

# Business Advice

## Simple steps Plumbers can take to improve their Search Engine rankings

This article was written by 3am at the request of the editor after the PIA received a request for assistance from a member who lost work as a result of another company registering a domain name similar to his company name and requiring one of his regular customers whom mistakenly believed they were calling our member when they searched for him via the Internet. One question 3am are asked almost on a daily basis is “How can I improve my search engine rankings for my business?” There are many companies out there who can provide specialised Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) – some of these companies are very good, and provide guaranteed results, but this comes at a cost – a good budget for this service is around \$1000 a month, but is an ongoing commitment.

There are also some less reputable companies out there, so it is important to do your research on the company before agreeing – especially if they have cold-called you! If you don't have the budget for a full-blown SEO/SEM campaign, there are a number of simple steps that can be performed with basic computer and Internet skills. These include:

- Create a Google Plus listing – when a potential customer searches for something like “plumbing Payneham”, the user is presented with a number of local businesses based in this suburb, next to a map
- Create a Facebook business page – add as much information to this as you can, but most importantly, engage with your customer base. By this we mean post status updates that your customers may find useful such as links to articles, tips and tricks, or special promotions
- Create listings on free ‘directory-style’ websites such as StartLocal, TrueLocal, Hotfrog, AussieWeb and Dmoz.org. This is known as ‘backlinking’ and helps improve your search results as Google will recognise your website URL on other popular websites, and in turn may improve your ranking.

If you have a website, check with your web developer that the following have been setup. If they haven't been setup, it should take your developer less than half an hour to implement, so it shouldn't be too costly:

- Google Analytics – this is an invaluable tool to monitor how many people are viewing your site and how they are getting there
- Google Webmaster Tools – webmaster tools can provide your web developer with important information about the health of your website. It will report broken links, search engine errors, and security issues. Make sure a sitemap has been submitted
- Google Adwords Campaign – these are the ‘sponsored links’ in the search results. The way these work is that you set a daily budget, say \$10, and for each click on your advertisement, a certain amount is subtracted from your account. The cost per click is dependent on how competitive the keyword is – some keywords might only be worth 5c, but others could be \$2-3. Being able to set your own budgets allow you to monitor your campaigns without spending a lot of money. If it isn't going well you can cancel it at any time!

The content of your website is extremely important for good results in search engines. Google loves content that is unique (eg not copy-pasted from

somewhere else), is rich in quality content (eg content that is useful to your customers), and is fresh (eg regularly updated). Forget about stuffing ‘meta tags’ with keywords – Google doesn't pay a lot of attention to meta tags any more as they were misused frequently in the past. Of course if all of this is over your head, Three Am Design would be happy to provide these services for you. We can tailor a basic SEO/SEM package for your requirements, which may cost anywhere between \$110 and \$550 as a once-off fee to set everything up for you. We can also provide a report on how your website can be improved and approximate costs to make the changes or rebuild it from scratch if it is not up to date with modern standards.

### What is the difference between Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM)?

The majority of the notes in the article relate to SEM tasks. SEM is where you perform tasks external to your website to help search engine rankings, such as backlinking, Adwords, and social networking. SEO is where your actual website is modified to improve results.

Common SEO tasks include optimising content to include keyword rich content, updating page titles, and ensuring the markup is clean and tidy. The reason SEO companies require an ongoing commitment is that they use data from software like Google Analytics to analyse the performance of keywords, and are continually updating the content to improve results.

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