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SEARCH ENGINE SUCCESS

Get your website found online

THE BIG IDEAS GUIDE

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EXPERT ADVICE

Why business blooms on the web



Anna Borsboom, in front of 'EYE', the new film museum in Amsterdam

Getting your website found online

As a web entrepreneur, you want your website to rank high in search engines that drive hordes of potential clients your way. But the competition is brutal and there is no magic formula for success. What to do? The answer is SEO.

SEO, short for Search Engine Optimisation, is the technique used to improve your website's position in search engine results. Getting your site to show among the top results for a search query is critical, considering that over 90% of people don't bother looking beyond the first SERP (Search Engine Results Page) and that one in two visitors end up on a website through a search engine.

Because a good ranking is key to online success, investing in SEO is vital. And invest is the right word, because it's not a quick fix. Technical SEO, the optimisation of your programming code, will definitely give your website a boost, but in the world of smart search engines, optimising your

content is at least as important to ensure a good ranking and, ultimately, conversions.

That's why .eu Identity spoke to Anna Borsboom, content strategist at Le Lab in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, to discuss SEO in today's Internet and how you can make it work for your business.

.eu Identity: How should you tackle SEO? Are the rules the same for everyone or does your approach depend on the size of your website?

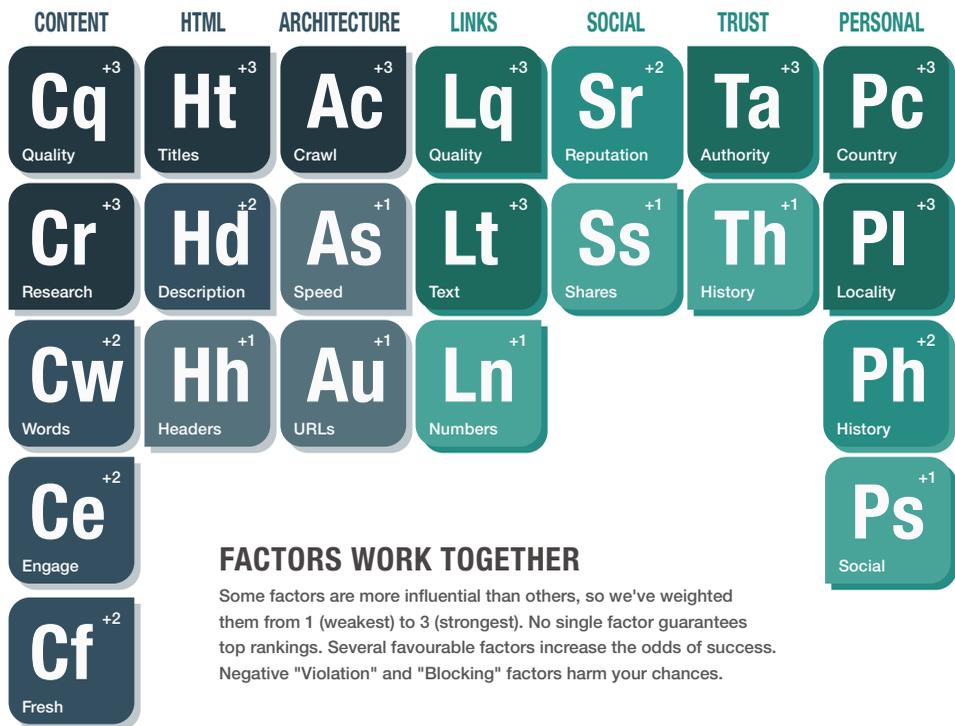
ANNA BORSBOOM: There was a time when websites with lots of pages used to rank higher, but that has changed considerably. Today, the ranking of a website, and of specific pages, depends much more on the relevance and trustworthiness of the content. As the focus has shifted more

The Periodic Table of SEO Ranking Factors

Search Engine Optimisation — SEO — may seem like alchemy to the uninitiated. But there is a science to it. Search engines reward pages with the right combination of ranking factors, or “signals”. SEO is about ensuring your content generates the right type of signals. This chart summarises the major factors to focus on for search engine ranking success (and thanks to Column Five Media for the infographic design).

ON THE PAGE SEO

OFF THE PAGE SEO



VIOLATIONS



BLOCKING



ON THE PAGE SEO RANKING FACTORS

These elements are in the direct control of the publisher.

