



The business owner's  
guide to SEO.



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CHAPTER I

# Why SEO Matters





## Why SEO Matters

The technological world is filled with abbreviations such as SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, and Domain Authority. Many business owners find these intimidating, whether they're brand new or have worked with the internet for years.

### HOW SEO WORKS

Search Engine Optimization is the organic presence of your website on a search engine like Google. Many website builders depend on code to improve their website's visibility. For example, they might use specific keywords or phrases in links to increase their back-linking and presence on external websites. This is good, but people don't purchase products or use services based only on links and the number of clicks your site generates. In fact, if you spend all your time tweaking keywords and inserting links, you'll miss many other opportunities.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SEO

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. Using the right SEO factors for your website helps your domain stay at the top of the search results. Many of these depend on how user-centric your site is. Research shows if users can't find what they're looking for on a website within three clicks, they leave. Additionally, today's computer users are busy people with shorter attention spans, so they need to absorb information in small chunks as quickly as possible. Website-building experts recommend taking these steps to stay user-centric:

- **Think about user-experience first.** [Use a sitemap](#) to help users navigate links and pages, especially if you have several on one page. Decide which links are most important and make those as conspicuous as possible to invite more clicks. When possible, use a



keyword or key phrase an SEO algorithm like Google will recognize. If you sell jewelry on your site, your purchasing link shouldn't say "buy now." For optimum SEO results, try "Purchase [product name] here" or "Order [X item]." The more specific your link names are, the more SEO algorithms will favor your site over others.

- **Keep content original.** Dated content drives users away from your website. Bad SEO can result in SEO-validation systems "punishing" your site by giving it negative feedback or decreasing its number of search engine hits. Archive old content as soon as dates or deadlines pass. Periodically examine your blog posts, video clips, podcasts, and other content to determine which topics you use most often. If you're using several versions of the same topic, it's likely time to move on to something new.
- **Use text.** Some webmasters believe text is negative, so they don't use it enough. While it's true users don't like big blocks of text, a total lack of text can leave them confused or disappointed. When posting a picture or video, [add a text description](#) to explain why it's important. Don't be afraid of blogs or other text-heavy posts on relevant topics, as long as you break them up with white space, captioned images, credible links, and other varied content.
- **Descriptive Content (i.e. meta content) matters.** Websites with good SEO feedback [often use meta descriptions](#). These are usually 150 characters maximum. Each meta description uses keywords or phrases as specific to the site as possible. Every meta description should be unique, even if your site contains many similar pages.

If you own a market that serves several suburban areas of New York, you might have separate pages for Brooklyn, Bed Stuy, SoHo, the Battery, and Queens. That's fine, but



each page should have specific keywords. Try tying the keywords back into specific addresses for each suburb, or let each page focus on a specific product you sell only in that location. This will keep your meta descriptions fresh and reduce the duplicate content that often hurts SEO.

- **Use links strategically.** Be careful about which pages get the most links within your website. The more a page is linked to within your site, the more search engines will recognize it. This is beneficial if a heavily linked page is a main one or has plenty of original information. Yet it can be disastrous if the page contains duplicate content, non-specific keywords, or information on just one or two crucial topics. Choose your backlinks wisely to ensure good PageRank flow. Use noindex or nofollow code for any page with duplicate content or less important information; this will keep the search engine from listing it as a primary source when users search for your keywords.
- **Give visitors a reason to stay on your site.** Of course, the key to good site-dependent SEO lies in making users stay on your site. Keep in mind the most easily navigable sites can lose users if they aren't set up correctly. Maintain clear, readable formatting with heading tags – H1, H2, and so forth. Strategically title each page, using specific phrases so users know each page has what they're searching for. Use ads and images wisely, avoiding clutter so users don't get overwhelmed and your loading speed can keep up with the content.

SEO fluctuates frequently, which can make it difficult to establish and keep your authority. With the right tools and principles, however, you can deal with these updates and maintain your status as an expert on your chosen content.



### Now it's your turn

Use this space to work through the exercise.

