



IREON Insights: Search Engine Optimization - by AJ Sonnick

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In today's digital age, if your business isn't leveraging Search Engine Optimization (SEO), you're missing out on one of the most impactful ways to grow your brand, build trust, be a leader/voice in your field, increase traffic, and drive conversions. The importance of SEO goes far beyond simply ranking for your business's name — it's about being discovered for the solutions you offer, by people who may not know your name yet.

What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of improving your website's visibility on search engines like Google. The goal is to rank higher for relevant keywords so that when potential customers search for terms related to your business, your website appears at the top of the results. Over the years, SEO has evolved significantly with Google's algorithms becoming increasingly sophisticated. Ranking well in today's environment requires a multifaceted approach.

There are four key components to SEO, and understanding them will help you see the full picture:

1. Technical SEO; 2. On-Page SEO; 3. Off-Page SEO; and 4. Content Strategy.

1. Technical SEO

This is the foundation of your website's ability to rank. It involves optimizing the behind-the-scenes aspects of your site that affect how search engines crawl and index your content. You can have the most beautifully designed website in the world, but with poor technical SEO, you're setting yourself up for SEO failure.

Things like how your site is coded, whether it is mobile-friendly, how fast it loads, and whether it uses an SSL certificate (i.e., <https://>) all fall under technical SEO. Google even indicated that page speed is crucial, with every millisecond making a difference in how they rank websites.

Ensuring that your website is technically sound is crucial because no matter how great your content is, if your website is slow, not optimized for mobile, or lacks security features, search engines will penalize it in the rankings. It's like trying to run a marathon in flip-flops; you need the right shoes to compete.

2. On-Page SEO

On-page SEO refers to the optimization of individual pages on your website to rank higher and earn more relevant traffic. This includes everything from optimizing title tags, meta descriptions, header tags, and images to ensuring your content is valuable and relevant to your audience.

Google's algorithms prioritize high-quality, original content that satisfies user queries. It's not enough to throw together a few sentences loaded with keywords — a tactic known as keyword stuffing, which Google now penalizes. Instead, your content should be engaging, informative, and truly helpful to the user. Google's Helpful Content Update in recent years, with another big update in August 2024, has only reinforced the importance of original content that addresses users' needs.

Focusing on a variety of keywords beyond just your branded terms is essential. It's important to rank for keywords related to the services you offer. For example, if you run a plumbing business, ranking for keywords like "emergency plumbing services" or "best commercial plumber NYC" will attract far more traffic than simply ranking for your business name. You want to position yourself as the solution to the problems your potential customers are facing.

3. Off-Page SEO

Off-page SEO is all about building your website's authority and reputation. It refers to activities that happen outside of your website, like earning backlinks from reputable sources, engaging in social media, and building brand trust. High-quality backlinks from authoritative websites act as a vote of confidence in the eyes of search engines, signaling that your website is trustworthy and should rank higher. By having a content strategy and providing high-quality content on your site, others will want to share this or link to this.

For businesses, this can mean cultivating relationships with partners, getting featured in industry publications, or even guest posting on other blogs. It's about spreading your presence across the web to boost your credibility.

4. Content Strategy

Content strategy is intertwined with SEO. It's not just about creating one piece of content and hoping it ranks well. It's about consistently producing valuable, relevant content that answers the questions and needs of your audience. Articles, video content, case studies, and guides are all ways to create content that not only engages your audience but also signals to search engines that your site is active and relevant.

Creating content around high search volume, industry-relevant keywords can be a game-changer. These keywords represent what people are actively searching for, so targeting them can drive more traffic and qualified leads to your site.

I did SEO. Am I done?

At the end of the day, SEO is no longer optional — it's essential. Google likes websites that are constantly kept up to date, adding more useful content on an ongoing basis. It's one of the most effective ways to build long-term visibility and authority online. SEO is not one and done. It's something that must be ongoing.

I'm on board with SEO, but I'm not sure where to begin?

Work with your in-house marketing team or a marketing agency partner to get started. They should start by evaluating your current SEO from technical to on-page. Focus on keywords that are high-search volume, and plan a content strategy for existing content, and developing new content. Don't try to rank for keywords that users aren't searching for. Tools such as SEM Rush or Ahrefs for example can provide you with this information. This will help lay the foundation for a successful SEO strategy.

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