Practical SEO: Are You Doing it Right?

To produce viable results, you'll need to know **what to build, why to build it** and **where to start** when structuring an effective SEO campaign.

The purpose of this eBook is to cover each step of the SEO process in detail.

Our SEO Guide Starts with:

- Budget
- Scope
- Keyword Research
- Site Architecture (based on keywords)
- Template Selection
- Landing Page Selection
- Supporting Article Creation
- Coding and Content Management
- On Page Optimization (preferably built into CMS)
- Internal Links (Link-Flow Sculpting)
- Off Page Augmentation (link building)
- Promotion (social media and otherwise)
- Feedback and Refinement (analytics and split testing).
- Reinvestment into additional content, links and promotion.

First up, the most important thing of all, your budget.

Budget

You either have it or you don't, there is no way around this one. For those with a steak appetite on a hamburger budget, SEO is not about mood-making, it's about determining how much of an impact you or how big a player **you can afford to be** in a given market.

The barrier to entry is different for each market, but keep in mind, whatever your monthly budget is, there are some competitors spending that per day to create the rankings they have; working smarter not harder is the critical metric.

There are layers upon layers of processes that must be executed properly in order for an SEO campaign to be successful – no amount of finagling will offset the work load required.

Our suggestion is that you find an individual or company with a proven track record and pay them what they're worth vs. trying to find the cheapest solution and waste months waiting on results (that may or may not occur).

Slow and steady wins the race as cheaper SEO providers could spell disaster as a result of poorly implemented automation, lack of protocol or lackadaisical execution. A flubbed SEO campaign is difficult to recover from (regardless of who you are).

Even large publicly traded companies are being penalized as a result of outdated SEO practices and are nowhere to be found in search engines for keywords they pushed too hard.

Here are a few posts that cover the conundrum of SEO pricing.

- [Budgeting and SEO Fees: The Cost of Competition](#)
- [Why Does SEO Cost so Much?](#)
- [SEO Costs – Paying it Forward](#)

The saying you get what you pay for has never been truer, particularly for SEO service providers. Sure, you could scrimp on links, spin content (to save money) and then end up with subpar content, in a supplemental filter or flagged as a bad neighborhood from using low quality links.

Scope

Good SEO costs money, but it can produce exponential ROI in the long run. My suggestion is to know which keywords you want (target phrases within your reach) and know what they are worth (from a conversion standpoint) then map out what you can spend to acquire that keyword.

Don't target 200 keywords if you can only afford 10, otherwise you may end up in limbo (on page 2 or beyond) instead of above the fold (in the top 3) for a solid keyword that can produce a return on your investment.

Keyword Research

This is where the magic happens, get this part wrong and you may as rub your lucky rabbits foot while you wait for money to fall out of the sky.

Seriously, keyword research is the most critical aspect of any SEO campaign. This is the part where you (a) determine your budget (b) assess the market and the competitors swimming in that space (c) refine which keywords that "buyers vs. browsers" use and then (d) embark on the content development plan and (e) execute the proper on page and off page optimization to get ranked for those phrases.

Keyword research should start based on (1) budget and (2) ROI – meaning how much you get back per sale for every visitor that converts from an offer.

If there are multiple stages involved in a conversion, such as someone having to find your website, click through, find another page or go to another site (if you are an affiliate) before they check out – then you need to factor attrition in the conversion path and determine the bottom line based on past performance of your offer to get a grip on what you can afford to spend.

If you are selling $8 items, then SEO applied to each product may not be an option, you may have to ball-roll the category and select a category that is broad enough and has proven search volume (based on the product) to then entice click-throughs by sending them to a page that has 20 products on it (to offset costs vs. ROI).

On the contrary, if you're selling a product for $100 or $1000, then you have the ability to target more aggressive traffic-bearing keywords.

You have to pay to play with SEO, the ROI requires more time. The bottom line is that conversions are the basis of budget which means that you need to develop the conversion process through conversion optimization properly in order to **"afford SEO"**.

Here are additional posts that provide insight on keyword research. Its importance at this stage of the SEO process is critical for the next steps to have any merit or resolve.

- [Keyword Research Educational vs. Commercial Queries](#)
- [Keyword Research and SEO Strategy](#)
- [Keyword Research and Search Engine Positioning](#)
- [SEO Modifiers for Affiliate Marketing](#)

A properly optimized keyword (it does not have to be competitive to yield profits) coupled with a high conversion rate is the ideal 1-2 punch for search engine optimization.

