

SEO ESSENTIALS

GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT SEO

HOW TO GET MORE LEADS:
A CHECKLIST OF 8 ESSENTIALS
FOR BUSY MARKETERS
IN GROWING BUSINESSES



*Explore Motivations,
Determine KPIs,
Manage Expectations*

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*"Would You Give
This Site Your
Credit Card?"*

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SEO

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Introduction: A Checklist of SEO Essentials

For my clients and the marketers I am acquainted with, time is their most precious resource.

They have to guard their time like a bulldog. And within this limited time, they have the fun challenge of being expected to consistently produce more and better results. And the really good marketers, well, they don't solely want results. They want to make a contribution, become better at their craft, and genuinely help their organization grow by driving more traffic, awareness, and of course leads.

The beauty of search engine optimization (SEO) is it helps with all of the above: efficiency, results, contribution, growth and leads.

But when it comes to effectively deploying SEO and hitting KPIs and objectives, marketers are often held back by a lack of time, resources, and knowledge about where to even begin.

SEO: Simple, But Not Easy

I personally dislike the phrase, "simple but not easy." A statement like that needs to be backed up with a more detailed explanation, don't you think? It makes my brain hurt to think about the implications and makes me wish someone would just spell out what is not so easy so I know what I'm getting into. That being said...

...SEO is simple but not easy.

I truly believe that SEO is simpler than ever, but not easy, due to the multiple disciplines and activities that have to come together in order to realize long term, sustainable success.

SEO success today requires a mix of best practices, trends, marketing 101, and SEO fundamentals meshed together.

But believe me, the headache is worth it. If you...

- know you're missing opportunities
- want to attract a certain type of customer but aren't sure how
- are overly dependent on pricey paid marketing services like PPC at the expense of organic SEO or other lower-cost alternatives
- have tried SEO but got busy and you know the stop-and-go efforts won't produce results you know are attainable

...then this guide is for you. In this 8-point checklist I'll explain the essential elements of SEO and how to generate more leads to your site consistently.

All it takes is a solid start, a plan for consistent action, and time and momentum in the right direction.

Simple, right?

Let's get started.



Explore Motivations, Determine KPIs, Manage Expectations

Why are you seeking help with SEO? What are you hoping to achieve? What keywords do you want? What are you wanting to see happen? What exactly is the problem? Have you ever seen SEO success? How will you know when you've achieved success?

I know, I know – that's a lot of questions.

But this is where you first start when piecing together your lead gen SEO strategy. The answers to these questions help you assess if we're starting from scratch and where those priorities are, "fixing" something that went wrong, updating a site if it hasn't kept up with best practices. And very importantly, gauge if you (or better yet your boss) have practical expectations on timelines and efforts involved. What will be needed: foundational SEO tweaking, a thorough SEO application, or a major overhaul? (Hint: for most marketers it will be that middle option.)

Use these questions as a guide to help determine where you fall:

1. What do you hope to gain by getting found online and having a better online presence?
2. What keywords do you want? Save an Excel spreadsheet with the 5-10 most important.
3. Why do you think your SEO efforts haven't worked so far?
4. How strong is your knowledge of SEO and knowing where to start? On a scale of 1-10, "1" being total newb, "5" being you know enough to know what you don't know, and "10" being you're skilled, updated and experienced but lack execution time and resources.
5. Have you ever seen SEO success?
6. Why is now the time to do something about it?
7. What do you envision will change if you gain SEO success?
8. What do you want to get out of your SEO efforts? List your goals and objectives.
9. What SEO work has been done to the site by you, your web designer, previous marketers, or an outside SEO resource?
10. How familiar with SEO was the person who designed your site?
11. When was your site last redesigned by a professional?

How are you looking so far? At this point there's nothing actionable to do with this information, you're just gathering up these details for your plan.

② “Would You Give This Site Your Credit Card?”

“Would you give this site your credit card?”

This is one of a series of questions that Google engineers ask when evaluating sites to determine if they needed to assess a Panda penalty.

