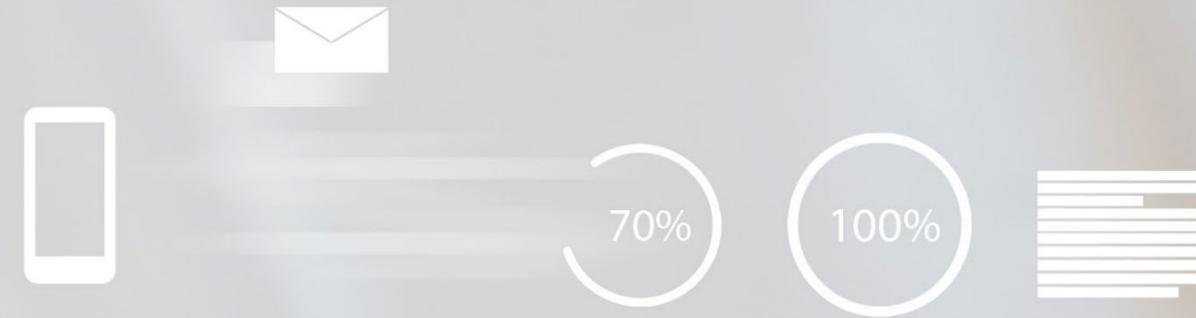




Guide to SEO Marketing for Small Business



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Guide to SEO Marketing for Small Business

Getting on the first page of Google search results is one of the top goals of every digital marketer. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the obvious way to achieve this, but building a [successful SEO strategy](#) takes patience and know-how. This guide is designed to demystify SEO for small businesses by sharing basic strategies that even beginners can use to achieve effective results in a short timeframe.

SEO has been around for many years, but is still one of the least-understood topics when it comes to digital marketing. Many SEO tips and tricks have come and gone over the years, making it hard to keep up with what works and what's obsolete. And, for smaller companies in particular, it can be hard to stay on top of the

latest best practices while still managing daily business operations.

For small business owners who don't have the time to become an SEO expert, or the marketing budget to hire one, this beginner's guide is for you.



What is SEO and why do you need it?

SEO encompasses several best practices designed to bring Internet traffic to your website through free (otherwise known as “organic”) search engine results. The ultimate goal is to earn a high ranking on the search

engine results page (SERP) so searchers can become prospective customers by easily finding and connecting to your content through a single click.

Although there is a science to SEO and how search engines actually work on the backend, effective SEO also requires qualitative research about the audience you're trying to attract. A good SEO strategy for small businesses must be rooted in a [solid marketing strategy](#) with a clear target audience. This ensures SEO can direct the people your business wants (as well as those who want your business) right to your website where they may become loyal, lifelong customers.

As a result, SEO requires more than just understanding search engine features or keyword tips and tricks. You have to understand what your audience is searching for, which questions they're asking, and what types of quality content or solutions they specifically want. You can jumpstart this

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process by [creating buyer personas](#) for your business. This process will give you a lot of the insight you need to optimize your content in a way that enables search engines to deliver the right audience to your business website.

What is your target audience searching for?

Above all, the most important thing to remember about SEO marketing is that you're trying to connect with people, not web

crawlers and algorithms. This means you need a content management framework designed to deliver relevant, engaging, and timely content. Your SEO strategy then ensures all of this high quality content gets the visibility it deserves by earning a higher rank on SERPs.



Download our [free guide](#) to learn how to build a content marketing framework now!

How to define your target audience

The first step in creating your SEO strategy is to understand who you're trying to reach with your SEO efforts. This is your target audience. Having a well-defined target audience helps you to:

- Create relevant, engaging, and high-quality content that brings the right people to your website and gives them a great experience.

- Optimize your search ranking by identifying specific keywords and search terms your audience uses most often.
- Increase search traffic to your website and attract relevant leads who are more likely to become customers.

