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SEO for CEOs: A simple blueprint to optimize your site for search.

We see it all the time. Your business is picking up steam, you've got traffic and customers, but your website search engine optimization (SEO) stinks. You never even gave it a college try — higher priorities always trumped optimizing for organic search and hiring a pricy agency to perform wizardry didn't appeal to you.

In this post, I want to:

- Take some of the confusion out of SEO.
- Provide a C-level recap of the basic building blocks of SEO.
- Give you, Mr. CEO, a basic framework you can use to mobilize your team to get your site optimized at a basic level, using minimal resources.
- Publish a scripted email template business owners can use to break down basic SEO into bite-size tasks.

This post is a kind of “SEO starter kit.” Use the tools and template herein to delegate the important tasks to your team. All you need to do is plug in the names of your team members and hit “send.” Empower each team member to project manage their assigned chunk of the SEO effort.

Invest If You Can

Look: I'm not saying you can compete with the big dogs of SEO by sending a templated email to your non-SEO-expert team members, nor am I saying this is a comprehensive SEO task list.

There are components I've chosen not to address. My goal is to help business owners prioritize basic SEO initiatives.

If you have the bandwidth and budget to hire an expert, you *absolutely* should.

But if you're one of the many business owners whose page titles are your brand name and nothing more, this framework will give you a decent and necessary start.

Building Blocks of SEO

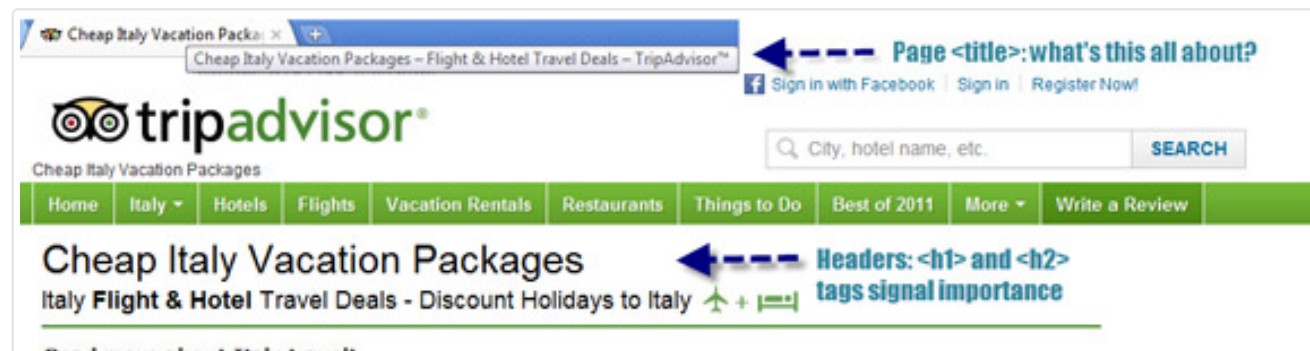
1. **Do your homework.** You're going to enlist the help of your team to do some basic research and make an educated guess at the best keyword phrase(s) around which to focus your SEO effort. You'll choose keywords that have the best balance of strong search volume and relatively low competition.
2. **Write tags & content.** You're going to have someone write content centered around the keywords that follow from your research.
3. **Implement HTML changes.** You'll have a developer make changes to your site, starting with the most critical pages.
4. **Start building links.** Finally, you'll put infrastructure in place to begin your link building campaign. This campaign will never really end.

High-Level SEO Lesson: What Matters Most

1. Your site content & the HTML behind it

Think of this as the groundwork for a healthy SEO footprint. On its own, it's usually ineffectual, but as part of your SEO strategy, it's indispensable.

Here's how search engines see your site.



Read more about Italy travel:

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Looking for things to do in Italy? Check out our page of things to do in [Italy!](#)

TripAdvisor's [Italy restaurants](#) page shows you the best local places to dine.

Visit our [Italy forums](#) page to ask questions and get advice about Italy travel, or and get advice - post in our [Italy forums](#).

Our [Italy maps](#) page has maps and other travel information for Italy.

