

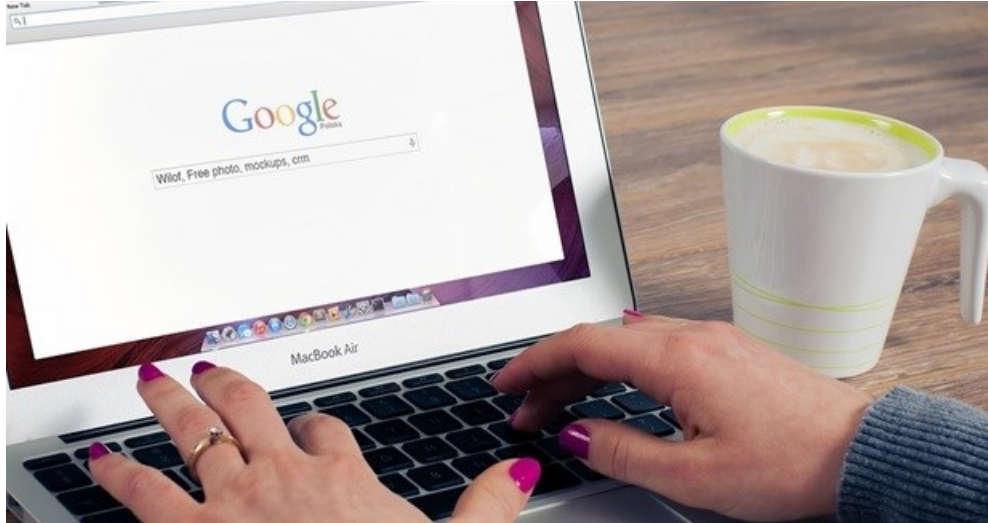
The fallacy of the magic of SEO



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In my few years as an SEO practitioner (I refuse to use the word "expert") I have consistently met with two extreme sets of people when it comes to using SEO to grow their business. The first is those who believe that SEO is the magic to their business growth and the second is those who believe that SEO cannot work for their business.



So today I want to talk about the fallacy of the SEO magic.

In between these two extremes is the other set of people who have luckily managed to use search engine optimisation to grow their business. A lot of brands, both big and small, will tell you their success stories.

If you fall into the middle of this extreme, you are lucky. However, if you find yourself in either of the two mentioned categories, then I hope that by the time you have finished reading this piece, you will begin to have a mindset shift that will help you make use of this powerful means of growing your business.

Optimising your business

Let us take these two cases one after the other. The first set of people are those who have been led to believe that the only thing they need to do to ensure their business growth online is to optimise it.

I was in a talk recently with a particular brand who wanted to grow their business online. To them, they were better than

their competitors, but they were desperate for growth and sales. They were looking for what could help them achieve this and, of course, organic traffic – aka SEO – was one of the things they were told to implement.

Once I got the briefing, the stop sign was “we are desperate to make sales”. These are not the kind of words you want to hear, especially if you intend to depend on only SEO for that. So we sat down and I started taking them through some analysis. We looked at a lot of things, amongst which were:

- How much traffic are you receiving on a monthly basis? This particular website gets about 500 monthly visitors.
- How many right keywords are you ranking for? There were no visible keywords on their website. In short, no optimisation had been done in the past.

As we began to look through these factors carefully, one after the other, and compared the brand with their competitors' data, it began to dawn on them that for their immediate sales needs, SEO is not their best strategy.

You may want to ask me, “Are you saying SEO cannot bring me sales immediately?” My answer is yes.

Search Engine Optimisation works in a different way from other marketing channels especially PPC or direct sales marketing.

For SEO to work for you, you must:

- First rank the right keyword. The first rule of the game is that your website must appear on the first page of Google for the right keyword you are targeting. This is because about 75% of the total searches for a particular keyword go to the first five websites listed on the first page.
- Optimising your website will not make you rank on the first page of Google. Links are important for ranking. Therefore, you must build the right kind of links to make you rank for the right keyword that can bring money to your website.
- Improve conversion on those keywords. Ranking on the first page is just the baby step. The next step is to increase conversion from the keywords you are ranking for. Conversion optimisation is a huge field, but the first conversion optimisation you want to implement is to increase the click through rate from Google search engine result pages.
- Increase sales and revenue. As you begin to rank for the right keywords and drive people to the right pages, then you can start looking at your sales and revenue from those keywords and see how you can increase or improve your sales rate.

This process takes time, a lot of hard work and a working strategy. It does not happen overnight. If it happens overnight, then it must just be pure magic or damn luck. That is why in online marketing, we say “creativity plus hard work equals success.”

A negative view on SEO

Let us now look at the other set of people – those who believe SEO can never work for them.

I have met very few people on this side of the divide. They believe so much in the power of their marketing activity, which sometimes is offline or paid advertisements, that they do not have time to consider SEO.

Who wants to wait for 6-12 months before they begin seeing results? Not them.

Usually they are the business who:

- Have big brands
- Have access to funds
- Are local businesses
- Have been burnt in the past

Let us address this reason again one after the other.

Big brands: I come from a location, Nigeria, where online marketing is just taking shape. If you take a look at the results you see today on Google.com.ng, you are sometimes tempted to laugh at people who say links are the major ranking factors (even the Google representative at the last SMX conference confirmed this).

Let me prove my point with these two scenarios.

Take a look at the website ranking at the top position for the keyword 'car loans'. You will realise that the only reason they are able to do that is because they have that word in the title tag. Another example is the keyword "give birth in USA". The website ranking for the top two positions is an online forum.

Therefore, big brands who have successfully penetrated their segment of the market through traditional marketing methods, and through their access to funds, will find it easier to continue to do so. At worst, they will invest in paid advertisements, because they do not have enough time and data to help them understand the value of SEO.

Local businesses: If you are a local player and you are still playing with the fact that you do not need SEO, then you are already late to the market. A few weeks ago, I was driving around town with my wife and we needed a place to conduct a scan.

We had our own scan centre, but unfortunately they moved and we were not aware (scans are not an everyday thing) so we had two options: forget about it or look up an alternative place. Of course, right there and then, my wife took out her phone and started searching.

If there was any small business around offering that service, which had good optimisation done on their web property, we would definitely pay them a visit.

Burnt in the past: These are the people I personally feel for on this side of the divide. Sometimes, through an act of commission or omission, they have had bad experiences in the past and are not willing to give SEO a try again.

SEO is a field that keeps changing and the tactic of yesterday may not be appropriate for today. So giving your SEO project to just anyone without understanding how SEO works or who does not have the required level of experience, may just be a recipe for disaster.

Conclusion:

SEO is no magic and it is not something done in the secret corner of a dark room. Search optimisation can work for your business if you remember these facts:

- SEO takes time to mature. If you want fast results, use PPC.
- Choosing the right SEO company may save you money and many headaches down the line.
- SEO may have the greatest conversion rate among other online marketing channels, but ranking for the right keyword is just the first step in a gigantic mix of strategy that can grow your business.
- When in doubt, and whether SEO is working for you or not, like my mother always says, "Trust your gut."

ABOUT ADEGBOYE ADENIYI

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