B BUDDY
WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Website Strategy and Tactics For

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

A Learn With Buddy™ Guide

2024 Edition

01.

SEO Overview

So let's start with the basics. What is SEO?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the art and science of helping your website be found on search engines like Google. Ideally, you want to show up as high as possible in the search results, as that means your website's listing is more likely to be seen – and thus clicked on – by people perusing these search results.

You might be wondering, how does this work? Well, Google and other search engines have algorithms they use behind the scenes, so when someone types in a search query, like "best basketball shoes," Google goes to work assessing, rating, and ranking all the various web pages out on the internet. The search results you see are Google's assessment of what the best results are, that are most relevant to any given search query.

It's important to note, when it comes to search rankings, there is a programmed scorecard driving the results. So, we need to stack the deck in our favor by doing the things that Google is looking for – and doing them better than competing websites – to show up high in the search results.

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In this guide, we'll provide some high level tips and tricks to help set you up for success when it comes to SEO.

Something that's important to keep in mind is that SEO is a long-term endeavor. While certain things will help your website show up in Google right away, seeing the most benefits from SEO efforts can take six months, a year, or longer. It's just how this game works.

That said, SEO can be a great long-term strategy that pays dividends in the long run, and can keep working for you, long after you've done the initial work.

So let's dive in!

02.

Keywords & On-Page SEO Basics

The basic strategy behind SEO is to optimize your website so that when people search for things that are related to your website, your site shows up high in the search results.

The backbone of SEO is keywords, which are the search terms people are using to find relevant content. Some examples could be: "best basketball shoes," "lasagna recipes," or "dentist near me."

For your own website, think about what your potential customers or target audience might be looking for. For example, if you're a plumber in Chicago, keywords like "Chicago plumber," or "plumbing service in Chicago" might make a lot of sense.

However, people also might be searching for more specific help. For example, if you're a plumber and something you commonly help with is fixing clogged sinks, a relevant set of keywords for you could be "get help with clogged sink," as your potential customers might be searching for a solution to that problem. That solution, of course, could be you!

If you enjoy research and are interested in diving deep into the keyword rabbit hole, there are free keyword planning tools online, such as:

- Ahrefs https://ahrefs.com/keyword-generator
- Semrush https://www.semrush.com/analytics/keywordmagic/start
- Moz https://moz.com/mozpro/lander/keyword-research
- Google https://ads.google.com/intl/en_us/home/tools/keyword-planner

These tools can help give you a quick assessment of how many people search for certain keywords, and how many other businesses are competing to rank highly for those keywords.

If you're just starting out, though, using your common sense and business experience, you can probably start to brainstorm what people would likely be searching for to find your products and services.

With this in mind, make a list of what these potential keywords are, and next you'll want to prioritize them into a shortlist of keywords you want to target through your website. While it's tempting to want to show up for any and every possible keyword, when you're just starting out, it's important to take a very targeted and deliberate approach, and go from there.

On-Page Optimization
Once you know what keywords you want to target, your first task is working on what's called on-page optimization. This is basically using those keywords throughout your website in a deliberate and strategic way, in places that are seen on your web pages.

The easiest way to get started doing this is just to use these keywords throughout the text on your website in a natural way. For example, if you're a plumber in Chicago, as you talk about your business and services on your website, be sure to drop in the words "Chicago plumber," "plumber in Chicago", and the like, across your website.

Beyond this, Google actually prioritizes or gives extra weight to web page titles and content headers, compared to paragraphs of text. So, continuing with our plumbing example, you might actually want to have a page on your website titled "Chicago Plumbing," or something similar. Ditto with headers on your pages, which you'll want to make sure are set up on the web page as an H1, H2, or H3 style header.

These tips will help get you started, but next let's dive into a whole array of other things you can do to help tip the scales in your favor!

03.

Advanced SEO Tips

Once you know what keywords you're targeting and have them integrated in your on-page content, such as text, headers, and page titles, there are many other tricks of the trade that you can leverage to help your website show up higher in Google search rankings.

Meta Descriptions
A meta description is a short summary of a web page's content that will appear in search engine results. The meta description helps users understand what the web page is about, and can help them determine whether or not they should click on your page when it shows up in search results. A meta description can be added for each of your web pages either directly in the html code, or via the content management system, typically with a page editor. Meta descriptions are a great place to integrate keywords. You can add a meta description for each page on your site.

URL
When naming website pages, and creating their URLs, be sure to keep these URLs concise and descriptive, and also include relevant keywords. For example, if you have a page about the ten best basketball shoes in 2023, a URL of

"yourwebsite.com/ten-best-basketball-shoes-in-2023" is much better than "yourwebsite.com/page-id-12345".

