

Georgia Southern University

Georgia Southern Commons

Association of Marketing Theory and Practice
Proceedings 2024

Association of Marketing Theory and Practice
Proceedings

Spring 2024

The Significant Role of SEO in Effective Web Marketing

Ramtin Ranjpour

California State University - San Bernardino, 008085994@coyote.csusb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amp-proceedings_2024



Part of the [Marketing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ranjpour, R. (2024). The significant role of SEO in effective web marketing. The 2024 Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings, 23. https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amp-proceedings_2024/23

This conference proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings at Georgia Southern Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2024 by an authorized administrator of Georgia Southern Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

The Significant Role of SEO in Effective Web Marketing: A Critical Literature Review

Ramtin Ranjpour

California State University – San Bernardino

ABSTRACT

With the ever-rising popularity of online shopping, the power of web marketing has become more essential than ever. And search engine optimization (SEO) plays a huge role in web marketing. This paper is a critical literature review that goes over the important scholarly and non-scholarly works of influential experts in SEO. It serves as a fun and engaging introduction for anyone interested in learning about SEO, specifically about its importance, benefits, top strategies, rivals, and how it can be combined with other marketing methods. The hope is that it helps individuals and small business owners with their web marketing and SEO efforts.

Keywords: *Search engine optimization, SEO, web marketing, Backlink building, Keywords, SERP*

INTRODUCTION

The best place to hide a dead body is on page two of Google. No one will ever find it. Such is the ironic reality of Google's results pages and if you cannot appear on the first page, you and your business are done for. Google is the world's dominant search engine. According to Statista, as of June 2022, almost 84% of all searches happen on Google. Let us say I want to buy a new gaming mouse. Yes, I am looking for one right now and that is why I am using this as an example. I Google what I am looking for and get to the results page. Then will check the first link to Best Buy. I will also check the second one on Amazon, and probably the third on Newegg just to be sure. Am I going to go through more links? Probably not. This means that those three websites will get all my views and every other website simply will not. This scenario applies to most situations. Top websites always get the biggest piece of the cake which is the web traffic. Ranking higher on the Google search results means more traffic to your website, which translates into more sales and profit. Every e-commerce business wants to rank high and get views from customers to survive and thrive. The question is, what is the best way to rank higher on a results page to get more people to our e-commerce website? We follow the search engine's algorithms to satisfy them as best as we can to rank higher. And how do we do that, you ask? By engaging in a process called search engine optimization (SEO). E-commerce websites particularly, absolutely need SEO.

E-commerce businesses are just about everywhere. So many people rely on their e-commerce businesses to make money and many more are looking for products and services through these companies. E-commerce businesses have websites that compete with one another for views and sales. Therefore, they need to rank as high as they can on Google's results page.

With the right use of top SEO strategies, e-commerce businesses can efficiently and effectively drive traffic to their websites. That is why this paper is beneficial for anyone interested in SEO for their e-commerce website as well as any person or organization with a website that needs traffic. We will go over the role of SEO in web marketing, the top SEO strategies, the comparison of SEO to rival methods, and finally witness how SEO can be combined with those rival methods. It all sounds great but what exactly is SEO?

THE IMPACT OF SEO IN WEB MARKETING

SEO is “The practice of optimizing web pages in a way that improves their ranking in the organic search results” (Li et al., 2014, p. 3110). The four most important optimization strategies are choosing specific keywords in your niche, tailoring your content to your audience, building links to and out of your website, and creating the right website architecture. Doing all of this is to make sure your website pops up first when someone is looking for something you provide. The better the SEO, the better the organic ranking. Organic ranking is based on the quality provided by a website that is sufficiently and positively correlated with its valuation for consumers. Whereas sponsored ranking, otherwise known as paid ranking, is bought by advertisers through competitive auctions (Berman & Katona, 2013).

Businesses and individuals realize the great value of getting a high ranking. They need to appear in those first few results when a potential customer searches for a product or service related to their business (Sheffield, 2020). To provide a good perspective, data collected by Chitika Insights shows that 91.5% of Google’s traffic goes to the websites on the first page, with only 4.8% to the second, and 3.7% to any websites on the third page and further. Now that we know how influential SEO is, ready to get started with the juicy details of SEO in digital marketing?

