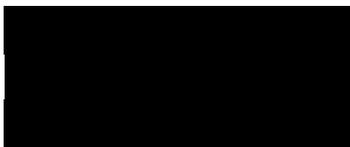# TOP RANKINGS: STEP BY STEP (2012)

BROUGHT TO YOU BY: ECOMBUFFET.COM

I'm so glad you requested my Optimization Step By Step: 2012, and that you are interested in optimizing your website.

To get us started – just a few quick facts about SEO:

- **More than 8 out of 10 Internet users look on search engines to find information and the products or services they want to buy.**

- **Pay-per-click (PPC) costs are rising (over 37% higher).**

- **Up to 85% of searchers ignore paid listings.**

- **63% of the top natural (organic) listings get click throughs.**

- **Natural (organic) search results convert 30% higher than PPC.**

- **11.8% of Google traffic will click on a site in the second page of results.**

July 2012

Did you survive Penguin? I hope so!

This started as a quick guide to walk you through the basics of optimization. It has grown as I have continued to share advice, tips and news updates. The main body of the document is the step by step process – but don't forget to read through the end as well. It has all the recent updates and news, as well as more advice and generally good stuff! So read from start to finish (maybe not all in one sitting). If you want to do well at your own SEO, the success lies in the details so you need to soak up as much of this info as you can. If you find it's too much and you can't handle it – let me know. I'll prepare a proposal and we'll see if it makes sense for us to work together.

Enjoy!   - Jenn Horowitz, Director of Marketing for EcomBuffet and SEO enthusiast.

OK! Now, let's get right to the good stuff.

Introduction to the Search Engines (in basic terms):

Think of the engines like teachers handing out gold stars for everything that you do well. Google currently has about 200 factors in their algorithms that determine how your site will rank. Imagine your teacher with a clipboard and checklist with 200 items on it and she assigns you gold stars for each of the things you do well.

Remember, some of the items on the list are more important and you may get multiple gold stars. No one knows for sure how the algorithm works, but we test

and monitor the industry to come up with a technique that works well for getting sites ranked.

The number of gold stars you achieve will determine how well your site will rank. There are no shortcuts and there are no tricks (none that are safe to use and won't result in trouble down the road).

Now let's dive right in…

Topics Covered:

- **Lesson One: Keyword Research**
- **Lesson Two: SEO Friendliness – Diagnosis & Correction, plus Competitor Analysis**
- **Lesson Three: On-page optimization**
- **Lesson Four: Google Webmaster Tools**
- **Lesson Five: Links**
- **Lesson Six: On-going Content Addition & Social Media**
- **Lesson Seven: Blogging**
- **Lesson Eight: Maintenance**
- **Misc Info**
- **Google information**
- **Conclusion: Final Words of Wisdom (don't miss this section, I cover some great tips, articles and news updates)**

 Lesson One: Keyword Research and Competitor Analysis

Finding the right keywords is the foundation to your campaign.

Here is an outline of the steps you should follow for keyword research:

1. Start with a brainstorming session to list all possible words and phrases that people would use to find what you have to offer. Remember to put yourself in the mindset of the potential customer.

2. Do the necessary research to continue building your list.
   a. Research your competitors and see what keywords they are using.
   b. Look at your web stats and logs and pull words and phrases from there (this is a great source of info, you can find the words that people are already using to find you and enhance your rankings on those words so you can get even more traffic).
   c. If you have a search feature on your site, look at the logs and see what people are searching for within your site once they get there.

3. Take the large master list you have come up with and use a keyword tool to determine how much traffic there is and how competitive the words/phrases are. Remember you can't live and die by this information, it only acts as a guide for you.

4. Take your list and break it into segments. You want some "low hanging fruit" – which means keywords that may be longer phrases with less traffic. These words will be easy to rank for fairly quickly so you can use those as your starting point to drive some quick traffic to the site. The second segment of your list should be words that are more competitive and have more traffic and will take longer to get rankings for. You will be glad you selected keywords from each segment because you will be getting traffic from the low hanging fruit while you are waiting for the more competitive phrases to kick in.

Because #4 is so vitally important, let's break that down a little further. If your keywords are too generic and not targeted it will take a long time to get rankings and the traffic likely won't convert as well. If you use keywords that are way too specific you won't get enough traffic. **The solution? Use a 3 tier approach.**

Broad:
- Shorter phrases and single words
- Generic to your industry
- Lots of traffic
- Lower conversions

Focused:
- Slightly shorter phrases
- Higher traffic numbers
- Phrases are still focused on what you offer

Laser Focused: The Long Tail
- Longer and more targeted phrases
- Traffic numbers are smaller
- People are further along in the buying process so conversion rates are higher

The thought process behind "long tail keywords" is that the more detail someone types in, the more they know exactly what they want and the further along they are in the "buying" process.

For example if someone types "blue plates" they could want to buy them or they could want info or they could want to see pics – who knows.

But if someone types in "Pfaltzgraff Blue dinner plates for 8" then they know exactly what they want and are more likely to buy.

Typically the longer the phrase, the less traffic there is but the more targeted it is, so it is likely to convert higher.

A solid SEO strategy should definitely implement some long tail because that allows you to get rankings quicker (there is usually less competition on long tail keywords) and it allows the conversion rate to be higher.

You get the benefit from the long tail while you are waiting for your more competitive phrases to get ranked and kick in.

Most people are continually adding new long tail phrases and find that when they add them up, in total the long tail phrases end up becoming a large part of your traffic.

Another thing to consider is the searchers intent. Let's look at this scenario to understand a little more.

"buy MAC lip gloss " – the searcher is looking to buy online

"MAC lip gloss prices" – they are comparing prices and probably trying to decide if they will buy

"MAC lip gloss" – they are interested in a specific brand

"lip gloss" – interested in a type of product

You want to capture leads at the different phases, but understand you will convert more at the top level where they are further along in the buying process.

Your SEO strategy should include keywords from each of those "tiers" above.

Don't forget you should also Google your keywords and check out what sites come up on top. Check out what keywords they are using – you may get some ideas.

Lesson Two: SEO Friendliness – Diagnosis & Correction, plus Competitor Analysis

What does everybody with top rankings know that you don't know? That's the question that drives most people in their quest for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) information.

The foundation of a top ranked site should be SEO Friendly or SEO Ready – both are terms used for making sure the foundation of your site is clean, concise and "friendly" to the search engine bots that crawl your site.

Have you ever tried to build a house of cards? Your strategy as the house grew more complex was very important - **but none of it mattered without a solid foundation.**

That is what you need for your site - a solid foundation to grow your search engine rankings on.

To get top rankings and have **long term SEO success** you simply **cannot** ignore the foundation of your campaign.

A solid foundation consists of the following:

- Clean code that is error free
- Java script that is in an external .js file and not on-page
- CSS in an external file and not on-page
- Easy to navigate pages that are well connected to each other
- A clearly defined topic for each page
- URLs that the engines can follow
- An XML sitemap
- A robots.txt file
- No frames
- No Flash or java script navigation
- Text that is on the actual page and not contained within Flash or an image (while the engines do read Flash, you shouldn't have **all** of your text within Flash)

Once you are sure your foundation is in place you should spend some time checking out your competitors to see what they are doing.

- What keywords are they using?
- How is their foundation?
- What on-page optimization do they have in place?
- How many links do they have?

You don't want to copy your competitors – but you do want to see what you are up against.

Now you are ready to move on and start dealing with your on-page and off page optimization.

Tip! Taking advantage of the tools that are available to you can make your SEO work, and your life much easier. Check out our comprehensive SEO Audit and save yourself the time and headache of trying to figure out if your site's foundation is SEO Friendly or not!

Check out: http://www.ecombuffet.com/120711-audit.htm

Lesson Three: On-page Optimization

Next we are going to focus on the tweaks we can make within your code to "prepare" your site for the search engines.

These techniques change over time, **so staying current with the engines is vitally important to the on-going success of your webpage.**

Please note: you should never abuse any of these techniques. Everything with moderation!

Let's start with your Meta tags.

Meta Tags are HTML tags which provide additional information about a web document. Unlike regular tags, Meta tags do not provide formatting information for the browser.

They provide such information as the author, date of creation or latest update for the page, titles, descriptions and keywords (which tell the search engines the subject matter of the page).

For SEO purposes those last three (title, description and keyword) are what matter the most. Also important are alt tags (which provide additional information about images) and header tags (which indicate to users important areas of content on your page).

The Importance of Meta Tags:

Meta Tags are important for two reasons:

- They help provide the information that is listed in the SERPs (search engine results pages).
- They are part of what influences (albeit only slightly) how well our individual pages rank on the SERPs.

All major search engines utilize (if only partially) Meta description and title tags in an effort to understand the relevance of the site. They also look at alt tags (important in today's Blended/Universal search results - which features video, images, etc.).

The Basics of Meta Elements & Tags.

Meta tags are not something you should spend a lot of time worrying about. But do focus on crafting them so they properly reflect your site and its mission.

Title Tag:

While no hard and fast rules have been established about title tags (this is actually a Meta element but is often referred to as "Title tag"), it is widely accepted that they are an important part of a Web page.

Many SEO Firms debate the ideal number of characters to be included in the Title tag. There are a few things that are not really debated and are widely agreed upon.

For example, your Title tag should contain the most important keyword for each specific webpage (and therefore are unique to that page and are not repeated throughout the site).

Title tags should never exceed 70 characters, since this is the point where most search engines will truncate the information. While many sites routinely exceed this character limit, the value of a clear and concise Title tag outweighs any benefit you may obtain from repeating the keyword or including keyword variations.

The placement of the keyword (or key phrase) is equally important to users and search engines. It is the "clickable" portion of a search listing and because search engines do take these keywords into consideration when weighing the value of the page, it's best to include keywords where they will be found – at the start of the Title tag.

Title tags are also an excellent spot to emphasize your brand, especially if your company or website name uses the keyword or phrase you are optimizing for.

SEO Firms that are truly tuned in to website analytics understand that targeting the intent of users often yields a higher click-through rate and can even influence the number of conversions. In other words, if your Title tag is clear, concise and conveys what the person is likely looking for, you should get a better click through rate.

It's not all about your position on the SERPs (position 1 versus 2, or 5 versus 7) – it's also about the quality of the listing and if it inspires confidence in your site and tells the user you have what they are looking for.

Description Tag:

The description is one of several Meta elements which assist users in determining whether a resource will be useful to them when conducting queries and viewing the SERPs. Your Description tag conveys the purpose of the page in a clear, objective manner for these users and in some instances (should the

search engines not find something better within the copy of your webpage) is used for search engine results.

When you write your Description tag think of your audience and the information you wish to convey. The Description tag is intended to assist users in determining if a listed resource will be useful to them, so stuffing keywords into this element and being "cutesy" or too "hypey" instead of being informative, clear and concise could cause alienation of the potential site visitor.

Typically the first 150 characters (including spaces) of the Description are created for the purpose of display on search engine results pages and should therefore be as concise, coherent and as objective as possible.

Keyword Tag:

The engines ignore this tag these days. But that doesn't mean you should just stuff a bunch of keywords in there – so many people say "if they ignore it, it can't hurt me and it may possibly help me" Not true – there is never an excuse to keyword stuff.

ALT Tags:

ALT tags are the alternative text that the browser displays when a Web surfer is unable (or unwilling) to see the images in a web page.

The ALT tag was initially utilized to help those with visual disabilities and use was required to be in what is referred to as 508 compliance.

You should not stuff your ALT tags with keywords, keep the text short and concise and use the most relevant keyword to that page and the particular image.

Now, onto some other on-page optimization techniques:

Headline tags (H1, H2, etc.):

Header tags are designed to turn text on your site into a Headline – so they actually change the appearance of the font by making it bigger – like a headline would be. The reason they help you is because the engines feel that if you have keywords within in Header tags then the page must really be focused on those words – otherwise you wouldn't use the words in the headlines.

By the way, if you are worried about appearances you can use CSS to alter the Header tags so the text doesn't actually look different but you still get the SEO benefit of the tags.

Try using an H1 and an H2 on your pages. Don't stuff keywords into these tags – use a real sentence that uses your keywords well.

Page/File Names:

Such as: http://yourcompany.com/USEKEYWORD.htm. Using your keyword in the file name is another way to let the engines know the page is really relevant to those keywords. There is some debate about how much this really helps – but most people feel it should be a tool in your arsenal and it doesn't hurt you. If you use multiple phrases use a hyphen (-) rather than an underscore (_) to separate words. Don't create a huge run on string (ex: keyword1-keyword2-keyword3-keyword4.htm) Also make sure you name the page according to what it is about, rather than just using it as a place to put random keywords.

Keyword Rich Content:

The search engines have one goal – that is to deliver relevant results to a searcher on their site. If they don't deliver quality, relevant results they are going to lose their following. Google got so popular because they are known for great relevant results. So, it stands to reason that the best thing you can do to show the engines you are relevant to your keywords is to actually use your keywords within your pages.

Some tips for writing for the engines.

- When you're writing your content, focus on 2-5 of your most important keyword phrases.
- Emphasize your main keywords in the first paragraph. This is the first thing the search engines "see" so it should include keyword-dense text.
- Aim to keep your page length between 200 - 600 words.
- If you're struggling on where to put all those keywords, try writing non-optimized copy first and add key phrases later.
- Search for words and phrases like "our product" and "it," and transform them into keyword-filled phrases. Then your text and marketing flow are covered and adding keywords is simply filling in the blanks.
- Read your copy out loud to make sure it doesn't sound stilted with all those keyword phrases. Strong search engine copywriting maintains a persuasive flow to it even with keyword phrases, and don't clump keyword phrases in a big text block separated by commas. Search engines read this as spam and your prospects will be unimpressed by your nonsensical text.
- Tighten your copy and keep it focused.
- Rather than one large text block, write short paragraphs and include sub headlines that integrate keyword-rich bullet points to make it more readable and satisfy the engines.

Writing for the engines is very similar to conventional copywriting except you structure your text around certain key phrases. With a little keyword phrase research and powerful benefit statements, your copy will sell your products/services in a way that the search engines love.

Tip! Some engines will take the first 100 characters of the body text and use that as the description in the SERPs (search engine results page) instead of the Meta description. Start your body text with text that incorporates the most relevant keywords for that page. Do not start with 'Welcome to our site" – that is just a waste of space. Because engines read left to right, you may need to incorporate this in the first left cell (if you use tables).

Interlink pages:

The engines like to follow a path through your site and they like to see your pages interconnected. The best way to explain this concept is to give an excerpt of text.

Let's say your website is about jewelry. You may have an article about how to clean jewelry – here's an excerpt:

"Cleaning gold rings is very different than cleaning silver rings. Cleaning gemstones is very different than cleaning pearls. Let's explore the different methods for cleaning each of your jewelry pieces".

> (By the way, I know nothing about jewelry care so for those of you out there that do know something forgive me if that made up text is inaccurate, I'm just trying to illustrate a point).

Rather than just leaving that text as is, you could chose to take some of the keywords in there and link them to another page within your site. It shows the engines that the site is focused and relevant and not just a bunch of random things thrown together.

So you may chose to link the following words:

"Cleaning gold rings is very different than cleaning silver rings. Cleaning gemstones is very different than cleaning pearls. Let's explore the different methods for cleaning each of your jewelry pieces"

Make sure you link to pages that are relevant to the words you chose. Don't go crazy and interlink every word but do try to make your whole site connected.

Generate your XML sitemap:

An XML sitemap is the preferred way to feed your content to the major engines. It should definitely be part of your process. You can let them know which pages are most important and how often you update pages, etc.
On-page optimization is not rocket science. However it does require patience,

Not sure if you should handle your own optimization or hire a firm? Email jennifer@ecombuffet.com and request a free consultation. We will walk you through an 11 point quiz that will help determine if you can handle your own SEO.

Bing & Yahoo - What You Need To Know

According to a recent comScore report, American consumers conducted more than 16 billion searches during the month of July, with Yahoo gaining 1.2% of search engine market share.

Yahoo's gains was largely at the expense of Google sites, which lost 1% of search market share month-over-month. Google is still the front-ruunner with 61.6% of the search market.

Bing and Yahoo may not make up the lion-share of your traffic but from what we've seen they drive nice traffic to sites and you never want to be too Google-dependant, so making sure you are going to do well on Yahoo/Bing is important. At a recent SEO Conference (SES SF) it was said "Yahoo and Bing are merging. They'll be 100% merged by the end of August or the beginning of September. It's not something to ignore anymore. You'll be missing out on 10 to 12 percent of traffic."

