

The SEO Challenge Demands Consistent Effort

ONLINE SEARCH: DOES IT FIND YOUR TEACHING BUSINESS?

by David Gould, Staff Editor

The slang term for Internet-searching software is “crawlers” or “spiders.” At this very moment they are helping some golfer, in some part of the world, locate a teacher or a place to hit balls.

Meanwhile, the famed Googlebot and its fellow spiders are always studying web pages and links to see what happens when a consumer clicks on a search result: Do they stay on the chosen site? If so, what’s their engagement pattern? Is this a site that gets lots of traffic from other websites, or only from the stack of search results? The evaluating never ends, and the factors that rank a business high on the Google, Yahoo or Bing results pages keep changing, too.

Proponent Group member John Hughes, of Haines City, Fla., serves golfers in the competitive Orlando instruction market, a factor that only adds to his sense of urgency around search engine optimization, or SEO. Hughes, over recent years, has made SEO-related projects and overall website maintenance an ingrained habit.

“Two or three times a week, in the evening, as long I’ve got a fair amount of energy left, I will sit down with my website and take care of the routine tasks,” says Hughes. “There’s no choice—either someone does this for you or you do it yourself, but it’s got to be done.” The first task on his list is to “check all the H1, H2 and H3 headers”—these are the titles of your content, which need the correct code syntax “or else your content looks like one big sentence to Google,” he says, and in a situation like that your ranking will suffer.

Another evening task that doesn’t take brainpower is checking local directory websites, such as whitepages, yelp, ezlocal, foursquare, yahoolocal, tripadvisor and so on. You want your data listed on these sites and you want it—for spider-pleasing reasons, if nothing else—to be correct



and matching, site to site. That means not typing “St. James Street” on some forms and “Saint James Street” on others. “I moved my business, and it’s taken a long time to check all these sites and edit the contact info so it’s accurate,” says Hughes.

He adds that it is possible to pay a service to do this work for you, and survey data tells us that \$500 a month is the minimum retainer you can pay, which may work decently if you truly consider yourself a “hyper-local” business. In the next price bracket, \$1,000 to \$5,000 a month, you start to get the more premium SEO services, such as consistent quality content creation, high-quality link building, and a strong focus on optimizing conversions, usability, and accessibility.

Search online with a keyword for just about anything and it’s likely you’ll receive 10 or 20 pages of results. As Hughes sees it, the search engines might as well delete anything past page 3. “Only your mother will still be looking for you if don’t show up after a couple of pages,” he says. What’s a good goal for a Proponent instructor in “organic” (not paid for) search results, when “golf lesson” and their town or city are typed into the search box? Try to be first, second, maybe third or fourth, is what Hughes would tell you, depending on which terms are entered.

What’s a good goal for a Proponent instructor in “organic” (not paid for) search results, when “golf lesson” and their town or city are typed into the search box?

In fact, based on his advice, you probably want to create a word-processing file where you can store (and periodically add to) the list of keywords and key phrases people would use to search for what you sell. If your teaching facility is in Dayton, Ohio and your name is John Jones, that list would start with “John Jones golf lesson Dayton Ohio.” Obviously if you specialize in elite junior training, one of your phrases would be “John Jones junior golf instruction Dayton Ohio.” Having the phrases in a known spot where you can easily cut-and-paste them into a search box will make your periodic tests go much quicker and smoother—and you’ve got to keep conducting these tests.

Your website’s home page is where the web-surfing golfer will land, so make sure that all your highest-quality and most “sticky” content is featured in some kind of teaser box or drop-down on the home page. Newsletters, for example, can be an ultimate digital marketing tool, but it’s a huge SEO no-no if that newsletter can’t be seen on your home page by the crawlers. And double down on any social-media marketing you do by including your home page URL (using a shortened URL via Bitly or some other link-management software) in what you post on Facebook or Instagram.

Lately the world of search has become more heavily skewed to mobile devices and—to a fair degree because of the device being used—much more local. “Right now my advice to a Proponent member would be to get as local as possible with your SEO effort,” says Hughes.

According to experts like Zach Miller of Imavex, about 50 percent of mobile search is local search. In other words, people are looking for someplace to eat, buy housewares or get a leaf blower repaired. This category of search naturally includes golf and golf instruction. “The figure now, for Americans using mobile devices to find local business information,” Miller says, “is up near



90 million people.” Furthermore, in half of all searches the entry words are generic, not specifying a business name. “For that reason,” Miller advises, “Make sure your Google Plus Local information is updated and current.” The alternative is getting missed by the crawlers when a local golfer wants to find a good teacher.

Miller also has actionable advice about how that website you’re so dependent on shows up on a mobile device. “The current data shows that mobile users are looking for quick answers,” he says. “They want directions, phone numbers, maps, and not much more.” For that reason, it’s necessary to stress easy, big-button navigation in your mobile-enabled website. When you go on Google Analytics, you can check your hits for local-ness, according to Hughes, and that’s a major form of guidance to you about the tactics you’re trying and how well they’re working.

Along with some of the listing-oriented tips mentioned above, here are a couple others:

1) Use your city name in your content, especially in phrases that also describe your service, but still trying to sound natural. So, you would have a sentence in a social media post or in your newsletter that says: “That’s another reason XYZ academy has such a great reputation among Dayton, Ohio golf academies.”

2) Keep posting strong, relevant content—it helps local SEO just as much if not more than it helps global search. **PG**

Another task is checking local directory websites... You want your data on these sites and you want it—for spider-pleasing reasons, if nothing else—to be correct and matching, site to site.