INTERNET MARKETING

A PRACTICAL APPROACH IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

MOUTUSY MAITY

Associate Professor
Marketing Management
IIM Lucknow

OXFORD

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Preface

Internet Marketing is the process of leveraging Internet for the purposes of marketing. Specific endeavors may include using search engine optimization, online advertising, social media marketing, and e-mail marketing, among many others to reach out to target audience for selling or promoting a product or brand.

The topic Internet Marketing, usually, sparks an animated discussion among students as well as professionals. The nature of the medium requires a solid grounding in technology, while the need to leverage the channel for the purpose of marketing requires an understanding of the user or customer. An understanding of the two needs to go hand-in-hand. Most often than not, traditional marketers find themselves lacking in the former, while the seasoned geeks usually fall short of the latter.

The Internet, as a channel of communication, transaction, and commerce has different implications for the different segments of consumers in India. Although there are the urban middle-class and elites (in metros, and tier two cities) for whom the medium is probably becoming a way of life, there are those in tier three cities and in the rural areas, who are waking up to the potential of the medium. There are still others who are not able to access the Internet because of the limited vernacular-based content that is available to them.

In engaging with the student community as well as with professionals, I often come across questions and comments that display their uncertainty about how the Internet as a medium is currently faring in India, and the possible evolution path that it may charter for consumers and retailers in this country. However, most of the books on *Internet Marketing* or *Online Marketing* that are currently available in India, engage with the online medium from the point-of-view of the marketer and user/consumer on the Internet located in the West.

Therefore, there was a need for a book on Internet marketing that addresses issues that are specific to the Indian consumer and marketer. In keeping with the changing times, many business schools in India have incorporated courses that deal with marketing-related concepts as they apply to the context of the Internet and other new and evolving channels.

While the concepts and processes, of how the Internet is expected to function as a channel, are similar across the globe, there are country-wise differences in the evolution and use of the medium, the path that it traverses, how buyers interact with the channel and what kinds of offerings are made by e-tailers, to mention only a few. Students often feel comfortable engaging with materials that represent their immediate environment. This book approaches the topic of marketing via the Internet through the use of India-specific examples and cases, while drawing a comparison with what is happening elsewhere.

About the Book

The dual purpose of this book is to provide a basic understanding of the fundamentals of Internet Marketing, as well as to provide an India-specific context, with sufficient comparisons with how the consumers and the marketers compare to their counterparts in some of the developed economies (e.g., the USA).

I would like to believe, virtually anyone interested in learning the subject called *Internet Marketing*, with a specific focus on India, would potentially be the target audience. Specifically, students pursuing a post-graduate degree in management studies would be the segment that will have an immediate need for an understanding of the topic. Marketing executives wishing to improve their understanding of *Internet Marketing* may use this book as a reference.

Salient Features

Integrated approach with an interlinking of various topics: A focus on practice An emphasis has been placed in discussing the practical applications of internet marketing. This approach has been possible by showcasing best practices followed by firms that are successfully deploying internet marketing. The strategies and the measurements deployed to determine the extent to which the objectives of Internet marketing are realized, is a constant focus throughout all chapters.

A critical and thought-provoking approach The approach in this book has been to initiate a critical and tempered approach in understanding and deploying Internet marketing. This approach helps readers engage with the subject, and dwell on the various facets of internet marketing strategies that may benefit the company.

Each chapter in the book has numerous examples related to the topic to understand its utility in different market situations. Every chapter has a dedicated case that showcases the application of the topic/concept discussed in the chapter.

Written in a simple language for better understanding Utmost care has been taken to write the book in a simple language so that the future managers understand the subject as well as applications in a better way. Each chapter also has concept review questions, critical thinking exercises, and assignments to make the topic/concept user friendly.

A managerial focus with an emphasis on applications The focus in the book is to provide an overview of Internet marketing to students of management studies. This overview will help them in developing a better understanding of the subject and its applications, which is likely to immensely add to the managerial roles that they take up.

Pedagogical Features

- Vignette to get the essence of the chapter
- Pertinent examples and illustrations
- Insights and Mini Activities, enhancing knowledge of the readers by making them understand the practical aspects of concepts
- Case Studies for better understanding of topics
- Chapter-end exercises include Concept Review Questions, Critical Thinking Questions, and Projects/Assignments/Internet-based Exercises

Coverage and Structure

This textbook consists of 13 chapters. A short description of each chapter is presented below. Each chapter attempts to address the characteristic of the Internet in the Indian market – from the perspective of the marketer and of the consumer.

Chapter 1: Introduction
This chapter introduces Internet marketing, specifically discussing the evolution of the Internet as a channel in India.

Chapter 2: Search Engine Optimization
The second chapter specifically discusses the process of search engine optimization (SEO). After reading the chapter, readers should be able to distinguish between search engine marketing (SEM) and search engine optimization (SEO). The core concepts involved in the SEO process, i.e., the importance of website structure, choosing the right keywords, on-page optimization, off-page optimization, and web-metrics in the context of SEO are discussed. India-specific challenges in the process of SEO are also emphasized upon.

