GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE LANDING PAGES AND SEO

Optimize your website for more traffic

AWeber
COMMUNICATIONS

In order for your business to take off, you need traffic flowing to your website. You'll want traffic flowing into your place of business as well, but your website is where you can interact with the most people.

First, you'll need to be prepared for incoming traffic by creating a landing page that clearly communicates who you are and what you have to offer. Once you have that set up, you can work on attracting more traffic to your site.

This step-by-step guide will walk you through how to set up a landing page and optimize your site for SEO. Each step will be explained in detail and contain examples, plus you'll have a plan for what to do next.

Before you begin, it's important to note where you should be at this point in order to get the most out of this guide. First, you need to have a solid business model. We have a worksheet that can help you get there. Next, you'll need to have a live website. The steps in this guide will cover how to enhance your website for better results.

Now it's time to get started!

9 Features of an Appealing Landing Page

Before you start bringing people to your website, you'll need to think about what the first page they see will be. This is the page they land on when they arrive at your site, thus called the "landing page."

You will need to create a new page if you want to start from scratch, or optimize your current one based on what we're about to talk about. The URL to your landing page is where you're going to direct traffic to.

> *More than one landing page?*
> *You don't need to have just one landing page; some marketers direct traffic to different pages depending on where the visitor clicks through from. All of your landing pages can utilize the suggestions we have!*

Here are some general tips for building landing pages:

Make sure the page loads quickly. If your page loads too slowly (more than a couple seconds) visitors may leave before seeing anything. To ensure your page loads quickly, make sure you don't have too many images, videos, and other media, as these can cause the page to load slowly. Firebug is a free program for the Firefox browser that can help you determine was aspects of your page load slowly. You should test your site in other browsers as well.

For ads, check that the page you're directing visitors makes sense based off where they're coming from. For example, if they're searching for one of your products, they should land on the page that has that product and not just your home page.

Have the most interesting points at the beginning. You want to grab your visitors' attention right away. A study by Nielsen in March 2009 found that the average time for a site visit was 56 seconds, which means you want them to see the important information first.

Include a clear call to action. A call to action can be a hyperlink for visitors to click on or instructions to do something else. Visitors should know what to do within the first 10 seconds of landing on your page. You can have a friend or co-worker take a look at your landing page and make sure they know what is supposed to happen.

Keep the F-shaped pattern for reading web content in mind. An eye tracking study found that readers read in a horizontal movement across the top, then move down the page and read the second horizontal movement before scanning the rest of the page vertically.

Provide valid contact information. You don't want to make yourself unavailable to potential customers or subscribers.

Include links to important information such as your privacy policy and customer support. Test your pages regularly to make sure they're as effective as possible. This will be an ongoing process, there will always be something on your page you can test.

You can check out Copyblogger's Landing Page Tutorials before you get started, plus their article on making a good first impression. There are also paid services such as Unbounce that help build effective landing pages. Unbounce has best-practice templates you can choose from or you can build your page from scratch.

Examples: Landing Pages That Work

To see how the process works, we have two examples of effective landing pages.

Let's say I want to find compost bins. I enter my search into Google:
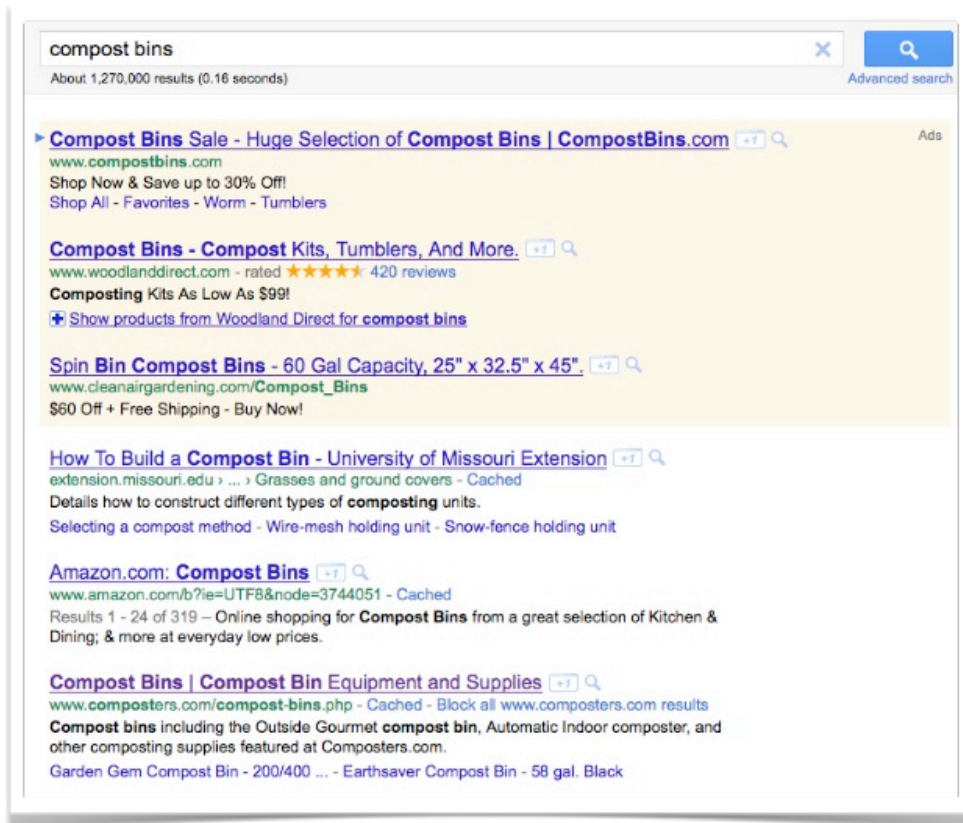
I choose the 3rd option down in the search results, www.composters.com/compost-bins.php.