The Panda update is a search filter/algorithm update that occurred in 2011. It was designed to improve the quality of search results. Panda penalties were assessed to prevent sites with poor quality content from ranking well. Since 2011, many more iterations of Panda have rolled out, including other algorithm changes, which reinforces Google’s strong warnings that spam, manipulative tactics and low-quality SEO/web activities will not be tolerated.

So back to your credit card.

Getting a site to be deemed trustworthy enough for an objective person to give their credit card information to is the bare minimum of getting to SEO success.

What this really means, is that your site better look, feel, and act extremely trustworthy. Before you start your SEO endeavors (or parallel to your SEO endeavors), put yourself in a neutral position and answer objectively, “Would you give this site your credit card?” Make sure the answer is a surefire “yes.” If it’s “maybe,” then that is a “no.” And if it’s a clear “no,” then update your design, put social proof on the page, get testimonials, freshen up your copy, and get clear on your messaging.

If you answered “maybe” or “no,” then list out the top three most impactful things you can change or improve that will bring you closer to a surefire “YES.”

To make this actionable and take it one step further, list out the person or resource who will actually do these things, the timeframe to get it done, and the cost if there’s going to be one.

And of course time block this on your calendar or put it on a timeline now. What you just wrote down are priority essential activities that will be in your Phase 1 plan.

Remember, your site isn’t going to SEO itself. SEO today requires active upkeep and execution.



Website Marketing Fundamentals: Engagement

How successfully do you engage your site visitor?

Meaning, are you successful at keeping them on your site and engrossed in what they're reading, seeing, and thinking?

Whether you're aware of it or not, Google can measure bounce rate, how long people are spending on your site, how many pages they visit, and if they interact with your content. These are all important metrics, and this is a direct result of: meeting expectations, good design and user experience, persuasive copy, and knowing your target market. You have only two seconds to make sure your market is able to self-identify their pain points with the services/products you offer, that they readily understand what you sell, that your core messages and themes are consistent and enticing, and that you can show, not just tell, why you're the best and why they should stay on the page.

You also have to put it out there. Be extremely explicit and clear and talk very directly, honestly and authentically. Know your audience's triggers. Give specifics. Verbalize what is in their world, their head, and what pain points cause them to need your product, service, information, solutions. This leads to engagement. More basics of good engagement:

1. Clean design
2. Intuitive navigation
3. Site speed

Now, I'm sure you're wondering, "What does any of this have to do with SEO?"

Everything.

You see, ranking is only half the battle. Once you drive traffic to the site you have to be able to keep visitors there. If you drive traffic but no one engages, that is a warning flag to Google (and of course your bottom line). Engagement – another website marketing 101 fundamental – is non-negotiable.

Now list 3 core website pages critical to your online sales efforts you should work on immediately to increase engagement from site visitors. This could be your homepage, about page, FAQs, main services page, a niche services page, or another important website page that helps move people from visitors to leads and ultimately buyers.

④

SEO's Foundational Individual Elements

Now is a good time to mention the most important part of this report: the elements that contribute to successful SEO.

You can't have long-term, sustainable SEO success without conscious improvements in each of these areas:

- ✓ Technical
- ✓ On-page optimization
- ✓ Content
- ✓ Competitive Analyses
- ✓ Keywords
- ✓ Links and signals
- ✓ Authority and credibility signals
- ✓ Engagement that contributes to goals

Each element is not equally as important when you first start out, but they all will be important in the long run. Sustainable, long-term success means consistent action, conscious attention and progress in these areas. Don't be intimidated – some of these will take care of themselves, and most of these will inherently be fine pending you have a truly viable business and have invested resources into growing your business and getting in front of your target market.

Non-Negotiable SEO Element: Uniquely Valuable

You must truly believe that your site deserves to be among the top in Google's results. But it's not enough for you to believe it – Google must believe it too. And one of the strongest signals for top rankings is that a site must be uniquely valuable.

Your site must provide unique value and content. On behalf of your organization, ask yourself if you:

- Envision and anticipate growing your site?
- Want to grow your visibility and brand?
- Have a full marketing plan in place for how you will promote your business?

