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Things you wanted to know about SEO (but were afraid to ask)

MAY 22, 2019

As we noted [last week](#), SEO is a real conundrum for small businesses wanting to derive maximum value from their websites. This week we ask **Patrice Hugron** (*pictured below right*), Chief Technology Officer with Canadian photo retail/photolab e-commerce software developer, [Dakis](#) to respond to some of the basic questions *Inside Imaging's* largely small business readership might have about the dark arts of Search Engine Optimisation.

He also addresses the specific issue of content duplication and its impact on search rankings...

What can SEO do for my business?

Patrice Hugron, Dakis: SEO is really about increasing the visibility of your business and your business' products and services online. A properly optimized site will allow you to answer your customers queries before they've even met you! This helps drive new consumers to your business and also helps existing customers discover new services and products they might not have realized you offer! This is particularly true in the services or more specialized product categories offered by most photo specialty shops.

Isn't SEO just a matter of having the person responsible for your website keeping everything up to date, no broken links etc?

Patrice Hugron: The above items in your question – content freshness and quality of self-referencing links within your site – are but a tiny sliver of the SEO equation.



Patrice Hugron, CTO, Dakis Decision Systems

Is content important to SEO?

PH: Yes content is important to SEO and content strategies will differ depending on what type of product or services you are offering.

Is SEO expensive?

PH: It doesn't have to be expensive as a direct spend, but it will require an investment in time and most likely a change in how you approach adding items and services to your website. In essence, modern SEO is about properly communicating your portfolio of products and services and no business can expect to grow, let alone survive in modern retailing without connecting with new consumers.

The time aspect is what really eats away at most small business owners. This is where hiring a service to help organize / structure and execute all the above efforts can be well worth it. The alternatives are hiring full time staff or doing the work yourselves.

Website owners get barraged by business from all over the world on a weekly basis offering to put them near the top in Google rankings. What's your opinion of these kind of approaches?

PH: If they were any good, wouldn't you be the one contacting *them*, because you found their services at a time that was appropriate for you? If they are so great at getting business' to the top of Google rankings why are they spamming you from every corner of the world? The business practices of most of these 'Quick Fix SEO Marketing' outfits are utterly reprehensible. They mostly serve to check a box in a retailers mind that 'they are taking care of SEO' by having signed up to an SEO subscription service.

With a set budget, wouldn't a photo retailer or lab be better off spending the money on PPC (Pay Per Click online advertising, such as Google Adwords) than SEO? That is, isn't SEO fading in importance?

PH: This is absolutely and categorically false. Spending money on PPC before properly optimizing your site and content is the equivalent of holding an open house without having bothered to tidy up for several weeks prior. Spending marketing dollars on PPC advertising prior to 'getting your house in order' will end up broadly:

- Increasing your cost per click;
- Reduce the frequency and quality of your ad impressions;
- Generate a poor conversion rate once visitors click through the ad;

We often assume that Google or Facebook's PPC businesses are exclusively about driving up the cost per click, with PPC ads being a race to the highest bidder. This is mostly incorrect as Google realized years ago that for their business to continue to thrive, the end user has to be satisfied with what is at the end of the PPC ad funnel, lest their ads be ignored. The PPC ad has to answer the consumer's query in a satisfactory manner so that the consumer keeps relying on PPC ads. From an advertiser perspective, consumers have to complete a business' call to action so that the advertising business is satisfied in his ROI to keep on advertising through PPC.

So SEO isn't fading in importance: in fact it's quite the opposite, proper SEO is growing in importance. When Dakis started out 16 years ago, there were all sorts of esoteric ways to trick Google into ranking your site higher on its main SERP (Search Engine Results Page) and your site ranking for various searches could fluctuate wildly from one week to the next. Google has methodically stomped out most, if not all, of those Black Hat SEO techniques ([see last week's story](#)). There are now well over 200 ranking factors in Google's algorithm, and many of these factors are the same that are used to set CPC (cost per click) as well as frequency and quality of ad display.

Let's also not forget that showing up in the organic searches is the most cost-effective way to generate new business as, once you climb your way up there, you're not paying for each visitor anymore.

Where should you start with SEO – are there some simple steps which deliver great improvements?