This way, you can afford to reinvest profits into capturing more keywords and scale that traffic (over time) without crimping cash flow.

For more information about keyword research – download our FREE eBook named "[Organic Search Top Modifiers Revealed](#)" using the link provided.

Site Architecture

Site architecture is where you map out which type of site you are going to build. The structure depends on (a) how competitive the keywords are (b) whether or not you are emphasizing certain landing pages, category pages, product pages or cyclical pages as the primary focus of your campaign.

Based on the keywords you are intent on ranking for, the competitors and which methods they are astute at as well as what type of weight you are willing to commit (time, energy, content, links, etc.), determines which type of site architecture is ideal.

While I could ramble for hours on this topic, I would rather provide a few links to other more relevant posts on the topic which we have covered previously on the SEO Design Solutions Blog.

- [SEO Tips for Website Architecture](#)
- [How to Easily Create Silo Site Architecture](#)
- [SEO Web Site Architecture and Why It's Important](#)
- [SEO, Sub domains, Site Architecture and Sitemaps](#)

The takeaway here is that there are hundreds of variations and some are more effective than others, but essentially it boils down to.

- Flat site architecture (often used in ecommerce) to build hundreds or thousands of lateral pages in the root folder (to share the link equity of being closer to the primary / home page).
- Tiered site architecture (ideal for sites with multiple categories) similar to a tree structure (think amazon.com).
- Theming and siloing (also good for sites with multiple categories or creating laser-like niche sites that rank themselves with minimal inbound links).

We will continue this discussion in greater detail as we progress through the remaining topics:

- Template Selection
- Landing Page Selection
- Supporting Article Creation
- Coding and Content Management
- On Page Optimization (preferably built into CMS)
- Internal Links (Link-Flow Sculpting)
- Off Page Augmentation (link building)
- Promotion (social media and otherwise)
- Feedback and Refinement (analytics and split testing).
- Reinvestment into additional content, links and promotion.

Next up is template selection.

PART II

Choosing the right template for the right task is one of the most underrated SEO techniques that can either **rank** or **tank** a site.

The templates you use are directly tied to the amount of link-flow that flows through the page (from proceeding internal and inbound links) as well as what degree of link equity proceeds to nurture and irrigate other linked pages in a site.

Template Selection

The templates you use determines how that page communicates with both search engines and other critical pages in the website. If the template is optimal, then it only houses elements (server side includes or custom code snippets) which are relevant to the purpose of that page.

The main consideration for templates from an SEO perspective is to minimize inherent duplicate content issues and to augment link-flow in a website.

The reason controlling link flow is important is, if you have the same shingles **"groups of words, code, etc."** such as a recurring side bar, footer, masthead and primary navigation within a website, then you will need more content to distinguish that page from those recurring areas.

Fail to add enough content and this is called **thin-content** and is a red flag for ranking suppression in search engines.

A search engine is programmed to seek out duplicate content (either internal an inherent to a website) as well as duplicate shingles (groups of words, code, etc.) on other sites.

Duplicate content is essentially a waste of server space and for this reason algorithms exist to minimize crawling data of this nature.

As a reference, here's a post on [Google Algorithms updates on 1.28.2011](#) on Matt Cutt's blog chief of the Web Spam team for Google pages lacking unique content may be flagged, removed or suppressed.

While this has been known for years in elite SEO circles (not to create a duplicate footprint) the problem often stems from lack of optimization or poor/lazy coding from developers either not knowing or simply relying on one template **to run the entire website**.

The typical reaction from search engines was previously **"the supplemental index"** meaning, sure, it's crawled, but isolated in a secondary index which may or may not be included as a **"relevant"** search. In other words it's analogous to SEO purgatory.

While you can get pages out of [the supplemental index](#) and back into the main index, it is better to avoid it in the first place, which leads back to template optimization and assigning a role in the hierarchy for each page.

There are solutions for breaking-out from the mold or rather **"designing [SEO friendly](#) templates"** but this involves creating a range of parameters such as having granular control over the header/masthead, Meta data, sidebar, footer and body areas extensively and independently in order to sculpt the most relevant type of page for the ranking objective.

Below are links to template optimization tips as well as SEO tips for large websites.

