

AYIMA

Building corporate SEO strategy



@ayima



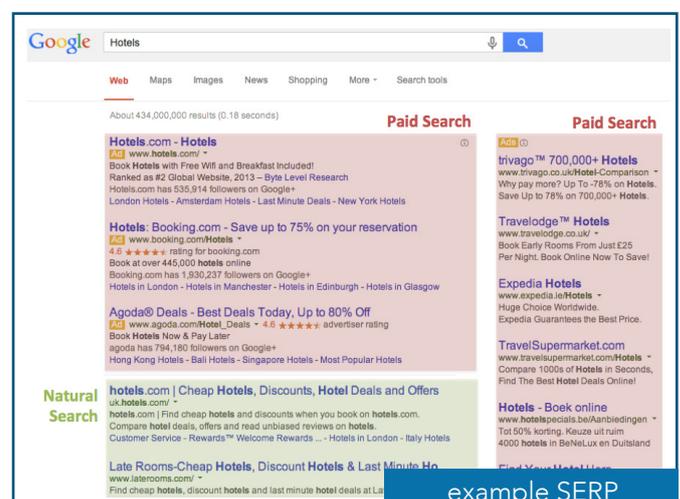
www.ayima.com

Marketing programmes can comprise many different stakeholders whose objectives must be aligned. This means resolving potential conflicts between business functions and elevating search engine optimisation (SEO) to a strategic level if the needs of the business, web users and by proxy, those of Google are to be met. In this whitepaper Ayima examines how to achieve optimal and sustainable results.

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of improving a website's position or 'ranking' within non-paid search engine results pages (SERPS) in order to drive more traffic to the site. SERPS are the lists of suggested web pages and other content such as video and social media displayed when a user enters a specific word or phrase (often known as 'keywords') into a search engine. Content is ranked according to what the search engine considers to be most relevant to the user's query. This process is known as 'natural' or 'organic' search.

However, Google's search results also

include paid search results in the form of 'Ads' or 'Sponsored' placements. Under the Pay-Per-Click (PPC) model for example, companies bid on keywords they want to be listed for and incur a charge each time a user clicks on the listing.





Natural Search (SEO) is a Core Marketing Pillar

Natural search can drive the majority of traffic to a website. A site's rank within SERPs is therefore vital because most users tend not to look beyond the first two search results pages. A study published recently by ad network Chikita found that websites listed on the first page of Google's search results generated 92 per cent of all traffic, with traffic dropping by 95 per cent when moving from page one to page two. Sites listed on the third page generated just 1.1 per cent of all traffic generated.

“ Although SEO is essential for any business looking to generate sales via its online presence, SEO budgets vary considerably. Econsultancy found that almost half of the companies surveyed for its UK Search Engine Marketing Benchmark Report 2013 are spending £10,000 or less on SEO per year, while 15 per cent are spending in excess of £100,000 per year. There have been more increases at the higher end of the range, with a 5% increase in companies spending over £50,000.

”



Yet many larger corporations today remain behind the curve, either because online businesses have established a leading position, or because they are being outpaced by more nimble and digital-savvy competitors.

Corporate digital disconnect

One only has to look at the dominance of online firms such as Skyscanner and Amazon in their respective sectors to appreciate just how far behind many traditional 'bricks and mortar' corporations are. It is most evident in where they rank within SERPS for competitive keywords such as 'cheap flights', 'mobile phones', and 'insurance' when compared with major online competitors.

That's not to say that larger brands don't already have a website and digital strategy in place that incorporates some form of search engine marketing. Indeed, most will have a solid understanding of the PPC model, given that it is similar to traditional forms of marketing – i.e. a budget is set and the results can be measured. The latter is achieved via click-through rate (CTR), which refers to the number of viewers that click on a specific ad, and is based on ad impressions or overall search volume.

The SEO model however, is much harder to grasp, and is more about making a long-term commitment to specific

activities that drive gradual improvement over time. All too often, senior management will be seeking justification for why they should be investing in what they perceive as some kind of 'black magic'. And there remains a lack of understanding and a certain amount of confusion as to how SEO works, what can be achieved, and why it is important.

Incorporating SEO into Corporate Procurement Processes

This disconnect is exacerbated by the fact that SEO, unlike PPC, does not fit easily into the traditional corporate procurement model. With SEO, although in theory it is possible to cost out time spent on projects and the cost of individual pieces of work, the process is not nearly as predictable as it is with PPC where 'deliverables' and spend can be broken down relatively easily. Meanwhile, the procurement process is typically led by senior managers rather than C-level executives, meaning there is a lack of visibility at Board level from the outset.

