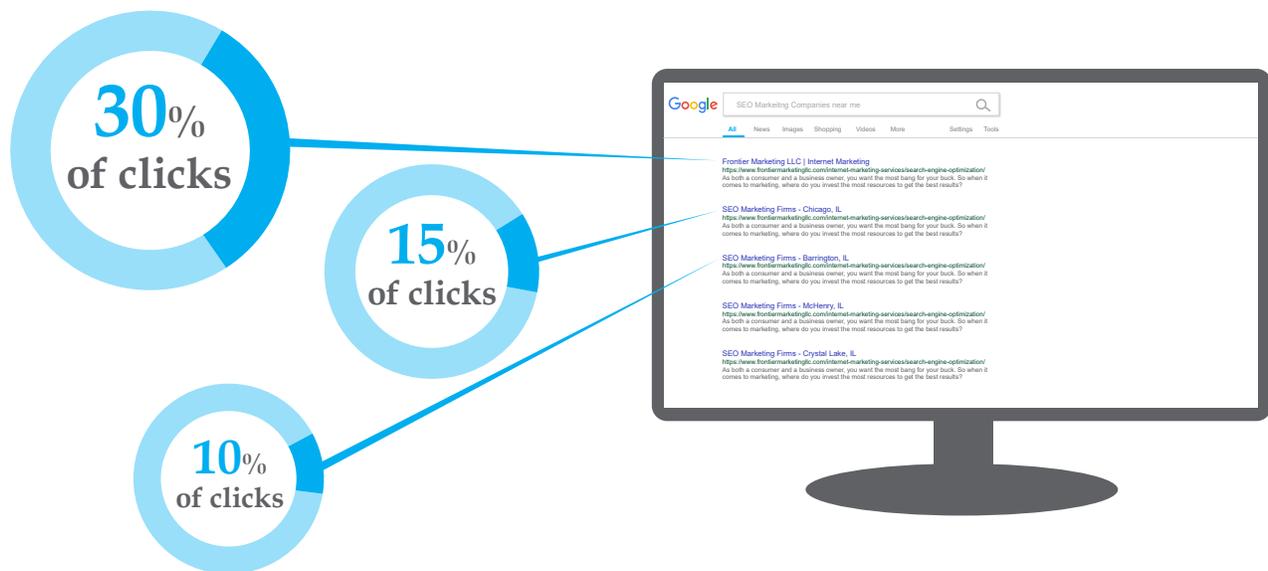
“SEO is a superior marketing channel that represents a serious investment into your business's marketing strategy”.



How Does SEO Help My Business?

What You Can Expect as a Business Owner

According to the Advanced Web Ranking organic click-through-rate research, about 30% of clicks go to the top result. The second result gets 15%, and the third gets 10%. In total, 65% of clicks go to the top five results alone. This means that if your page isn't in that five, or even on the first page, you're unlikely to get much search traffic.



SEO is designed to move your website ever closer to the top of search results pages. Getting seen early and often means more clicks, visitors, and conversions, since users know that search engines rank relevant and authoritative results highest.

You may be wondering what this process will look like. We start by focusing on the low-hanging fruit—auditing existing online assets, targeting available keywords, optimizing for local, etc. Then we keep the momentum going by consistently applying SEO best practices.

How Does SEO Help My Business?

What You Can Expect as a Business Owner

Typically, you start moving up the search rankings around 90 days in. You'll steadily begin to dominate more online real estate and leverage synergies with your other marketing channels. At the same time, we grow more familiar with your business. As we become more effective at tailoring our tactics to you, your long-term strategy starts to take shape.



Over the course of the next six months, you continue your upward trajectory and start ranking on the first page for specific keywords in your industry and area. Optimized blogs from previous months and even years will continue to attract web traffic. As your archive of optimized content grows month by month, the returns they provide will stack and accumulate.

Remember again that the leads that SEO generates are coming from highly qualified traffic. These are people who were searching because they're ready, able, and willing to make a specific purchase. Take into account not just the number of leads you get, but the quality as well.

Overall, the process of building up your SEO strategy is like a race where you're paddling a canoe upstream. It's a lot of hard work at first, but each stroke of the paddle takes you further and faster than the last. You steadily build up momentum, until eventually you just have to maintain your current speed. All that work early on sets you up for easy cruising later — but don't take this to mean you can just stop paddling altogether. Otherwise, you'll start to drift backwards with the current, and the competition will pass you by. In SEO, you have to compare what you're doing to what your competitors are doing. If you stop putting in work while they keep improving, you'll lose the progress you made and fall behind.



How Does SEO Help My Business?

Benefits to Conversions and ROI



Of course, you want more than just for people to see your website. You want them to become loyal customers. What good is increased web traffic if those people aren't sticking around or making purchases? Fortunately, good SEO strategy does more than simply increase traffic – it also increases conversions.