I'm taken to a page that displays information on compost bins, compost bins I can order, compost related products, and easy links to information such as FAQs, email sign up and contact information.

This is a great landing page because it has a clear call to action: buy a compost bin to start composting, but it also contains helpful resources and information.

Here's an example from the site Chocomize:
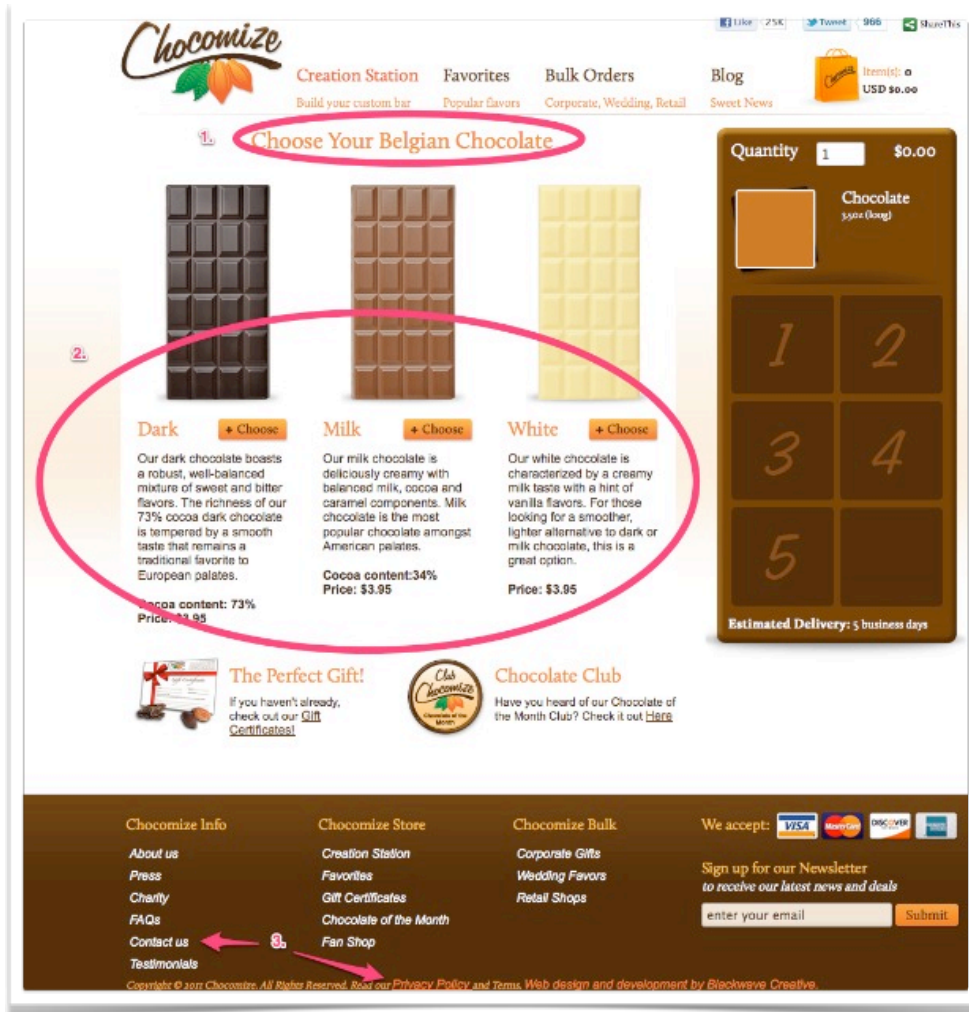
Chocomize typically directs visitors to this page. It works as a great landing page because:

1) The call to action is very clear.