- [SEO Tips for Link Sculpting and Template Optimization](#)
- [SEO Tips for Website Templates](#)
- [Using Server Side Includes and Alt Attributes for SEO](#)
- [SEO Tips for Large Websites Part I](#)
- [SEO Tips for Feed Optimization and Dynamic Data](#)

Next up, landing page selection…

Landing Page Selection

Landing page selection is something we have been adamant about for years. Essentially, there are two kinds of pages in a website (1) pages that are meant to rank as the flagship for a specific keyword and (2) pages that are designed to support the flagship pages a.k.a. preferred landing pages in a website.

The reason why selecting a preferred landing page is imperative for organic optimization is (1) it delivers users directly to the page they were seeking and (2) it serves as the perfect hub page or springboard to feed additional pages in the site architecture based on semantic relevance or more effectively theming and siloing your content to increase rankings (by passing along ranking factor to other theme relevant content in a site).

It is capable to rank an entire cluster of keywords for various [search modifiers](#) (i.e. leading, best, affordable, cheap) as well as Geographical modifiers such as a city, state or zip code all from adhering to principles of simple on page optimization.

This ties directly in to the previous topic of keyword research and [site architecture](#) but directly is impacted by the following topic content development and creation as well. Essentially, each primary keyword should have its own page, but can also serve as a catch all for 4-6 additional keyword variations.

This process is augmented through (a) how you link internally from page to page (b) what data exists on the page, in the meta data, the H1 (header tag which is the topic of the page – much like a headline in a newspaper) as well as (c) the range of anchor text from other websites.

This combination creates a synergy or rather a symphony of ranking factors which imbue your landing pages with specific algorithmic attributes that ear mark that page as the definitive source of information for its intended keywords.

For more information about how to properly create preferred landing pages or elect them, refer to the body of documents in the archives in the SEO Design Solutions Blog.

- [SEO Techniques to Improve Search Engine Optimization](#)
- [How to Theme and Silo Your WordPress Blog](#)
- [How to Create a Plan B for Ranking](#)

Once you have deemed which keywords are important based on which pages yield (a) the highest potential for monetary conversion (b) the most search volume (c) which pages can act as a pre-sell page to funnel visitors to the appropriate offers or (d) represent the most suitable match for first time visitors – you will be able to sculpt them at will using a few simple techniques covered here:

- [SEO and Internal Linking](#)
- [SEO Rankings and How to Create Them](#)

This process isn't rocket science, just consider it as holistic planning for the health of your website. Using human beings as an analogy, think of landing pages like appendages, the internal links as the circulatory system and the site architecture as the skeleton and your content as the muscles which when unified produce the phenomenon of a synchronized body capable of movement.

Consider the optimization process as conditioning and it is that conditioning that allows your website mobility and dynamism. The objective is to climb higher

through the corpus of documents in the search engines index, but in order to do so, each page needs to serve a purpose based on [form, function, relevance](#) and appeal.

Part III

Finishing up let's dive into more tactical SEO techniques for optimizing your online web properties.

- Supporting Article Creation
- Coding and Content Management
- On Page Optimization (preferably built into CMS)

What is Left?

The remaining topics are:

- Coding and Content Management
- On Page Optimization (preferably built into CMS)
- Internal Links (Link-Flow Sculpting)
- Off Page Augmentation (link building)
- Promotion (social media and otherwise)
- Feedback and Refinement (analytics and split testing).

- Reinvestment into additional content, links and promotion.

Let's get stared with…

Supporting Article Creation

Each keyword has a tipping point, and all websites start from just one page and then stem and blossom according to the barrier to entry and tipping point required to **"capture the flag of authority"** and scale past competitors.

We have alluded to this several time in previous posts, there are two kinds of pages; the first are pages that are the primary or "preferred landing pages" that are ideal for readers to take action and convert and the second are supporting topical pages (designed to increase rankings, capture a semantic cousin to the seed phrase) and serve as layers to influence either rankings or relevance for the elected primary landing pages.

While each industry is unique, the structure by design for content development is to (a) start with keywords that are less competitive, attainable and within reach (under 50,000 competing pages), then (b) create content, get ranked and work your way up to capture the more competitive traffic-bearing / market defining keywords.

Over time, you can determine the tipping point required to create the synergy between the on page requirements such as site architecture, supporting content, internal links, meta data, site speed, social citation, author weight and the off page requirements such as citation, server environment and links to create the required trust and authority to procure a keyword victory.

