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Be Focused

Bring Visibility to Your Website With SEO

If you have a website, but no one can find it, do you even have a website?

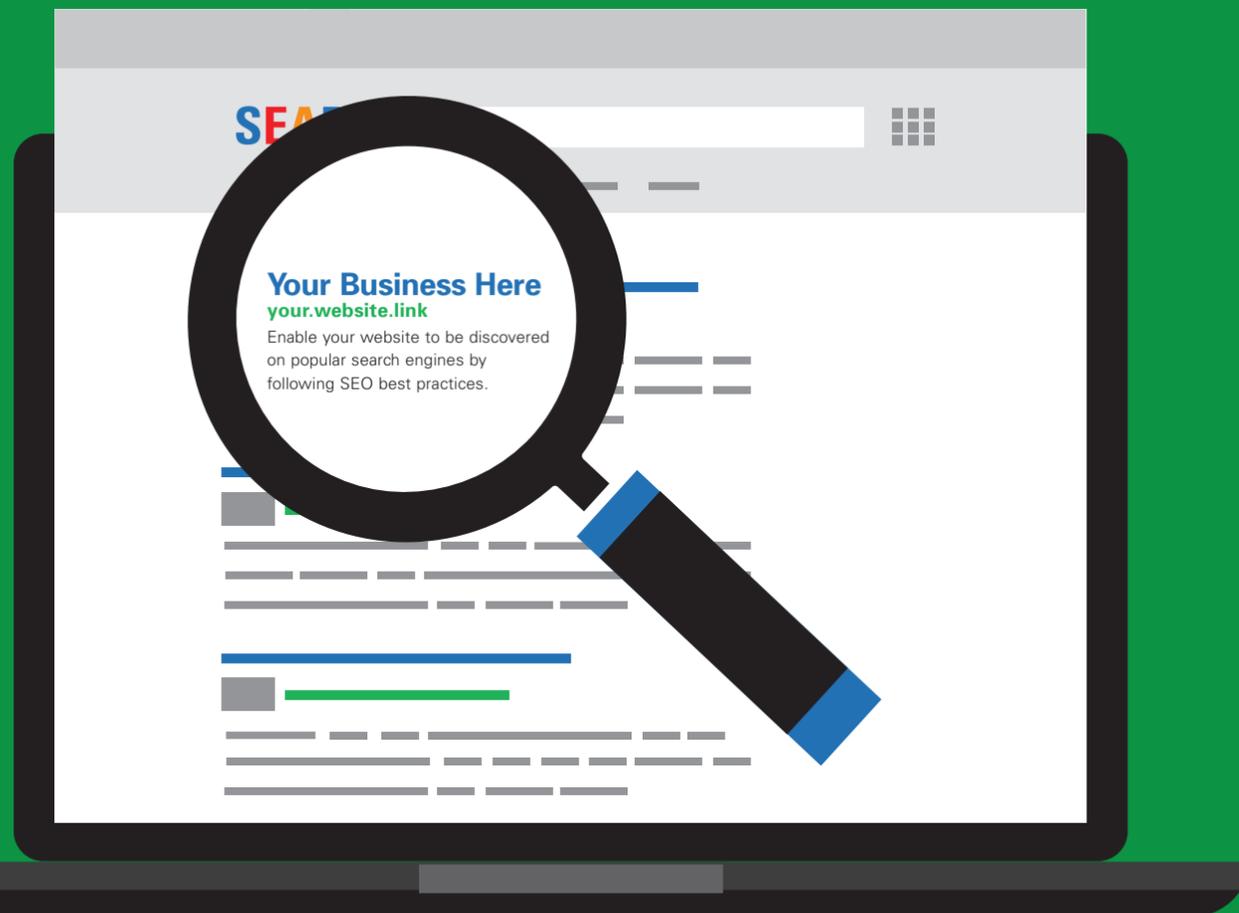
Many business owners today know that having a web presence is a necessity. Studies show even simple websites that give customers a broad look at your products, an overview of your services and a bit of history about your operation can engage shoppers and make them more likely to visit in person.

But these days, it's not enough to simply have a website. Operators are using search engine optimization (SEO) to ensure their websites are found among the top results on popular search engines. Whether a homeowner is looking for online inspiration for their kitchen renovation or a contractor is quickly searching for a hardware store with stainless steel rebar, even a simple SEO strategy can put your business right at their fingertips.

SEO refers to the steps you can take to ensure many key elements of your website are working in harmony to be recognized by search engines as content-rich and relevant to searches. By using these elements to implement a keyword strategy on your website, you can aim to appear as a top search result when customers are looking for your products and services in your town.

On the following pages, broaden your SEO knowledge by learning more about how it's evaluated by major search engines. Take a dive into the anatomy of a website to identify the elements you can use to position your business for new success through online searches.

