

Search Engine Optimization Best Practices

1. **Use both Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing together to improve your referrals from search pages.** Search Engine Optimization (“natural search”) and Search Engine Marketing (“paid search/paid per click”) both have advantages and disadvantages. Together, they make an effective tandem and should be used together.
2. **Continually re-allocate your budget across SEO and PPC for optimal results.** It is appropriate to split your budget between both SEO and PPC methods. But whether that split is 80/20, 50/50 or 20/80 depends on your particular business and the market for your keywords and key phrases. Continually analyze how well each is working and continually readjust your budget. Don’t let the budget work itself out by default.
3. **SEO isn’t free; it takes time and money.** Even though SEO, or natural search, is based on what is referred to as “free clicks”, those clicks aren’t really free. Many, many hours are required to achieve and maintain high rankings for the most relevant terms through natural search. Most retailers underestimate the cost of this time.
4. **The key factor for SEO is your content; make it work for you.** The content on your pages drives much of the SEO ranking. Add text content to at the highest-level pages on your site first (the ones that are most likely to be seen by customers): your homepage, category, product and static pages that contain keywords that convert the most. Make sure your content includes visible text on pages, anchor, alt text, and the META description tag. Matching the content on your pages to the search terms entered is the key factor in achieving high rankings.
5. **Duplicate Content.** If your products are in multiple categories and have the same content on each, make sure that the search engines recognize only one. Duplicate content can negatively impact rankings. Using “do not follow” within the link to those duplicate pages is one way to prevent being penalized for duplicate content.
6. **Replace Meta Keywords with Tagging.** The age of Meta Keywords is over; instead, consider tagging your pages with relevant tags. Your customers may even be able to help.
7. **Brainstorm your keywords.** Every person shops and searches differently. Try different words and phrases. Brainstorm to find alternative keywords and phrases that your customers may use to find your products. These are sometime referred to long-stem key phrases. Look on Google to see how often the keywords are used to see if it makes sense to try them on your site.
8. **Use Social Media Optimization (SMO) to build content and rankings.** SMO is a good way for retailers to leverage their content through customers’ reviews, blogs, shares and other social media tools in order to increase relevant content and links. Although the customer does most of the work, retailers need to monitor and include this in their SEO strategy.
9. **Use site maps and affiliate links to improve SEO rankings.** Site maps (both the HTML customer-friendly and the XML search engine types) and links to and from your site are important for rankings. It is not just number of links, which is important to determine ranking, but also the quality of the links.
10. **Create landing pages for top SEO keywords.** People who search with your top keywords are hot prospects that expect to get to a page that is relevant. Show them your best assortment and or products and merchandise it to convert your traffic more easily.
11. **Make sure your analytics work and are accurate.** Without analytics, you cannot track any SEO effectiveness.

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