Some tips:
1. Bing likes older domain names so now is not the time to give up a domain name with good history and start again.
2. Titles are important. Bing seems to place a lot of emphasis on Title tags, so make sure you use your best keywords in the title tags of every page on your site.
3. Bing seems to place a higher value on pages that have at least 300 words.
4. Link popularity is important - just make sure they are from relevant sites!
5. Microsoft's Satya Nadella also says that "now is a good time for you to review your crawl policies in your robots.txt and ensure that you have identical polices for the msnbot/Bingbot and Yahoo's bots."

The Bingbot is designed to crawl non-optimized sites more easily. The new Bingbot will replace the existing msnbot in October.

The Bing Webmaster Tools experience is live. This has been completely redone with new features (and more to come).

Suggestion From Bing: Rick DeJarnette from Bing's Webmaster blog has this to say:

"The reasons for poor ranking are nearly as myriad as the number of sites on the Web. Your site may be competing against some very well established, well-designed sites in your industry niche. Your competitors may have published a ton of useful, expert content, or have implemented a blog or forum where all of your industry's customers go for information, thus earning them tons of valuable visitors and backlinks. **And frankly, it could be that those competing sites have seriously invested in search engine optimization (SEO) efforts when you have not.** *If your page ranking is not where you want it to be, your site may be due for a serious examination, one that looks for problems to solve and uses optimization techniques that are meaningful to both human visitors and search engine bots alike.* **You may be ready to consider a site review.***"*

The Takeaway? The holiday season is fast approaching, if your site isn't in tip top shape and getting top rankings - now is the time to take action!

Already know you want to hire a firm? Click here to request a no-obligation proposal: http://ecombuffet.com/Consultation-request.htm

Lesson Four: Google Webmaster Tools

Google has given us the gift of Google Webmaster Tools. In one convenient location you have access to great tools.

In Google's own words, Google Webmaster Tools is:

"Statistics, diagnostics and management of Google's indexing of your website, including Sitemap submission and reporting."

Verification: Before you get started, you need to tell Google what sites you want included in your account. Enter the URL as prompted and then you will need to verify your ownership/control of that site.

A Peek Inside Google Webmaster Tools:

Diagnostics: The Diagnostic tools are here to tell you about any errors that Google has encountered while crawling your site. They will report on the following error types:
- HTTP errors

- Not found (404)
- URLs not followed
- URLs restricted by robots.txt
- URLs timed out
- Unreachable URLs

Some Statistics:

Top Search Queries: This report shows you how people are getting to your site from a Google Search.

What Googlebot Sees: This is a great way to learn how others link to you and how those links are considered along with your on page content. Multiple sections exist on this report:
- Phrases used in external links to your site (anchor text)
- Keywords in your site's content
- In inbound links
- The actual content on your site (ordered by density).

Index Stats: The index stats are a shortcut to advanced Google queries on your site using operators. Shortcut links are provided on the following operators…
- site:
- link:
- cache:
- info:
- related:

Links: The link reports in Webmaster Tools are limited, but do provide you with ways to measure internal and external link popularity.

Google Sitemaps: Google Sitemaps are what the entire Webmaster Tools were originally built around. Here you can upload and manage XML based sitemap files that catalog all of the pages on your site.

Analyze robots.txt: Robots.txt is where Googlebot and other spiders go when they land on your site to immediately find instructions on what they can and cannot have access to within your site. If you don't want spiders indexing your images, just disallow them. If you'd prefer not to have certain areas of your site indexed and available for the searching public – go ahead and restrict access.

This is where you can check to make sure your robots.txt file is not only up to date, but also valid in terms of how it is written.

Set crawl rate: This area is very informative - it provides an overview of Googlebot's activity on your site. If you have recently updated your site or

acquired new links you'll want to come back and check this section out. See if you see an increase in Googlebot activity in response to your work.

Set preferred domain: Tired of seeing www.domain.com and domain.com in your search results? Or, maybe you have become worried about canonicalization and how it will impact your optimization and links? All you have to do is set the preferred domain tool. Using this tool you can instruct Google to display URLs according to your preference. Now you can have all listings appear as being on www.domain.com.

Of course, if you're not worried about this – you can also opt to have no associations set at all.

Remove URLs: This automated tool is available to help resolve issues with pages that no longer exist or pages that you just want removed from Google's index.

New Features: October 2009

There are new Labs features for Google Webmaster Tools – you should check them out.

The features are "malware details" and "fetch as googlebot"

In order to help webmasters eliminate malware, Google is now sharing snippets of code from pages it considers malware.

"To help protect users against malware threats, Google has built automated scanners that detect malware on websites we've indexed," says Google's Lucas Ballard (of the Anti-malware, Anti-malvertising, and Webmaster Tools teams).

"Pages that are identified as dangerous by these scanners are accompanied by warnings in Google search results, and browsers such as Google Chrome, Firefox, and Safari also use our data to show similar warnings to people attempting to visit suspicious sites."

"While it is important to protect users, we also know that most of these sites are not intentionally distributing malware. We understand the frustration of webmasters whose sites have been compromised without their knowledge and who discover that their site has been flagged," Ballard says.

The Fetch as Googlebot feature lets users see if some of their pages have been hacked and help them understand why they aren't ranking for certain keywords.

"Our keywords and HTML suggestions features help you understand the content we're extracting from your site, and any issues we may be running into at crawl

and indexing time.," says Webmaster Tools Product Manager Sagar Kamdar. "However, we realized it was important to provide the ability for users to submit pages on their site and get real-time feedback on what Googlebot sees."

As you use these tools more you'll find a number of new ways to use the data. Remember, knowledge is power and Google is sharing some great info about your site.

Tip! Make sure you are aware of what information Google makes available for download. Schedule a download every 60 days or so. Google is only provides the information for 90 days and if you don't download it, you will lose data.

NOTE: Google has added +1 reporting as well.

Lesson Five: Links

Links are important to the search engines because it shows the engines that other sites think your information is worthy of sharing. Each link is like a vote for your website.

Links are not only good for the engines but good links open up new sources of traffic from relevant, complementary but non-competing websites.

Linking has gone through so many transformations over the years. First all reciprocal links are good, then only relevant links are good. Then reciprocal links are not helpful, you need one way links.
Today you are better off getting one way links, but some reciprocal links are OK. The higher the PageRank on the site that links to you, the more the link helps you.

Buying links is a hot topic now. Google has clearly and plainly stated that they will penalize sites for buying links – and they are also asking people to report sites that are selling links, so they can penalize them as well. We strongly advise you to avoid this practice.

So, how do you get links?

Hire a link expert. It is usually pretty pricey. Outsourcing to India, in my experience, has never paid off but that is always an option, I guess.

Another way is through good old fashioned hard work. Seek out sites that are relevant but not competing and propose some type of link swap.

The best way is to just write great content, create a fabulous podcast or an interesting video and then submit it to various social media sites, article

directories – basically any place where you can put it. People will find it from those sources and it'll start to spread as people repost your content with links back to you. Creating great content that enhances your site and also spreads virally is the Holy Grail.

Sharing information and being a great resource is definitely valuable. However if you can get creative and have a unique angle or even something controversial your content will spread even faster.

> **TIP!** A URL for a links page should be resources.html. Don't use links.html as your page name. The engines see it as a tip-off that you are just collecting links to improve your rankings – rather than building a true resource.

Some general guidelines:

- No more than 100 outgoing links at an absolute maximum on any one page. I prefer to keep it even lower – I don't go above 50.

- You don't want anyone with more than 50 links on a page linking to you.

- Links should be organized in categories that make sense.

- All links should be **very relevant** to the topic of your site. In other words, if you sell jewelry, link to jewelry cleaners and jewelry repair sites – don't link to dog groomers and stock tips. It needs to be **natural**, which means the engines need to believe that someone looking at your site would actually be interested in the topic of the links you are providing.

- Links coming in to your site should go to different pages, not just one page.

- The "hot" part of the link (the anchor text) that you click should vary from link to link (coming into your site) to get you the most benefit. In other words, don't have everyone that links to you use the same text.

- Links must be attained and grow in a **"natural"** way – in other words, start with a couple on each page and then build evenly across your important pages over time. If you get too many links too quickly it can be a red flag for the engines.

Here are some examples of the anchor text or "hot" part of the link using keywords. Just remember, you want keywords in the anchor text, but you don't always want them to be the same. Vary them as you send them out to other sites to link to you.

```
<a href="http://www.domain.com">Beads & Bead Supplies</a>
```

The above sample leads to much better search engine rankings for the keyword "beads & bead supplies" than the link below.

```
<a href="http://www.domain.com">Beadsmith Bead Store</a>
```

Quality Links (Insider Info Direct From Google)

There are a lot of ways to use social media to obtain links to your site:

- Contests - people will always link to and spread around news about good contests.
- Anything funny - we are all looking for a good laugh and you can be sure if you have a funny comic, video, Blog post, story etc, people will repost it with links back to you. Get creative and think outside the box.
- Anything controversial - take a current topic and have a view that is a little different and controversial and people will link to it and dissect it on their Blog.
- Offer great information that is explained in a way that really makes sense to people. We are all looking for solutions to problems - if you can provide a solution in a clear, concise and helpful manner, your content will be a hit.

Now let's look at some linking advice right from Google:

Google is often asked what their take is on organic link building, so they compiled a response. Rather than paraphrase, I'm just going to share Google's words with you. Any comments our opinions I have are in [ ] and are to be taken as my thoughts and opinions and not part of Google's statement!

"If your site is rather new and still unknown, a good way marketing technique is to get involved in the community around your topic. Interact and contribute on forums and blogs. Just keep in mind to contribute in a positive way, rather than spamming or soliciting for your site. Just building a reputation can drive people to your site. And they will keep on visiting it and linking to it. If you offer long-lasting, unique and compelling content -- something that lets your expertise shine -- people will want to recommend it to others. Great content can serve this purpose as much as providing useful tools." [Great advice but I have to reiterate the "contribute in a positive way" part - it's so true. Comment spam (adding useless comments to people's Blogs) won't earn you links and it's a sure way to earn you a bad reputation. It's a waste of time. Speaking of time, doing legitimate

comments that add value to a conversation can be time consuming. Work out a schedule and plan to spend a bit of time each day on it.]

"A promising way to create value for your target group and earn great links is to think of issues or problems your users might encounter. Visitors are likely to appreciate your site and link to it if you publish a short tutorial or a video providing a solution, or a practical tool. Survey or original research results can serve the same purpose, if they turn out to be useful for the target audience. Both methods grow your credibility in the community and increase visibility. This can help you gain lasting, merit-based links and loyal followers who generate direct traffic and "spread the word." Offering a number of solutions for different problems could evolve into a blog which can continuously affect the site's reputation in a positive way."

"Humor can be another way to gain both great links and get people to talk about your site. With Google Buzz and other social media services constantly growing, entertaining content is being shared now more than ever. We've seen all kinds of amusing content, from ASCII art embedded in a site's source code to funny downtime messages used as a viral marketing technique to increase the visibility of a site. However, we do not recommend counting only on short-lived link-bait tactics. Their appeal wears off quickly and as powerful as marketing stunts can be, you shouldn't rely on them as a long-term strategy or as your only marketing effort."

"It's important to clarify that any legitimate link building strategy is a long-term effort. There are those who advocate for short-lived, often spammy methods, but these are not advisable if you care for your site's reputation. Buying PageRank-passing links or randomly exchanging links are the worst ways of attempting to gather links and they're likely to have no positive impact on your site's performance over time. If your site's visibility in the Google index is important to you it's best to avoid them." [Read this paragraph again, it's hugely important!!]

Last May Google got a patent for their linking analysis. Here are some details

The patent describes that the value of a link seems to be based on the probability that a web surfer would click on the link!

Here's the summary from the patent application: "Systems and methods consistent with the principles of the invention may provide a reasonable surfer model that indicates that when a surfer accesses a document with a set of links, the surfer will follow some of the links with higher probability than others. This reasonable surfer model reflects the fact that not all of the links associated with a document are equally likely to be followed. ....

Examples of unlikely followed links may include 'Terms of Service' links, banner advertisements, and links unrelated to the document."

How does Google classify the links?

To determine the value of a link, Google analyzes several things:

- Features of the linking page: URL of the page, number of links on the page, presence of other words on the page, match between the topic of the link text and the other words on the page
- Features of the link: color and size of the anchor text, link position, number of words, how commercial the text is, length of the linked URL, link type (image or text), context of words
- User behavior data: language and interests of the user, used search query terms, frequency of link selection, navigational actions (forms completed, links selected, etc.)
- Features of the linked page: URL of the page, associated websites, words in the URL, length of the URL

Lesson Six: On-going Content Addition & Social Media

The search engines like to see that your site is growing. They like to see new content being added. It's actually an important part of their algorithm. Many people add content when they optimize their site, and that is a great idea but you shouldn't stop there. Create a plan to add content on an on-going basis. We all get busy and forget, but if there is a plan to guide and remind you, you are more likely to remember.

I am often asked how much content you need to add. It depends on so many factors, just a couple of which are: how big is your site already, how often are your competitors adding content and the most important factor what can you realistically commit to getting done? If you start adding a page a day and just can't keep up with that pace the engines will notice when you stop adding content. You want to establish a pattern and some consistency.

You should plan on making your content pull double duty. Use it to syndicate to article directories and also use it on social media sites.

Tip! Make sure your content is posted on your site and spidered by the engines before you start syndicating it. You want to be sure you are credited as the original source of that content.

Most people look at adding content once or twice per week.

If your Blog is on your server in a subdirectory then content you add to your Blog counts. (Don't have a Blog yet? You are missing out! But that's a whole other topic.)

Once your content addition plan is in place it is time to turn your attention to social media.

When most people think about SEO, they think Meta Tags and keywords.

In 2012, SEO is so much more than that.

SEO is also about social media and the user experience.

While "on-page SEO" is still vital and should be taken care of (fresh, quality content added and attention to site structure and code enhancements) it is crucial that site owners understand that it doesn't stop there.

Social media is often further down the priority list for many site owners. Primarily because they either don't like it personally or they don't understand HOW it actually helps their business. It's hard for people to imagine a tweet or Facebook message creating a sale (ROI).

The best message I can teach you in 2012 is that it doesn't matter if you like or understand Social Media. It only matters if Social Media can help your business grow. And it can!!

The search engines (Bing and Google specifically) are now taking into account the reputation of websites as reflected in social media as part of their algorithm to rank sites.

Much like links count as a "vote of popularity" for a site, so does Social Media exposure. If your site is out there, getting talked about, getting messages shared and liked and +1ed, then it shows the engines the site has something of value that people are responding to.

If you do nothing else in 2012, you need to get involved in Social Media. On its own Social Media can drive traffic and exposure BUT the boost it gives your SEO is something you can't afford to ignore.

Often I hear: "it's OK, I'm already ranking well so I don't need Social Media, but thanks."

The critical error there is thinking that ranking well now means you will continue to rank well long term. With an average of more than one algorithm change per day last year, there is no arguing how fast things change with the engines. A ranking today is no way any assurance that you will rank tomorrow. How can you ensure you will continue to rank tomorrow? Actively optimize in all areas that the engines look at (and that includes Social Media).

So what is Social Media exactly? Social media as defined on Wikipedia is:

Social media is an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. This interaction, and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and "building" of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories, and understandings.

Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, message boards, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few. Examples of social media applications are Google Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace (social networking), Facebook (social networking), Last.fm (personal music), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Second Life (virtual reality), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging) and other microblogs such as Jaiku and Pownce. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms like Mybloglog and Plaxo.

A few years ago Time magazine announced that the person of the year was YOU. After all the "user generated" content that was published and spreading rapidly across the internet Time felt YOU were responsible for this amazing new trend and information that is now available.

The trend continues to grow as more and more sites appear and existing sites allow for much more interaction and user generated content.
These social networks allow you to post articles, podcasts, videos, Blogs, bookmarks, bios, profiles and comments.

With social media it is very easy to share your thoughts and your marketing message. Of course sharing it is only step one – the content has to be interesting, funny, informative, shocking etc to create a viral spread of the content through email and various networks.

This new phenomenon gives the consumer the power to voice their opinions and impact the decision making of other potential consumers. Because of all this open and honest dialog that just spreads across the internet "Reputation Management" has become a big buzz word and something we are all concerned about.

