3 Steps To Improving Search Rankings

By Charity Hisle, Socially Engaged Marketing

Search Engine Optimization, SEO for short, is a term to describe the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to your website from search engines. Being on the first page is critical for every business because 94% of shoppers primarily click on the 1st-10th search results.

In order to improve visibility of a website within search results, companies can purchase Pay-Per-Click advertising. PPC, is a type of ad placed online. Ads are priced by the click and can be purchased over a set period of time. They are placed at the top of the results page and on the sides of the page.

Although many companies purchase ads, 70% of online searchers typically prefer organic search and click on those non-paid results more often. "Organic" simply means that the content within the website is relevant to the terms submitted. 60% of all clicks on organic search results are on those listed within the top 3 positions.

Search engines sort results based on algorithms that sift content in order to deliver the most relevant and valuable materials as quickly as possible. To generate organic SEO, start with keywords.

Step 1. Use Keywords and Phrases

Think of keywords and phrases as if they are website DNA. These words tell search engines what websites are related to one another and help searchers identify the type of content that can be found within the pages of websites.

Do you know which keywords are being used for your company's website? Here are the steps to checking on Safari, (other browsers are similar):

- Click View from the main menu
- Select View Source from the drop-down
- Click Edit from the main menu
- Select Find from the drop-down
- Type Keywords into the search box.

There should be a list of 10-20 words separated by comma's within the text following the highlighted term "keywords." If there are no search results or there are no keywords, please check another page within the website. If there are no keywords to be found, make a list of keywords and phrases and contact the webmaster of the website for immediate implementation.

What Are Keywords?

Keywords and phrases are the terms that the searcher types within the search engine to locate relevant content. Be as detailed as possible in the development of keywords and search local competitor's keywords.

Keywords and phrases should be similar to those you have selected for your website and used within all of your online marketing efforts. If you are starting from scratch, here are a few keyword tips:

- Location, location, location! Use the community name, neighborhood name, cross streets, city, county, and abbreviations.
- Amenities are good keywords. These keywords have been proven in the real estate industry: pets, pet friendly, fitness center, pool, balcony, patio, garage, gated, parking, fireplace, washer/dryer, and laundry.
- Other possible search terms could include furnished, utilities, schools, and names of landmarks.

Combine keywords in variations to create key phrases. For example: Pet friendly apartment Community in Hillcrest near I-40; or Gated apartments with washer/dryer near Downtown Charlotte.

Step 2. Implement a Digital Optimization Strategy

Once you have keywords and phrases selected, implement them within your community's digital assets. To put it simply, Digital Asset Optimization (DAO) is about naming and describing digital content online using keywords and phrases to help searchers locate the content online. Additionally, optimized content appears higher within search results and even improves search rankings of the websites that host the content.

All of these digital file types should be optimized, especially if they are online. Check the properties saved for each of these types of files to complete the information prior to posting online:

- PDFs – complete the title, author, subject, keywords, and additional metadata
- Videos – fill-in the title, description, and keywords
- Pictures (like floor plans, units and property photos) – should include the title, author, author title, description, rating, description writer, keywords, copyright status, notice and url

Optimize the names of all files that will be placed online or embedded within the website. Use dashes between words to signify a space, for example: Hillcrest-Oaks-Outdoor-Pool.jpg, or Hillcrest-Oaks-one-bedroom-apartment.jpg

Optimized videos dominate search results. They provide a significant advantage for search results on Google. In fact, using optimized video improves the odds of your website making the first page of Google search results by 53 times!

After optimizing video titles and descriptions with keywords and phrases, embed videos on your website. Use videos on your landing pages, within your website, on blogs, on social networks, and within presentations and emails.

> "If one picture equals a thousand words, one minute of video equals 1.8 million words."
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> ~ *Forrester, 2011*

Take the time to implement a digital optimization strategy today. Learn more about Digital Asset Optimization for property managers.

