

SEO & SEM 3.0: Demystifying Social Media Optimization to Bring Consumers to You

“Social media is not a campaign. It’s a commitment.”

These words, spoken by imc strategy lab Digital Managing Director Robb Hecht, neatly summarize the mindset that is required to truly maximize the opportunities put forth in the digital space.

When applied to social media marketing and SEO, Hecht’s statement embodies the dedication, experimentation and occasional failure needed to go beyond simple online content creation and actually get content in front of the right audiences.

Such is the burden of communications executives who, just as they are getting the hang of optimizing press releases and Web site content for search, must now learn to transfer those skills to new territory: Twitter, social networks, video-sharing platforms, you name it—and it can (and should) be optimized. How else do you expect to bridge the ever-widening gap between your brand and consumers?

With that, the following strategies and tactics help to answer that question, creating a proverbial bridge out of SEO and SEM.

Spread the link love. SEO 101 teaches communications executives to include as many relevant links as possible to cross-pollinate their online content and, in turn, appear higher up in search results. This theory applies to newer social media platforms that are increasingly central to capturing—and keeping—audiences’ attention.

For example, one way to integrate your Twitter content into your corporate Web site (or even press releases) is to tweet links to a blog post, a news story on your site or even a video interview of one of your executives.

Think links have too many characters to fall within the 140-character limitation of microblogs? Sites like TinyURL.com and www.bit.ly will take a full URL and compress it into a microlink in a matter of seconds—at no cost to the user.

Get groupies. Similar to spreading the link love is the strategy of generating a following of individuals who are genuinely interested in your brand; after all, social media is all about cultivating a loyal fan base, regardless of your industry.

“Using Twitter can help you create a following,” says Lisa Maini, principal and founder of myMarketingManager. “Why create a following? Because followers are self-selected individuals who are interested in what you have to say.”

She cites the following marketing benefits of building a following through social media:

- Puts more eyeballs on your site.

- Helps promote an idea, speaking engagement or event.
- Helps establish you as a thought leader.
- Generates qualified leads, referrals and other client opportunities.

But remember: “Doing this without appearing too sales-y and self-serving is the trick,” Maini says. “People don’t like to be sold.”

Create content with conversions in mind. In order for SEO and SEM to work for social media, your content creation strategy must be fully aligned with your strategy for driving users to take action, be it buying a product, signing up to receive an e-newsletter or participating in your online community. Having strategic alignment in this context first requires an intimate understanding of both your target users’ preferences and your desired end result.

If, for example, a user is typing in very general search terms about a product—say, a digital camera—then he/she is probably still in the research stage and is just looking for more information. Keywords are critical here, as you could optimize your tech blog to appear higher in general queries, while more specific keyword searches (compact, 7x optical zoom, etc.) would direct the user to a product page on your corporate site.

Develop an audience segmentation strategy. Knowing who your audience is and what avenues they take to arrive at your branded content is essential to optimizing your social media platforms.

Fortunately, all this new-fangled technology comes in handy in this regard: Things like Web analytics, cookies and unique landing pages help you see the various audiences and vehicles that end up on your site. Categorize audiences into specific groups, such as:

- First-time visitors.
- Repeat visitors.
- Visitors who registered for something.
- Visitors directed to your site from a marketing campaign.
- Visitors referred by partner sites.

Once you define groups of visitors, you can optimize your social media content accordingly, placing emphasis on the segments that have the biggest impact on each platform. A segmentation strategy will allow you to anticipate visitors’ needs, and it helps avoid unnecessary marketing to dead-end audiences.

Learn to share. With social media, the shortest distance between two points isn’t a straight line, it’s one click of a button. If users don’t have a way of navigating your online content without ever leaving your branded sites—that is, without reverting back to Google to start a new search—then you’ve lost a potentially rapt audience.

One easy navigation trick is Add This, the bookmarking and sharing service that links up your Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts, as well as Digg, Delicious and

Technorati, in one neat little package. You can put buttons on all your social media sites for free by visiting addthis.com, grabbing the code and embedding it on your site. Yes, it's that easy.

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