Book a [flight to Italy](#) with our cheap flights finder.

Copy: this juicy stuff gives the search engine confidence your page is really about that.

Internal links with strategic anchor text tell the search engines what these pages are about, and that they're important too!

Note: The content of the TripAdvisor sample page above has been sliced up to fit this format.

On the most basic level, you need these components:

Title. The <title> of your pages is critical. It's read from left to right in terms of importance, so once you've carefully chosen the keyword phrase(s) you're trying to rank for, a good, simple formula for page titles can look like this:

Primary keyword phrase | Secondary keyword phrase (optional) | Company name

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL www.adamscreative.co.uk. The website header features the Adams Creative logo on the left and a navigation menu on the right with links for ABOUT US, SERVICES, NEWS, PORTFOLIO, CLIENTS, JOIN US, and CONTACT. The phone number 0203 4163 214 is displayed in the top right corner. Below the browser window, the HTML title tag is shown as follows:

```
<title>Marketing Agency | Web Design, PR and Search Marketing Agencies  
Kent London | Adams Creative</title>
```

Meta description. This is the little blurb search engines will show when a page on your site shows up in search results. Make it short and unique, including your top keyword phrase if it fits naturally.

[Marketing Agency | Web Design, PR and Search Marketing ...](#)

www.adamscreative.co.uk/

Adams Creative is an integrated marketing agency. We are a pr agency, web design agency, search engine marketing agency and **online marketing agency** in ...



```
<meta name="description" content="Adams Creative is an integrated marketing agency. We are a pr agency, web design agency, search engine marketing agency and online marketing agency in one, offering many of the services other specialist marketing agencies do but with a joined up approach" />
```

Copy. Each page on your site should contain, at the very least, a few sentences with organized headers describing what the page is about. On your homepage, that means spelling out what you do in simple language that both humans and machines can understand.

2. Getting relevant, good quality sites to link to yours

Link building is like bridge building. It takes time and sweat. But without strong inbound links, your on-page HTML changes will hardly help you rank.





Even one or two powerful links from good sites can funnel “SEO authority” to your site. When negotiating a link, be sure to get specific about the anchor text.

Here comes a link, and **this is what's called the anchor text.**

3. Some technical stuff that sounds pretty complicated but isn't

SEO best practices dictate that you submit a sitemap, use proper redirects and descriptive image alt tags, develop a structured system of internal links to indicate the relative importance of your site's respective pages to the search engines, and execute on a slew of other minutia in order to achieve organic search nirvana.

I'm going to recommend focusing on #1 and #2 above as a top priority. Once that's in motion, you can attack these tasks, but don't let them overwhelm your team into paralysis.

Choose your Cast of Characters to get the Job Done

1. **Excel Nerd / Research Ninja.** You want a super smart, analytical team player for this role. This person

crosses their t's and dots their i's. Maybe they once won a spelling bee.



2. **Writer Person.** You're not looking for Dostoevsky here, but someone who can write short, punchy marketing copy based on findings curated by your Research Ninja. You also want someone who's well-liked by your team and great at collaborating with them on different types of projects.



3. **Developer.** Yup. You'll need a web developer, too.



Mobilize your Cast of Characters

Here's a simple email template you can use to rally your team and spell out the tasks that'll get your SEO gears a grindin'.





From: Mr. CEO guy

To: Research Ninja, Writer Person, Developer

Subject: Let's SEO our site in 30 days

Hey team,

We've never had many resources to devote to SEO, but I see big reward for us if we can start to plant the seeds for greater organic search traffic in the future.

I'd like to enlist your help with this project, whose objective is to get us to a basic level of SEO proficiency so we have a chance to rank on some desirable search terms.

(Research Ninja), I'd like you to:

1. Use the [AdWords Keyword Tool](#) to research the types of phrases our prospective customers are using to find sites like ours. The default results will reflect broad match estimates, so be sure to look at exact match, too.
2. Download the search volume and competition data to Excel. This will transform the competition "meter" into a

quantitative measure of each keyword phrase's competitiveness.

