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IS SEO GOING SEOCIAL?

by David Jenyns

Have you been keeping up with what's going on in search lately? Google's +1, Farmer updates, Panda updates, changes to real time search, Facebook feeding Bing social data - and that's just over the past few months! Sheesh... SEO is definitely one of the fastest changing industries in the world. So what's working today and where is Search Engine Optimization (SEO) headed?

At the core of SEO you still need the basics and they haven't changed that much over the years - simply, it can be broken into two components - on-page SEO and off-page SEO.

On-page optimization is centered around picking the right keywords and then including those keywords in your page's title tags, description tags and headers and using them in well-written, informative text on your page at least a couple of times. If you do these things well then you are already 80% towards achieving good on-page SEO that will get you into Google's good books. There's no "voodoo" or secrets with this - just simple steps to follow.

Off-page SEO revolves around the concept of websites ranking well when other web sites reference them, by linking to them. Like a research report that becomes popular and highly regarded because other research reports reference it - it gains credibility and achieves an authoritative status on the subject. This has been the mainstay of Google's measurement system for a long time and will no doubt play a major part for some time to come... or is that all about to change?

There's a war brewing between the social media giant Facebook and Google and the present debate might just change the face of search. Clearly Facebook dominates the social space with its 500 million plus users and smart innovations such as the "Like" button and it is hoping to revolutionize how people interact on the web.

In a world where the landscape can change quickly, Google appears to be becoming more and more threatened by Facebook and is keen to get its own slice of the social media pie. We saw with Google's failed "Buzz" platform that it's been knocking at the door for a while and its latest "+1" tool released in March 2011 is set up as a direct challenge to Facebook's "Like" button as a means for users to flag content that is seen as most relevant to them.

So why is social media so important to the future of search?

Well let me ask you this: if you're looking for a pizza restaurant for dinner tonight, who's opinion would you trust more, a computer program's or your closest friend's? Your friend's of course and social media gives access to this kind of data - Facebook knows it, Google knows it and even

Bing knows it. In fact, in a move to throw Google off its search throne, Facebook and Bing (Google's biggest competitor) have joined forces to combine their technologies and data to create a search engine with results personalized by what your friends think. Google's looking to do the same, already integrating tweets from your social network into search results and more social ranking factors with their +1 button's recent launch to be introduced shortly.

The influence of this type of comment upon buyers is undeniable and Google know that unless they start including it in their search results somebody else will eat into their "space". Google's own advertisements via AdWords now include the +1 button - a sign that they are serious about incorporating it into their long-term plans.

In the recent annual report of SEO Ranking factors by SEOMoz it was made clear how social signals have, this year, shot up in the relative importance of the factors that the search engines consider when ranking sites.

In my opinion, it's only a matter of time before, when you search "pizza restaurant", you will find standard search results personalised to you, using social data listing only those restaurants favorably reviewed by your friends and family. So if Auntie Doris tweeted that she went to a great pizza restaurant in Footscray called Pepe's, and they do the best pepperoni pizza in Melbourne, you'll know all about it!

As a website owner how can you prepare for the changes?

Well, if you're a website owner who's fared pretty well with Google rankings and SEO, it's not time to change any of the things that have worked for you in the past – onpage and offpage SEO still matters! You're still on the leading edge by reading this article, but it is time to start planning for the future. You need to consider “social indicators” as part of your future strategy.

Here's a few points to keep you on the right track.

#1. Sell great products and/or services. In the social media world, word travels quickly. Good news travels quickly and bad news even quicker. Whether it's Facebook's Like, Google's +1, or whoever wins the search engine war, you can guarantee they'll be listening to what people are saying about your business.

#2. Join the conversation. People are talking about your products and/or services whether you like it or not – you need to be there and share your views. Set up Google Alerts and watch your company and product keywords on Twitter, Blogs, YouTube, Facebook and other web 2.0 properties.

#3. Encourage the conversation. Make it easy for people to talk about you - add re-tweet buttons, Google +1's and Facebook Like's. Encourage people to comment on your blogs, post reviews on Google Places and tell them how to share it with their friends.

Although we can't say for sure which factors will play the biggest role in the way search engines rank websites in the future, we can say, whatever happens, social media is here to stay and will play a major part. Join the conversation today or you'll be left out.



David Jenyns (www.davidjenyns.com) has many stories to share, from selling the Melbourne Cricket Ground for \$24.95 to setting up a chain of punk rock clothing franchise stores, he is more than just another Internet Marketer – he's a business builder. Most recently, David has started the almost overnight success, Melbourne SEO Services – one of Australia's leading online marketing companies. Now he's looking to help you, small and medium sized business owners, grow to the next level.

Discover how he can help you: www.MelbourneSEOServices.com