



SEO FOR LAW FIRMS

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INTRODUCTION

Did you know that 74% of all legal clients visit a law firm's website before contacting them? A firm's digital presence plays such a crucial role in building trust and lead generation. A consumer will spend time on a firm's website to learn about the team, learn about the areas of service, read about previous results, and ultimately determine whether or not they can trust the team to get the job done.

So, how do you make sure that a potential client can find your website? While a robust digital marketing strategy includes social media, public relations, and digital ads, search engine optimization (SEO) is lucrative for helping potential clients find your website.

74%

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source <https://blog.capterra.com/the-top-15-legal-marketing-statistics-for-2017/>

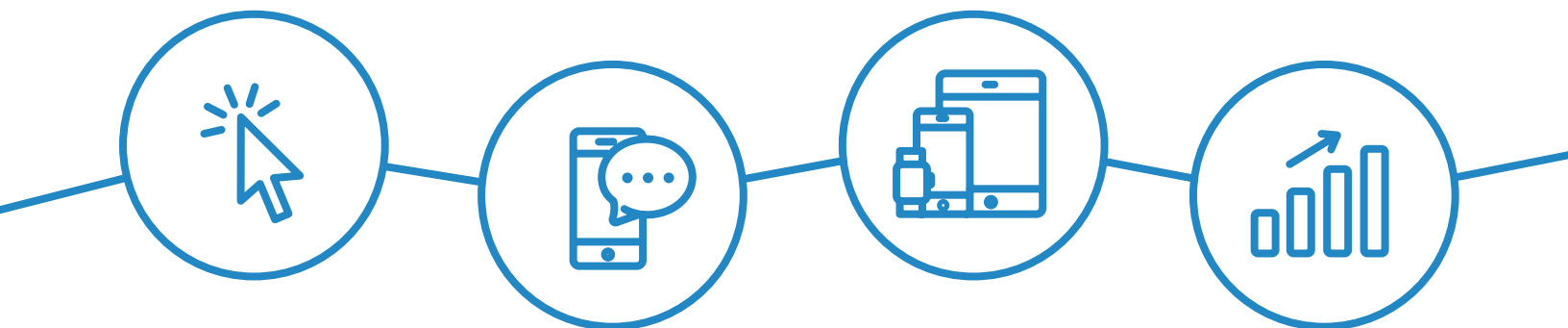
WHY IS SEO IMPORTANT FOR LAW FIRMS?

Building and maintaining a law firm website can take several hours of work a month. Sometimes you need to edit content to ensure it is still accurate which then means a lengthy review process before it's clear to publish.

Your website includes all kinds of content specific to your firm. Whether your services focus on monitoring, reporting, maintenance, or any other support services, a good digital marketing and PR strategy will ensure potential clients can find you when they are looking for you.

SEO might seem daunting with the technical jargon and time required, but with a little knowledge and perseverance you can improve your firm's web traffic without being a digital marketing expert.

A good SEO strategy can set you apart from your competitors, can help improve brand awareness and most importantly, can help you demonstrate measurable results to firm Partners who may otherwise be skeptical of their investment.



WHAT IS SEO?

