

Online Visibility: Search Engine Optimization

Georgetown University - School of Continuing Studies

Spring 2010

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The Course

Course Objectives

The objectives of this search engine optimization (SEO) course is to familiarize you with organic search—the importance and benefits of ranking highly in major search engines. Our goal is to help you inherently understand how search contributes to online visibility, how it can be used in reputation management and to integrate search with your current public relations/communications efforts, which must involve a search component. As search is both an art and a science, we will delve into tactical as well as strategic measures. To that end, there will be some technical aspects that you will be expected to grasp. At the conclusion of the course, you will be able to assess your current search strategy and make and implement recommendations to improve search rankings.

Course Description

We will explore the fundamentals of a solid SEO strategy. You will learn how to perform keyword research, edit body text for search engines, understand a technical audit and perform link building to name a few key components. In addition, search is a moving target and changes on a daily basis. In order for you to succeed well after you have completed this class, you will be expected to monitor daily search blogs and news sites and discuss with the class.

Philosophy

This is an interactive class. While I will be lecturing about the fundamentals during each class, I encourage discussion and debate. Since search is an ever changing field, this will require us to be flexible with both the topics we cover and the extent to which we cover them. As an SEO professional, I monitor blogs and web sites that pertain to search and will sometimes bring new items up for discussion that are not on the syllabus. I expect and encourage you to do the same.

Administrative

Class Time

Tuesday-- 7:45 pm-9:45 pm.

We will begin on time and will have one break. Class will usually start with student presentations or guest speakers and be followed by lecture.

Contacting Me

Email is the best way to get in touch with me. I will usually respond within 24 hours. If it's an emergency, you may call me on my cell. Email and phone are listed above.

Communicating

We will use Google Groups to communicate with each other, share information and participate in discussions. Please request an invitation to join as soon as possible.

Website: <http://groups.google.com/group/seo-spring-2010>

Email: seo-spring-2010@googlegroups.com

Office Hours

Office hours are by appointment only. I will usually be available before and after class. I am also available to schedule phone appointments during non-business hours, if needed.

Devices

While I am addicted to both my iPhone and Blackberry, I will turn these devices off during the class. I will give you my undivided attention and hope you do the same. However, I understand that you are working professionals. If you must respond to an urgent email or return an urgent phone call, I ask that you step outside of the classroom and preferably respond only during breaks. We will learn from each other and any unnecessary distraction will impede that.

Attendance

Attending class is critical to your success. I will circulate an attendance sheet at the start of every class. You may miss no more than two excused absences. Please notify me as soon as possible when you will not be able to attend. There are several classes that are critical. Please make every effort possible to be here for the lecture on keyword research, tools, tweaking content, tech audits and link building. These courses are directly related to your graded assignments and will be difficult to understand using notes or slides only.

University Policies

Honor System

Students are expected to abide by the Georgetown University Honor System. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the materials and information posted at: <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/>

Georgetown University Honor Pledge

“In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system; To live out a commitment to integrity in all my words and actions; To be honest in every academic endeavor; And to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together. To live out the ideals of Georgetown University I commit myself to be a person for others in my daily life, respectful of difference and disagreement; To care for this venerable campus and all of those with whom I share it; and to fulfill in all ways the trust placed in me to carry on the Georgetown tradition.”

Resources

Tools

These are tools that you will rely on to complete assignments and to get hands on experience. Please install them or bookmark them. I encourage you to try out other tools that may be useful and share them with the class.

Keyword Research

- Keyword Discovery (<http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/search.html>)
- Word Tracker (<http://freekeywords.wordtracker.com/>)
- Google Keyword Tool (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>)
- <http://keywordfinder.org/index.php>

Technical Audits and Linking

- Firefox Plug in Web Developer (<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/60>)
- Rank Checker (<http://tools.seobook.com>) – determines position by keyword
- URL Redirect Server Response (<http://www.seologic.com/webmaster-tools/url-redirect.php>) -- determining 301 redirects
- Xenu (<http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>) – crawling site
- Yahoo Site Builder (<http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com>)
- SEO Pro Link Checker (<http://seopro.com.au/free-seo-tools/link-checker>)
- Backlink Checker (http://www.iwebtool.com/backlink_checker)
- Backlink Watch (<http://www.backlinkwatch.com>)
- *iWebTool (<http://www.iwebtool.com>)
- *RankQuest (<http://www.rankquest.com/seo-tools.html>)
- *SEOMOZ and SEO Book both have extensive tools that are free. More robust tools require membership. (see URL below)

* These sites have a variety of tools to explore

Web Sites/Blogs

In order to keep up with current events, staying on top of these blogs is essential. I use Google Reader to easily see the latest in one place. In addition to reading the daily news, these are very good SEO resources for you to use in deepening your knowledge.

