

# A Marketer's Guide to MANAGING AND MAXIMIZING SEO SUCCESS



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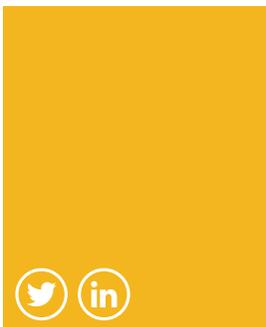
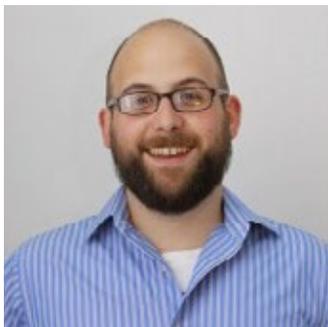
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[\*Review Your Current SEO Strategy with One of Our Experts »\*](#)

# A FRIENDLY NOTE FROM DAN RENO

VP OF ORGANIC MEDIA



Congratulations! You want to rank at the top of Google search results! We commend you. Make sure you're prepared for the long road ahead.

It's a good thing you decided to take some time aside to read this, because the state of SEO is in a very interesting place right now. Things change more rapidly and at larger scale than ever before, but there is more support from the Search Engines, wonderful tools and professionals like our SEO team that can help you keep up with the pace.

In this eBook you will find 7 sections of what we believe are fundamental to SEO as it should be done in 2015. We wanted to give you information on everything from selecting keywords to reporting results, including some strategic insight on where you should putting your effort with SEO.

We are excited to share some of what we feel are the essentials to modern day SEO success. There is nothing short of a wealth of information about these topics, so we encourage you to read as much as you can, but we also understand how overwhelming it can be for marketers. We hope that you can walk away from reading this feeling encouraged about your choice to make an undertaking in SEO; and start off the right foot!



# WHY SHOULD I BE READING THIS GUIDE???

The goal of this guide is to provide Marketers with a one-stop resource for all the SEO knowledge needed to not only manage, but also maximize SEO success as a piece of an overall marketing strategy.

Why? Because the rapid pace at which SEO evolves tends to result in a lack of understanding of SEO among anyone who isn't doing it day-to-day, including marketers. A marketer who understands their SEO team's world can effectively maximize their team's potential to drive awareness, leads, and ultimately revenue. The evolution of SEO is time-consuming to keep up with, especially if you aren't an SEO yourself, so we've compiled the knowledge for you in this neat little guide.

SEO teams today are capable of enhancing overall marketing strategies, beyond just helping you rank well for a handful of keywords.

Our guide can help marketers learn the SEO language and understand how SEO fits with other marketing teams to maximize results.

#### It's all about:

1. **effectively managing your company's SEO efforts as a piece of your integrated marketing strategy, and**
2. **being sure you are fully tapping in to your SEO team's potential to enhance your overall marketing strategy.**

Enjoy!



## SECTION 1



SET THE FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC SUCCESS:  
**KEYWORD RESEARCH**

**Keyword research is a vital, fundamental part of any SEO strategy. Combined with competitor analysis, it's a way of making sure you set relevant, appropriate SEO goals for your site, in both the short and long term. Knowing how to get started with keyword research can help set your SEO strategy up for success**

### WHAT IS KEYWORD RESEARCH?

Keyword research is the practice of discovering keywords that your target audience is likely to use to find your website in a search engine. Sources for keyword discovery include:

- **Your own website analytics:** Review the keywords that your analytics platform shows are bringing users to your site
- **Competitors' websites:** Review competitors' title tags, h1s, URLs, top-level navigation, and body copy for the keyword phrases they are using
- **Keyword tools like Google AdWords Keyword Planner:** Use these after you've looked at your website analytics and competitors' sites. Input the seed keywords you have collected and let the tool fetch similar terms as well as the associated search volume

When you've determined the keywords that will be most effective in your SEO strategy, use a tool such as Rank Checker (a free browser extension) to find out where your site currently ranks for those terms. Baseline ranking research also lets you know which specific pages you rank on for each term. This will be something to monitor on a regular basis for change as you optimize your site.

### THE ANATOMY OF KEYWORD PHRASES

Keyword phrases come in all shapes and sizes. Because search engines simply have a free-form text box for searches, there are as many keywords as there are unique searchers. Some keywords, however, share similar structures. You may have heard the phrase "head keyword" or "long-tail keyword" but perhaps don't understand their meanings.

KEYWORD

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:



**LINDSEY BLESSMAN**  
SEO Account Manager

Lindsey is an SEO Account Manager and has been with BFO for a year and a half. She combines more than 10 years of online marketing experience with her MBA in Marketing to achieve success for clients. When she's not at work, she can be found performing at a small theater in Chicago, riding her road bike, or taking photos.

## THE ANATOMY OF KEYWORD PHRASES CONTINUED

This keyword is representative of the very beginning of a user's search where they haven't narrowed down what they're looking for to fit their current need. Therefore, it is not as likely to lead to a conversion as a more descriptive keyword.

A "long-tail keyword" is more descriptive in nature, with a narrower focus. (Example 2: "specialized road bike for sale in Chicago 60647.") The more a user is able to narrow down the results of their search by including more words, the more likely they are to convert when they find the webpage that suits their needs.

These examples illustrate the difference between head terms and long-tail keywords. While they both contain "bike," the user who enters the search in Example 2 is more likely ready to purchase a bike when they find the webpage that offers them everything in their query.

## KEYWORD STRATEGY

Every keyword that a) is targeted to your audience and b) has a fairly high search volume is an opportunity to serve your content to those users.

When you have your keywords, you can start keyword mapping. Map those keywords to the pages on your site, and then begin the process of optimizing the key page elements for that keyword phrase.

If you find that some keywords do not have an appropriate page on your site to map back to, consider this an opportunity to create new and valuable content for your audience. This new content can help drive fresh traffic to your site (traffic that you may have missed without it). When evaluating the likelihood of pushing a competitor off of page 1 with your own page, take a look at those top 10 results.



