

Search engine optimization: Helping customers find you

PREVIOUSLY, I OFFERED some tips on putting your website to work for you. This month, I'm back to help make sure your website can be discovered by search engines, such as Google, which is vital to helping both customers and other businesses find you on the internet.

The primary goal of search engine optimization (SEO) is to make sure that when users are looking for your nursery or wholesale business, your name comes up high on the search engine results page (SERP). This makes you more visible to a greater number of internet users and, generally, increases the traffic to your site. It's organic, there are no fees or payments involved, and it can drastically improve your business.

Here are five things you can do to help the search engine bots, spiders, and crawlers locate and index your site to ensure the best results possible when customers are looking for the specific services you offer:

Add a site map to Google

search console. As a rule, search engines won't have any idea that your site exists unless you give them access to your site map. This allows search engines to crawl and index your website, which is crucial to having your site appear in search engine results. You can use a tool, such as the Yoast plug-in for WordPress, to create the sitemap, then index it through Google Search Console.

Always add meta titles and meta descriptions to all of your pages.

In order for Google to present the best possible search results to a user, it needs to know what content you have on your page. This is why your metadata is important — it's the high-level information that Google looks for when they connect users to your site. The key metadata elements you'll need to address are:

Title: This title will be displayed at the

top of the browser window and will also appear as the headline on the SERP. The length limit for a meta title is 60 characters.

Description: The description shows up on the SERP and tells users what the page is about. Ideally, some of your keywords should be used, but only if they are an accurate part of the page description.

The length limit for a page description is 160 characters.

Add alt-tags to all your

images. Alt-tags are alternative text descriptions that are used to describe any images, videos, or visual media on your pages. They tell Google what your images are about, which benefits you on the SERP and also increases your chances of showing up in image search results. Additionally, alt-tags visually allow impaired customers to access your site via screen readers. This is an important part of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and can also enhance your SEO efforts.

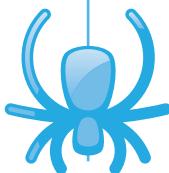
Improve your site speed. Believe it or not, Google actually cares how long it takes your site to load. There's data that shows if your site takes longer than 3 seconds to load, you might be losing almost half of your visitors.

Here are a couple of things that can affect your load times:

Image file size – Large images take longer to load than compressed images and can slow your site loading time. Compress and optimize your image files to make your site load faster.

Use a CDN (content delivery network). CDNs are groups of servers that are distributed geographically. Working together, they're able to speed up the delivery of your content.

Script handling – Certain types of scripts, such as JavaScript, can add substantial weight to your site's speed. However, JavaScript can also be important



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to your site for a variety of reasons, both aesthetic and functional. Your goal should be to make sure you minify its use as much as possible.

Make your website mobile

responsive. You may remember this suggestion for improving your website for users from last month. Guess what? It's also important for SEO.

Google penalizes sites that aren't optimized for mobile devices because more than 55% of all Google searches originate from mobile devices. Consequently, Google reviews your website's mobile responsive behavior and adds that to its ranking calculations. If you want to find your customers or, more importantly, have them find you, making your site mobile responsive is a must.

Good SEO practices are changing all the time — sometimes five tips just aren't enough. For that reason, I'm including a sixth bonus tip you should keep in mind:

Update your content regularly.

Search engine crawlers are always looking for new content and improvements. Letting your content grow stale is a sure-fire way to lose ground in the SERP. Make sure that you're touching, adding, tweaking, and improving your pages regularly — at least once a week for your most frequently visited pages.

Follow these seeds of advice and you'll be well on your way to growing your web presence and enhancing the digital side of your business. ☺