Educating SEO Strategic Benefits during the procurement process

In addition, the language and structure employed in tender documents is designed primarily for the procurement of



physical goods and services, rather than virtual technologies or logical assets that are less tangible. Even in scenarios where those leading procurement do have some understanding of digital and the key messages being pitched to them by SEO specialists, it is unlikely they will appreciate the nuances. More often than not, the result is a decision based purely on price, as opposed to strategic benefits. This is where the disconnect between SEO strategy and its execution occurs.



SEO activities

On-page



Ideally, SEO should start with the technical aspects of a company's website, such as initial design and build, and the technology behind the site – including the content management system (CMS) and the service. It also takes in optimising the information architecture of the website – i.e. the way the website is structured to deliver the most important information for users in a simple and effective way, but also such that search engines can identify information they believe is important for users. These factors are classed as 'on-page' activities.

Off-page

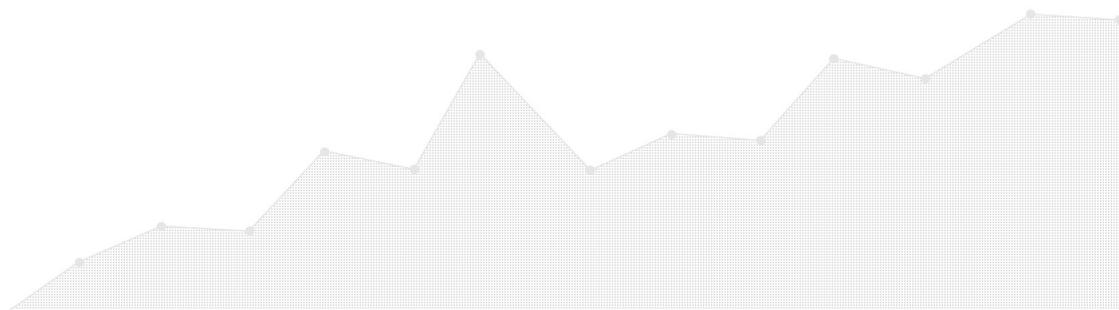


SEO also embraces 'off-page' activities, which are designed to increase the 'popularity' of a company's site and thus its rank within SERPS – for example, the number of people that link back to a company's website and the 'strength' and quality of those links. These activities are known as 'link development' and are like seeking votes from other web users for being the most relevant or best resource for a particular type of query or search topic. Google and similar search engines value these links highly, using them as a primary signal of quality and authority in the way they rank websites for relevant queries.



Using SEO Techniques Wisely

Keyword targeting and link-building activities are core pillars of SEO, but both must be approached with caution. Search engines employ sophisticated algorithms to sort through the billions of web pages and other content in order to return what they believe to be the best results, while SEO is employed by website owners to ensure their content sends the right 'signals' to these algorithms. In the eyes of search engines such as Google, there are techniques considered as good SEO ('white hat'), and those that are deemed bad ('black hat') and penalised either by being ranked lower, or at worst by being severely penalised, resulting a website's near or total de-listing from the search engine's index.



Google has been cracking down hard on bad SEO, with the introduction of algorithms such as Panda, which penalises 'low-quality' sites with thin or weak content (e.g. content that is duplicated, or stuffed with keywords), and Penguin, which penalises websites that have un-natural, un-related or low quality links from third-party websites.



Aligning objectives – the role of an SEO Specialist

While the variety of SEO techniques and activities is myriad, it is suffice to say that a website featuring unique content that is refreshed regularly, with the right keywords distributed carefully throughout, and with links pointing back to this content from other relevant sites, stands a good chance of being ranked highly by search engines. The role of the SEO specialist is therefore to ensure that corporations can be aggressive in their SEO strategy and maintain performance over time, but in a way that is sensitive to the aims and needs of both Google and web users – and which avoids any potential penalties for black hat activities (whether intentional or not).

For medium and large organisations that already have a large share of their business generated online, SEO and search marketing will most likely already be embedded within corporate strategy. But for firms where online represents only a small part of their business today, defining SEO and search marketing objectives, aligning these with existing corporate strategy and obtaining buy-in from multiple stakeholders can prove difficult. For example, those responsible for marketing might argue that brand, messaging and user experience take precedence over any functional changes designed to drive traffic and conversions.

This is where the role of the SEO specialist becomes as much about being internal advocates for driving specific activity, and providing the critical interface between the various stakeholders, as it is simply performing the work in isolation.

“

One approach is to bring all stakeholders together to share ideas on best practices with regards PPC, SEO, and social media, as well as to agree a framework for delivering a more joined-up approach.

”

Such stakeholders might include: digital acquisition managers and marketing executives; direct retail managers; PPC, SEO, and social media managers; and heads of legal, procurement, and web development.



