



# Raise your website search-engine ranking

by Doug Knorr with Phil Callighan



## Turn It Around

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When a company wants to drive consumers to its website, Pay-Per-Click (PPC) often gets up to 80 percent of the budget. That's because PPC lets you control, quickly display, and begin measuring results. In last month's issue, we discussed PPC strategies, but you also need to understand the importance of Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

**Why? Some sources credit SEO with driving as much as 75 percent or more of all search-engine traffic to websites, while PPC is said to drive less than 15 percent of search traffic.** Others assert that "For

every single click on a paid search result, the organic (SEO) results generate 8.5 clicks."

Depending upon your objectives and the period of time in which you will accept results, SEO and PPC are both worth using.

Search engine (SE) users that click on PPC listings are often more qualified than organic SE responders. PPC responders know they are clicking on a paid listing and choose to do so because they want the information promised. That's like someone who stops racing through playback of a pre-recorded TV show to watch a commercial



because they want to see or learn about the item that's advertised.

However, over the long term, SEO can be more valuable than PPC.

**SEO is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to your website from search engines by enhancing "organic" ("natural" or "algorithmic") search results.**

SEO creates an easier path for people who don't know your store website URL to find you by looking for sites on a business category (furniture, for example), a product category (sofa, sectional, dining room table, etc.) or your store itself (for instance, Klingelhofer Furniture). They can use a website search engine such as Google, Yahoo, MSN or Ask for a fast, easy, no-cost way to find your website. You can take it from there.

**The goal of SEO strategies is simple but not necessarily easy. To have your website URL appear as one of the top five results, a search engine reports when someone queries your business category (furniture) or a product that you carry (sofas, sectionals, dining room tables, etc.).**

How important is this? Hugely important!

A Cornell University study conducted in 2006 used eye tracking and measuring clicks of search engine users to find that:

- The top three search engine results positions received over 80 percent of all clicks.
- Past the fifth position, the difference in attention and clicks between each of the rankings disappears, indicating that, once the user begins to

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scroll down the page of results, position becomes less of an issue.

- 98 percent of all users who clicked on a website did so in the first page of results.

**Bottom line: Although search engine websites do not charge for the organic results that are displayed as a result of a keyword query, it is vitally important that you invest in the time and talent to generate a high ranking on them.**

High SE rankings will help build confidence among SE users that you are a trusted resource. And SEO results won't end abruptly as they do when you stop investing in PPC.

Of course, due to the size of the home furnishings industry, the number of retail competitors and the global reach of the Internet, **you need to focus on producing SEO results that will help you rank high in your local target market.**

Since search engines match keyword queries to relevant content, *the content on your website* is what will determine how high you rank with local keyword queries.

This means that your website must contain the *local* phrases and the *original* content that identifies you and your store brand.

Your site must display relevant information and functionality that prospects and customers want.

Once your website has accomplished these tasks, you can begin to examine structural web design techniques that can improve your website SEO.

How do the search engines decide how relevant your site is to a query and therefore, how high on the page it appears? Most search engines browse the Internet in a methodical, automated manner called "web crawling" by means of robotic software called "spiders." They "read" your website to index relevant key words or subject matter.

**This methodology means that codes and numbers are largely ignored by these web crawlers. You must use descriptive text everywhere you can to assist search-engine indexing. However, search engine optimization isn't as easy as writing thousands of words about your products or store.**

Search engines frequently change the algorithms and formulas they use for indexing in order to ensure the relevancy of the results they report and defeat obvious attempts at tricking those results. The tips we're listing today may be less effective in the days ahead. Ultimately, SEO results are solely controlled by the search engines.

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# Tips to improve SEO



*Here are several structural do's and don'ts we recommend you consider for improving SEO:*

1. If you are developing a new website or a new landing page for your website that relates to a specific promotion or advertising campaign, include a relevant keyword or a keyword phrase in the URL of your website. For most of our home furnishings clients, we try to incorporate their store name, a store location or a brand positioning statement in their URL.