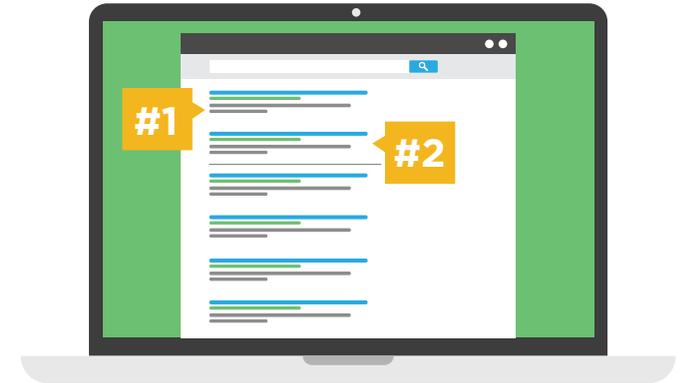
Review the sites' domain authority, backlinks, and the way the keyword phrase is used on their sites. Keep in mind that keywords should be periodically researched and refreshed due to the following factors:

- Your rankings and your competitors' rankings are constantly shifting
- Phrases that your audience uses can also change over time for the same subjects
- You may add new content to your site
- Review your keyword strategy often to keep things on track toward SEO success

### COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

In conjunction with keyword research, it's important to analyze your competition in the search/SEO space. Competitors in the search arena might be different than those you're already familiar with in the business world.

Once you have identified your high-priority keyword phrases, the sites that are ranking on page 1 for that term are, in essence, your main competitors in the search space. Also consider the different device types as varying competitive landscapes. The sites that rank on page 1 for your terms on desktop searches may not be the same sites when viewed on a mobile SERP (due to the emphasis on mobile usability).



VS.



WORDS

## SECTION 2



OPTIMIZE FOR THE LANDSCAPE:  
**GET MOBILE, BABY!**

**At the dawn of 2015 we find ourselves entrenched in a progressively exciting time in the way we utilize the Internet. With mobile and wearable technology gaining market share, it's more important than ever to be sure your website is nimble enough to compete across all devices.**

2014 saw the largest increase in mobile usage since the concept was introduced, and it's showing no signs of slowing down. In fact, mobile web usage is the third most popular use for mobile devices behind only calls and text, and it's poised to very soon overtake desktop as the most preferred method for Internet browsing. Knowing this, there are a few key things to consider when designing and optimizing any website as mobile becomes the preferred way to consume information and make purchases:

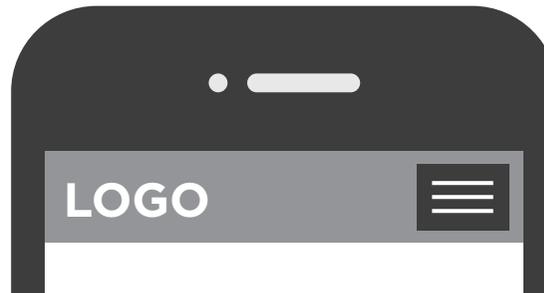
### BE RESPONSIVE!

To ensure that you have a mobile user experience that is both SEO and user-friendly, Google supports the following three site configurations:

- **Responsive Web Design (RWD):** This serves the same HTML for a single URL and properly renders CSS according to the screen resolution on the user's mobile device. This is Google's stated recommendation

- **Dynamic Serving:** This option serves different HTML/different experience for a single URL, depending on device type (i.e. mobile, tablet, desktop)
- **Separate Mobile Site:** With this option, the user will be redirected to a mobile-specific URL, if the site detects they are on a mobile device (i.e. m.example.com).

Using RWD enhances the user experience, making it easy for visitors to find information and making them more likely to share your web content. Google incentivizes RWD, too, by factoring responsiveness and user experience into the ranking mix



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:



**ADAM WOODBURN**  
SEO Analyst

Adam Woodburn has a B.A. in Advertising from UW – Milwaukee and is an SEO Analyst to the stars (because we treat our clients like celebrities). He does what he does because he loves to see clients excel in the SEO space. He hopes to teach others about his experiences with SEO, as well as learn from new ones. Adam enjoys sports, travel, movies, live music, and general gallivanting.

*"It's good to be here... It's good to be anywhere." – Keith Richards*

**BE FRIENDLY!**

Fact: 40% of people will choose a different search result if the first is not mobile-friendly. What this tells us is that even if you have invested the time and money to become the top result for your coveted “golden keyword,” it still may not garner the amount of traffic you desire.

Google has recently incorporated the practice of identifying search results with a “Mobile-Friendly” tag if the site is easily compatible with mobile devices.

**Example**

<https://www.example.com/>

Mobile-friendly - This is an example of a website that is well-designed for mobile devices.

Source: <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/>

Achieving this mobile-friendly distinction is dependent on following the guidelines for creating a site that is usable across all device platforms. For example, here are two important considerations: avoid using Flash, which makes a site sluggish, and space the

links in your menus far enough apart so users can move around pages with ease on small screens. It’s easy for mobile users to leave your site and find another one if they don’t like the experience they find there—so give them some reasons to stay.

**BE KNOWLEDGEABLE!**

Know that the intent of mobile users is often very different than that of desktop users. It’s no coincidence that the rise of local search has coincided with the rise of mobile usage, as they are inherently linked. People are now making more of their purchase decisions from their phones while on the go.

For brick-and-mortar businesses, making your locations, hours, and contact information readily available is crucial. E-commerce businesses need to make sure the user can locate and purchase an item on your site with ease, on any device. Updating your check-out process to remove any roadblocks or ensuring the images of your products load quickly are among important areas to consider.

**Designing and optimizing your website with these three goals in mind will help you be more competitive in the mobile space and cultivate a happier, more loyal customer base.**



**RUN A FREE TEST WITH  
GOOGLE TO SEE IF YOUR SITE IS  
CURRENTLY MOBILE FRIENDLY!**

[www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/](http://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/)

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOCAL SEO

Local SEO is a dynamic landscape, particularly with the rise of mobile usage in consumers. Here are some emerging trends and things to consider as you develop your local SEO for 2015:

- There is an **entire marketplace outside of Google** competing heavily for customers. In addition, Apple (Apple Maps, Apple Pay), Amazon, and Facebook are directing attention at the local market because of the transaction volume.
- Each location-based business is different, yet a **core set of online services** is needed for each: website (content), basic link profile, basic reviews, and citations.
- **Citations-building** should maintain a set system to ensure correct building and management of citations.