EVERY MARKETER LOVES TRAFFIC

The use of SEO is widespread in the world of digital marketing. Even back in 2010, a survey showed that 90% of 1,500 advertisers and agencies engaged in SEO (Berman & Katona, 2013). This is because 89% of customers turn to search engines, mostly Google as previously mentioned, to find information on products, services, or businesses prior to making purchases (Griwert, 2012), and 81% research online before making big purchases (*Chain Store Age*, 2013). One of the main strategies of SEO is to make sure that the content presented on a website is high quality. If your website ranks high on the results page, it means your website has quality content. Meaning when website reviewers visit your website to publish their reviews. In fact, 61% of customers read online reviews before making a purchase decision (Charlton, 2015), and 67% of them are influenced by online reviews (Hinckley, 2015). So, getting those top rankings on a search results page is really important right? YES! It is extremely important. Multiple studies have shown that search users rarely go beyond the first results page. Specifically, the top three organic positions receive 58.4% of all user clicks (Sheffield, 2020). Hollingsworth (2021) continues by stating that getting that sweet #1 spot can even get you something called “zero-click results”. This is when the search engine will automatically display your content on top of the results page as the answer to the search of a researcher. Thus, most brands and businesses know, or at least they think they do, that their websites need SEO because of the benefits it brings. To give you an example, a student of Brian Dean (2017), an SEO expert and founder of Backlinko, utilized what Dean had taught him in his

e-commerce website and got 259% more traffic just on his main page. Speaking of benefits, I believe efficiency sounds nice to talk about.

One Hell of an Efficient Method

SEO is an efficient method when it comes to money, time, and content. SEO is inexpensive when you think about it in the grand scheme of things. It is a long-term strategy that keeps delivering again and again. On top of that, the content of SEO is quantifiable, meaning it can be tracked and analyzed to learn what makes it good or not so good. At the same time, the content of SEO is consistently improving and the best practices to create better content are ever updating. So, let us go through what makes SEO great.

Cost-effective

When it comes to running a business, managing costs efficiently is vital. The interesting thing is that there are no direct costs that can be assigned to SEO (Erdmann & Ponzio, 2021). However, you will have to pay if you want someone else to do it for you or if you want to make your life easier by gaining access to useful tools such as SEMrush for obtaining specific keywords you need to use on your website. Therefore, there is a lot of freedom when it comes to spending money on SEO. You have the freedom to spend nothing or to spend tons if you want the very best SEO strategy for your website. Most of the time, however, SEO involves a lump-sum payment at the very beginning to start getting results and after that, it is the investor's decision on how much more they want to spend but the costs will be much lower than the initial one (Berman & Katona, 2013). Dean (n.d.) argues that to get the best out of SEO, people need to invest a good amount of money in it. Especially if they want that sweet #1 spot. He has a dedicated website he uses to teach SEO and mentions the fact that he must pay \$355 per month to continue using a paid SEO tool that provides him with the keywords he needs for optimizing his website. Yes, SEO can cost as low as \$0 but that leaves a lot to be desired. You would need to work on SEO on your own without any paid tools. The truth is, to get the best out of SEO, you need to invest a good amount of money into it.

Most businesses should expect to spend between \$500 and \$5,000 per month for SEO, says marketing expert Rizzieri (2022). According to a study by Backlinko (2019), clients who spent over \$500 per month were 53.3% more likely to be "extremely satisfied" compared to those who spent less than \$500 per month. These results came from surveying 1,200 business owners. A local business needs \$500 per month for top-level SEO while a national or international business needs \$2,500 to \$5,000 (Price, 2021). However, other factors such as the size of the business, the competitiveness of the industry, and the desired results also determine the total cost of SEO (Rizzieri, 2022). Continuing to talk about the efficiency of SEO, time is just as important as money.

A Long-term Strategy

An important business consideration is having strategies that last for a long time. SEO can have a noticeable impact within the first year of action being taken, and many of those actions will have an effect that lasts more than several years (Hollingworth, 2021). Indeed, Dean (n.d.) says that SEO indeed takes a lot of time to properly get going, especially if your website is new. You need to wait for at least six months before seeing the effects kick in. However, once you make that initial investment, the benefits can last for many years. Having great long-term business strategies,

especially under uncertain market conditions, depends on the managers' understanding of where to spend their resources, and making critical decisions when allocating those resources (Erdmann et al., 2022). Thus, devoting financial resources to SEO can be a great investment for the long-term success of businesses.

Certain elements make SEO a long-term strategy. Search engines, especially Google, have gotten very sophisticated in terms of algorithms. Numerous factors, which will be talked about later, need to be considered to have the best possible SEO strategy and you cannot consider and deploy all of them overnight. Particularly if a website is new, it does not even have backlinks, which are links from other websites to yours, to increase its authority in each field (e.g., selling hiking gear). So, keep in mind that SEO is a method for the long run and takes time to get everything ready for it to work. Even when SEO starts yielding results and getting you traffic, you cannot let off the gas pedal. SEO is evolving all the time, as do Google's algorithms, and you need to stay updated with the latest tips and tricks. "Google's updates to its various search algorithms take many different forms, including changes to search functionality, updates to search result composition and layout, changes in various aspects of relevance and ranking algorithms, and daily testing and bug fixes" (Enge et al., 2022, p. 61). Hence, SEO is not just about getting to the top but also about remaining at the top to continue getting that sweet traffic. However, if it is instant traffic you need, you are better off with the two other methods that will be discussed further. But if you want to stick with SEO, content is yet another way of just how good this method is.