Tip! Set a Google alert for your name, your company name and various other keywords that are relevant to your site and business. Keep tabs on what content is spreading about you and your company. You may come across negative content and will have to

work to neutralize the negativity and you may discover supporters of yours that will open up new opportunities. So, definitely plan some reputation management so this new age of user generated content doesn't work against you.

The advent of social networking sites and user generated content also opens up new opportunities for businesses to get involved and really interact with and market to their audience in a different way.

Many companies are shying away from social media for 2 main reasons:

1. They don't understand what it is and how to participate.
2. They don't believe they will benefit from social media.

It is important that we address both of those issues.

How do you participate in social media?

There are so many ways, we could never cover it all right here so let's look at just a couple examples and some of the rules and tips you must know in order to participate.

Facebook.com is a site that was designed for social networking. You connect with friends, family and colleagues by searching the Facebook member database.

Each member has the opportunity to create their own profile, which is a page that allows them to post a photo, share contact info and post information about education, career, interests, as well as photos, quotes, videos and much more. You can also set up a Fan page. I highly recommend you create a Fan page and promote it. You can use your Fan page to build your mailing list, promote your products or services and drive traffic back to your site. You can even pull your Blog feed into your Fan page.

(Need a quote on creating a killer Facebook Fan Page? Email jennifer@ecombuffet.com)

There are many different ways to break into facebook.com and use it as a marketing tool, but the key thing you need to remember is you can't go in there and plaster your sales message all over the place and expect hordes of people to go running to your site.

You need to experience the "culture" of the site and learn the etiquette. There are ways you can share content that will turn your audience off and there are ways you can attract them and get them interested.

Without learning the accepted etiquette for each site, you risk offending the very people you are there to attract.

Start by setting up your profile and then check out groups and individuals that have listed an interest in what you do, or the product or service that you offer.

See how they communicate and check out the type of interaction that occurs.

One thing you have to remember is things may not play out like you would expect them to. For example, I have a Blog that many of you read. Many popular Blogs have comments and feedback from the Blog readers. My Blog gets none of that – instead people email me directly and share their comments and ask their questions.

At first I was disappointed, I expected people to post comments on my Blog. I quickly learned to adapt and realized I was getting a response; it just wasn't in the form I expected. So, you go with the flow. If something isn't what you expected you either adapt your expectations or alter your strategy. In my case, I just adapted my thinking since the end result was what I wanted; it just didn't occur that way I expected it to.

So what I'm saying is the whole point of social media is that it is driven by the public and you don't have control, so you may not get what you expect. There is no precise science. There is just trial and error and getting your name, your site and your message out there.

I will go into detail on how to specifically participate in social media in an article coming out soon, but for now I just wanted to lay the foundation and provide a basic understanding for you.

So, in general you would participate in different ways depending on the particular site, but usually you start a group related to your product or service, posting your interests, posting comments on the Blog or Message Board forum within the particular website. You can post announcements, list products or services in the marketplace section (if the site has one). You can announce events, newsletters, teleconference calls etc.

More About Facebook Fan Pages:

They are a great tool to generate new leads and develop relationships with people to help grow your business.

There is some confusion about a Profile on Facebook, a Group and a Fan Page or Business Page.

Unlike groups in Facebook, Fan pages are visible to unregistered people and are indexed by the engines – which is another opportunity for you to come up in the engines.

The number of Fans you can have is unlimited (whereas the Friend limit is 5,000).

Pages are generally better for a long-term relationships with your fans, readers or customers.

Pages include links. Because the pages are public, you can get some link juice (link popularity).

You can send "updates" to fans whenever you want. It's a nice way of building a database of interested users. Send messages about new products, updated website, etc.

When someone joins a Fan Page, it's published in their News feed for all of their Friends to read (unless they have turned this off). This helps spread the word about your Fan Page.

A Fan or Business Page is designed to promote a business. It can be used to share simple information like your business hours, contact information and product/service offerings. It can also be used as a marketing tool.

If you design a fun and graphically appealing Fan Page that is designed to capture leads and promote your business well, it can be a good tool for generating new leads.

You don't have to have a Facebook profile to have a Fan/Business page BUT if you want some of the added features to enhance the page, then you do need a profile. You don't have to be active and look for old high school or college friends or play any of the games or other things people do on Facebook. You can use Facebook simply as a business tool. You just need a simple profile with your name and a link to your website and then the Fan/Business page can be set up with all of the added benefits.

Anyone can set up a Fan page, but to get the most out of it with the added features, you need to know HTML.

NOTE: as of March 10 2011, Facebook will be using iFrames for custom tabs (which means they are phasing out FBML – if you already have an FBML tab, it will still function but all new pages will need to be created with iFrames. More coding knowledge will be required and you are more likely to need help if you aren't proficient in coding.

Some interesting Facebook stats:

- Facebook has 600 Million Global Users (and growing)
- Facebook has 100 Million U.S. Users: Facebook is strong around-the-world (Canada has the highest penetration rate), but nearly 1/3 of all Facebook users are in the U.S.
- The average Facebook User Spends 55 Minutes Per Day
- Real-time Search Is Important Today: Facebook is now making most content available publicly (unless you adjust your privacy settings). This has tremendous implications for search engine optimization and reputation management. You need to be on top of real-time search - today.

A recent study (The Sysomos study) found a strong correlation between amount of content (notes, links, photos, videos and custom pages/tabs) and number of fans.

If you are looking to really grow your Fan base, you need something more than a standard Fan page.

2012 Facebook Updates:

I wanted to give you a comprehensive breakdown of all the changes to the pages (keep reading for that). I also wanted to make a limited time special offer.

We are offering comprehensive Facebook packages at a special price. Let me take a minute to explain that and then we'll get to the detailed breakdown of all changes.

We can design a custom tab with an incentive-to-like feature (also called fan-gating, it means you offer fans access to a coupon or info AFTER they click the "LIKE" button so they are more compelled to click it and it increases your fans). We can also design a custom cover photo for your timeline page and a thumbnail graphic to draw attention to your custom tab. The normal cost of this package is $370 onetime fee. We are now able to offer it for $320 onetime fee for a very limited time (until this coming Sunday). Save $50 by ordering before Sunday. It's the best way to ensure you have high-end custom design for the major elements of your Fan Page.

If you have questions of what any of this means…shoot me an email and I can show you samples and give you more details.

OK, now onto the details of all the changes…this is going to be long so get comfy. You can read it all here:

With the new timeline pages, you will experience the following changes (remember people were able to choose to convert to the timeline page anytime

but come tomorrow, it's no longer optional and the switch is happening whether you are ready or not).

If you are designing your own custom pages, one new change is that you will have a chance to preview your page(s) and make any edits or tweaks before you publish them. You'll find the preview option at the top of your page in the old design. Or, you can view a list of your pages here: https://www.facebook.com/pages/status/ mode.

One of the major new changes is the **Cover image.** If you plan to create your own, here are the dimensions and other details you need to know: It is **851 x 315 pixels**. Note: if you upload an image that is smaller than that, they will stretch it out and it may look distorted. Also note they won't accept any image unless it is at least 399 pixels wide. Facebook does have some rules for these images, this is not meant to be free advertising for you (they want to get paid for any advertising you do). Since they are giving you a nice piece of prime real estate, there are some rules they want you to follow – which you can read about here: http://www.facebook.com/page_guidelines.php

There is also space for your standard profile picture. Your profile pic should be square and is either 160 x 160 pixels, depending on the size of someone's screen. The photo you upload must be at least 180 x 180 pixels.

Changes to custom landing tabs: You are no longer able to set a default tab – if they find you on Facebook, they will land on the Timeline "wall" by default BUT your custom tabs are still present on the page – they are listed as "custom apps" and each custom app has a unique URL so you can **drive traffic to any 'landing page' you wish**.

You'll notice on the new pages, just below your cover image there are thumbnails which showcase your apps/tabs etc. You can have a maximum of 12 with 4 on display. The first one will always be your Photos tab, you can't change that. The other possible ones are Notes, Events, Likes, your custom tab and any other third party apps (like a shopping page etc). You have the ability to customize these little thumbnail apps - and if you don't, they look pretty ugly and don't stand out – check the ones from my page that I haven't yet customized:

So my suggestion is to customize the one for your custom/welcome tab – especially if you are offering an incentive to like. It's a great way to make that tab stand out and draw people to the tab. If you are offering a free report, the image could be customized to announce that. (If you hire us to do your page, we'll handle customizing the thumbnail for your custom tab). If you handle it yourself, the dimensions for the thumbnails are 111 x 74 pixels.

(Directions for adding/changing a custom thumbnail: expand all apps by clicking the small down arrow to the right of the four app display. Then hover over any app > click the edit pencil > click Edit Settings > click Change next to Custom Tab Image (opens in a new window) > click Change > upload an image.

The Like becomes Liked. In the past when someone clicked the Like button, it went away. Now it stays there and turns from Like to Liked. Users can hover over the Liked button and see various options.
As of early March they added Interest Lists. You can read more about that here: http://newsroom.fb.com/Announcements/Introducing-Interest-Lists-109.aspx

The Timeline allows you to go back in time and add business milestones. You can add milestones any time during the time you list your business as active (in other words if you said you started 5 years ago, you could go back 5 years ago and create a milestone that highlights the company formation – it's a great way to list important events in the company's history)

There are new filters for wall posts: Highlights, Posts by Page, Posts by Others, and Friend Activity. The default is always Highlights.,

A cool new feature allows posts on the page to be pinned the top of the wall for up to 7 days.

Page admins can make some posts 'double wide' so **the post spreads across both columns of the Timeline**. All you have to do is hover over a post and click the star icon to highlight.

You can also reposition photos shared by you (or others). Hover over the image and click the edit pencil, then **click Reposition photo**, then drag the image where you want it, and click Save.

Fans and visitors can private Message fan admins – you can get more details here: https://www.facebook.com/help/?page=265660236817588

Lots going on and the new pages are great – visually appealing and they create a lot of opportunity for connection with potential customers. ☺

Facebook announced a minor change…starting April 26 the size of the profile picture on all Pages will be 160 x 160 pixels and will sit at 23 pixels from the left and 210 pixels from the top of the Page.

Since you were supposed to be loading images that were 180 x 180, you should be fine. This just means they are showing a larger image than they were before.

Doing business on social media sites has its own set of challenges (the cost to make changes and stay current if you don't handle the work yourself, the time needed to stay current and learn new features etc) but that's all minor considering the benefit you get. So while I was one of the ones ranting yesterday about the sizing glitch, I had to remind myself that Facebook is offering us a platform to get exposure and build connections – and it's free! So if we need to update from time to time, it's really not that bad!

Please note Facebook consistently makes changes, they recently rolled out a new Commenting platform that allows you to add the ability for people to comment on your Blog and have it run through Facebook.

December 2010 News:

Google and Bing both just confirmed that both Twitter and Facebook do impact SEO rankings!

We've long suspected this and in anticipation of this announcement have encouraged all our clients to get involved in Twitter and Facebook.

In a recent interview between Danny Sullivan (if you don't know Danny, he is seen as the leading expert in SEO – when I first met Danny I called him an SEO Rock Star and while he laughed, it really is how he is known!) and Google and Bing, we got the details of this announcement:

Danny Sullivan: If an article is retweeted or referenced much in Twitter, do you count that as a signal outside of finding any non-nofollowed links that may naturally result from it?

Bing: We do look at the social authority of a user. We look at how many people you follow, how many follow you, and this can add a little weight to a listing in regular search results. It carries much more weight in Bing Social Search, where tweets from more authoritative people will flow to the top when best match relevancy is used.

Google: Yes, we do use it as a signal. It is used as a signal in our organic and news rankings. We also use it to enhance our news universal by marking how many people shared an article.

WHAT THIS MEANS: You need to be on Twitter and sharing content that gets retweeted!

Danny Sullivan: Do you try to calculate the authority of someone who tweets that might be assigned to their Twitter page. Do you try to "know," if you will, who they are?

Bing: Yes. We do calculate the authority of someone who tweets. For known public figures or publishers, we do associate them with who they are. (For example, query for Danny Sullivan)

Google: Yes we do compute and use author quality. We don't know who anyone is in real life :-)

Danny Sullivan: Do you calculate whether a link should carry more weight depending on the person who tweets it?

Bing: Yes.

Google: Yes we do use this as a signal, especially in the "Top links" section [of Google Realtime Search].

WHAT THIS MEANS: You need to be actively building your follower base and improve your "author authority" (so your tweets and retweets of your tweets help you more and carry more weight).

We now know that those link sharing activities on Twitter + Facebook are evaluated based on the person/entity sharing them through a score Google calls "Author Authority," and Bing calls "Social Authority."

If you aren't yet on Twitter or Facebook (with a Fan Page) please contact us to get a quote and get going – it's only going to become more important as time goes on.

If you are already on Twitter and/or Facebook but think you may need some help, let us review what you are doing and see how we can help!

Pinterest For Business

What is Pinterest?

Pinterest's About page tells us it is:

a virtual pinboard — a place where you can create collections of things you love and "follow" collections created by people with great taste. People use Pinterest to collect and share all sorts of things — wedding inspiration, favorite T-shirts, DJ equipment. You name it, people are pinning it.

To get started you need an invitation. You can either go to the homepage and put in your email address to request one or you can ask a friend that is a Pinterest user to invite you.

TIP: Use the same email you used for your Twitter account – that will make it easy to share your pins with Twitter. Right now Facebook only has the ability to connect with personal profiles and not business pages, so you don't want to connect your Pinterest to Facebook if you are planning on using it for business.

Getting started on Pinterest once you have your invitation:

The first thing you'll do is set up your profile page.

Your profile shows your display name, a profile picture, a bio/description, and how many followers you have as well as how many you are following.

There is an option that says "Hide your Pinterest profile from search engines". Be sure this is OFF or else the engines won't be able to spider your materials.

When you open a new Pinterest account, you will be given these five templates for boards:

You can keep these five boards to get started or you can change them. On each of the boards there is an "edit" button. Click on this and you can name/rename a

board, write a description for that board, choose a category (required by Pinterest), determine if you are the only one who can pin or if it's a shared board, or just delete the board altogether. NOTE: Don't forget to click on Save Board Settings when you are done!

At the top of your profile page, in the right-hand part of the screen, you'll see various drop-down menus to help you navigate your own settings and boards as well as discover others on Pinterest.

Navigating Pinterest:

If you are logged into Pinterest, you can hit the Pinterest icon in the top left-hand corner of your screen to go to your Pinterest home. Just like going to your home page in Facebook or Twitter, this will show you your feed. Here you will see all of the recent pins of the people you follow.

Remember that everyone who follows you will see everything that you pin in their feed.

From your home page (not your profile – your Pinterest home), you will see a link to Discussions. This will show you what is hot on Pinterest at the moment based on comments and repins (think of repins like retweets on Twitter or shares on Facebook – it's when someone shares a pin).

Then there is a link to Everything. This brings up the most recent pins from everyone on Pinterest.

Beginners Tip: Click on the Everything feed and just spend some time looking. This will help you to see what kinds of things people are pinning, what kinds of boards others have created, and just give you a general feel for what Pinterest is about.

Once you are done that, you want to start building your Boards before you actively try to build followers. Much like a new Blog, you don't want to drive people there before you have something for them to see. So build some boards that have interesting pins and then you can start building your followers. (Note: You will have the option to share posts through Facebook, Twitter and email.)

How do I pin something to Pinterest?

You can use the "Pin This" bookmarklet (see that plus other topics here: http://pinterest.com/about/help/)

NOTE: There has been talk from IE users that it's difficult to use the Pin This bookmark in Explorer.

What should I pin on Pinterest?

There is etiquette to be followed and one of the leading items is not to be too blatantly self-promotional. That ruins it for everyone.

(Side note: when you are posting from another source be sure to cite the source and give them credit.)
Remember the name Pinterest comes from pinning about Interests. So you can use Pinterest to create a personality and connection for your company that potential customers and clients can relate to.

You can share things of interest to your target audience – things that show how your product or service is used in their lifestyle. Things they can relate to. Things they will find interesting. That will pay off – it'll help them see you as a resource and a source of interest in their life. You can post pictures of your products if there is a reason, like they are homemade or they are décor related or fashion related. People love to see beautiful things – just remember to balance it with other things as well. If you hit them with nothing but your product catalog, there isn't really much in it for them and it's all about you selling.

