4 Building Blocks to Help Your Brand's SEO Strategy Succeed

Crawlability, optimization, brand engagement and knowledge-content creation are all important pieces to create a more competitive SEO program.

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In a competitive and increasingly online environment for brands, SEO matters more than ever. One-third of U.S. consumers in 2018 started their online purchases with Google or another search tool — more than three times the number who started at retailers' sites or apps, and second only to searches beginning at Amazon. To do well in organic search results, brands must have a solid SEO strategy. Before you can take your SEO to the next level, you need to know where you are now and what to do next. Let's look at four building blocks you can use to create a more competitive SEO program for your B2C or B2B brand.

Crawlability: lay your SEO foundation

To appear in search results, your site must be found by search engines. That means if you're starting from the ground up or have never engaged in SEO, your first task is making your site visible to search engine crawlers. One common problem here is also an easy fix: your site's robots.txt file. Retailers and brands often neglect this little file, but adding instructions to it tells crawlers which pages you want indexed and which you don't.

You'll also want to show crawlers your site structure for better indexing. To do that, you may need to update and expand your sitemap or build one from scratch. The ideal sitemap for SEO crawlability includes all of your site's categories, subcategories, and product pages. If you're wondering how long it will take to map or update your site's thousands of product pages, services like Screaming Frog can generate a sitemap you can link to in your robots.txt file. After you update robots.txt, submit it to Google and other search engines so they can re-crawl your site as soon as possible.

If your site uses older plug-in technology like Flash or Silverlight to display content, you face a bigger crawlability challenge. Flash and Silverlight content is invisible to search engine crawlers so it can't appear in search results. To make that content visible, you'll need to convert it to a format that can be indexed, like HTML5 or JavaScript. The [conversion process can take a few months](#), and you may need new software and coding talent to make it happen. After the conversion is complete, you can map the content, update your robots.txt file, and submit it to Google.

Content optimization: leverage your existing assets

When your robots.txt, sitemap and crawlability issues are solved, the next SEO building block to put in place is content optimization. This requires making better use of your current assets to improve your rank for specific keywords. You can use Google Keyword Planner to develop a list of target keywords based on volume and ROI. Then use the list to enhance your meta tags and content, starting with your top-level pages and working down through your categories and subcategories and finally ending with product pages.

An alternative to working through your entire site is to focus on optimizing a few select pages. For example, if product category "Page A" does reasonably well, use [Google Search Console](#) to evaluate its performance. Does the page align with particular keywords? If so, you can optimize the category page for those keywords to boost its performance. This will serve to enhance, but not replace, your programmatic SEO tools.

Offsite: build links and brand engagement

The next stage of building your SEO program is pursuing offsite strategies like link-building and social influencer relationships. You don't have to wait until all your existing content is optimized to start your offsite work, but the more complete your content-optimization process is, the more SEO benefits you'll see from your link-building and influencer efforts.

Link building requires research, and it's a good idea to review [Google's link-building ethics and best practices](#) before you begin. The most efficient way to find possible

links is with a tool like SEMrush that shows you where your competition's backlinks originate. That tool displays a list of potential sites to reach out to with link requests. Narrow that list to high-quality sites with good traffic and a strong social media presence. Don't expect a huge response to your outreach — a 10 to 15 percent response rate is good for link-building campaigns.

Finding the right influencers requires research, too. You need to know your product and your audience. You also need to identify the social media users who've built a following by posting about your industry or niche and then learn who their audience is. It's also important to understand that the best-known influencers in your niche may not deliver the best ROI for you. You can break the bank working with high-profile influencers, or you can choose to work with micro-influencers. These are people who may only have tens of thousands of followers, but they've earned a high level of trust and authority within that group. Depending on your niche and your goals, micro-influencers may prove to be more cost-effective.

Content creation: expand into knowledge topics

If your company is mature in its SEO program, you can focus on content creation at a whole new level. At this stage, your content should expand beyond describing your products and services to answering consumer questions related to what you sell. For example, instead of creating more content about the shoes you sell, create content about how to choose shoes for different events, how to care for leather shoes and so on. Deciding what topics to focus on requires keyword and competitor research.

Use a tool like SEMrush to do a content gap analysis based on your products, segment, market and relevant search phrases. For example, a watch retailer's keywords include basics like "men's watches" and "women's watches," but there are other popular search phrases they can leverage, too, such as "watch repair" and "types of watches." By doing this analysis, you can typically generate somewhere between 750 and 6,000 keywords that you can use to create non-promotional content.

You're not going to use all the keywords, though. The next step is to segment your new list of keywords and analyze how you perform for those phrases versus how your competition performs. This sifting can take anywhere from

a few days to a full month. The time you spend on this is an investment that leads to a content road map for your SEO program. For example, you can prioritize the keywords where you have a competitive opportunity and make them the focus of your content creation program over the coming year.

To summarize, to get to this level of SEO, you have to build up the other levels first. Crawlability gives you the foundation to optimize your existing content. Optimization makes link-building and influencer marketing more effective. Knowledge-content creation is the capstone on these other steps. Together, these building blocks give you a durable SEO strategy to help you win organic search traffic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danielle Savin has over 20 years of experience in e-commerce, direct marketing, and traditional and brand marketing. She has launched multiple e-commerce sites for retailers spanning a variety of verticals and categories. Danielle combines experience, vision and talent to assess business needs, develop strategy, and implement and monitor deployment. Danielle's clients have included Havaianas, World Kitchen, Wilton Brands, La Senza, Juicy Couture, Jarden Brands, KUIU, JoAnn Stores, Beats by Dre, Go Pro, Hershey's and many others. Danielle received her BA from the University of California San Diego.

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