Ensures Content Quality

A website's content is everything. Too obvious I know. Even if you magically get people to your website, they are not going to stay there for long unless your content is worth it. Whether it is an e-commerce website or any other type, everything needs to come together to make good content for the audience. Quality content is crucial for the future development of an e-commerce business (Erdmann & Ponzoa, 2021). It gets an e-commerce website to the top of the results page and makes sure the website remains there so long as the content continues to be of high quality. SEO simply does not work without quality content since that is what keeps people on your website. When done correctly, SEO involves careful audience analysis and deep knowledge of specific content (Sheffield, 2020). SEO has a specific focus on content, and it ensures marketers that their content becomes visible to their customers by helping them climb the ranks of the results page (Schultheiß & Lewandowski, 2020). SEO experts optimize their content for specific locations and business sectors that a brand belongs to (Hollingworth, 2021). It is crucial to remember that you are not trying to be everything all at once. For example, an e-commerce website that sells surfing gear must focus on creating desirable content about surfing. Such as writing about the essential gear for surfing and why that is so, the best places to surf, and other information about surfing. The website should also realize its audience. If a website sells surfing gear in Iceland, the content must be related and useful to the people living in Iceland. For these reasons, good SEO makes sure the content of a website is tailored to its audience. Say what now? You want more reasons to have quality content? Okay.

It is not just customers who are looking for good content but also other website owners. If you have quality content on your website, you will get backlinks from other websites which will increase your domain authority, meaning how big of a deal you are in your field, as well as getting more people to your website. To recap, by engaging in SEO, a business shows an understanding

of the public's voice and what they want from the business. The right use of content in SEO not only means getting more traffic but also increasing engagement with their audience like a form of conversation. Without further ado, let us jump right into the top SEO strategies.

THE TOP SEO STRATEGIES

The four big strategies in SEO are keywords, content, link building, and site architecture. This section of the paper will go through what each strategy is and the process to make them work. Starting with the most famous strategy. Keywords.

Keyword Strategy

Using keywords and phrases that are most often searched. This will match your website to what the users have searched for and will get your website to appear higher on the results page. "This means identifying the terms people are searching for (also known as "keywords") that you want your website to rank for in search engines like Google" (Demers, 2022, "SEO basic part 2" section). On-page SEO requires using keywords in the title, snippets, on-page content, and URL (Luh et al., 2016). For example, a study by Backlinko (2020), which analyzed almost 12 million Google search results, found that URLs with 50 or fewer characters rank higher than those with long URLs. Think this all sounds easy? Then you are in for a treat dear. Many factors need to be considered when using the keyword strategy.

First, you must have actionable data if people are searching for a specific term, and if so, how many times. Second, you must make sure the keywords you are using are relevant to your business. Third, you need to consider how competitive the scene for some keywords is and evaluate your chances of success. All of these refer to your audience. You must be able to clearly identify your audience. You may ask questions such as: What type of people am I looking to attract? What are the things they may be interested in? What type of language do they use when searching? Who else may they be buying from? After identifying your audience, you must start looking for branded and generic keywords.

Branded and generic are the two types of keywords. Branded keywords are related to certain companies. Such as the iPhone to Apple. Whereas generic keywords are associated with a business sector such as furniture and not with any specific brand (Erdmann et al., 2022). Dean (2017) recommends using these keywords as title tag modifiers in your page title such as cheap, best, or free shipping. These modifiers will help you to naturally show up on a results page. There are also magnet keywords, such as 30% off, lowest price, or sale, that increase your click-through rating (CTR). The term CTR refers to the ratio of the number of people who clicked on your link divided by the number of people who saw your link. Having a higher CTR simply means that most people who get your link actually click it and visit your website page. Dean (2017) also suggests using keywords three to five times in your content. Such as repeating the word "4K display" for the description of the television you are selling on the product page. There is another factor that needs to be considered when choosing keywords.

Keyword difficulty is a very important aspect to watch out for when selecting your keywords. It is the process of evaluating how difficult it is to rank in Google's organic search results for a specific term. A keyword's difficulty is based on several factors. First, the domain authority; refers to the relevance of a website to a subject. Second, page authority; is the relevance of a single web page

to a topic. Third, the content quality; simply how good the content is. Some business scenes can be very competitive and if you are a newbie, it is going to be very difficult to compete with established businesses over commonly used keywords. Now you may say all of this sounds superb. But where on Earth do we find good keywords?

You can find keywords using keyword research tools. Dean (2020) advises using Semrush as the best tool to find good keywords. He also mentions other tools such as Soovle, Jaaxy, and Google's very own Search Console. Demers (2022) on the other hand, suggests using Moz Keyword Explorer. My personal preference is Semrush, as it is the most popular one, but you must do your own research about these tools and decide on your own. You also have the choice to pay Google for a specific keyword and if you pay more than anyone else, your link will appear above anyone else's at the very top of the results page. But that is another topic about sponsored links which we will go through later.

