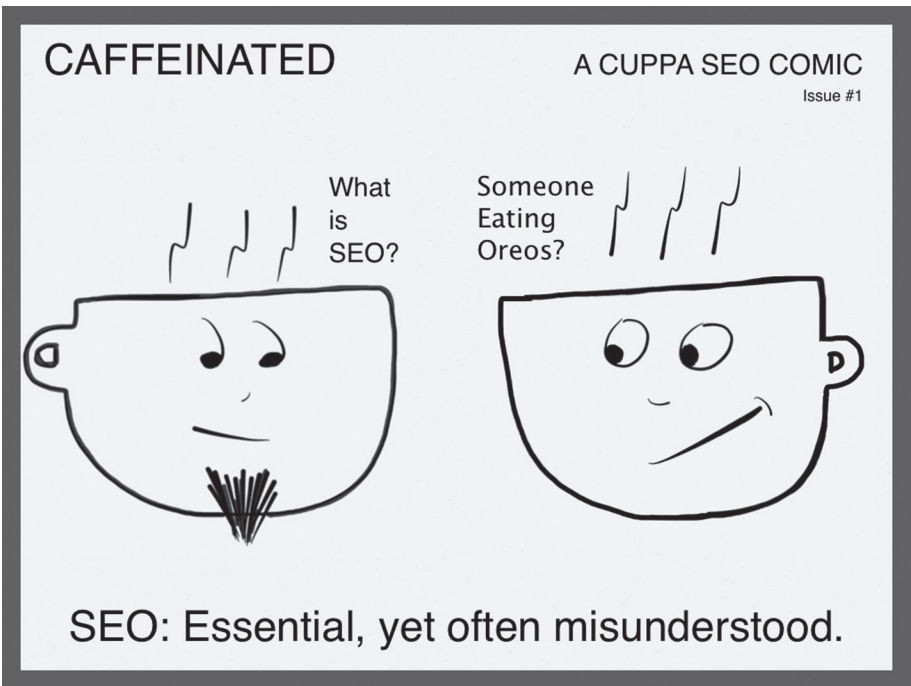


1. What is Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

Your holistic guide to online marketing begins with SEO. In a nutshell, SEO is a process that has the ability to improve the natural ranking of your website or blog in search results — leading to increased traffic, sales, customer engagement and overall growth. SEO is the connector between someone who’s making a specific query on Google (or another search engine) with websites and/or blogs that contain relevant information pertaining to the query.



We’ve all performed countless searches, right? And on the surface, it seems pretty simple. Someone performs a search — say with the keyword

“plumber” — and Google looks for and delivers results that are relevant to this keyword phrase. This, in and of itself, is no big news. But the question is, how does Google decide which results to list? And why do some sites or blogs rank higher than others?

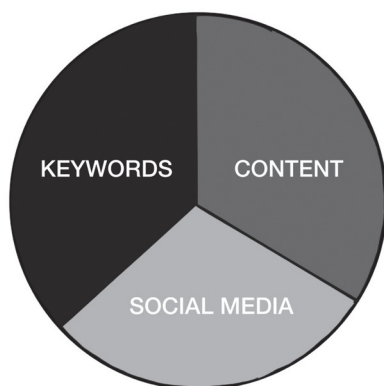
Search engine optimization is a large part of the answer to these questions. It plays a critical role in determining where a website or blog ranks in the natural (also referred to as “organic”) search results.

Let’s take a deeper look at how this works, and learn about ...

THE SEO PIE

Part of search engine optimization is the selection and strategic implementation of optimal keywords into your website content. Keywords account for approximately one-third of the SEO pie — a significant amount, for sure, but not a complete package by any means. In the past, keywords were a bigger piece of the pie. Then blogs and social media came along.

Now, effective SEO is broken into three major parts: keywords, content and social media. Together, they make up the SEO pie.



1. Keywords

You’ve probably heard the term “keywords” referred to more than once in relation to your website. And although you may know they’re a critical element in SEO, you may be wondering exactly what keywords are. Let’s take a look!

Keywords are terms or phrases that, when implemented into your website, can help connect you with people who are looking for what you do. In other words, when the keywords you use on your site are in alignment with the search terms people use to find the specific products or services you offer, there's a better chance Google will present your website higher in the search results.

For example, if you were a dentist in Los Angeles, CA, phrases like "Dentist," and "Dentist Los Angeles" would be good keywords because they're actually terms people use to find a dentist in Los Angeles, CA.

That said, the quality of your keywords makes a big difference in how effective they are. Many factors go into determining which keywords are best for your website and blog, including:

- The size of your site
- How long it's been around
- How many people are searching for a specific keyword phrase within the region(s) where you do business
- How much competition you'll be facing for that particular keyword or keyword phrase
- How relevant a keyword phrase is for your business or organization

Now that we've got a basic definition in place, let's dive deeper for a greater understanding of keywords.