### CONTENT CREATION

Local SEO includes content creation. All online entities need good content, and the true objective should be to create content that is trusted by customers, other content publishers, and, of course, Google. Content should not only focus on city but on neighborhood levels as well. Trust equals more conversions, and so your content needs to be:

- ✓ **accurate and high-quality**
- ✓ **relevant and serve a purpose on your site**
- ✓ **original (not generic)**

Build trust with your potential customers by creating great content and participating in the local community. Engage and interact in a genuine way to bring local customers to your door.



## SECTION 3



EXPAND BEYOND YOUR SITE:

# CONTENT DISTRIBUTION & LINK BUILDING IN 2015

**The game has changed. SEO is no longer about the link-building arms race that dominated the space for most of time. Google has handed out manual actions or “penalties” faster than SEOs could build unnatural links, and for the most part, this is a good thing. Effective link-building today is about quality content built on true relationships, with links only representing trusted relationships and material. It’s a major change, but it’s one for the best.**

At BFO, we’ve steered clear of shady link-building practices employed by many SEOs over time. Our tactics for content marketing and link-building are built on the foundation of quality SEO, which includes understanding the complex set of guidelines defining proper linking.

Frankly, this is the kind of stuff that any PR representative, marketing manager, or online marketer is going to have to know moving into the future. Let’s dive into some guidelines for the most common link-building scenarios.

### BACKLINKING AS A PR ACTIVITY

When engaging in PR and linking back to any site, please be sure to follow these rules. It is imperative that you be selective about which sites link back to your own. Highly relevant, high-quality sites should be the only sites

linking back to yours. For any opportunity, always consider the following:

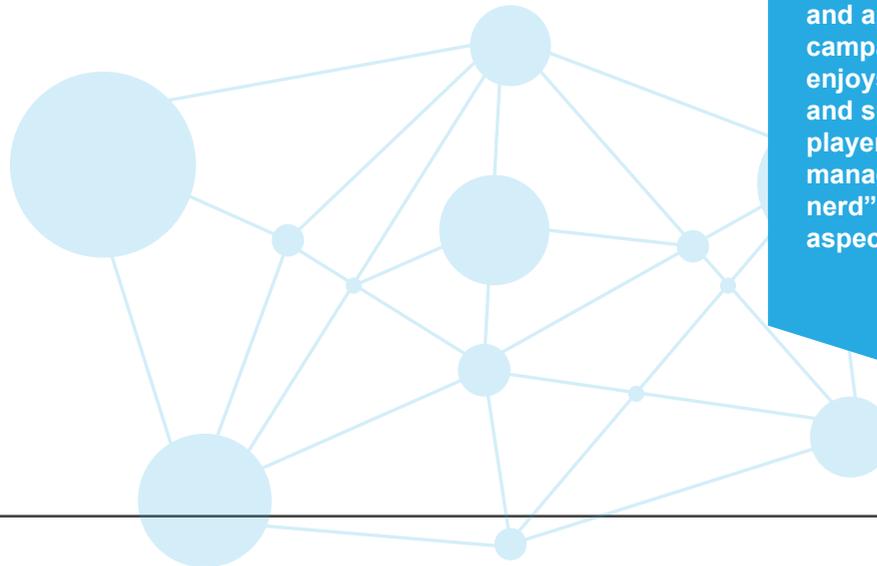
- When in doubt, use a no-follow link
- Do not overuse anchor text that is keyword-driven. If possible, default to the brand name or something else that is highly branded
- Press releases should include no-follow links

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:



**MICHAEL H. KLEIN**  
SEO Analyst

Michael Klein is a lifelong native of the Chicago area and has worked in several facets of the digital marketing industry throughout his career, notably moving his primary focus to SEO in the past two years. Michael both enjoys and thrives in the challenging space of SEO and looks forward to learning something new every day and applying that to a client’s campaign. In his free time, Michael enjoys nothing more than music and sports. As an avid guitar player, former band marketing manager, and all around “music nerd”, Michael loves nearly every aspect of music.



## SAFELY CREATE FOLLOWED BACKLINKS

When engaging in outreach or any form of backlink mining, follow these instructions.

Creating “followed” backlinks is essential to SEO, representing only the most high-quality and trustworthy links to a site. Poor, spammy, or manipulative backlinking can hinder SEO efforts and create larger problems and even manual actions (penalties). Due to this, please exercise selectivity with followed links to your own site. Additionally, consider the following:

- Do not overuse anchor text that is keyword-driven. If possible, default to the brand name or something else that is highly branded
- There is no better guide for proper backlinking than the Google Webmaster Guidelines, including this quote:

“

The best way to get other sites to create high-quality, relevant links to yours is to create unique, relevant content that can naturally gain popularity in the Internet community. Creating good content pays off: Links are usually editorial votes given by choice, and the more useful content you have, the greater the chances someone else will find that content valuable to their readers and link to it.

Source: <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66356>

”

## IMPLEMENTING “NO-FOLLOW” LINKS

“Sponsored,” “paid,” or any other form of incentivized backlinking requires the strict use of one of the following two approaches. Because the link might be considered “arranged” or “manipulative” by Google, caution must be exercised to avoid the risk of a manual action.