There are many businesses that don't have plans to grow, evolve, or improve their site. And that's completely fine. But they will not achieve long-lasting SEO success without an improving digital footprint.

Demonstrated unique value is not only important for SEO, it's non-negotiable if you want to see sustained success. You have to WANT your site to grow, evolve and improve. And you'll need a plan in place to do so. Those who succeed in SEO are constantly doing the things it takes to get in front of their target market – offline and online. And that carries across to their site and ultimately good vibes and signals to Google.

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Take A Holistic View: Benchmark Individual Elements Then the Site as a Whole

I am all about MVP (minimum viable product) when it comes to SEO. As much as I possibly can, I work within the constraints of my clients' websites without recommending a complete overhaul.

When SEO professionals conduct audits, we do so to find out what's working, what's not, where the opportunities are, and what SEO issues your website might have that we'll need to tackle. Even with top-notch sites, there is always something that can be improved to get more and better results.

Looking at each of SEO's elements individually (referenced in Step 4) and then as a whole is how we develop a strategy and prioritize activities: the technical back end of the site, the website front end, keywords, analytics, the market, the off-page landscape and opportunities, marketing activities, and SEO competitors.

What am I looking for during my SEO Audits?

- Targeting a healthy mix of practical, easier-attainable longer-tail keywords in conjunction with more competitive, general keywords that will generate leads
- Critically reviewing the potential of the content and what needs to be improved in what order to create maximum impact

- Identifying the pages that we prioritize to Phase 1 that will create the most impact
- Ensuring I can readily identify the inherent connection with the target market and opportunity for engagement (as mentioned previously)
- The non-negotiable priority technical fixes for the site to make it more SEO friendly and optimal (vs «nice-to-have» fixes that we'll forgo for now and apply to the next website iteration)

Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools

A technical analysis under the hood of your website is required when undergoing a new SEO effort. And it's nearly impossible to assess the situation without access to Google Analytics (GA) and Google Webmaster Tools (GWT). Sure it can be done, but believe me when I say that a much better plan can be put together if you can look at the data that is accessible for free in GA and GWT: where traffic is coming from, what keywords are working, how long people are staying on your site, what pages they're looking at, what might be preventing SEO success, what is not happening that should be happening, and where the "broken" parts of the process are. The SEO strategy you need to put together is intended to bridge the current reality to the goals and KPIs you laid out in Step 1. You have to compare and benchmark where you are NOW in order to set a plan that gets you to where you want to go.



Getting Lead Gen Results

The first phase of establishing a new website is: just get the darn website LIVE AND FUNCTIONAL.

That's no easy feat in and of itself when there are so many must-do's, could-do's, should-do's and able-to-do's with the incredible features websites are able to have today.

After a site is live and collecting traffic and data (measured in Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools), the next phase should be to assess what needs to be done to drive more focused traffic and more qualified leads.

This is where SEO is truly powerful.

Generating leads from SEO is the ultimate Holy Grail. But an important distinction: SEO doesn't drive leads. **It drives prospects and qualified traffic that will ideally turn into leads once they hit the site.** SEO doesn't guarantee leads.

You have to first convert traffic to prospects and prospects to leads.

There are purposeful things you need to do to make this happen. First things first, let's assess your site and plan:

- ✓ Have you prioritized lead-gen keywords? This is my own way of saying you need to prioritize keywords that show the intent that someone is looking to buy or to shortlist potential providers. Is it super obvious what you do and what you sell?
- ✓ Do you directly state why your prospects should hire you and that you are even for hire? Believe me, you make think this is implied but I come across plenty of websites that never ask for the business. Implied will not cut it in today's busy, short-term-attention-span world.
- ✓ Is your copy persuasive? Do you explicitly tell people you want to work with them and why you're the best fit? Do they know how and why your organization's products will solve their problems?
- ✓ Do you know how to move people through the funnel? How do you turn prospects into leads offline? Are there middle steps between visitors landing on your website and them doing your ultimate call to action?
- ✓ Do you know how to measure SEO and integrate it in to your ongoing marketing activities?
- ✓ Are you prepared to execute the plan, then tweak consistently?