To understand what your audience is searching for, you need a clear picture of who they are and what they specifically want from your business. Here are five attributes to help you define your target audience:

1. Understand current customer demographics.

In addition to reviewing your company's internal sales data, you can also check out data from your Google Analytics account. Simply download your [Audience](#) report to see who has visited your website, where they come from, what their interests are, and more.

2. Identify your social media followers.

Along those same lines, you can also generate insight about your followers on social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and more. For instance, [Facebook Audience Insights](#) offers a tool to learn more about your followers.

3. Know the questions your target audience is asking — and make sure you answer them.

Remember, SEO isn't just about getting Google or Bing to send people to your website. Once they arrive, you have to engage them with relevant and interesting content. We've all had the experience of Googling a search term or question, only to click through to a page that doesn't provide the answer. For instance, if you search for "How to write a blog" and you click through to a site that's only trying to sell you web-building software, you'll probably leave after just a few seconds. That's exactly the scenario you want to avoid, which is why the quality of your content is far more important



HOW TO DEFINE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

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than relying on SEO keywords to do the work for you.

4. Analyze customer feedback.

Pay attention to customer feedback you receive from platforms like Yelp, your social media channels, or even customer surveys you create. The best way to deliver the content your audience wants is to understand what they love (or dislike) most about your business. Even negative reviews can be helpful, because they can tell you how your business needs to improve, and also give you insight into what potential customers might be seeking. For instance, if customer service is a frequent subject of customer reviews (either good or bad), then you should consider making the customer service experience a priority on your website.

5. Find out what your competitors are doing.

If you can't quite figure out why your competitors are so successful, try using [tools](#)

[like this](#) for keyword research and to identify which types of content and keywords rank highly on SERPs.

How do search engines help your target audience find you?

Search engine functionality has evolved a lot over the years, which is partly why SEO has not always been an easy thing to understand. Today, search engines use [web crawlers](#), which constantly survey the web to find discoverable links on pages, retrieve information about the page (such as text and [meta tags](#)), and then index the page so Google's algorithm can rank it for users.

So what are algorithms, exactly?

Algorithms are basically a series of factors that search engines like Google use to rank web pages. These algorithms are often designed to prevent spammers from

manipulating search engine results (by keyword stuffing web pages, for instance) while ensuring users can quickly find the content they want. As a result, these algorithms are frequently updated to deliver high-quality search results.

For instance, in early 2021, [Google](#) introduced a new algorithm that evaluates the user's actual experience with a page, with the goal of making the web more user-friendly on any browser or device. This new algorithm goes well beyond metrics such as keywords to include user engagement in page rankings – a big step forward in the evolution of SEO. This should come as welcome news for Internet marketers who are already working hard to create more personalized digital user experiences, because these efforts directly align with Google's new algorithm. This is another reason why the key to effective SEO is not to try and “trick” search engines, but to create high-quality content that engages your target audience.

Why not just use paid advertising?

While paid advertising can be a great way to drive traffic to your website, over time it's not as effective as organically driven traffic from search engines.

For one thing, most website traffic comes from organic searches ([at least 53%](#) according to some sources). Organic search results that come from an effective SEO strategy can also be far more cost-effective in the long run. Paid advertising requires continuous funding that may be out of reach for many small businesses, while a solid [content marketing framework](#) can continuously generate website traffic and improve search engine rankings for free.

Why should you create SMART goals for SEO?

The ultimate objective of any SEO strategy is to meet your business goals, not just drive traffic

to your website. Therefore, before embarking on any SEO strategy, you first need to identify what your business wants to achieve, and then develop SEO marketing goals that align with your corporate objectives. To optimize effectiveness, we recommend always using the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) format when outlining your objectives.

For example, a SMART goal that SEO can help you achieve may be:

Generate at least 15% more qualified leads from website conversions over the next twelve months.

This goal is:

Specific: It clearly states what, how much, and when you will achieve your goal, e.g. you will generate at least 15% more qualified leads from website conversions within 12 months.

Measurable: It includes quantifiable objectives so you can measure your goal's progress and make adjustments to your tactics, as needed, to achieve it.