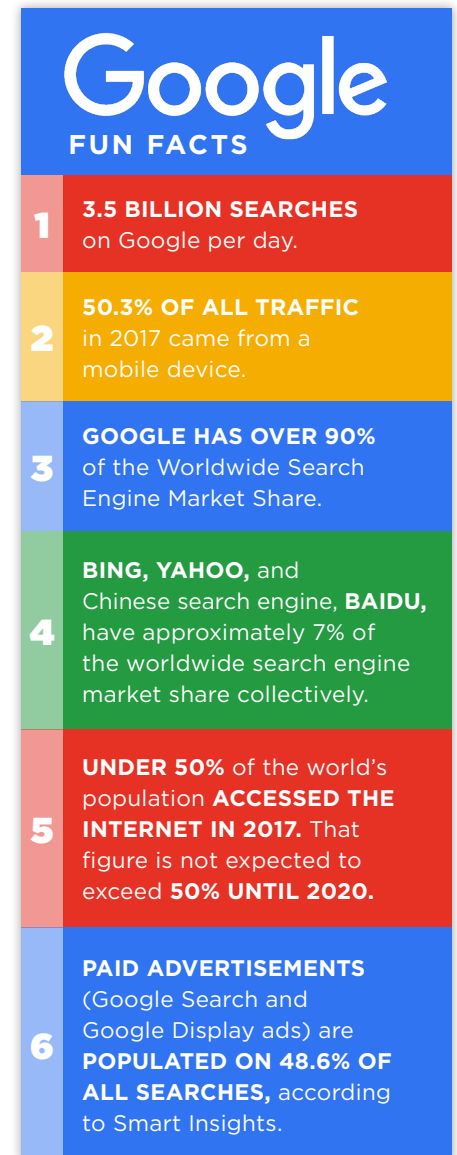
In short, search engine optimization means making technical and content enhancements on your website to help get a higher organic ranking on search engines for relevant keywords. The higher your website ranks for the relevant keywords, the more likely potential clients are to find you and visit your website.

Google's algorithms have over 300 criteria and standards known as ranking factors. The goal of SEO activities is to achieve the highest ranking on the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) for the most competitive keywords. Ranking factors can include activity on your website (on-site) or on other websites linking to your website (off-site).

While Google doesn't make public these 300 standards, to understand how Google rates a website, we look at Google's mission statement for search engine users: to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

To determine how accessible and useful your website is, Google uses a combination of data including time spent on your website, how users found your website, how many pages they visited, and various others. These factors are coupled with the number of websites that have linked to your website, the types of websites that have linked to your website, where they are located, and even the context of what the user is looking for.

Because of all these different factors, the ranking of sites will likely differ from person to person and from search query to search query. But, there are many fundamental tasks that webmasters and search engine optimization specialists can do to ensure that a website is showing up as high as possible for as many people as possible.

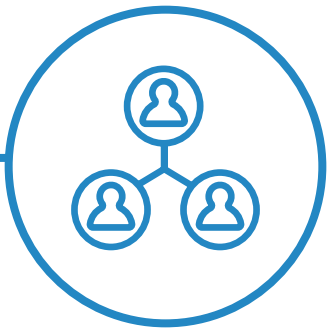


HOW CAN LAW FIRMS LEVERAGE SEO?

In 2020, it is not uncommon to have a website. Every firm has a website. What everyone isn't doing is paying attention to SEO in order to stand out from the competition. A well defined SEO strategy can help you do just that. So, if you're wondering why you should be thinking about SEO, here are some important reasons:

GET MORE EYES ON YOUR FIRM'S CONTENT

If your firm has implemented a content strategy that requires your lawyers to spend non-billable hours writing, you want to ensure you're getting the most value for the time spent. By ensuring new content is optimized, you can almost guarantee your copywriters that their article is going to have significantly more visibility. Of course SEO alone can't do that, but it will certainly help.



TARGETED CAMPAIGNS

SEO can be utilized in specific campaigns or to help grow a particular segment of the firm, such as a new service area or an existing area that you'd like to push. For example, if your firm is looking to drive more personal injury business, SEO can be a vital part of your digital campaign.

BIO OPTIMIZATION

Individual Profiles are where most conversions happen on a firm's website. This is where potential clients go to see if they can trust you - it's the page we see has the highest amount of time spent. So, it is vital that this page have the appropriate tags and content to be found.



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEO AND PAY-PER-CLICK (PPC)

PPC

A PPC advertisement, which is marked with the word “Ad”, is a paid listing that is aimed to put a website on top of the page.

SEO

Organic search results are the listings that appear because of their relevance to a search query and not because the website has a paid advertisement to place them there.

INSIGHTS

For law firm's, keywords such as “personal injury law” can cost as much as \$4,000 per month and over \$200 per click in order to rank in the first position of search results. To compare this cost, an effective backlink strategy doubled up with onsite optimizations can increase your website traffic organically for approximately half of that cost.

