

# What is SEO and why does your South African brand need it?

 By [Stephen Sandmann](#)

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So what is SEO (search engine optimisation)? What does SEO mean for brands in South Africa? Is SEO really a mysterious digital marketing discipline or service?

I believe that SEO is an evolving digital art; a means of developing a website, improving its usability, optimising its content and spreading the word on the Internet. When I refer to optimising, it means to create content that offers clarity to the user in a South African and global context.

## SEO can do wonders for your brand

A high visibility in Google's search results equates to an increase in brand recognition to a large degree. A high-ranking website is usually seen as a sign of authority and credibility in your brand's South African marketplace.

Google searches are driven by a goal; users use a search engine to find information about a product or service they either want or need. Well-executed SEO will drive relevant traffic to your website, which should significantly increase the conversion rate (the rate at which users take a desired action) such as completing a Contact Us form, making a purchase or requesting a quote.



Google provides brands with access to each stage of the consumer's buying cycle. In brief, consumers will search out information at each stage of the buying cycle. So, by targeting different keywords associated with each stage of the buying cycle, you can effectively access these consumers.

## The mechanics of the Google search engine

The Google search engine selects the best possible websites to appear in their result pages for their users' queries. To quote Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google: "We believed we could build a better search. We had a simple idea, that not all pages are created equal. Some are more important."

Your content must match what your target market wants or needs; in other words, your content strategy should be centred on relevance to the user and the brand. When your audience is searching via Google for the service or product your brand offers, don't let a competing brand take that potential lead; effectively executed SEO will significantly reduce the chances of this happening.

Google has taken this to an advanced level with their latest algorithm called Hummingbird. According to Google: "The Hummingbird algorithm is more focused on ranking sites better for relevance. The algorithm can better understand concepts vs. words as well as relationships between concepts. It's essentially to better answer the much more complex queries people are making."

Brands spend a great deal of money on above-the-line or traditional advertising which often display the brand's website address/URL or just promotes the website in the form of a TV ad, on a billboard or in a print ad. In today's digital world, I feel brands should be spending more on digital advertising, especially SEO, as what is the point of having a brilliant website if no one can find it! While the above-the-line advertising can and does help drive organic traffic, the website must be streamlined for the highest potential ROI.

One of the most salient quotes, which describes the importance of SEO, is from a whitepaper: 'SEO Keyword Strategy' by SEOMap: "The prime real estate is in the middle of the (search result) page, as search engines display the websites they deem to be the most trusted and most relevant to the user for that query. Consequently, being perceived as the most trusted and most relevant website for a particular search can be a lucrative source of traffic."

This illustrates the power of a high-ranking organic search result page listing. In reality, this means that the user is more likely to click on the organic search link to your website. In most cases, paid traffic accounts for only a fraction of website traffic when compared to organic search traffic.

## SEO's cost-effectiveness

For one of our clients, SEO assisted in supplying an additional 90,000+ additional potential leads to their website, in just over two weeks. Because these visits came from organic search, our client was not billed for each of these visits to their website, as would have been the case with paid search.

When it comes to SEO, you only have to pay for your website to be maintained to the highest levels of content quality. The latter could provide users with the best possible experience, which you should be doing anyway. SEO is a very efficacious way in improving your brand's long-term online performance.

The final component to consider is to select the right digital agency to provide you with an effective SEO service. Don't simply take digital agency's or SEO Strategists' word for it either - the proof is in the pudding after all. So take a look at some of the relevant digital agency's case studies and work before you sign your brand up for SEO.

## Sources:

Google. 'SEO Keyword Strategy' (2012). Retrieved from [seomap.com](http://seomap.com) 14 December 2013.

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## ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

Stephen Sandmann is a Senior Digital Strategist at Quirk. He has a keen interest in everything digital.

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