Showcasing your web presence is becoming an increasingly important component to retail success. Learn how you can use SEO to help customers discover your business in perfect clarity.



How Does SEO Work?

When you do an online search, how exactly are the results compiled? Answering that question can help you understand basic SEO principles and recognize how you can set up your website for powerful SEO visibility.

According to Google analysts, there are three main methods to rank websites. The first is called crawling, in which search engines scour the internet using “spiders” to look for new content to analyze and use within search results.

The second process, called indexing, aims to help search engines understand what a website is about. By analyzing the content of a website (the text, photos, videos and code), search engines can categorize a website within an index of similar sites.

The third part, according to Google, is serving websites in searches. All search engines will use their indexes to display results that match a searcher's query. Search engines personalize the results based on a user's previous browsing history, their location and what kind of device they're using, Google reports.

In short, ensuring your website clearly identifies your industry, main products and services and location can be a powerful—and free—way to rank higher in online searches and introduce your business to new customers as they search for reliable home improvement retailers near them.

Making an SEO Splash

Michael Bellush, founder of Indianapolis marketing firm HighMark SEO Digital, says it's important to regularly update your website to ensure it is using current best practices to appear as high as possible on search engine results pages.

“The real value of SEO is that in today's world, roughly 90 percent of people start their buying process by doing an online search,” Bellush says. “It's not just to do product research; it might be to get information about a specific business. If you don't have a website that shows up on the first page of a search, there's a good chance you'll be losing out on a lot of business.”

For many retailers, a robust, SEO-friendly website is a vital component for any operator's marketing efforts. Writing for *Forbes*, founder of content marketing firm AudienceBloom Jayson DeMers says nearly two-thirds of website visits originate from searches on well-known platforms like Google and Bing. Only 6 percent occur from paid advertising, like Google Ads.

What's more, Google estimates that half of all customers who search for local business information on a mobile device visit a store on the same day. The good news doesn't end there; 18 percent of local mobile searches lead to a sale within one day, showing how critical SEO is for your operation's success both online and in-store.

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Web Words Glossary

Don't be stumped by common SEO terms. Get a quick definition of helpful online search components now.



H1s, H2s

This refers to an HTML tag that indicates a heading on a website. H1s are usually the first header on a page, and H2s refer to subsequent headers.

Meta Description

This term refers to the short summary that appears below your page title in search engine results. Be sure it includes original content.

Title Tags

Your website's actual title—what appears in the window of your browser—is your title tag.

URL

This term refers to your actual web address.

SEO in Sight

You don't have to be an expert programmer to implement a strong SEO strategy on your website. Take a tour of some of the most critical SEO components so you can identify where and how to boost your website's SEO power.

Title Tags and Meta Description

Bellush says title tags and meta descriptions are both prime opportunities to implement your keyword and boost your ranking.

Write your keyword close to your location to help customers find your products in your town, which will enable search engines to serve geo-specific search results.

- ✓ Be sure each page of your website has a unique title tag and meta description. Consider using the formula: Keyword Location | Your Business Name | Page Title for your page title.

H1s and H2s

What's written on your website can be a powerful force in shaping your overall SEO impact, Bellush says.

By sprinkling your keyword in your page title, meta description, the first paragraph of text and within a header on your website, you can ensure your keyword appears in prime locations that can signal to the SEO crawlers that your website has relevant content for searchers.

