

SEO:c21web's Guides.

10 SEO tips for small businesses & start ups

All business owners know that marketing and promoting their business is critical – and promoting your website is part of business promotion. This is where “Search Engine Optimisation” (SEO) comes into play – crafting your website along both traditional and very modern marketing guidelines to maximise it's impact.

1. **SEO is just one part of your marketing strategy.** It is neither a replacement for solid marketing nor irrelevant if you feel your marketing is good. Good on-website and off-website SEO are best in combination with a well-rounded marketing strategy. Building a solid plan for your online (and offline) marketing will also help you to understand who and what you are optimising for!
2. **You don't have to be (or employ) an “expert”.** Although at some point professional advice or assistance may well be beneficial, there is a lot which you can do (or learn to do) for yourself. In reality, when it comes to off-site SEO (link building, social networking and so forth), you are likely to be better placed to do a good job than many experts – after all, you know exactly how your business works and who your ideal customers are. You must make sure that your website “system” (e.g. your CMS) supports “on-page SEO”, though!
3. **Don't be blinded by science.** There are literally hundreds of fancy terms and acronyms related to SEO and broadly speaking, you don't need to know what they all mean. It comes down to a few simple principles:
 - a. Build an error-free site which search engines can easily read and index
 - b. Make sure you have good content for your visitors (humans and machines alike)
 - c. Help people (and search engines) to find your site by obtaining inbound links
4. **Remember that your customers are people, not search engines.** Do not become so wrapped up in the world of SEO and search results that you forget the purpose of your site. The vast majority of business sites are primarily created either for lead generation (to get the customer to make contact with you) or to make sales directly to the customer. If your site is so packed with keywords and SEO trickery that the customer can't see the wood for the trees, it doesn't matter if you are ranked first, or one hundredth.
5. **Content is king. Content is king. Content is king.** This simple mantra is repeated in thousands of places online. And ultimately it is true. Search Engines index the content of your site. If you have nothing of “value” to say – they won't index very much, and people won't find you. Work on the content of your site. Make sure it is clear, concise and informative but above all else, remember #4 and keep it easily readable!
6. **Responsible link-building.** When you want to build links, the very best ones are those which come from within the content of a site which is relevant to the topic of your own– a couple of links to your white-goods site from a review of a washing machine, for instance. So if you see a site which links to your competitors, or which you think would make a great link to you – contact them. Ask (nicely) if they might be willing to link to you and suggest something you might be able to do for them in return.
7. **Encourage people to link to you.** Try to include Social Media buttons when you publish content (Tweet this! Add to Facebook!) and give people the right link to use when

connecting back to you. Even ask them (see above) – “Enjoyed this post? Then why not link to us – here is how to!” – if “Content is king” then links are his throne!

8. **Quality over Quantity.** Whether talking about content or links – or indeed doing anything else with your website, quality will always win out. A thousand back-links from irrelevant sites which do nothing but link to people or from comments on other peoples blogs are of less value than a single high quality, highly relevant link from a site on the same topic – which links to relatively few other pages. One page of good, original content is far better than ten pages of nonsense which has been copied from elsewhere.
9. **Don’t take risks.** Before you make any changes to your website to “improve its SEO”, make sure that you are safe. Some suggestions (by no means a complete list):
 - a. **Read the Google webmaster guidelines. Do not violate them!**
 - b. **Keep a copy of your site before the changes, so that you can undo them if necessary.**
 - c. **Don’t try some fancy new technique you’ve read about unless you understand how and why it is supposed to work!**
10. **Rinse, Wash, Repeat.** In order to obtain the best understanding of what works for your site – and why – you should make changes in small, isolated batches, wait until they have been indexed and monitor the results – this can take a week or two (even more) for each set of changes. Once the outcome has been established, you can make another set of changes and so forth. Gradual increments will produce far more measured results than huge sweeping changes all in one go. Make sure you keep note of your sites performance so that you can compare after each revision!

It’s vital to promote your website – after all if you are going to invest in having one, you should also invest in making sure your potential customers find it and SEO is a key part of website promotion. It should be one of the first elements tackled and must be maintained just like any other element of a marketing campaign!