



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

"The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself." -- Peter Drucker

The goal of every good marketing strategy is to place the product/service in front of the customer. In the recent years, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has been touted to do exactly that. SEO started inbound marketing, a trend where marketers began to question the old marketing paradigm of outbound messaging which is based on going out and finding customers. Inbound marketing started getting momentum with properly optimized websites as they got to bring visitors in, rather than companies seeking those customers out. SEO and search engines were and still are at the heart of that process.

But what is SEO, really?

According to Wikipedia, "search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a search engine's unpaid results - often referred to as "natural," "organic," or "earned" results."

SEO would sound like the holy grail of marketing if it weren't for constant changes on the side of search engines and the ever shrinking marketing budgets on the side of SMEs who are looking to advertise online. Nonetheless, SEO is an important part of the marketing toolbox available to small and medium-sized companies and below are a few tips that can be helpful in its adoption:

1. Optimize your most important digital property, your website.

Ensure that your domain reflects what you do, and stay away from using free domains. Over time Google has shown preference for local businesses, so ensure that your location is listed (ideally in your page titles along with your name and the services you offer). It is also advisable to include your phone number to benefit further from Google serving locally targeted results to users.

2. Keep your online directory entries up to date.

Every so often, try to do a sweep across all the online data that pertains to your business, starting from online directories. Claim your listings, and make sure they are updated and free of any errors or omissions. Ensure that



your business is placed in the correct category and make the listing more compelling by including multimedia content. Lastly, always remember to link back to your website.

3. Encourage and follow up on online reviews.

Getting constant and timely feedback is crucial for progress. Encourage your customers to leave reviews and share with the world what they love about your service. And if you get the odd sour review, ensure that you can take it as constructive feedback and approach it with grace and a promise to improve the experience next time.

4. Maintain an active and engaged social media presence.

Claim your space in the social media sphere via Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and other popular networks. Build an audience around your offer so that you can get more followers and build higher engagement rates. This reflects positively on SEO and helps your pages rank higher in search as social and search are intricately related. Some ideas for engagement include updates on new products, promotions, giveaways, as well as events have shown to be quite effective for social media engagement.

OUTSOURCING

"Do what you do best and outsource the rest." -- Tom Peters

To outsource or not to outsource? This is a dilemma many companies face at one point or another, so in this version of InfoPays we share some tips on what to watch for if outsourcing finds itself on your business agenda.

But first, what is outsourcing?

Outsourcing is when a company contracts an outside partner (called "the agency") to perform a certain service under agreed upon terms, cost and conditions. It has gained popularity because it can bring reduced costs, increased flexibility, and better access to specialized, niche expertise. The list of disadvantages enlists coordination costs, missed opportunity for the organization to gain new knowledge, and decreased employee morale.

Overall, outsourcing can be a mutually beneficial undertaking, and if you have found yourself with the decision to outsource, it is critical to ensure some of these steps are followed:

1. Assemble a project team.

Define clear timelines, activities and accountabilities against which you can measure progress.

2. Analyze the needs your organization is facing.

Assess your processes to ensure that you are outsourcing the right ones (i.e. activities that would be less effective if done in house).

3. Look at your industry for success stories.

Your competitors may have already done what you are trying to do. Look at their success stories and try to follow their best practices.

4. Be clear about your core business.

Routine or repetitive processes are often considered to be ideal for outsourcing because they are non-core, auxiliary activities. Additionally, most project-based work such as website creation and advertising get increasingly outsourced nowadays.

5. Prepare a package.

Outline your requirements in a formal package including budget, timelines, specifications and call for bidding.

6. Select a partner.

Outsourcing opens up larger markets, often markets with no geographical boundaries, so take the time to select the right partner from the plethora of options.

7. Draw up a contract.

Working with legal counsel ensures that your project is formally protected, and lowers the possibility of being negatively affected by any surprises down the road.



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