

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): A Study on Scope of SEO in India

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Abstract

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of humanizing the volume or worth of traffic to a web site from search engines via "natural" or un-paid ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results as opposed to Search Engines Marketing (SEM) which deals with paid inclusion. SEO may target different kinds of search, as well as image search, local search, video search and industry-specific vertical search engines. This gives a web site web presence. The contraction "SEO" can refer to "search engine optimizers," a term adopted by an industry of consultants who bring out optimization projects on behalf of clients, and by employees who perform SEO services in-house. Search engine optimizers may offer SEO as a stand-alone service or as a part of a broader marketing campaign. As an Internet marketing strategy, SEO considers how search engines work and what people search for. The aim of the authors in the paper is to represent the scenario of SEO market in India. Authors work towards the scope of SEO as a career in India.

Keywords

Search engine optimization; Black hat; White hat; Gray hat techniques recent work in SEO; Analytics is the True Measure of SEO Success.

I. Introduction

Search Engine Optimization is the art and science of optimizing your web pages to be found by the search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing etc [1]. But why part art, part science? The science part of SEO deals with technology and all the engineering & technicalities of a website such as code, information architecture & user experience etc. While Art is all about understanding the business, and the customer behavior and try to positively influence it by adding value to them (in the form of a product, service or a solution) and getting value in return (as leads, sales or branding).

SEO plays a vital role in scaling up sales and accelerating the growth of a completely online business (such as Flipkart.com) or an offline business (such as KFC).

Webmasters and providers begin optimizing sites for search engines in the mid 1990s, as the first search engines Webmasters and content providers began optimizing sites for search engines in the mid-1990s, as the first search engines were cataloging the early Web. Initially, all a webmaster needed to do was submit the address of a page, or URL, to the various engines which would send a spider to "crawl" that page, extract links to other pages from it, and return information found on the page to be indexed. The process involves a search engine spider downloading a page and storing it on the search engine's own server, where a second program, known as an indexer, extracts various information about the page, such as the words it contains and where these are located, as well as any weight for specific words, and all links the page contains, which are then placed into a scheduler for crawling at a later date.

According to industry analyst Danny Sullivan, the phrase search engine optimization probably came into use in 1997.

A. White hat versus black hat

SEO techniques can be classified into two broad categories: techniques that search engines recommend as part of good design, and those techniques of which search engines do not approve. The search engines attempt to minimize the effect of the later, among them spamdexing. Some industry commentators have classified these methods, and the practitioners who employ them, as either

white hat SEO, or black hat SEO.

B. White hat SEO

An SEO technique is considered white hat if it conforms to the search engines' guidelines and involves no deception. We can say the legal seo is a white hat seo. White hat SEO is not just about following guidelines, but is about ensuring that the content a search engine indexes and subsequently ranks is the same content a user will see. White hat advice is generally summed up as creating content for users, not for search engines, and then making that content easily accessible to the spiders, rather than attempting to trick the algorithm from its intended purpose. White hat SEO is in many ways similar to web development that promotes accessibility, although the two are not identical.

C. Black hat SEO

SEO attempts to improve rankings in ways that are disapproved of by the search engines, or involve deception. One black hat technique uses text that is hidden, either as text colored similar to the background, in an invisible form, or positioned off screen. Another method gives a different page depending on whether the page is being requested by a human visitor or a search engine, a technique known as cloaking.

Search engines may penalize sites they discover using black hat methods, either by reducing their rankings or eliminating their listings from their databases altogether. Such penalties can be applied either automatically by the search engines' algorithms, or by a manual site review. Infamous examples are the February 2006 Google removal of both BMW Germany and Ricoh Germany for use of deceptive practices. and the April 2006 removal of the PPC Agency Bigmouth Media. All three companies, however, quickly apologized, fixed the offending pages, and were restored to Google's list.

Many Web applications employ back-end systems that dynamically modify page content (both visible and meta-data, for example the page title or metakeywords) and are designed to increase page relevance to search engines based upon how past visitors reached the original page. This dynamic search engine optimization and tuning process can be (and has been) abused by criminals in the

past.

Exploitation of Web applications that dynamically alter themselves can be poisoned.

D. Gray hat Techniques

Gray hat techniques are those that are neither really white nor black hat. Some of these gray hat techniques may be argued either way. These techniques might have some risk associated with them. A very good example of such a technique is purchasing links. The average price for a text link depends on the page rank of the linking page.

While Google is against sale and purchase of links there are people who subscribe to online magazines, memberships and other resources for the purpose of getting a link back to their website. Another widely used gray hat technique is a webmaster creating multiple 'micro-sites' which he controls for the sole purpose of cross linking to the target site. Since it is the same owner of all the micro-sites, this is a violation of the principles of the search engine's algorithms (by self-linking) but since ownership of sites is not traceable by search engines it is impossible to detect and therefore they can appear as different sites, especially when using separate Class - C IPs.

