How to: Set Your 2015 SEO Strategy and Budget

SEO Planning Overview

Ranking competitively on search engines in today's SEO environment is about far more than meta-tags and link-building. If you want to show on the first page, you need to improve your site content as a first priority.

Keep in mind that a site content development project is a long term investment. When planning budgets and evaluating ROI, always expect results about four to six months after implementing changes. However, expertly improving the content of your website will have positive results that ripple through all of your channels, not just your organic results. Thus, despite the slow turnaround, this is an essential step toward improving your overall digital marketing results.

Search Rank Improvement Outline

To get you started, we've outlined the first nine steps you should take to determine an appropriate strategy for improving your organic rank on Google. We then provide tactics for breaking down the ROI for this typically hard-to-analyze channel, and for evaluating and pricing an SEO engagement.

1) **Decide Which Search Terms Are Most Important for Your Business.**
   a. In other words, determine the search terms (keywords) for which you'd like your site to rank.

   b. List these search terms on a spreadsheet.

   c. Roughly prioritize the keyword list based on your own intuition about their value to your business. We won't finalize this list until step four below.

2) **Understand Your Industry and Competitive Environment.**
   a. Search for your terms and note the competitor sites that show at the top of the results, *example search shown on the right*. Also note any terms for which you already rank organically. Ignore the ads and sales links for this analysis.

   b. Review the content of these sites to understand your competition for each term.

   c. You may find that your original keyword list was overly broad or crosses into many other unrelated industries. If this is the case, return to step 1 and reevaluate your keyword list based on your discoveries.

   d. You might also identify additional industry search terms that you didn't previously consider. Add these to your list of keywords.
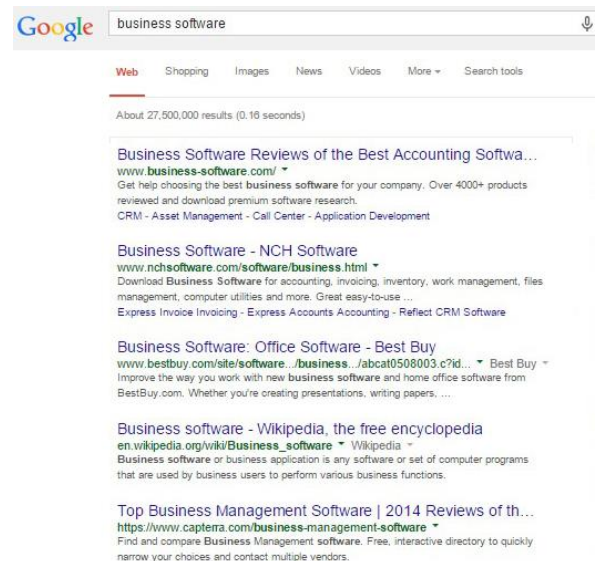
3) Analyze the SEO Opportunity of Your Keyword List

   a. There are online tools provided by Google, KeywordSpy and many other organizations which can help automate keyword list analysis. We recommend Google's Webmaster Tools and the Keyword Planning Tool from Google AdWords, *as shown on your right*.

   b. Here at Strongpages, we've developed a proprietary algorithm to calculate the SEO Opportunity. Contact us and we'd be happy to run a free analysis of the SEO opportunity score for your keyword list.
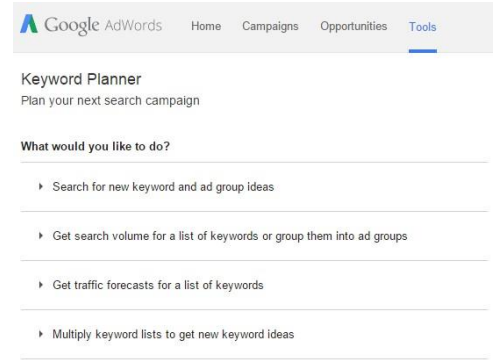
4) Evaluate Your Website and Identify Content Gaps.

   a. Now that you know <u>what you want</u> and <u>what you're up against</u>, you need to determine <u>where you currently stand</u>.

      i. If you aren't experienced at SEO content gap analyses, we definitely wouldn't recommend trying it on your own.

      ii. Due to the long lag-time to see results, this is a critical step where you could invest a lot of time and energy up-front only to see minimal results half-a-year later.

      iii. Therefore, even if you don't have Strongpages conduct this review, at least hire another digital marketing agency for a short-term site review and content planning project.

5) Make a Plan to Fill These Gaps.

   a. Finalize the themed prioritization of your keyword list based on the aggregated results from the above reviews.

   b. Develop a work-plan to develop new site content based on your keyword list themes.

   c. Focus first on the sections of your website related to your highest priority themes.

      i. For instance, during the first month, plan to develop content around the keywords that are most important to your business. In the second month, plan to work on your second highest priority terms, and so on.

   d. Create a schedule for carrying out this plan. Associate realistic dates and deadlines to complete each section. *We've provided an example of a Strongpages POA for SEO in the screenshot on the right.* You can access this spreadsheet from our Digital Marketing Toolkit.

6) Start Creating Content.

    a. Develop and launch new content in waves according to your schedule.

    b. Be sure to follow all SEO best practices and edit your pages thoroughly.

    c. If you aren't an expert, we highly recommend hiring an expert or a content development agency to ensure professional results.

        i. Ultimately, you can develop your own keyword lists, track results and analyze ROI without any real expertise. However, content gap analysis, content creation, and competent analytics really require someone with experience to get right.