This is why "ranking" as an SEO measurement of success is limited and only half the battle. First you need to rank, then you need to get "clicks" and people coming to your website. Then once they're on your website, your website marketing plan takes over, and drives prospects into the sales funnel.

Focus – and conscious decision making – on Holistic SEO + Website Marketing 101 can make this happen easier than you think.



Foundational SEO: Your First Order of Business

Applying and mastering **foundational SEO** – an essential to success – means:

- Becoming familiar with (and dare I say fond of) basic SEO terms like title tag, meta description, and H1
- Having a technically proficient site – ensuring nothing is blocking Google from coming in and crawling, indexing, and ranking your pages
- Pursuing a mix of attainable keywords that are ambitious, yet practical, and then targeting and mapping them to core website pages ([see my free keyword research report here](#))
- Ensuring SEO execution will get done thoroughly, correctly, and in a timely manner
- Knowing how to work keywords naturally into the page
- Applying on-page optimization best practices on the site – especially on the core pages
- Assessing links that the site has gained naturally and starting to think how you will leverage and up-level what has naturally worked – with the goal of becoming more intentional about seeking link opportunities and just plain ol’ asking for them
- Applying SEO principles to your other online and offline marketing activities: email, tradeshow, events, PR, social media, blogging, PPC, etc.

The “Who” Behind SEO

More important than the “what” that needs to be done with foundational SEO is the “Who.” Here are questions you need to ask yourself when getting serious about SEO:

- Who will keep their eye on the KPIs and high-level strategy?
- Who will be carrying out the tactical work?
- Who is your content writer/blogger/copywriter and your technical person? How familiar are they with SEO best practices, or how trained up do they need to get? (a little training goes a long way)
- Does anyone who makes regular updates or changes to the website inherently understand SEO or do they need to be given guidance? (especially important is to understand how big website changes can impact and undo your efforts)
- Who is going to own it – and do measurement and reporting?
- Who is the stakeholder? Who manages and approves budgets? Who is invested in its success?
- Who will project manage integrating initiatives like the ones below?
 - o Social media marketing
 - o Blogging
 - o Marketing and editorial calendars
 - o Technical team
 - o Writers



Integrate Ongoing SEO into Your Marketing Routine

At one time, the person (or agency) doing the SEO for a company could sit at a desk in the corner, or be halfway around the world, and never have to regularly talk to anyone to get their job done.

That is not the case today. SEO success is very dependent on the other marketing, promotional, business development, and inner workings of what else is going on in the company. Successful SEO relies on knowing, understanding, and leveraging these other activities and making sure that translates to the website, SEO and digital strategy. Also, to make sure that SEO best practices are being applied to these other channels. This involves everything and anything where the goal is to get in front of the target audience: tradeshows, live events, sponsorships, social media, advertising, PR initiatives, and other content marketing projects.

And Don't Forget Technical

It also goes without saying that you have to be vigilant about changes to your website, whether that be for one-off initiatives or ongoing website changes. Know who is involved with your site and make sure you have a process for keeping updated and apprised of significant changes. That's why it's important to bake SEO into the process. Early and often.

5 Ways to Integrate SEO Into Your Marketing Mix

Here are a few tools and methodologies for making this work:

1. Assess marketing channels and activities your organization is already involved in
2. Utilize a marketing communication calendar to keep track, plot out, and integrate initiatives.
3. Take advantage of the many Editorial Calendar and Content Marketing Calendars out there to ensure all content that needs to be optimized is, and that SEO-focused content is included
4. Always "Think of the Link" when it comes to leveraging existing opportunities to get a link back to your site and consistently improve your linkbuilding and back link profile
5. Get a firm grasp on one-time vs ongoing initiatives so that you can maximize your efforts

The Time Factor: One-Time vs Ongoing Tasks

Are you overcommitted? What are you going to de-prioritize in order to do SEO? Do you know how to say no to your boss, colleagues, team members, in order to accomplish your SEO goals? If you're a people pleaser this is an especially hard skill to master.