## SEO Lab #1

### INTRODUCTION

- 1. Do you have a sitemap setup for your site?** If not, it's important to set one up. Use one of these links to help you:
  - [xml-sitemaps.com/](http://xml-sitemaps.com/)
  - [xmlsitemapgenerator.org/](http://xmlsitemapgenerator.org/)
  - Wordpress: [wpbeginner.com/beginners-guide/what-is-a-wordpress-sitemap-how-to-create-a-sitemap-in-wordpress/](http://wpbeginner.com/beginners-guide/what-is-a-wordpress-sitemap-how-to-create-a-sitemap-in-wordpress/)
- 2. Check your website for broken links** and fix those necessary:
  - Are they strategically linking to the set of pages that you most want to highlight about your organization?
  - Are any causing 404 (i.e., page can't be found) errors?
- 3. Check & correct pages with poor readability.**
  - Readers scan vs. reading a wall of text, are you using chunked blocks of text vs. a wall of words?
  - Are you using Header tags (H1 and H2) strategically to help users scan?
  - Are the URLs for each of your page titles using simple keywords that users are searching for?



CHAPTER 2

# Writing SEO-Friendly Content





## Writing SEO-Friendly Content

The internet makes getting published easy and convenient. Tools abound that allow anyone to build their own website or blog. However, the ease of publishing can also lead to costly content mistakes. Many webmasters who have informative content and a navigable layout are often shocked to find their websites aren't getting traffic. This is often because they didn't pay attention to SEO. No matter your website's topic or layout, you need SEO-friendly content that will attract users to your site and keep them coming back.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SEO IN CONTENT

Simply put, SEO refers to the visibility of your website in a search engine's unpaid or "organic" results. In other words, if your website is one of the first to appear in a search engine when users type in certain keywords or phrases, you probably have good SEO. However, good SEO does not happen overnight. It takes effort, which begins with paying close attention to content.

### WHAT MAKES WEBSITE CONTENT GOOD?

Most business owners and website experts agree on several key steps webmasters should take to ensure their content is SEO-friendly. Each step usually revolves around certain parts of a website. We'll examine a few of them now.

### KEYWORDS

In the past, website designers relied on "keyword stuffing" to make search engines pick up their sites first. Keyword stuffing is exactly what it sounds like – using a



keyword or key phrase in as many sentences as possible, as close together as possible. Therefore, the website for Daniel Wilder’s Luxury Hotels might begin with, “Daniel Wilder’s Luxury Hotels serve thousands of guests all over the world. When you stay at Daniel Wilder’s Luxury Hotels, you will feel like royalty,” and so on. Obviously, this kind of content isn’t helpful for readers.

Today’s experts recommend using keywords more sparingly, as well as [mixing and matching](#) keyword order. Additionally, avoid filler or using words like “in” or “throughout” just to get a keyword onto a page. Instead of writing, “St. Bridget’s, best Catholic school in the Southeast,” try something like, “When seeking the best Catholic schools, parents in the Southeast count on St. Bridget’s.” This is more natural but still makes sense in context.

In addition, make sure your keywords are as specific as possible. Generic key phrases like “cat care” will send users to a plethora of websites, and yours might be the fifth, seventh, or tenth one listed on a page. To get the most visits, use phrases like “The Cat’s Pajamas Kennel.” If users search for a specific name, your SEO ratings will go up and you will likely find plenty of new clients.

## WRITE FOR PEOPLE

If you took computer courses during the late 1990s and early 2000s, your teacher probably told you to “remember the human” while online. There’s a person on the other side of your screen, so try to be as respectful as you would in real life.

The same principle applies when considering SEO. You must target your content toward a specific audience and remember that audience is made up of people. Before designing a website, picture the ideal user, the person you most want to visit your site and take away



information. What does this person want or need to read most? Is this person highly visual, and if so, what types of videos or images would he or she most appreciate? What is this person's lifestyle like?

Once you know your audience, it'll be easier to determine content topics, keywords, page setups, and other components that will improve your SEO ratings. For example, if you know your ideal user is a stay-at-home parent, gravitate toward topics like preparing children for school after summer vacation or keeping toddlers occupied on a rainy day.

### **USER-FRIENDLY LAYOUT AND FORMATTING**

You might have wonderful content, but if your website isn't formatted correctly, that won't matter. Users quickly leave poorly organized sites. Make sure all your posts are [grammatically correct, professionally formatted, and well-structured](#). Your writing should flow easily from one topic to the next. Fonts should be clear and readable, and headings should be easy to spot, even in a long post. Use headings and titles to guide yourself through writing individual posts.

### **CURRENT CONTENT**

Dated content will hurt your SEO ratings, as will unoriginal content or repeated topics. To avoid these pitfalls, [monitor your content frequently](#). Use free services like Google Analytics or PageRank to determine the content readers are most interested in. Then you can remove posts and other content that isn't getting traffic and focus on the content users find helpful.



**Now it's your turn**

Use this space to work through the exercise.

