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CONTROLLING the ROBOTS - SEO and the CEO

Making SEO relevant to the stakeholder

What do you do when you want to move a company into the current century, but the purse strings are held by “the old-school generation who refuses to make room for digital marketing” You can poke fun if you want—“the robots are taking over!” or you can get real and help the process along so that everyone benefits. Know that when you are pitching any new idea to an old-school stakeholder, you need to do what good SEO does, and make your argument relevant to your audience. Make your SEO plan relevant to your stakeholders.

SEO is like the yellow pages—explaining SEO to the CEO

“Why in my day...” Before the internet, if you wanted to buy something, you would look up possible vendors in the local yellow pages phone directory, or, for farther reach, in industry-generated listing catalogs. You would spend time calling a few companies to see which was the best fit for your needs. Knowing this perspective is how I made SEO really relevant to an old-school CEO, and also gave him an easy verbal tool to spread the good word. I likened new technology to its old-school counterpart: “SEO is like the new yellow pages.” SEO is indeed the new yellow pages, but with SEO we have more options and can get much better information, reviews and instant answers on products. If you can provide relevant and unique information, online, that the customer is looking for, your organic SEO will improve.

Keywords. Be real, be relevant.

Don't let your organization get “keyword happy”, just because your old-school stakeholder has heard about keywords from their golf buddy. With keywords, here is the basket you have to fill for your customer once they find you online: a relevant and compelling answer to their search question. You will provide this by adding keywords to your website that the customer might type in when they start their search. These keywords should be such that actually apply to your business, or you will not be relevant to the online customer and they will simply not choose you. These keywords should be embedded into your page metadata, and in your copy. Don't ruin your copy, or be so obvious with SEO and keywords that you end up saying “Jennifer Anniston” 50 times in one sentence. This will not help you win the customer you want. Be real, be relevant.

Everyone now uses online search.

Whether you buy online or in a brick and mortar, you research online first. I was once pitching to a Sr. VP who did not understand SEO or see the prevalence of online search. He'd stated that, “only young people do this—our customers don't care.” I took a deep breath—my most valued negotiating skill—and as I did I looked around his office. I spied his Land's End bag. Knowing he was all business, and not likely a mall-shopper, I said, “where do you go for clothes, Macy's?” Startled, he replied that he had no patience for that, that he simply bought all his clothes from one catalog. “One and done—efficient,” he said happily. I complimented him on the simplicity of that and his choice of catalog. I asked him if he ever looked up the merchandise, size, etc. online before placing his phone order, as I do. Well, yes—I just go online, punch in what I want, take a look at it and call the number. Aha. Online search. No further argument, your honor. Even he had to laugh. More importantly, he got it—that everyone researches online before they buy, even a 70-year old former farmer.

Make them the hero.

Within a few days of presenting SEO to that aforementioned CEO, I heard him say to his Financial Controller, “It's simple, Bob, SEO is like the new yellow pages.” That's when I knew that my evil robot plan was working.