

Social media optimisation - what you need to know

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South Africa's top brands invest heavily in social media. Research conducted by Fuseware and World Wide Worx this year revealed that 93% of leading brands use Facebook, 79% use Twitter, 58% use YouTube, 46% use LinkedIn and 28% use Pinterest. Their research also included an analysis of South Africa's leading 50 brands, which showed that each of these brands have an average of 58,000 Facebook fans and 12,785 Twitter followers.



(Image: Search Engine Watch)

Are brands receiving the maximum ROI from their social media and SEO efforts? I feel that many South African brands can do much more to harmonise their social media efforts with the other relevant elements within their digital marketing mix.

This is where the social media optimisation (SMO) and search engine optimisation (SEO) digital marketing disciplines play a crucial role. The concept of SMO has been with us for quite some time but a large number of brands are yet to implement it.

What exactly is SMO? According to Wikipedia: "Social media optimisation (SMO) is the use of a number of social media outlets and communities to generate publicity to increase the awareness of a product, brand or event. In general, social media optimisation refers to optimising a website and its content in terms of sharing across social media and networking sites."

Google search and social media social signals

Google has stated that their current search engine algorithm factors in 'social signals' to help it determine where a website should rank in a search result page. Social signals are social media-related recommendations, likes, tweets or social sharing that are associated with the brand's website. Currently, the value Google associates with a particular social media platform and the type of social media activity is not measurable by us. It is safe to assume that Google+, as Google's own social media platform, is the most important in terms of generating social signals. It is also safe to assume that the social signals, which are generated by Facebook and Twitter, are both significant, due to their popularity.

This does not mean that the other popular social media platforms are not important. However, brands are advised to invest only in social media platforms which are relevant to their company, and for which you have the resources to implement effectively.

Google's website reputation measurement

In addition to social signals, Google values links which point back (backlinks) from social media-related sources to a brand's website.

A simplistic way to understand how Google wants us to place a 'value' on a website (popular social media platforms included) is via a website's PageRank. PageRank (PR) is a Google-allocated score of a website, out of a possible 10, with 10 being the best possible score. According to Google's Matt Cutts: "PageRank is a measure of (a website's) reputation." Few traditional websites (cnn.com for example) have a PR that is as high as popular social media sites. This illustrates the significance Google attaches to social media platforms, so it makes sense to associate a brand's website with them extensively.

A brand should therefore want to associate (link) their website with other websites that have a high PR. It is important to maximise backlink generation from some social media platforms (such as Google+, WordPress, Tumblr, YouTube,

LinkedIn, Blogger and Pinterest), and focus on social signals with other social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter).

SMO research

I conducted SMO research that focused largely on two leading websites over their current lifespans, from as early as 2004 to July 2014. These two websites had sample sizes of approximately 300,000 visits (Website A) and approximately 120,000,000 (Website B) visits respectively. Website A has a PageRank score of 4 but is a noteworthy example to analyse because the company's Google+ page is regularly active and one of the quickest growing Google+ pages in South Africa. This company is also active on a large number of social media platforms.

Website B is a significant example to analyse because it has a PR score of 7, which is extremely high for a South African website which is also not a social media platform. Website B is also one of the top 5 in terms of original content creation and number of monthly visits in the country.

Google+

It is crucial to prioritise Google+ in terms of both backlinks and social signals.

Google+ can be largely seen as a purely SEO-orientated social media platform. The focus of Google+ content should be to enhance the brand's SEO and not for user engagement, which, for example, is the case with Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook and Twitter

Website A did not have any backlinks from Facebook or Twitter over the above-mentioned period when perusing its Google Webmaster Tools' backlink report (a free website-specific service that Google can provide). This is due to the Website A's sample size being too small. Website B's backlink report only reflected a single backlink each from Facebook and Twitter during the above-mentioned period.

Social media platforms provide an ideal channel to drive traffic to a brand's website, especially Facebook and Twitter. Facebook and Twitter provided Website B with approximately 14% and 5% of their visits respectively. The next largest source of social media-derived website visits was via Google's Blogger (Google's blogging platform) with 0.12% of website traffic.

The emphasis needs to be put on the 'sharability' of the high quality and original content. An example of this could be a Facebook post, which, in turn, may have a call-to-action and a link that would direct the user to the website.

Social media integration

SMO requires a comprehensive integration of social media into a brand's website and content strategy. There should be effective cohesion between a brand's content creation, content publication/'seeding' and social media platforms. This is where the services of SEO and social media professionals are helpful to guide brands effectively through this complex digital marketing discipline.

All relevant social media platforms should be connected to their respective brand's website and other social media platforms, where applicable, to assist in the facilitation of social sharing. Simply put the visibility of a brand in the organic search and social media spheres are magnified significantly through the combination of SEO and SMO.

Sources:

Fuseware and World Wide Worx.

Wikipedia.

Google.

Google Webmaster Tools.

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

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

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