In short, utilizing keywords on your website is very advantageous. Baye et al. (2015) used over 12,000 search terms and 2 million users, from the top 759 retailers in search engines, in their research and discovered that a 1% improvement in rank following a given keyword search, results in a 0.02% increase in total organic clicks. So, use keywords. Just do not get carried away constantly using keywords in your content because it will ruin your content.

Content Strategy

Creating quality content for your audience. Listen closely when I say that content is everything. But what does that mean? Creating quality content on your website means creating pages that have valuable, useful, and detailed information for your audience. Offering unique content must always come first (Schultheiß & Lewandowski, 2021). As Patruti-Baltes (2016) says, the real winners of the online marketing war are those who succeed through content strategy to rank high on the first page of the search engine by providing necessary information to the customers. Now to create such content, you need to consider three top factors.

Demers (2022) first emphasizes the importance of identifying and understanding your audience. These are the people who will use your content and may start building links with you to share your content. More on that later. Second, you must determine what content you can make and how you can promote it. You should be creating content that solves your customers' problems. Take something that works but reverse engineer it to make it even better. Producing original content is a must. As Enge et al. (2022) argue about creating pages with little or no original content. Have your own piece to add to your industry. Also, make sure to highlight your useful tools and sources. You can build connections with the "smart folk" in your niche too. Finally, use keywords that your audience is using in their search. These keywords, as mentioned before, will help to increase the relevance of your content, and make sure your website ranks as high as possible. Allow me to provide you with an example of useful content.

A student of Brian Dean made an e-commerce website for camping and surviving gear. He made one long and valuable page about pistol shooting tips by 20 sharpshooters. This helped him establish his domain authority as well. The word count on this page exceeds 1000. It is super important to have long and valuable descriptions on multiple pages of your website. Remember

those long descriptions of products on Amazon? Yeah. They are there for a reason. It is not just about the quality of your content but also quantity.

According to Dean (2017), industry studies have shown that website pages with close to 2000 words have a much higher chance of ranking in the top three. Google wants to understand what your page is all about and this helps to do just that. Furthermore, it helps your customers to understand what they are purchasing, and that increases conversion rates of viewing to buying too. Even if you cannot write 1000 words for each of your product pages, make sure you at least do so for your top 10 most important pages.

To wrap up the content strategy, focus on creating quality content that will be of real value, have a plan for promoting it, and do not be shy about letting people whom you have featured or whose audience would benefit from your resource know that it exists. With quality content, customers will start trusting your business. Such content shows the worth of your website which in return will increase its domain authority. In simple language, it means you know what the hell you are doing. And that means you are a useful source. “If you can consistently be of use to smart content creators in your niche, you’ll start to build powerful relationships that will pay dividends as you’re creating content” (Demers, 2022, “Identify and understand linking” section). With an increase in domain authority, you will get these relationships which in return will start getting you backlinks to and out of your website will get so much easier. These link other websites to yours and vice versa. Both the domain authority and backlinks will make your website more relevant, rank your website higher, and ultimately get you more traffic. Therefore, creating quality content leads to better link-building.

Link Building Strategy

Building links that connect your web page to another source and vice versa. “Link building is the process of acquiring hyperlinks from other websites to your own” (Moogan, n.d., “Definition of link building” section). These links are commonly known as backlinks. They are hyperlinks that are most frequently seen as words in different colors on a web page which takes you to other sources once you click on them. Backlinks can be internal, connecting a page of your website to another page on your website. Or they can be external, connecting a page of your website to a page of another website and vice versa. So, do not forget that you are not the only one with a website in your industry. Just like we humans have connections to one another, websites need to have connections to other sources. They will not get depressed or anything with no backlinks, but not many will be viewing their pages. In business, backlinks can create relationships, send referral traffic, and increase brand awareness (Moogan, n.d.). So, where can these backlinks come from?

Websites can have backlinks to social media platforms and not just other websites. Although backlinks mostly link one website to another, these backlinks are the ones that have an impact on a website’s ranking on Google’s results page as they create domain authority. Nevertheless, social media backlinks can also generate huge amounts of traffic which then cause a website to rank higher. These backlinks can be from your website to a Facebook post for example or they can be a story on Instagram advocating for the high quality of your website and its content. Thus, creating backlinks can get traffic to your website and increase its ranking.

Backlinks can be made by slightly modifying a website’s HTML code. HTML is the web programming language best described as the skeleton of your website. The typical way to print

text in HTML looks like this: `<a>SEO Tutorial`. However, if you want this text to become a hyperlink to another web page, it will look like this:

`SEO Tutorial`.

Once you have modified it, the user can click on the term “SEO Tutorial” in a sentence, and it will redirect them to the W3schools website once they click on it. You probably should change the color of this specific term as well using CSS, the web programming language best described as the skin of your website. Let us not turn this into a programming tutorial all right? You can Google this for yourself.

