Can Your Potential Customers Find Your Business Online?

When you’re looking for a product or services, one of the first things you do is search Google (or another search engine) to see which businesses in your area have what you need. After you type in a word or phrase describing what you’re looking for, you get a list of results. You then browse those results to see which business can best meet your needs.

Searching the internet has become second nature to most consumers, and that creates an opportunity for your business. Just how widespread is search engine use? A recent eMarketer survey found that 80 percent of people online used a search engine to find a local product or service in the past week, while 87 percent used one in the past month.

Google controls a good portion of the search world. In the past year, nearly three-quarters of all internet searches were performed on Google, according to NetMarketshare. But there are other search engines that are valuable to pay attention to as well, including Bing and Yahoo.

Remember, your business doesn’t have a website simply for the sake of having one. When used smartly, websites are powerful tools that drive new business. The trick is getting your website noticed in the first place, and search engines are one key way to do that. With the help of some SCORE partner content experts, I will share some suggestions on how to give yourself the best chance of showing up when people search for the products or services you offer.

First, let me start with SEO? A term you may already be familiar with is SEO, which stands for search engine optimization. Essentially, this is the process of setting up your site so search engines notice it. There are several factors that go into SEO, including the use of keywords and phrases on your site, as well as high-quality original content that’s updated frequently.

Every page and business is ranked for keywords, and the higher your business ranks, the better. If you run a store that sells vintage vinyl records, you would want to rank highly for keywords such as “vintage vinyl” or “classic records.”

When it comes to posting content to the web, you should always keep SEO in mind. Yes, you want the content on your site to be as clear and straightforward as possible, but for SEO purposes it’s also very important to sprinkle in words and
phrases that potential customers are likely to use when searching for businesses like yours online.

**Why does SEO matter?** Your website is one crucial method to drive business, and SEO is an essential tool for getting that done. If you don’t build and maintain your website using SEO techniques, you risk losing out on potential business.

Additionally, as you have probably noticed during your own web searches, the higher up on a search results page a website appears, the more likely potential customers are to click on that link. The search results appearing on pages 2, 3 and later are even less likely to be clicked on. These high-ranking websites on page 1 of search results use SEO in a way that gives them the best chance to be noticed by potential customers.

One of your SEO goals should be to show up in the results when people search the web for information related to your business’s products or services, and then continue implementing SEO best practices so your website moves forward on those search results. Your competitors are likely making the most of SEO, so it’s important for your business to do so as well.

Here are some suggestions to boost your website’s SEO:

- **Page title:** The title of each webpage is the most important SEO element on your site. Include keywords as close to the beginning of the title as possible. Limit the title to 60 characters. The title appears in the browser tab and is the blue clickable text in a search result.
- **Page URL:** Including keywords in the URL will help search engines better understand what the page’s content is about.
- **Meta-description:** The meta-description does not show on your website, but rather appears as the text underneath the blue clickable text in a search result. Each page’s meta-description should be relevant to that page’s content.
- **Primary headline:** The primary headline is the second most important SEO element. Include keywords within the H1 tag, which is the HTML language that indicates a headline.
- **Body content:** Make sure to include keywords where appropriate, but don’t overdo it. Ensure the content reads well. Update it frequently to keep it fresh and relevant.
- **Image names:** When placing important images on your webpages, include keywords in the file names as appropriate.
☑️ **Image alt tags:** Most website platforms allow you to append alternate (alt) text to images. This is the information that describes the image. Include keywords as appropriate, as these alt tags are picked up by search engines as well.

Dean L. Swanson  
Southeast Minnesota SCORE  
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce  
220 South Broadway, Suite 100  
Rochester, MN 55904  
www.seminnesota.score.org/  
*Dean is a volunteer Certified SCORE Mentor and former SCORE Chapter Chair, District Director, and Regional Vice President for the North West Region*