

# Search Engine Optimization

## Drive more website traffic with this expert strategy

by: Jenna Miller, Emerald Strategic Marketing

It is three simple letters, but far from simple to execute: SEO, or search engine optimization. You have probably been told by more than one marketing manager, web designer or industry webinar that you should have a strong SEO strategy. Why is that? It is because the right strategy can increase eyes on your products and services, and increase conversions of prospects to customers. Who doesn't want that?

If you are unfamiliar with SEO, let's catch you up before jumping into the finer details. SEO is the process of increasing website visibility and improving the quality and quantity of organic website traffic from search engines.

The benefits of a good SEO strategy are numerous. By optimizing your website, you significantly increase its visibility on search-engine results pages (SERPs), attracting more potential customers. Improved search rankings bolster your credibility and trustworthiness by giving the perception of authority and social proof to online searchers. Additionally, SEO is a cost-effective marketing strategy compared to traditional advertising methods, offering a substantial return on investment when done correctly. Plus, by outranking competitors in searches, you gain a competitive edge and establish your business as an industry leader, furthering your website's and company's credibility.

### Common SEO Myths

Now that you know the what and whys of SEO, let's discuss common myths that are perpetuated by some not-so-reputable marketing agencies. One misconception is that implementing SEO strategies (as we will discuss in a moment) will give you overnight results. This is wrong. It typically takes four to 12 or more months before you start seeing results. Why? Search engines need to crawl and evaluate your site, and that takes time. But it is also because SEO is not a one-and-done task, which is another myth. It is a continual effort of adding, adjusting and evaluating many factors that will help build SEO strength. With each change, search engines will reevaluate and scan your website.



Another common myth is that by stuffing as many relevant keywords onto your site as possible, you will rank higher. Wrong again. This practice, aptly named "keyword stuffing," hurts your ranking ability. Search engines are advanced these days and are looking for practices like this, penalizing sites accordingly.

It is also incorrect to assume that adding keywords with the most overall web traffic will give you a better chance of ranking higher in searches. This is yet another myth. Choosing the right keywords is more than how much traffic they see each month. Considerations of their ranking difficulty, current trending pattern, search intent and even narrowing in on your specific location's searches are all factors to consider when choosing the right keywords for your site.

### A Strong SEO Strategy

A strong SEO strategy starts with understanding your website's current analytics. Log your current organic search traffic, keyword rankings, click-through rates, bounce rates, average session durations, conversion rates, backlink profile, mobile performance, site speed and local SEO strength. Tools like Semrush help you see the entire picture and changes over time.

After your initial evaluation, it is time to implement strategic tactics to improve your SEO. Start with in-depth keyword research. You need to understand what your target customer is searching for online and what keywords your competitors are organically ranking for. Using free and paid research tools, you will want to pick long-tail keyword phrases versus short-tail phrases to incorporate into your content. Long-tail keywords are typically three or more words long, which often makes them less competitive to rank for in searches and have a higher conversion rate. For example, focusing on a keyword phrase like "cybersecurity for small businesses" is 35% easier to rank for than "cybersecurity," which has a 100% difficulty rating. Plus, the intent of most people looking at the search term "cybersecurity for small business" is to investigate brands and companies (C), whereas those

searching “cybersecurity” are looking for information (I) on the topic (see the screenshot below).

Keyword	Intent	Volume	KD %
cybersecurity	I	90,500	100

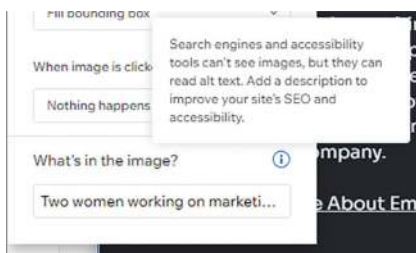
  

Keyword	Intent	Volume	KD %
cybersecurity for small business	I	300	65

Once you have a list of keyword phrases to focus on, you will want to produce high-quality content using them. Notice I did not say a high volume of content. It is always quality over quantity. Your content needs to be well-organized and easy to read. Structuring your content with proper HTML tags like <h1>, <h2> and <p> (these are “behind-the-scenes” indicators that help define the structure of your content) helps search engines read your site and determine the quality of your content.

Ensure that your content thoroughly covers the topic. While there is no set number of words per page that a search engine looks for, landing pages with 300 to 600 words, blog posts with 1,000 to 2,000 words, and evergreen content (content that remains relevant over a longer period of time) of 500 to 800 words are often ranked better, though it is a bit subjective.

Next, within your high-quality content, use optimized images to break up the text, where applicable. These are images that load quickly, add to the content and have alt text utilizing one keyword phrase you are writing about. See the screenshot below for an example of alt text.



Additionally, be sure to link to other internal pages within your content, where appropriate. By linking quality content on one of your pages to another piece of good content elsewhere on your site, you are helping build credibility, which search engines love.

Another type of linking that is important to any good SEO strategy is backlinking. Backlinks are links from other websites to content on your website. In the past, people would create backlink groups. These groups’ sole purpose was to link to each other’s pages and get their links on as many sites as possible. But when you try to cheat the system, the system catches on. Search engines have updated policies to consider these practices a violation.

SEO is a process and a bit of an art form. It takes lots of analyzing, researching, planning and experimenting ... but I promise you, it is worth it.

Keep in mind that not all backlinks are created equal. Links from high-authority websites always do more for you than those from low-quality sites. Think of it this way: If you are looking for recommendations for a new office chair, you are more likely to trust the suggestions of a well-known company that specializes only in office chairs versus an unknown shop that specializes in staplers. To accumulate more backlinks, you can reach

out to reputable sites for opportunities to guest blog or share high-quality guides and tutorials that other sites would want to share.

So far, all these recommendations have focused mainly on on-page SEO. But I would be remiss not to mention that technical aspects of your site also affect your ranking. First and foremost, page loading speed is crucial. A page that can load within two seconds is ideal. Slow-loading pages often can have a higher bounce rate and can cost you a possible client. Websites like PageSpeed Insights (<https://pagespeed.web.dev/>) can do a quick test to see how your site loads on mobile and desktop. To increase loading speed, ensure your images are compressed, reduce the size of your HTML, CSS and JavaScript files, and store static resources locally on your content management system (CMS).

Another technical SEO consideration is your site’s mobile responsiveness. Google recently adopted a mobile-first indexing approach, meaning it primarily uses the mobile version of your site to index and rank pages. To improve your site’s responsiveness, you will want to ensure the overall site has a good user experience, regardless of the screen size it is viewed on. Elements you will want to include are large buttons that you can easily tap on smaller screens, readable text, easy navigation and quick loading speeds.

In the end, it is important to remember that there is no one quick fix to higher organic rankings on search engines. If anyone tries to sell you on that, run away. SEO is a process and a bit of an art form. It takes lots of analyzing, researching, planning and experimenting. In a world where everything seems to happen instantly, it can be difficult to trust a good SEO strategy’s long and tedious process, but I promise you, it is worth it. ■

*Jenna Miller is the CEO of Emerald Strategic Marketing, a digital marketing agency based in Naverre, Florida, that delivers custom solutions like SEO, social media management and other marketing services tailored to each client’s unique brand story. She can be reached at [info@emeraldstrategicmarketing.com](mailto:info@emeraldstrategicmarketing.com). Visit [www.emeraldstrategicmarketing.com](http://www.emeraldstrategicmarketing.com).*

