



SEO Case Study

How Optimizing Two Web Page Elements Increased Unique Visitors By 22%

Invenio SEO

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Here's how a resource-limited newspaper achieved higher rankings by applying only two SEO on-page factors to their articles. Even with a lack of budget, some SEO can be done efficiently and effectively to help any site rank better. In the end, the newspaper increased its' unique visitor count by 22% and ranked 90% higher on two targeted keyword phrases.

Company Background

A nationally known newspaper in Washington DC that was in business from October 1969 to November 2009 had just celebrated its' fortieth anniversary with a special edition for its readers.

A few days after this edition was printed and put online, the parent company declared bankruptcy and shut down the website and took all content off the server. The domain name was also owned by the parent company. However, the former employees didn't take this news lying down. They immediately decamped to the nearest coffee shop and began planning a new publication that would meet the next regularly scheduled publication deadline in both print and online.

A mad scramble ensued, but the new publication quickly found web hosting and a CMS to create a new newspaper from scratch. Amazingly enough, they made the deadline with help from volunteers and donors in the gay and lesbian community.

After lengthy legal action, the trademark and archives were purchased from bankruptcy court by the newspaper's editors and publisher. This included the domain name, which had now been idle for several months.

The Challenge: How to Optimize Quickly With A Small Budget

In April 2010, the newspaper was once again launched using the previous publication's name and domain. But the editors/owners were faced with a challenge: how could they regain their once-high search engine visibility? With no digital marketing budget and no expertise in-house, they were unsure of what could be done.

Since the domain had been down for several months, it was completely dropped by all search engines. The staff would have to start from scratch as a new domain and website.

If the newspaper could improve its rankings and get more readers to the site, this would help them sell more advertising to businesses that serve the gay community locally and nationally. With increased sales revenues, the newspaper's goal was to hire digital marketing expertise and develop an enterprise SEO program.

Process – Publishing Articles That Were Not Optimized

The editors/owners knew that consistent SEO is necessary, but given the resource limitations, the site was only depending upon the daily publishing of content to gain visibility in the search engines with regular crawling. This went on for two years.

Solution – Fix What's Within Full Control of the Paper With Limited Resources

After discussing available SEO options on a limited budget, the paper decided to have Invenio SEO re-optimize the meta title and description tags for selected keyword phrases to boost rankings. Invenio proposed the tasks below to boost the newspaper site higher in SERPs.

- Conduct an SEO website audit and generate an inventory of URLs that have missing or duplicate meta data
- Conduct an SEO URL "clean up" of the associated meta data by creating and optimizing unique title and description tags for approximately 1100 URLs to encourage search engine crawlers to come back to legacy articles and re-index them
- Train the reporters in writing optimized articles that comply with Google recommended webmaster guidelines
- Create and distribute an SEO checklist for each reporter to use when writing and publishing articles
- Create an SEO process for the editors and social media coordinator to spot check each reporter's SEO efforts as a final "quality control" check
- Create and implement a process of ongoing re-optimization for legacy URLs that have missing or duplicate meta data issues until all archived articles are complete
- Implement Google Authorship and schema.org to further encourage indexing by search engine crawlers to get more articles to rank high in SERPs

Implementation – Inventory, Create, Upload, Train

An SEO support services contract for four months of SEO work to identify URLs with missing or duplicate meta data, run ranking reports on selected keywords and competitors, and provide SEO article writing training to the reporters was issued.

- Invenio ran an SEO audit and compiled a list of URLs into a spreadsheet. There were approximately 1300 URLs that needed fixing by the time the proposal and contract were agreed upon.
- Invenio ran a ranking report on selected keyword phrases the paper wanted to rank for that compared them to the top two competitors using the same keywords. The initial ranking report listed the site at #22 for the preferred, primary keyword phrase the site wanted to rank for.
- Invenio created a daily schedule to re-write and re-optimize unique meta title and description tags for a minimum of ten (10) URLs per day, five days per week. The oldest ones were fixed first. Invenio was able to fix more URLs on some days, depending upon other scheduled client work and training commitments. From May to August, over 800 URLs were re-optimized. The newspaper uses Word Press, and Invenio was given a user name and password to upload the re-optimized meta data and re-publish each article.
- Ranking reports were run approximately every two to three weeks to gauge progress. As expected, some reporting periods showed gains, while others showed a slight decline, given the natural volatility and fluctuations in SERPs.

Even so, the gains became more consistent and permanent after two months of daily meta data re-optimization.

Finally, Invenio created and taught a three hour SEO article writing course for the reporters. Prior to conducting the training, the editors had to win the reporters over to understanding that by adding very basic SEO functions to their current duties, more visitors would come to the site.

This would enhance the paper's marketing approach to potential advertisers to spend more money on advertising. The reporter's egos were also appealed to by pointing out the personal benefits of having Google authorship applied to their new Google Plus profiles.

Results – Increased, More Consistent Rankings and Visitors

As a result of re-optimizing the meta title and description tags for approximately 800 URLs over a four month period, the newspaper climbed from #22 on Google to a fairly consistent #2 - #5 for their target audience on the two most important terms that reflect the newspaper's mission and branding. The paper also achieved top ten rankings in Bing and Yahoo for the same phrases.

In addition, visitor traffic to the site increased 22.1% in the same four month period.



Figure 1. Ranking for keyword phrase 1. Client is in red.



Figure 2. Ranking for keyword phrase 2. Client is in red.

Significant cost savings were also realized by training and empowering reporters to apply basic SEO to their articles until the newspaper generates enough revenue to engage part time SEO support services on a regular basis.

Conclusion – Any SEO That Can Be Done Helps In SERPs

By concentrating on improving SEO factors within their control, budget and resources, the paper began ranking higher for their targeted keyword phrases. Title and description tags are important for ranking well for chosen keyword phrases and improving click through rates. These tags are important and will boost SERPs.

The reporters and editors found that using the checklists provided allowed them to quickly review each article and apply the basic SEO processes they were taught. The editors were able to do SEO quality control to ensure all articles were optimized either prior to publishing or soon after.

The paper is still trying to allocate resources to re-optimize the approximately 500 remaining legacy URL meta title and description tags. This could further help keep the newspaper consistently in the top five search results for the chosen keyword phrases.



Invenio SEO

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