2. Avoid reserving multiple URLs that direct users to the same public website. Search engines will view this as multiple websites with duplicate content and this will diminish the relevance of any single URL.

3. Apply unique, descriptive titles to every page on your website. "traditional\_leather\_sofas\_" on a product page communicates much more clearly to search engine spiders than "PHP789\_23\_01"

4. Make your navigation intuitive — that is, naturally easy to follow. This could include employing the "breadcrumb" navigation technique. This refers to the appearance of links back to each previous page that the user navigated through in order to get to the current page. Another technique is repeating drop-down navigation lists by having them appear on pages.

How important is it to have your website URL appear as one of the top five results?

**Hugely important!**

5. Write effective anchor text: the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink. Search engines read this text, so you need to use descriptive words, not code, to define and tell search engines something about the page or site to which you are linking.

6. Optimize the images on your website. All images can have a distinct filename and "ALT" attribute. Take advantage of them both. The "ALT" attribute is especially helpful if a user is viewing your site on a browser that doesn't support images, or is using alternative technologies, such as a screen reader. In these cases, the contents of the "ALT" attribute become visible and provide information about the picture. It's also a good idea to store all your website images in a centralized directory of their own. This helps if someone is searching "picture of sofa," "picture of eight-way hand tied", "picture of your furniture store," etc.

7. Include an HTML site map on your website. Sitemaps can be a good tool for giving the SE "spiders" a direct link to all of your pages and for users to see everything you have on your site

8. Reference free webmaster tools. Major search engines, including Google, provide free tools for webmasters. Google's Webmaster Tools help webmasters better control how Google interacts with their websites and get useful information from Google about their site.





There are several techniques you can employ outside of your own website that will enhance SEO. We advise you to:

- Add your business to Google's Local Business Center. This connects you to local searches in your community and surrounding towns.
- Blog about your store, products, or services where you reference your store and always include links to pages within your website. Your organic ranking improves when search engines recognize that other websites link to your site.
- Write a page on the free encyclopedia, Wikipedia, about your business or edit a Wikipedia topic if your business is considered a reference. Anyone can edit a Wikipedia page but your original or edited work must generally include references to third-party articles or websites in order to justify your comments.
- Link to relevant, related websites and seek reciprocal links. Consider including the websites of furniture manufacturers with whom you do business as well as any professional organization or association to which you belong.
- Participate in social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. Many of your customers have already signed up to participate in these sites. The sites are built around user interaction and sharing and make it easy to match interested groups of people and relevant content.

These social network sites also make it easy for you to invite people to join a group you create about your business (Friends of John Doe Furniture Store, for example) and to push out emails to them when you have something important to say.

A word of caution, though. Participating in online social networks doesn't mean advertising or selling so much as listening and replying to consumer opinions and reviews.

Feedback you receive from consumers on these websites might not be exactly what you want to hear. However, these social websites can help you genuinely understand what consumers want and how they react to any new product introductions or changes you make at your store.

If you participate in these social websites, plan to monitor your presence there weekly, if not daily, in order to participate in a meaningful way.

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## SEO plays a critical role in the "click and brick" strategy you need to reach today's empowered consumers,

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If you're accustomed to the immediate results of PPC, remember that you must have patience with SEO. SE indexing of a website takes time.

Depending upon the legacy investment in successful SEO strategies made by your local competitors, compared to the investment and extent of the SEO steps you take, it may easily take three to nine months to see some SEO improvement.

All told, it may take up to 12 months for your website to bump top competitors from historically high rankings. And, that's only if your competitors aren't vigilant about updating their websites and protecting their SE ranking turf.

Yet, the payoff of a successful SEO campaign can give you the greatest return on every dollar you invest. So don't get discouraged.

SEO plays a critical role in the "click and brick" strategy you need to reach today's empowered consumers, build your brand and drive them into your store.

Start improving your website search engine results today and you will turn it around in 2009! 