

How Much Money it is Costing You to Listen to these Commonly-Held SEO Myths?

The state of SEO advice these days reminds me a lot of the old game “Telephone” that school children play during recess. If you haven’t played it before, here’s how it goes...

One person thinks up a message – no more than 1 or 2 sentences – and whispers it in the ear of the second player. The second player must then pass along the message to the third child in the game, who then repeats the information to the fourth person in line, and so on and so forth. By the time all of the players involved have heard and passed on their version of the message, the final product usually comes out quite different from what the original child intended!

Here’s how it works in the SEO world...

One marketer – bored with executing the “usual” SEO campaigns – tries something new and, lo and behold, winds up with good results. Without understanding the mechanism behind this gain – let alone whether or not his success can be attributed to his new technique at all – “Marketer A” passes on his recommendation to anyone who will listen. The next marketers in the chain repeat what they’ve heard as verifiable fact – and suddenly, an SEO myth is born!

As time goes on, more and more of these SEO myths are accepted as fact, which leads to a whole crop of website owners who are following this word as law – without any evidence that the techniques they’re using ever worked in the first place!

The obvious problem here is that, if you don’t know whether your SEO practices are legitimate techniques or simple folk wisdom, you aren’t doing your website any favors. At best, you’re wasting time on techniques that won’t have an impact on your rankings. At worst, you could be setting your site up for serious penalties if you don’t know what you’re doing.

So today, I want to take the time to clear the air regarding a few SEO myths that have gotten out of hand. As the co-author of [The Art of SEO](#) and author of [Google Power Search](#) as well as the founder SEO agency Netconcepts, rest assured when I say that the information I’m about to share comes from thousands and thousands of hours of personally helping websites to rank high in the natural search engine results pages (SERPs).

If you have the sneaking suspicion that your current SEO methods aren’t as effective as they could be, I encourage you to read on to find out how the following seven common SEO myths could be costing you time and money.

Myth #1 - SEO is a “set it and forget it” practice

How many times have you heard someone say, “Yeah, I just finished the SEO on my site” – as if SEO was something that could actually *be* completed?

Let's clear up one common misconception right here, right now. SEO is **never** done. It's an ongoing process that requires continuous investment in order to succeed, which means that anyone who tells you that SEO can ever be truly finished is either a) sadly misinformed or b) lying to sell you something.

It's not just that most SEO efforts require time to take effect (although if you want to see this phenomenon in person, just try getting a website ranked well for the phrase, "make money online"). It's also important to remember that SEO is a constantly changing field. Just because your site is optimized well for current best practices doesn't mean that it'll pass muster when the search engines change their algorithms in the future.

And that's exactly how this myth could be costing you money. Suppose you "finish" your website SEO and sit back to enjoy your hard-earned high rankings in the SERPs. One day, Google comes along and devalues the methods you used to optimize your pages and build backlinks to your site. Overnight, your revenue declines dramatically – all because you believed that you were done with SEO for good.

To really stay on top of the SEO game, you've got to schedule time each and every month to work on your site's optimization. For most webmasters, this will mean dedicating regular time to increasing the number and quality of backlinks pointed at their sites, as this metric is estimated to account for 50% or more of a site's total rank positions in the search results pages.

Of course, just because good SEO requires an ongoing effort doesn't mean that you have to do everything by hand. There are plenty of great tools out there that will automate the process of prospecting and contacting potential link builders, so be sure to take a look at those instead of swearing off SEO altogether due to the commitment required.

Myth #2 -Good SEO is a "paint by numbers" process

This one kills me... How many times have you seen an "SEO guru" advertising a step-by-step program that will (at least according to the program's claims...) show you exactly which actions to take in order to improve your site's rankings?

Typically, the materials for these programs read something like this:

"For optimum SEO, include your target keyword once in your title and meta description tags, specify 3-5 variations of your target keyword within your meta keywords tag, write one H1 tag and then use your target keyword at a 5-10% density within your site's body content."

Kind of sounds like you're baking a cake, doesn't it?!

Let's clear up a few misconceptions about SEO that are highlighted in the sample paragraph above:

1. Google has never used meta keywords to influence search engine rankings. Include a few tags in this section if you absolutely must, but be aware that nothing you put here

will have even the smallest impact on where your site falls in the SERPs.

