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Social Media's Impact on SEO

It's been a year since our Technology Matters writers discussed Search Engine Optimization (SEO) with *Residential Resource* readers, and a lot has changed since then. Most notably, the correlation between social media signals and your company's website ranking in the eyes of Google and other search engines.

So, here's a recap for you and a few new things to consider when embarking on your own SEO campaign.

THE BASICS OF OPTIMIZATION

We've all heard that SEO can have a higher Return on Investment than other media, including direct mail and email campaigns, print, online or broadcast media buys. But why? Because more people now use search engines to determine when and from whom they're going to buy (or rent) the products, services and even homes they want.

According to JupiterResearch, 68% of search engine users choose websites within the first page of search engine results. That means if your company is on the second page, or "below the fold," you may not get noticed when the next prospect is looking for a three-bedroom, two-car garage in Spokane, Schenectady, or Springfield, USA.

The experts at SEOMoz define SEO as "the active practice of optimizing a website by improving internal and external factors in order to increase the traffic the site receives from search engines."

For one, this means SEO is an ongoing effort. And two, it means the mentions of your company outside of your site are as important as the SEO work you do within your site, like the basics of keyword placement and keyword density to improve your search rankings. This is where social media signals can help.

INCREASING YOUR INTERNET CLOUT

In August 2011, the New York Times reported internet users spend a quarter of their time online browsing social media. So, not being socially active on the web is no longer an option for most companies. Not just because "everybody else is doing it,"

but because your competition is.

TechCrunch recently reported on a survey of small business owners that revealed only 12% considered social media "a must" for their business, while 50% considered "word-of-mouth recommendations" their best marketing tool. If you don't think using social media will increase your web presence and the number of prospects who find you, remember this: social media is the new word-of-mouth.

Prospective renters are using Facebook and Twitter and other social sharing sites to search for the perfect place to live as much, or more often, as they are using Google and other search engines.

And when their friend recommends your company, or a listing on your company website, that recommendation means much more to the prospect than a random "Page One" listing on a Google search.

Hence, the search engine machine's inevitable consideration of "likes," "fans" and "followers" when compiling pages for each query sought. Every mention of your company and your url in "WWW Land" improves your rankings, period.

Simply stuffing your name, url and keywords isn't enough anymore, because search engines are now rating positive mentions much more. This is partly in an effort to protect the web consumer, but also an effort to improve their reputation as a provider of quality information – not just more junk sites.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the others know this, and have made it much, much easier in recent years for businesses large and small to create pages, and control the content on their pages, thereby expanding their online presence beyond a company website. Which means if you don't have a social presence on the web yet, you need to get one. And if you have one, but aren't yet using it to the full potential, you should start!

DEVELOPING A PRESENCE

First, set up a company account on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and any others you want to pursue. Get some fans and followers there, then



grab those sites' social media icons to add to your own site. (Most sites make it effortless to do this, but if you need help, visit addthis.com or sharethis.com to get the icons you need to make your site appear socially active).

Chances are, there's someone in your office or in your inner-circle who is already a social media butterfly and would love taking on the responsibility of tweeting weekly (or daily) for your business, plus posting photos of properties and other interesting information on Facebook or LinkedIn.

Another thing some property management companies may want to consider is placing ads on social media sites targeted to users in their area. Facebook has added a number of friendlier ad options recently, including Page Like, Page Post and Page Post Like "sponsored stories." Facebook also offers standard marketplace ads and makes it easy for businesses to engage in this type of advertising.

On LinkedIn message boards, some property managers have recently debated the influence of sites like Yelp and other social rating sites. Most are in agreement that there is no suave way to respond to a "bad" review on one of these sites. But there are ways to encourage positive reviews, such as simply asking for them and/or offering a small incentive or gift to those who post peachy reviews. Make sure to review any gift giving policies of the provider.

Being active in online professional groups, such as NARPM's LinkedIn group, is another great way to increase your social media presence and gather new ideas and content for your other social media outlets.

FINDING QUALITY CONTENT

Using social media to promote special events and promotions within an apartment community may be easier than finding quality content to post as a residential/third-party property management company. Here's a brief list of topics any residential property manager can use to get started on the path to SEO success.

- New listings (with photos) especially in sought-after areas.
- Interviews with and profiles of satisfied residents. You'd be surprised how many people love being

asked their opinion or to share their story.

- Links from articles on your blog (if you have one) and links from other related blogs with content specific to your area and the interests of people who live there. Don't underestimate the power of blogging for your company's SEO rankings. It's huge!
- Top ten lists and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) blurbs.
- Helpful tips and even quotes of the day.

It's important to remember to use your business' social media pages as professional tools, and also to have fun with them. Share them with your friends, family and colleagues. The more they share it with others, the better.

You're not going to break anything. Just remember to be professional, and not too used-car-salesman in tone, and you can't go wrong.

IN CLOSING

Here are a few resources to help you on the path to SEO success. An expanded list is available at propertyboss.com/narpm.


BOOKS

- *The Art of SEO* by Eric Enge, Stephan Spencer, Rand Fishkin and Jessie Stricchiola (ISBN 0596518862)
- *The Truth About Search Engine Optimization* by Rebecca Lieb (ISBN 0789738317)
- *Search Engine Optimization Secrets* by Danny Dover (ISBN 0470554185)

GUIDES

- SEO ranking factors study: seomoz.org/article/search-ranking-factors
- SEO Book: youtube.com/user/seobook
- Beginners Guide: seomoz.org/beginners-guide-to-seo

TOOLS

- GinzaMetrics (ginzametrics.com)
- Google Analytics (google.com/analytics)
- Social Media Icons (addthis.com and sharethis.com) 

Scan this QR code for easy access to the links at bottom left, plus more info on Search Engine Optimization. Not using QR Codes yet? The next installment of Technology Matters will address using QR codes to market your properties.

