

mastering
search

COMMON SEO QUESTIONS

(AND ANSWERS)

By Peter Prestipino, Editor-In-Chief

Even if you're not a search engine optimization expert, you can still play one in the business boardroom.

When you receive questions about the practice and challenges of SEO from either co-workers, colleagues or those in the C-suite (who can't typically tell a search engine from a combustion engine), let *Website Magazine's* guide to common SEO questions help you to provide not just an answer, but the right one.

It is important to remember that search engine optimization is an ever-evolving, highly complex and often intricate process (not a one-time effort), which

demands the full stack of digital expertise: marketing, design, communication and technology (and at times a deep familiarity with them all). The pace of change makes for a tough go when it comes to educating those around you that are interested in learning more about why some sites rank high on the search results pages and others don't. It's not an art or a science, but a blending of the two, and you need the right answer to help everyone make a meaningful impact on the success of your enterprise in the future.

There is so much information that is important to a successful search engine optimization campaign, however, that it's not uncommon to miss a few things here and there — particularly if you're just getting started or haven't been on top of your digital game of late.

Let's address some of the most common questions facing those responsible for SEO, from the basic to the advanced.

There are, of course, many, many more SEO-related questions that could/should have been included that

Internet professionals must ultimately be able to answer for themselves and their clients. The *Website Magazine* staff has put together a more comprehensive resource on the Web available at wsm.co/seoquestionlist, which contains questions and answers to help you through all of the biggest challenges in SEO today.

How long does it take for a website to get listed?

There's no one answer to this question, as there are myriad factors that may influence whether a website gets indexed at all by the search engines and ultimately appear for keywords related to the business. To speed up the process, however, there are practices that websites can engage in including submitting sitemaps to Google and Bing's respective Webmaster platforms directly (as well as having other sites link to the website or page, which makes the engines aware of its existence). Learn more at wsm.co/sitemapprimer.

Why does my website's ranking fluctuate so wildly?

The reason that rankings fluctuate is that over time search engines locate, index and process more information about the query itself. And with more data at their disposal, they are able to more accurately assess quality and relevance of a particular page/website

to that query from a search user. If you're interested in measuring SEO performance, learn more at wsm.co/measureseonow.

How much "content" is required to rank well?

Neither of the major search engines have an official stance on a specific, quantifiable amount of content that is preferred. That being said, the answer is simple: enough to keep readers engaged. If you're interested in the concept of leveraging content for the purpose of improved search engine traffic, review *Website Magazine's* content marketing guide at wsm.co/contentmarketing2013.

Are unique page titles really that important?

There are really just two areas of SEO — those which concern elements off-site (e.g. links) and those which are concerned with elements on the site itself. When it comes to on-site SEO, unique page titles are of immense importance and great care should be taken to ensure they are creative, compelling and keyword rich.

Can the use of header tags improve rankings?

Search engines, as sophisticated as they are in terms

of their algorithmic functionality, still need a helping hand from time to time. The use of header tags (e.g. <H1>) has in the past been one of the ways to indicate the context of the page.

Learn how to develop creative, compelling page titles and improve many other on-site SEO factors such as header tags at wsm.co/optimizewithseo.

Why do the search engines not show all of my pages/content?

Even though you may not see all of your pages in the respective search indices using engine specific queries/commands (e.g. site:URL.com), it is essential to first trust that if you have submitted a sitemap, then the search engines are likely aware of most (if not all) of your pages. If you suspect that a few key pages are missing, make sure they are not being blocked by robots.txt files or with meta tags.

How many links does it take to get to the top of the SERPs?

The number of links (or Web citations) depends not just on the quantity of links but the quality of those links as well. A website with 10 authoritative links will almost always outrank one with thousands of low-quality links. The objective should be to focus on obtaining links that on their own have the ability to drive visitor

traffic (and which are earned by merit, not money). Take it a step further by ensuring that the anchor text that is being used on a variety of Web pages linking to you are diverse in nature, and that the links are spread out consistently to various areas of your website's pages. While it's not easy (for an expert or newbie) to acquire links, discover how to get started at wsm.co/linkprospecting.

Why do I see different results than other people with the same query?

Search engines used to be relatively static indices — meaning they didn't change very much (from person to person or because of geography/location). That's no longer the case. Today's search engines take into consideration numerous additional factors including the searcher's previous Web history, social interactions and locality.

Keep in mind that this list of SEO questions only skims the virtual surface. Make sure to visit *Website Magazine's* Master List (wsm.co/seoquestionlist), bookmark it and share it to spread the virtual SEO love.

about the author

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