

RezNEWS Feature Article:

What is taking so long? Search Engine Optimization: a marathon or a sprint?

If you have a website for your property, it is likely that you have at some time experienced frustration with the results (or lack thereof) of your Internet marketing efforts. There are several factors that can play a role in stalling your climb to the top of the search engine rankings. When you and/or the marketing company you employ understand these factors and how to deal with them, it becomes clear that your marketing efforts should include a well-executed, long-range strategy. As analogies go, prepare to run a marathon, not race a sprint for business success.

The following **RezNEWS** feature article will outline some of the barriers that block search engine success and also include some tips on how to avoid or to mitigate the effects of these barriers. This discussion will focus primarily on the well-known Google search engine, but nearly all of these principles can be applied to the other major search engines.

The most frustrating of the factors that delay search engine ranking is a complete lack of search results for your website's most important keywords. Assuming that your website is properly optimized, this situation is usually the result of one of two factors. Either Google has banned you (a topic for another **RezNEWS** article) or Google has not yet indexed you. The later is unofficially known as being in the Google "sandbox." Google protects its search results from spammers by putting new websites in a "holding pattern." This is done primarily to discourage unscrupulous SEO (search engine optimization) individuals or firms from using techniques to artificially improve their website search rankings. This has effectively rooted out the "get rich quick" set and eventually rewards those websites that are in it for the long haul. Unfortunately, in the short term, this practice will "penalize" those SEO companies who are using legitimate techniques to enhance search ranking and whose only "crime" is to have a website that is brand new. The good news is that while time goes by, you can be doing all the things such as proper optimization, link building, content building, etc., that when allowed out of the sandbox will have a very positive effect on your ranking. If your website is new, prepare to practice some patience. If you do all the right things while your website is in the sandbox, you will get out sooner and receive more favorable placement once you do. Your determination and diligence will be rewarded.

Note: It is very difficult to predict if a website will end up in the Google sandbox or not. For those that do, you can expect to be there for 6 to 12 months.

Next in line in implementing your long range marketing program is a well-planned link building strategy. Link building entails getting as many websites to provide quality links to your website as possible. These links (from websites with similar and related content only) are considered "votes" or link popularity.

Link building has been around for a relatively long time and it continues to be an important factor in search engine rankings. Proper link building requires knowledge, planning, and continuous implementation. A poorly designed linking plan can be a total SEO disaster. On one extreme, you could get banned from a search engine, or at best, your efforts could be a complete waste of time and money. These factors combined with the occasional third party fees charged for purchasing links can make link building an expensive proposition. If you do not have a professional and well-thought out link building strategy and your competition does, you can forget about achieving good rankings in any search engine, at least for the foreseeable future. Keep in mind you may be competing against someone who has been link building for years. All things being equal, you will need to do the same to compete with them. This is exactly what Google rewards, a serious commitment to growing your business online in an organized manner over a long period of time.

Like link building, content building also requires a long-term strategy, the results of which are difficult to "fake." For this reason, content building, the practice of constantly adding and changing content on your website, is also rewarded by Google and can speed up your rise in the rankings. From a search engine perspective, a small website with minimal content that never changes is not that valuable to its searchers. This helps to explain the recent proliferation of RSS (real simple syndication) feeds and blogs that automatically add, or make it very easy to add, current and relevant content to a website. Google likes websites that change often and grow larger in size. This shows a commitment from a

Webmaster to constantly update a website with “newsworthy” and relevant information of value to its searchers.

So what should you consider about the company that offers to get you indexed or on the first page of Google overnight...guaranteed? If this company is referring to the organic or free placement in Google, beware! To vault a website from relative obscurity to the first page or the top of the first page in Google for a competitive keyword overnight is simply not possible. The above-mentioned factors that are heavily weighted in Google's search algorithm practices simply take time. It is unrealistic to expect results overnight. Of course, you can always pay for traffic in the Google Adwords pay per click (PPC) program or the similar Yahoo! Search Marketing PPC program. These PPC plans can literally provide placement in the first page “sponsored” results column overnight. For a well-rounded online marketing plan, these plans should be used responsibly and in conjunction with your other search engine optimization efforts, not as a sole replacement for steady and ongoing marketing campaigns.

While there are other factors to be addressed concurrently in the time it takes to achieve top rankings, the three discussed in this article, proper optimization, link building, and content building, are arguably the most important for positive search engine rankings. Knowing these factors exist while planning a new website launch or executing a long term marketing strategy will allow you to have realistic expectations about what is possible and what is not possible in search engine rankings. Plan your business success based on training for and executing a masterful marathon. You will achieve greater success than if you ran a hastily planned sprint!

About the author

Joe Pawlak is Vice President of Sales and Business Development for RezStream, Inc. He also heads the Internet marketing division. Joe has over seven years extensive experience in the website design, hosting, and marketing arena.