Here are some examples of integrating lifestyle imagery into your pins:

If you sell shoes, post pics of the shoes and then pics of the types of places people would wear those in everyday life. Show beautiful hiking trails for hiking boots. Show cocktail parties and great outfits that go with fancy heels. Take what you sell and create imagery of that product being used in life.

If you sell baby blankets, show pics of babies in beds and playing on the floor. Show baby showers and gift giving to plant the seed. Show your products. Show all things baby related.

TIP: You can pin items from your Blog or site. [Pinterest now has a Pin It! button you can use for blog posts or product pages.](#)

Following/Unfollowing

When you begin, Pinterest will help you find friends on Pinterest using your email, Twitter, or Facebook. That's a great place to start. Pinterest will then make suggestions for you and display those suggestions on your home page. Pinterest has also compiled some lists which are also a great place to find great people to follow (check out the upper right hand corner of the page and find the People drop-down menu; you'll find the lists there).

You have the choice to follow all of someone's boards or follow individual boards they have created. If you follow all, that means that you will follow every board they have at present and all future boards they will create.

Unfollowing a board is easy. Click on whatever board you don't want to follow (from your feed) then click the Unfollow button from the top right-hand corner of that board. Easy! Now that board will no longer appear in your feed.

Helpful Pinterest Tips:

- You can follow a user, which means you will be notified of anything they pin on any Boards or you can follow just one board to be updated on the pins to that Board only.
- You will have the option to share posts through Facebook, Twitter and email.
- Use hashtags just like you do on your other social media sites.
- If you have an off-line event, create a Pinboard to share images from the event and use that to promote future similar events.
- You can create video galleries too.
- For every pin, there is a space for a description. You'll see everything from "want this" to "love this" but you can also go into more detail. It's a great place to include a link back to your site/Blog/landing page etc. Note that when repinning, the description from the person who pinned it before you appears in that space by default.
- Choose to receive email notifications from your Preferences. This will alert you to new followers, new repins, @ mentions, and likes.
- "Like" is a wonderful and helpful feature on Pinterest. If you come across something that you like but don't necessarily want/need to pin, you can simply Like it. This won't show up in the feed of those who follow you, but you can click on Likes from your profile to see a list of everything you have Liked on Pinterest.
- To tag another Pinterest user when you pin something, use @ just like on Twitter or Facebook.
- You can even create something specifically for the purpose of pinning. If you are on Facebook you'll see that the hottest trend is taking inspirational or motivational quotes and creating an image to post. You can do that with quotes related to your industry and pin those. They spread like wildfire – especially if you pair an incredible image with a great quote.
- If you are in the fashion, food, crafts/handmade, art, photography, décor, Mommy interests, sports area– you might find Pinterest to be a really great tool for you. It's designed for just those kinds of things (although with a little creativity you can make it work for any business)

Why should I be on Pinterest?

The growth of Pinterest has been amazing and many compare it to Facebook in its early days.

Most compelling, the primary demographic of Pinterest users is composed of women, a hard-to-reach online demographic.

Ideas For Pins

- Use any visual content and images you already have
- Create new ones – either design images in Photoshop or go on a camera spree in the office one day and catch some great candid shots
- Look at Blog posts and see what visuals you can pull from there
- Create or use infographics and charts
- Use covers or ebooks or books
- Show product photos
- Show photos of happy customers
- Allow users to pin to your pinboards.

Promotion Ideas

Try hosting a contest. Ask people to create a board on their own account that shows why they love your product and/or service.

Ask them to show pics of then doing fun/crazy/interesting things with your products. The coolest board wins a prize or ask them to re-pin their board to your profile and get people to vote on who is best.

Promote your Pinboards via email, your site and Blog and all your other social media profiles

Engage with other users – like and comment on their work. Much like on Tiwtter if you are active with them, they are likely to reciprocate.

Be focused on specific topics on your Boards – that allows you to create a strong area of interest for people passionate about the topic.

Remember the key here is thinking about your target audience and how your products/services fit into their lifestyles. Capture imagery they can relate to and will respond emotionally to.

Let's look at a few more samples:

If you sell kitchenware, pin images of great recipes (share the recipe under the photo), show pics of moms & kids cooking together (they are always funny and cute), create images of great quotes from famous chefs (like Julia Child etc).
If you sell baby blankets, in addition to images from baby showers and adorable baby pics and product photos, you can also get creative and look for images of kids using blankets in play (as a cape, as a fort, to drag their sibling around, as a bag of their stuff when they threaten to "run away" etc.

If you sell accounting software, show images of people saving money, show images of paperwork and frustrated people, show screenshots of your software with smiling people. Show image of tax and financial tips (remember it could be just words designed a graphic, that is so popular on Facebook right now)

Get creative and have some fun. As with all social media, this will take more time to get up and running and then once you are in a groove, it'll get easier.

Lesson Seven: Blogging

- About 120,000 new weblogs are created each day – which means 1.4 new blogs are created every second
- 1.5 million posts per day which means 17 posts are made every second

What does that mean?

Some people might think it means there are so many Blogs out there how could my little Blog get noticed and make a difference? That's not the right way to look at it though, and here's why:

• 3000-7000 new splogs (fake, or spam Blogs) are created every day

• Only 19.4 million Bloggers (55%) are still posting 3 months after their Blogs are created

Which means a real Blog, with interesting content that is configured for maximum exposure and benefit, can find its place in the Blogosphere and make a difference in your SEO campaign and your marketing campaign as well.

Benefits of a Blog:

• Easy to update, once it's set up you can create posts yourself and add fresh content as often as you want

• Blogs invite interactivity with your site viewers – the more you engage your visitors the more likely they are to buy (and the more they are likely to spend on each purchase)

• The search engines index more Blogs daily then web pages, so adding a Blog to your arsenal creates a second site that can be indexed and drive traffic.

• Your Blog can boost your main site's rankings if set up properly.

• Many people are not aware of the power of Blogs and are just using a free Blogger.com Blog. They are missing out on the benefits of all the powerful Plugins** that come with a hosted Blog. Which means if you set up a powerful hosted Blog you are a step ahead of so many of the Bloggers out there.

• Blogs allow you to tap into Real Time Search, which creates another opportunity for you to appear in the first page of the SERPs (search engine results pages)

36

**Plugins are features that are added to your Blog to make it more powerful. With Plugins your content can virally spread across the internet through RSS Feed, pings and so much more.

If you don't have a Blog, or aren't sure if you are getting the most out of your Blog – send us an email and we'll help you sort through the tech stuff and make a decision that is best for your business. Just email me at <u>jennifer@ecombuffet.com</u>

Lesson Eight: Maintenance

Now that your site is optimized, your link campaign is under way and you are diving into social media, it's time to talk about maintenance.

SEO is an ever changing industry. Optimization is not a "set it and forget it" kind of thing. You have to monitor rankings and tweak your site if the results you were hoping for don't happen. Even if you get the results you were after, you need to stay on top of industry news and make any necessary changes to your site. If you don't stay current with what the engines are looking for, you risk losing your rankings.

There is always going to be some fluctuation in rankings – the SERPs (search engine results pages) are not static. But you want to minimize the chances of major rankings changes.

Aside from staying current on trends and changes in optimization you also need to stay current on keywords and definitely monitor web stats.

Let's talk about keywords for a minute.

Did you know that 25% of searches each month are brand new, never before seen search words and phrases? That is shocking. You would think with the number of search queries running through Google, they have seen it all.

We spend so much time on keyword research – and rightfully so, it's the foundation of your campaign. But this new information tells us that we need to tweak the process a little bit to keep up with the ever changing SEO world.
So, how do you handle keyword research and make sure you are staying current?

First and foremost you want to make sure you have outlined your strategy. Without a plan in place you are likely to forget to do it, and it'll just rattle around in the back of your brain or sit on a post-it note that gets stuck to the back of another piece of paper in your planner.

So, before that happens, let's define your plan right now.

You've already done your initial keyword research steps as outlined in Lesson One – which outlined steps 1 – 4. Here is where most people are missing out and need to plan further action.

5. Once a month you should do keyword research and see what new words and phrases come up and add those new words and phrases to your campaign. If you find once a month is too often, do it every other month. Just make sure you have a plan to check back regularly so you can take advantage of new search phrases and tap into more traffic. You could put a monthly reminder in your Outlook or use an online reminder service. Find a system that will work for you!

If you are adding content to your site like you should be, then adding these new keyword phrases should be easy to work into the new content you are writing. ☺ You should also schedule at least a monthly review of your web stats (if not more often). Check out how much traffic you are actually getting from the engines. Find out what phrases people are actually finding your site with. Don't forget the engines will start picking up your site for "bonus keywords" – which are different combinations and variations of your core keywords that you optimized for. If you identify some of these "bonus keywords" it'll give you insight into exactly how people are searching and what they are looking for. You may find it's worth adding content for these new phrases so you can try to get even more exposure for them.

You also want to look at how long people are staying on your site, how many pages they are looking at before they leave, and what pages they leave most often.

Although checking web stats is not directly related to optimization, it is vital to the success and growth of your site – which is ultimately why you are optimizing your site, right?

MISC INFO – STILL "MUST HAVE" INFO (just added it on to the end as it become new info that you had to have)

I have been a columnist at industry favorite Search Engine Journal for a while now and there is some great content you should check out. Here is a list of all my posts there: http://www.searchenginejournal.com/author/jennifer-horowitz/

We are done with your lessons, so now let's take a look at some other really good information…

GOOGLE (A breakdown of news, tips, new features etc)

This section includes a collection of information, specifically related to Google. I've thrown it in to keep you updated on the history. I recently edited this book
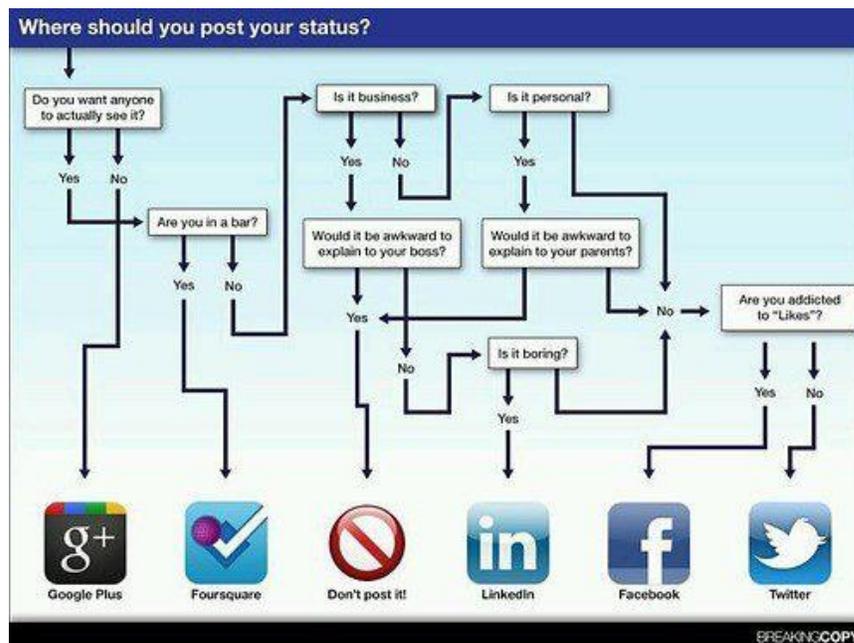
(August 29) so anything that is still here is important information for you to have, even if it's dated from a year or two ago.

Search Plus Your World

I am getting a lot of questions about "Search Plus Your World" and it's not surprising. With Google pushing the +1 button and Google+ down our throats, most people have heard of it by now. But in case you don't know the details, I wanted to give you a rundown. Grab a drink and maybe a little snack and get comfy – this could be a long one! I'll give a rough overview of +1/G+ and then we'll go into "Search Plus Your World" (and at the end I'll wrap it all up with my opinions and what it means to you).

+1 is the equivalent of Facebook's "LIKE" button. Google+ or G+ is Google's social network. It allows you to post pics, "hangout" (chat) and post comments that people can follow. You create "circles" to organize your "friends" and you can choose what content you share with what circles.

When it first launched it was invitation only. It was primarily people in the SEO/online marketing industry using it. As it expanded, more and more people started checking it out – primarily business owners that were scared into checking it out (for fear of missing the next big traffic generation source). The number of users that Google was reporting were large. BUT then it came out that the numbers were a little inflated because they counted people logging into gmail as well. Long story short: it's still not totally clear whether G+ will pass the test of time. Most people seem to feel like this about it:

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPLAINED

TWITTER — I'M EATING A #DONUT

FACEBOOK — I LIKE DONUTS

FOURSQURE — THIS IS WHERE I EAT DONUTS

INSTAGRAM — HERE'S A VINTAGE PHOTO OF MY DONUT

YOU TUBE — HERE I AM EATING A DONUT

LINKED IN — MY SKILLS INCLUDE DONUT EATING

PINTEREST — HERE'S A DONUT RECIPE

LAST FM — NOW LISTENING TO "DONUTS"

G+ — I'M A GOOGLE EMPLOYEE WHO EATS DONUTS.

(I got those both on Facebook, would love to credit the brilliant creative minds that came up with those)

So the bottom line? Google has a lot invested in making this work (rumor has it employee bonuses are being tied to the success of this) BUT most people aren't convinced it'll take off and even it does, it likely won't overtake Facebook.

OK, so now that you know the scoop – back to "Search Plus Your World"

How Does "Search Plus Your World" Work?

If you have a Google account, you automatically have a Google profile and if you have a profile, then you now have a Google+ presence. So even if you haven't yet signed up for to Google+, your profile in the Google+ community exists and is lying there dormant until you get active on it.

Any Google user (Google+ participant or not) can experience the personalized "Search Plus" results when they search in Google, and active Google+ users can see even more personalized results based on content shared in Google+.

Google explains that the content people can now see in the SERPs is:

- *Personal Results, which enable you to find information just for you, such as Google+ photos and posts—both your own and those shared specifically with you, that only you will be able to see on your results page;*
- *Profiles in Search: both in autocomplete and results, which enable you to immediately find people you're close to or might be interested in following; and,*
- *People and Pages, which help you find people profiles and Google+ pages related to a specific topic or area of interest, and enable you to*

follow them with just a few clicks. Because behind most every query is a community.

So basically the search engine algorithms that made behavioral, social and personalized search possible before are all bundled together now into the "Search Plus Your World" feature. The non-personalized results are still available.   A user can jump back and forth between personal and non-personal results with one click.

There are now basically three options for the SERPs:

1. Non-personalized results (stripped of most cues that have personalized searches in the past)
2. Personalized results
3. Google+ personalized only results.

If doing a search in the "Search Plus" (the default view in the SERPs), here is what you are likely to find:

- **Google+ posts.** You can find relevant G+ posts from friends/colleagues/people in your circles (you'll see this info whether they shared it publically or privately with you). You'll find links that they shared also.
- **Photos.** You'll find photos – both yours and your friends that are relevant to your query (I went to Buenos Aires last year, so if I'm in your circle and you search for Buenos Aires, you'll see some of my great pics – go for it – they are worth a look!) Images are pulled in based on captions, comments and the album title.

If I haven't totally confused you yet, keep on reading for more details.

So these personalized results are mixed in with the "normal" results and they are personalized to you. So you could be sitting side by side with a friend and each search for the same thing and you'll see different results.

When Universal search first came out, there was some confusion (for those that don't remember that was when Blogs, shopping, images, videos etc were all integrated in the SERPs). This is the same as that, but now there are also links/posts and images from yourself and people you are connected to in the mix as well.

"Search Plus" has been called "personalized search on steroids"- but still many people are not happy about it. There are privacy issues and there are concerns about the information being delivered in the SERPs will be so filtered based on "over-personalization" (feeding information that is only relevant to your circles and you and not giving unbiased "big picture" results.

41

Another point of contention – it doesn't include date from Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social networks. People feel it's very self-serving of Google and they also feel if personalized content is so important they are missing the boat big time by leaving out the biggest sources of social content.

FYI: Google says they would be open to featuring the content from other social networks if they had access to the data they need from Facebook, Twitter etc. Skeptics says its lip service and they could easily access the data but want to exclude it for their own benefit (promoting G+)

Another interesting note: The Official Google Blog says that "behavioral search" is no longer happening in the non-personalized results:

That means no results from your friends, no private information and no personalization of results based on your Web History. This toggle button works for an individual search session, but you can also make this the default in your Search Settings. We provide separate control in Search Settings over other contextual signals we use, including location and language.