7) Track Your Search Engine Results

    a. Next, start tracking your shifts in search engine rank that result from the new content in each themed group.

    b. There are a lot of tools available for tracking movement in keyword search rankings, so you don't have to do this manually. Google Webmaster Tools is a great place to start.

    c. As mentioned above, you should expect a four to six month delay before you see results. Don't get discouraged after two or three months if you haven't yet seen a shift in the data - you're still only halfway there.

8) Understand Your Site Analytics

    a. Hopefully you're already doing this, but you should have a web analytics package installed on your website. If not, we recommend that you set up Google Analytics (GA). Google Analytics, *shown in the example screenshot below,* includes access to lots of useful tools for tracking and analyzing SEO results. It also links into Webmaster Tools data.
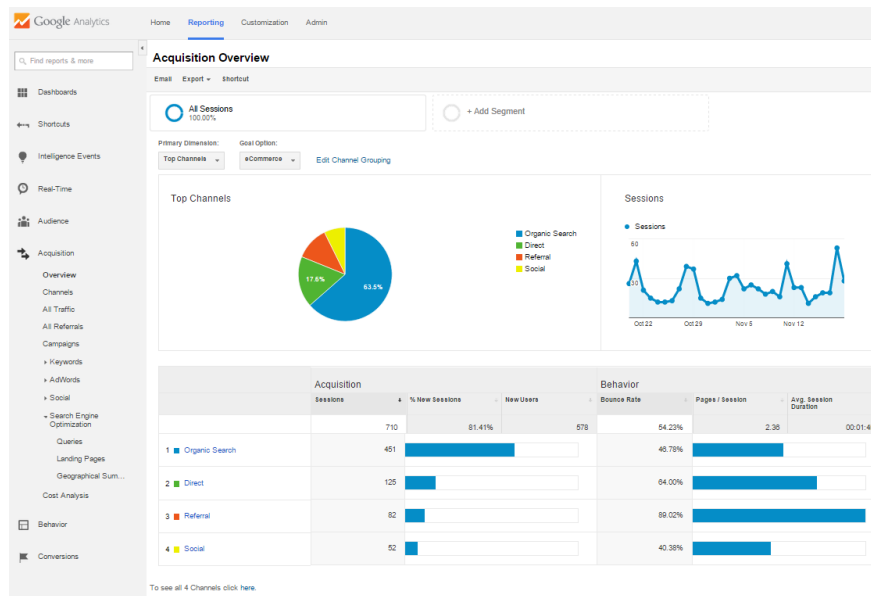
    b. Set-up goal conversion tracking in analytics. Assign a monetary value to each goal.

    c. Use the multi-channel funnels feature to understand how improved organic results affect your other channels.

9) **Analyze Your ROI for the Project**
   a. Again, expect a four to six month delay before seeing tangible results.
   b. Therefore, when analyzing the results of an SEO effort, shift your comparison timeframe between the most recent month and the keyword theme launched six months prior.
      i. For instance, if you launched a new set of content in October, analyze the results in March of the following year.
   c. Utilize the Strongpages ROI Digital Budget Planner and Marketing Employee Net Cost Calculators, *example shown below*, to calculate and compare the ROI for this channel with your other channels such as paid search and social media.

Weekly Time Breakdown					
Project	Percentage of Time (Weekly)	Hours (Weekly)	Weekly Project Cost	Monthly Project Cost	Yearly Project Cost
Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising	10%	4	$173.00	$749.68	$8,996.15
Search Engine Optimization (SEO) / Content Development	20%	8	$346.01	$1,499.36	$17,992.30
Facebook Social Media	25%	10	$432.51	$1,874.20	$22,490.38
LinkedIn Social Media	10%	4	$173.00	$749.68	$8,996.15
Twitter Social Media	5%	2	$86.50	$374.84	$4,498.08
Blogging	5%	2	$86.50	$374.84	$4,498.08

   d. Determine the real value of your SEO project on an annual basis.
   e. Return to step one to develop a new keyword list based on new developments in your business and/or industry and continue into the new year.

Pricing a Content Development Project for SEO

The actual pricing on a content development project will vary greatly depending on your needs and the size of the engagement.

Hiring In-House: When hiring an in-house agent, be sure to ask them to outline their strategy for showing ROI on their SEO work. If they cover a process similar to the one shown above, you have a strong candidate.

Hiring an Agency: When hiring an agency to improve your SEO results, it is best to start with a short project to evaluate the team you'll be working with. This team synergy is particularly important if you're in it for the long-haul of a full SEO engagement. Therefore, contract an agency for a short one-to-three month project, such as the content gap analysis or developing your first few waves of new content, as discussed above. If you decide you enjoy the benefits of working with an agency, hire them for year-long project to complete the content generation and assist you with the analysis on the final results.

If you've taken the first few steps and would like Strongpages to get you the rest of the way there, please contact us at http://strongpages.com/contact/.

About Strongpages

Strongpages is a leading digital marketing agency with a deep history of developing digital strategy and managing successful online marketing programs. Strongpages has generated significant results for our client's brands – ranging from startups to the world's largest retailers. We're dedicated to helping businesses of all kinds leverage this mission-critical channel to fuel their business in the digital age.

Learn more at http://strongpages.com.