2. From a rankings perspective, meta description tags are just about as worthless as their keyword counterparts. But this doesn't mean you should ignore them. As your meta description is frequently used as the snippet that displays whenever your site is included in a search results page, it's a great place to include a call to action or value proposition that will increase your clickthrough rate from the SERPs.
3. There is not now, nor will there ever be a "preferred keyword density" that you should aim for. Do you really think that Google uses criteria that could be quite so easily gamed? Instead, as far as your website's content is concerned, what matters is that you produce good quality, valuable content and distribute it in an ethical way.

The bottom line? There's no single approach to optimizing a website for the search engines that will guarantee you top rankings – and anyone who tells you so is likely just trying to sell you something. By buying into this hype, you're wasting money on coaching programs that will never get you where you want to be and losing out on wasted time that could be better spent implementing good SEO.

Instead of falling victim to these "paint by numbers" schemes, focus your efforts on following established SEO best practices and creating a useful website.

Myth #3 - More backlinks = better

It's incredible to me that the idea that more backlinks naturally equates to better rankings still persists – especially considering that Google has stated the opposite quite clearly in its

Webmaster Guidelines:

"It is not only the number of links you have pointing to your site that matters, but also the quality and relevance of those links. Creating good content pays off: Links are usually editorial votes given by choice, and the buzzing blogger community can be an excellent place to generate interest."

So again, if a program tells you that it will help your site to earn high rankings by automatically creating thousands upon thousands of backlinks, **it's lying to get you to buy something!**

(Are you noticing a theme here...?)

But if simply creating more backlinks doesn't result in higher rankings or better results within the search engines, what does a good link building strategy look like? The following are a few guidelines that separate the good from the bad when it comes to backlink building techniques:

- *Good links come from relevant sites.* As stated above, links are treated as "editorial votes" by the search engines. Naturally, when you look at links this way, it's easy to see that a link to a dog training website from a dog breeding website would be more

valuable in the eyes of the search engines than a link from a computer repair website.

- *Good links come from high quality sites.* Along these same lines, a backlink from a site that's highly regarded by the search engines will be treated as being more valuable than one from an unknown site. To put it in perspective, think about what a backlink from sports giant ESPN.com says about your site compared to a link from an unknown, foreign language sports website directory.
- *Good links are not reciprocal.* Buying backlinks or trading links with reciprocal link partners is an obvious attempt to game the search engine rankings and can result in penalties being applied to your site. And considering how easy it can be to find good quality link partners who are willing to refer visitors to your pages freely, there's no reason to even mess around with these link schemes!

Again, there are plenty of great tools out there that can help you to automate the process of finding potential link partners and contacting these website owners directly. Just be sure to use them responsibly to create good quality backlinks that stand on their own merits instead of wasting time and money on scam backlinks and the programs that teach you to build them!

Myth #4 - "if you build it, they will come"

Don't take this the wrong way, but publishing great content on your website doesn't automatically grant you an exemption from adhering to SEO best practices...

Of course it's important to publish good content. Filling your site with valuable information gives you more potential exposure in the search engines, as more words naturally equals more keyword mentions – even if they're phrases you aren't actively targeting. In addition, good articles are shared virally more often, leading to more backlinks and more visitors to your site without any extra effort on your part.

Unfortunately, though, simply publishing good information and hoping for the best isn't an effective substitute for implementing a strong SEO campaign! Following this advice – instead of adhering to the guidelines described above for optimizing your site and generating backlinks – will cost you big in terms of the opportunity cost that poor SERPs rankings have on your website's revenue.

Myth #5 - if your SEO is good, you don't need to worry about PPC (or vice versa)

Too many marketers view SEO and PPC as mutually exclusive pursuits – even going so far as to label themselves as one or the other. "I'm an SEO marketer," you'll hear some proponents of website optimization declare. "I build my traffic through PPC advertising," reply others.

The debate about which promotional method is better has become so heated that you've got entire groups of people decrying the alternate approach as bogus – often because industry "experts" are able to sell you more products when you've placed yourself

(unnecessarily) in one of these two clubs.

But here's the real truth...

Some sites will perform better with SEO. If you're targeting a significant number of long tail keywords, optimizing your site for these terms and building the appropriate backlinks is often the most cost-effective way to build traffic to your site. On the other hand, webmasters working in competitive niches (or those who want to quickly test the profitability of an idea before investing in a full-scale site) appreciate the guaranteed traffic PPC can provide.