That is really interesting and it means we have data that is ultra-personalized on one side and with the click of the toggle button, content that is no longer personalized. That means no more influence from past web browsing history or social or behavioral cues (but geo-targeting will still happen so you will still see local results). Halleluiah! But this is not the default so remember to toggle to non-personalized if you want "raw" Google data.

The problem is most users don't spend the time and energy that people in my industry and web site owners spend, so they may not realize they can toggle to the non-personalized. But then again, those users are not likely to be active on G+ and won't have a lot of data pulling from there.

As you can see, there are a lot of "ifs" and "ands" and even some "buts" (some may argue there are also some "butts" over at Google!) and a lot that is still not totally clear. We need to wait a bit longer and see how it impacts the results over time. We'll see users that aren't as aware of all this start noticing a decrease in quality of results (people speculate that over-personalizing will limit and impair results).

So what does all this mean? Is this the year SEO actually dies? If we had a funeral for each time SEO was declared dead, I'd be pulling out my black dress quite a few times a year.

The answer once again is a resounding NO.

As with most Google changes, this doesn't mean the death of SEO, it simply means we have some adapting and adjusting to do.

People still want real info – they want to research and book travel and find hotels and find stores to buy from. They don't only want to see their friends photos and links and posts.

*On-page optimization to get your site to come up for relevant queries is still very alive and well and **needed.***

Google still values content (as evidenced by their freshness filter and duplicate content filter – let's not forget Panda!) You still need to add content, optimize your site, create a strong structure that is easy to navigate – basically Google still needs to clearly see the theme of your site and find it relevant to the search queries people perform.

There is talk that Google will focus more on click-throughs from within your circles and optimizing tags to get click-throughs is important but I don't even want to go there because that was always important and something that should already be being done.

So my friends, there you have it. As you can probably tell I'm in the cynic's camp on this one. There is a lot I don't like and I think a lot will change (The LA Times is already predicting more FTC trouble for Google and the privacy groups are going to be all over this too). Time will tell how it all plays out. And as always, I want to leave you with a take-away:

Don't stop optimizing and adding content to your site (if anything optimization gets **more** important over time as searchers get more sophisticated and more competition comes on board). Lastly, don't jump all over G+ for fear of missing out (I'll let you know if that changes) but you probably should put a +1 button up on your site just in case. ☺

Important Information: How Does Google Categorize Your Site?

You know what you have to offer and you know what your site is about – but does Google?

If you had to categorize your site, do you think it would match how Google would categorize it?

You can find out!

If Google thinks your site is about a certain topic, or in a certain category and it doesn't match what your site is truly about, it could be hard to rank for words that are relevant for you because Google may not agree they are relevant. So being sure how Google sees your site is important.

You can use the "similar" search operator to find out just how Google categorizes your site!

Go to your Google search box and type:

related:www.domain.com/ ~domain.com

Replace www.domain.com with your own domain name. Make sure there is no space after the colon.

The results page will show other sites Google thinks are related to your site. This will give you a glimpse into what Google thinks your site is about. If the websites listed on the search results page are related (similar) to your site, which is good. It means Google understands what your site is about and you are in sync! If the sites are about totally different topics, then there is a big problem that needs to be fixed immediately.

If its hit and miss, some of the sites are actually related sites and others aren't, then there is still some tweaking to get more clarity and to show Google without a doubt what the topic/category of your site is.

How does Google determine what your site is about?

They look at the content of the site (and the accompanying optimization) and they also look at the links coming into your site. If the links coming into your site are all from completely unrelated sites, it doesn't reinforce the theme / topic / category of your site. You want to be sure that the links you are getting are coming from complementary sites and also be sure the anchor text is using a keyword that is related to the page it is linking to.

Tags on Local Listings

For $25 you can enhance your Google Maps/Local listing.

Get more details: http://google-latlong.blogspot.com/2010/06/google-tags-rolling-out-
nationwide.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=F
eed:+blogspot/SbSV+%28Google+LatLong%29&utm_content=Google+Reader

Google's "Mayday Update" and What It Means To You (this is from May 2010 but the lessons learned from this update are still relevant today):

My Blog has details on Google's "Mayday Update" – which things up and caused a lot of site owners to see a decrease in traffic – specifically for keyword phrases that are three or more keywords long, known as long tail keywords.

The good news: Google is now able to index longer keyword phrases more accurately.

Previously Google guessed at the best pages to rank for long keyword phrases. The new Google patent indicates that Google now has the power to index longer keyword phrases on web pages instead of guessing them.

The Takeaway? If you've taken the time to really learn how people search and done proper keyword research to select targeted phrases that are very likely to convert and if you've optimized your site pages well for those phrases – then you are in good shape. If you haven't, you need to.

Longtail keywords are highly valuable. People don't have time to search generic terms and scroll through tons of results so they get really detailed and use longer search queries right out of the gate. People know what they are looking for and want the quickest path to it!

While the "Mayday Update" was not a welcome change for many (especially those site owners who don't have good quality sites that are well optimized and deep with content) it actually presents lots of opportunity for those that choose to act on it.

Important Info: Has Your Site Been Banned From Google?
Does Google Forgive? Forget the Sandbox – when you are in the doghouse, will Google ever "forgive" you and release your site back into the SERPs (search engine results pages)?

We all understand the importance of top Google rankings – and in some cases people may get a little desperate for rankings and try things they shouldn't. Or maybe they trusted the wrong SEO Firm and bad "black hat" stuff was done without them knowing.

However it happened, once you are in the doghouse with a Google penalty, is there a chance you'll get out?
First let's just take a quick look at the kinds of things you could get penalized for.

The most common transgressions are: keyword stuffing, cloaking (fake redirects), hidden text or hidden links, automatically generated doorway pages, paid links and automated linking systems.

So what happens when you get caught? It varies from dropping positions in the SERPs to being totally removed from the index.

The truth is that people's experiences are all over the map and some of it depends on what the transgressions were.

Some people report a long climb back to the top which lasts about a year and involves cleaning up the issues and submitting multiple reinclusion requests.

Note: Google has said it's OK to submit a request more than once if you don't get a response from your initial request – just don't bombard them over and over, wait a reasonable amount of time. Don't forget when you do submit a reinclusion request: always communicate how the problem happened in the first place, what was done to fix it and what was learned from the situation.

Others report that they are able to get indexed but not picked up in the SERPs no matter what they do.

The best thing you can do is avoid these bad practices and penalties to begin with. If it's too late for that, you should work with someone that knows their SEO stuff and can help you begin the rebuilding process. You will need to earn Google's trust back.

We believe, as do many others, that Google tracks penalties so if the same site happens to end up with another penalty, it will be harsher and harder to get out of.

The message is clear – avoid the wrath of Google and if it's too late, get some help to get your problems fixed and your site back in the SERPs.

Bye Bye PageRank: While this news is about 2 years old now, it is worth repeating since the PageRank myth is still running strong and wild.

Google Removes PageRank From Webmaster Tools

"We've been telling people for a long time that they shouldn't focus on PageRank so much; many site owners seem to think it's the most important metric for them to track, which is simply not true," says Google Webmaster Trends Analyst Susan Moskwa. "We removed it because we felt it was silly to tell people not to think about it, but then to show them the data, implying that they should look at it."

So why are they keeping on the Toolbar?

The theory over at SearchEngineRoundTable is that it has to do with branding and it may never come off the Google Toolbar. (http://www.seroundtable.com/archives/020960.html)

Some feel PageRank is still useful as a way to get a clue of what Google is thinking about your site and others feel it is completely useless. I've used it as a clue over the years, but never rely on it for any sort of substantial or meaningful information. When I try to explain this to people, I get the feeling that sometimes they aren't buying it, so I'm pleased about this move.

For newbies, it can be confusing having data in Webmaster Tools that really isn't important – they think if it's there, it's important. Cleaning up Webmaster Tools when features are no longer important is a good idea.

February 2011 Google Algorithm Update: PANDA

Google confirmed that an algorithm change has taken place. For those that track this kind of thing, you know Google makes a lot of algorithm changes. Most of them aren't noticed by the masses and are ignored.

This particular change is worth some attention though.

Here is the scoop straight from the Official Google Blog:

Many of the changes we make are so subtle that very few people notice them. But in the last day or so we launched a pretty big algorithmic improvement to our ranking—a change that noticeably impacts 11.8% of our queries—and we wanted to let people know what's going on. This update is designed to reduce rankings for low-quality sites—sites which are low-value add for users, copy content from other websites or sites that are just not very useful. At the same time, it will provide better rankings for high-quality sites—sites with original content and information such as research, in-depth reports, thoughtful analysis and so on.

So what does this mean? Google is going to reward unique content that is high quality and offers real value to site visitors. Excellent! As it should be.

Some people are calling this a shift back to "on-page optimization" – whatever you call it; just make sure you learn the lesson –

Adding quality, unique content to your site and Blog is always a good idea – for the engines and for site visitors.

Alas, the February update was not the end of Panda. Here is some information you need to know:

There have been a few other Panda updates since the first one (the most recent one in September 2011).

Lots of lingo is thrown around and there is a lot of talk about Google updates. Sometimes what is commonly referred to as an algorithm update is not actually a change to the algorithm itself.

That is the case with Panda. Panda is actually a component of the algorithm - it's one piece of the puzzle. So think of Panda as a filter on top of the algorithm. If you pass the Panda inspection, you will filter through and then go through the rest of the algorithm to determine where/how you will rank.

If you don't pass the Panda inspection, then you get bumped out and don't even run through the full algorithm. Make sense? So it's just another factor that is used to determine if your site should rank well, but it's like a gate or filter that you have to pass through before you can go any further.

BUT to further complicate things - we have to note that they aren't running the Panda filter all the time. They run it and score sites. If your site is hit by Panda, even if you clean it up, Google won't notice the new, higher quality version until the next time they run the Panda filter. So this doesn't mean you shouldn't fix your site but it does mean you can't expect to get back on top overnight.

The purpose of panda is to detect low quality pages. There are various factors it looks at when deciding if the page is low quality or not (little content, duplicate content, boiler plate items, no links etc). But the kicker is, if you have too many low quality pages, it can actually cause your whole site to get flagged as a low quality site. So it is worth the time to go through your site page by page and get it cleaned up.

So what does this all mean?

You should always focus on high quality content and best practices so you don't risk getting hit by the Panda or any new thing that comes up.

You can't assume any drop or change in rankings is a result of Panda. There are other updates often. Again just focus on quality and you should fare well no matter what.

This is a key point for everyone: just looking at a ranking report doesn't always paint an accurate picture of how your site performing. Look at traffic, look at Webmaster Tools and see how many impressions and clicks you are getting. Those are much more telling than a ranking report.

What Exactly Does Panda Look At:

Through information that Matt Cutts and Amit Singhal have shared, we can surmise the following:

Sites that have a high percentage of duplicate content are going to be considered low quality.

Your action item: develop new, unique content and grow your site.

Let's look at this scenario: If you have a page here and there that has duplicate content but the rest of the site has unique content, those pages with the dupe content may not fare well but your site as a whole should still do OK.

But when going page by page, if the engines are hard pressed to find quality, unique content then it will end up impacting your site as a whole. Google's official take on this: "low quality content on part of a site can impact a site's ranking as a whole." So be careful!

For those that repost content and then add a line or two with their opinion on the content, and feel that is enough unique content to satisfy the engines. That is going to be problematic going forward! If lots of pages have only a small percentage of the page's content being unique, those pages won't fare well either.

Google also seems to be looking for pages that have a high volume of ads that aren't relevant to the content of the page (especially if the ads are higher up on the page). These pages will not fare well in today's Google.

Your action item: Be sure to review your site and get rid of ads that are irrelevant. Also be sure your site isn't too cluttered with ads.

If your site happened to rank well for a phrase but the phrase is not really present in the Title tag or the body content, the page isn't going to continue to do well going forward.

Your action item: Review your site and make sure each page has unique Title Tags that use keywords that are also present in the body content.

Keywords being repeated over and over and over and over will trigger the new algorithm to devalue the page. Keywords should be used appropriately.

Your action item: Review your content, tone down your keyword density of you need to. Be sure it reads well. One test many copywriters share is reading your content out loud, your brain processed it differently when it hears the text out loud and you'll know if there are too many keywords stuffed in there.

The next one is something a lot of people struggle with:

High bounce rates and low time spent on the site can impact rankings. This will force people to really look at the quality on their site and improve things so they entice visitors to not bounce and to stay longer. It means strong marketing principals and good copy are going to be more important than ever.

Your action item: Get a professional marketing review of your site (or do it yourself if you feel you have the knowledge and experience to honestly assess it). Improve headlines, calls to action and general usability of the site. Email me at jennifer@ecombuffet.com if you want details on a marketing review of your site.

CTR (clickthrough rate) from the SERPs (search engine results pages) will also impact rankings. If your site comes up a lot but no one is clicking, you can be sure it'll impact things.

Your action item: Review your Title tags:

Pay attention to the length of your Title tags and be sure your descriptions on the SERPs aren't being truncated before you reveal the most important info. This is key! People need to be able to see what you offer and how it's relevant to their query. So also get your keyword in there early. In other words, look at where Google is pulling the data from that they display in the SERPs (usually your Title tag is what they use to create the main headline for the listing) and make sure that area of text is compelling, and that is explains exactly what the page has to offer, it's also helpful if it includes a keyword phrase.

Ex: A Must Have Comprehensive Guide: Learn How To Care For Your Pet Turtle – not so good – the keyword phrase is pushed to the back of the phrase and will likely get truncated.

Ex: How To Care For Your Pet Turtle – Must Have, Comprehensive Guide – much better – they keyword phrase is at the start but you also still got the descriptive compelling content in there.

If you need your company name in your Title tag, put it at the end.

Think of your Title tag like an ad – be descriptive of what the page is about but be compelling so people want to click through. Promise a benefit (as long as your content delivers on what you promise)

OK now back to more lessons from Google's recent update:

They don't want to see boilerplate content (content that is the same and repeated on every page)

Your action item: Review your site and look for blocks of content that you are reusing on multiple pages. Tweak it, so it's unique.

Sites that have a lot of low quality inbound links aren't going to do well.

Your action item: Work on building links!

Sites that aren't getting some social exposure (mentions and links from social media sites) won't do well.

Your action item: Yep we keep saying it, and it's true – you need to be on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Need some help with that? See my special offer above for Facebook or email me with questions!

OK, so that's the summary. It's a lot!   So what now?   You need to take this list and add them all up and see how your site fares. Get making changes now if you aren't doing so well in some areas.

Even if you weren't hit in the big update, if your site has many issues in the areas outlined above you can and will lose rankings over time. Sites that excel in what Google is looking for will dominate.

Now is actually a GREAT time to optimize your site. You can jump in there and show Google that your site is worthy of rankings.

So let's wrap it all up. **Some advice from Google…**

"If you believe you've been impacted by this change you should evaluate all the content on your site and do your best to improve the overall quality of the pages on your domain. Removing low quality pages or moving them to a different domain could help your rankings for the higher quality content."

Some advice from me:

Review your web stats and see what pages have taken a hit lately – you can work on improving those pages first (but a site wide review is never a bad idea, as mentioned above). See if you can identify the difference between the pages that are still faring well and those that have been slammed.

If you really want to fix things, take an in-depth analytical approach and note which of the factors noted above are present on each page and strive to eliminate all the problem areas.'

Focus on improving your content and the user experience and you should be just fine.

Google simply put out a list of questions that all sites should consider when thinking about creating "quality" content. Those questions were:

- Would you trust the information presented in this article?
- Is this article written by an expert or enthusiast who knows the topic well, or is it more shallow in nature?
- Does the site have duplicate, overlapping, or redundant articles on the same or similar topics with slightly different keyword variations?
- Would you be comfortable giving your credit card information to this site?
- Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?
- Are the topics driven by genuine interests of readers of the site, or does the site generate content by attempting to guess what might rank well in search engines?
- Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?
- Does the page provide substantial value when compared to other pages in search results?
- How much quality control is done on content?
- Does the article describe both sides of a story?
- Is the site a recognized authority on its topic?
- Is the content mass-produced by or outsourced to a large number of creators, or spread across a large network of sites, so that individual pages or sites don't get as much attention or care?
- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?
- For a health related query, would you trust information from this site?
- Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?
- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?
- Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?
- Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?
- Does this article have an excessive amount of ads that distract from or interfere with the main content?
- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopedia or book?
- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?
- Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?
- Would users complain when they see pages from this site?

