

Features

2/28/2017

Attracting More Eyes (And More Shoppers)

Joe Dysart

With most leading green businesses devoting more time to content marketing these days—the publishing of articles, videos, images and more to reinforce brand image—it's more important than ever to ensure that content is Search Engine Optimized.

“It definitely helps,” says Chad Wehrbrein, co-owner of Greenlife Gardens in Papillion, Nebraska. “Everyone sits on their phone at home or work and looks up companies, locations of companies and phone numbers using the search engines.”

Ryan Martell, director of sales at The Garden Factory in Rochester, New York, agrees: “Whether potential customers are new to the area or just visiting, when looking for a garden center in the area, chances are their first instinct is going to be to search ‘garden center’ in a search engine like Google.”

Essentially, if your green business spends just a little bit of time making sure you're using the right keywords, the best Web design, the proper image tags, etc., your excellent content will appear even higher in search engine returns.

“We carefully consider the impact SEO will have and design the site with SEO in mind. We craft content using highly applicable keywords and continue to do so when altering by season,” says Carole Johnson, communications director of Chalet Landscape, Nursery and Garden Center in Wilmette, Illinois. “We link keywords from Chalet’s website to our social media platforms, and we use them in blogs and other published documents to connect the dots, bringing searchers full circle back to Chalet’s website.”

Plus, you'll be giving your business a decided advantage. “In most industries, you'll find that your competitors are not that smart,” says Jason McDonald, PhD. and author of “SEO Fitness Workbook 2016.” “Most industries are not as competitive in SEO as you would think.”

How to Get Started

So much has been written about SEO, it can seem daunting for the beginner, and even for some who have tried their hand at it here-and-there.

But with the following tools, you'll be able to give your business a complete handle on how to SEO-optimize your website, as well as how to track new developments in SEO:

- **“SEO Fitness Workbook 2016,” by Jason McDonald:** This is a good book that gives you a complete grounding in SEO fundamentals. Written in everyday, engaging English and virtually devoid of jargon, it will help you put together a full game plan for SEO-optimizing your site. Essentially, the “SEO Fitness Workbook 2016” is Stop One for getting serious about SEO, since everything you do to SEO-optimize your site will make sense once you've read this book.
- **Google SEO Starter Guide:** (To find it, just type the words “Google SEO Starter Guide” into Google and you'll find it in PDF form.) Given that Google is the biggest game in town in the world of search engines, it only makes sense to read this guide and follow its recommendations. It's brief (32 PDF pages), well-illustrated and crystal clear. Other, similar overall guides include “Search Engine Land's Guide to SEO” (<http://searchengineland.com/guide/seo>) and “SEO for Wordpress” (<https://yoast.com/wordpress-seo>).
- **Google Search Console:** This is another must-use tool for businesses serious about SEO-optimizing their Web site. It enables you to directly submit content on your website that you want Google to monitor—and eliminate other content you don't want showing up on the search engine. It'll also track which keywords and phrases are working for you, show you which websites are linking to you and monitor your site's performance on mobile devices.

Plus, it also will give you guidance on how to create a sitemap that will make it easier for Google to track your website.

“Google rewards websites that make its job easier,” Jason says. Bing Webmaster Tools helps you in the same way when it comes to your performance on Bing.

- **Keyword Brainstormers:** If you'd like a little inspiration and guidance coming up with the optimum keywords for your content, Google's Keyword Planner (adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner) will serve as your trusty guide. Similar keyword helpers include Keyword Spy (www.keywordspy.com), which will help you uncover keywords and phrases that are working for your competitors and Related Keywords (www.pagerank.net/related-keywords), a tool that will help you identify keywords related to your primary keywords.
 - **Page Tag Optimizers:** While “page tags” sound a bit technical, they're simply the tools that garden center owners can use to label various elements of a webpage. There's a tag used to title your page, a tag to title each image you use, a tag to boldface words you consider to be most important on your page, etc.
- You can use tools like SEOCentro Meta Tag Analyzer (www.seocentro.com/tools/search-engines/metatag-analyzer.html) to ensure you're optimizing your use of tags. Similar tools include Side-by-Side SEO Comparison Tool (internetmarketingninjas.com/seo-tools/seo-compare) and Keyword Density Checker (webconfs.com/keyword-density-checker.php).
- **Link Builders:** Good links to your website from other, authoritative websites have always been critical for

high search engine returns. So investing time securing links from such sites will pay off big time and long term. OpenLinkProfiler (openlinkprofiler.org) helps you do this more effectively, as does Buzzsumo (buzzsumo.com) and Moz Open Site Explorer (moz.com/researchtools/ose).

- **Local SEO Tools:** If the location of your business plays a key role in your profits, you'll want to spend time ensuring your website is optimized for local search. Google's Local Adwords Preview Tool (adwords.google.com/apt/anon/AdPreview) will help you do this and can be used for free. Similar tools include Moz Local (moz.com/local) and Local Stampede—Local Search Marketing (www.localstampede.com/citation-building-strategies-list/).

- **Content Creation Helpers:** There's a reason why so many journalists refer to the next day's paper as "feeding the beast." Once you're in the content creation business, you'll find the hunger for ever-more content at your website and other web properties is insatiable. Fortunately, news aggregators like Feedly will help pull together stories for you each day, based on a specific search word or phrase. And Google Email Alerts will do the same thing via email.

- **Headline Analyzers:** If headlines for your stories and posts are challenging, you can get some help from CoSchedule's Headline Analyzer. Simply type in your headline and CoSchedule will instantly grade your headline based on how common your headline words are, how emotional the wording is and how powerful the headline is overall. Bring up your grade by trying alternatives based on the suggestions CoSchedule makes about your first choice.

- **Free Press Release Distribution:** Regularly posting press releases to the web that link back to your business' website should ultimately help boost your search engine rankings. PRLog will help you distribute those press releases for free.

"Press releases have natural SEO benefits, including natural links from multiple and high-quality outside sources and opportunities for keyword linking," says Aidan Griffin, a senior account executive at the public relations firm Ketner Group.

- **SEO Plugin for Wordpress:** This is a free, incredibly valuable tool for anyone managing a Wordpress website. The Yoast plugin embeds an SEO dashboard in every unpublished page you create, instantly analyzing each and every word for you, and making clear recommendations on how you can tune-up your page to get the best shot at the search engines. For an extremely easy-to-follow guide on how to get started using Yoast, check out the "Beginner's Guide to Using Yoast Wordpress SEO Plugin" (<https://www.shivarweb.com/3902/beginners-guide-using-yoast-wordpress-seo>).

- **Ongoing Study:** An unendingly changing animal, SEO must be continuously studied to yield the best results. Some of the best sources on new info in SEO include Search Engine Watch (searchenginewatch.com), Search Engine Land (searchengineland.com), Search Engine Roundtable (www.seroundtable.com) and Search Engine Journal (www.searchenginejournal.com).

Laura Hammond, Director of Marketing, at Al's Garden Centers in Portland, Oregon, says, "With over 50% of my customers using mobile devices, and searching for information on the go, my information has to be

served up first.” **GP**

Joe Dysart is an Internet speaker and business consultant based in Manhattan. He can be reached by phone at (646) 233-4089 or by email at joe@joedysart.com. His website is www.joedysart.com.