

A WINNING TRIUMVIRATE

CONTENT. MARKETING AUTOMATION. SEO

Every marketer has heard it often enough: in the new era of digital marketing, **content is king**.

From enterprise brands to mid-market players to small businesses, companies in every industry woo customers and close deals through emails, blog posts, white papers and websites carefully architected for relevance and appeal.

While benefiting from this new paradigm involves a certain amount of skill and effort, adopting the right approach can pay dividends. Never before have marketers enjoyed such a rich opportunity to attract, nurture and convert leads through such a diverse variety of channels – nor have they had access to the precise and useful metrics content marketing can offer.

Two of content marketing's chief underpinnings, of course, are marketing automation and search engine optimization (SEO). By delivering targeted information to prospects at the right time, marketing automation coaxes leads through the sales funnel, from initial engagement to purchase. SEO attracts them to that funnel through keywords and phrases aligned with the prospect's behavior and interests.

These days, both SEO and marketing automation are essential tools in every serious marketer's toolbox. Yet many marketers make two serious errors in using them. The first is that, in their eagerness to capitalize on SEO, a lot of companies stuff their digital content full of excessive keywords, leading to disjointed and clunky writing. Not only can this backfire with search engine spiders, but such awkward content tends to alienate readers, thereby destroying the relevance and engagement the marketing automation was designed to create.

The second error is compartmentalizing SEO and marketing automation. Too many companies view and utilize them as separate functions and processes. The reality is they can and should work in tandem and drive improvements in each other. Just as marketing automation works hand-in-hand with a CRM system, SEO and marketing automation can function as one synergistic and mutually beneficial system; marketers who keep them separate are leaving ROI on the table.

While some marketers know this, many aren't sure if they can maximize SEO through marketing automation without sacrificing the quality of their content. The truth is anyone can – but it requires diligence and an intelligent strategy.



SEO STRATEGY: THE QUEST FOR CONVERSION

Since the day Search Engine Optimization was coined as a phrase, companies have relentlessly sought to optimize their digital assets for maximum exposure and appeal.

The goal of SEO is simple: **To boost both a site's visibility and visitor conversion.**

By incorporating the right keywords, companies hope to rise in search engine results pages (SERP) and generate leads from the resulting web site visitors.

Keywords

Keywords are used beyond search engine traffic as well; once a visitor is on a web page, keywords can be used to lure the prospect to other pages. To that point, additional behaviors, such as viewing a video or downloading an eBook, further lead them into the funnel.

Choosing the right keywords, and structuring content to appeal to search engines, is where the strategy can get a bit complicated. Smart SEO practices must analyze how search engines work, what topics people search for on which search engines and the actual terms and phrases they type into those engines.

Once marketers feel confident in this knowledge, they must then structure a site's content, HTML and coding to both increase its relevance to specific keywords and to eliminate any barriers to a search engine's indexing functions. Experienced marketers will also try to boost their site's visibility by increasing the number of inbound links from other sites, or backlinks, to rise higher in search results.

To make all of this even more complex, SEO efforts must be ongoing. The leading search engines, such as Google, Bing and Yahoo, can and do change their algorithms frequently, and assess a number of different factors when "crawling" web site pages. Given that search engine algorithms can evaluate literally dozens of elements on a site, enticing a consistently high flow of traffic means staying current on high-response keywords and SEO strategies.



COMMON SEO MISTAKES

When SEO is done right, the rewards are impressive.

High traffic, qualified leads, brand visibility: there's no doubt strategic optimization can be a marketer's best friend. Yet plenty of companies take a thoughtless or ill-informed approach to SEO that ends up harming them more than it helps.

By focusing on SEO as the only vital element in building high-value sites, these companies dismiss the content that houses it as nothing more than a formality. The truth is search engines are sophisticated enough to recognize this tactic – and so are readers. Sites that make the below mistakes will pay a price in both visitors and engine rank.

Using the wrong keywords.

All too often a marketer will assume using the most common keyword will draw the biggest traffic. If anything, it buries a website beneath the competitors already using that keyword. An important step is to brainstorm keywords to come up with original words and phrases that appeal to targets. Tools like Google Suggest or Soovle can help with this in a matter of moments.

Duplicate content.

Businesses that don't bother to create fresh and organic content tend to end up creating repetitive content that uses the same topics or keywords. Not only will this annoy readers, but this kind of recycling is quickly recognized and penalized by search engine spiders. For true search engine recognition, original and varied content is required.

Keyword stuffing.

This is probably the most common mistake marketers make when trying to optimize their sites: using as many keywords as possible, while building only the barest excuse of a content framework to use them in. Headlines, subheads and titles will sound repetitive, while page text will sound wooden at best and nonsensical at worst. Once again, this is a behavior easily recognized by spiders, and can damage your search rankings. Search engines know when they're being manipulated and penalize accordingly.