NOTE: There continue to be Panda updates and it's as important as ever that you make sure you have a high quality, well optimized site.

You have 4 options right now…

1.   Do nothing! Although this is only an option for those willing to accept poor rankings and lots traffic.
2.   Order an SEO Audit and see how your site fares, according to our SEO experts
3.   Request a proposal or consultation to see what it would cost for us to help you get your optimization cleaned up and get you some great rankings.
4.   Get to work on your own – work hard and fast and get your site in shape to get top rankings.

APRIL 24, 2012:

The new algorithm went today and Google said they expect it to impact about 3% of English search queries.

Side note: I'm hearing a lot of angry talk that the impact is greater and sites that shouldn't have been impacted were. We do need to give it a couple days to settle down before we really assess the collateral damage. But so far, there are more questions than answers and people are reporting all over various forums that the quality of the search results is actually worse now. Again, we need to wait and see what happens after things settle down.

So back to what Google is saying:

"*In the next few days, we're launching an important algorithm change targeted at webspam. The change will decrease rankings for sites that we believe are violating Google's quality guidelines. This algorithm represents another step in our efforts to reduce webspam and promote high quality content.*"

They are making reference to "webspam" which means the usual link schemes, keyword stuffing, cloaking, redirects that are sneaky, duplicate content etc.

According to industry expert Danny Sullivan what's new here is not the fact that Google is going after these things, but it's about how they are going after it. They are improving how they detect and weed out these issues.

This all ties into my article yesterday on "over-optimization" and according to Danny Sullivan at Search Engine Land, Matt Cutts from Google clarified his "over-optimization" statements:

"I think 'over-optimization' wasn't the best description, because it blurred the distinction between white hat SEO and webspam. This change is targeted at webspam, not SEO, and we tried to make that fact more clear in the blog post," (source: http://searchengineland.com/google-launches-update-targeting-webspam-in-search-results-119295)

Matt Cutts was clear that Google has no problem with SEO – it's spam that they are after. Another quote from Google:

"Our advice for webmasters is to focus on creating high quality sites that create a good user experience and employ white hat SEO methods instead of engaging in aggressive webspam tactics….

Sites affected by this change might not be easily recognizable as spamming without deep analysis or expertise, but the common thread is that these sites are doing much more than white hat SEO; we believe they are engaging in webspam tactics to manipulate search engine rankings….

We want people doing white hat search engine optimization (or even no search engine optimization at all) to be free to focus on creating amazing, compelling web sites. "

So to repeat my message from yesterday, the problem isn't with optimizing your site, it's with participating in "black hat" or spammy practices.

The biggest area I am personally seeing this problem is with link building and networks. There are so many affordable link services out there that are sucking people in and getting them in trouble. You get what you pay for and you want to really think before you jump on board with one of those services. The same with low cost content generation and "mass submission" services that people still seem to be selling and buying.

Your website is your online presence, it's your office or your store. Would you open a store and then fill it with cheap décor, poor staff and an overall low quality presentation? Most people wouldn't dream of it. If/when they open a store or office; they understand that how it looks when people walk in or when people see the window display is going to directly impact their results.

It's the same with your website. You need a quality site and you need quality optimization.

Cheap tricks, spamming, manipulating and taking the "easy way" or "shortcuts" to "fast rankings" is no longer optional and in case you thought it was – keep your eye on your site in the coming months and you'll see the results.

Be sure about the quality of your site and start cleaning up and properly optimizing now. It's cheaper and quicker to stay ahead of this and ensure you have a quality site rather than getting penalized and trying to pick up the pieces afterwards.

I think it's important that everyone really hear this message. It's time to face reality and if you want your site to perform, you need to take the quality of the site and the optimization seriously.

So I offer you some options:

If you want to handle your own SEO (and you honestly have the time knowledge and skills) then check out our SEO Audit (also good for those considering professional SEO services and wanting to know if they will benefit from it and wanting to know how their site fares now). You can check out our SEO Audit here: http://www.ecombuffet.com/seo-audit.htm

Or you can request a proposal or consultation if you think you are ready for some professional help. Get some advice on your strategy and plan and see what the professionals think you need. http://ecombuffet.com/Consultation-request.htm

Update May 5: Because there was so much shake up, Google has offered a form people can fill out if they feel their site was hit and shouldn't have been or if they want to report poor quality sites that are still showing up in the results.

Things are still shaking out with the update as Google will continue to tweak and fix the areas it went wrong. The one thing we do know is that they aren't going to stop heading in this direction. Weeding out "webspam" is important to them. That doesn't mean optimization has no place, it just means that you need to focus on not over-optimizing.

Here is a breakdown on some details of the problem areas Google is targeting:

1. The most common infraction is keyword stuffing/spamming/abusing etc. When desperate for rankings people will often resort to just repeating keywords as often as they can. You need to focus on proper keyword usage and the best test for this is to read your content out loud. You'll know if it sounds keyword stuffed and you can go back and edit it. One way to avoid keyword stuffing is to use different variations of your words and phrases and look for synonyms that you can get in there. That eliminates the over usage of one phrase and it creates more phrases you can possibly be found for.
2. Lots of low quality links all with the same or very similar anchor text. This dates back to the days of the good old fashioned link exchange – "you link to me and I'll link to you and by the way, let's both have everyone linking to us use the same anchor text and all link to only the homepage". Not

cool these days. As with most things in SEO, it's about balance and well rounded diversity. You want quality links to many different pages, all with different anchor text (that is relevant to the page you are linking to). These kind of links are hard to obtain but Google doesn't care. It's what they want. Most people want a quick easy link fix and it was never a good idea but it's even more important that you avoid it these days.

3. Too little content on the page but lots of "optimization"
4. Lots of duplicate content taken from sites that rank well.
5. There is some theory that too many sites being pointed/redirected to your main site could hurt you. I've heard a lot of talk about this one but not seen a lot of proof
6. Link farms/networks. There are two ways this can hurt you. If you are running a link farm – which means too many links on a page, none with any real text or purpose other than giving out links. The second way is having a link farm/network linking to your site (especially if the same ones have multiple links back to your site).

It actually surprises me that everyone is making such a big deal about this – over optimization has always been a bad thing. It's been called spamming and black hat (which also involves cloaking and various other nefarious things) but the bottom line is Google has been continually ramping up their efforts to weed out bad sites. Each time it happens and a group of bad sites take a hit, everyone is surprised and rushes to analyze it. The truth is you do need to optimize but it needs to be in a more "natural" way. Avoid some pretty basic things and be strong in the areas you should be.

As I said, this really isn't new. We went through this months ago. I mean, wasn't Panda aimed at the quality of sites? You bet it was!

All this really means is Google is getting more aggressive about cleaning up the search results. I am actually good with that. Sites that aren't participating in any of the problem areas have nothing to worry about. If you have a quality site that focuses on "evergreen" optimization, you won't have to worry each time there is an algorithm shake up.

The above content was written in May 2012 – since there is a lot more info and more updates, so I've created a little "overview" of Panda and Penguin so you can get the most current info:

Farmers, Pandas, Penguins – Oh My!

It started with the Farmer Update – which morphed into Panda and just when we thought things may settle down, we now have to contend with the Panda. What is Google doing to us and why?

Along with the attack of these once adorable animals (honestly so tired of Panda pictures now!), comes the usual rhetoric…

"SEO is dead" "This really is the death of SEO"

Sorry peeps, I'm not quite ready to break out my black funeral dress.

In fact, I would actually go the other direction and say SEO is more important than ever. With so many things being "not allowed" and other things being "required" and some things being "optional" – it's a confusing mess and it's more important than ever to be organized and strategic and actively work the SEO for your site.

So what is really going on over at Google? Wanna know the truth? OK, I'll tell you…

Absolutely nothing new!

Google has always been very clear about their intolerance for spam and black hat techniques. The only difference is they are now better at detecting it and they are more openly communicating with us so we are more aware of what is going on.

So if you think about it, we are actually better off than we used to be. We have way more info about what Google wants and we have more open communication directly from Google.

So, we know SEO isn't dead but where does that leave us in the aftermath of Panda and Penguin?

First let's be clear – there are pretty much 3 ways you could be impacted by these updates:

1. Penalties – this is referred to as "manual action" by Google and you would have received a notice from Google of your transgressions.
2. Adjusted rankings by algorithmic changes. This is the one that confuses most people. If your rankings dropped, that doesn't mean you were "penalized" – it just means that you need to clean up your act to satisfy the algorithm and then you can make your way back. There is no reason to panic or submit a reconsideration request. You just need to responsibly clean up your site and let Google respider it.
3. Collateral damage. This one sucks the most. It's when you truly are innocent and inadvertently got shuffled down in the SERPs. As noted above, there is a way to plead your case. In addition to that, you can focus on adding quality content and getting active on social to ramp things up.

Let's go a quick overview of the vicious little Panda and Penguin….

Panda:

In summary, Panda was going after sites that were low quality and not offering much value to the readers. The term "thin content" was thrown around a lot. Content farms were hardest hit by this update (did you know it was originally called the Farmer Update before the name was changed to Panda?).

A Content farm is usually a Blog where people publish dozens of low-quality, keyword stuffed articles that offered little to no real value for the reader. Many publishers would submit the same article to a bunch of these content farms just to get extra links.

Panda went page by page through sites and if "enough" pages were found to be low quality, the site as a whole could take a hit. They never defined what "enough" was but its safe to say they were aggressive in their assessments.

Most people didn't realize this, but Panda was not an algorithm but rather a filter that Google runs to syphon out poor quality sites. If your site makes it through the filter, it still goes through the regular algorithm to determine where it will rank.

It's been over a year since Farmer/Panda entered the picture. Here is the timeline (TIP: use this to look at traffic stats and see if your site took a hit after any of these dates, if it did, you were likely caught by the Panda)

Panda 1.0 (Farmer Update) on February 24th 2011
Panda 2.0 on April 11th 2011
Panda 2.1 on May 9th 2011
Panda 2.2 on June 18th 2011
Panda 2.3 on July 22nd 2011.
Panda 2.4 in August 2011
Panda 2.5 on September 28th 2011
Panda 2.5.1 on October 9th 2011
Panda 2.5.2 on October 13th 2011
Panda 2.5.3 on October 19/20th 2011
Panda 3.1 on November 18th 2011
Panda 3.2 on about January 15th 2012
Panda 3.3 on about February 26th 2012
Panda 3.4 on March 23rd 2012
Panda 3.5 on April 19th 2012
Panda 3.6 on April 27th
Panda 3.7 on June 8th
Panda 3.8 on June 25th
Panda 3.9 on July 25th

Because Panda is a filter that is only run at Google's discretion, if you made changes to improve your site, you didn't get to reap the rewards right away. You have to wait until the filter runs again and your site gets through it.

The Takeaway:

Make sure you add high quality, fresh content to your site and review old content with the above questions in mind. Work on improving old pages, as well as adding new pages.

And now, onto…

Penguin:

The Penguin Update launched on April 24 2012. According to the Google Blog, Penguin is an "important algorithm change targeted at webspam. The change will decrease rankings for sites that we believe are violating Google's existing quality guidelines."

Keyword stuffing is an obvious target for Google but they are also really cracking down on link spam – i.e. buying links, too many links from low quality sites, too many links with all the same anchor text etc.

A quote directly from Google to help you better understand: "*Sites affected by this change might not be easily recognizable as spamming without deep analysis or expertise, but the common thread is that these sites are doing much more than white hat SEO; we believe they are engaging in webspam tactics to manipulate search engine rankings.*"

Here is a list of the top areas that we believe Penguin is targeting:

- Aggressive linking with the exact same anchor text
- Overuse of keywords
- Low-quality article marketing & Blog spam

 NOTE: If you really believe you were a falsely hit by Penguin, you can file a report. There is no guarantee it'll work, but it's worth a try. Just please be really sure you aren't doing anything wrong before you take this action!

So What Can You Do?

As I already mentioned above, there is a difference between a penalty, which according to Matt Cutts from Google is a manual action that you will be notified about and just having your results adjusted in the SERPs because the algorithm doesn't think your site is up to par. Also, sometimes you are just collateral damage – with all the shuffling going on, your site takes a hit. So please don't

jump to the conclusion that you've been penalized and freak out. Systematic analysis and strategic SEO is the way back when you've taken a hit. Panic induced action with no thought is rarely the solution and often digs a deeper hole.

Check out your site and make sure you aren't inadvertently keyword stuffing. Make sure you don't have thin content. Use the questions provided above by Google to review your site.

If you know you have purchased links, paid someone to obtain links for you or if you think someone is trying to sabotage you by setting up links to your site, it's going to take some effort to resolve the issue.

First you can do a link analysis to determine what links are problematic. Then create a spreadsheet or some system of tracking your activity. List all of the problematic links and find a contact email address for those sites linking to you.

Note: If you've actually gotten a notice from Google and need to do a reconsideration request, document as much of this as you can (with screenshots if relevant) – that information will help in your reconsideration request.

Reach out to the site owner, be kind and ask for help (no one likes getting a mean email and they are not likely to respond to threats, so being kind but firm is usually the best approach).

Ask them to either no-follow the links to your site or remove them. Document your email date and then follow up a few days later. Document all emails and responses.

When you've done as much as you possibly can, compile all of the information and prepare your request for Google (note: if you didn't get a notice from Google but are just doing this because you think you may be hit in the future, still document everything, if you ever need to request reinclusion, it will come in handy)

On-site links: Don't neglect those!

Do a review of your own in-site linking. It's a good idea to use keyword phrases to link to relevant pages but as with all things SEO, it is possible to overdo it. Review your interlinking and make sure you aren't creating some internal spammy links.

Focus on getting quality help from a reputable SEO firm or commit to spending the time yourself. Just remember: SEO takes time, patience and attention to detail. It can be hard work. And Google doesn't owe you anything – you need to play by their rules or risk the wrath of some animal coming after your site!

More info…

Danny Sullivan asked Googler Matt Cutts some questions at SMX Advanced recently and I wanted to share the very concise and helpful info:

Danny Sullivan: What's the deal with Penguin. Is it a penalty?

Matt Cutts: We look at it as something designed to tackle low-quality content. It started out with Panda, and then we noticed that there was still a lot of spam and Penguin was designed to tackle that. It's an algorithmic change, but when we use a word like "penalty," we're talking about a manual action taken by the web spam team — it wasn't that.

We don't think of it as a penalty. We think of it as, "We have over 200 signals, and this is one of the signals."

Danny Sullivan: So from now, does "penalty" mean it's a human thing?

Matt Cutts: That's pretty much how we look at it. In fact, we don't use the word "penalty" much, we refer to things as a "manual action." Part of the reason why we do that breakdown is, how transparent can we be? We do monthly updates where we talk about changes, and in the past year, we've been more transparent about times when we take manual action. We send out alerts via Google Webmaster Tools.

Important Note: There is a difference between a penalty, which Matt Cutts says is manual action that you will be notified about and just having your results adjusted in the SERPs because the algorithm doesn't think your site is up to par. Also, sometimes you are just collateral damage – with all the shuffling going on, your site takes a hit. So please don't jump to the conclusion that you've been penalized and freak out. Systematic analysis and strategic SEO is the way back when you've taken a hit. Panic induced action with no thought is rarely the solution and often digs a deeper hole.

Danny Sullivan then asked a question about removing bad links.

Matt Cutts: We want to see an earnest effort to remove the links. When you do a reconsideration request, we'll look at some of the links and see "how much progress have they made?"

Danny Sullivan: What if you can't get rid of bad links pointing to a page, should we get rid of the page?

Matt Cutts: If it's not an important page, you could. Or you could at least document the effort to remove the links and share it with us.

Danny asked a question about Google+ and SEO

Matt Cutts: When we look at +1, we've found it's not necessarily the best quality signal right now.

Danny asks: You have to be on Google+ if you want to rank well in Google.

Matt Cutts: No!!!! It's still early days on how valuable the Google+ data will be.

More Google News: Knowledge Graph

Last month, Google introduced the Knowledge Graph with the claim "things, not strings." Google says that the new algorithm "understands the world a bit more like people do."

This is going to have a major impact on how you optimize your site.

Context matters.

Some words have multiple meanings.