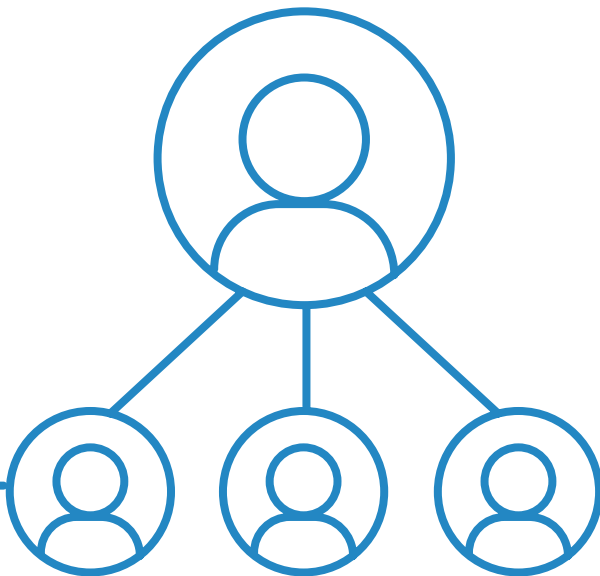
SEO is focused on sustainability in the long term. For example, if you run ads and suddenly stop, you will feel the impact immediately. But while healthy SEO takes longer to build, it also takes longer to break.



HOW DO I RANK ON PAGE ONE?

First of all, everybody wants to rank on the first page. For competitive keywords, this means thousands or even hundreds of thousands of webpages are vying for those few coveted spots. And to get there can take a year or more of hard graft.

But there is a lot of work that can be put in to improve your position in the SERPs from where you are today. And with a comprehensive onsite and offsite SEO strategy, your firm's website will be climbing the SERPs in almost no time at all.



ELEMENTS OF ONSITE SEO

SECURITY

In modern SEO, a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificate on your website has become more than a best practice. It is now an explicit ranking factor. This is of utmost importance for law firms as it protects any potentially sensitive data that is provided by a website visitor from being compromised.

PAGE SPEED

You have six to eight seconds to catch the average user's attention. So, the longer the load time, the less time your website's landing page actually has to make an impression. Page speed is a critical part of the mobile-first update from 2018. This is one of the ranking factors that Google's algorithm takes into account when presenting results to a user. Ideally, Google would like to see the first pixels rendered to the screen (known as First Contentful Paint) within one second.

MOBILE RESPONSIVENESS

Over 50% of global searches come from a mobile device. This has grown significantly since 2016 when mobile traffic accounted for only 34% of all traffic. Now, more than ever, it is essential to have a website that takes into account the mobile experience first. As of Q2 2018, Google started rolling out their mobile-first indexing. This means that websites that were not mobile-friendly were losing their position on the SERP. As client demographics continue to change and trend younger, it's a best practice for firm's to have responsive sites so mobile users have a good experience.

IMAGES

To reduce a website's loading speed, it is critical to compress all images on your website. Furthermore, a firm should be compliant with accessibility laws, this is of particular importance if you do firm in Ontario or the USA. It is therefore important that you add informative descriptions of what the image is so that screen readers can describe the image for visually-impaired visitors.

META DESCRIPTIONS

Once upon a time meta descriptions were the be all and end all for SEO success. But, Google has since decreased the importance of meta descriptions. That being said, a good meta description can provide context to a keyword set like "British Columbia disability law firm." Aim to hit between 120-160 characters for your meta descriptions. These are the descriptions that show up on the SERP when your website is listed.



**OVER 50% OF
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COME FROM A
MOBILE DEVICE**

ELEMENTS OF ONSITE SEO

SCHEMA MARKUP

Schema is a semantic language that allows Google to understand the context of your website in further detail and potentially serve it higher than another site if the algorithm believes that it will provide more relevant content for the searcher.

There are over 600 Schema Markup options but the main types include breadcrumbs, website, person, organization, local firm, article, product, event, and job posting.

