

The New Face of SEO

Gail Buckley

www.PLRContentSource.com

Having a virtual entity on the World Wide Web is meaningless if there's no traffic to enjoy your products, services and insights. Sure, there are paid traffic systems you can shell out for – but even those who dabble in paid traffic envy those who can rank for relevant search for free.

It's a shame that so many online entrepreneurs have spent way more time trying to claw their way to the top of the SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) than they do on branding, product creation, and engaging their customers.

If they took that focus and flipped it – they might discover that the SERPs take care of themselves when you do everything else right.

It's virtually impossible for some of you to set aside your addiction to SEO. You're consumed by it. You check rank every single day. You're constantly competing for keyword phrases.

In the past, that may have been a good strategy – in fact it's one that enabled many marketers to cash in big time on the 'net. But the face of SEO has changed and it's no longer about technicalities that help catapult you to the top.

It's about being the best the web has to offer, period.

Google Reliance Is a Thing of the Past

First, we have to take away your crutch – Google SERPs. Believe it or not, there are many other search engines sending traffic to websites other than the almighty Google.

Google's dominance is still strong in the world of search engine competition, but it's not the only game in town – and focusing on matching your entire business

efforts to whatever announcement one single search engine company makes is what will cripple your success.

You'll spend time (and sometimes money) trying to learn how to master Google, only to have it all slip away in the blink of an eye when their latest (and really frequent) shakeup or "dance" takes place and your site plummets to the bottom of the SERPs.

Yahoo and Bing are still formidable in the world of free traffic. In fact, Bing is growing into a powerhouse of its own – and many consumers prefer using it over Google.

No one's saying Google doesn't matter. But basing your entire business on their latest developments is foolish.

Gaming the System Is Now a Gamble

Remember link farms? How about link wheels? These are strategies SEO "experts" began teaching webmasters as a way to game the system and get ahead in Google and other search engines.

What happens is, the people and companies teaching or offering services for SEO spend a lot of time testing and manipulating sites in Google to see what helps improve rankings.

They're deciphering the search engine's algorithm, which is their formula for what the system uses to choose site rankings. So back in the day, Google used to reward sites with many incoming and outgoing links.

Link farms were born where everybody just participated in a big old link fest – and ultimately, Google got wise to it and clamped down on it, eliminating that specific perk from their algorithm.

How about keyword stuffing – remember that? Marketers were told that if their websites contained a good number of keywords and phrases, then they would be rewarded with a good Google SERP ranking.

Because they're always looking for a shortcut and an easy win, the webmasters started flooding their sites with keywords. Readers didn't like this – so the sites began hiding the text, making it the same color as the background so that only the search engine robots would see it.

There came a time when keyword density became an issue – so now webmasters spent a lot of time ensuring that they used a specific word or phrase a certain percentage of the time, like 2-3%.

Here's today's new reality: if you game the system, you can almost guarantee the search engines will find out about it and shut it down.

Then what?

Then your site tumbles off of page 1, page 2...maybe it's not even indexed at all anymore because Google realized you were doing something shady.

There's a Trend Toward White Hat Tactics for Longevity

Instead of putting your site at risk (and your financial security in jeopardy) every month, why not just embrace good, strong above-the-board methods for getting traffic to your site with search engine rankings?

These practices are known as white hat (black hat are shady methods).

More and more webmasters and search engine optimization companies are emphasizing these methods because they're tired of seeing sites fail suddenly after achieving good positioning in the rankings.

Imagine if you got a site ranked in the #1 spot on Google and you began to focus all of your time growing that portion of your business – and it was paying off! In fact, you might let other business models in your arsenal take a backseat - even dump some of them to get them off your plate.

What if that site got to where it's at because you hired an SEO company and they were SO smart that they had figured out Google's algorithm and gotten you the spots you paid them to get you strategically.

And then one day you get up and notice the income has all but disappeared. This literally happens overnight in many cases.

Would you feel devastated? This is a typical story among many webmasters who thought that a hardcore focus on algorithms and SEO was all that mattered in business.

Many people who innocently hired SEO companies or listened to black hat marketers and implemented those efforts have had to completely start from scratch with their online business, and that's a heartbreaking position to be in.

It's a hard lesson to learn, too. The people this happens to will take one of two roads. They'll either learn from their mistake and rebuild based on white hat techniques. Or, they'll chase the fast riches again and try to scheme the search engines a second, third or fourth time.

Recognizing Black Hat Advice You Should Avoid

Some people knowingly pursue black hat operations for their website. They want the top spot and they don't care what they have to do to get there.

Others don't know that what they're doing is putting their site at risk. They go into this wanting to learn, so they turn to the experts who are currently ranking well and listen to their advice.

How do you know when something isn't above the board?

First, look at the scarcity of the offer. Is the seller implying or even stating outright that this strategy may not work for long, so you need to buy their course today to find out how to make it work fast?

This is a good sign that something's wrong. You don't want flash in the pan methods for your site. You want evergreen SEO techniques you can employ across the board.

Second, consider your gut instinct. Does what they're asking you to do feel wrong? If someone asked me to put a bunch of keywords into the background of my site, I'd probably know that it wasn't a truthful thing to do.

If someone told you to make sure you used a specific density of keywords in your content, it might make you uneasy or annoyed thinking about how you had to fake your content to be just right – when what you really wanted to do was just share good information.

Third, do your research to see what everyone is saying about it. Don't rely on some sales letter or even a service provider to tell you it's okay to do something. Take responsibility for your own site's well-being and dig around online to see if it's an acceptable practice.

Fourth, don't be afraid to ask someone you trust. Whether that's a specific person or the members of a forum – it's okay to say, “Hey I'm not 100% sure if this a good SEO practice – please let me know your thoughts.”