Incorrect keyword usage.

Often marketers will do research on the smartest keywords for their site, yet still fail to attract traffic. The most common reason for this is using the keywords incorrectly. For example, using generic titles, or not using keyword phrases high in the page text or in the headlines. Keywords must be well-placed to do their job. Frequency is also critical; if a keyword is used too many times, search engines may penalize a site; but if it's not used enough, it is irrelevant. One trick is publishing enough content to justify repeating a keyword several times.

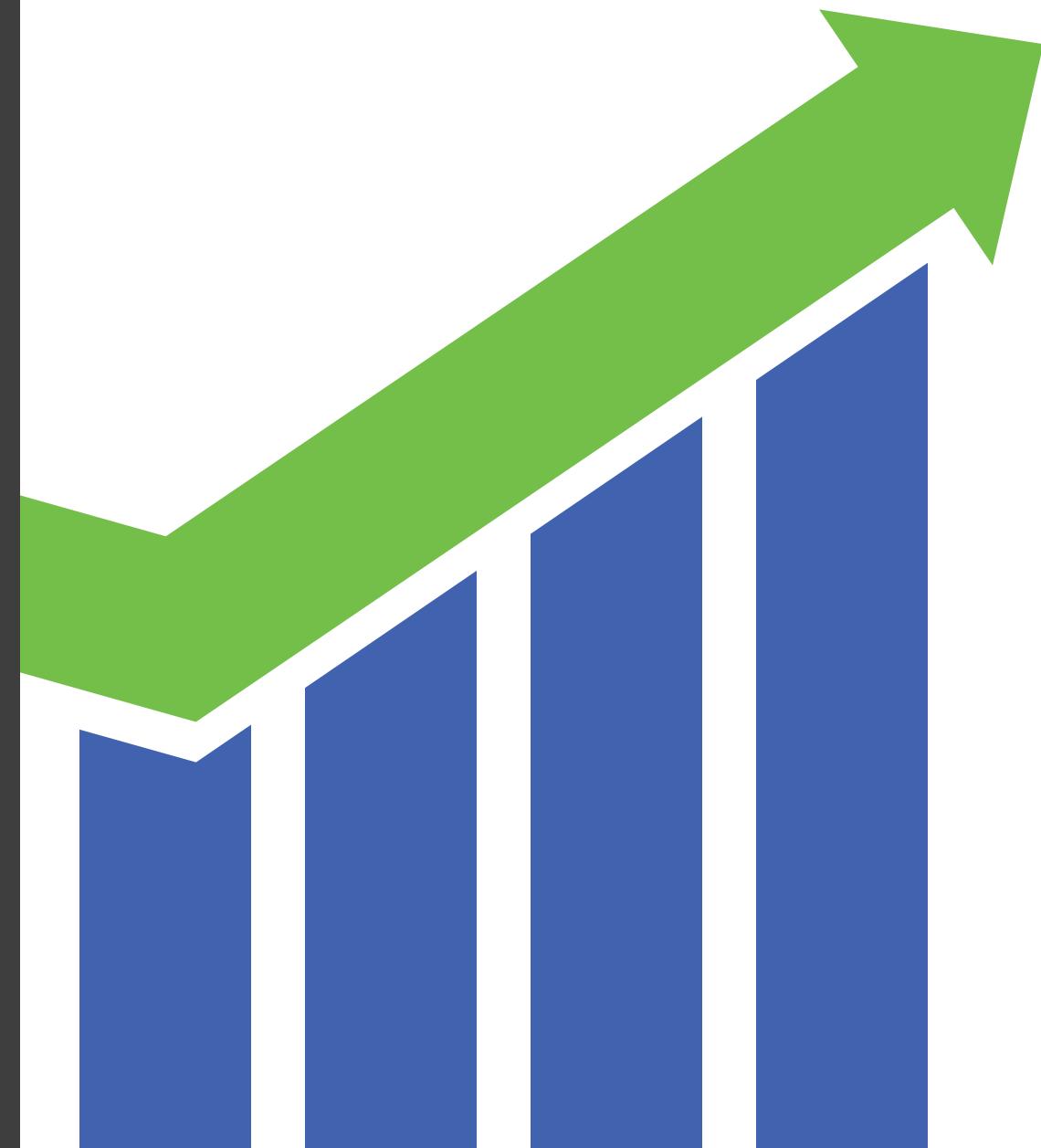
Maximizing ROI

INTEGRATING SEO, CONTENT & MARKETING AUTOMATION

If you've actively implemented a marketing automation system, you're probably using it in emails, landing pages and lead nurturing programs, among other channels. This can seem disconnected from SEO at first, because automation is normally seen as pushing leads through the funnel, while SEO is seen as attracting those leads.