Foundational SEO requires investing a moderate amount of time into SEO, and after that, dedicating time consistently to ongoing SEO. But remember that time won't appear out of thin air. Are you going to take something else off your plate to make that happen? Hire a resource to help with a certain part?

A lack of time to execute is the reason why most marketers do not see SEO results. You have to be practical and realistic about when you can commit to making these big changes that will give you big results.

Summary

What questions come up from reading this guide?

I encourage you to reach out with any questions swirling around your mind. The goal of this checklist is to let you know that there is much more to SEO success these days than pure tactics. The tactics are the easy part – you can Google specific “to do’s” and get those anywhere.

What I want you to take away is that getting serious about SEO means knowing what you’re getting into and working towards all parts that contribute to success.

Remember when I said SEO is simple but not easy?

At the end of the day, SEO can be one of the best lead-generating, awareness-driving, highest-value marketing activities you can do. You just have to know what it takes, and put a butt-load of educated action behind it. Lastly, the learning is in the doing.

You won’t fully understand SEO until you actually get started. The path will unfold as you go along. If you wait until you fully understand SEO to get started, then believe me – you will never get started. There is just zip, zero, zilch way you can grasp it by reading about it. Just like tennis.

You can read about tennis all day, watch it on TV, but if you never get on the court with racquet in hand and start swinging, you’ll never truly get it.

12 Reasons Your SEO Lead Gen Efforts Might Fail

1. Targeting keywords that are out of your league
2. Pursuing shiny objects that left you with half-finished tactical tasks and projects
3. Fragmented initiatives
4. Failing to get clicks back to your site
5. Poor copywriting
6. Not working keywords into your copy effectively
7. Not applying SEO fundamentals
8. Incurring Google’s wrath by going against guidelines
9. Not tackling website technical constraints
10. Losing the link game
11. Not understanding the concept of general vs lead gen terms
12. Focusing on parts – but not the holistic whole – of what Google wants

My SEO Training and Strategy Services: Want to Chat?

Getting serious often means investing in help. If you need a little help to lift your SEO lead generation initiatives off the ground, let's talk.

I help savvy marketers who:

- Are already doing marketing on behalf of their organization
- Want to and are willing to understand how to bake SEO into the process
- Know that a customized plan and a little training will take them a long way
- Do not want to outsource to an expensive SEO agency month after month
- Know that hiring a cheap SEO professional will not get the job done

I am certainly not the most expensive SEO consultant or resource out there, but I'm not the cheapest either. I work with marketers and organizations who are invested in the growth of their company, and who are ready to tackle SEO in order to start generating leads consistently and improve traffic.

Take the Next Step

If this is you let's talk. To learn more you can:

- Read about the [SEO services I offer to in-house marketers, agencies, and SBOs](#)
- [Schedule a time to chat with me](#) via my online calendar and see if your needs and my services are a fit
- Contact me: <http://jennymunn.com/contact/>
- Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#)

Regardless if you're ready, I hope you realize that there is nothing black magic about SEO. Your website can be a powerful lead generation tool. All it takes? Getting creative and taking action.

About Jenny Munn

I am an SEO Consultant and Trainer who helps organizations get more leads from their website **and integrate SEO into their marketing mix.**

I consult with in-house marketing managers, agencies, and small businesses who want to fill their leads pipeline more consistently.

I'm passionate about my field, and believe SEO is a no-brainer for companies that want to 1) reduce costs and 2) increase the number of qualified website leads without a lot of additional work.

I have taught SEO at WordCamp Atlanta, Digital Atlanta, Solo PR Summit, PRSA FL, Business Marketing Association, Atlanta Tech Village, and various content marketing and social media organizations.

Learn more at jennymunn.com.



Report Resource Links

- <http://jennymunn.com/>
- <http://moz.com/google-algorithm-change>
- <http://jennymunn.com/technical-seo-issues/>
- <http://jennymunn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Keyword-Research-Guide-v3.pdf>
- <http://jennymunn.com/seo-services/>