

'Those' SEO Secrets...

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I've been doing SEO in South Africa for 10 years. One of the questions I get asked a lot is, "What quick things can I do to get to the top of Google?"

The answer to this question is that you can do a lot and it's easier than you might think:

- You can simply ensure that your on-site SEO is adequate
- Your targeted keyword is in the site title, description, H1 tag and content
- All your images' ALT text and your page URLs contain your keyword
- Your site is getting plenty of links from automatic article directory submissions, maybe some site-wide footer links and forum/blog comments. You could even exchange links with other websites or pay for them.

The above strategy is how easy it was to rank globally for your chosen keyword back in 2009, and this strategy still seems to work just fine for most SEOs in South Africa.



Now for the bad news...

In case you didn't know, 'those' secrets don't really work anymore; certainly not in today's global SEO game. South African businesses that utilise SEO as part of their marketing strategy need to be aware that Google's algorithm is a lot more sophisticated these days and it won't be long before Google starts to pay more attention to how SEOs are optimising for the South African SERPs (Search Engine Results Page).

Certainly, the last bullet point above is not a recommended tactic today, and could get your site in deep trouble with Google.

The [annual organic ranking-factors report by Search Metrics](#) highlights approximately 50 of what are deemed to be the most influential signals currently at play, all contributing in varying amounts to how sites fair in the organic SERPs.

If you really want to outperform your peers online, chances are that you're going to need to build a medium to long-term strategy that addresses as many of these signals as possible. You will need to prove to search robots and users that your website and content really does deserve to be more visible than that of your competitors.

There is hope!

With the bad news out of the way, it is worth mentioning that there are still a number of simple, but impactful, often forgotten, SEO tactics that you can use to improve your website's overall performance and visibility. By no means are these the Holy Grail, but they will help your site to perform better and provide some valuable food for thought.

1. Optimising listings outside of the big search engines

There is no doubt that the big search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo account for a tonne of search online. As such, they are often the first and only places that online marketers look when trying to secure traffic. However, there are alternative places that SEO can factor-in and for certain industries, such as food, travel and automotive. These alternatives can have an extremely positive impact. Take for example:

- Listing sites such as Carfax Used Cars, TripAdvisor, Realtor.com and Google+ Local
- App Stores such as Google Play Store and iTunes
- Listing Apps such as Hotels.com, AirBnB and Yelp

Many of these sites have their own internal algorithms and optimising towards them can aid the external search visibility of your own site, plus provide vast amounts of referral traffic. Furthermore, the quality signals associated with ranking prominently on large authoritative sites are capable of influencing visibility and rankings across large search engines too.

2. Leverage user generated content

User Generated Content (UGC) is a force to be reckoned with! Getting customers, consumers and users involved in your content creation is a great way to scale SEO efforts, build-out your site's Information Architecture and generate trust-building consumer-focused content.

In an environment where 'content is king', some of the most cost-effective and efficient ways of growing content across your brand's digital assets is to incentivise others to do it for you!

How does this look in real terms?

- Q&A sections on your website
- Forums with relevant topics and conversations
- Surveys to build data sets that can be incorporated into rich media assets
- Customer feedback

Reviews are also great ways to use UGC in building brand authority and trust while contributing towards your SEO

campaign. Not only do reviews provide fresh, unique content which is keyword rich, but by using schema code to mark-up reviews you will also allow Google to present your reviews and ratings as Rich Snippets and within its Knowledge Graph.

[Studies](#) have shown that Rich Snippets and Knowledge Graph content can increase click through rate (CTR) in search engines by up to 30%.

3. Using PPC to validate your keyword strategy

Within SEO campaigns you won't necessarily know how profitable a keyword will be until you've invested the time and effort to rank for it. However, this process can be expedited with paid search tests.

Say you have a very competitive keyword with 5,000 searches a month, and a much less competitive term getting 250 search a month; intuition and sheer ambition will often prompt you to invest resources into establishing your site for keyword A. However, a quick PPC test could show that keyword B produces twice the conversions as keyword A, even with such low search volume. This can then validate focusing your keyword strategy towards the lower volume, less competitive keyword in order to maximise revenue and increase conversions.

The point is that insight is incredibly valuable and should be used to help structure and sculpt an informed SEO strategy. Pay-per-click offers some great opportunities to garner this insight.

To summarise

These aren't clever technical tricks that will catapult your site to the top of search, they are tactics that, for me, are often forgotten about or neglected, but represent healthy wins in terms of improved website performance and visibility.

SEO in South Africa is no longer something that can happen silently behind the scenes, using manipulative tactics – it is part of the overall marketing mix. Put users first and ask whether your SEO activities will benefit the customer. If the answer is yes, you know you're investing time appropriately.

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