3. Strategically whittle down the options to a maximum of 2 or 3 keyword phrases we should try to rank for. Your key criteria are relatively low competition and significant global search volume.
4. Validate your research against search volume and competition estimates shown by other SEO tools like [Raventools](#), [SEOMoz](#), [KeywordSpy](#), etc. You might need to start a free trial or two. See if your recommendation holds water using data from several tools.
5. Whatever you determine our top priority keyword phrase should be, please communicate to the team that this is our preferred anchor text for inbound links. Hand off your final recommendations to Writer Person.

(Writer Person), I'd like you to...

1. Take a stab at identifying the 5 or 10 most important pages on our website.
2. Based around Research Ninja's conclusions, write a page title and meta description for each of the pages you identified. Use the following format for page titles:

Primary keyword phrase | Secondary keyword phrase (optional) | Company name

Meta description format: One or two very short sentences describing what the page is about, in the context of what our company does. Be sure to use the highest priority keyword phrase Research Ninja identified.

Next, write a short paragraph or two describing each page. Don't stuff keywords into the copy — work them in naturally. Write for humans.

Each paragraph should have a header or two, as appropriate, related to the keyword phrase(s) from Research Ninja's research. You'll hand these over to Developer, who will wrap them in <h1> and <h2> tags.

3. Coordinate with our other properties, if we have any, to get links pointing to our site.
4. Develop a plan to incentivize customers/partners/vendors/affiliates to link to our site.

5. Work with sales / business development to ensure we start requiring a backlink in every contract we sign, if it's realistic to ask for one.

6. Identify 5 bloggers and/or companies related to our space and reach out to them to explore guest blogging opportunities. Beyond your obvious outreach tools — [LinkedIn](#), [Jigsaw](#), your colleagues' contacts.

– you can also scope out [myblogquest.com](#) for guest blogging opportunities. Once you have some leads lined up, let's talk about who on our team can help write good content.

7. Are we listed in basic business directories? Please create a standard business profile and submit our site to [DMOZ](#), [CrunchBase](#), [LinkedIn](#), [HotFrog](#), [Google Places](#) and [Bing](#).

8. Do we have a blog? Let's talk about how we can get one going.

In all your link building efforts, remember to request the preferred link anchor text recommended by Research Ninja wherever possible. Of course, if you're building links to pages other than our homepage, it might make sense to tweak this anchor text. As a rule of thumb, you can use the keyword phrase in the title of the page you're linking to as the anchor text.

Developer, can you please work with Writer Person to change our site HTML as follows:

1. Change the <title> of each page per Writer Person's recommendation
2. Change the <meta description> of each page per Writer Person's recommendation
3. Add the copy per Writer Person's recommendation, with a single <h1> and 1 or 2 <h2> tags as headers. Please make sure these are the only header tags on the page.

Finally, extra credit to whoever can:

1. Create [Google Webmaster Tools](#) account.
2. Submit a sitemap.
3. Check for any indexing errors or site slowness and report back.

Let's get'r done!

Thanks,
Mr. CEO guy

And there you have it. Define a timeline and get it done. Many months down the road, your shot at free traffic will be much greater for your efforts here.

Get strategic about the HTML on your site, have your developer make the quick tweaks, and suddenly you're "keeping up with the Joneses" in terms of on-page SEO. Then, get aggressive about your link building campaign and get the link juice flowing your way. You won't see immediate results, but month by month, you'll build up that free traffic.

Don't forget: while it seems like a lot of hard work for a tough-to-measure reward, even companies with modest PPC budgets are paying several dollars for each and every visit they buy. If one can estimate the value of a visit by what others are willing to pay, your team's hard work will yield some nice loot.

About the Author: Igor Belogolovsky is Cofounder of Clever Zebo, a group of online marketing strategy experts (www.cleverzebo.com) specializing in SEM, SEO and conversion funnel optimization. He also happens to like craft beer and snowboarding.

Comments

[Add your own comment](#)

Nicole

Oct 25, 2011 at 2:41 pm

If as a CEO you have to utilize the included email template (or follow this blog post at all, really), then you as a

CEO have failed at your job of hiring the right people.