## SEO Lab #2

### EVALUATE YOUR PAGE SEO

Within a focus group at your organization, select 10 pages from your website to review. Using the following scales (1=low, 10=high), evaluate each piece of content from your site. Compile the results and make changes to those pages as necessary.

Identify the page URL reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Keyword Usage: 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5..... 6..... 7..... 8..... 9..... 10

Humanized Writing: 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5..... 6..... 7..... 8..... 9..... 10

Professional Format: 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5..... 6..... 7..... 8..... 9..... 10

Dated Content: 1..... 2..... 3..... 4..... 5..... 6..... 7..... 8..... 9..... 10



CHAPTER 3

# The Impact of Branding on SEO





## The Impact of Branding on SEO

Every business needs its own brand identity. Whether you achieve branding with logos, taglines, specific fonts, or something else, branding helps clients recognize you, your products, and your website. Additionally, branding often helps increase positive SEO feedback. The right branding strategies can make your website well-recognized on any search engine or algorithm.

### BRANDING STRATEGY 1: SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES

Instead of focusing on coding, tweaking, and fixing, use concrete branding strategies, but be subtle. For example, many authors [advertise their books on external sites](#). A user might visit a website looking for updates on world events. On the news portal, he or she sees an unobtrusive, eye-catching ad in the upper right corner. It's for the autobiography of a girl who survived human trafficking.

The reader's eye is instantly drawn to the ad, and even if he or she doesn't click on it, that user remembers the book. If he or she continues seeing similar ads on other sites, the user will remember the author and his or her brand. This can facilitate a search for the author, that person's website, and more books. In turn, this can increase both book sales and the author's SEO ratings.

### BRANDING STRATEGY 2: FISHING FOR CLIENTS

Many website builders compare SEO to "fishing" for clients. Before determining keywords, content, or other factors important to SEO, determine who you're fishing for. In other words, who makes up your audience? Picture your ideal user, the person you most



deeply understand and want to help. Maybe that's a reader who picks up your book because he needs to learn studying strategies for college. That person is seeking a solution to his problem: he isn't sure how to study.

Your brand will be a major way your clients find you. Use keywords and phrases that reflect your brand specifically. For instance, if your tagline is “Cozy Amish Fiction,” use that in as many ads, posts, and web pages as possible. Supplement it with words or phrases that relate to the tagline such as “realistic fiction about Amish” or “well-crafted, warm-hearted Amish fiction.”

Along with specific keywords, some website builders recommend using generic ones so [your marketing “net” will be broader](#). In other words, if your website is already in the top 10% of results for “Amish fiction,” you can build off the traffic with “cozy Amish fiction,” plus your name and other long-tailed keywords such as “new release from Liesel Hershberg coming January 2016.”

### **BRANDING STRATEGY 3: HAVING FUN**

Many business owners and web designers find SEO intimidating, and they worry so much about it that they forget to enjoy their work. However, building brand recognition with fun and casual techniques will also increase your SEO ratings. Most people love personality quizzes; thousands of quiz sites exist, including [blogthings.com](#) and [selectsmart.com](#). Capitalize on this with quizzes relevant to your industry, product, or service. If you're an author, your readers might like to quiz themselves on how well they know your books or which characters they relate to most.

A blog is another fun way to keep client interest, promote your brand, and get good SEO feedback. Update the blog consistently – weekly if possible, or monthly if your posts tend to be long. Break up text with relevant images, videos, or bulleted lists. This keeps users from getting



bored with long text blocks and makes your information easier to remember. Use clear, standard fonts like Courier or Times New Roman, and keep your background colorful, but not too busy.

#### **BRANDING STRATEGY 4: ATTRACTING INFLUENTIAL USERS**

It's difficult to get positive SEO feedback if your website doesn't have enough visitors. The good news is, even the smallest businesses can attract influential followers who will inform larger audiences about them. When planning your SEO strategy, think about using keywords or blog topics related to current events, prominent people, and widely read news or other information outlets. For example, if you're a midwife, look up midwifery licensing laws in your state and post news articles or blogs related to legal issues. This will increase your chance of recognition from bigger publications and broaden your audience.





**Now it's your turn**

Use this space to work through the exercise.

## SEO Lab #3

### EVALUATE YOUR BRAND REACH

- Talk to current customers and ask them how they found you. Was it through a social media ad, an organic search, an in-person referral, or through some other means? If the results are heavily skewed away from online, it may be time to take a re-look and refresh of your website and SEO.
- Identify who your customers are. Take some time to write down a description of your top 3 target customers. See if your team identifies the same target customers. If the entire organization isn't synched on target customer, get everyone together to hammer it out.
- If you aren't blogging, determine to set aside 1-3 hours every other week to get one new piece of content posted to your blog weekly. Make sure to add keywords to the blog and then post it on your social channels.