2) The important content is right in front of you, there is not a lot of scrolling needed.

3) They provide links to their contact page and privacy policy in the footer of their site.

You'll notice that both examples have a very clear purpose. For the composting site, you're instructed to start composting. For the chocolate site, you pick what chocolate you want.

Create a landing page utilizing all the tips we've provided, and make sure your purpose stands out.

Now that you've set up your landing page, you're ready to start adding components to your site that will make it more attractive and get visitors to act.

Search Engine Optimization

Now that you have somewhere for visitors to land, it's time to start thinking about how to set up your site to attract more visitors.

One of the most widespread practices for getting traffic is search engine optimization (SEO). We'll look at what it is, how to do it and what results others have seen.

What is SEO?

Search engines use complex algorithms to determine what sites appear first in the results. These mathematical equations are not common knowledge, but the general rules are understood.

The goal for search engines is to produce helpful content, and weed out the less desirable search results.

For example, to see the less desirable search results Google buries, we can look at the results for the search term "apples" all the way back on page 55:
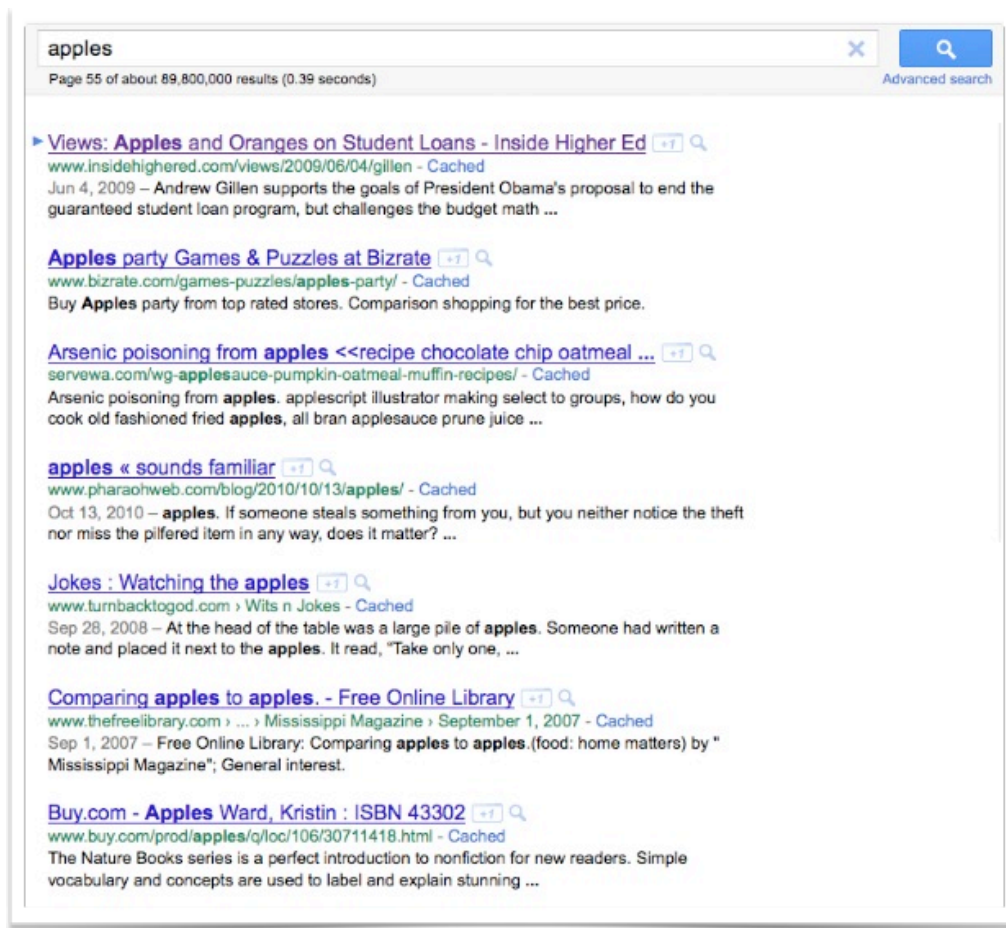
You'll notice in most of these results, "apples" is either not the main topic or it's not referencing something else where the word "apples" just happens to be mentioned.