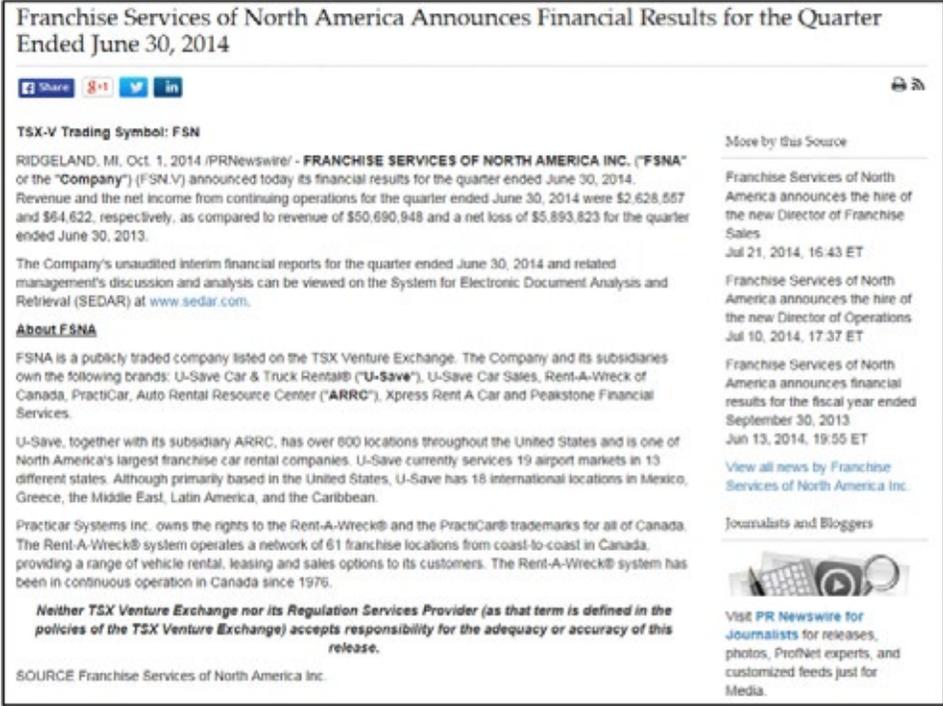
## HOW TO CREATE NO-FOLLOW LINKS:

The first approach to take when accepting a paid link opportunity is to use the “no-follow” link attribute. Simply put, this does not allow for page rank to be passed from one page to another when a link is made. This negates the risk of Google flagging the link as “unnatural.” In order to set up a no-follow link, please ensure that the linking site uses the following link convention:

To use the no-follow tag, ensure the link is coded as follows:

```
<a rel="nofollow" href="http://www.example.com">EXAMPLE ANCHOR TEXT</a>
```

## EXAMPLE OF A NO-FOLLOW LINK:



Franchise Services of North America Announces Financial Results for the Quarter Ended June 30, 2014

TSX-V Trading Symbol: FSN

RIDGELAND, MI, Oct. 1, 2014 /PRNewswire/ - **FRANCHISE SERVICES OF NORTH AMERICA INC.** (“FSNA” or the “Company”) (FSN.V) announced today its financial results for the quarter ended June 30, 2014. Revenue and the net income from continuing operations for the quarter ended June 30, 2014 were \$2,628,567 and \$64,622, respectively, as compared to revenue of \$50,690,948 and a net loss of \$5,893,823 for the quarter ended June 30, 2013.

The Company’s unaudited interim financial reports for the quarter ended June 30, 2014 and related management’s discussion and analysis can be viewed on the System for Electronic Document Analysis and Retrieval (SEDAR) at [www.sedar.com/](http://www.sedar.com/).

**About FSNA**

FSNA is a publicly traded company listed on the TSX Venture Exchange. The Company and its subsidiaries own the following brands: U-Save Car & Truck Rental® (“U-Save”), U-Save Car Sales, Rent-A-Wreck of Canada, PractiCar, Auto Rental Resource Center (“ARRC”), Xpress Rent A Car and Peakstone Financial Services.

U-Save, together with its subsidiary ARRC, has over 600 locations throughout the United States and is one of North America’s largest franchise car rental companies. U-Save currently services 19 airport markets in 13 different states. Although primarily based in the United States, U-Save has 16 international locations in Mexico, Greece, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

PractiCar Systems Inc. owns the rights to the Rent-A-Wreck® and the PractiCar® trademarks for all of Canada. The Rent-A-Wreck® system operates a network of 61 franchise locations from coast-to-coast in Canada, providing a range of vehicle rental, leasing and sales options to its customers. The Rent-A-Wreck® system has been in continuous operation in Canada since 1976.

*Neither TSX Venture Exchange nor its Regulation Services Provider (as that term is defined in the policies of the TSX Venture Exchange) accepts responsibility for the adequacy or accuracy of this release.*

SOURCE Franchise Services of North America Inc.

More by this Source

- Franchise Services of North America announces the hire of the new Director of Franchise Sales  
Jul 21, 2014, 16:43 ET
- Franchise Services of North America announces the hire of the new Director of Operations  
Jul 10, 2014, 17:37 ET
- Franchise Services of North America announces financial results for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2013  
Jun 13, 2014, 19:55 ET

View all news by Franchise Services of North America Inc.

Journalists and Bloggers

Visit PR Newswire for Journalists for releases, photos, ProNet experts, and customized feeds just for Media.

```
<p itemprop="articleBody">The Company's unaudited interim financial reports for the quarter ended <span class="xn-chron">June 30, 2014</span> and related management's discussion and analysis can be viewed on the System for Electronic Document Analysis and Retrieval (SEDAR) at <a onclick='linkOnClick(this)' href="http://www.sedar.com/" rel="nofollow" target="_blank">www.sedar.com</a>. </p>
```

NO-FOLLOW LINK

## SECTION 4



# INTEGRATE STRATEGIES: **SOCIAL MEDIA & SEO**

**We are past the days of having to convince a brand they need to be on social media. Everyone knows they need to be on Twitter, optimize their Facebook profile, and get some advertising running on LinkedIn, right? Let's consider that crossed off our list.**