SCHEMA EXAMPLE:

```
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org/",
  "@type": "WebSite",
  "name": "My Website",
  "alternateName": "Law Firm",
  "url": "https://www.thisismywebsite.com"
}
</script>
```

You can use Google's Structured Data Testing Tool to check that the Schema Markup will work before putting it onto the header of your site or wrapping your content.

LANDING PAGE EXPERIENCE

One of the single-most important factors that Google's algorithm judges your website by, it is critical to have a good landing page experience. This means not having too many blocks of content, ensuring that all your images are displaying, that your site looks reputable, is mobile-friendly, and has a quick loading speed.

Consider hiring a landing page copywriter when building your website to ensure that your content is as effective as it can be. Two important on-page metrics to refer to when determining how positive your landing page experience is are your website's bounce rate and time spent on page.



ELEMENTS OF ONSITE SEO

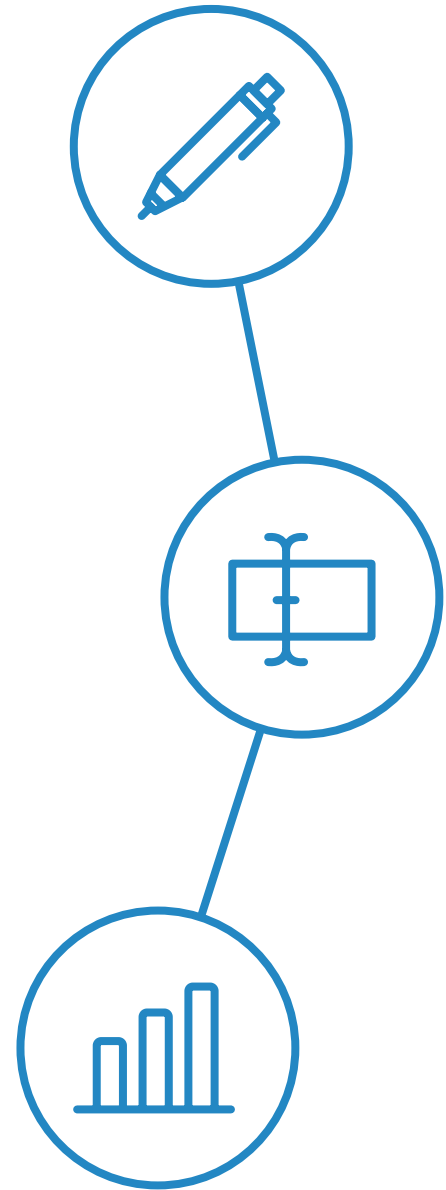
LONG AND SHORT-TAIL KEYWORDS

Prior to the Google Panda update, keywords were one of the most important ranking factors for the search engine. Unfortunately, the importance of keywords led to many “black hat” SEO tactics which hijacked the SERPs through a variety of methods including keyword stuffing, hiding keywords in coloured text using HTML, and a variety of other methods. Here’s what keyword stuffing looks like for a firm – avoid doing this!

“If you’re looking for the best lawyer in British Columbia, look no further. Our law firm offers the best lawyer in British Columbia that you could want for your legal needs. The best lawyer in British Columbia has been university educated and is knowledgeable about disability law in BC, workplace law in BC, ICBC lawyers near me, and small claims lawyers in British Columbia.”

As you can tell by that example, this renders a website’s content useless and unreadable.

It was tactics like this that led Google to create Latent Semantic Indexing. As a result, keyword stuffing (and for the most part all keywords) are dead. Instead of fitting in as many keywords as possible into a piece of website content, write naturally appealing or useful content for your website’s visitors.



ELEMENTS OF OFFSITE SEO

We don't know all the factors that Google's algorithm uses to rank a website, but data from Moz's Search Engine Ranking Factors study show that off-site SEO weight more than 50% of the ranking factor.

LOCAL SEO

Focusing on searcher intent, Local SEO has gained traction over the past couple of years. That rise was largely triggered by the creation of Google My Business, the postcard that pops up on the right side of the SERP for desktop (or the top for mobile) when you search a local firm.