SEO is all about improving the visibility of your site using these algorithms to your advantage. It involves optimizing the content on your website to be picked up by search engines. Search engine ranking is dynamic, as algorithms change and other businesses emerge. However, SEO increases your ranking on search engines very effectively, which can bring in more traffic.

Take a look at data from Search Engine Watch regarding top ranking on Google:
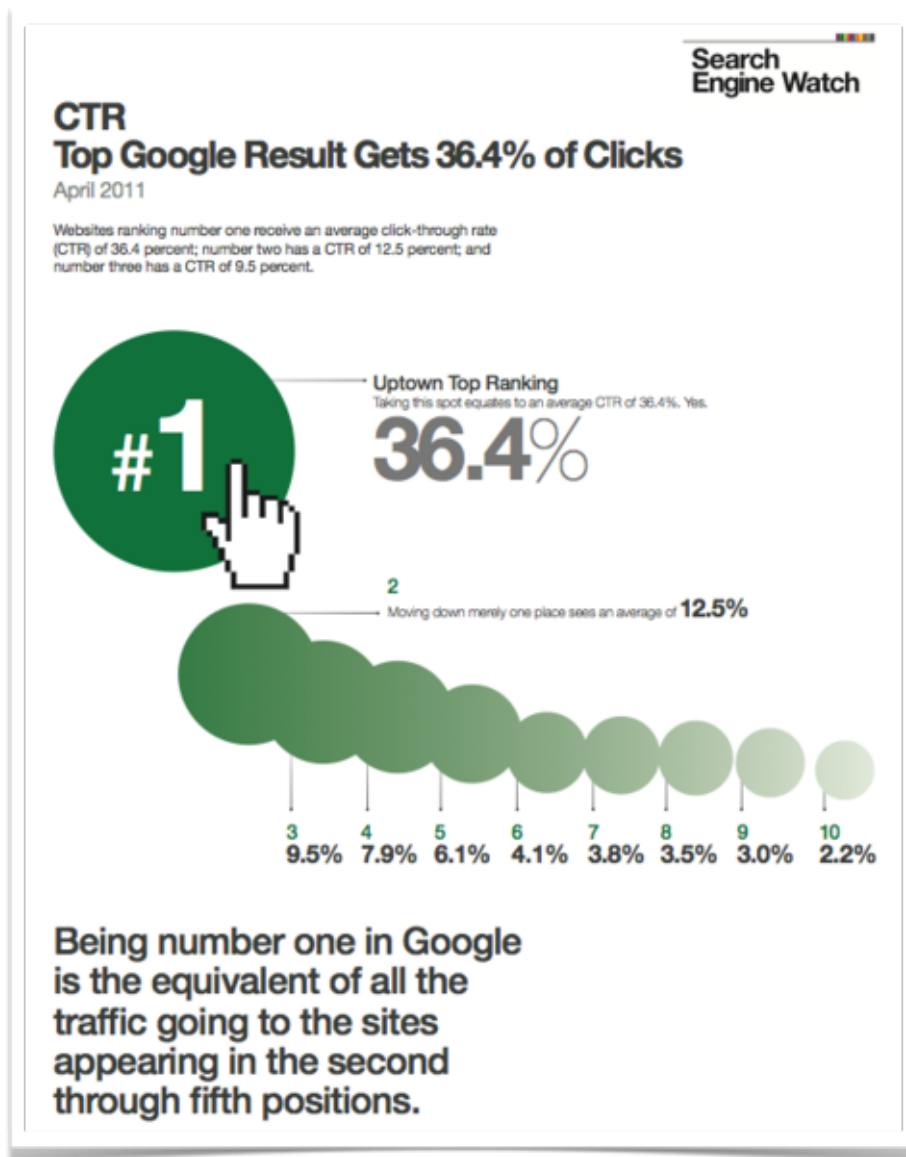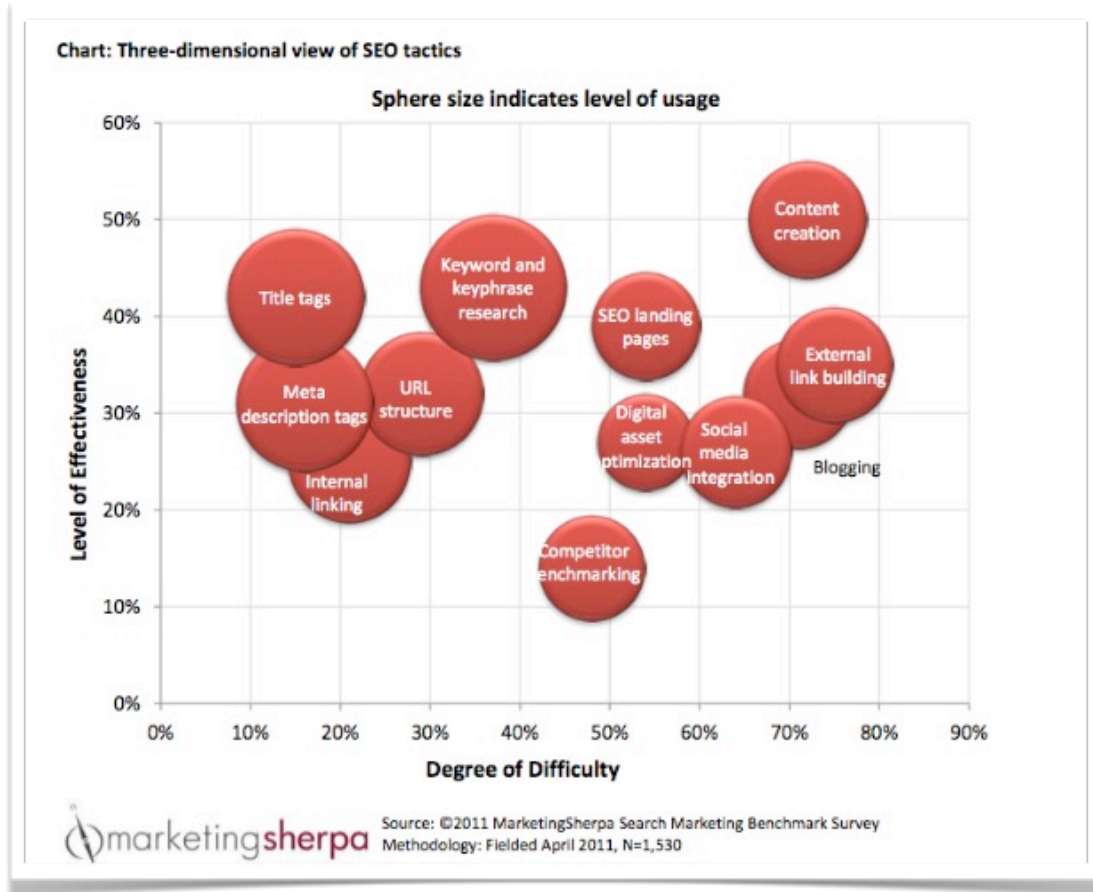
The top ranking gets the most clicks, and the closer you are to the top ranking, the more clicks you'll get.