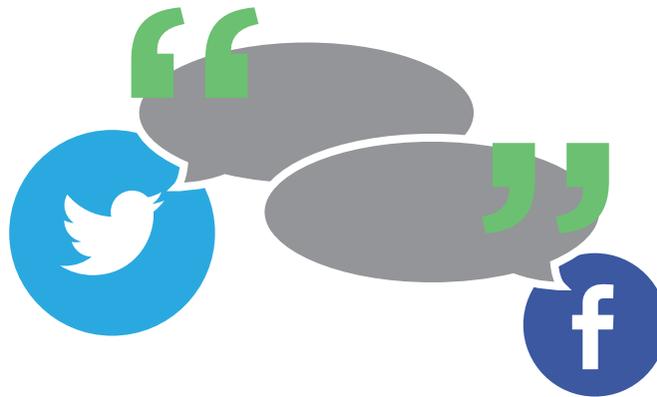
### SOCIAL SIGNALS

Social signals are the pieces of data a search engine can access that communicate authority and credibility about a specific brand or website. Search engines take these signals and consider them as a piece of their algorithm to rank websites for a given set of search queries. Social signals can be:

- Retweets
- Facebook shares
- Blog comments
- Pins and +1s
- and, in some cases, likes, followers, and audience size

Just as a search engine can crawl a company's website, it can crawl a social profile and mine data to use when it's serving search results.

So, does what you're posting matter? It sure does. But, the real difference is made when a social media post is paired with lots of shares and social authority. When a post or link is shared hundreds, thousands, or millions of times across the web, it can communicate relevance to a search engine.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:



**JILLIAN WILHELM**  
SEO Account Manager

Jillian Wilhelm is an SEO Account Manager. Her role at Be Found Online is to help clients build the best possible SEO strategy to achieve their business goals, and she does so with enthusiasm and determination. She is passionate about using SEO to help brands have a “voice” on the Internet. Jillian has a B.A. in Integrative Public Relations from Central Michigan University, and her certifications include:

- Google AdWords
- Bright Edge

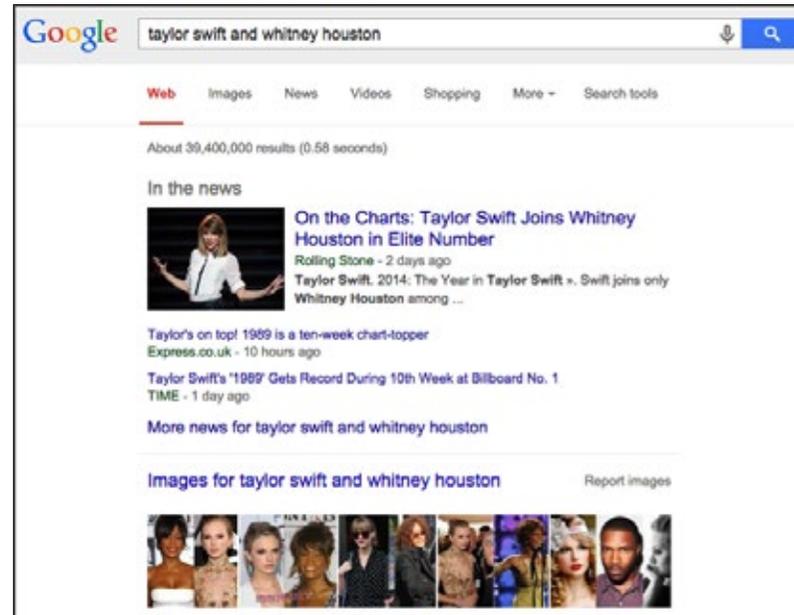
Jillian enjoys listening to Celine Dion and just about any song played on a piano. She also has a cat named Hugh.

## SOCIAL SIGNALS CONTINUED

Specifically, if a social media post is shared by users with greater “authority,” it can mean more. That’s right— when Taylor Swift shares an article or blog post, it is more effective than when you do. Why? Because Taylor Swift’s Twitter profile is considered more authoritative than yours. She has more followers and high levels of engagement. So, she has the ability to drive a lot of traffic, which can, in turn, give us an advantage in search results. Here’s an example:



On February 4, Taylor Swift (along with 4.5K of her followers) retweeted a post from the Rolling Stone about a new article featuring her and Whitney Houston in an elite Number One club.



On February 6, two days after the article was first publicized, this article is still positioning first for a generic search term like “taylor swift and whitney houston.” The article easily kicks those image results and random articles down the page simply because it’s making noise on social media.

Sadly, it takes quite a bit of luck (or a lot of money) to catch the attention of Taylor Swift. But, there are some best practices brands can follow to help enhance SEO performance using their social profiles.

## GETTING SOCIAL MEDIA AND SEO TO WORK TOGETHER

So how can you optimize your social media strategy to work in conjunction with your SEO project? The key here is to create an association between the content in your social share and a page on your website. The content in your social share should include a keyword being targeted with your SEO strategy, and it should point to a relevant page on the site. See this example from LinkedIn:

**Be Found Online** What are best practices for leveraging Google Shopping feeds to drive profitability in the e-commerce space? Our President and Chief Search Artist, Dan Golden, recently sat down with Google Partners to discuss the latest trends and best practices in Google Shopping.  
<http://bit.ly/1wV8eHL> less



**Talking Google Shopping Best Practices with Dan Golden**  
 bit.ly · BFO's rock star President and Chief Search Artist Dan Golden and his iconic orange jacket seem to be everywhere these days! Dan recently sat down with Jenny Lintz, an agency strategist with Google Partners, to discuss the latest trends and best...

### Target keywords:

- “google shopping best practices” – placed at the front of the page title, which is pulled right into our LinkedIn post
- “best practices in google shopping” – exact instance is included in share content

By getting our keywords in the LinkedIn post, we’re communicating to a search engine that this page is relevant for terms like “google shopping best practices” (just like how our friends at Rolling Stone made their article relevant for

two of the world’s most searched artists). Much like link anchor text in a link-building campaign, social shares are most useful when they include our SEO keyword targets.