CONTENT

Cq	QUALITY	Are pages well written & have substantial quality content?
Cr	RESEARCH	Have you researched the keywords people may use to find your content?
Cw	WORDS	Do pages use the words and phrases you hope they'll be found with?
Ce	ENGAGE	Do visitors spend time reading or "bounce" away quickly?
Cf	FRESH	Are pages fresh & about "hot" topics?

HTML

Ht	TITLES	Do HTML title tags contain keywords relevant to page topics?
Hd	DESCRIPTION	Do meta description tags describe what pages are about?
Hh	HEADERS	Do headlines and subheads use header tags with relevant keywords?

ARCHITECTURE

Ac	CRAWL	Can search engines easily "crawl" pages on site?
As	SPEED	Does the site load quickly?
Au	URLS	Are URLs short & contain meaningful keywords to page topics?

VIOLATIONS

Spam techniques may cause a ranking penalty or ban.

Vt	THIN	Is content "thin" or "shallow" & lacking substance?
Vs	STUFFING	Do you excessively use words you want pages to be found with?
Vh	HIDDEN	Do colours or design "hide" words you want pages too be found with?
Vc	CLOAKING	Do you show search engines different pages than humans?
Vp	PAID LINKS	Have you purchased links in hopes of better rankings?
Vi	LINK SPAM	Have you created many links by spamming blogs, forums or other places?

OFF THE PAGE SEO RANKING FACTORS

Elements influenced by readers, visitors & other publishers.

LINKS

Lq	QUALITY	Are links from trusted, quality or respected web sites?
Lt	TEXT	Do links pointing at pages use words you hope they'll be found with?
Ln	NUMBER	Do many links point at your web pages?

SOCIAL

Sr	REPUTATION	Do those respected on social networks share your content?
Ss	SHARES	Do many share your content on social networks?

TRUST

Ta	AUTHORITY	Do links, shares & other factors make site a trusted authority?
Th	HISTORY	Has site or its domain been around a long time, operating in same way?

PERSONAL

Pc	COUNTRY	What country is someone located in?
Pl	LOCALITY	What city or local area is someone located in?
Ph	HISTORY	Does someone regularly visit the site? Or have they "liked" it?
Ps	SOCIAL	What do your friends think of the site?

BLOCKING

If searchers "block" the site, it hurts both trust and personalisation.

Bt	BLOCKING	Have many people blocked your site from search results?
Bp	BLOCKING	Has someone blocked your site from their search results?

Written By:  Design By: 

The Search Engine Land Guide To SEO explains factors in more depth, with tips and a tutorial on implementing them. Learn more at <http://SLEND.COM/SEOTABLE>.

towards content, the 'authority' linked to that content has become a big factor.

Does the content come from a credible source and is it written by someone with a proven track record on the subject matter? If so, a small organisation with a good online reputation will most likely get a good SEO score.

And what about physical location?

Location is extremely important, because often people are looking for a product or service nearby and search engines behave accordingly. For example, if I'm from Florence and I'm looking for an interior designer, I won't get results from Rome or Venice, let alone Vienna. So even if I do a general search for an interior designer without specifying my location, I'll likely get results from my surrounding area because the chances that I would shop at a designer that's far away are small.

Search engines not only consider your location when displaying results, they also take into account other contextual information based on your browsing behavior. If I enter 'Egypt' as a search term and I'm someone who often looks for holiday destinations, then I'll see more travel and tourist information websites among my search results, whereas the SERP of an archaeologist would look quite different.

People may think, "If everybody does SEO, does it still mean anything? Will my website still stand out?" Is that a legitimate concern?

To some extent, yes. You can look at SEO as an arms race where tactical differences decide the outcome. That's why it's important not to limit your efforts to technical SEO, because those tricks can be adopted by everyone with an online presence. Your online strategy should focus on serving your target audience with desired content and building a credible online identity for your brand.

Brand awareness goes beyond SEO really, because if people know your brand, they will search for it and end up on your website. That's much more beneficial in the long run than investing in optimising your content on keywords, each of which has hundreds of competitors.

To what extent is specialisation a factor in getting found through Google?

Well, let's say you're a carpenter whose niche is refined oak tables. Chances are extremely small you'll be among the top results shown when people are looking for 'tables'. You'll never win that fight anyway, because there's too much competition out there and big players like Ikea will automatically nab the top spots.