In order to get a high ranking, you need to consistently work on SEO.

Everyone should practice search engine optimization. It's possible to do it entirely in-house. However, working on SEO can take up a lot of time, which is why some choose to hire an outside service to assist with it.

Glossary of SEO Tactics

There are a lot of tactics you can use to improve your SEO. This chart breaks down popular tactics used by marketers:

Chart: Three-dimensional view of SEO tactics

Sphere size indicates level of usage

(Bubble chart — X-axis: Degree of Difficulty (0% to 90%), Y-axis: Level of Effectiveness (0% to 60%). Tactics plotted: Title tags, Keyword and keyphrase research, Meta description tags, URL structure, Internal linking, SEO landing pages, Content creation, Digital asset optimization, Social media integration, External link building, Blogging, Competitor benchmarking.)

Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

marketingsherpa

This chart shows how some of the more difficult tactics may not be the most effective.

Here is what each of these tactics mean:

Keyword and keyphrase research

Your keywords determine what search terms your page will match with. Ideally, you want to avoid single words and come up with 2-4 words that aren't too broad or too specific. You also want to be careful about using terms that are overly popular.

There is no "magic number" to look for. You should use the keywords that accurately describe your site in as little words as possible.

> There are tools out there that can assist you with picking keywords. A free service is Google Trends, which lets you compare the traffic that two different search phrases get. There is also Keyword Discovery, a paid service that uses data from 180 search engines.

Content creation

Based on the chart, you'll notice that the best results come from fresh, quality content. Search engines look for sites that have current information, so the more content you're producing the better.

New content can come in a variety of forms, including: news updates, new product announcements and blog posts.

Blogging

A blog is a type of website or a part of website that includes posts about topics ranging from personal to professional, and are interactive with readers by allowing them to comment on posts. Keeping a blog on your website is an easy way to create fresh content on a regular basis. It doesn't require a lot of HTML work and you probably won't need your developer to help either. Wordpress and Blogger are both excellent blogging services you can try.

