

SEO *and* PRESS RELEASES

*How to Drive Search Visibility
While Following Google Best Practices*



SEO


Search
Engine
Optimization



INTRODUCTION

Press releases are an important way for organizations of all sizes to build buzz and attract customers—as well as an overlooked tool to improve organic search ranking.

In the wake of Google's recent update to its link schemes document, which states that overly optimized anchor text in articles or press releases distributed on other sites are considered "unnatural" and essentially paid advertising, companies scramble to figure out what each new search engine algorithm means for Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Fortunately, taking advantage of real-time market insight and following SEO best practices will still boost search engine rankings.



SEARCH ENGINE RANKING: HOW CAN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES STAND OUT?

It's a fact of doing business: people find your website through search engines.

According to BizReport, 95% of search-driven traffic comes from the first page of search results. That makes achieving a high search ranking crucial for attracting new customers, generating revenue, and gaining the edge over your competition. Most businesses use SEO to make sure their company's web presence is found by search engines and appears in that all-important first page of results.

The challenge? Search engines are always changing their algorithms—the way they identify what sites are the most relevant. As SEO professionals uncover ways to elevate sites in the rankings, search engines adapt and evolve to stay ahead, making sure that users are getting the most helpful results when they search.

In 2011, for instance, Google released Panda, an update to its software that changed the way it used site text and external links to a site to determine ranking. Many companies, both large and small, saw their ranking take a hit, as previous SEO best practices ceased to yield good results and even harmed search rankings. Google then released Penguin to penalize sites engaging in keyword stuffing. SEO best practices again had to be updated.

A few months ago, Google completely replaced its algorithm with Hummingbird, a brand new engine built on existing and new algorithm components. These constant changes can pose a challenge for small and medium-sized businesses that may have fewer resources to commit to SEO. The good news is that companies have an effective, if overlooked tool already at their disposal that can boost search engine rankings: press releases.

BOOST RANKINGS AND GENERATE LEADS WITH PRESS RELEASES

Customers who come to your site through organic search are some of the most qualified and least expensive leads available.

Local businesses especially benefit from being visible in searches in their area. Press releases are an effective way to help generate the external links and outside authority that improve search rankings and help keep those valuable leads coming to your website.

In the ideal lifecycle of a press release, it is distributed, and reporters, bloggers and other influencers then write about the news. The original release and any stories written about it remain online in news archives. The original release creates short-term traffic to the company's website. The long tail effect builds equity in the form of authoritative outside links that generate search engine visibility.

When creating a press plan for your company or even a single release, it's important to choose the right

topic and timing. A press release could announce a new company, product, or name change, connect the company to a local event, upcoming holiday, or piece of current news. A press release should be a story that its readers can care about.

A business with primarily local customers can use that fact as an advantage by creating press releases with local interest and locally focused keyword phrases. Talking about local issues makes readers feel like you understand them, and makes them feel good about being a knowledgeable part of the local community. For instance, when a dry summer is predicted, a gardening company can create a press release about plants that require less watering, which will be of interest to the area's gardeners and position the company as relevant to their current problems.

8 STEPS TO SEARCH-OPTIMIZED RELEASES

FOLLOW THESE SIMPLE STEPS TO CREATE AN ORGANIC SEARCH-OPTIMIZED PRESS RELEASE:

1. Pick the right topic to publicize: a new product, new management, seasonal or community-focused news will generate interest.
2. Research and choose one keyword phrase that is:
 - specific and relevant to your users;
 - a search phrase they already use to find your website; and
 - related to the content of the press release.
3. Work the phrase, and close variations, into the press release at four points: the headline, first paragraph, multimedia elements, and the final sentence.
4. Avoid the temptation to use keywords as anchor links in your press release copy, as Google considers these links to be a violation of its guidelines and may penalize you. Instead, use navigational

keywords (business name, website). Google recommends that all anchor links include a 'nofollow' flag – Marketwired automatically adds this to all press release links to comply with Google's best practices.

Use links in the text when it really makes sense, such as a final call-to-action or to get more information such as detailed product specs that add depth to your new product announcement. What Google frowns upon are links strictly intended to generate website traffic to boost search engine ranking.

This is the example Google gives of what not to do:

*There are many **wedding rings** on the market. If you want to have a **wedding**, you will have to pick the **best ring**. You will also need to **buy flowers** and a **wedding dress**.*

Here is Google's example rewritten with a navigational link added to provide reader value:

*There are many types of **wedding rings** on the market, but choosing one wisely requires knowledge. Familiarize yourself with the **Four Cs that govern diamond quality** before you invest thousands of dollars.*

While links like the above will have a "no follow" tag (rel="nofollow") instructing Google to discount them when assessing PageRank, readers will still click on the "Four Cs" link because they want the promised information. That action, in turn, will organically drive website traffic.

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5. When writing, put the most important information in the headline and first paragraph. The first paragraph should be a summary of the whole story, which reporters may include verbatim in their own stories. In the remainder of the release, provide the background and details. Make sure the release tells a story, answers a question, or addresses problems a reader may have.
6. The URL of the linked page should also contain the words of the keyword phrase.
7. If possible, add multimedia—a video, picture, or chart to illustrate the story; using a filename that contains the keyword phrase will also help with SEO.
8. To save money and increase the chances of your news being picked up, identify the right targets for your release and distribute only to them. Typically this is local and/or industry media. Consider releasing short news items via social media to further save distribution dollars.

GOOGLE'S SEARCH ALGORITHM

WHAT IS GOOGLE PANDA?

Google Panda was an update to Google's previous search engine algorithm that is meant to keep low-quality content from showing up high in search results.

WHAT IS GOOGLE PENGUIN?

Google Penguin was another update to Google's previous search algorithm, which penalized search engine rankings of websites that manipulated the number of links pointing to the page (this is also known as link scheming).

WHAT IS GOOGLE HUMMINGBIRD?

Google Hummingbird is Google's new search algorithm, released in September 2013, which still includes

some aspects of Panda and Penguin, but is also ever-evolving to optimize organic searches. A prominent difference is that Hummingbird takes "conversational search" queries into consideration.

SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED ABOUT IT?

Monitoring your search rankings and making changes both to your website and marketing strategy is always important to continue to drive good rankings. However, search rankings are not built overnight. Creating focused, readable, accessible, useable websites that give customers what they are looking for will always be the most important part of building good search rankings.

SEO VOCABULARY

SEO:

Search Engine Optimization, or making a piece of web content drive desired search ranking results

SEARCH RANKING:

The position where your company's website appears in a search engine results page for a specific keyword phrase

SEARCH ALGORITHM:

The proprietary method a search engine uses to determine search results

PAID/ORGANIC SEARCH:

Paid search is purchasing an ad that appears when a user searches for a specific keyword phrase. Organic search is generated by search engines crawling the internet and determines which sites are most relevant to which keyword phrases.

WHITE HAT/BLACK HAT:

Search Engine Optimizers that use good practices, which increase a site's relevance and usability, are called "white hat," while "black hat" SEO professionals may create link farms, steal content, or do other things that are against the spirit of search engines, where the most relevant and authoritative information should rise to the top.

ABOUT MARKETWIRED

Marketwired is a social communications leader offering best-in-class news distribution and reporting, as well as state-of-the-art social media monitoring and analytics. We open up new opportunities for our clients—helping them tune into the conversations that count, find insights that matter, and influence the right people.

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