By claiming your Google My Business account, you not only improve your profile when searcher intent matches your firm's listing, but you can also respond to reviews left about your services. A Google My Business account also allows you to connect your location to Google Maps so when somebody in your geographic region does a "near me" search, your firm will show up. The local business option of Schema Markup will help provide even more context to search engines as well.

BACKLINK STRATEGY

Whether it is through traditional Public Relations activities or through conference/panel speaking opportunities, or a mix of both, having a backlink strategy is imperative for building your Domain Authority and ranking higher. Although backlinks shouldn't be considered the holy grail of SEO, ensuring that higher domain authority sites are linking to your website is an important ranking factor in Google's eyes.

Other sources of potential links include clients, vendors, partners, press releases, directories (be careful with this), other blogs, articles, white papers, newspaper columns, Pinterest, Reddit, YouTube, and other social media.

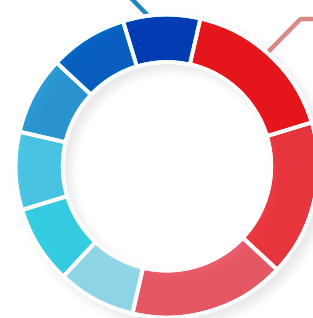
We have seen SEO and PR become more and more interlinked - pardon the pun! In addition to increasing your brand awareness and credibility, PR helps generate high domain authority backlinks. A good SEO strategy will include public relations - which means taking the time to create and foster relationships with relevant influencers and writers of publications, newspapers, and blogs.

ON-SITE

- Landing Page Experience
- Compressed Images
- Schema Markup
- Page Speed
- Security
- Meta Descriptions
- Mobile Responsiveness
- Long and Short Tail Keywords

OFF-SITE

- Social Media
- Backlinks
- Local SEO



source <https://moz.com/learn/seo/off-site-seo>

Pingdom Speed Test

Google PageSpeed Test

SEO Site Checkup

Schema Markup
Generator

Google Structured
Data Testing Tool

SEMRush

TOOLS FOR SEO SUCCESS

ahrefs

Screaming Frog

Neil Patel's SEO
Analyzer

Grammarly

Moz Link Explorer

Moz Open Site Explorer

HOW MUCH SHOULD I SPEND?

This is the million dollar question – though hopefully it doesn't actually cost a million dollars! Here's a rough outline on what you should be spending on your SEO per month if you are outsourcing.

INITIAL SEO AUDIT

Basic SEO Audit – \$750

SEO Audit with Google Analytics audit – \$1000

SEO, Google Analytics, and Google Ads Audit – \$1,500

Initial Audit including Analytics, Adwords and PR – \$2,500

3-MONTH SERVICE PACKAGES

Ongoing Onsite SEO

- First Three Month – \$2,000
- After Three Months – \$1,000

Ongoing Offsite SEO

- First Three Months – \$5,000 (including Advertorial)
- After Three Months – \$2,500



HOW TO GET BUY-IN FROM YOUR FIRM FOR SEO?

Now that you know why SEO is so important for your firm's website, let's talk about how to get your firm to buy in to invest time and resources into it. The reality is that it is all about results. Tools like Google Analytics report website behaviour and will ultimately show you if your SEO activity is producing positive results. Metrics like organic traffic and conversions from organic traffic should be top of mind when evaluating your digital marketing activity. Regular reporting will ensure your SEO team is held accountable to results and that the firm management understands the value of the investment.

Let's face it though - everybody is busy, and the technical jargon is meaningless to most. What is the most important thing to the ones paying for SEO? Their ranking! This is really the core of SEO reporting. Simple comparison tables that show priority keywords and their month-to-month change in rank can be all the information needed to determine whether the money is being well spent. It's really all firm owners or those investing in SEO care about.