II. A Survey of SEO Research

Eye tracking studies have shown that searchers scan a search results page from top to bottom and left to right (for left to right languages), looking for a relevant result. Placement at or near the top of the rankings therefore increases the number of searchers who will visit a site. However, more search engine referrals does not guarantee more sales. SEO is not necessarily an appropriate strategy for every website, and other Internet marketing strategies can be much more effective, depending on the site operator's goals. A successful Internet marketing campaign may drive organic traffic to web pages, but it also may involve the use of paid advertising on search engines and other pages, building high quality web pages to engage and persuade, addressing technical issues that may keep search engines from crawling and indexing those sites, setting up analytics programs to enable site owners to measure their successes, and improving a site's conversion rate[2].

SEO may generate a return on investment. However, search engines are not paid for organic search traffic, their algorithms change, and there are no guarantees of continued referrals. (Some trading sites such as eBay can be a special case for this, it will announce how and when the ranking algorithm will change a few months before changing the algorithm) Due to this lack of guarantees and certainty, a business that relies heavily on search engine traffic can suffer major losses if the search engines stop sending visitors. It is considered wise business practice for website operators to liberate themselves from dependence on search engine traffic. A top-ranked SEO blog Seomoz.org has suggested, "Search marketers, in a twist of irony, receive a very small share of their traffic from search engines." Instead, their main sources of traffic are links from other websites.

Optimization techniques are highly tuned to the dominant search engines in the target market. The search engines' market shares vary from market to market, as does competition. In 2003, Danny Sullivan stated that Google represented about 75% of all searches. In markets outside the United States, Google's share is often larger, and Google remains the dominant search engine worldwide as of 2007. As of 2006, Google had an 85-90% market share in Germany. While there were hundreds of SEO firms in the US at that time,

there were only about five in Germany. As of June 2008, the market share of Google in the UK was close to 90% according to Hitwise. That market share is achieved in a number of countries. As of 2009, there are only a few large markets where Google is not the leading search engine. In most cases, when Google is not leading in a given market, it is lagging behind a local player.

Successful search optimization for international markets may require professional translation of web pages, registration of a domain name with a top level domain in the target market, and web hosting that provides a local IP address. Otherwise, the fundamental elements of search optimization are essentially the same, regardless of language.

III. Analytics is The True Measure Of Seo Success

Analytics will be the key to gauging our optimization efforts, the most important factors is that it may become more important to our site's rankings:

A. Bounce Rate

If you are using Google Analytics, it will be very easy for them to gauge your visitor interaction, and bounce rate may be one of the key factors used in determining your rankings. If they are able to see that a visitor entered your site through a specific keyword, and your site has a higher bounce rate than other sites for the same keyword, your position in the SERP's may be lowered. The logic is being that other sites keep more visitors for that keyword, so they must be providing better content.

B. Page Views

A second factor that would be very easy to judge (if you are using Google Analytics), would be the number of pages viewed on your site. If a site visitor enters your site through a specific keyword, and continues to browse through your entire site, chances are they found compelling information that caused them to review your site's content in depth. If they only view one or two pages, they must not have found what they are looking for, and have left the site to seek another source.

C. Time on Site

If the above listed information is not available to the search engine, the overall determining factor may be the amount of time on the site. Without an analytics program to give detailed information about the site interaction, the only variable that can be measured is if you enter a site through a search engine, and then return to the search engine to run another query[1]. While this is not an exact measurement, it can provide the search engines enough information to determine the average amount of time spent on your site.

IV. How Seo Work

Search engines have two major functions - crawling & building an index, and providing answers by calculating relevancy & serving results.

Imagine the World Wide Web as a network of stops in a big city subway system.

Each stop is its own unique document (usually a web page, but sometimes a PDF, JPG or other file). The search engines need a way to "crawl" the entire city and find all the stops along the way, so they use the best path available - links.

1. Crawling and Indexing

Crawling and indexing the billions of documents, pages, files,

news, videos and media on the world wide web.

2. Providing Answers

Providing answers to user queries, most frequently through lists of relevant pages, through retrieval and rankings.

“The link structure of the web serves to bind all of the pages collectively.”

Through links, search engines’ automated robots, called “crawlers or “spiders” can reach the many billions of interconnected documents. Once the engines find these pages, they next decipher the code from them and store selected pieces in massive hard drives, to be recalled later when needed for a search query. To accomplish the monumental task of holding billions of pages that can be accessed in a fraction of a second, the search engines have constructed datacenters all over the world. These monstrous storage facilities hold thousands of machines processing large quantities of information. After all, when a person performs a search at any of the major engines, they demand results instantaneously – even a 1 or 2 second delay can cause dissatisfaction, so the engines work hard to provide answers as fast as possible. Search engines are answer machines. When a person looks for something online, it requires the search engines to scour their corpus of billions of documents and do two things – first, return only those results that are relevant or useful to the searcher’s query, and second, rank those results in order of perceived usefulness. It is both “relevance” and importance” that the process of SEO is meant to influence. To a search engine, relevance means more than simply finding a page with the right words. In the early days of the web, search engines didn’t go much further than this simplistic step, and their results suffered as a consequence. Thus, through evolution, smart engineers at the engines devised better ways to find valuable results that searchers would appreciate and enjoy. Today, 100s of factors influence relevance, many of which we’ll discuss throughout this guide.