CHAPTER 4

# How Social Media Drives Great SEO





## Social Media and SEO

Social media and SEO are similar in that they both rely on high-quality content, visibility, and continued client interest. If you have a Facebook or Twitter account, you probably don't read every friend or follower's post every day. Your eye is drawn to the posts that use wording or content that interests you. Search engines look at social media the same way. If your social media accounts are connected back to your website using the right techniques, you'll get positive SEO feedback.

### WAYS SOCIAL MEDIA CAN WORK FOR YOU

Several methods exist to help social media drive up your SEO rankings. The experts at Forbes and other companies recommend a few key ways, each connected to a specific part of social media.

### GROW YOUR FOLLOWER BASE

The old adage is true: in business, it's not what you know, but who you know. The more friends and followers you have on social media, the more popular your website and business will naturally become. However, this doesn't mean your business will be forever stuck in limbo if you only have a handful of followers.

To grow your base, you must [stay engaged](#). Determine what your social media voice is and stick to that. Your word choices and writing style will draw users in just like a good book from a familiar author draws readers. Additionally, post as much as you can. Your posts need not be long – try for short daily tweets or posts and one longer weekly post.

Vary your topics for each post. For example, if your last two posts have been self-





promotional, make the next one about a topic relevant to your business. If you run a tutoring service, find and promote a current article about the top new ways to teach elementary math or make English class easier on dyslexic kids.

### LINK UP

Arguably the best part of social media is the “social” part. It allows us to network and link up with people we otherwise might not know. Again, search engines work the same way. The more quality, authoritative links your accounts have, the more authoritative Google will see you. [Links and hashtags serve as “bait,”](#) enticing users to click on relevant information and learn more about not only your site, but the content you’re passionate about.

You can use links in several different ways. Let’s say you run a treatment program for people suffering from eating disorders. In a Facebook post, you might link to an authoritative site such as [nimh.org](#) that can tell readers about the signs and symptoms of anorexia or bulimia. One of your Twitter tweets might link to a trusted psychiatrist your clients work with during or after treatment. You could Instagram pictures of what a balanced meal looks like, with linked text, to help potential and current clients determine what they should be eating and why.

Finally, use links to research existing and upcoming content. For example, if you’ve heard about a new counseling method for eating disorder patients, find authoritative sources that explain how it works. The links will make your endorsement or rejection of the treatment more credible and will help clients determine whether it’s right for them.

### SHARE FREQUENTLY

Social media users share posts and images all the time, whether it’s a hot new political post or a new recipe for cheesecake under 400 calories. As a website builder, you need to take



advantage of sharing, too. Offer incentives for people to like and share your Facebook content. For instance, if you sell dolls, maybe everyone who shares the image of a new doll gets entered into a drawing to win one. [Use sites like Pinterest](#), which allow users to create their own boards and pin what they like from others' boards. The pins can be linked back to your site, gaining attention from people throughout your state, country, or even the world.

### USE KEYWORDS

When most people think of SEO and keywords, they think of blog posts and press releases. While keywords are crucial for this type of content, you need them in social media, too. [Audit your keywords frequently](#), and use the ones that generate the most traffic in social media posts. Ensure the keywords make sense in context.

Don't just type "best sporting goods store in Tennessee" in the middle of a post. Say something like, "Good Sport Sporting Goods has locations in Knoxville, Memphis, Pigeon Forge, and Nashville. We have the best selection of any sporting goods store in Tennessee." Switching up the keyword order will keep users reading while still helping them remember your business name, locations, and brand.



**Now it's your turn**

Use this space to work through the exercise.

## SEO Lab #4

### HOW IS YOUR SOCIAL PRESENCE?

- Facebook and Twitter: Evaluate how many followers you have. What are you doing to grow your follower base on a regular basis?
- Are you sharing useful links on your social sites that relate to your line of business? If not, make a regular practice of searching for useful content and then reposting it on your social channels. Google will love it!
- Make it a point to share at least once a day on each of your social channels, and if you are ambitious, find something to share about multiple times each day. It doesn't have to be original content, it can be content in your area of expertise that you think would help your customers.



