



Building Your Practice's Website for Google

In our digital world, whether you own a pizza shop, are opening a new restaurant, or have a financial practice, to exist in 2019 you must exist on Google. Google is where the large majority of consumer searches begin and end; it's where brands get discovered and where digital credibility is built.

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When it comes to optimizing for Google, it starts with your website and search engine optimization (SEO). SEO is not advertising. It's not about buying ads on Google or some other network. SEO is about structuring your website, optimizing your experience, and developing content in order to improve your website ranking, and ultimately, make it to page one. Why page one you may ask? Well, 75% of users never scroll past the first page of search results. So, if you're trying to capture potential clients in your niche, whether you're a tax planning expert in New York or Advisor in Oklahoma, you want to spend time and resources on SEO.

While it's easy to talk about, building a website for Google seems like a daunting task, so where do you start? Here are a few steps you can take:

Choose Your Domain Name (Carefully)

Google and other search engines use the domain name as a ranking factor, but also as a monitor to combat any keyword-stuffers (more on that below). When choosing your domain, think of something that's easy to remember, easy to read, and easy to type. Avoid hyphens and domains not ending in .com when possible. This will make it easy for users and search engines to access your website.

Become a Keyword Expert

Keyword research is probably the most important aspect of SEO. The goal is to uncover words and phrases that people are actually searching for within your niche. For example, "planning for retirement" has around 22,200 searches a month and there's a strong likelihood that these searches are made by highly-qualified users looking to learn more about retirement planning and different approaches they can take as they build their plans. So, if you're a retirement

expert and develop content around these keywords and phrases, your odds of converting people becomes much greater. Google keyword planner is the best free source to conduct this research. Ideally, you should identify 25-100 keywords and not only track how much search volume exists but also how your content is ranking. While having this list of focus keywords is crucial, you want to use them carefully and avoid any keyword stuffing across your site. Keyword stuffing is the practice overloading a webpage with keywords in order to manipulate Google. This is a big no-no in Google's book, so while there is no best practice to stick to, try to keep it to a 2% keyword density (number of words in copy/number of times keyword appears).

Plan Your Website Structure

The structure of your site has a significant impact on the experience for your visitors as well as Google. If a user can't find the information they're searching for, it's unlikely they will become regular visitors. A good site structure also helps Google understand who you are and what you're selling. As you produce new content and introduce new pages (e.g. writing a new blog post), a good site structure will create a balance between the different pages on your site.

Submit Your Sitemap

The only way to communicate to Google that you want your site crawled by the search engine is to submit a sitemap. A sitemap is a list of your web pages in a technical form (XML file) that allows Google to recognize the individual pages and overall structure. Once your site is complete, before you launch, submit your site to Google through Google Webmaster Tools so it can begin crawling your pages.

Optimize Your Web Experience

With technology continuously evolving, your website needs to be able to change with the times. Mobile phone optimization is much more important than it was five years ago, so you need to ensure your web pages are built for phones large and small as that's where most consumers are spending their time. Google recognizes this as well, so ensuring your website is built for all devices, loads fast, and is simple will result in a better experience and ranking.

Develop Regular Content

The "set it and forget it" model for a website will never work. In order to rank effectively and build your brand, you need to be building regular content centered around your niche. Whether it's content on retirement or tax planning, having a consistent stream of content will help raise the SEO moat around your website. As always, remember to clear everything with your compliance department.

When it comes to your website, it's the modern-day front page for your business. Creating an SEO plan that allows you to build the best website possible will allow you to attract and retain clients. When it all comes together, you'll rank well in 2019 and beyond.