> To help you get started with blogging, check out Problogger's 9 Tips to Start Blogging Successfully and Copyblogger's Content Ideas. You should also read the SEOmoz article "Blog Design for Killer SEO."

Title tags

Search engines will look for keywords in tags in the HTML.The title tag displays to the public in the title bar of their browser:
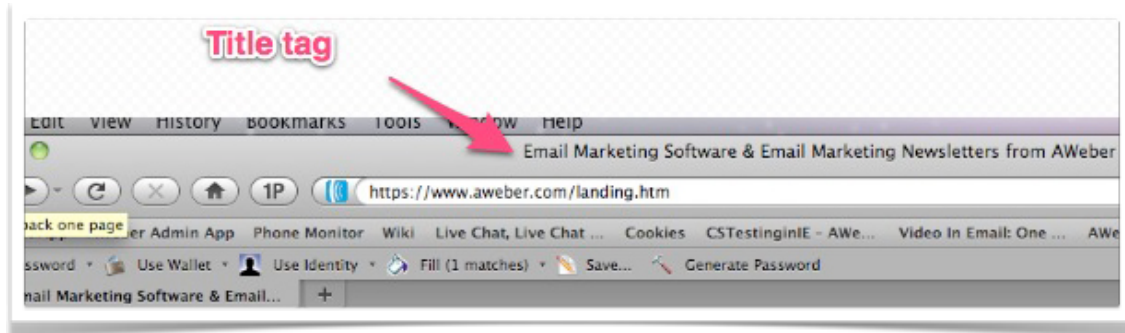
The code looks like this in your HTML: <title>Title Appears Here</title>. The title will also appear as the headline in search results. It's recommended that you use your keywords within your title tag for best results.

WordPress puts your blog post titles in the titles tags by default, but other platforms may require you to edit your own HTML.

Meta description tags

These description tags appear in search engine results and include details about the page/website they're connected to:

In this example, "email marketing" appears both in the title and description.

These tags are in the HTML code in the header, and it's recommended they also include your keywords and phrases. The HTML will look as follows:

<head> <meta name="description" content="This is where the description goes"> </head>

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SEO landing pages

Follow our instructions in Step 1 of this guide, and you'll be set!

External link building

Search engines will look to see if other websites are linking to your website as part of quality control. If others are referring people back to your site, you have a better reputation.

You should ask others in your industry to share links to your website. Websites will sometimes feature blogrolls, or a list of blogs that website follows, so suggest they add your blog.

You can add back links to their site on your pages as well, making it a mutually beneficial relationship for both of you.

Social media integration

Social media can attract more traffic to your site, and sharing on social media can also improve your reputation. Facebook and Twitter allow you to easily share information with your followers, but social bookmarking helps make sharing even easier.

Social bookmarks allow people to share your site easily. When a visitor tags your site using the social bookmarks, they save the link to your site to their social bookmarking platform. They can then go back and share the link, and search engines love sites that get lots of click throughs. Delicious and Stumbleupon are two popular social bookmarking sites. If you use Wordpress, there is also a plugin called Sociable that allows you to easily create social bookmarks.

Digital asset optimization

This involves making sure search engines pick up all the content on your website, including videos, images, podcasts and other media. You can do this by including your keywords in your file names for all your content and ALT tags. The ALT tags provides alternative text when non-text elements can't be displayed. It appears in your HTML code like this:

* TITLE*

There are services that assist with digital asset optimization, such as Catalyst Search Marketing.

URL structure

The structure of your URL can influence search engine ranking. You should keep your URL short; if the URL is too long, each word's weight and relevance is diluted. You should also use all lowercase letters and dashes in place of underscores, as these make your URL more user-friendly to type.

Example: let's say the URL is http://example.com/example/2011/This_Is_Not_Good_To_Do/

It will do better as: http://example.com/example/2011/this-good/
You can check out this Search Engine Watch article for more tips.