Step 3. Optimize Social Presences and Other Content Online

Optimizing Social Networks

Social networking presences are searchable and visible within search results. Facebook, in particular, has a very robust search feature. Increase the opportunity for your community to appear within the first page of Google search results by:

- Choose the right name for your accounts, keep them consistent with other social networking presences
- Claiming Url's – Choose your vanity url's wisely. They should be easy to remember and relevant to your community or local area.
- Use keywords within the company information and description
- Posted relevant updates, photos, videos, comments, and questions
- Link to and from the community website to build reciprocal links

Learn more about Optimizing Your Property Management Facebook Page.

Optimizing Websites, Blogs and Content

Today, people share 30 billion pieces of content on Facebook and over 5 billion tweets per month. Make the content on your website convenient to share online. Sharing indicates to search engines that the content is relevant and valuable and can dramatically affect regular search results.

Companies with a blog generate 55% more web visitors. Blogs are useful for generating web traffic because fresh, original content on the web is indexed and delivered quickly to searchers online. Here are a few steps to take when creating a blog and writing content:

- **Reciprocal Linking:** Link to and from your website to the blog. Linking online is like wearing a name tag to a family reunion; it will help search engines to determine the relationship between two or more websites.
- **Original Content:** Create content that readers will appreciate and value, that is relevant to your company and not overly promotional.
- **Keywords:** Use keywords and phrases within the content, in titles and headings, use within links/anchor text, and use within alt-tags for images.
- **Anchor Text:** Anchor text is the text that is used when creating a hyperlink to another place on the web. The words chosen to describe the link should represent the content within the linked page. Never link from the words "click here" or paste in lengthy url's.
- **Frequency and Consistency:** Blog at least once per week. Google has modified their search results to display the most current content closer to the top of the page.

Optimizing Classified Ads

While Craigslist will not improve your Google search results, it is important to use the right keywords and phrases within the content to improve the visibility of your ads within search results. Marketplace ads, syndicated by Oodle, may be viewed from multiple web locations. Keyword and phrase placement is critical for standing out above the competition. Be sure to use property management software that allows you to post vacancies to many sites on the Internet.

Use images with the correct naming convention, include information regarding the location of the community (neighborhood, cross streets, etc.) add links within the ads to the website, and list the top five amenities at the community.

Ratings Sites

According to the new survey "Getting Inside the Head of Today's Online Renter" from SatisFacts Research, 51.6% of renters check ratings and reviews websites. Check these sites regularly and reply to both positive and negative commentary.When responding to negative commentary leave out the name of your community. (Download this free eBook for more information about reputation management.)

Ratings sites provide an excellent opportunity to improve search rankings. SatisFacts Research also indicated that 62.5% of renters would post a positive comment on ratings sites upon request. However, only 8.8% have indicated that they have ever been requested to do so. Take the opportunity to request residents to share their positive experiences with others online. Provide links to do so from emails, social networking sites, blogs and websites.

Email Marketing Is Not Dead

Regardless of claims that email marketing is dead, this is a critical opportunity to improve inbound links to your website. Here are a few email tips:

- Improve email deliverability by using a quality opt-in list
- Try various subject lines and determine which ones work best
- Include calls to action that prompt readers to visit your website, leave a review or comment on a social networking status update

Internet Listing Services

In addition to using these techniques to boost search engine rankings, some Apartment Internet Listing Services can be helpful to your SEO efforts. Because the ILS's aggregate organic content and purchase keywords, they are able to successfully generate web traffic not only to their site but to their customers websites. Review reports carefully to determine your cost per lease and establish a minimum expected return on investment.

Learn more about Search Engine Optimization for property managers. ⊚

About the Author
Charity Hisle is a social media consultant, national speaker and trainer. After several years as a vendor in the Multifamily industry, Charity established Socially Engaged Marketing. She has rapidly become a leading provider of social media consulting and services. She is known for her innovative and unique insights on using social media strategies to attract and retain customers. Her previous experience includes managing a national blogging and social media services program for thousands of customers, directing new media integrated marketing initiatives, planning and implementing Internet marketing campaigns, e-mail marketing campaigns, e-commerce campaigns, and classified listings strategies. You can reach Charity on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter @CharityHisle or @SoEngaged.

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