PH: The answer to this will vary by business, but yes there are in fact some simple steps to take to

start seeing improvements. Depending on the quality of a given retailer's or studio's online presence, these can be:

- Claiming your Google business pages: https://www.google.com/intl/en_au/business/ ;
- Setting up analytics to track progress: <https://analytics.google.com/analytics/web/> ;
- Optimizing images to speed up load times;
- Optimizing page speed. First run a speed test, as available here: <https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>
- Ensuring you have an SSL certificate / ensuring the site is mobile ready and even 'mobile first' – actually designing a website with mobile screen complexity as the key priority;

Then there are slightly more advanced items like:

- Targeting page titles / descriptions;
- Optimizing 'H' tags (using headings and sub-headings effectively);
- Working in self-referencing in-site links (linking to other relevant pages on your website);
- Modifying service pages to target specific keyword phrases (specific phrases that you think your potential customers and visitors might use in a search engine hoping to find a site like yours);
- Ensuring OG (Open Graph) tags are correct: <http://ogp.me> ;
- Ensuring microdata tags for product catalogs are up to snuff: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microdata_\(HTML\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microdata_(HTML)).

And then the bigger, ongoing long-term items:

- Creating landing pages for services that talk about specific categories and products;
- Creating 'rich' content such as videos for your landing pages or even for individual products;
- Removing 'out-of-date' content so that your site keeps a laser focus on your mission. (Note that **old** content isn't necessarily out-of-date. Out of date means not relevant, no longer useful, no longer on offer, etc);
- Improving on page conversion of your call to action;

In reality, modern SEO is mostly about the all-round quality of your web presence as well as how well your content meets visitor expectations.

What's Keyword Research and why is it important?

PH: Keyword research is really a subset of target market research, and it's invaluable for a small business for so much more than just their SEO efforts.

In short, keyword research will allow you to know what services and products to invest effort in on your website and will also guide you as far as what terms to use when crafting content that promotes these products and services. You'll be able to know just how competitive traffic for specific keywords is, as well as what segment of your target audience is looking for specific keywords.

I'll highlight with an example that's specific to photo retailing services. The term '**Photo Gifts**'!

I've personally come to loathe this term, as it's an all encompassing hodgepodge term broadly meaning any item with a photo on it. Many retailers have abandoned the category and a badly done keyword research would encourage this, since no consumer out there is looking for such a thing as a photo gift. Well-executed keyword research might indicate that consumers are looking for such things as: 'Mother's Day Gifts'; 'customizable Mother's Day Gifts'; 'my photo on canvas'; 'wall décor'; 'photo canvas'; 'print iPhone photos'; 'stag party t-shirts with ugly photo of groom as a baby'; 'inspirational message coffee mugs for team building'; etc

All of the above from some general terms to some very, very, very specific terms are different examples of terms that can come up doing keyword research in the specific Photo Gifts category. Then comes the next part of keyword research, which is to decide which terms are worth pursuing and with what strategy.

The Content Duplication issue:

One of the keys to good SEO performance seems to be having good quality and unique content (as judged by Google). How do you help Dakis customers to differentiate their content from other Dakis customers?

PH: All of our modern sites start from a blank slate content wise, which means we build up the home page, main menus, first level landing pages in conjunction with the retailers offering of services, product categories and brands. All of that content is automatically unique.

We also try to focus on unique local content and events since most small business' can win at something the larger outfits can't, which is local search.

I know you offer SEO support, but for customers who choose to not take up that service, won't they be seen by Google as having duplicate copy to other Dakis users? (Or do Dakis users generate all their own content?)

PH: I've been hearing this question for the better part of a decade now, specifically referring to camera hardware product pages. In that decade we've had zero sites get flagged for duplicate content nor had any pages de-listed or penalized on any index for duplicate content.

Truth is that every single retailer out there, from Amazon and Best Buy through your local options of Digi Direct or Camera House all the way down to the local single store outlets start from exactly the same [product description] content, which is supplied by the manufacturer. In fact, many of the bigger sites actually use syndicated content which is piped directly into their site from a vendor! Other than moving bits around a bit, you can't really change that marketing copy at all and you can't vary the product names either, or you'll risk your supplier simply pulling your supply for not respecting their branding.

What you aim for is to differentiate and enrich that base content through such things as:

- Customer Reviews;
- Staff / Owner product reviews;
- Product unboxing or tutorial videos;
- Proper accessory/add-ons selection and recommendations on page.

On top of adding rich content to the product pages you'll want to create landing pages for brands, categories, events, specific sales which will all come help add extra content and internal site links to help boost your product rankings.

One Comment



Brian Kearney
MAY 23, 2019

There are far too many parameters to becoming a top site to leave this vital job to a junior employee or a fatigued owner

Great to have a dedicated team to rely on for the " heavy lifting "