Alt Text
Alt text, which is short for alternative text, is a concise description of an image on a website. It is helpful for website visitors who may have visibility limitations. Alt text is relevant to SEO because search engines can use it to understand what an image is and its context, and use that information to determine how relevant an image – and the page it's on – is for search results. Alt text is another place to include keywords, as well. Alt text can be added in the HTML code, or typically when you upload or select an image to your media gallery, if you're using a content management system.

Link Building
A way of demonstrating credibility to search engines is when other highly ranked websites link to your site. For example, if a highly ranked website, such as CNN, had an article on their website about "top travel bloggers," and then linked to your own travel blog website, that would be an inbound link from a highly regarded website. Thus, in Google's eyes, it raises the status of your own site, particularly associated with keywords like "top travel blogger."

For your own business, think about how you can get links to your own website from other credible sources, such as social media, industry leaders, or industry associations, just for example.

Internal Linking
By creating links within your website and amongst the pages of your site, search engines get an understanding of how your website is structured, and can thus help provide relevant results. Therefore, link between pages where appropriate.

As an example, on your home page, you could have some text that says "check out our services," and link that text to your Services page.

Blogging

Search engines love when websites are regularly generating new and relevant content. When you consistently are creating and publishing new blog posts, you're demonstrating to search engines that your website is actively managed and regularly updated, which contributes to higher search engine rankings. Thus, if you have the ability and bandwidth to regularly create new blog posts for your website, do it. And, be sure to include keywords in your blog titles, headers, and body text.

SSL Certificates

Behind the scenes, with your web host, make sure you get an SSL certificate for your website. This is what gives you the "https://" prefix on your website, versus "http://", and shows your website as being secured. Certain website hosts will include an SSL subscription for free, and this is helpful both for user confidence, as well as something search engines like to see. So, it's a good step to add this to your site.

Business Address

Make sure you have your business' physical address listed on your website. The footer is a common location for this. Having your address helps demonstrate where you are for local search results.

If you have a virtual business, or, if you work from home and don't want to display your home address, often if there's a Staples or FedEx near you, you can relatively inexpensively get a business mailbox there, so you have a local business address you can use more anonymously.

Google Maps

If your business isn't listed on Google Maps, add it. It's an extra way for customers to find you, and it's another link to your website. Also, encourage your customers to leave your business reviews on Google Maps, and then in kind, be sure to reply to those reviews. It boosts up engagement, which is a good thing in Google's eyes.

Social Media Integration

Consider having links or buttons on your website that make it easy for visitors to share your website on social media. By having people share links to your site on social media, you're both getting more awareness of your website, and you're also adding inbound links.

04.

SEO Tools

While this guide so far has covered some of the basic building blocks, SEO is a deep and robust discipline that can take years to learn and master. Fortunately, there are quite a few online tools that can help make managing and improving your SEO much, much easier.

First off, at Buddy, we use and recommend an SEO tool called SEMrush. SEMrush helps by thoroughly analyzing your website and prescribing improvements that can help boost your search engine rankings. At Buddy, it's made a big difference for us and helped break down SEO improvements into easy-to-implement bite-sized pieces.

Second, whereas SEMrush can help at a macro-level, we've found the Premium version of Yoast to be very helpful on optimizing individual pages and blog posts. While the free version of Yoast is helpful, as well, the premium version has helped us at Buddy to further optimize on-page content, as well as interlinking pages and posts, which is helpful for Google.

Candidly, there are lots of tools out there that can potentially help with SEO. These are two of our favorites that we use ourselves.

05.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading Buddy's guide to Website Strategy and Tactics for Search Engine Optimization!

Whether you're just starting out on your SEO journey, or are looking to find additional ways to gain an edge in your search rankings, we hope this guide has been useful.

This guide is intended to be a concise and simple resource to cover the basics of search engine optimization. If you'd like additional expert advice on SEO, or web design and development topics in general, please check out The Comprehensive Guide To Improving Your Website & Getting More Customers: A Learn With Buddy Guide, 2023 Edition, available as a paperback or eBook on Amazon.com. This 150+ page guide shares in-depth knowledge and expertise across a wide array of topics to help set you up for success.

We endorse it, of course, because we've written it, and feel confident it can be a valuable resource for anyone responsible for creating or managing a business website, without needing you to learn how to code or be a computer whiz!

06.

About Buddy Web Design & Development

Buddy Web Design & Development is a recipient of Expertise.com's "Best Web Developer in Grand Rapids, Michigan" designation in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, and a 5-star rated web development business on Google.

Buddy offers services including web design, web development, logo design, branding, graphic design, web content writing, e-commerce, and SEO-focused blogging.

Buddy has worked with businesses and brands across the US from a vast array of industries, most commonly with organizations that are – or are aspiring to be – leaders in their space. Buddy's aim is to provide great design, excellent technical work, and an exceptional customer experience.

At Buddy our mantra is *Do great work. Be great to work with.*™

To learn more, visit our website at BuddyWDD.com.

07.

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