Good Content Is Now Rewarded

When you start building a new website – or begin to work on one you've had that isn't ranking, consider what it is that search engines really want – and then give it to them!

One thing they want is a site that has good, relevant content. What does that mean? Well, it should read well, it should be relevant to what your site is about, and it should help your readers feel satisfied in some way, shape or form.

Google itself says that they want the information to be trustworthy – not questionable. It doesn't have to be written by an expert, but at the very least it should be written by someone enthusiastic about the topic. Passion shines through in your writing.

They don't want content that's unnatural – like those pages stuffed with keywords that a human reader doesn't find appealing. Forget about robots crawling your website – cater to the needs of the person who lands there needing answers.

They don't want content that's copied from another site – even if it's just a duplicate of content that you yourself own. They don't want scraped content (theft is never good – it should fire up your gut instinct on what to avoid).

Your content doesn't have to be perfect, but if it's flooded with errors (spelling or even factual) then you might experience a "ding" in the SERPs. Longer content is good – it means you thoroughly exhausted the subject and didn't write a quick paragraph or two just to get people to your site.

Search engines don't want you to go to a top competitor and create a knock off. They would love to showcase a variety of styles and opinions. If you have a slant – say so!

And when you create your content, make sure you weigh it against the volume of advertisements you have on your site. Good content should dominate over ad space.

Socialize Your Site for Good SERP Rankings

Search engines want natural socialization on your site. They LOVE it when people comment on your blog (hint: it adds to the conversation and the content and confirms to them that your site is somewhere relevant to the topic).

They don't reward you for spam comments, and in fact Google representatives have made videos about how spam comments that you approve can hurt your site – so make sure you filter those out manually or with a good plugin.

Google and other search engines want people sharing your content. If they see people hitting that Google Plus or Twitter or Facebook share icon, it's a sign to them that this is not only relevant and on topic, but it's so good you'll want to tell others about it.

Do backlinks still matter? Just because some bad eggs went and ruined the concept of backlinking with their spam tactics doesn't mean search engines don't care at all about that anymore.

It's just that they pay a lot more attention to how the backlinks are built, where they come from, and how fast they're generated. The days of paying a set fee for thousands of quickie backlinks (and having it matter) are gone.

Make sure you use a variety of socialization options, too. For example, use images with your content – not just text. Pinterest users will help your content go viral if they can pin it to their boards and allow others to share it.

Use video, too. Some people want to share videos (on YouTube or Vimeo) that they find – not just text or static images. Video marketing can be done in a non spammy way – where you're regularly sharing insight with your target audience.

Technical Abilities Matter

Another thing search engines are looking for is site functionality. They don't like broken sites – and why would they? Would you go back to a service if they kept referring you to broken down “hot spots?”

So make sure that your site works. Log out of your blog and see what the general public is seeing and navigate all around the site to ensure your readers aren't encountering bad URLs.

Try making sure that your content is above the fold. Your header shouldn't be so big that a person has to scroll to begin reading the content. You want them to land and instantly see that this was a great choice to click on.

How about catering to the mobile audience? Search engines want to make sure that whatever gadget their customer is using will be compatible with your site. If you have a blog, there are quick plugins that can easily turn your blog into a mobile site option, giving you an advantage over those who don't go the extra mile.

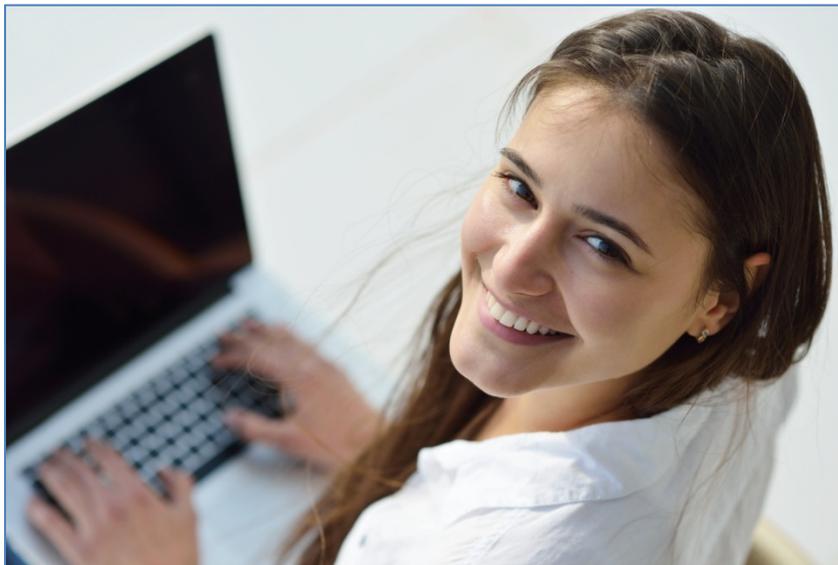
Focus on Building Trust and Engaging Your Brand

If you will attempt the big feat of letting go of your obsession with search engine optimization – and instead think more along the lines of customer optimization, then you will automatically give the search engines what they're after – a good end user experience.

Concentrate on how you want to be branded online. Do you want to be known as the site that dominates the #1 spot in Google but nobody comes back to because it wasn't helpful?

Or would you like word of mouth to spread rapidly that you're the go to person (or website) for a particular topic? Make sure you take advantage of Google's Authorship Markup feature, which will help your entries in the search engine results pages stand out with an image.

It's easy to see which method provides sustainability for you in the marketplace – white hat SEO. And that's what you should be doing – building long-term business empires, not risky sites that won't be around very long.



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