Keyword Hierarchy

Let's start with what I call "keyword hierarchy," something I've developed over the years to help identify optimal keyword (and keyword phrase) usage.

Essentially, when optimizing content, you don't want to have just one keyword phrase that you hammer on ad nauseam. Instead, you'll want to create a well-rounded list of keyword phrases for every web page and blog post. Depending on the topic and the content length, this list could include 3–5 keyword phrases or more than a dozen.

No matter the length of the list, make sure every single phrase is relevant to the topic, service or product you "discuss" in your content. Some call

this “topic-based SEO,” among other things, but I just call it good writing. For instance, if you have a pet food store that caters to dogs, well-written copy won’t be limited to dog food. You’ll want to talk about food for puppies as well as for older dogs ... about different breeds of dogs and what foods might be best for them ... and don’t forget dog treats! You might even want to cover how the foods you sell affect not only canine general health, but also canine dental health. You get the idea. Well-rounded keyword usage helps produce well-rounded content that’s good for the human eye — and for SEO.

Primary, Secondary & Semantic Keywords

Once you’ve developed your list of keywords for a particular web page or blog post, you’ll need to decide which are primary, secondary and semantic, respectively.

- **Primary Keywords:** As “primary” indicates, these are the main keywords in your content. Sometimes you’ll determine them in advance; other times your organically written content will dictate them.
- **Secondary Keywords:** Used less often than primary keywords, these are still specific to the website page or blog post you’re optimizing.
- **Semantic Keywords:** Used only once or twice at most, these still play an important role in “rounding out” the relevance of the content.

As you can see, semantic and secondary keywords play a supporting role in the optimization of content. They’re good to use, but they don’t have the oomph that a main keyword has, typically for three reasons: 1) they have low search numbers; 2) they have high competition; 3) they’re not the main topic of the page, but they work tangentially to support the main topic. An SEO novice might use secondary and semantic keywords as main keywords — or might overlook them completely. In Part 2 of the book, we’ll dive deeper into primary, secondary and semantic keyword usage.

Long-tail Keywords

This is a fancy term for using keyword phrases that are typically three or more words long. Very often, what makes a keyword phrase long-tail is the fact that it has some “definers” or “qualifiers” in it, making it very specific.

For example, “dentist” is most likely going to be a strong keyword, no matter where your dental office is located. But I’ll bet it also has very high competition. Adding qualifiers to the keyword — “Dentist Madison WI” for example — makes it more specific and might have less competition from other area dental offices.

Case Study — First Choice Dental

First Choice Dental (FCD) is a local dental chain in Dane County, WI. In our work together, Cuppa SEO optimized dozens of First Choice Dental’s website pages and blog posts. Part of this optimization included implementing long-tail keywords in exactly the way I described above.

Take a look at the actual numbers (as of this writing), and you’ll see that the long-tail keyword is preferred over the short-tail keyword:

Keyword Phrase	Monthly Search in Madison WI	Competition	FCD Rank
Dentist	1,000	High	2 nd on page 1
Dentist Madison WI	880	Medium	1 st on page 1

As you can see, FCD ranks well on Google’s natural search results for both phrases, but it ranks better for the long-tail keyword: It’s easier to crush weaker competition!

A nice thing about long-tail keywords is that they often contain multiple short-tail keywords. In the example above, “Dentist Madison WI” actually contains, “Dentist,” “Dentist Madison,” and “Dentist Madison WI,” so it really packs a punch.

Keyword Density

The term “keyword density” is worth a quick mention here. Keyword density is what it sounds like: the number of times (density) a keyword phrase appears on a page compared with the total number of words on the page.

Over the years, I’ve heard SEO experts argue that a keyword phrase needs to occur a certain percentage of the time to be considered an actual keyword. Through testing, I’ve found this untrue. Although a keyword phrase typically needs to appear more than once within the content to be taken seriously by Google, it DOES NOT need to appear a certain percentage of

the time. That's no way to optimize — and that's no way to write good, relevant content. In Part 2 of this book, we'll take a step-by-step look at exactly *where* to implement your keywords, which is a critical component of solid SEO practices.

Another point of view is that it's *context* — not keyword occurrence rate — that's important. As you might have guessed, I agree that *context* is extremely important. When you're writing rich, relevant, helpful content, that's a third of the SEO pie. Of course, for content to meet all of these requirements, it has to make sense within the context of the page it's on as well as within the website or blog as a whole. Let's talk a bit more about content ...

2. Content

In plain terms, content is the copy (words) and imagery found on your website and blog. And, when it comes to content and SEO, there are two important factors to keep in mind.

The Relevance Factor

Just like a human, Google is judging your content and determining whether it's rich and relevant or boring and “thin.” Rich, relevant content helps each of your web pages and blog posts gain more authority in Google's eyes, which means ranking higher in search results. It also increases credibility and engagement with actual *people*, too.