If you search for Flea are you looking for the bug or the bassist for the Red Hot Chili Peppers? If you search for Red Hot Chili Peppers, are you searching for the band or the vegetable?

In the past, search engines simply looked for the words that were used in a query and returned sites that used those words. Now the meaning and the intention also plays a role.

So you need to use content that shows the meaning of the phrases. Good ways to do that are to use a few different versions of the same phrase – saying the same thing different ways can help get the message across.

More content may also be needed now. Rather than one page that just uses a word, you are likely going to need multiple pages that help convey the "message" and intention – while using variations of the phrase.

To summarize, it just isn't enough that your web page is relevant to a keyword. It must also be relevant to a topic.

Conclusion: Final Words of Wisdom

In closing there are a few other important things that I wanted to go over:

Site Builders

I didn't talk at all about Site Builders and this is an important topic. An article that I wrote explains the issues perfectly.
Unfortunately many people are living a perfect example of "If you build it, they won't come".

If you build your site with a standard site builder that doesn't allow for

- HTML – to create unique Meta tags on each page, use tags, ALT tags, etc.
- FTP access
- Root directory access to add static HTML files and XML files
- Easy addition of new pages, to grow your site content.

then you are setting yourself up for failure. If you build a website that can't be optimized for the search engines, you will be unable to rank highly and tap into the large amounts of traffic that run through the search engines daily. You are missing out on people that are searching for products and services just like yours.

Whether you felt it was cheaper to build a site with a site builder, or you just didn't know it was a problem – you need to take action and get your site onto a server that has no restrictions that will prevent your site from being properly optimized.

Many of the site builders out there even claim to be "search engine friendly" and then when we go to optimize a site for a client we can't even do the most basic things like create unique Meta tags on each page.

Many site builder companies lock clients in for a year or more, leaving the client trapped with a site that can't be optimized. Not all site builders are the enemy. However, you want to be very thorough and ask very specific questions when evaluating a site builder company. You don't want to be locked into a contract that will ultimately hurt your website and your business.

Even if you think you are saving money by not hiring an expensive web designer, you are ultimately losing business and money if you can't be found in the search engines and your competitors can.

Already stuck with a site builder?

Contact a reputable SEO firm, preferably one that does design as well (like EcomBuffet!) and have them look into whether your site can be optimized with your site builder. If it can't, even if you lose some money, leave the site builder and get a quote on having your site moved to a new server (if you own the design of the site). If the design of the site is a template belonging to the site builder, you'll need to get a quote on a new design.

It may seem like a lot of trouble and it may mean finding some extra money in your budget. However, without traffic from the search engines coming to your site, how can you expect to grow your site? Sure, you can do a PPC campaign and various other marketing campaigns – but you'll always be missing out on the volume of traffic that runs through the search engines.

How will I make changes to my site if I move from a site builder?

That's a common question. People don't want to be chained to an expensive webmaster that will charge them for every change they want made. With the site builder, at least you could make the changes yourself.

There are a couple possible scenarios here. Maybe it's worth paying a webmaster and freeing up your time to focus on other areas of your business. Another option is that the webmaster show you how to make simple text changes. The final option is to inquire about the control panel that comes with your website hosting package. They often have control panels that have a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor – meaning you still don't need to know HTML and you can still alter your site – and have it be search engine friendly and optimized.

If you are unsure if your site builder is holding you back, or if you know your site builder is and you want to break free, EcomBuffet is offering free consultations and a discount on web design right now.

If you don't have a site yet and are looking at creating one, beware of going with a site builder, especially if you have to lock into a long contract. The questions you should ask are:

- Can an XML file be added to the root directory?
- Can unique Meta tags be added to each page?
- Can you add an unlimited number of pages to your site?
- Is FTP access available?
- Does the builder generate any "special code" that could cause problems for the engines?
- Can CSS and java script be placed in external files?

If the answer to those questions are no, I would strongly advise that you look at other options and not get yourself locked into something that is going to hurt you in the long run.

My site builder comes with a shopping cart. What do I do if I don't go with the site builder?

Another valid concern. There are many great plugin shopping carts that are easy

to configure and use. There are ones that run off your own server and you will need a secure server and certificate, and then there are ones that run off a third party server.

Many shopping carts these days even have extra marketing features and allow for the user to load product images, pricing, shipping, descriptions, etc. In a very user friendly interface that doesn't require any programming or complex code. Before you lose any more time and more importantly money, check out your site builder situation today and see if there is a solution that will work for you.

Marketing and Conversion

Getting top rankings and driving traffic to your site is just step one. You also have to look at how well your website converts those visitors into customers.

You should be looking at your web stats regularly to see how much traffic you are getting, how long people are staying on the site, which pages are most popular, which pages people leave from the most, etc. Once you have this data you can start to create a plan to fix the problem areas.

Tip! Not sure if your website is the sales machine it should be? Check out our WebSite Surgery – a comprehensive, custom marketing review of your site. We outline the problems and solutions for all your marketing issues. Special offer for "Optimization Step by Step" readers – save $100 right now on your WebSite Surgery. Click here for details: http://www.ecombuffet.com/WSS-discount.htm

OK, onto another important issue….

Should You Handle Your Own SEO?

Everyone is trying to save money in today's economy – but sometimes when you think you are saving money you are actually losing so much more than you save.

If you are considering handling your own SEO, that is only a good decision if;

a) You have the time to do the work and actually get it done and
b) You can get the results you need so you actually increase your traffic from top rankings.

To determine if you should handle your own SEO – check out these questions.

1. Can you work within simple HTML?
At a bare minimum, you need to be able to add Meta tags to an HTML document. Ideally, you can also bold text, set up links, change formatting, rename images, move java script into a .js file etc.

2. Do you have enough time to make your site search engine friendly?
Plan on a minimum of 3 hours for site's that are in great shape, and up to 25 hours (or more) for sites that may need a complete overhaul. In our experience, 3 - 6 hours seems to be the norm for time spent on updating SEO friendliness issues.

3. Will you have this time for SEO friendliness work within the next week?
Typically if people don't take action in the immediate future (within the next 5 business days), the project ends up being delayed indefinitely. You need a clear scheduled start date for your SEO work – especially when the holidays are approaching! You need to get things going!

4. Can your business afford to "lend" this time to SEO without experiencing some other negative impact?
If the time is not truly extra time you have, then you would be "borrowing" the time from another area of your business. Can you do that without harming another area of your business?

5. If you SEO project becomes bigger than you initially anticipated, will you have the time and attention to continue dedicating to it until completion?
6. Are you an experienced and competent copywriter? If you said no, do you feel you can quickly master writing compelling copy that is also keyword rich?

7. Is the content already on your site something you feel comfortable altering?
Often people that have paid for high-end marketing copy on their websites do not want to make any SEO alterations themselves, for fear of altering the effectiveness of their current copy – and therefore affecting their conversion rates.

8. Do you have any prior SEO experience?

9. Do you have the tools or know where to purchase the tools that will help you in keyword selection, site analysis, reporting and current industry information?

10. Would you rather spend your time working ON your business(i.e., growing it) than IN your business (i.e., taking care of the nitty gritty details rather than the big picture)?

11. Do you have a plan in place to make sure you stay current all SEO trends and changes so you can maintain your rankings on-going?

Now let's take a look at your answers and what they mean:

1: Can you work within simple HTML?
On-page optimization requires that you work within the HTML on your website. If you are not able to work with an HTML document and feel confident that you will not cause any errors or malfunctions, then you simply cannot handle your own SEO at this time.

You would need to learn HTML before you could consider handling SEO. Please note, if your site is more complex than simple HTML, you would need to be comfortable working within the code used on your site.

2, 3 and 4: Do you have enough time to make your site search engine friendly? Can your business afford to "lend" this time to SEO, and therefore experience no significant negative impact? If the time is not truly extra time you have, then you would be "borrowing" the time from another area of your business.

You will also later need to write content, alter content and handle various optimization techniques, but to get started – before you can do anything else – you need to make the time to get the foundation ready for SEO. If you don't have time to do this, your project simply won't get off the ground.

Do you truly have the time, or are you just taking it from somewhere else. If you are taking it from somewhere else, that may be fine – you just need to be sure that you aren't harming your business in other ways. Getting rankings, and ultimately traffic to your site will not benefit you if your business falls apart while you work on the optimization.

The remainder of the questions are details for you to consider. Basically, the more No's there are, the more likely it is that you should NOT handle your SEO in-house.

If your results determined you can handle your own SEO, here are the final details you need you consider:

1. What is your time worth per hour? Which option is more cost effective for you - hiring someone or spending your own time?
2. Can you recognize when your choice is not working for you and are you willing to try the other option at that time?
3. You must commit to educating yourself and learning all that you need to know to truly run a successful SEO campaign. Inadvertently spamming, or using a questionable technique can result in a temporary loss of results or a permanent ban from the engines. Be 100% sure you aren't endangering your business.

If your results determined you should outsource your SEO, here are the final details you should consider:

1. Make sure you know what questions to ask the SEO firm you hire (check out http://www.ecombuffet.com/SEO-Blog/?p=294)
2. Plan on spending anywhere from $300 - $1000.00 per month to run an aggressive SEO campaign.

No one but you can decide - we just wanted to arm you with some things to consider. It is all in the details, and you should consider them carefully before making a decision.

Treasure Trove of Website Tips

Recently people have been asking for tips and "Do's and Don'ts" for website design and content.

Whether you are building a new site or redesigning a current site, here is a collection of tips that you'd be wise to follow:

- Create your site with clear a hierarchy and interconnection of pages.
- Your most important pages should never be more than one click away from your homepage.
- Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link.
- Offer a site map to your users with links that point to the important parts of your site. If the site map is larger than 100 or so links, you may want to break the site map into separate pages.   I'm conservative; I don't like more than 50 links on a page.
- Try to use text instead of images to display important names, content, or links. The Google crawler doesn't recognize text contained in images.
- If you are using images, name them with your keyword phrases.
- Avoid frames.
- Avoid an all Flash site. It doesn't matter that Google can read and index Flash. You are still better off not having a site that is all Flash.
- Optimize your site – if you don't know how – hire someone.
- Create a plan for content addition – keeping your site current with fresh content is good for the engines and your site visitors.
- If you decide to use dynamic pages (i.e., the URL contains a "?" character), be aware that not every search engine spider crawls dynamic pages as well as static pages. It helps to keep the parameters short and the number of them few.
- Use a text browser such as Lynx to examine your site, because most search engine spiders see your site much as Lynx would. If fancy features such as JavaScript, cookies, session IDs, frames, DHTML, or Flash keep you from seeing your entire site in a text browser, then search engine spiders may have trouble crawling your site.
- Allow search bots to crawl your sites without session IDs or arguments that track their path through the site. These techniques are useful for tracking individual user behavior, but the access pattern of bots is entirely

different. Using these techniques may result in incomplete indexing of your site, as bots may not be able to eliminate URLs that look different but actually point to the same page.

- Test your site for broken links and errors – nothing scares site visitors off like a site that isn't well maintained.
- Test your shopping cart often to make sure there are no errors that are causing you to lose sales.
- Don't waste your thank you page – make an up-sell offer on your thank you page. People have already bought from you and should be open to other offers.
- Test, test, test. You should be split testing or multivariate testing your pages to improve results.
- Make your opt-in box prominent and compelling. Building a list is vitally important to your business.
- Never make major website changes before an ad or holiday campaign unless you are sure you have time to complete the changes and test the pages.
- Don't wait too long to start holiday marketing. Some campaigns (like SEO) take time to build momentum. End of summer (at the latest) is when you should start.
- Avoid Site Builders unless you absolutely must use one – and then before you do, make sure they allow you to do everything necessary to get your site optimized. (I've written articles on this, it's really important!!)
- Don't use too much jargon or confusing language. Talk to your site visitors in a language they will understand and relate to.
- If at all possible, consult with a marketing expert to make sure your site is in tip top shape. Remember many designers know design but not marketing – and your site may be missing some of the core marketing principals and techniques.

It's a lot, I know, but it's all really important to the success of your site. Print this article and keep it handy as a reference sheet.

Losing Links To 404 Errors?

The Google webmaster Blog recently announced that you can find out what sites are linking to pages on your site that don't exist (and therefore are getting a 404 error page).

Let me explain that a little further…when someone links to a page on your site that doesn't exist, then your server will deliver what is called a 404 error page. It means the page was "Not Found."   Those are links that should be benefiting you but because they are going to pages that don't exist, you are likely not getting the credit you deserve.

Now Google's webmaster Tools lets you see who is linking to your 404 pages.

Inside your Webmaster Tools account, click on Diagnostics, then Web crawl, and select "Not found".

You could choose to contact the webmaster and ask them to change the link but there is no guarantee they will respond. You are better off to create actual content on the page – it gives you the opportunity to add new content and it instantly gets you the credit for that new link.

Note: This report can also be downloaded as a CSV file. Just click on Diagnostics, then Web crawl, and then click on "Download all sources of errors on this site."

Bonus tip directly from Matt Cutts (from Google): if your webserver does cruddy things on 404 pages, Google's webmaster portal will help you create better 404 pages with about 14 lines of JavaScript that you can copy/paste into your 404 page template. Because it's just some code to add to the HTML template for your 404 page, it works for Apache or IIS.

Holiday Marketing

I know it's not the right time of year for this but tuck it away and refer to it later.

Shoppers Concerns
Studies have known that during the holiday season, shoppers have extra concerns about online shopping. They have questions and concerns about returns, gift receipts, gift wrapping, and gift cards and messaging.

To help ease these concerns and make sure that you don't lose sales because of them, it's a good idea to state your privacy policy and holiday return policy prominently on the site and on check out pages. Add assurances about their options for gift wrapping and messages and if possible deal with gift receipts and the logistics of what happens if the gift arrives at someone's house and they need to exchange their gift.

Stating this information puts consumers at ease and makes them more likely to shop, without their concerns nagging them. An unpleasant experience can cause them to just leave the site – even if it's not your fault they are concerned.

Holiday shopping increasing online
The percentage of holiday sales made online grew by 20% from 2006 to 2007. Experts are predicting continued growth and they cite online price comparison tools as part of the reason for increased online shopping.

Cyber Monday
Over the last couple years, online retailers have seen a huge spike in traffic on the Monday after Thanksgiving. This day had come to be known as Cyber

Monday - the day retailers finally turn a profit. In 2007 the second Monday of December was also a huge shopping day and became known as Green Monday.

Shopping online from work
Increasingly people are shopping online and are doing so from work. A 2007 survey found that 68.5 million Americans shopped from work.

Last minute frenzy
 Many people (especially men) shop at the last minute.
- In previous years, nearly 17% of shoppers had not even started and over 50% had only completed half of their shopping by December 18th according to the National Retail Federation.
- TIP: If there is a time to significantly increase email frequency, it's the two or three weeks before Christmas. Effective campaigns can make finding the right product easy (for example, a campaign with gift suggestions for different budgets or family members) and will contain a call to action that reminds them that time is running out.

So, in preparation for the holidays, there are 3 things you should consider:

1. **Are you listed in the engines so you can tap into the holiday shoppers?**
    If you aren't on the top of the engines, you are losing traffic to your competitors and won't make the most out of the holiday traffic. I often hear people ask "how quickly can you get my site on top of the engines" and the truth is, the time it takes varies based on the history of your site, the level of competition, what's going on with the engines and how aggressive you are. It doesn't happen overnight. But there is still time to build some momentum before the holidays.

2. **Are you building a social media presence?**
    People are going to be looking for gift ideas and social media is a great way to share holiday ideas and tips with people and also show them what you have to offer. The truth is the best time to start getting involved or ramping up your social media is always NOW. Even if it's later than would be ideal, it's better late than never.

3. **Is your site designed to convert?**
    If you are working on ramping up traffic, you want to make sure your site is ready to convert that traffic into sales. It may be a good time to do a marketing review of your site and identify the weaknesses that you could improve.

I know times are tough and budgets are tight but I'll share a quote I shared on Twitter in the past:

> "*The man who stops advertising* to save money, is like *the man who stops* the clock to save time." - Thomas Jefferson

Don't be that man or woman. Take action and do what it takes to get your site ready for the holidays and beyond.