This is largely due to the parameters that search engines like Google have put in place for ranking pages. As discussed previously in the “How do search engines work” section, the algorithms take numerous factors into account. These include content, site structure, load times, geographic location, and more. Other factors that are now being considered by Google's searchbot include the length of time users stay on the page, the number of pages that users view on the site before leaving, etc.

All of this is designed around creating a good user experience. In Google's eyes, a good experience is one where the user's need is fulfilled meaningfully and conveniently. So, you have to produce content that's as relevant, useful, and accessible to your readers as possible. When you follow this model, viewers who visit your site will actually find value there, stay longer, read more, and have higher chances of engaging with your brand. This means higher conversion rates. Users are filling out a form or engaging in some other way. They're becoming future customers.

According to the well respected Search Engine Journal, leads generated by SEO have a 14.6% close rate. Contrast that against outbound leads like print advertising or direct mail, which have an average close rate of 1.7%. Many advertisers have organic lead conversion rates of 2-5%, but with proper SEO strategy you can get a lead conversion rate of upwards of 10-20%, which will give you a larger pool of leads to draw from when looking for sales to close.

This is why it's important to put out high-value material, and why we focus on content of value to your specific target audience.



What Components Go into SEO?

Keyword Research

So, what exactly are the different parts of SEO? The first is keyword research. This is where you figure out what keywords in your industry people are using to find you and businesses like you. This is accomplished with keyword and analytic software that tracks what queries led people to your site, which ones are most often searched and most highly sought after in your industry, etc. However, this is more complicated than it sounds.

“Web Development”

“Graphic Design”

“Nonprofit Consulting”

“Search Engine Optimization”

With SEO, it’s not enough for you to simply go after the most obvious keyword for your industry. That’s because these are likely the keywords that have the fiercest competition among your competitors, and if they’re more firmly established, have a longer-running SEO strategy, and outspend you in the marketing department, it may not be realistic to compete for that keyword. Your keyword research, then, should lead you to alternatives that fall more squarely within your niche—terms that are still searched often, but are less competitive. If you can’t rank for “teddy bears,” maybe you can rank for “handmade teddy bears,” “customized stuffed animals,” or some other related term.



What Components Go into SEO?

Keyword Research

Part of accomplishing this is also learning about long-tail keywords and geomods. Long-tail keywords are keywords that have extended into three- or four-word phrases. Users who use these have a specific product or service in mind. Continuing the above example, a good long-tail keyword might be “custom purple handmade teddy bear.” These force you to get more specific to your product, but on the flip side, they’ll be easier to rank for and you’ll be fulfilling more specific user needs.

The way people search is changing to favor longer queries with long-tail keywords. This may be due to people using voice-to-text for search, which facilitates more conversational queries with complete phrases and questions. The format of search changes in other ways as well. One example is geomods. A geomod is a location added to a keyword. For example, you might specify in your content, “custom handmade teddy bears in Chicago, IL.” This builds your local SEO, meaning you’ll appear more for people in your area. People are even starting to end their queries with “near me” instead of “near Chicago.” Mobile users now understand that their search results are already customized for their location.

Tracking these trends and best practices is exactly why it’s important to have a knowledgeable marketing team at your disposal. Frontier Marketing employs professionals who understand the ongoing changes in keywords and keyword research, and can choose the best keywords for you to target.



“Chicago Web Development”

“Graphic Design in Fox Lake”

“Search Engine Optimization in Chicago”

What Components Go into SEO?

Website Design

The layout of your website is a more important factor in your search rankings than you may realize. When a crawler like the Google searchbot investigates your site, it analyzes not only the content, but also the structure of your site.

Not only is poor design inconvenient, it also detracts from your credibility!

For example, one metric Google examines is load speed. Fast load times are important because they give mobile users a more responsive experience. This prevents them from bouncing off the page when it doesn't load immediately. You can influence this with things like the size and quality of images you use. This is just one of the many factors Google analyzes when inspecting your site structure.

All of this gives the search engine an idea of how easy your website is to navigate. If your website is poorly organized and the individual pages are poorly designed, the search engine will penalize you in the search rankings. Again, it's all about being relevant and useful—here, the emphasis is on useful. No matter how valuable the information you're offering, it won't be useful if the user immediately leaves the page due to poor formatting.



What Components Go into SEO?

Website Design

Optimized website design is about more than just ease of navigation, though. There are all sorts of guidelines which the algorithms use to determine the credibility of your site. These include the amount of content per page, the number and placement of internal and external links, meta descriptions, and more. It takes more to optimize a site than just to make it easy to navigate. You need the expertise of online marketing professionals who know the best practices for SEO-oriented website design.