### INDIRECT LINK-BUILDING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

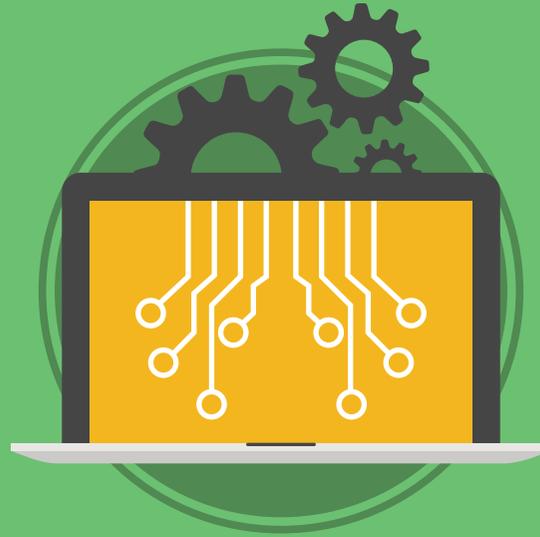
Can social media act as an indirect link-building campaign for your website? The answer is, unfortunately, “yes and no.”

You can use social media in the way outlined above to help communicate relevance to engines, but you’re still limited by the

<nofollow> tags on sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. This <nofollow> tag means no link relevance is passed on to the site (so, you’re not benefiting from Facebook’s incredible authority score).

**That said, social media can be a powerful tool in driving traffic (like in the Taylor Swift example), which can give you some positive scores in search engine algorithms. So, we recommend maintaining a social media strategy that coincides with your SEO efforts.**

## SECTION 5



BE AWARE OF NEW CAPABILITIES

# RECENT TECHNICAL SEO CHANGES

SEO has always been an ever-changing industry, requiring professionals to stay abreast of its pace on an almost-daily basis. That's especially true when it comes to the more technical aspects of SEO, which require marketers to really dig into the gears and get their hands dirty with what makes websites—and search engines—tick. In this section, we're going to take a look at a couple of major technical SEO changes that happened in 2014-2015, giving you the details you need to know and how they'll impact your business.

In this chapter, we'll discuss two recent updates in technical SEO: Making JavaScript Crawlable, and Secure Search.

### MAKING JAVASCRIPT CRAWLABLE

If you've spent any time with SEO professionals, you've probably heard us issue the following warning: "Don't render your content with JavaScript." Historically, search engines have been unable to execute and crawl JavaScript, making it near-impossible to "read" and index whatever content is being rendered. "But JavaScript can create such a great user experience!" You say. "There's got to be a workaround."

Well, now there is.

Along with a handful of other groups, Google helped create and maintain AngularJS, an

open-source development framework that is great for building rich web applications. Oh, and it supports a way to have JavaScript crawled and indexed by search engines!

In a very small nutshell, when an AngularJS-enhanced site is properly implemented, users get the same great experience that JavaScript affords them while the search engines are given the HTML they need to properly crawl and index the site. As the AngularJS-enhanced page loads, they are designed in such a way to deliver an "HTML Snapshot" for search engines to read: a standard HTML source code file, containing all of the content that would normally be rendered by JavaScript.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:



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Senior SEO Analyst

Dalton joined BFO after 7 years in search marketing, with a majority of his career working in SEO for major clients across Gaming, Technology, Retail, and CPG.

With a technical background, he took quickly to the more technical aspects of organic search, happy to get his hands dirty. And, at the same time, with an evolving love for the people side of the business, he always makes sure that the theories and structures of SEO translate into real, measurable success for the client.

When Dalton isn't at work, he's a (sometimes) avid practitioner of bikram yoga, cooking, hiking, and has recently started producing electronic music (don't expect to see him with a Grammy anytime soon, though!). He will also genuinely laugh if you tell him a math joke.



## MAKING JAVASCRIPT CRAWLABLE CONTINUED

This is much too detailed of a topic to discuss in full, so we suggest bringing this to the attention of your web development team. Sit down with them and talk about how to enhance your next web project or site revamp with AngularJS, providing users with a rich experience and search engines with a fully crawlable site.

## SITES GET A BOOST FOR SECURE SEARCH (HTTPS)

In August 2014, Google publicly announced that it would be rewarding those websites that have secured domains, otherwise known as HTTPS. Domains that use HTTPS technology have strong encryption, helping to keep information on the site secure from security breaches and other website attacks. By doing this, you are sending signals to Google that say your site is safe for users to shop and share their personal information on.

Currently, Google has said that HTTPS-enhanced websites will only receive a small rankings boost but has not ruled out strengthening the signal over time. This makes perfect sense given Google's 2014 campaign of "HTTPS Everywhere."



Like most other technical changes to your website, we recommend bringing this to the attention of your webmaster. But, to set you up for success, we've provided you with a quick checklist to review with your technical team to ensure HTTPS transition success:

- **Choose the correct SSL certificate:** Google recommends a 2048-bit certificate, which provides strong encryption and user security.
- **Implement redirects to HTTPS:** Ensure that all of your HTTP URLs now point to their HTTPS equivalent. We recommend using a 301/Permanent redirect. This will ensure that search engines know where to find your new HTTPS pages.
- **Update internal links to HTTPS:** Check that all internal links on your site now point to their HTTPS equivalent. This will ensure that your site is still crawlable.
- **Update URLs in XML sitemap and robots.txt files:** Ensure that your XML sitemap references the new HTTPS URLs and the 'sitemap' declaration in the robots.txt references the location of your new XML sitemap (i.e., <https://www.example.com/sitemap.xml>).
- **Re-validate HTTPS site for Google Webmaster Tools (GWMT):** To ensure that Google knows about your domain change—and that you receive proper indexation information in GWMT—you will need to verify all existing variants of your site (HTTP, HTTPS, etc.). Make sure that you create a new site for the HTTPS version in GWMT.

## SECTION 6



KNOW YOUR PLATFORM OPTIONS  
**FIND THE RIGHT SEO TOOLS**

**The beauty (and pitfall) of the digital marketing space is that there is no shortage of technology options. SEO is certainly no exception; there are a ton of tools that exist and probably even more being developed as we speak.**

**This can present a significant challenge when trying to decide what to use for running and managing your SEO efforts. The good news, however, is that despite the wealth of options, there are really only 3 main categories of SEO tools that you need to be concerned with choosing.**

### **CHOOSING THE RIGHT CRAWLERS/ SEO “SPIDERS”**

This is certainly in the more technical realm of SEO, but it’s absolutely necessary. There are many different kinds of crawlers available for many different purposes, but there is only one that is focused on SEO and does an excellent job: Screaming Frog SEO Spider.