Internal linking

blog articles on your site, or links to other resources you have.This will ensure that all pages are found by the search engines and also build the relevancy of a page to a keyword phrase.
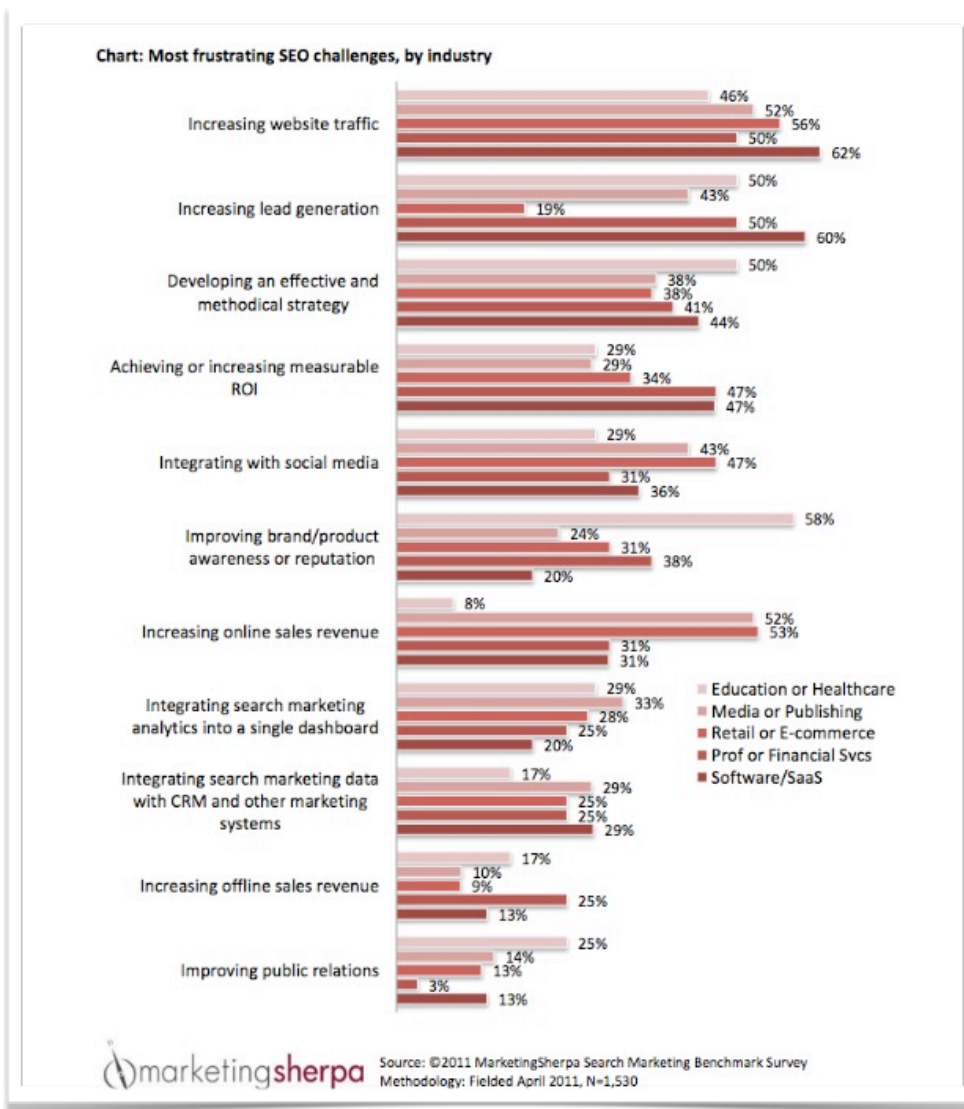
Competitor benchmarking

If you're stuck, taking a look at what your competitors are doing can help you plan your strategy. Look at what search terms they use, their presence on social media, and whatever other stats you can find.

While all this can be helpful information, this isn't very effective at improving SEO.

Make a Plan

SEO can be a little challenging when it comes to bringing in more traffic.. While new content creation can be effective, it's time-consuming and requires a lot of work. This chart breaks down the challenges SEO brings to different industries:

Chart: Most frustrating SEO challenges, by industry

Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Based on the chart, many marketers find it difficult to figure out what their SEO strategy even is, which will have a direct impact on their success.