In short, think of backlinks as a web of connections that help both sides. According to Backlinko (n.d.), the websites that rank as number 1 on Google’s results pages have 35,000 or more external backlinks on average. Yes, you read that number correctly. So, create backlinks. Consider them as networking for your website as it becomes more authentic, gets more traffic, and climbs the rankings. Do not forget to often check your backlinks though, to see if they still work. Nothing bugs me more than clicking on a dead link just to get a 404 error. Backlinks get you closer to having a perfectly architected website.

Site Architecture Strategy

Web pages must be arranged in a way that is as user-friendly as possible. Website architecture refers to the planning and design of a site’s architecture to establish structure and enhance usability (Hinds, 2019). Having a well-organized website is especially important for e-commerce websites since they have way more pages than other types of websites. A well-organized e-commerce website makes browsing and finding the important pages much easier. There are many things to talk about but let us start with the single most important one.

The Golden Rule of e-commerce site architecture is to keep every single page within three clicks from your home page (Dean, 2017). The more clicks it takes to reach a page from your home page, the deeper your website’s architecture is, and by the time the customer gets to the page they are looking for, your domain authority has already evaporated. So, you need a flat model for your website. Let us take eBay as an example. Let us say you are looking for a new VR headset. You click on the electronics link, then on the virtual reality, and finally on the standalone VR headsets. And boom! You are where you wanted to be and looking at loads of options to choose from. The Golden Rule also makes it easy for Google to find and index all of eBay’s product pages (Dean, 2017). This process is also known as crawlability. A website with no crawlability issues allows web crawlers, bots operated by Google itself, to comfortably access all its content easily by following links between pages. And that my friend is how you get Google’s algorithms to approve your site architecture and increase its ranking. The Golden Rule is also the basis for creating your website.

Keep things simple by creating category pages that make a straightforward site architecture. Good website architecture looks somewhat like a pyramid (Hinds, 2019). Another is to use internal backlinks to connect your web pages to one another. This also helps with minimizing crawlability issues and aids your website ranking. Use a mega navigation bar at the top of your home page that connects it to the next layer of your site’s pages (Hinds, 2019). You can add breadcrumbs at the top of your page indicating how many pages they are away from your home page. Breadcrumbs

show the name of each page the users have clicked on their way to the one they are on at the moment (Varagouli, 2021). There is also stuff to avoid.

Avoid having dead backlinks leading to 404 errors, mislabeled or empty categories, and duplicate content (Hinds, 2019). Duplicate content can be caused by keyword cannibalization. It refers to the event when two of your pages show up for one search query since both have the same keywords in their titles and content (Varagouli, 2021). These issues cause a lot of problems for the website's users and cost the website valuable traffic and ranking loss. There is one last but very important thing to avoid. Exclusivity.

All websites must aim for high web accessibility. "Web accessibility is the quality attributed to webpages when their contents can be accessed by an individual regardless of that individual's physical capabilities or the context in which the attempted interaction takes place" (Moreno & Martinez, 2013, Introduction & Motivation section). You want to have as many people as you can accessing your website. Not just for business motivations but also for ethical reasons. Everyone deserves to have access to useful websites to help them live richer and better lives. What is more, search engines interpret achieving high web accessibility as an indicator of quality and will be able to better access and index the resulting web content. And as we already know, that helps to increase the website's ranking. Moreno and Martinez (2013) offer in-depth guidelines for web developers to increase web accessibility as this is a topic that needs to be addressed by all. You have to read their research results for those as their guidelines are in-depth and out of the scope of this paper.

Ultimately, I cannot stress enough how important site architecture is. There are so many practices and factors to consider as well as stuff to avoid. Good site architecture helps customers with their purchases, increases website traffic, and business revenue, and ultimately helps websites climb the rankings. Now with the rise of OpenAI, also known as ChatGPT, how can it help marketers with their SEO efforts?

AI COMING IN CLUTCH

Please allow me to pass the mic to our dear friend, ChatGPT. "I can provide help with your website's SEO by analyzing your current SEO performance, identifying areas for improvement, optimizing on-page elements like titles, meta descriptions, and headers, suggesting relevant keywords, and assisting with the creation of SEO-friendly content. Additionally, I can offer guidance on technical SEO aspects, such as improving website speed and mobile optimization." So, ask specific questions from our friend and you will not be disappointed. A general life advice that comes to mind when deciding to seek help from ChatGPT or not is to work smart and hard. Not just hard. With that being said, despite all the benefits SEO strategies bring to the table, SEO is not without its rivals.

IS SEO REALLY THE BEST?

Despite having competition from other methods such as the method of Social Media Marketing (SMM) and even Paid Per Click (PPC), SEO remains the best tool in a website developer's arsenal to get their website to the top. You are going to find out exactly why but first, what are these rivals of SEO? SMM is the public mentions that take place on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter Favorite or Retweet, Facebook Like or Share, LinkedIn News Feed or Share) (Zhang & Cabage, 2017). The sharing process can be done by you, or someone you paid; also known as paid

advertising. Good examples of SMM are Instagram posts with the 'Paid Partnership' header or stories with #AD.

