

An Online Entrepreneur's Best Friend: Getting to Know SEO

Date : June 11, 2012



When he was 16, Jarret Miller, now a senior at Butler University in Indianapolis, started a business. Like many teens, he was enterprising, independent and attracted to the idea of being his own boss. “The reason that I wanted to go into business for myself,” says Miller, “was to actually build something with the time I put in, rather than simply ‘sell’ my time to an employer.”

The Internet proved to be a great platform for Miller’s startup — he could easily work from home, and the world was literally at his fingertips. His business model: buying and developing websites and monetizing them, a well-established Internet practice. Anita Campbell, owner of bizsugar.com and smallbiztrends.com, both online sources of news and advice for small business owners, says buying and fixing up web pages has become more popular in recent years. “[A website] is like any other undervalued asset,” she notes. “There is always someone who thinks, ‘This could be worth something.’”

Lots of Eyeballs

Miller’s business either buys preexisting websites or creates new ones, researching and identifying niche markets. While he is not willing to discuss specific web addresses, his sites are aggregators that pull information from multiple online sources to help people find specific services, as well as evaluate their quality and legitimacy. He then works to make the sites profitable. “The method through which the website makes money will vary depending on the website and the niche,” says Miller. “Some websites have contextual advertising; others have links to advertisers that generate income on a pay-per-lead basis, where I get paid for every visitor I send who turns into a lead.”

In order to make money off web-based advertising, a website needs traffic — lots of eyeballs perusing the content and the featured ads. Generating traffic, according to Miller, can be the hard part. The Internet is a maze of websites covering every conceivable topic, thus prompting online entrepreneurs to continually strategize about how to capture visitors. Miller has become a pro at data analysis, keeping records, reviewing costs and revenues for each website and tracking what draws visitors to his sites.

One of the key tools used to get attention for an online business is search engine optimization (SEO), which is the

process of improving the visibility of a website or web page. “If you’re a do-it-yourselfer, you have to know SEO,” says Campbell. Search engine optimization involves tailoring aspects of a website to target the criteria of a search engine so that the website shows up at the top of the list when Internet users conduct searches on Google, Yahoo or other web browsers.

Miller has become an SEO master. “I learned SEO through trial and error and reading forums and articles,” he says. Keywords are often vital to SEO success. The so-called search engine spiders — programs used by search engines to scan through web pages for the source code of different sites and links on those sites – will look for keywords in order to index the site. The more popular the keywords, the more visible your website becomes in a search.

Miller uses his skills in data analysis to find the right keywords for his websites. He looks through search volumes to find the most important and commonly searched keywords for a topic, then makes sure to integrate those into the text of his web page. He also uses his research to determine where to allocate his time and money when it comes to SEO.

The architecture of a website also influences its search-engine ranking. The organization of graphics, text and other media on a web page tells the search engine which parts of the page the site owner thinks are most important. By correctly arranging the page, you can direct search engines right to the keyword-rich text and help the web page climb higher in the ranks. Keywords and site architecture are both referred to as “on-page” SEO.

Another aspect of SEO is developing links between your website and objective, third-party sites on the same topic. Anyone can set up a link to someone else’s website. The important thing is to have respected third-party websites link to your web page, which enhances your credibility. Search engines target websites with high credibility for the tops of their lists.

Scoring an Internship

Miller hires help for tasks like encouraging other web pages to link to his own and other types of off-page SEO, which covers everything that doesn’t show up on his web page. His average daily upkeep per website requires five minutes to check statistics and make sure everything is running correctly. Developing a website takes 10 to 20 hours in the beginning, but, like any student, Miller has to balance his extracurricular activities with his classes and homework. He does most of his web development during breaks from school.

These days, Miller is studying accounting and finance at college. He says that running his own online business has helped his job and internship search. “The interviews that I have had so far all included questions about business-related experiences, and I have been able to use examples from my online business,” he notes. His online expertise helped Miller land an internship as an accountant for ITech Digital, an Indianapolis company that specializes in surveillance systems.

Meanwhile, he continues to maintain his business – and keep up on the latest SEO strategies, especially when he is off-campus. “The total number of visitors to my websites has increased substantially. I have also increased the number of websites I own and the amount of revenue they bring in,” says Miller. “In the beginning, it was more of a hobby, but recently I have been viewing it as something that is sustainable.” After all, in today’s tough job market, being your own boss has its advantages.

Questions

How does Jarret Miller make money from his websites?

What is SEO or search engine optimization? What are some effective SEO strategies?

How has the Internet influenced innovation and entrepreneurship both positively and negatively?

How might Miller grow his business?

Related Links

- [Some of the Top Aggregator Sites on the Web](#)
- [New York Times: The Dirty Little Secrets of Search](#)
- [Website Magazine: Search Engine Optimization](#)
- [Entrepreneur.com: Search Engine Optimization](#)