Educating parts of the business on SEO

Training sessions are another beneficial activity. Sessions don't have to be long, but placing an experienced SEO professional in front of different teams to ensure a better understanding of the SEO process can deliver significant benefits. In short, basic SEO knowledge should be like any other basic skill for marketing executives, and checking that it has been done right with an in-house function or external agency expert should be as commonplace as checking a translation is grammatically accurate before putting out a creative piece, advertisement or other campaign.



Adopting an integrated approach

To achieve the best possible results for all stakeholders, SEO specialists tread a fine line between departments responsible for brand and marketing, and the technical teams managing the website itself. Yet it is necessary, because SEO has multiple touch-points that can link back to every other type of marketing activity – both online and offline.



Leveraging other parts of the business

One example would be whether a link is included within a feature article written for a scientific publication and syndicated and translated internationally, especially when the piece is likely to be quoted or cited in the future. The lack of this link could make the difference between a healthy number of high-value links pointing back to the company's website (from all of the international publications that subsequently publish, reference or review this article online), and essentially no links pointing to the website at all.

Another example would be where a company plans to run an advertising campaign on TV where people might search

for a main theme or catchphrase in the commercial. By ensuring they use the phrase on an appropriate web page and that the page ranked well for that specific phrase before the advertisement debuted on TV, they would be maximising the impact of that campaign both online and offline. Going further, these pages should not just be safe-guards or landing pages, but should be effective in converting a curious TV watcher into someone who requests more information, signs up, or otherwise converts.



Your website: Your virtual shop window

This is why a website should be considered a strategic asset: because it can complete or complement a lot of tasks for a company. It is an online flagship that the company owns completely, rather than simply being its presence on a social platform like Facebook or Twitter.

“

It is often the first impression of the business that potential customers, clients, employees and investors will see and if not the first impression, certainly it is often the part of a business with which a person has the most interaction.

”

As such, it is not only important that a website ranks well for its target keywords. The site should also reflect the intent of those searches wherever possible. At a managerial level, the website should be thought of and treated as a primary marketing asset that deserves as much attention, if not more than many forms of offline advertising due to the ability it provides to impeccably track, test and perfect traffic flow and conversion.



Take ownership for strategic outcomes

A common pitfall made by corporations is to approach SEO as a process that can be undertaken within a couple of months. In reality, it can take years. The fact is that most companies' competitors aren't simply standing still: it's a constant competition with many players battling to be in visible positions. And even if a company is performing to the best of its ability, this may not be better, or as aggressive, as what its competitors are doing.

Furthermore, companies cannot simply 'buy their share of voice', as there can only be one or two brands at the top of the SERPs taking the lion's share of traffic. Whereas in PPC or any other kind of mainstream marketing, companies are able to buy as much 'voice' as they can afford. Ensuring companies understand this distinction, and that they take ownership of their SEO, is the first hurdle to overcome.



Search is Worth the Budget Spend

When one considers how much companies spend on marketing, search is an area that is now firmly entrenched as a legitimate marketing channel. The fact that results are highly trackable is to the advantage of SEO teams, and all the data that they can collect has become much more valuable since Google ceased providing keyword tracking data for non-paid search traffic. And the more data Google continues to take away, the more valuable the data held by SEO teams becomes.

With Board oversight of SEO projects and analysis of the data available, corporations can stay ahead of search engine evolution. The criteria for success in organic, non-paid search is constantly changing. Thus the challenge for C-level executives is to ensure that SEO is embedded firmly within corporate strategy, and that it is approached as another key channel that is tightly managed in line with all of the other online channels and different stakeholders responsible for a website. This way, SEO activities can be undertaken safely, consistently and robustly to drive sustainable results and business outcomes over time.



Mike Jacobson

Co-Founder & Managing Director / CEO

With a background in finance, marketing analysis and forecasting, Mike has overseen Ayima's growth from a three-person outfit to an agency of over 100 staff in three continents. This has involved opening an additional office in the United States whilst continuing to grow the business in the UK. He divides his time between London and Stockholm, where the company has recently opened its first Nordic office.



Janaya Wilkins

SEO Consultant & Business Development Manager

With 10 years in Marketing and Sales, and a background in IT and Data Analytics, Janaya works in a team of 20 highly-skilled technical SEO experts who manage accounts across a vast range of sectors, such as telecoms, travel, retail, gaming, and financial services. Janaya has developed and implemented SEO strategies for a number of major blue chip organisations.



Contact us

Ayima,
2nd Floor,
1 Benjamin Street,
London,
EC1M 5QG,
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 207 148 5970

F: +44 (0) 207 681 3140

E: contactus@ayima.com