PPC on the other hand is the procedure of getting sponsored links that are allocated to advertisers through competitive auctions (Berman & Katona, 2013). "Whether you use Google Ads or Bing Ads, paid ads in search are all about bidding" (Dean, n.d., SEM overview section). You bid on a specific keyword and, when someone searches for that keyword, your ad shows up at the very top of a search results page. These paid links appear ahead of the organic links because money talks. On Google, for example, they are shown with a tag that reads "AD" right next to the link. Even though PPC and SMM may not be able to compete with SEO in general, they can surpass SEO when it comes to certain scenarios. These are mostly instances when instant traffic is required with a small budget.

Quality of the Content

SEO guarantees high-quality content. Having quality content ranks a website higher in organic links and users can trust that website's content. However, the same cannot be said for PPC or SMM as these two are basically "paid to win" as we gamers say. Money is the biggest factor as to why they get traffic. Furthermore, by having quality content, you can get advocates for your website. According to Nielsen (2012), a top audience data analysis company, 92% of people trust these advocates whereas according to Forrester (2022), a well-known research and advisory company, only 18% of people trust influencers on social media. Consequently, quality content cannot always be expected from websites that have been linked by social media. PPC is the same since both methods are different in nature compared to SEO and can be directly bought. For that reason, quality content is not guaranteed. You can of course get links because of the high quality of your website but that is not always the case. Remember, it is always about the content and its quality. A note to remember: SEO is mostly built not bought. Unlike PPC and, most of the time, SMM.

Long-term & Short-term Costs

Berman and Katona (2013) note that SEO remains superior to PPC since advertisers may be able to avoid paying big money for getting sponsored links through PPC. Spending money the right way is always very important. Investing in SEO is a better plan for the long run. Furthermore, Baye et al. (2015) emphasize the investments in the quality and brand awareness of a site which should be included as part of an SEO strategy because of the long-term impact of brand reputation. This goes to show that, when creating an SEO strategy, one must always consider the brand awareness of the website since increasing it means more income as well as the growth of the business. All of this shows the significance of SEO in getting your website to the top of the results page to get more traffic, increase your brand's reputation, gain more income, and ultimately grow your business.

But what about SMM? Using the social-sharing strategy realized a quick but temporary burst of traffic that slowed down shortly after the sharing activities whereas SEO takes more time to show effectiveness, however, it costs much less and can have a long-term effect on getting consistent traffic if well-executed (Zhang & Cabage, 2017). Over the short term, PPC is also usually cheaper than SEO (Dean, n.d.). The same thing goes for SMM too. Paying for a one-time mention or post is certainly cheaper than investing in SEO every month.

Instant vs. Continuous Traffic

Dean (n.d.) argues there is no question that PPC starts working much more quickly than SEO. PPC yields better results when instant traffic is required and when a large initial expenditure is not possible (Weideman & Kritzing, 2017). There are those situations when we just need some traffic fast and SEO is not going to cut it since there are many steps that need to be taken before a website is truly optimized; therefore, it requires time and patience. SMM works similarly to PPC. Social media can be an effective method for quickly building traffic (Zhang & Cabage, 2017). It can be for an occasion perhaps and you need to get the word out ASAP. Take an Instagram post or story. If it comes from a big personality, it will give you the traffic you seek in the short run, but it will only last for so long.

Human Connection

Finally, it is about a matter of human connection. Using social media can also create a humanistic approach that customers may find more comfortable. The social-sharing strategy focuses on creating interesting and viral content that attracts the attention of potential customers. It leverages social media, like a human approach, to build natural linking rather than manipulating search engines, like a machine approach (Zhang & Cabage, 2017). Hence, SMM may be able to create a better human connection in comparison to SEO.

Considering everything said, PPC and SMM work better and cost less in the short run, compared to SEO, which works better and costs less in the long run. Nevertheless, something to keep in mind is that there are no limitations to using these methods; all of them can be used together. There are ways that SEO becomes one with PPC and aids with SMM.

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is a combination of SEO and PPC. “The goal of SEM is to get traffic and visibility from both organic and paid search” (Dean, n.d., “SEO & SEM difference” section). SEM is the best of both worlds. You can get the instant traffic of PPC to get ahead fast while building your website with SEO to also get traffic in the long term. It is like combining two worlds that can help each other to get even better. For example, if you use PPC, you will get a lot of current keyword data that are real keyword data. Not estimates guessed by external tools. Then you can use that PPC data to optimize your on-page content to get a lower cost-per-click. How? Because Quality Score, a Google benchmark for deciding the rank of an ad, can be influenced by how relevant the website’s on-page content is to the ad (Lincoln, 2018). PPC provides the data for SEO, and SEO in return provides on-page optimization for PPC ads. Thus, SEO and PPC should be sharing their knowledge and data. Especially since they both share the same advertising space which is Google’s results page.