Search

- Search Engine Land (<http://searchengineland.com/>)
- Search Engine Watch (<http://searchenginewatch.com/>)
- SEOMOZ (<http://www.seomoz.org/>)
- SEO Book (<http://www.seobook.com/>)
- Matt Cutts blog (<http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/>)

Technology

- Tech Crunch (<http://www.techcrunch.com/>)
- Read Write Web (<http://www.readwriteweb.com/>)
- Mashable (<http://mashable.com/>)

Readings

Some of our readings will be from blogs and search sites. However, we will read heavily from the following. I highly recommend that you get the two text books as soon as possible because Week 2 requires heavy reading assignments of 100+ pages.

Required Readings

- Daily blogs
- Online articles – collection of articles to support weekly topics. These readings are subject to change.
- *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.: Driving Search Traffic to Your Company's Web Site (2nd Edition)* – Mike Moran and Bill Hunt
- *The Art of SEO* – Enge, Spencer, Fishkin & Stricchiola
- *50 Kickass Keyword Strategies*—Aaron Wall <http://www.wordtracker.com/offers/kickass/>

Recommended Readings

- *The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture* – John Batelle
- *Search Engine Optimization for Dummies* – Peter Kent
- *The SEO Bible* – Jerri Ledford

Assignments

More detailed instructions for each assignment below will be reviewed in class.

As SEO is both an art and a science, you will be expected to share in both oral presentations and written materials how/why you reached the conclusions you did, the tools you used, how you cross checked etc. The “art” portion of SEO allows you some wiggle room. However, you must support your claims with logic, data and analysis.

Papers should be written in 11 point, Calibri or similar font with 1” margins.

- **Weekly Update**--(Group assignment with 3 people per group). Find a *new* (within the last month) SEO issue/development on Search Engine Land, Search Engine Watch or any other news/web site, develop a PowerPoint and deliver to class discussing the SEO implications (i.e Google’s Universal search). Specifically, I’m looking for what the new development is; how this impacts SEO and online visibility; the challenges it presents; how you would work around it of possible? What does this mean for your employers, personal or client’s web site? Essentially, how does it change search?

The presentation will be limited to 20 minutes, not including Q&A. This assignment must be unique and topics are claimed on a first come, first served basis using our Google Group.

We will begin each class with these presentations, providing there isn’t a speaker conflict. Please **provide me with a hard copy prior to your presentation**. You are encouraged to choose topics

we have discussed. However, the groups that go first are at a disadvantage and will be graded accordingly.

- **Keyword Research Analysis Part 1**– You will perform a keyword research analysis on a list of keywords that I will provide. You will be expected to categorize these terms, find which categories have higher search volume, determine the most important categories and provide insights into the various ways in which searcher search. Provide a written summary that highlights the insights you’ve gleaned, surprises you found and what you now understand about the given topic. Paper is limited to 3 pages.
- **Keyword Research Analysis Part 2** – I will provide you with 5 web pages from the same domain. You will use your keyword analysis completed in part 1 in determining a unique keyword phrase for each page. However, you will also do additional keyword research using the tools we review in class to find the most appropriate term for each page.

Please provide a detailed, written description of your analysis, how you reached your conclusions and why you’ve chosen the specific terms you did. Additionally, *concise* data (graphs, tables, pie charts etc) can be used to support your findings. I want you to tell me what the data means rather than me having to dig through tons of data to distill your claims. Consider search volume, competition, content, and ability to obtain additional links, etc. In addition, take 1 page that you have optimized and offer recommendation on how you would edit the existing content to incorporate the unique keyword phrase you have identified.

Paper should be limited to 5 pages, excluding supporting data.