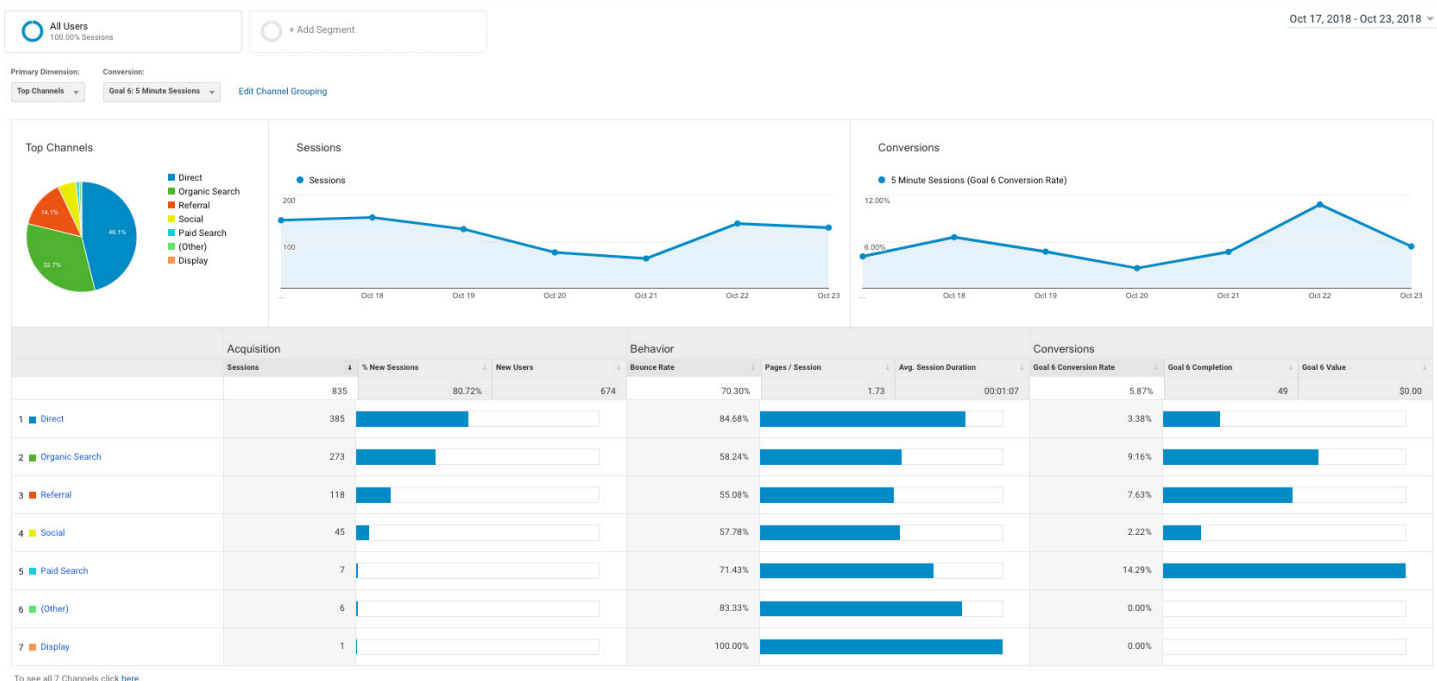


KEYWORD RANKINGS

Keyword	Position	Previous Position	Rank Change	Location
Construction Lawyer	24	52	28	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Construction Lawyer	18	37	19	Canada
Construction Lien	83	>100	17	Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Construction Lien	88	>100	12	Canada
Construction Lien	88	>100	12	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Construction Law	22	31	9	Canada
Infrastructure Law	15	19	4	Toronto, Ontario, Canada

HOW TO GET BUY-IN FROM YOUR FIRM FOR SEO?

If you want to keep the buy-in of those in control of your marketing budget, make sure you're able to show month-to-month improvement on the keywords you've determined are a priority. This can be as simple as a table showing: Priority keywords, current month's ranking, previous month's ranking, and rank change for the month. Of course, the lower the ranking, the higher the keyword is placing on the SERPs. The table in the example below shows how simple, yet beneficial, this table can be.



SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING GLOSSARY

SEO Stands for Search Engine Optimization. Is the process of improving a website to increase its organic position on Google and other search engines.

PPC Stands for Pay Per Click advertising, which is pretty self-explanatory but is the practice of paid advertising that you see at the top and bottom of the search engine after typing a query.

