

Optimize Your Website: Users First, Google Second

by Mark O'Brien, November 2009

The problem many websites have today isn't that their pages aren't optimized, it is that they are difficult to access, read, and take action on. SEO basics are widely known and easy to implement. Developing accurate prospect personas and the information architecture and calls to action that will guide their sessions is more complex--but it is well worth the effort.

"Optimizing" is an interesting word. It is important to ask the question, "For what, or *whom*, are we optimizing?" Is the ultimate goal of your site to be Search Engine Optimized, or User Optimized? Oddly enough, most people get stuck on the SEO part of this but don't stop to think about what happens if the SEO actually works and brings great prospects to their site. Your site's success isn't measured in traffic; it is measured in conversions.

We believe that focusing on the actual user experience is the best approach to optimization. If users can get to your site easily, intuitively find the content that they are most interested in, and easily read it, then Google will be able to do the same. The reason that Google has become synonymous with the word search itself is that Google is the best at mimicking human behavior. Since Google reads through web pages and sites like we do, we people consider it to be the best search engine. Makes sense, right?

We have seen time and time again that Google bait pages aren't great at bringing people in and keeping them. You may get a #1 ranking on Google for a certain phrase, but chances are that few people will actually search for that phrase and most of those that do click through to your Google bait page won't stick around for long once they get to your site. Why? Simple. It is because the page wasn't written for them, it was written for Google. Once they get to the page it just doesn't really seem all that interesting to them, so they bounce.

Plan your site and write your content for your prospects, make it an educational resource they can't live without, and I assure you that Google will respond in kind.

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