There are several instances when you should consider using SEM instead of SEO. First, you need to have a constant advertising budget, meaning you have to keep spending to get traffic, and if you stop paying, kiss goodbye to your website’s traffic. Second, you have to know how to manage a Google Ads account. May sound simple at first. Bid on keywords and get traffic. But unfortunately, no. You need to consider a lot of factors such as keyword-targeting, ads themselves, quality score, Return on Investment (ROI), conversion rate, and more. Not so simple now, is it? Third, you need to have the ability to launch and test landing pages. These landing pages are where your customers

will end up once they click on a link on a web page of your website. Therefore, you must possess a way of quickly launching lots of different web pages for your website. Sounds like a lot of work, right? That brings us to the last factor. You must have a team. Because of the sheer complexity of SEM, you need multiple people to create a team. You cannot do SEM alone (Dean, n.d.). I bet you were so happy to see that you can just combine SEO and PPC and live happily ever after. But now in hindsight, you understand that SEM is complicated, and many things need to be considered for it to work at its best.

SOCIAL SEO

SEO can also work together with SMM in a method called Social SEO. “Social SEO is the idea that social media links and interaction play a considerable part in a website's search rankings” (Williams, 2021, “Introduction” section). Social SEO has a great impact on SMM. Social SEO consists of a good number of the SEO principles mentioned. These strategies work on social media too. Keep in mind that social media platforms are also considered search engines. We search for all sorts of stuff on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. People, products, services, information, you name it. Take YouTube as an example. You may not believe it, but YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, second only to Google (*Quicksprout*, 2021). Other popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are considered the same. SEO's content strategy applies to both posts and page biographies; meaning they should be as descriptive and informative as possible (Williams, 2021). Then there is SEO's link-building strategy where others mention a website in their posts or stories and that gets the website more traffic. In conclusion, SMM can help to increase the ranking of a website by creating backlinks from a social media account to a website. Social SEO can help SMM to yield more views on the social media account of a business, and in return that business can use the tools in that social media platform, such as posts, to promote their website and increase their website traffic. As more people visit the website, its ranking will improve over time.

CULMINATION OF SEO

SEO is a very complex topic and everything we went over was just scratching the surface. However, now you have a good general understanding of the role of SEO in web marketing, what its strategies are and how they work, how SEO fares against other methods, and why we do not need to limit ourselves to using only SEO.

With good SEO, e-commerce companies can efficiently and effectively drive traffic to their websites. No e-commerce business can take off without SEO. It is the best method to get e-commerce websites to the top of a search engine's results page, get more views and sales, grow your business, and of course, get those green beauties into your bank accounts.

If you have a website that is both useful to an audience and has great content, for the love of God, use SEO to make it show at the top of Google's results page. Good content helps people to have better lives and they in return will help you grow your business and earn good amounts of income. If you ever got tired of SEO and started to doubt its powers, just remember how the e-commerce website of Brian Dean's student took off after getting 259% traffic because of effective SEO. In the end, unless you have a dead body to hide, use SEO to not end up on any results page other than the first.

Just as Google and its algorithms are always evolving, so is SEO. New discoveries about SEO take place each year and as time goes on, more research must be done on SEO to include all the new things that have not been studied yet. Each of the big four SEO strategies can be studied in more detail to cover as much ground as possible. The process of applying to each one, their impact on websites, and more. Web accessibility is another important topic that must be further addressed in SEO for all web developers to consider so that everyone can enjoy useful content.

Those who have fully read this paper understand how impactful SEO is and that there is so much to it. After reading this paper, you must start doing your own research on SEO. First by finding out which strategies are most useful to you, and then learning more about each of them. Then you must start implementing SEO. So, stop reading and get some damn traffic to your website.

REFERENCES

Baye, M. R., De los Santos, B., & Wildenbeest, M. R. (2015). Search engine optimization: What drives organic traffic to retail sites? *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, 25(1), 6–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jems.12141>

Berman, R., & Katona, Z. (2013). The role of Search Engine Optimization in search marketing. *Marketing Science*, 32(4), 644–651. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2013.0783>

Brian Dean. (2017, January 11). Ecommerce SEO - Get Traffic to Your Online Store [Top 4 Factors] [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAdV6FuHrs>

Charlton, G., 2015. Ecommerce consumer reviews: Why you need them and how to use them in Econsultancy [online] <https://econsultancy.com/blog/9366-ecommerce-consumer-reviews-why-you-need-them-and-how-to-use-them/>

Dean, B. (n.d.). What's the difference between SEO and SEM? *Backlinko*. <https://backlinko.com/hub/seo/seo-vs-sem>

Dean, B. (2019). The SEO Services Report. *Backlinko*. <https://backlinko.com/seo-services-statistics>

Dean, B. (2020). 15 best keyword research tools for SEO [2022 Reviews]. *Backlinko*. <https://backlinko.com/keyword-research-tools>