- **Link Building**—A 25 minute group presentation (3 people or less) on link building. Choose a site and develop a link building campaign. Who will you target? Which blogs, sister companies, like-minded organizations will you pitch to? What is your hook? How will you pitch it? Why is it interesting to objective outsiders? Walk the class through how you will develop relationships and how you will be a valuable resource to those you are trying to get to link to you. The presentation should include all of the above questions and your reasoning behind your answers. **Please provide a hard copy of the presentation to me prior delivery.**
- **Online Visibility Analysis**-- Bringing everything together that we’ve discussed in class , assess the visibility of a web site. Write a 10-15 page paper (maximum) discussing pros/cons of their online presence, missed opportunities, suggested next steps, etc. In addition, analyze the optimization of the site: Has this site been optimized? What are the strengths and weaknesses? Who are their competitors? Have competitors engaged in optimizing their site? To what extent? Compare and contrast. Be sure to explain your approach by supporting your claims. For example, how did you come to your conclusions? What do you recommend as next steps? Prioritize these next steps. Consider the difference, if any, about the visibility of your site on major search engines. Cite and discuss the different tools you used and your process in developing recommendations. This paper is an opportunity to demonstrate all you have learned regarding keyword research, content analysis, link analysis, technical audits and outreach.
- **Participation**—Class time is an opportunity for us to learn from each other, to challenge each other in constructive ways and to deepen our understanding. Your contributions to this discussion will be reflected in your final grade. I encourage you to poke holes in what is in front

of you (did I mention constructively?) and to take everything to the next level. Dive in and get your hands dirty.

Grading

10 points —Weekly Update Presentation (10 pts)

15 points—Keyword Research Analysis Part 1

15 points—Keyword Research Analysis Part 2

15 points—Link Building

35 points—Online Visibility Analysis

10 points—Participation

100 Points Total

Schedule and Assigned Readings

As search engines rapidly change, this schedule will remain flexible and is subject to change as well. I will do my best to post new articles as far in advance as possible. Please have all readings completed prior to class.

Week 1—Introduction to Online Visibility (January 19)

- Introductions
- Class objectives and syllabus review
- Readings and assignments
- Goals
- Overview of search
- How to search
- What is SEO

Week 2—Search Engines (January 27)

- How do search engines work?
- Searcher behavior
- SEO—Art and Science
- What Does online visibility mean? Why does it matter?
- Getting your feet wet: Analyzing online visibility

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapters 1-4
 The Art of SEO, Chapter 2
 <http://www.seomoz.org/article/bg1>

Week 3—Keyword Research (February 2)

- Keyword Research—high level
- Keyword Research —Unique Keyword Phrases and the long tail
- Competitor targets
- Keyword Tools
- [Handout detailed link keyword research assignment](#)

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapter 11
The Art of SEO, Chapter 45
50 Kickass Keyword Strategies in its entirety
<http://keywordfinder.org/index.php>
<http://www.wordtracker.com/academy/keyword-research>
<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html>
<http://searchengineland.com/keyword-research-listen-to-your-customers-20204>
<http://searchengineland.com/eight-keyword-research-mistakes-that-are-costing-you-money-14002>
<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/whiteboard-friday-implementing-keyword-research>

Week 4 –Install, downloads Tools, Using Excel (February 9)

- Must bring laptops to this class
- Excel (examples demonstrated using Excel 2007)
 - Sorting and filtering
 - Formulas: Sums, Averages, Percentages, Divisions
- Tools
 - Download Firefox, Rank Checker, Web Developer and SEO for Firefox
- Hands on Keyword Research
- **Group #1 Current news presentations**

Week 5—Content and User Experience (February 16)

- Tweaking Content—how to apply keyword research to existing content
- Duplicate content
- User-generated content
- User experience
- **Keyword research Part 1 due**

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapter 12
<http://searchenginewatch.com/3625720>
<http://searchengineland.com/understanding-search-engines-duplicate-content-issues-11738>
<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/content-is-king-baby>
http://gelconference.com/videos/2006/seth_godin/
<http://searchengineland.com/user-experience-seo-15638>
<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/awardwinning-content>
<http://www.fatdux.com/blog/2009/08/07/20-tips-for-writing-for-the-web/>
<http://searchengineland.com/search-marketing-user-experience-and-human-behavior-web-site-requirements-16629>
<http://labs.wordtracker.com/keyword-questions/questions?seed=obama&commit=Search>

Week 6—Link Building and Outreach (February 23)

- Link building—why it's important, how to do it
- **Group #2 Current news presentations**

- Guest Speaker: Rachelle Lacroix – Online Editorial Outreach
- Handout detailed link building assignment

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapter 13
 The Art of SEO, Chapter 7
<http://www.seobook.com/archives/001792.shtml>
<http://searchengineland.com/the-social-media-underground-22030>
<http://searchengineland.com/social-media-a-great-tool-to-solve-short-term-brand-management-challenges-16057>
<http://searchengineland.com/its-hip-to-be-link-square-13939>
<http://www.searchenginejournal.com/the-psychology-behind-link-giving/15374/>
<http://www.searchcowboys.com/seo/575>
<http://www.sugarrae.com/11-experts-on-link-development-speak/>
<http://searchengineland.com/a-big-bunch-of-link-building-17225>
<http://www.seomoz.org/article/viral-marketing-and-linkbait-on-the-web>