Currently, the direction that Google is pushing and which marketers are finding most effective is prioritizing mobile search and responsive web design. Google even provides a free search tool called a mobile checker. It provides valuable info about how mobile-friendly your site is.

Sites that don't pass the mobile test won't be displayed on mobile searches—a crippling loss, considering more than half of internet traffic is on mobile devices these days.



What Components Go into SEO?

Content



The primary method of maintaining and building your SEO authority is content marketing. This is the practice of regularly creating content such as blog posts and infographics and publishing them on your website.

Why is content creation so important in SEO? Because search engines factor it in heavily when ranking websites for search results. Google tries to encourage and reward pages for being relevant

and useful. Some ways that it measures this include time the user spends on the page, whether they reach the bottom, how many pages they browse before leaving the site, and more. It also tracks how often you publish content. A source that publishes regularly is more likely to be credible and has more for the searchbot to analyze.

Company blogs are an amazingly useful way of improving your SEO. Blogs provide useful information and advice that answers readers' questions and problems. To get the most value out of a blog, it should be optimized for search. That includes proper natural keyword usage, formatting, length, and more. This is why getting a company blog to deliver maximal SEO benefits requires the use of professional content writers like those employed by Frontier Marketing.

While the SEO value provided by each individual blog may seem small at first, a well-optimized blog will continue drawing visitors long after it was first posted. As you continue adding blogs to your archive month after month, the benefits begin to stack up. This creates sustained growth. Hubspot, the popular marketing blog, claims that 90% of their new leads and 70% of their traffic every month comes from blog posts published months or even years before.

When you contract a professional firm like Frontier Marketing, we help you produce unique and original content that fulfills readers' needs. This tool builds your SEO authority and boosts your digital marketing strategy.



What Components Go into SEO?

Content

Other types of content besides blogs include:

Lists

Infographics

Video

PowerPoints

Ebooks

Digital Brochures

Photos

Graphics

Audio Interviews



What Components Go into SEO?

Link-Building

Backlinks and link-building used to be the primary strategy for getting a website to rank at the top of Google. While the strategies have shifted toward content, reviews, and citations, link-building is still a critical part of any SEO strategy.

Link-building is the practice of trying to get as many **high-quality links** to your website as possible. Years ago marketers would try to take advantage of link-building through all sorts of underhanded tactics like leaving their link in online comments sections. This artificially signaled to searchbots that because other places on the internet were linking to that website, it must be a reputable and useful source.

“Link-building is the practice of trying to get as many high-quality links to your website as possible”.

Eventually, the search engine algorithms caught on. Now those sorts of practices are not only ineffective, but they can also get you penalized in the search rankings. Link building is now centered on naturally collecting high-quality links —

but what's a high-quality link?

A high-quality link is one that's from an authoritative and authentic source. You can't simply link to one of your websites from another website you yourself own. Google specifically warns against this technique. Ideally, the link is from an expert in a given field with their own followers.

If you write a guest blog, you can link to your site in your byline. If you have a collaborative campaign with a business partner, they might link to your site as well. Simply creating quality content will naturally create more inbound links as people share your content in their own blogs, on social media, etc. Search engines have successfully incentivized SEO practices that are honest, natural, and accurately establish sources' reputability, while discouraging attempts to exploit the algorithm.



What Components Go into SEO?

Reviews



Another way to build your site's SEO value is with online reviews. Much like links, reviews help build up your reputation and signal to Google's searchbot that users have found value in your content. In fact, reviews are one of the main factors that Google's algorithms consider for search rankings, because it's assumed that they're generated by real people.

There are several different platforms for generating and collecting reviews. We at Frontier Marketing focus on Facebook, Google, and Yelp. Each of these has different strengths and requires a distinct approach. Facebook has a high degree of user involvement. Google's review aggregation is tied in with their suite of other services like Maps. Google also recently began showing reviews from other review sites like Yelp on the search results page. Yelp meanwhile is the only one of these three focused exclusively on reviews.



Collecting reviews from past customers is a powerful way to improve your SEO because reviews have high conversion value. When you're looking for a business in your area, you almost always take aggregated review scores into account. Just think—when you're looking for a place to eat, don't you favor places with a lot of stars and positive reviews? This is essentially the online version of word-of-mouth. Having good reviews is a huge benefit not only for search rankings, but also for generating conversions online.

Review collection can be accomplished in a number of ways. Maybe when a customer completes a purchase they get an automated email asking them to write a review. You could also provide step-by-step instructions on how to leave a review. Branded marketing materials can suggest reviews as well.



What Components Go into SEO?

