

Learn, Practice and Teach Search Engine Optimization

David Horowitz, Sonoma State University

Abstract

The marketing education literature devoted to teaching marketing topics such as social media, search engine optimization (SEO) and ecommerce is developing rapidly. In order to discuss how marketing educators can learn, teach and practice SEO, this paper is divided into three sections. First, resources on how to learn SEO are reviewed, second, recommendations on how marketing educators can practice SEO are offered and third, recommendations on how to teach marketing students SEO are presented.

How to Learn SEO

There are a lot of great online resources for learning SEO. Free SEO blogs, webinars, videos and software are common. This section reviews resources to learn SEO at SEOmoz, Google and Lynda.com.

SEOMoz Resources to Learn SEO

SEOMoz sells SEO software (<http://www.seomoz.org/tools>), has a large online SEO community (<http://www.seomoz.org/community>) and has many great resources to learn SEO (<http://www.seomoz.org/learn-seo>). The last link listed a priori is to SEOMoz's *Learn SEO* webpage, which is a great place to learn SEO.

Google Resources to Learn SEO

On Google's *Webmaster Central Blog*, Google published a *Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide* .pdf (<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2008/11/googles-seo-starter-guide.html>). Google's *Webmaster Tools Help* section has additional resources on SEO <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=35291>, and the *Google Webmaster Central* YouTube Channel (<http://www.youtube.com/GoogleWebmasterHelp>) is frequently updated. Furthermore, Google also has great resources to learn Google Analytics at its *Conversion University* (<http://www.google.com/support/conversionuniversity>) and great resources to learn AdWords at *Learn with Google* (<http://www.google.com/ads/learn/marketing-business.html>).

Lynda.com Resources to Learn SEO

Lynda.com is a paid subscription service that provides video tutorials from industry experts. Lynda.com regularly adds video tutorials on SEO topics. Currently, Lynda.com has two beginner

tutorial series (<http://www.lynda.com/Business-Online-Marketing-SEO-tutorials/Analyzing-Your-Web-Site-to-Improve-SEO/82409-2.html> and <http://www.lynda.com/Web-Design-tutorials/seosearchengineoptimizationgettingstarted/52344-2.html>). Lynda.com also has a category of video tutorials dedicated entirely to Google (<http://www.lynda.com/Google-training-tutorials/117-0.html>), which contains SEO-related topics such as Google AdWords, Google Analytics and Google Website Optimizer.

How To Practice SEO

Many marketing professors are publishing their content online, but they are not necessarily practicing the best SEO practices. Marketing educators link to their businesses or consulting companies, books that are for sale, personal blogs, and marketing class content. The focus of this paper will be on how marketing educators can publish their classroom content online. The recommendations made in this sections include using a modern content management system or publishing platform, examining keywords, featuring best content, writing blog posts and writing static pages.

Content Management System or Publishing Platform

It is important that marketing educators take advantage of the latest and best online publishing technology. Many marketing educators publish their online content with old publishing tools. Newer publishing tools such as WordPress and Blogger allow marketing educators to take advantage of the latest publishing technologies. The self-hosted WordPress.org content management system is one of the most powerful publishing tools available, but it does require technical knowledge to install and to customize.

Keywords

The starting place of most SEO improvement efforts is with keywords. A lot of marketing educators publish their marketing content under the titles of their classes (MKTG 305 or BUS 360). These types of class titles are not keywords that people commonly search for on search engines. If a marketing educator teaches “marketing research” or “services marketing” it would be better to use these keywords as class titles.

Feature Your Best Content

While it is tempting for marketing educators to feature a bio, publications, or teaching history on a home page, this is not necessarily the type of content that readers or search engines are interested in. When readers visit a marketing educators' site for the first time marketing educators

should be ready to present readers with their best content. There should be multimedia content such as graphics or video that can communicate to visitors why they should stay on the site.

Write Blog Posts

Marketing educators should write blog posts that are SEO-friendly in terms of title tags (<http://www.seomoz.org/learn-seo/title-tag>), meta descriptions (<http://www.seomoz.org/learn-seo/meta-description>), and other on-page factors (<http://www.seomoz.org/learn-seo/on-page-factors>). These blog posts can then be added to static pages.

Write Static Pages

Static pages should be organized in a logical hierarchy and linked to frequently in blog posts and on social networks. After the home page, these pages are the most important pages of a website.

How to Teach SEO

SEO fits into a variety of marketing classes such as Promotion Management and Marketing Research. Based on the author's experience, it takes approximately five weeks to cover SEO in a hands-on manner. It is important for students interested in learning SEO to have access to a website that they can customize in order to help them learn SEO. This section is divided into five subsections that outline the weekly topics that can be followed in order to teach SEO in a hands-on manner.

1) Start a Website with WordPress.com, WordPress.org, Blogger or Tumblr

In order to learn SEO it is important for students to be able to control their HTML, but blogging tools can be difficult to setup and costly. Students can start WordPress, Blogger, or Tumblr websites and begin to publish content that is crawled by search engines.

WordPress.com: Mostly free, easy to setup and easy to customize for SEO. WordPress.com sells premium features such as domain mapping (<http://en.wordpress.com/products/>).

WordPress.org: Not free, difficult to setup and easy to customize for SEO. Requires paid hosting and domain name (<http://wordpress.org/hosting/>) which will cost \$5-\$10 per month.

Blogger: Free, easy to setup and difficult to customize for SEO.

Tumblr: Free, easy to setup and easy to customize for SEO.

2) Write Blog Posts and Pages

Search engines will need content to crawl, so students should add some static pages that have information like their contact information, bio and portfolio, and students should begin to add blog posts about topics that they are interested in.

3) Register, List, Link, and Track

While Bing and Yahoo offer similar services to the services that Google offers, Google's services are the most popular and are therefore the services that marketing students should focus on learning. This week should focus registering a site with Google Webmaster

(<http://www.google.com/webmasters/>), listing a site on Google Places

(<http://www.google.com/places/>), linking social media accounts and tracking a site's traffic with Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>).

4) Learn SEO

The same SEO educational resources from SEOmoz, Google, and Lynda.com presented in the first section of this paper can be covered in this week. Students can customize their websites to cater to search engines.

5) Review Tracking Data

This last week can be used to analyze data that has been gathered by Google Webmaster and Google Analytics. Additional SEO software and tools can be used to analyze the SEO characteristics of a website. A search of Firefox add-ons or Chrome extensions for "SEO" will provide lots of SEO tools.