SEM Stands for Search Engine Marketing. The overall practice that encompasses both PPC and SEO.

Webmaster Older term for an SEO specialist. The person responsible for maintaining a website.

SERPS Stands for Search Engine Results Page. The pages shown when you enter a query on Google or another search engine.

UX User experience. The experience of a website's visitor.

UI User interface. A webpage and its design.

Backlinks A link that points to your site from an external website.

Link Juice The authority that is passed from one site to another when a backlink is given.

Keywords Terms that people most use when searching in Google. Can be long-tail or short-tail, meaning that they can be short (2 words) or a longer phrase such as "Neapolitan pizzerias that serve beer near me."

Alt Text a description of the image that will show if the image is not displaying. Alt Text was used for keyword insertion but since Google has reduced the importance of keyword density, alt text is mostly used by screen readers for the sight-impaired.

Schema Markup Semantic language that helps Google understand your website's content in further detail and context.

CSS Stands for Cascading Style Sheets. CSS is a programming language used mostly for user experience details like colours and additional elements like accordion boxes. It is also important for responsiveness of a webpage.

HTML Stands for Hypertext Markup Language. It is the most basic language for creating websites. In modern SEO, HTML is mostly used for formatting written content.

Landing Page The page where a user enters your site from an external source such as the SERPS or social media.

Google Analytics The main tool for measuring your website's traffic and their behaviour.

Google Search Console - Another tool in the SEO toolbox. Search Console allows SEO specialists and webmasters to see broken links, commonly used queries for their site, the website's structured data, and submit sitemaps.

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING GLOSSARY

301 Redirect protocol to show Google where the original page has gone to.

404 error Page not found/deleted. Says to Google to no longer index this page.

Black Hat Unethical SEO. Practicing black hat techniques can lead to your site being deindexed by Google.

White Hat Ethical SEO practices such as making site improvements for UX.

Bounce Rate The rate in which a visitor goes to your page and then leaves without interacting with any on-page element. If a bounce rate is high, this is often because the page is broken or generally provides a poor user experience.

Breadcrumbs The path that you have taken to land on that specific page. Often found at the top of a website, it looks like this: Home > About > Our Lawyers > Thomas Shultz

Canonical HTML language that tells Google's crawlers that two pages share the same content and to treat them as one page.

Duplicate Content Content that is duplicated either from the same site or another site. You might also know this as plagiarism. Canonical tags are often used to avoid being punished for duplicate content.

Crawler (or bot or spider) A programme that autonomously performs a process like indexing a website or parsing its information.

iFrames Commonly used for embedding Youtube Videos. An iFrame allows a mirror from one site to another. iFrames are generally avoided in website development.

Dofollow Allows a web crawler to pass through from one site to another via a link. These pass link juice and authority between websites. All links are automatically dofollows unless modified.

Nofollow Doesn't allow a web crawler to pass from one site to another. Nofollows do not pass link juice but can signal to crawler's that your site is of authority. For example, Wikipedia links are nofollows but they can add to your ranking positively because it is a high authority site.

NoIndex Says to Google's web crawlers to not include the page on the SERPS.

Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) The process that makes long-tail keywords relevant. It is a process that helps crawlers understand the context of a seemingly unstructured content.

Long-tail Keywords "What is a long-tail keyword" is a long-tail keyword. It is a string of words that make a query.

Link Exchange A link exchange is a technique that is often used by directory pages to build site authority. It is mostly frowned upon by Google, although there are some exceptions.

Domain Authority Google's assessment of how trustworthy and authoritative your site is.

Robots.txt A directory that says to web crawlers which pages should and should not be crawled.

Sitemap A list of your site's URLs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Darian is founding partner of the award-winning Digital Marketing and PR firm known as Jelly.

If you didn't already know, Darian brings unparalleled charisma and excitement to the brands that he popularizes (is yours one of them?).

Known for off-the-wall ideas and fantastic stories, Darian's energy keeps the Jelly bus rolling down fun and fabulous roads.



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