You can either target one keyword at a time, dozens, hundreds or thousands (depending on your budget, resources for content and link development). As your website grows and becomes "more themed", it becomes easier to acquire more competitive vertical keywords.

Also, it's not just about having lots of content (since anyone can automate this), it's about having sufficient authority which is a by-product of social signals, on page metrics such as bounce rate and engagement and links from authoritative websites.

The synergy creates the effect of authority, what happens next is your website (when compared to other sites algorithmically) will be the definitive source on that topic.

So, instead of you *trying to influence search engines*, on the contrary they will follow you like a scribe, anticipating your next page or post, digest your content eagerly and looks for ways to correlate that to mid-tail and long-tail queries on the topic.

Trust me, this works. Once you have authority it's rather amazing. I could write a blog post, wait 8-12 minutes, search for keywords in the title from Google and be on the first page (in minutes) from a well-crafted post.

At the time, any keyword with 8 Million competing pages or less would be brushed aside and our website would trump them (all from just publishing content, no links, nothing). That is the goal!

Coding and Content Management

There are a variety of options available for content development, however to simplify they are either **"static"** and pages are independent whereby changes are made manually without site wide integration and **"dynamic"** whereby pages are served from a database or administrated by a content management system.

While the implications of that management system can hail from various programming platforms, for the sake of SEO, only a few critical granular metrics are required such as:

- The ability to have independent control over the header, body region (where the article is), the sidebar and the footer and
- The ability to influence the title, Meta data and URL structure of the page (to create optimized naming conventions to convey relevance for search engines).

On Page Optimization (CMS / SEO Web Design)

While there is nothing wrong with good old fashioned html pages (crafted on by one) where you have to go through and make individual changes page by page

and add links one by one, there is another way – SEO Web Design or building the SEO into the site from the content management system.

The advantage of optimization by design vs. fixing the broken wagon and trying to make a jalopy of a page compete against a finely tuned SEO Ferrari is possible; there is another way to alleviate such an exercise in futility.

Our CMS of choice is WordPress (while it may be perceived as a blogging platform) is rather pliable and can be sculpted into a very effective content management system with the addition of a few simple plugins.

It just so happens SEO Design Solutions offers a Free All-In-One Plugin called SEO Ultimate which has the power of 20 plugins and features all integrated into one nifty dashboard where you can simply select or disable modules as needed.

SEO Ultimate was our way to eliminate the need for hacking together bits and pieces of code to create specific SEO functions. While it was originally our best kept secret, we released it to the public and it now has over 150,000 downloads and growing daily. To get your copy download SEO Ultimate from WordPress or read about the recent updates or browse the SEO Ultimate product page.

The moral of the story is, by applying SEO to the core code of the CMS (content management system) and coupling this with selective content development, you can orchestrate everything from optimized titles, tags, categories, canonical correction (eliminating duplicate content), optimize URL slugs, ad custom tracking code, analytics, ads, implement social media sharing buttons and much more with a few simple clicks.

Internal Links (Link-Flow Sculpting)

Links are the fabric of the web, they are the only thing allowing users to move from one page to another page in your website (via navigation or contextual links) or from one website to another via navigating the web.

While many emphasize the power of backlinks (links from other websites) internal links (links from page to page) can be equally as effective for creating on page ranking factor within a website.

We have written many posts on internal links and their inherent ability to transfer ranking factor from one page to the next. However, when coupled with themed site architecture and deep links (links to internal page from other websites) this is one of the most powerful SEO tactics ever devised.

The idea is to provide links from a themed page to another themed page and to use an array of anchor text and modifiers based on the primary seed phrase you intend to rank the target page for.

By cultivating a higher quality of link, the volume becomes less important (as trust and thematic relevance are a powerful combination). Similarly, by controlling the number of links leaving a page and consolidating the internal links, you provide exponential ranking factor to the links that exist on a page.

If cultivated properly linking selectively from tier 1 pages to tier 2 category pages and tier 2 category pages linking to internal product pages and those product pages linking back to tier 1 and tier 2, you can create internal link dynamos capable of ranking thousands of keywords with the same amount of backlinks required to rank a few dozen keywords.

By properly combining the on page and off page links in unison, one is able to scale the barrier to entry **"keyword by keyword"** using the site to rank the less competitive keywords and backlinks and primary navigation to rank for the more competitive keywords and get on the grid from "not in the top 1000 results" to page one **"if the ratios are applied correctly"**.