Last minute holiday marketing tips

- o User driven content: User driven product content such as ratings, reviews and Q&A can provide credible product information. Then, come holiday time, you can send a "top rated products" promo email
- o Send a mailing to your list with a special holiday offer
- o Do some quick PPC to drive some immediate traffic
- o Do a "buy one, get one" offer
- o Support a charity – give a donation for each sale you make
- o Blog about gift ideas (related to your product offering)
- o Hold holiday contests on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter
- o Tweet gift ideas

SOCIAL MEDIA NOT WORKING FOR YOU?
In my experience, most people think of social media like a "get rich quick" scheme. They think they can set something up with little effort and then enjoy the benefits overnight.

While the benefits of social media are varied and vast, they take work.

Most people tend to focus more on the number of followers and fans than on how to bring value to the people in their audience.

When providing value is your main goal and a prominent part of your campaign, the rest will work itself out. You just have to be prepared to put in the work, listen, communicate and offer value.
I know we are all bust and although there are some shortcuts and some streamlining of tasks, there are *no shortcuts* or ways to bypass the human interaction that is needed for social media success. So plan to spend some time daily (15-30 minutes or more depending on your goals and various campaigns)

SETTING A BUDGET FOR SEO
When you decide to outsource SEO, there are various factors to keep in mind.

First and foremost, if your budget is limited, you have to realize that you may not be able to tackle all the areas you would like to. But remember, some SEO is better than none and you are better to get help in the areas you can afford to then not do anything at all.

Understanding your competition is important. If your goal is to beat them out, you need to understand what they are doing and then plan to do more than them!

Remember, most SEO tactics (link building, social media marketing, article marketing, etc) don't cost anything, but they do require a serious time commitment. So you have to ask yourself if you want to spend time or money. In most cases, it'll be both. You'll do some of the work and you'll outsource some of it.

So start by asking yourself what your goals are, then take a look at the competition. Think about what you can do yourself and what you need help with and then think about how much you can afford. These are all things you should talk to an SEO firm about when getting a proposal from them.

Remember SEO should be an investment not an expense. Meaning you should get a return on what you put in (not overnight of course).

MARKETING IN A TOUGH ECONOMY

We all know the problems with the economy. Learning to market in a tough economy is important. Here are some helpful tips:

- People are thinking more before buying, and are also doing a lot more research, so search counts on most keyword phrases are actually higher. Getting your site to come up on top when people are doing their research is a very important first step – if they can't find you, you don't have a chance of winning their business.

- Online retail is booming, even in the current economic climate, and has been growing significantly year after year for the past 6 years.

- Online shopping landscape is changing. The changes we are seeing are:
    - declining customer loyalty (which means you have the opportunity to grab up customers that were previously not available.
    - severe price competition with large retailers competing online now – pricing is important, especially in a tough economy but remember you don't always have to compete on price. You can add value to your offering, so they are paying the same price but are getting more.

- Consumers shopping behaviors are constantly evolving by
    - increased researching prior to purchases (on multiple sites) – which again means you need your site to come up on top to tap into this increased activity
    - use of comparison sites

- using search features within sites when looking for specific products – so make sure your site has a good search feature and your products are well tagged with keywords to come up easily when someone searches within your site. Tip: check out your logs and see what people are searching for, you can create a "Popular products" section and you can create special offers on your best sellers.

- Consumers are looking for:
    - Price is the most important factors for the majority of consumers. To 'catch' these consumers, key web pages have to stress savings, but just 'shouting' about the price is not enough, consumers must be able to find what they are looking for, once on a site, with ease. And they must feel that the site is providing the right type of product information.
    - Free shipping, rebates/coupons, sales, etc. – people pay more to get something free
    - Privacy policies and guarantees, particularly early in the check-out process
    - Order tracking
    - Customer ratings and reviews
    - Customer service, including live help, in-store returns, etc.
    - Email alerts on promotions and offers

Data Feeds For Ecommerce Sites

Choosing the shopping engines where you'll list your products

Just getting started with shopping engines? Each engine has it's own criteria and it can be confusing at first, so I suggest you start with one and once you have that one complete move on from there. Work your way through the list. You want to get as many done as you can, but it's more important that they be accurate and error free and that they meet the criteria so you aren't dealing with rejected feeds and errors.

You could start with Google Product Search – it drives a lot of high quality traffic.

Here are some details on other's to check out.

Google Product Search (http://www.google.com/products)
Google Product Search is free. Ranked #1 by CPC Strategy. Google also lists its shopping results even when consumers perform a general product search at Google.com.

NexTag (http://www.nextag.com/)

NexTag's site search shows coupons, rebates and price drops. It also shows Facebook sharing activity, which ties social media and peer recommendations in with shopping.

PriceGrabber (http://www.pricegrabber.com/)
In March, PriceGrabber became the comparison shopping provider on Yahoo sites. It's getting a lot of exposure and people seem happy with the results.

Shopping (http://www3.shopping.com/)
Mobile friendly! They have an iPhone app that allows people to find price and product reviews. They recently improved conversion rates lately by presenting more detailed product information.

Amazon Product Ads (http://www.amazonservices.com/content/product-ads-on-amazon.htm)
Amazon Product Ads featured the highest conversion rates in the CPC Strategy report—but that quality also comes with the highest reported click costs ($0.30 – $0.71/click).

Shopzilla (http://www.shopzilla.com/)
Been around for a while. We hear good things from our clients.
Bing Shopping (http://www.bing.com/shopping)
Free. Newer and I don't personally have a lot of experience with it but worth checking out (especially since it's free)

Tips for getting your feed ready!

Your product data feed is the foundation of this exercise. A poor feed will likely result in poor results!

Most of these engines have their own data requirements and it's worth the time and effort to prepare your feed specifically to meet their criteria.

Poor data often equates to poor placement in the engine. If your product appears in the wrong category, it could cost you if people click but aren't really targeted and you also won't get the exposure you want in the category you do want to be listed in.

The more comprehensive your data, the more qualified the click will be and that should mean the conversions are higher. People will know the details so when they choose to click, it's because they are really interested and not just trying to find more info. Make sure you include as much detail as they allow (color, size, price etc)

General Notes on SEO in 2012

This will NOT be the year SEO dies. A few times a year we hear predictions about the death of SEO. Every time the issue comes up, you must hear the collective sigh from the experts in the industry that know SEO is not dying, it's just changing (and for the record, I think that's a good thing). So, no, it is not going to "die" – getting found in the top of the search engines is always going to be important for anyone trying to grow a business online.

Things are becoming more and more about the user.

Facebook will launch something new that knocks our socks off (I don't know what yet, but I have a feeling they will – maybe they will enter the search market?)

It's no longer good enough to just throw up a site. You need to have a site that looks good and is inviting – a site that will pass the "preview test" and make people want to click and see more. You need to be actively participating in social media. You need to have a well optimized site.

If you aren't ready to see the benefit and value in those things, your site likely won't do well in 2012 – because each of those things are only going to get more important.

This is so telling of the times:

Recommendations from personal acquaintances or opinions posted by consumers online are the most trusted forms of advertising, according to the latest Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey of over 25,000 Internet consumers from 50 countries.

Ninety percent or consumers surveyed noted that they trust recommendations from people they know, while 70 percent trusted consumer opinions posted online.

"The explosion in Consumer Generated Media over the last couple of years means consumers' reliance on word of mouth in the decision-making process, either from people they know or online consumers they don't, has increased significantly," says Jonathan Carson, President of Online, International, for the Nielsen Company."

This isn't really a prediction, but it's an important perspective that is definitely worth sharing. When considering your marketing strategy for 2011, remember:

"SEO is more than ranking web pages.

SEO is not about tricking search engines.

SEO is not a complete online marketing plan, but…SEO — and search marketing in general — isn't something a smart marketer should ignore or just leave to chance." Source: Danny Sullivan – www.searchengineland.com

So what does Danny mean?

"SEO is more than ranking web pages." Means that on-page optimization and building links is important but with all the changes we've been talking about, you have to factor in Blogging and Social Media now.

"SEO is not about tricking search engines." This means you can't get away with the same tricks you used to able to, and you want to make sure your strategy isn't one that is designed to trick the engines, because you will quickly fail.

"SEO is not a complete online marketing plan, but…SEO — and search marketing in general — isn't something a smart marketer should ignore or just leave to chance." This one means there is more to marketing your site than just SEO and you need to be comprehensive in your marketing but that doesn't mean ignore SEO. I would say that SEO is the foundation you build upon.

In summary, I predict that Social Media and SEO will only become more intertwined and that focusing on both will be very important.

I also predict metrics (web stats or analytics) will become even more important, as people need to find out what is and isn't working for them.

I predict Google will continue to make changes and roll out new features and tools and algorithms and staying current is going to be more important to your success than ever (sort of a no brainer but important enough to say it!). I also think Bing and Yahoo! will continue to shake things up as they fight for market share.

So here is what you need to do, if you haven't already!

Your Checklist:

Get Your Site Ranked in the Top of the Major Search Engines: If your site isn't already on top of the major engines for your most important keywords you are missing out on traffic. Even in this rough economy people are still shopping online and in fact, people are doing more research and comparison than ever before, so in order to have a shot at that business your site needs to be ranked well for your important keywords so it is easy to find (and it also needs to be designed with the proper marketing techniques so that you can successfully convert those site visitors into paying customers). If your site already ranks well, make sure you are staying current on the changes at the engines so you can hold on to those rankings and also make sure you aren't missing out on new

keyword opportunities. Of course the foundation of all of that is making sure your site is SEO Friendly. If you don't know where your site stands in the engines and what you need to make it to the top, contact Jennifer Horowitz, Director of Marketing and Business Growth Advisor, for a free consultation.

Note: The next item only applies if you have a physical location (an office or store).

Set up and CLAIM your Google Places listing: It doesn't take long to get this done. Go to Google Maps and search for yourself (by business name and city name). If your business is there, click the More Info, then Edit Details link, and then click CLAIM YOUR BUSINESS.

If you're not listed use the Google Local Business Center (https://www.google.com/accounts/ServiceLogin?service=lbc&passive=1209600&continue=http://www.google.com/local/add/businessCenter&followup=http://www.google.com/local/add/businessCenter) and follow the directions to add your business.
 Do the same thing for Yahoo Local and Bing Search Maps: Search for your business on Yahoo Local (http://local.yahoo.com/) and Microsoft Live Search Maps (http://www.bing.com/maps/)

Yahoo will specifically ask, "Own this business?" with a link to claim it. Live Search has a link that says "Change Your Business Listing."   If you need to create listings, use these links: Yahoo Local (http://listings.local.yahoo.com/) and Bing Maps (https://ssl.bing.com/listings/ListingCenter.aspx)

Stake your claim on social media: Even if you aren't active in social media right now, you may be at some point. When that time comes you'll want to make sure you have your name and/or your company name locked in. So, start now by creating accounts for your business — using your company name or personal name — on sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace. Complete the profiles and be sure to link to your primary web site whenever possible. Even if you never use these social media profiles, at least you'll know that no one else will be using your name and you are protected.

Of course, I recommend more than just reserving your profile. I strongly advise you get active and use this as a prime marketing tool.
At a minimum I suggest:

- Create a Facebook Fan Page. (See: http://www.ecombuffet.com/fbfpWPN120711a.htm)
- Set up your Twitter account (including a custom background) and learn how to use Twitter to grow your business (you need a strategy for building your audience and writing tweets that get people to take action) – For more details see: http://www.ecombuffet.com/Twitter-quickstart.htm

List your products in Google Base/Products. If you carry products make sure you set up your products to feed into Google Base/Product Search.

Start basic online reputation management: What other people say about you and/or your company matters a lot. Bad business or product reviews can spread quickly. Use Google Alerts (http://www.google.com/alerts/) to keep track of what people are saying about you, your company, your products, and any other important members of your staff/team. Use it to monitor your company name, your own name, and the names of important people in your company.

Check your linking foundation: Make sure you are listed in the top Directories (BOTW, Yahoo and any industry related directories). Also check what links you have coming into your site and make a plan for acquiring more links. While you are at it, you should also check out your internal linking structure and make sure you have good interlinking between your pages and that you use keywords as your anchor text.

Learn how to use a stats program and track your traffic: Google Analytics is adequate for many small businesses, and it's free. Look at what keywords are sending organic search traffic to your site. Look at what other sites are referring traffic to you. There are usually new marketing opportunities to be found in both of those data sets. Also look at how long people are staying on your page and which pages people leave the most often. Use this information to tweak and improve and take advantage of new opportunities.

Review, Test, Check: Check the overall state of the union to make sure you are going into the New Year with everything in place. Some things to check: Review and test your contact forms on your site to make sure all is in working order. Update your copyright and/or privacy policy statements. Test all outgoing links on your web site. Review your domain record.

Participate in the Blogosphere: If you have a Blog make sure you learn how to get the most out of it. If you don't have a Blog, get one immediately and learn how to drive traffic and make money with your Blog.

Check the load time of your site. See where you can compress things and fix code to be sure your site loads quickly.

Holiday Campaigns: Take a look at the holidays for the next year and start top outline an action plan to take advantage of holidays and your busiest times. It can take some time to implement a holiday campaign, so calendar the activities in advance so the holiday's don't sneak up on you.

Create A Weekly Work Plan: Make sure you are focusing on the right areas to grow your business or outsource them to a professional if you don't have the time, knowledge or tools.

Phew, it's a lot but it's all important! So to further drive it home, here is an "at a

glance" summary

Summary

What do I need to do to get better results in 2012?

1. **Make sure your site is well optimized.**
2. **Make sure your site loads quickly.**
3. **Make sure you have a strong Facebook Fan Page.**
4. **Make sure you have a strong Twitter presence in place and a strategy.**
5. **Blog consistently.**
6. **Make sure your site looks good and passes the "preview" test!**

Things are getting more competitive and things are changing quicker than ever before.

How can EcomBuffet help you?

*   For more information on how to succeed on Twitter, visit: http://www.ecombuffet.com/Twitter-quickstart.htm (I've gotten amazing feedback on how helpful this course has been for people)

*   To request info on a killer Facebook Fan Page, email jennifer@ecombuffet.com and use "Facebook Fan Page" as the subject line. I can get you more information and a quote.

*   To request an SEO consultation to see where you stand and how you can benefit from SEO, email jennifer@ecombuffet.com – Please use the subject line "Consultation Request"

Advice If you decide to hire an SEO Firm:

This was written by Stoney deGeyter, he's well known in the industry and I thought even though I didn't write it, it was an important message to share:

"*I think businesses get into trouble when they expect their SEOs to have all the solutions. They look at the SEO as the magical ranking provider. They want better rankings, more traffic, increased conversions, and expect an SEO to be able to provide it all... within a few hours of paid time.*

Not. Gonna. Happen.

Again, just like any other field, you get what you pay for. You find the cheaper expert you'll get cheaper results. You find a plumber that charges less per hour he'll likely take twice as long as the guy who charges a few dollars more per hour. You hire the cheaper lawyer, you may not like the results. Just sayin'.

When you're looking for your "SEO expert" you gotta know what you want and what you expect. Don't expect real magic on a clown budget. If you know what you want, then you can select the person, firm or group that will best be able to give you what you expect."

About The Author:

Jennifer Horowitz is the Director of Marketing and co-owner of EcomBuffet.com. Jennifer's vision and concepts are behind all in-house marketing campaigns.

Additionally, since 1998 Jennifer's expertise in online marketing and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has helped clients increase revenue and achieve their business goals.

Tip! Don't forget to follow me and stay current on SEO, online marketing, social media and more. http://twitter.com/EcomBuffet

About EcomBuffet.com:

Industry leader EcomBuffet has been achieving top rankings for clients for over 12 years. Members of the EcomBuffet team have spoken at conferences, been published in industry publications and been interviewed as industry experts in various newsletters.

A full service SEO, marketing and web design and development firm, EcomBuffet is unique in their offerings. Rather than offering only technical SEO work, EcomBuffet also offers marketing services. EcomBuffet's focus is not only on driving traffic but helping convert that traffic into paying customers.

Free Consultation

Jennifer brings experience, a strong understanding of the search engines and a remarkable ability to find solutions for struggling businesses to the table and offers you a Business Growth Consultation.

Proficient in identifying issues and finding solutions for business growth is a strength of Jennifer's.

Take advantage of your Business Growth Consultation and receive the following:

1. A no-nonsense 3 Point Inspection. Jennifer will identify and outline the 3

biggest problems with your website.
2. An assessment to determine if you will benefit from SEO and how.
3. A no-obligation proposal.

And lastly, I leave you with a quote that I think is very relevant to business and SEO:

"I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been."

-- Wayne Gretzky, Hockey Player