[Reply](#)

Jacques van Heerden

Oct 26, 2011 at 12:40 am

SEO is one of the most important aspects to a new business/website. People constantly overlook it due to not having accumulated knowledge surrounding SEO.

Nice post, and great work highlighting the basic steps to SEO proficiency.

[Reply](#)

Troy

Oct 26, 2011 at 8:13 am

Great article — I'm going to forward it to at least one person — but you misspelled "spelling bee."

[Reply](#)

Casey

Oct 26, 2011 at 8:50 am

Great simple breakdown to get people started and pluck off the low hanging fruit.

[Reply](#)

Igor B.

Oct 27, 2011 at 2:33 am

@Casey @Jacques, thanks guys, I'm fired up that you found it helpful!

@Troy, nice catch and thanks for the feedback. :)

@Nicole, I hear where you're coming from; this is a simplified look at SEO activities, and if you're a sophisticated firm with real investment in your organic search presence, you're going to hire killer help with specialized skills in these areas rather than relying on your "research ninja" and "writer dude." But alas, I've seen many a company — great companies with strong growth potential and an awesome product — who haven't made SEO a priority to that extent, so the goal of this cookie-cutter / templatized approach I'm describing is really intended to help that segment attack critical SEO tasks in an economical way.

[Reply](#)

Mega

Oct 27, 2011 at 8:59 pm

Very nice post, many interesting things to learn.

[Reply](#)

Igor B.

Oct 28, 2011 at 1:28 am

@Mega, thanks for the comment, glad you liked it.

[Reply](#)

Ross Hudgens

Nov 01, 2011 at 9:32 am

You should link to <http://www.distilled.net/excel-for-seo/> if you're going to use their logo! Great otherwise though.

[Reply](#)

George Lewis

Nov 01, 2011 at 9:33 am

I'm more than a little nervous about talking to (some) CEOs about SEO because once they take some time between shopping online for new shoes or browsing for pictures of hot chicks, there's a million and one idiotic bits of advice online that they might waste time and money asking their team to implement. Some CEOs are talented people in one aspect of life, but aren't always the best people to be involved with SEO. Good SEO starts with good web-development (human urls, links that work, etc, etc) and quality writing that captures attention. That's about the gist of it. I think that a lot of companies are understanding this because I see an increased focus in hiring skilled web-developers and writers to design a quality site right from the start. Putting out good content and finding new ways to promote yourself and measure these results are key. Certainly, a lot of companies are experimenting more and more with social media as an important influence on traffic and there's a decent number of companies at <http://www.buyfacebookfansreviews.com> that do nothing other than help businesses get more traffic on Facebook: which is increasingly looking like the dominant online figure and a legitimate threat to Google. The final bit of advice is always to analyze and keep track of what is going on your page because each site works differently and you can measure what works best on any given site and adjust from there once you have some solid data. But if you design a solid site from the start, a large portion of what has to ultimately be done is finished right there.

[Reply](#)

Mrinal

Nov 01, 2011 at 10:25 am

Thanks for a such good post, I read this post all points, some was known and learn some good points, going to running one seo website called semantic seo service, preview url <http://www.semanticseoservice.com/>

I will follow those tips on my site for batter performance.

[Reply](#)

Christian

Nov 08, 2011 at 1:19 pm

Nice summary. But I would never ever forward this to any of our CEOs as it's far too detailed and low-level for them to understand in the tiny timeframe they can afford for this topic. Key message to get across is SEO==\$\$\$.
Delegate SEO to the people who know about this stuff and hand them the money to invest and the time to wait for the ROI.

[Reply](#)

Purchase Digital //email marketing

Nov 22, 2011 at 2:28 am

Wonderful article guys, I'm actually in the midst of doing all of this so this is one wonderful resource to have on the side. Do we know how much weighting "new" content has on SEO? I've heard that fresh and new content can help a lot with improving SEO and was thinking of starting a blog – wondering if it's worth the effort.

[Reply](#)

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