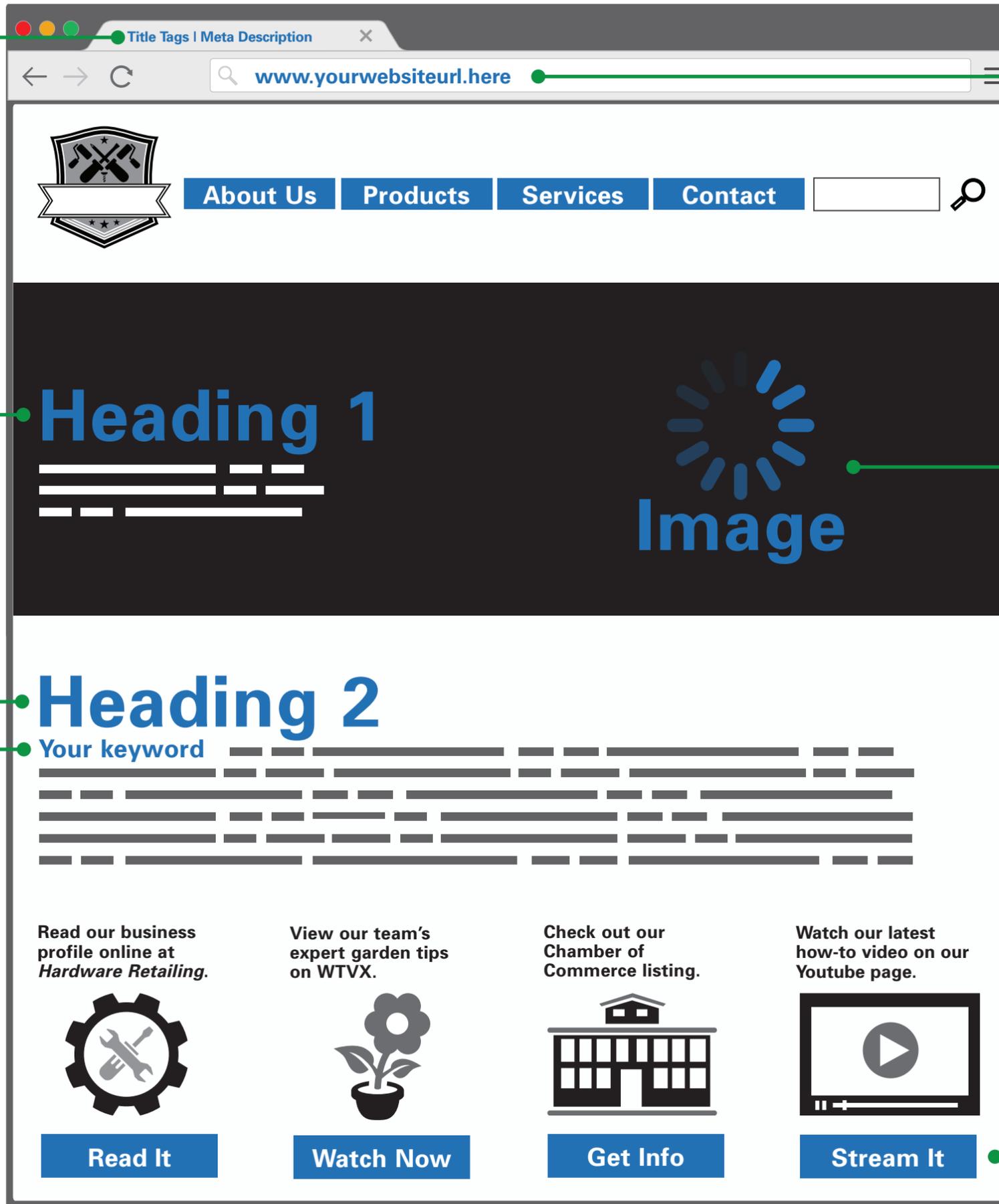
- ✓ Ensure each page of your website has more than 100 words of content. Using headers, which are essentially titles for paragraphs, can help you reach that word count and break down your content for visitors.

First Paragraph

Bellush says the first paragraph of text is a prime location to drop your keyword and a location reference. Search engines prioritize websites with unique, specific content, so have someone on your team write a few paragraphs that include your full business name, your location and the keyword you're hoping customers use to find your business.

"I've tried various ways, but I've found that the sooner you work the keyword in, the more successful your SEO becomes," Bellush says. "The sooner a search engine can start to recognize what a page is about, the easier it is for it to rank that page."

- ✓ Finish this sentence to use within the first paragraph of your website's home page: "Welcome to (business name), your top choice for (product or service) in (location)."



Page URL

Bellush says clear URLs are "the single most important ranking factor" for websites.

Bellush advises giving your top-selling product or category its own webpage and naming it with a clear keyword, not random characters. If you sell paint, create a page and name its URL www.myhardwarestore.com/paint-supplies so Google can tie that keyword into what the page is about, which will boost your overall SEO ranking.

- ✓ Review your website to ensure each page has a clear, logical URL. Update webpages that have random letters and numbers in their URL to include clear keywords for easy navigation and greater SEO reach.

Images and Site Speed

One other aspect of SEO Bellush says to consider is your website's overall loading speed.

Search engines penalize websites that are slow to load. Retailers can use several online resources to test their website's overall site speed. If your website loads like molasses, there are a few steps you can take to speed it up. Ensure all your internal links are active and be sure to reduce image file sizes before placing them online.

- ✓ No matter which web platform you use, be sure it incorporates responsive design, which will ensure it loads quickly and displays properly on mobile devices and tablets.

Links

Bellush says one of the most important aspects of boosting your website's SEO power is working to establish links from other websites that point to your own. These are called backlinks and they have a powerful effect on your SEO.

When websites that already have a well-established SEO pull link to your own website, spiders see those connections as votes of confidence in your content, which can signal to them that your website is full of valuable information for readers.

Links on your website can help readers discover new resources, but they do not impact your overall SEO, according to Bellush.

- ✓ Do what you can to ensure your website has links coming to it. If you're profiled by a local newspaper, ask the editor to link to your website in the publication's online edition. ➔