Five Common Misconceptions About SEO by Trevor Southwold

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Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a mercurial industry and standards are changing all the time. Techniques that worked years, or even months, earlier regularly fall out of favour as the system evolves and search engine algorithms change. In this climate of constant change it is unsurprising that many people misunderstand what search engines want. Here are five common misconceptions about SEO.

1. Invisible Text Works

When keyword stuffing led to some web sites being manually reported to search engine operators, some unscrupulous web site owners came up with an ingenious solution: use 'invisible text', e.g. white text on a white background or black text on a black background, so that search engines - but not human beings - could read the words. This meant that early search engine crawlers found sites to be relevant to certain key terms even when the visible body text was about something very different. Today's search engine crawlers are more intelligent and can recognise when a web site shows one thing to its readers and another to the crawlers.

2. Keyword Stuffing Works

To make this explicitly clear from the outset, keyword stuffing does not work. In the distant past of search engine optimisation it did, but search engine operators did not take long to realise that this led to a poor user experience and therefore had to change. Search engine algorithms now count repeated key words as a percentage of the body text and will penalise web pages that exceed a predetermined proportion.

3. On-page SEO Wastes Time

Some search engine optimisation companies claim that on-page optimisation is a waste of time and resources. While it is true that consistent link building produces a greater impact on search engine rankings, the importance of on-page SEO should not be underestimated. Think of off-page SEO as a skyscraper and on-page SEO as the foundation: the foundations may represent a small part of the whole, but without them, building the skyscraper is impossible.

4. Link Building is All About Numbers

Many SEO companies still work on the outdated assumption that link building is all about numbers. Like many other SEO techniques, this one used to work - but search engine algorithms are increasingly good at understanding quality. Spamming thousands of blogs using a computer program might produce hundreds of links but they will mostly be of a low quality. Low quality links pass little value to their destination web page - and to make matters worse, search engines may penalise web sites that engage in what appear to be deliberate link building initiatives. Link building is about quality as much as quantity.

5. Targeting Competitive 'Head Terms' is Better

There is a distinction to be made between 'head terms' (usually short terms with high competition) and 'long tail terms' (usually longer terms with low competition), but many SEO companies wrongly assume that head terms are better. Although head terms have the benefit of high search volume, they also have the disadvantage of heavy competition and they do not necessarily convert well to

sales. Search users who enter nonspecific head terms are often looking for general information rather than to make purchases.

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