This tool was developed by an SEO agency out of the UK and it has rather rapidly become the industry standard. Not only are the features robust and geared toward SEO, but they are constantly updating it and are very responsive to both feature requests and general customer support. It is not a free tool like Xenu Link Sleuth (the former industry standard), but it is well worth its weight in Sterling (British Pounds).

### **DECIDING BETWEEN RANK TRACKING & SEO PLATFORMS**

Tracking rankings is at the core of SEO reporting and maintenance. With secure search being nearly ubiquitous, rank tracking is debatably more important than ever before. There are perhaps more options in this category than any other; each have their benefits and limitations, but it’s important to pick one that works best for your organization. Here are just a few that we feel are worth mentioning, but we encourage you to do your own research since there are many great tools available.

Authority Labs is a tool for plain-and-simple rank tracking. They supply the ranking data for many of the smaller SEO reporting platforms out there and for good reason: they’re very good at it.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:**



**DAN RENO**  
VP of Organic Media

Dan, sometimes known as seoDR (online), “The DR” or “Machino” started in Internet Marketing at the ripe age of 18 years old and has been loving it ever since. He originally started in paid search for a small group of Ecommerce websites selling Poker Supplies and Mini Scooters. He shortly thereafter expanded into organic search (SEO), but continued managing paid search campaigns for another company’s web development clients and was later acquired by AmericanEagle.com; a leading Chicago suburbs based web development company.

## DECIDING BETWEEN RANK TRACKING & SEO PLATFORMS CONTINUED

Moz (formerly SEOMoz) provides a number of tools beyond just rank tracking and is one of the more affordable platforms out there. Moz Analytics is the main SEO product, but they have also branched out from just SEO tools and into Local Search (Moz Local) and Social Media (Followerwonk). Moz Local is a separate product with its own pricing and is a great option for companies with brick-and-mortar presence, while Followerwonk is paid for by your Moz Analytics subscription. Open Site Explorer is also included with Moz Analytics, but we will address that one specifically in the next section.

Enterprise SEO solutions such as BrightEdge, Searchmetrics, and Linkdex are all more like reporting “suites” than a group of tools. They typically include everything from rank tracking, analytics integration, dashboarding, backlink data, on-page analysis/recommendations, auditing, research, forecasting, and even task management. As with any other type of SEO

tool, each have their pros and cons, but we highly recommend looking at a platform such as one of these if you’re interested in actively managing your SEO efforts.

Lastly, rank tracking itself has become a significant factor in SEO because of the different types of results now available to searchers. Know your business objectives and make sure that you are able to track localized search results if necessary, as well as mobile (smartphone and tablet) and even combinations of those.



**BACKLINK DATA**

Domain authority and link equity are integral parts of SEO success and we highly recommend having a license to at least one of the tools supplying this data. While there are a wealth of options and tools available to both analyze and manage your websites' backlink data, there are essentially two companies who supply nearly every SEO tool on the web with those backlink and authority metrics.

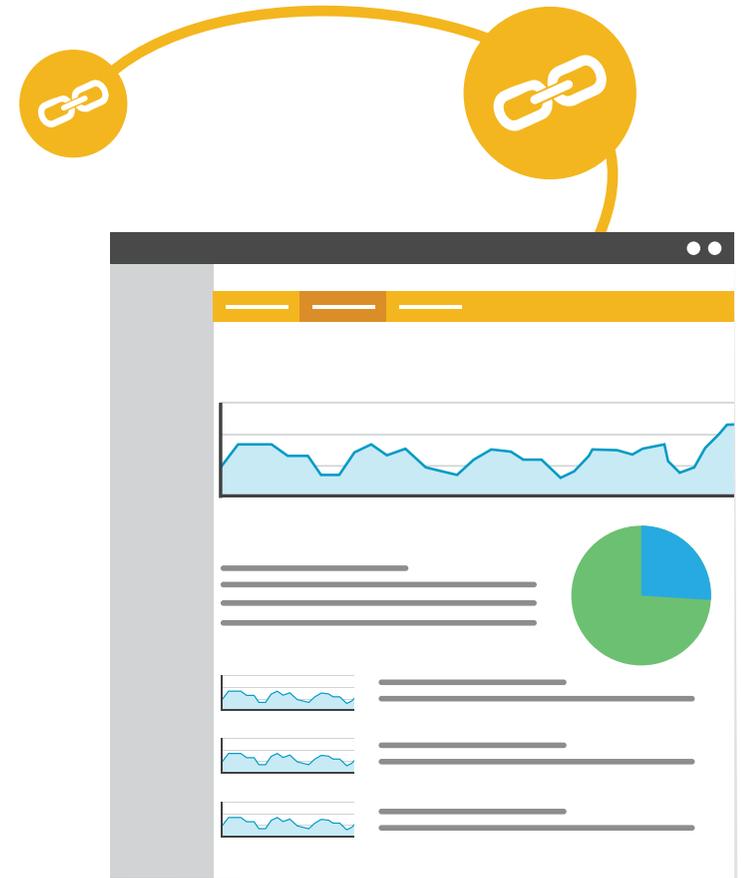
Open Site Explorer is bolted onto your Moz Analytics subscription, but is also available in a limited capacity for free. The data here is high-quality and useful, but is not the largest backlink data set available as it is relatively new.

Majestic is the single largest repository of backlink data available on the market today. Google's backlink data is undoubtedly larger, but they don't allow nearly the same transparency that either of these tools do. Majestic also supplies the vast majority of SEO tools' backlink data, but we feel it is a great value to have direct access independent of any other SEO platform you may already be paying for.

Again, monitoring backlink and authority metrics is critical to SEO success and we recommend paying for both of these tools if you can justify it. At the very least, we recommend subscribing to one of them, or another tool that might license their data such as Ahrefs or cognitiveSEO.