Achievable: It's important that your goal is realistic. If you expect to achieve 5% more conversions each quarter, you can rest assured that your goal of 15% more qualified leads is achievable within your timeframe.

Relevant: This means that your goal is aligned to your corporate objectives. If your company's overall goal is to increase annual revenue by 8%, you can do the math to confirm that generating 15% more qualified leads through web conversions should bring in the needed number of customer accounts this year to meet this revenue goal.

Time-bound: It's essential for your goal to have a deadline so you can evaluate its performance and make adjustments along the way. In this scenario, you have 12 months

to meet your goal, with milestones being measured each quarter.

Creating SMART goals can help you analyze whether or not your existing marketing approach is adequate, or if you need to expand your digital toolbox to meet your objectives. For instance, which types of assets are most downloaded from your website? What types of content need to be created for specific SEO campaigns? How can you create more shareable content to boost your social media footprint and online presence?

Ultimately, by linking your SEO strategy to SMART business goals, you avoid the rut of measuring SEO success by relying solely on intangible metrics such as clickthroughs and page views. While SEO metrics are certainly an important part of measuring SEO results, in the end true SEO success is measured by business performance.

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How do you optimize your website for SEO?

Now that we've emphasized the critical importance of delivering a personalized, engaging website experience to boost SEO performance, there are some techniques you can use to optimize your website. And, the

good news is that you don't necessarily need to hire an expert to handle them for you.

Ensure your URL is relevant.

By directly tying your website address to the business services or products you offer, you make it easier for search engines to connect users with your company. For instance, a mobile veterinarian serving a certain area code could be 512mobilevet.com — a type of URL that could also be a common search term.

Analyze your website data.

The key here is to understand how users are experiencing your website and whether it's performing as expected. For instance, you can use [Google Search Console](#) to see how users behave and navigate through your site, the number of sessions they initiate, bounce rates (the percentage of visitors who leave your site after viewing only one page), and more. You can also determine how people are

finding your site — do they come from search engines, social media, or other sites? And, by identifying which pages generate the most traffic and conversions, you can figure out how to replicate that success to other pages.

Add meta titles and meta descriptions.

These text snippets briefly describe the content on each page and provide more context for search engines to analyze.

Optimize website pages.

In addition to adding meta titles and meta descriptions, you should also think about creatively adding primary keywords near the top of your pages in headlines, as well as in subheads and image alt text. Also, you can [create high converting landing pages](#) by distributing keywords through the body copy while avoiding anything that resembles keyword stuffing. (Again, this is where the rule of creating engaging content comes into play. If your page is just a Mad Libs-style list

of keywords, your users will bail quickly and the search engines will likely penalize your website.)

Keep your content fresh.

Old, outdated content will quickly fall in search engine rankings. It's important to routinely review your website and either update or remove pages that are no longer relevant. Blogging regularly can be a great way to keep your site refreshed with timely and engaging new content.

Establish authority through link building.

Unfortunately, no matter how great your content is, there's still more you need to do to achieve high search engine rankings. This is where external and internal link building comes into play. External websites that link to your pages via backlinks are like Internet votes for the quality of your website. The more external sites that link to yours, the more the search engines will see you as an authority

and boost your rankings. Additionally, you can also backlink to pages within your site, as long as you do it in a way that makes sense and doesn't seem like spam. For instance, if you write a blog review of the top 10 local restaurants for 2021, you might link to a previous restaurant guide you wrote in 2020.

Next steps: Getting started

This guide has covered some of the basics of SEO — what it is, why it's important, how it delivers value for your business, and how you can master many simple SEO tasks without hiring outside expertise. Although the discipline of SEO goes much deeper than what we've covered in this guide, there are many [free tools](#) that can help you simplify the basics and beyond.

Ready to deliver personalized customer experiences? [Try Act! for free.](#)



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8800 N Gainey Center Dr Unit 200, Scottsdale, AZ 85258