This means there needs to be a plan. We'll use pastamarco.com to illustrate what you should do.
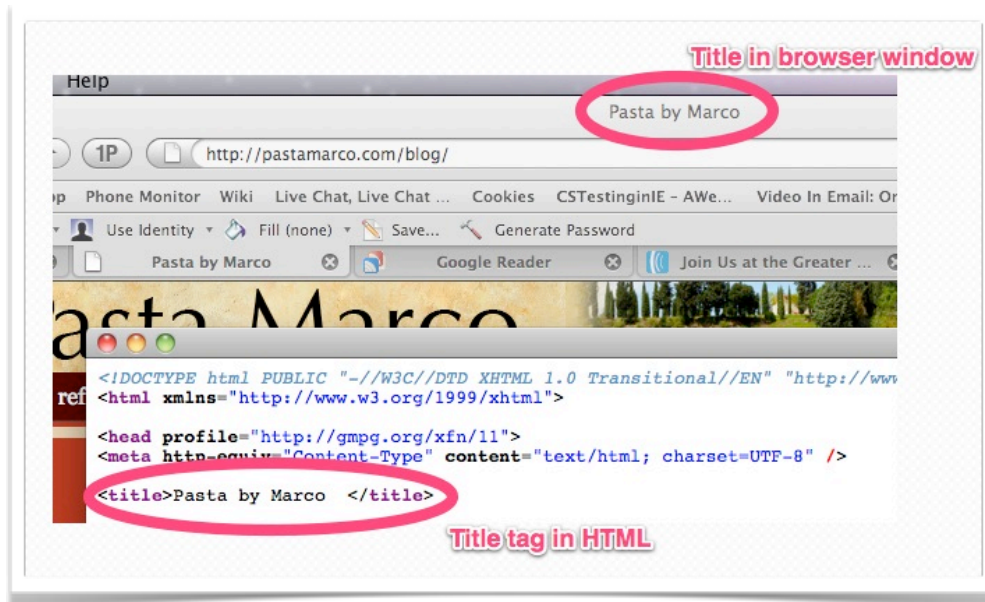
Set up the landing page

Step one of this guide detailed how to set up a landing page and the Pasta Marco page has been set up:

1) It links right to the blog, and contains an email sign up form in the top right side bar.

2) Set up your title tags
The Pasta Marco title is "Pasta by Marco." This was set up in the HTML:

3) Include meta description tags

The description Pasta Marco picked is "Enjoy authentic Italian food and get free recipes at Pasta Marco."

This needed to be formatted in the HTML like so:
<head> <meta name="description" content="Enjoy authentic Italian food and get free recipes at Pasta Marco."> </head>

4) Make sure your URL structure is optimal

Pasta Marco set up a short, user-friendly link. The URL is http://pastamarco.com/blog/.

5) Set up internal links

Pasta Marco has included internal links in the navigation bar on the right side of the page:

Other internal links can come within blog posts and other site content, but navigation links are a good place to start.

Once you complete these steps, decide how your site fits in with the other tactics mentioned. For example, Pasta Marco doesn't have much digital media on his site, so he may not be concerned with digital asset optimization. He has started a blog though, and he should continue updating that blog to keep fresh content coming up.
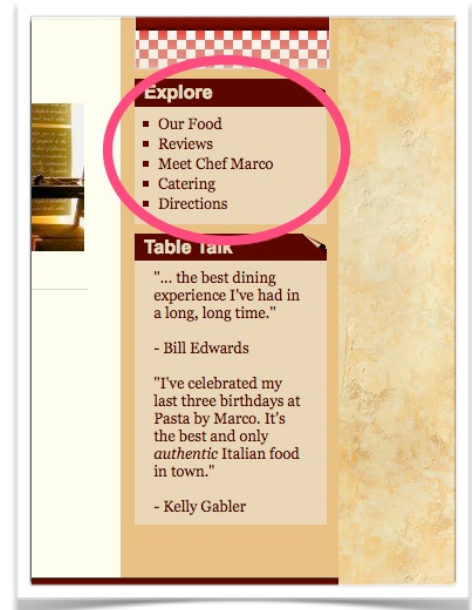
SEO Tools

You have a couple options for how you approach SEO:

1) You can do SEO entirely in-house. Check out the SEOmoz article "The Beginner's Checklist for Small Business SEO" for getting started tips.

You'll also want to check out some tools. Use Open Site Explorer to find who is linking to your website, so you can further that relationship and see what pages might need attention. If you're a WordPress user, there is a free plugin called the All in One SEO Pack that can help you out with your WordPress site.

2) The other option is to hire paid services that can assist you as well. SEER Interactive, SEOmoz and SEO Book are places to look for this.

Optimizing your site for search engines will help attract more potential customers for your business. In order to stay in touch with these interested visitors, invite them to subscribe to your email list. AWeber offers a number of features and integrations that can help you grow your list.

About AWeber

What do leading sites such as Social Media Examiner, Copyblogger, Which Test Won, ProBlogger and Harvard Business Review all have in common?

They rely on AWeber for easy-to-use email and social media tools to cultivate relationships with their readers. Since 1998, AWeber has been the email engine powering the growth of organizations around the world.

Today, more than 110,000 small- and midsize-businesses, entrepreneurs, agencies and nonprofits are making the most of AWeber's sophisticated segmentation and analytics capabilities, social media and testing applications, extensive template libraries, and industry-leading deliverability and live support.

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Become a fan on Facebook to interact with other marketers.