However, if you jump on either SEO or PPC's bandwagon and swear up and down that your chosen methodology is the only way to profit online, you're doing yourself and your site a real disservice – and possibly flushing your time, effort and dollars down the toilet!

Suppose you follow an “industry expert” who claims that PPC is the only real way to promote a website. So day after day, you follow his system, pumping tons of money into advertising campaigns that direct visitors to your site. If you're targeting mildly competitive keywords with an average cost per click (CPC) of \$.50/day and earning 100 clicks a day on your campaigns, you're spending \$350/week to maintain your PPC campaigns.

Now, what if you could have earned the same number of visitors by achieving a few high rankings within the SERPs for a fraction of the cost?

Hopefully, by now, you can see that there's no clear cut “winner” in the SEO versus PPC debate. Instead, it's important to understand your experience level, budget, industry competitiveness and other factors to determine what particular balance is appropriate for your website.

Myth #6 - Social media is for hipsters

Social media – like blogging – often gets a bad rap as being too loaded down with overly-emotional teenagers sharing their innermost thoughts and cute kitten videos to be of any use to internet marketers.

Well, cut the crap! Social media is here to stay, and there's growing evidence that brand signals from the web's most popular social networking sites may play a role in how your site ranks within the SERPs.

As far back as December 2010, SEO expert Danny Sullivan interviewed representatives from Google and Bing, asking how they weighted links and content shared on social networks from a rankings perspective. Here are the respective representatives' **answers** to the question of how each engine handles Twitter user authority and link shares on the site:

Bing responded with:

“We do look at the social authority of a user. We look at how many people you follow, how many follow you, and this can add a little weight to a listing in regular search results.”

And Google responded with:

“Yes, we do use [tweeted links and RTs] as a signal. It is used as a signal in our organic and news rankings. We also use it to enhance our news universal by marking how many people shared an article.”

In a follow up question, Sullivan asked, “Do you track links shared within Facebook, either through personal walls or fan pages?” and got these additional responses:

Bing said:

“Yes. We look at links shared that are marked as “Everyone,” and links shared from Facebook fan pages.”

And Google said:

“We treat links shared on Facebook fan pages the same as we treat tweeted links. We have no personal wall data from Facebook.”

The message is crystal clear – social signals matter from an SEO perspective, and will likely play an even bigger role in influencing the SERPs in the future.

However, there are a few things you’ll want to keep in mind before dropping everything to launch your social media marketing campaigns:

- At this point, social media signals are “noisy”, meaning that they’re easily gamed and therefore difficult to translate into meaningful data. Instead of optimizing your site in terms of total “likes,” “retweets” and “+1s”, focus on using social media to expand your brand’s reach and connect with industry influencers.
- In addition, the 2009 rollout of Google’s Social Search features indicates that the search giant may put more of an emphasis on customized results (ie – SERPs based on content shared by members of your social networks) in the future. However, this impact (particularly the uprooting of sites ranked in the SERPs via traditional SEO versus social media) appears to be limited right now, so don’t give up on traditional SEO!
- Social networking site users are extremely sensitive to promotional tactics, so use your profiles to engage first and promote later. Providing value to your followers and interacting with them on a personal level is much more likely to bring about good results with social media marketing.

Implementing these principles into your own social media marketing campaigns will help ensure you receive the best possible ROI on your efforts, resulting in more traffic and more sales on your website.

Myth #7 - SEO is free

So – let me get this straight...

You've invested money in a good link building tool, not to mention the dozens (if not hundreds) of hours you've put into developing good content, optimizing these pages according to SEO best practices and implementing more advanced SEO techniques including internal linking and microdata – and you **still** think SEO is free???

Here's the thing... Whether you pay up front to generate your traffic (as in the case of PPC advertising) or you pay with your time and energy (via SEO), you will be paying something in order to get visitors to your site. There are certain situations where it may make more sense to build traffic via SEO and high SERPs rankings than through PPC (and vice versa), but the correct balance that's right for your website depends on your expertise, your budget and the industry in which you operate.

But just because SEO doesn't require the same upfront capital commitment as PPC advertising doesn't mean that it shouldn't be approached with the same level of discipline. Your time is valuable, and if you waste this time chasing SEO strategies that aren't proven to be effective by industry experts, you're wasting just as much money as you would on a poorly executed PPC campaign.