Yet your marketing automation system can provide valuable information for your SEO strategies and vice versa. An examination of your metrics can identify lead sources and tell you where your leads are finding and evaluating you. By capturing search behavior data, you acquire a wealth of knowledge on your leads' interests and intentions, which assists in tailoring both your keywords and your automated content with more relevance and precision. Similarly, a look at the results of previous content campaigns should give you an idea of what keywords work with which demographics.

Furthermore, a good marketing automation system should offer reports that allow you to connect keywords to closed deals. From there, marketers must maximize their SEO strategy and content development; for instance, if a certain keyword is performing above all others in attracting traffic and initiating purchases, not only should the site's SEO be tweaked accordingly, that phrase should be utilized in other content such as ads, email campaigns, newsletters and more.



Maximizing ROI

INTEGRATING SEO, CONTENT & MARKETING AUTOMATION

The following strategies can help marketing automation, content and SEO work together for maximum ROI.

Develop engaging content.

If your content is dull or clumsy, all the SEO in the world won't matter, because readers won't be motivated to stay or revisit your site. Instead of viewing content as a required platform to house the SEO, see it as an opportunity to create an appealing and relevant site your target market will enjoy. Use your data to define your audience, then create high-value content your targets will find interesting and helpful.

Use keywords strategically.

Instead of stuffing each page full of keywords, pick one or two phrases or words for each. If it's critical to use a variety of keywords, create a separate page for each and optimize accordingly by using them in the page titles, headers and page text. The trick is to make sure they read naturally and not like an SEO platform. In blog posts, eBooks and white papers, the optimal density is 0.5% to 1.5%, which works out to about one usage per every two to three paragraphs.

Produce new content on a regular basis.

Search engine spiders reward sites that frequently change and update their content. In practice, this means four blog posts containing each keyword once are preferable to one post that uses the keyword four times. Creating ongoing content that uses your keywords is the best way to improve your search engine rankings; a steady supply of fresh content also is more likely to inspire backlinks to your site from credible web sites, which further boosts your popularity with search engines.

Use specific keyword phrases.

Generic phrases and words will get drowned out amidst the digital competition. But specific and longer phrases can perform well in targeted search engine results. Instead of using an umbrella phrase such as "web developer" that could apply to literally millions of search results, try "Monroe County web developer." If you think about it, it makes sense: people who search for specific phrases over vague or generic phrases usually know what they want and are more likely to act on their research.

Use dynamic landing pages. Dynamic landing pages are where SEO and marketing automation work perfectly together. Just as you optimize your sites with traffic-generating keywords, dynamic landing pages allow you to create pages that change in response to whatever ad or search phrase led the reader there. While offering tailored and relevant content can boost conversion rates, dynamic pages also offer the ability to measure the effectiveness of your campaigns.

Speak your prospect's language.

Too many marketers think in their own industry's jargon and come up with keywords that make sense to within their industry, but leave their prospects cold. Once again, tools like Google Suggest or Soovle can tell you exactly what words and phrases your customers use to search. But it's also helpful to ask the same questions marketers have always asked: What are the audience demographics? What challenges do they face? What do they respond to? Adopting your customer's perspective and vocabulary is key to selecting the right keywords.

Go off the beaten path.

One obvious obstacle many businesses face is that they and their competitors are using the same keywords. One solution for this is to find a popular search term that is just disconnected enough from your business that your competitors probably won't be using it, yet is still of interest to your visitors. Structuring a web page or sidebar section around it means you can "own" that keyword and tap into its popularity without sharing it with your competitors.

The evolution of content marketing

Content marketing is here to stay and so is the timeless cycle of sales and marketing. Yet the strategies for attracting, nurturing and converting leads will doubtlessly evolve along with emerging technologies and new tools. Algorithms will change, indexing standards will alter, and marketing automation capabilities may expand to target leads and customers with more power and precision than ever before.

This means that SEO and marketing automation strategies will need to evolve right along with all of it. Marketers will need to stay informed, and adjust their practices accordingly. For now, the most intelligent approach to integrating SEO, marketing automation and content marketing should involve three steps: continually producing fresh content, conducting ongoing keyword research, and analyzing the results of both SEO and marketing automation strategies to drive better performance in both.



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ABOUT



LeadMD combines the resources of a digital marketing agency with revenue focused sales and marketing alignment strategy, all through the use of on-demand cloud technology. Creating, managing and converting quality leads in higher numbers is how we enable our clients to out perform their competitors and out market their peers.

The most effective way to engage more prospects and convert better leads is through Conversational Marketing. At LeadMD, we will help your team leverage email and online channels to build buyer trust and engagement through cutting edge technology such as Marketing Automation. When your focus is on building a demand generation process that truly drives revenue, it's time to engage LeadMD and fix your funnel.