How Do Search Engines Determine Importance?

Currently, the major engines typically interpret importance as popularity – the more popular a site, page or document, the more valuable the information contained therein must be. This Assumption has proven fairly successful in practice, as the engines have continued to increase users’ satisfaction by using metrics that interpret popularity. Popularity and relevance aren’t determined manually. Instead, the engines craft careful, mathematical equations – algorithms – to sort the wheat from the chaff and to then rank the wheat in order of tastiness (or however it is that farmers determine wheat’s value). These algorithms are often comprised of hundreds of components. In the search marketing field, we often refer to them as “ranking factors” SEOmoz crafted a resource specifically on this subject –

Search Engine Ranking Factors .

You can surmise that search engines believe that Ohio State is the most relevant and popular page for the query “Universities” while the result, Harvard, is less relevant/popular. or "How Search Marketers Succeed" The complicated algorithms of search engines may appear at first glance to be impenetrable. The engines themselves provide little insight into how to achieve better results or garner more traffic.

V. Googlers Recommend The Following To Get Better Rankings In Their Search Engine

Make pages primarily for users, not for search engines. Don't deceive your users or present different content to search engines

than you display to users, which is commonly referred to as cloaking. Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links. Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link. Create a useful, information-rich site, and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content. Make sure that your <title> elements and ALT attributes are descriptive and accurate. Use keywords to create descriptive, human friendly URLs. Provide one version of a URL to reach a document, using 301 redirects or the rel="canonical" element to address duplicate content.

VI. Local Search Becomes More Important

- Based on the increased efforts at Search “Personalization”, local search will become more important, and those seeking placement on a national or global scale will have to focus on local search methods to show up in an area outside of their local market[3].
- A user searching for flowers in Denver may find completely different results than a user in Seattle. The national companies that ship throughout the country, or internationally, will have a new challenge to contend with, and may see a significant decrease in their traffic from other areas.
- More small businesses are going to be in the SEO arena, as more and more businesses close, leading to more sales conducted online = local search becomes more important.

VII. Traditional Optimization Factors Are Still Important

- Content is still king as it engages site visitors and improves site interaction – the difference now is that content includes items other than text – pictures, audio, video, etc...
- Links still matter, but social links are more important, and editorial links and internal link structure become more important, while the value of links from paid sources such as directories continues to diminish.
- Good site navigation leads to a more interactive experience, so having an easy to navigate site is essential to increasing user interaction and increasing the time a user spends on your website.
- Internal link structure still ensures that the bots crawl all the content and direct link equity to the important pages of a site.
- Links within multimedia content, like watermark links within video and image content start to carry value, similar to anchor text.

VIII. Scope of SEO In India

SEO is the force behind a company’s online success. Internet marketing is now a billion dollar industry and everyone is slowly but surely accepting this. Even top companies in India and the world are now keeping huge budgets for internet marketing[4]. There is so much buzz going about internet marketing. People know that SEO can bring them new prospects for their products and services . But what’s the scope of SEO’s in India in comparison to the rest of the world.

IX. Why Seo Industry Is Growing?

1. Increased use of search engines to look for information on web year on year.
2. Large brand advertisers are using SEO actively in India & Internationally.
3. Traditional or Direct marketers are increasingly adopting SEO.

4. Growth in the number of local search request with mobile web searches.
5. Organic SEO listings on Google search result page is more trustworthy than Ads.
6. Google are fast evolving and making demographic targeted & Geo targeted search results.

X. Is SEO Recognized As A Career?

Let us give me some proof that SEO is a great career choice. Just like CCNA, MCP, OCJP and other professional certifications; for Digital Marketing (SEO is a part of Digital Marketing) we have International certifications from Google and Microsoft. That is a clear indication of the demand and future growth of this field. In fact marketing spend is slowly shifting from traditional media such as newspaper, TV, billboards and tele-calling (channels which are interruptive in nature) to Organic SEO and Social Media.

XI. Why To Prefer Seo As Profession?

- Elevated demand for SEO services.
- Some IT Professionals have made a successful SEO career.
- Search Engine Optimizers make Good Money.
- Logical step ahead if anyone comes from marketing or advertising.

XII. Conclusion

SEO can be defined as "all tasks necessary to improve the rankings of a website for certain keywords," however, the term SEO is often used to describe other services related to search engines and marketing. Those are just a few of the ideas I have about the direction SEO will take in 2010. There are many more options, and some of those may not become valid, but it's already apparent that including more engaging content and creating a broad online profile will be important to a website's overall importance in the eyes of the search engines.

We welcome any comments or ideas about this subject, and look forward to a follow up article in 2010 to gauge how accurate our observations are.

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