



Good Things Come to Those Who Wait (and Other Analogies and Cliche's for SEO)

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We've all heard that familiar expression, "Good things come to those who wait". Whether you're waiting for your Heinz ketchup to pour out onto your burger (remember those commercials?), waiting for Christmas day to open your gifts, waiting for summer vacation to be let out of school, or waiting in line at the DMV... well, maybe not the DMV, good things will come if you simply allow them to come in their own time.

Under normal circumstances that expression is simply not true. You'll still get your ketchup if you shove the butter knife into the bottle, dragging it out onto your plate; open all your gifts on Christmas Eve; skip that last few pointless days of the school year; or get into the express line at the DMV. The real lesson behind the cliché is that patience is a virtue.

One instance where it's true, that good things come to those that wait, is when you are performing search engine optimization. Unlike placing sponsored ads via Google AdWords or Yahoo! Search Marketing, where results are almost instantaneous, the long-term return on investment for SEO is considerably better than most other forms of on- or off-line advertising. Unfortunately, SEO does not produce instantaneous results. And yes, patience is still a virtue. Optimizing your site for your targeted key phrases won't get you to #1 over night. You won't find all your keywords to rank in the top 10 on Google in just a few days, nor will you get

significant traffic improvement at the snap of the fingers. To use a simple analogy, SEO is like boiling water: you don't get a hard boil the moment you turn on the burner, you have to wait for it.

The process of optimizing a site, or just specific pages in a site can take weeks, and that's just the initial optimization phase. In a previous article I wrote about the making of a perfect SEO firm, highlighting all the different jobs that an SEO firm must perform for the optimization process. That article outlined only the overall human resources needed but didn't go into the specific job functions that are required in the SEO process, when performed correctly. Here is where I let that particular cat out of the bag.

Can't Find Your Way Out of a Paper Bag

On the front end of the optimization process hours and hours of research must be performed for each account. Everything from keyword research, industry research, competition research, marketing research, and more, all needs to be completed before any optimization can begin. We often get asked if research time can be shortened if we have performed optimization work for another site in the same industry recently. The short answer to that is, "no."

Every site is constructed different, designed different, laid out different, has a unique history and targets the audience differently. These are all factors that are considered in the multiple levels of research performed. No two sites are the same; therefore no research is the same.

Nothing to Write Home About

A good SEO will actually write or rewrite your page content to properly (and effectively) work in your targeted keyword phrases. A professional writer should be able to take the SEO recommendations for keyword usage and incorporate that into existing content in a way that reads naturally (i.e. does not look as if you just tried to insert keywords here and there for search engine relevance) and maintains the ability to convert your visitors to paying customers. This is no small task and should be done with utmost time and care.

Take It or Leave It

Code bloat removal is probably the most overlooked part of the SEO process. Sure, everybody knows about titles, meta tags, alt tags, etc. and making them all search engine friendly. That's not necessarily a small task either, but many times, eliminating page code bloat is an incredibly daunting task. Moving styles and javascripts is only part of the puzzle. Many times a page has to be almost completely rebuilt due to the excess amount of junk code that was put in place by whatever design programs were used.

Even a Broken Watch is Correct Twice a Day

On top of the code bloat removal process you also want to get your pages to validate to professional HTML standards set by the W3C. Validation is simply ensuring the correct coding elements are used and used correctly. While most validation issues are relatively small, they tend to come in multitudes thorough the site. Larger validation issues can often take time and substantial finessing of the code in order to correct.

All Things Being Equal

Site maps, custom 404-redirects and robots.txt files are all important to the overall construction of your site, even if they don't necessarily have a direct effect on the actual on-page optimization of your site. Site maps help both search engines and visitors quickly and easily get to the information that is important. A custom 404 redirect eliminates that annoying "page not found" error and lets you keep visitors on your site if they somehow access a page via a bad link. The robots.txt file is useful to communicate with the search engine spiders about content they should or should not index. This allows the search engines to focus its time on the good stuff and not the irrelevant portions of your site.

There's More Here than Meets the Eye

There are a lot of details that I left out simply because it can't all be addressed in a single article, but you can get the gist of the amount work that goes into just the initial optimization of a site. Depending on the size of the site or the number of pages being optimized, the processes above can take several weeks to a few months to complete. Going back to our boiling water analogy, you just filled the pot, now its time to put the pot on the stove.

Very rarely is search engine optimization a one-time-only process, but takes a continuous ongoing effort to build site relevance, evaluate performance, analyze effectiveness, and adjust the campaign accordingly to achieve and maintain top rankings against active competitors and substantial algorithm changes.

There are Plenty of Fish in the Sea

Link building and management is an important aspect to the total optimization campaign. Optimizing your site without considering your link campaign is like trying to drive a car without tires. You don't need great tires to make the car move forward, but you have to have some kind of tires in place, unless you're towing your car on a flatbed truck. Same holds true for a web site, it can be a great site but without links you just won't perform in the natural search results. (Just to complete the analogy, we can say that sponsored ads and off line marketing efforts are the flatbed truck.)

Linking has gotten more and more complex as the search engines fight link spam and seek to improve relevance. Whether you seek out one-way or reciprocal links, linked articles or directory submissions, or "authority" links, link building is a very time consuming process that undergoes constant re-evaluations. A good link today may not be a good link tomorrow, not because it was never a good link but because the linking site might become irrelevant to the search engines or become a search spammer, or whatever reason. A good half to two-thirds of the monthly man-hours assigned to ongoing optimization can easily be focused specifically on the link campaign.

Look at Both Sides of the Coin

Unless you are targeting no more than a single phrase for any given page of your site, inevitably it will take some finesse to achieve top rankings for all phrase being targeted. Good keyword research in the set-up process can greatly improve the ability to achieve top rankings for multiple phrases per page, but no matter what there will always be certain elements

working against each other. Adjust one phrase here and another one drops. Adjust that phrase and still another phrase drops.

With time, a good SEO will be effective at getting your keywords ranked well against the competition. That's half the battle. The rest comes as new or existing competitors amp up their optimization efforts in order to take back what was achieved and as search engines adjust their algorithms. We've all heard of sites losing rankings with algo adjustments, even those that have never spammed. It happens and it's the job of the SEO to see these things coming and adjust the site accordingly and should rankings dip, to move in and get them back in place.

Wait with Baited Breath

Again, this is just scratching the surface of what goes into the monthly optimization campaign. But all of these adjustments work over time. Even more so once you consider "sandboxing" and "aging delays" that are becoming a staple in the search engine algorithms.

If You're Not Part of the Solution, You're Part of the Problem

Don't expect instant results with your optimization campaign. Many SEOs require a six or twelve month contract, simply because they know it can often take that much time to show solid results for all of your keywords. Expecting great results any sooner is simply wishful thinking.

We all heard the saying, "A watched pot never boils." Well, in reality, it'll take the same amount of time to boil as an unwatched pot, but it just seems longer because you're there looking at it. Once you hire your SEO company, let them do their job and walk away. Don't completely forget about them and check in from time to time just so you know what's going on (and your SEO knows that you expect results), but just give it time for the process to work.

Go work on your site, your business and other marketing efforts. While your SEO is working to make your site successful in the search engines, look for other ways to bring success to you and, to use another cliché; don't put all your eggs in one basket. Search engine optimization should not be your only hope for success.

If you have done your research and chosen the right SEO company success will come, but only with time. Be willing to let the process work its course and good things will come... by the boatload.

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