

SEO Makeover: Top 10 Search Engine Optimization “Must Dos”

By Mary Gospe

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of designing and maintaining websites so that they appear high in Search Engine Results Page (SERP) listings organically, that is, not via paid search ads. The goal is for the site to be found when people are researching the products and/or services you offer—the ultimate in “pull” marketing—by providing relevant content (often referred to as keyword-rich content) throughout the site. SEO takes into account site content, structure and in-bound links.

[KickStart Alliance](#) partners with SEO expert, [Bloofusion](#), based in Santa Cruz, CA and Emsdetten, Germany for our clients’ SEO needs. Bloofusion is an online marketing agency that enables companies to take advantage of search engines and turn their web sites into effective sales and marketing channels.

According to Bloofusion, “search engines are constantly adjusting search algorithms to provide better results for their end-users and these changes may, and often lead to changes in SERP ranking results.” Therefore, it’s important to treat SEO as an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Below are 10 tips, based on advice from Bloofusion, to help you assess your current site and apply SEO best practices that you may be missing.

1. **Put yourself in your customers’ shoes.** Start with a review of your target audience, [buyer personas](#), positioning, unique value proposition and messaging. What is the customer’s buying process? How can you solve their business problems and what is the language they use to describe that problem? Use messaging that differentiates your business and resonates with your customers.
2. **Research your competitors.** What messaging and keywords are they using? Visit their site to review their page titles and content. Are they using language that speaks to their agenda or to your customers’ agenda? If it is the latter, what learning can you draw from this content? View the page source code with your browser to see their [meta descriptions](#) (structured data such as key words, location, language) and learn how they describe their company, services and what call to action they might be employing.
3. **Identify keywords.** Based on your positioning and messaging work and competitive research, determine the keywords or phrases that your prospects and customers are likely to use when searching for solutions that your company offers.

- If you have analytics tools on your site now, check to see what search terms are the most productive in driving click-throughs and conversions (form submissions). [Google Analytics](#) will show you the number of visitors over time, sources of traffic (direct, search engine and referring sites) and in the *Content Overview* section you can view the “entrance keywords” that people use to reach various pages on your site.
 - Use resources like [Google AdWords](#), [WordTracker](#) and [KeywordDiscovery](#) to see what keywords and phrases are popular for your business offering.
 - Test keyword effectiveness by buying pay-per-click (PPC) ads—also known as Search Engine Marketing (SEM). You’ll not only determine effective keywords, but hopefully pick up some leads in the meantime.
4. **Benchmark.** Use Google Analytics or a similar tool to determine your current site performance so you can measure the results of your optimization efforts over time.
 5. **Assess Site Architecture.** Some components of website infrastructure are not indexed easily by search engines, including [Adobe Flash®](#) and [AJAX](#). Use them sparingly or find a way to duplicate the content in searchable text.
 6. **Optimize Content.** Bloofusion’s definition of optimization is to “fine-tune your content according to your audience’s search terms”.
 - 90% of search results take you to a subpage, not the Home page. Produce one page per search term and make sure every page plays a role in attracting and educating visitors and encouraging them to take action.
 - Include descriptive and contextually relevant keywords in the page title, headings, subheads, text, and meta descriptions. For example, replace a page title of “Welcome to Acme Company” with a keyword descriptor for the content on that page, i.e. “Offering Alpine and Diving Widgets at lowest pricing – Acme Company”.
 - Use descriptive URLs for each page with appropriate key words separated by hyphens.
 7. **Drink your Link Juice.** SEO consultant [Greg Boser](#) coined the term “link juice” to refer to the strength of a web site’s link power. Key components of link juice include:
 - The number and quality of internal, inbound and outbound links.
 - Site traffic.
 - Use of keywords as [anchor text](#), the visible label of a clickable link.
 - Relevance of the site.

Instead of using generic link labels, like “download here” use phrases that are descriptive to the content, like “VOIP Phones”. Use a tool like [W3C Link Checker](#) to check for and fix any broken links.
 8. **Include a XML Sitemap File.** According to [sitemaps.org](#), “a Sitemap is an XML file that lists URLs for a site along with additional metadata about each URL (when it was last updated, how often it usually changes, and

how important it is, relative to other URLs in the site) so that search engines can more intelligently crawl the site.” This is not the same as the HTML Sitemap that visitors view to help them navigate the site. You need both. And make sure to register with [Google Webmaster Central](http://www.google.com/webmastercentral/) and submit the XML sitemap file.

9. Images Count.

- Use HTML captions on images where appropriate and always with information graphics, descriptive naming of the files and alt tags, which display alternative text when an image cannot be displayed.
- Include keywords in the audio of your videos and include downloadable transcripts.

10. Call to Action! Include one or more “calls to action” on each page. This has a big impact on click through rates (CTRs). What action do you want the visitor to take? What will they learn? How will this help them advance in their buying process? Examples are content to download (reports, whitepapers), joining a mailing list, subscribing to a newsletter, chatting with a rep, or viewing a demo.

Below is a screenshot of the [KickStart Alliance](http://www.kickstartall.com/) website with a few key SEO questions...



Like marketing, SEO is a process not a one-time event. It often takes 30-60 days to see your first results. Take the time to ensure your site is optimized with your audience’s needs top of mind, and apply resources to monitor results and make adjustments on a periodic (preferably monthly) basis. If you do not have internal

resources to do this, consider hiring an SEO expert, like [Bloofusion](#). For more information, check out Bloofusion's article [Search Engine Optimization and Web 2.0](#) and Mary Gospe's blog post [Be Findable: Tips on Optimizing Blended Search](#).

Good luck "being found when people are looking"!

About the Author:

Mary Gospe is principal and co-founder of KickStart Alliance. She helps B2B tech and clean tech companies build and nurture their sales pipelines through integrated marketing campaigns, sales development programs and inside sales operations. For more information, contact [Mary Gospe](#) at 650.941.8970. You can follow Mary on Twitter at www.twitter.com/marygospe