

Term Project

THE PROJECT:

1. Perform a comprehensive search engine optimization (SEO) audit on an existing organization's online presence.
2. Complete an SEO recommendations report for the company selected in step one.

If we were performing a full search marketing audit, we'd also look at and plan the paid search component, however that was covered well with the simulation lab, so for the term project, we'll just focus on SEO. This is a secondary research assignment using the tools and techniques learned in class – do not contact the company directly without permission from the instructor. NOTE: make sure you've reviewed the SEMrush and other SEO software tools (e.g. WildShark or Screaming Frog), as they will be used for your project. You should also plan to use a page speed tool, such as Google PageSpeed Insights or Pingdom. Other tools may be used at your discretion.

The Team: Form your own team (up to four people) or work individually as desired. **NOTE:** there is no peer evaluation in the distance version of this course, so choose team members carefully if you wish to form a team.

The Process: Choose an organization to perform your audit on and apply course concepts to recommend corrective actions. The company should be real for this project so that you can perform an actual audit. Use the following format for your report:

The Report Format: Direct the report to the client, not the instructor. Use your skills developed earlier in the course to provide a professional analysis. **Note that you must provide a fact-based analysis of the data, not just copy and paste the results from the software tools - be sure to analyze your metrics, not just report them!** Use the following outline to ensure you cover each area.

- **Cover page** (with title, organization name, team member names)
- **Outline**
- **Introduction** (purpose of report, company name and brief paragraph on what they do or which area of the company the audit is limited to, if applicable)
- **Keyword Review** (find relevant keywords and how well the organization ranks for them.)
- **Landing page evaluation** (follow the keywords to their landing pages – are they good, bad, etc.?)
What about relevance, content, tags, market segment reached, trust symbols, etc.?) Remember: the primary measure of a good website is that it converts traffic into customers. Address usability and conversion.
 - What are the likely segments of customers (based on purpose of website visit)?
 - What information is each segment looking for?
 - Usability:
 - does the page layout give them the information they require (without making them look too hard?)
 - does the layout encourage each segment to move toward conversion?
 - What trust symbols have you incorporated (explicit and implicit)?
 - How does your website answer the following questions (above the fold):
 - **What are you offering?**
 - **Why should I pick you?**
 - **What do you want me to do next?**
 - Aside from the homepage, which other pages are likely to be landing pages? How well are these optimized?
 - Are description metatags, title tags, alt attributes and URLs optimized for search?
- **Site health** (most tools will give you some information on site health, including SEMrush. You may also check manually for issues such as **broken links**, **duplicate pages**, etc., but this approach is much slower.) Make sure you also check for site **blacklisting** (which can impact client email communications) at blacklistmonitoring.com, mxtoolbox.com or equivalent.

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- **Backlink Review** (use SEMrush to check backlink quantity and quality, check competitors to see where company is at, etc.) Be sure to note referring domains, and any toxic backlinks.
- **Page Speed Review** (use Google's PageSpeed tool AND Pingdom or equivalent to check site loading time/quality.)
- **Social Media Review** (what do they currently use, is content fresh and of high quality? Do they respond to customer's? Is the media connected to their website and vice versa?) What are your recommendations, and why?
- **Reputation Analysis** (use Google Alerts and organic searches with negative keywords to see if there are any reputation-busters online in pages that potential clients might see. If so, do they respond to them?)
- **Recommendations** (what do you recommend that the client do in each of these areas to improve their online marketing? What is the timeline for implementing each item?)
- **References**

NOTE: many metrics are almost meaningless without some standard of comparison. Looking at trends over time (if available) and the relevant competition is important!

Some additional notes on search engine optimization

The goal of the SEO portion of the audit is two-fold:

(1) provide your clients with a list of action items that will improve his/her organic website rankings on key search terms;

(2) provide the client with a plan going forward to continue to improve organic rankings.

The best possible outcome of implementing your recommendations is that on one or more search terms, your client's website moves onto the first page of search results. (But remember, this would have to be tested on a neutral computer, not one you've used multiple times to search on that term.) Short of that, another good outcome is to see improvement in organic rankings on some search terms, even if it doesn't arrive all the way to the first page. To improve your chances of success:

- Do extensive keyword research. What are the keywords that are most beneficial to for this website to rank for? (Explain keyword selection based on relevance, volume, competition, and current ranking.)
- Map keywords to pages within the website. Explain the reasoning behind this mapping.
- Perform good on-site keyword placement for all the key pages (you could show an example).
- Develop an off-site SEO plan. Identify websites you plan to target for links. Identify content that the client should develop for the website.

Some additional notes on Social Media

Follow the steps outlined in the course to implement an effective social media campaign. Your actions and plans should be documented in detail.

- Define the objective of the social media campaign.
- Create a content creation plan. What is the desired breakdown of content types? You might create an example of content to post.
- Create a plan to attract followers.
- Implement the campaign on at least two different social media platforms.
- What are the pertinent metrics to track the campaign's performance?

Grading: See the posted grade sheet in Moodle for grade distribution. The focus is on quality, not quantity, but please be sure that all areas are covered, and apply course concepts appropriately to demonstrate your understanding of the subject material (you don't need to define terms and/or concepts, just use them appropriately). Be sure to review your report for typos and grammatical errors, as this is a professional report. Your team should expect to lose one quality mark per error, and for multiple errors in a section may also receive a reduced mark for that section.

Submission Requirements: Project must be submitted by due date – see assignment for due date and any early submittal information. To submit your project, please:

1. **Make sure all group member names are on the report cover page.**

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2. Use the **name of your company/organization** for your presentation filename.
3. Submit the file via Moodle to the assignment called “Term Project”.

Privacy Disclosure: Please note that unless you specifically request that it not be disseminated, your final report may be used as a positive example of how a report should look in future classes, or elsewhere within the academic community.