Thin content accomplishes the opposite, and it might lead your website or blog toward what I call the “black hole of Google Panda” — never to be found in organic search results. The good news is that if you take the time to create quality content, your site is already partially optimized!

The Freshness Factor

Freshness is an important factor in how well your website ranks in natural search results on Google. But *where* you add that fresh content to your site is just as important as how rich, relevant and useful it is.

Many novice SEO practitioners will tell you that the best way to inject new content into your site is to “freshen up” your homepage and subpages with new copy and keywords — sometimes on a monthly basis.

Taking this approach on a well-optimized site will most likely backfire.

Why? Because once your site is well optimized, changing the SEO on your homepage or subpages is similar to changing your phone number every month: It makes no sense. Just as your customers depend on your phone number as a means to reach you, Google is depending on your optimized content to find you and connect you with individuals who need you. Once you change the SEO on a page, the result can often be going back to square one — losing some or all of your page authority (credibility) with Google.

In other words, unless something changes — like a service or product — or one of your pages starts to perform poorly, you'll want to leave well-optimized content alone on your home page and subpages.

So, if you need fresh content, where does it come from?

Fresh Content Comes from Your Blog

Use that blog of yours to generate the fresh content Google — and your viewers — are looking for. Adding a minimum of one blog post per week can do wonders for your “freshness factor.” Why? Because every time you publish a blog post, Google notices and gives your website credit for having some new, fresh content.

And, by the way, each blog post is excellent fodder for your social media efforts, too. Speaking of which, let's review ...

3. Social Media

Your social media efforts round out the SEO pie. Just as with your website and blog, you'll want to optimize each and every social media post you publish. This means you'll want to incorporate relevant keywords into each post.

It's important to note that platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter can help with business growth and relationship development, but it's Google My Business that holds the lion's share of SEO value in the world of social media.

In other words, consistently publishing posts through your Google My Business page can play a significant role in boosting your overall online

authority. Google has made itself extremely self-important in the social media world. Like it or not, Google My Business is an extremely critical platform in the SEO equation. My advice: Use it to your advantage.

At this moment, you might be feeling the urge to jump ahead to Part 4 of this book and begin implementing all of the social media optimization strategies. Resist the urge! Remember, your online marketing will be most effective if you stay true to implementing the strategies in this book in the order they're presented.

SEO Pie Recap

Addressing all parts of the SEO pie helps Google identify what you do, so when an individual searches for your services or products, you'll more likely show up closer to the top in natural search results as Cuppa SEO does in the following example. The better optimized your website, blog and social media efforts, the better chance you have of ranking high in these search results, which look like this ...

Search results for Cuppa SEO in Madison, WI. The page shows a map at the top, followed by a list of local business listings for Cuppa SEO, and a search result for Cuppa SEO: SEO Madison WI | Web Design | Search Engine ...

Annotations:

- Paid ads (Google Adwords) will sometimes appear here, at the top of the search results page.
- These are Google My Business listings, which typically appear when Google has regionally based search results for an inquiry
- Natural (unpaid) search results start here.

***Holistic Side Note:** Throughout this book, we'll be referring to Google as our primary search engine. The reason is simple: Google is king of all search engines. But don't worry about the others, because the strategies we're discussing here apply to all search engines.*

THE RAFT ANALOGY

Getting your website to appear at the top of search results can be compared to how a raft works. Let me explain ...

Imagine that you're embarking on a whitewater rafting expedition. You and five fellow adventurers are ready to brave the rapids — and probably get soaking wet!

What would happen if you took your un-inflated raft out of your car and threw it in the water? It would sink, right?

Before you get into your raft, you have to pump it up to the optimal number of pounds per square inch (PSI). With every pump of air, your raft comes closer to its optimal PSI, which makes the raft more and more *buoyant*.

Half pumped, some parts would probably be above water and others below, but the raft would not yet be ready to bear any weight. Once you've attained the optimal PSI, the entire raft will sit on the surface of the water — even with six people in it!

Your website, metaphorically speaking, is similar to a raft. It needs to be “pumped up” before it can rise to the top. But instead of air being the catalyst to bring it to the surface, your SEO efforts help your website become more buoyant.

Every well-optimized web page and blog post is like a pump of air into that raft, assisting with your website's “buoyancy factor.” The same is true for your social media efforts. Every optimized social platform, and every optimized post, is like a pump of air that improves the “PSI” of your website. As mentioned earlier, Google My Business is going to be the most influential channel for SEO value.

In Part 2 of this book, we'll be examining the many facets of a successful website. We'll lead the discussion by reviewing a step-by-step process for implementing SEO into every nook and cranny of your site. From creating a killer keyword report, to defining exactly where you need to implement SEO, you'll learn how to increase the buoyancy of your site for better visibility.

Part 2 will also address user experience (UX) and conversion strategies for your website. Speaking of UX, it just happens to be our next chapter. Ready to dive in?