Reviews

Here are some “do”s and “don’t”s for reviews:

Do:

- Respond to reviews
- Be polite, professional, and courteous
- Monitor reviews regularly
- Encourage video testimonials



Don't:

- Solicit reviews with gifts
- Collect reviews in-office
- Pay for fake reviews
- Ignore negative reviews



What Components Go into SEO?

Citations

A citation is any online listing that includes your name, address, and phone number (NAP). They typically also include a link to your website. Prominent examples include directories like the Better Business Bureau and Angie's List.

Monitoring and maintaining these citations is important to your marketing and SEO strategy. Google keeps an eye on them and favors businesses which maintain consistent information across the internet. The searchbot sees you as less credible when your business is listed in multiple places with conflicting information about your NAP, hours, payments accepted, and other details. It also can't sort your information as easily in things like snippet previews in search results.



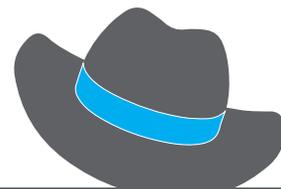
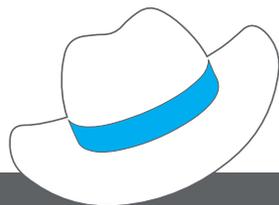
That's why it's important to remove incorrect or conflicting information and duplicate listings. It's also extremely important to complete the verification processes on these sites, like claiming your Yelp page. These processes typically involve phone and/or postal verification, to prove you own this business and have the correct info.

To really get the most out of citations though, you should seek out high-value citations in niche directories. The Chamber of Commerce is a good starting point – for a fee, you can have your business listed in this local and authoritative directory. Beyond that, you can look for niche citations specific to your industry. Medical professionals use Zocdoc and Healthgrades, contractors use HomeAdvisor and Angie's List, etc.

Maintaining consistency across all citations will boost your local search value, make your business easier to find, and improve your rankings and conversion rate.



The Right Way to Do SEO vs. the Wrong Way to Do SEO



White Hat vs. Black Hat

As with anything else, there's a wrong way to do SEO and a right way. These are respectively referred to as black hat and white hat techniques.

Black hat techniques are attempts to game the system and artificially boost returns without putting in effort to produce quality content. White hat techniques focus the needs of the user while staying within the search engine's guidelines.

Here are some specific tactics in each category that you accordingly should either avoid or pursue.

Black Hat Techniques



These techniques attempt to manipulate search engines and users to achieve short-term results. They're typically penalized by the search bots because they're dishonest, create a worse user experience, and often violate search engines' rules. This makes it important to avoid these tactics and any marketer that suggests them for your content.

Examples include duplicating or stealing content, over-optimizing content by stuffing in too many keywords, or including hidden content the same color as the background to affect rankings without changing what a viewer sees. These are all manipulative practices which search engines penalize.



There's a longer list of black-hat practices to watch out for when it comes to link-building. They include buying links, spamming comments sections with links to your site, reciprocal links, hidden links, footer links, malicious backlinks, and overuse of anchor text. Some of these tactics may seem innocent or even smart, but none of them improve the quality of the user experience. Google and other search engines will penalize those who use them.



The Right Way to Do SEO vs. the Wrong Way to Do SEO

White Hat vs. Black Hat

White Hat Techniques



These techniques, by contrast, focus on doing the best you can to provide users the optimal experience. Search engines increasingly use metrics that attempt to measure how beneficial your content is to users.

Your content should be useful, valuable, and enjoyable. White hat tactics include:

- **Focusing on mobile first**—As more and more users view your site from mobile devices, Google is gradually shifting focus to mobile being the primary focus for indexing. You should do the same by making every page mobile-friendly.
- **Claiming your local listing on Google My Business**—Less than half of businesses have done this.
- **Trying out A/B testing** to see what users prefer.
- **Using Schema to add HTML tags to a web page** page and create rich snippets. For example, enhanced descriptions may be displayed in the search results page.
- **Building additional links** by creating a page with a list of helpful resources.



Claim this Business



Conclusion

The What, Why, and How of Using SEO to Better Your Business

We hope this ebook has taught you how SEO works and how it can benefit your business. We also hope you've seen how only an honest and professional approach will deliver those benefits. Now it's up to you to decide what to do with your business and its marketing budget.

You've read about the many advantages of good SEO, and how important it is to hire professionals for the job. Frontier Marketing specializes in providing marketing services with an SEO foundation. We use only the most current white hat best practices.

If you're a business owner considering search engine optimization in the Chicagoland area, call Frontier Marketing at (847) 254-0837.

Together we can discuss your next steps toward expanding your business and getting the most value out of your online marketing.





“Business Solutions of Tomorrow, Today!”



36 Fairfax Rd., Fox Lake, IL 60020 • (847) 254-0837

www.frontiermarketingllc.com • info@frontiermarketingllc.com