Week 7—Tech Audits and Competitors (March 2)

- Tech audits
- Page Analysis
- Flash and other SEO challenges
- Competitive Analysis – What terms are your competitors targeting? Are they engaging in SEO?
- **Keyword Research Analysis Part 2 due**

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapter 10
 The Art of SEO, Chapter 6

<http://searchenginewatch.com/3634671>
<http://www.seomoz.org/article/search-friendly-guide>
<http://www.searchenginepeople.com/blog/on-site-evaluation-in-action-what-where-and-how.html>
<http://www.seomoz.org/qa/view/7455/key-elements-of-a-comprehensive-seo-site-audit>
<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/the-web-developers-seo-cheat-sheet>

Spring Break (March 9)

- **No Class**

Week 8—Optimized Press Releases (March 16)

- Optimized press releases
- Google News
- **Group #3 Current news presentations**

Readings: *Online articles*
<http://mashable.com/2008/11/04/how-to-make-press-releases-seo-friendly/>
<http://www.briansolis.com/2008/02/definitive-guide-to-social-media.html>
<http://www.toprankblog.com/2008/03/pull-pr-seo-public-relations/>

<http://www.toprankblog.com/2008/02/seo-tips-for-public-relations/>
<http://www.seobook.com/archives/002287.shtml>
<http://searchengineland.com/looking-at-links-from-news-search-10877>
<http://searchengineland.com/practical-points-for-perfecting-press-releases-23624>
<http://searchengineland.com/google-news-ranking-stories-30424>

Week 9— Online Reputation/Crisis Management (March 23)

- Reputation management
- Crisis communication
- Link Building presentations Group #1

Readings: Online Articles

<http://social-media-optimization.com/2007/12/reputation-management-seo-and-social-media/>
<http://www.toprankblog.com/2007/03/basics-of-online-reputation-management/>
<http://www.stuntdubl.com/2007/07/11/reputation-management/>
<http://www.marketingpilgrim.com/2007/10/google-reputation-management.html>
<http://www.marketingpilgrim.com/2006/03/online-reputation-monitoring-beginners.html>
<http://www.reputation.me/> (Blog to peruse. No specific articles.)
<http://www.toprankblog.com/2007/06/future-online-pr/>
<http://www.scoreboard-media.com/reputation-management-guide/>
<http://searchengineland.com/nine-essential-tactics-for-reputation-management-in-social-media-13572>
<http://searchengineland.com/search-engine-reputation-management-setting-managing-expectations-13252>
http://www.sempo.org/learning_center/articles/ElixirSystemsOnlineRepMgmt.pdf
<http://searchenginewatch.com/3628265>
<http://www.searchenginejournal.com/the-dos-and-donts-of-online-reputation-management/10973/>

Week 10—Optimizing New Media (March 30)

- Optimizing videos, images and audio
- Link Building presentations Group #2

Readings: Search Engine Marketing, Inc., Chapters 16

Online articles:

<http://www.matcutts.com/blog/link-to-youtube-minute-second/>
<http://www.aimclearblog.com/2008/08/19/how-to-optimize-video-step-by-step-instructions/>
<http://www.marketing-jive.com/2007/09/14-best-practices-and-tips-for-video.html>
<http://www.10e20.com/blog/2009/08/12/video-optimization-tips-from-ses-san-jose/>
<http://www.seomoz.org/blog/seo-for-video-content>

Week 11—Local and Mobile SEO (April 6)

- Local search
- Mobile search
- **Link Building presentations Group #3**
- **Hand out detailed final project assignment**

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapter 15
 The Art of SEO, Chapter 8 (Sections pertaining to Local and Mobile)

Week 12—Real-Time Search (April 13)

- How does real-time search change the game?
- Is Twitter a Google killer?
- **Guest Speaker: Gerry Campbell, CEO of Collecta**

Readings:
 -As this is a heavily evolving space, online articles will be assigned one week prior to class.

Week 13—Search Engine Marketing and SEO (April 20)

- The intersection of SEM and SEO.
- Pay Per Click (PPC) Strategies
- **Link Building presentations part #3 due**

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapters 14,
 <http://www.seomoz.org/blog/whiteboard-friday-ppc-basics>
 <http://adlab.msn.com/Keyword-Mutation-Detection/Default.aspx>

Week 14—Where Does Search Go From Here? Wrap Up (April 27)

- Conclusions
- **Final projects due**

Readings: *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, Chapter 18
 The Art of SEO, Chapter 13