While use powerful SEO tools to facilitate this process, however, once you provide the proper synergy, the result is buoyancy for the selected keyword or keywords cross linked or deep linked within a website.

Off Page Augmentation (SEO Link Building)

While many consider links to be the holy grail of SEO, their value is compounded by proper on page SEO, meaning, the more optimal you're on page optimization, the less links you require to gain traction.

While there are many types of links that you can build or acquire, getting trusted links from thematically relevant websites which (a) rank for the keyword or a variation of it (that you are targeting) and (b) have the collective weight of

citation in the link graph (meaning they are linked from some of the first or most authoritative sites online) provide the most ranking factor.

IP diversity (diversifying the server environment) is also another consideration and getting 100 links from 100 different sites rather than getting 1 Sitewide link (from a Blogroll, footer or sidebar) from one site is preferred to pass more citation and trust to the target site.

If a link is indexed, then it has a value "no **matter how insignificant they may seem"** and can pass along some form of ranking metric or score. This is known as link-flow and becomes critically important as you raise the stakes and target more competitive keywords.

In fact, the more competitive the keyword, the more important link-flow and on page optimization becomes. Off page links from other websites can vacillate and easily be phased out from changes in search engine algorithms. On page links on the contrary can provide stability and ranking factor independently of inbound links – however both are important for SEO.

Promotion (Social Media and Otherwise)

Just as the nuts and bolts are important for SEO, getting the word out and creating a sympathetic wave of interest through syndicating your content socially can have vast implications on conversions and the bottom line.

Ironically, the more **"buzz"** or collective synergy your pages or posts have, the more opportunities exist to transform fly's on the wall into evangelists for your brand.

Every person who enjoys your content represents a 50/50 chance that they may pass it along to others (hint, hint) and create a barrage of traffic to increase exposure. If cultivated properly, the law of reciprocity can impact the bottom line.

Before you can improve metrics, you have to be able to track the traffic you have, measure the level of engagement, determine the demographic profile of the users who pass through and determine which unique selling proposition and conversion funnel to introduce to appease their inherent what's in it for me? mantra running silently under the surface of every surfer.

Cross the invisible value meter and you now have a potential evangelist for your brand; fail to impress and you may never see them again. Such is the way of the web and with so many options and so little time, make the right first impression then keep giving more and more until your content reaches critical mass.

While Facebook and Twitter lead the pack "**for now**", don't neglect other forms of syndication such as RSS feeds, eBooks, press releases, offline promotion to drive online conversions and guest blogging, as a means to increase market share and get your message in front of **"the right"** audience. Guest blogging is not about links, it's about finding the perfect audience for your product or service.

Feedback and Refinement (Analytics)

While many swear by Google Analytics, we are fond of pmetrics for providing straight forward data on visitors, their IP, country, bounce rate, engagement time, navigation path, what they downloaded, how long they watched a video on your site, etc.

Without measuring user engagement, you will never be able to recreate or improve on critical areas in your website.

Going back to re-read this SEO Guide starting from Part 1, Part 2 and finally reading this on Part 3 will provide you with enough insight on what SEO is, how it works and how to put it to work for you.

Reinvesting Profits

Just like a light at the end of a tunnel, the basis of [SEO is ROI](SEO is ROI). Without achieving a return on investment, you will not be able to scale.

While SEO requires an initial investment (unless you have know-how and time) the goal is to reach a prominent position in search engines **"in the top 3 results"**, drive traffic, increase conversions (downloads, subscriptions, phone calls, contact form request, etc.) if you choose the right keywords **"that buyers use instead of browsers",** you can fund new keyword conquests indefinitely.

While we use tools for tracking conversions (the number of people that take a desired action), by making granular changes to landing pages, images, typography, copy and layout can dramatically improve conversion rates.

In either capacity, keep the bottom line in mind and **"know what your time is worth"** or whether or not you can delegate or outsource the less desirable processes.

Once your website has reached critical mass, you may not have to try as hard as you think to gain viral social engagement or algorithmic traction from search engines. To reap the rewards, you will either have to invest your time or pay someone who can. There are few worthwhile shortcuts to the top, risk does not always equal reward.

Yet, there are ways to shorten the time to the top 10. Yet, like other methods, they also require patience to reach fruition.

If you enjoyed this informative SEO guide, by all means, make sure to like us on Facebook, Follow us on Twitter or on the social medium of your choice.

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- **Thank you for your time** -