CHAPTER 5

# Relationship-Building Strategies to Grow SEO



## Relationships and SEO

When most people think about relationships, they don't think about websites or computers. In fact, computers have a bad reputation for keeping people isolated. The truth is, though, good website management can and should help build lasting client relations. One key way to do this is through SEO. If you invest time in building client relationships online, your SEO ratings will follow.

### RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES THAT WILL IMPROVE YOUR SEO

#### **Use social media to build relationships & a strong network**

Almost everyone loves using social media because it keeps them connected and helps them network, finding new friends, jobs, and contacts. One of the best things you can do to improve SEO status is [using your social media channels](#). No matter how small your business or website, make sure you have at least one social media account. If you hate Twitter or don't take enough pictures to justify Instagram, use Facebook. If you're a highly visual person, Pinterest and Instagram may be best for you. Update these accounts as much as possible, focusing on strategies such as short daily posts or tweets and longer weekly or bi-weekly ones.

Your social media posts should always be targeted and specific. Use high-traffic keywords or phrases from your website in each post. Monitor your content often, using tools like Google Analytics or PageRank. These will tell you which parts of your SEO and content are performing well. Once you know this, you can tailor social media content to what users are most interested in and get rid of dated or unused content.





### **Be Friendly With Other Webmasters**

Many companies improve their SEO ratings through [connections with other websites](#) or businesses, particularly if they, themselves, are small and building a base. For example, you might be a world music singer putting out a first album. If your sound is similar to Celtic Woman's sound, link to their website on your own pages. Linking will help you connect with news outlets, publicity companies, and other organizations better-known singers use. As you build a fan base, internet users will be more likely to click on your website after searching for one of your keywords. Your SEO ratings will increase, and you'll reach a broader audience.

### **Give Credit to Influencers**

You've probably heard authors, musicians, and actors talk about their greatest influences. There's a reason for that – they know the influencers can help them build relationships with people online. If you're a new author who's just published your first book, you might not get an endorsement from John Grisham right away. Yet if you talk about Grisham as a big influence in a well-trafficked blog post, more readers will connect with you.

They'll recognize an author whose style is similar to Grisham's and researches his plots, may have spent plenty of time in the legal system, and enjoys a good suspense story. Those same readers will keep coming back to learn what you're doing – when your new releases will be out or whether you're holding blog interviews, for instance.

### **Get & Use Feedback**

It's often a good idea to let others in your business [read your content and provide feedback](#). This doesn't mean allowing competitors to steal ideas or clients – it simply means forming a mutually beneficial relationship. For instance, you might be a pediatrician with a thriving practice, but you're not sure how to make a blog accessible to patients. The pediatrician in the practice



across town might be a pro at creating accessible web content, so go ahead and ask for an opinion on your latest blog.

### **Listen to Your Users**

It's vital to know the type of content users want, as well as the questions they are asking. The most successful websites have a section where users can contact the owner for products or services. Again, the section uses keywords to increase SEO feedback.

It's also a good idea to add a newsletter or question and answer section to your website. Access it regularly to determine the questions users are asking, then address them as specifically as possible. If you're a lawyer who advocates for disabled children, you might get several questions about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Use a newsletter to answer these questions, or set up a "frequently asked questions" page. Clients will know you're interested in their specific needs and take time to research answers for their most pressing questions.



**Now it's your turn**

Use this space to work through the exercise.

## SEO Lab #5

### HOW ARE YOU AT RELATIONSHIP BUILDING?

- Are you using your social media channels? (if not, go back to and master Lab #4).
- When you share work from other influencers, either in blogs, on your site, or on social links, are you giving credit to those influencers through a link, an @, or a tag?
- At least once a year do a customer survey. Ask them about your online content including: your website, blog, and social channels to see if the content you are providing is useful to them.



CHAPTER 6

# Wrap Up: What We Have Learned



# Final Word

Mastering the ever-changing landscape of SEO can be daunting, especially since Google changes their algorithms frequently. But it's not impossible! We hope that these helpful tools and techniques will help you build out and maintain effective SEO across your digital tools.

**Don't miss the opportunity to help grow your organization through effective SEO.**

We hope that after reading this guide, you will be well-prepared for any SEO project. If you would like to ask us questions, we'd love to chat. You can reach us through our website, by phone (717.261.0111), email, or even a carrier pigeon if you happen to have one.

Thanks for reading!

## **ABOUT CROSS & CROWN**

Cross & Crown is a team of creatives who are passionate about solving problems through design and technology, taking what is there and making it better. Based in Chambersburg, PA, we strive to help educate, advocate, and thrive in a digital world.

[Contact us today](#) to see how we can help!

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