But if you work on improving your brand awareness, people are much more likely to search for your company name, the name of a certain collection, maybe even your personal name. That

"You've got to keep your brand and the desires and needs of your customers in mind as you produce new material for your website."

Anna Borsboom, Content Strategist

won't happen overnight, but in the long run it will pay off, not in the least because you can promote products beyond those refined oak tables as your business grows.

The concept and scope of SEO have shifted considerably over the last few years. In the beginning, SEO was mainly about getting your code right and optimising your metadata - the data that tells a web browser or search engine how to handle your website and its contents - but now content and how it's structured plays a prominent role.

That's true. A nice anecdote to underscore your point is that webmasters used to sneak the word 'sex' in the meta tags of their website, even if they were selling pencils. They did that because 'sex' was the most sought word on the Internet, and they would 'get found' more easily via search. But 'getting found' only goes so far: if what you're offering on your website isn't what your visitors are looking for, they'll be gone as swiftly as they came.

Luckily, today such code pollution practices are penalised. Google doesn't take meta keywords into account anymore either. The meta description – the information that Google shows below the link in its search results – of your site or page has become much more important though: if it corresponds well to the search query, it improves the chances of people clicking on the link to your website. But in turn the content on your website must be what those visitors are after.

What makes for SEO-effective web copy?

Again, the key to success is corresponding to the search query. Even though you don't always know what potential visitors are after, it's essential to try and imagine what they want. If you run a web shop selling children's clothing, it's good to list if an item is washable or not, because that may be what a mother is looking for when she's browsing for the winter jacket she wants to buy her daughter. It may also be useful to add



5 effective SEO tips

1. Keep an eye on your bounce rate

If you get lots of traffic through search engines but zero conversions, i.e. people instantly leave your site, don't buy anything or retweet or subscribe to your newsletter, you'll have to rethink how you present your content to your target audience.

2. Have a good meta description

Make sure your meta description is engaging or includes the answer to a specific search query. The test: Can your description be an advertisement in Google Adwords? If yes, then you've done a good job.

3. Write keyword-rich page headings

Clear headings help people and search engines easily scan the page for relevant content. Strong headings point them in the right direction of what they are after.

4. Make your content shareable

If your content invites people to share it on social media or link to it on their website or blog, you'll gain online authority in your field.

5. Ensure that people look for you, not a generic product

Pay attention to branding and make your SEO efforts part of your broader marketing strategy so you become top of mind with your customers.

a blog to your web shop where you discuss your products to show your clients that you care.

So, properly and clearly describe your products or services and get to know your audience. Once you've decided who you're aiming at, the better you can optimise your content for them.

How important are links to your website from other websites? What can you do to boost the process?

Links from other websites, called backlinks, underscore the authority of your site as a cred-

ible source. The higher the quality and authority of the site linking back to yours, the more your ranking will benefit. If your Lisbon-based web shop for car parts gets a link back from a pet food company from Detroit, it won't matter, but getting a few good mentions from a car manufacturer will.

You can influence backlinking – and authority, because they're quite connected – by promoting your brand and company on social media, offer meaningful content to third parties to try and spread awareness. When you do, keep your target audience in mind when deciding on tone of voice, images and story angle, etc.

What mistakes do companies commonly make when implementing SEO?

There's still too much trust in the cowboys out there who promise you a number one ranking in Google. Sure, it's not impossible, but it's probably only on a very specific search query and it won't last long.

Secondly, people tend to invest in things that aren't effective in the long run. I've had a woman in one of my training courses who owned a web shop that sold high-end interior products for children's rooms. The competition on the keywords she used in her Google Adwords advertisements was enormous, and she spent about 2 500 euros per month on them. Even though she usually broke even, it would've been much wiser for her to devote that budget to brand building.

And I can't stress enough the importance of continuously investing in good content. SEO specialists can help you clean up your code and improve your existing content, but you've got to keep your brand and the desires and needs of your customers in mind as you produce new material for your website. ■



About Anna Borsboom

Anna Borsboom specialises in online branding and strategy, and mainly works for clients in the fashion and design worlds. She also gives courses about editing, content management, Internet strategy and, since the beginning of 2011, content strategy. She views content strategy not as a deliverable or a product, but as a process. A process that requires dedication but, at the same time, can also be started at any time and yield quick results.