Dean, B. (2020). We analyzed 11.8 million Google search results. *Backlinko*. <https://backlinko.com/search-engine-ranking>

Demers, D. (2022). SEO basics: Complete beginner's guide to Search Engine Optimization. *WordStream*. <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2015/04/30/seo-basics>

Do People Click on The Second Page of Google? (2022). Reputation 911. <https://reputation911.com/do-people-click-past-the-first-page-of->

[google/#:~:text=The%20difference%20between%20the%20first,Il%20have%20on%20Google%20SERPs.](#)

Enge, E., Spencer, S., & Stricchiola, J. C. (2022). *The art of SEO: mastering search engine optimization* (4th ed.). O'Reilly Media. <https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/the-art-of/9781098102609/>

Erdmann, A., Arilla, R., & Ponzoa, J. M. (2022). Search engine optimization: The long-term strategy of keyword choice. *Journal of Business Research*, 144, 650–662. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.065>

Griwert, K. (2012). 89 percent of consumers use search engines for purchase decisions. <https://www.brafton.com/news/89-percent-of-consumers-use-search-engines-for-purchase-decisions/>

Hinckley, D. (2015). New Study: Data Reveals 67% of Consumers are Influenced by Online Reviews. <https://moz.com/blog/new-data-reveals-67-of-consumers-are-influenced-by-online-reviews>

Hollingsworth, S. (2021). 15 Reasons why your business absolutely needs SEO. *Search Engine Journal*. <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/why-seo-is-important-for-business/248101/#close>

Li, K., Lin, M., Lin, Z. and Xing, B. (2014), Running and chasing - the competition between paid search marketing and search engine optimization, In R.H. Sprague (Ed.), *The 47th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp. 3110-3119). <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2014.640>

Lincoln, L. (2018). How SEO and PPC can work together. *Merkle*. <https://www.merkle.com/emea/blog/how-seo-and-ppc-can-work-together>
Link Building for SEO. (n.d.) Backlinko. <https://backlinko.com/hub/seo/backlinks>

Luh, C. J., Yang, S. A., & Huang, T. L. D. (2016). Estimating Google's search engine ranking function from a search engine optimization perspective. *Online Information Review*, 40(2), 239–255. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-04-2015-0112>

Moogan, P. (n.d.). The Beginner's Guide to Link Building. *Moz*. <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-link-building>

Moreno, L., & Martinez, P. (2013). Overlapping factors in search engine optimization and web accessibility. *Online Information Review*, 37(4), 564. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-04-2012-0063>

Price, C. (2021). SEO cost calculator: How much should you budget for SEO services? *Search Engine Journal*. <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-cost-calculator/264305/#close>

Rizzieri, S. A. (2022). SEO cost – how businesses budget for SEO services. *Agency Partner Interactive*.
<https://agencypartner.com/how-much-to-budget-for-seo/#:~:text=While%20there%20is%20no%20set,industry%2C%20and%20the%20desired%20results>

Schultheiß, S., & Lewandowski, D. (2021). “Outside the industry, nobody knows what we do” SEO as seen by search engine optimizers and content providers. *Journal of Documentation*, 77(2), 542–557. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-07-2020-0127>

Sheffield, J. P. (2020). Search Engine Optimization and business communication instruction: Interviews with experts. *Business & Professional Communication Quarterly*, 83(2), 153–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490619890335>

Study: 81% research online before making big purchases. (2013). Chain Store Age. <https://chainstoreage.com/news/study-81-research-online-making-big-purchases>

Varagouli, E. (2021). *How to build your website architecture for SEO*. Semrush. <https://www.semrush.com/blog/website-structure/>
Website Architecture. (n.d.). Backlinko. <https://backlinko.com/hub/seo/architecture>

Weideman, M., & Kritzing, W. (2017). Parallel search engine optimisation and pay-per-click campaigns: A comparison of cost per acquisition. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 19(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v19i1.820>

Williams, E. (2021). Social SEO: What It is and Why You Should Care. <https://www.zenbusiness.com/blog/social-media-seo/>
Worldwide desktop market share of leading search engines from January 2010 to July 2022. (2022). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/216573/worldwide-market-share-of-searchengines/#:~:text=Global%20market%20share%20of%20search%20engines%202010%2D2022&text=As%20of%20July%202022%2C%20online,market%20share%20was%202.55%20percent.>

Zhang, S., & Cabage, N. (2017). Search Engine Optimization: Comparison of link building and social sharing. *The Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 57(2), 148-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08874417.2016.1183447>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ramtin Ranjpour is a Research Assistant and a Graduate Assistant at California State University – San Bernardino, where he will be graduating with his master’s degree in communication studies in May 2024. He is passionate about public relations, corporate social responsibility, and integrated marketing communications. He recently presented a research paper of his at the 76th annual conference of the Public Relations Society of America and won the Betsy Plank Award for the top graduate student paper. He is looking forward to continuing his studies at the doctoral level.