Google Webmaster Tools does also supply verified website owners with backlink data for free. We feel that while it should absolutely be included, it simply is not enough for the reason mentioned before: lack of full transparency.

**If you don't have each of these SEO tool categories represented in your SEO efforts, it's something you should consider. Another alternative is to pay professionals who do use these kinds of tools to help get it done on your behalf.**



## SECTION 7



TAKE ACTION:

# VISUAL STORYTELLING IN SEO REPORTS

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL STORYTELLING IN YOUR SEO REPORTS

A standard, static reporting template may seem like a great idea, allowing you to see the same data the same way every single week/month, but we know SEO and your website can quickly change. As a result, your reporting needs to be nimble enough to tell the story of what those changes mean for your business. In short, your SEO reports need to change (or at the very least evolve) as your organic search situation changes.

Chances are, you've seen more SEO reports than you care to count. When these reports are compiled correctly, it leaves you with a great sense of what's going on in your business and what's next. Too often though, that's just not the case.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHAPTER:

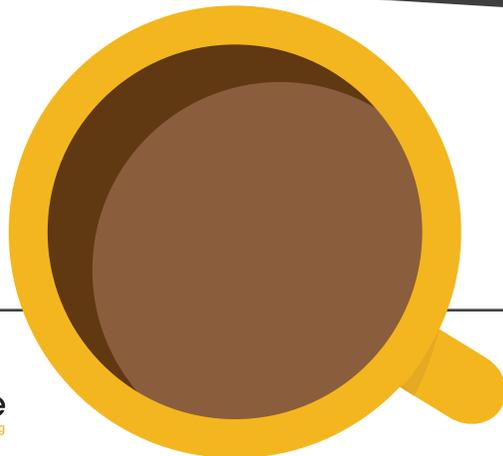


**BEN HOCKING**  
Associate Director, SEO

Ben Hocking is the Associate Director of SEO, and his versatile role includes a little bit of everything. He oversees organic media strategies, handles team management and support, and hits home runs for BFO clients. Ben takes pride in showing the power of SEO, and he's great at turning ideas into action. He has a B.S. in Creative Writing & Journalism and his certifications include:

- BrightEdge Certification
- Multiple journalism awards

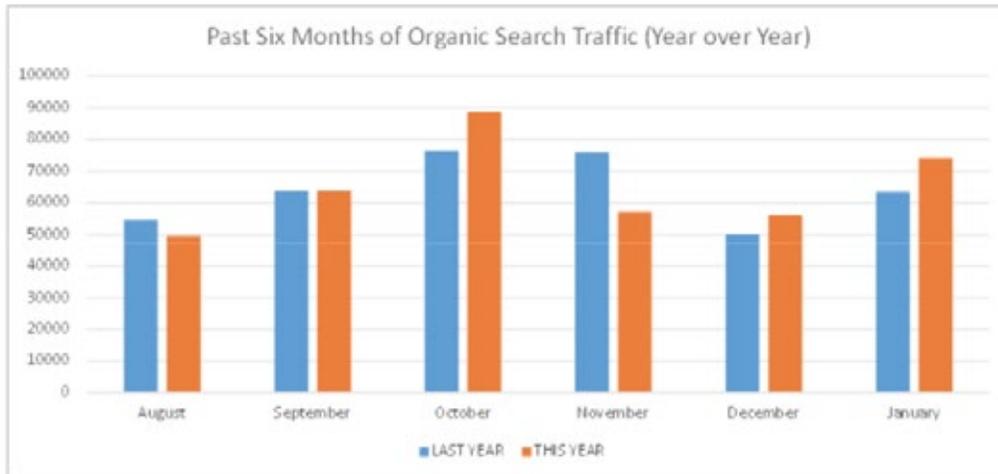
Ben loves reading, technology, and the Detroit Tigers. He also enjoys health, fitness, and trying new ideas and hobbies.



Too often, SEO reports don't contain the needed customization required to truly gauge how an SEO project is progressing toward its goals, or the website's larger goals as a whole. Frequently, you'll see reporting templates that are either cookie-cutter or not geared toward telling the story of your website's organic search performance in relation to a brand's larger business goals. Here's an example of how SEO reports can tell stories, instead of just showing numbers.

For this example, the SEO goal is to increase traffic by 15 percent year over year.

#### HERE'S WHAT A STANDARD SEO TRAFFIC REPORT LOOKS LIKE:



There's nothing wrong with this data. We just have no idea what it means. Although text-based executive summaries can often fill in reporting gaps, it's important that you utilize visual storytelling in your reports as well for those within your organization who don't have time to read all of the fine print. Right now this report looks like a mixed bag, and we don't know for sure if we've been meeting our 15 percent goal in December or January.

Right now this report looks like a mixed bag, and we don't know for sure if we've been meeting our 15 percent goal in December or January.

LET'S TAKE THIS SEO TRAFFIC REPORT ONE STEP FURTHER. HERE'S AN ENHANCED VERSION:



★ **\*\*\*This indicates the first full month of organic search traffic after the site relaunched with blog issues**

This report tells a bit more of the story. We now can visually see if/when we're hitting our target 15 percent traffic increase goal, while also noting why there is a drop in organic search traffic in August. Keep in mind that it's obvious to you why organic search traffic would slip if there were issues after the blog re-launch had a fair share of problems, but it's critical that anyone reading your SEO report knows the story behind the numbers, too!

LET'S TAKE THIS SEO TRAFFIC REPORT ONE STEP FURTHER AND TELL EVEN MORE OF THE STORY. HERE'S AN EVEN BETTER VERSION:



★ **\*\*\*This indicates the first full month of organic search traffic after the site relaunched with blog issues**

This version of the SEO traffic report highlights a critical shift. When a significant event (such as a faulty blog re-launch happens) the timelines included in your reports need to adjust accordingly. It's obvious that the six-month snapshot we looked at first just isn't telling the whole story, as the site increased traffic by more than 46 percent shortly before the site re-launch.

**Now we're able to clearly show the success, why our traffic totals dipped, and that they have been rebounding quite nicely over the past two months. All without reading an executive summary. It's a self-contained story within the chart itself!**



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