Chapter 3: Search Advertising
After going through this chapter, the reader should be able to distinguish between search advertising and display advertising. The core concepts involved in search advertising are discussed, which include the different advertising payment models (pay per click/cost per click and pay per thousand impressions), real-time bidding, and setting an advertising strategy.

Chapter 4: Display Advertising
The different forms of consumer targeting involved in display advertising and the different formats of display advertising are discussed in this chapter. The reader is expected to understand how to manage the different aspects of display advertising, appreciate the strategic implications of using search and display advertising, and appreciate that display advertising may be a short-term or a long-term strategy.

Chapter 5: Web Analytics
This chapter presents a definition of what the domain as well as the components that constitute the domain includes, which allows the reader to undertake research aimed at understanding the online consumer/customer. The chapter attempts to impart an understanding of the core concepts and methods involved in Web analytics, whereby, the reader is expected to develop an appreciation for quantitative and qualitative techniques of conducting online marketing research.

Chapter 6: Consumers Online
The sixth chapter is on online consumers, which discusses the core concepts involved in online consumer decision-making. Consumer segments, user experience, user engagement, and the role of recommender systems in personalizing user experience are focused upon in this chapter. Steps that may be taken to monitor, manage, and enhance user experience are also discussed.

Chapter 7: Social Media Marketing
The seventh chapter strives towards developing an understanding of the role that social media can play in Internet marketing. The chapter provides a definition of social media, discusses the state of social media in India, and lays out the steps that may be followed in order to pursue a social media marketing strategy. Social media advertising and paid, owned, earned media, and social CRM are covered as well.

Chapter 8: Social Media Analytics – Structured Data
The eighth chapter focuses on discussing structured data that may be obtained in the context of social media. The chapter raises questions like: What is the role of social media analytics (SMA) in web analytics? What are the techniques and methods (and some tools) involved in SMA? Why does an organization need to undertake continuous SMA for monitoring consumer sentiments on social media websites?

Chapter 9: Social Media Analytics – Unstructured Data
The chapter focuses on the role of unstructured data in social media analytics (SMA). Explanation is provided and discussion is undertaken on the techniques and methods (and some tools) involved in analyzing unstructured data obtained from social media. The marketer, after reading this chapter, will also appreciate the strategic importance of big data in marketing.

Chapter 10: Mobile Marketing
The tenth chapter focuses on discussing mobile marketing. It covers the state of mobile marketing in India and provides a definition for mobile marketing. The chapter delineates the specific steps involved in planning mobile marketing campaigns and offers a discussion on the various forms of mobile marketing. The marketer is expected to develop an understanding of the strategic use of mobile marketing.

Chapter 11: E-mail Marketing
It provides an overview of the state of e-mail marketing in India and provides a definition for e-mail marketing in general. The chapter also identifies the steps involved in planning an e-mail marketing campaign. Overall, the chapter contributes to developing an understanding of the strategic use of e-mail marketing.

Chapter 12: Internet Marketing Strategy and Content Marketing

The chapter provides an overview of the state of content marketing in India, and provides a definition for content marketing in general. The chapter raises questions including: What is Internet marketing strategy? What is the role of content marketing in the context of Internet marketing? What are the steps that may be undertaken in order to devise and undertake content marketing strategy?

Chapter 13: Looking Ahead

The thirteenth chapter discusses issues and concerns in the context of Internet marketing in India, looking forward to possible changes that await Internet marketing.

Online Resources

Online resources have been developed to complement the textbook and have, therefore, been provided for better use by faculty and students. It is available at https://india.oup.com/orcs/9780199469550. The content for the online resources is as follows:

For faculty:
- PowerPoint Slides
- Instructors' Manual

For students:
- Flashcard Glossary

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank all my students with whom I continue to discuss about marketing on the Internet. I also have the highest sense of appreciation for the copyright holders who have granted me the permission to use their works in my book.

I am beholden to the editorial and the production team at Oxford University Press, and all the people who worked behind the scenes to complete this project.

Comments and suggestions from all the readers of this book can be sent to me at moutusy.maity@gmail.com.

**Moutusy Maity**

Features of

VIGNETTE

Prati is in need of pest control services for her house. Traditionally, she has been using the pest control services suggested by her friends/family. However, she has recently moved to a major metropolitan city and she does not have any friend/relative to turn to. The Internet seems to be a channel that she thinks may provide answers to her queries. She often uses the Internet to find products and services. She turns to a leading search engine and initiates a query on 'pest control services'. She comes across many 'organic listings', as well as several 'sponsored listings'. She knows that the pest control services that are listed towards the top of the organic listings are usually the more preferred ones by users (based on click-through-rates, usage metrics, and other search engine optimization indicators). However, how does she gauge the advertisements that appear under sponsored listings? Can any service provider advertise? What are the mechanisms through which an ad appears under sponsored listings?

Figures:
These have been included in the text to support, reinforce, and enhance learning of the concepts discussed

Figure 4.1: (a) Search Engine Marketing (SEM)   (b) Online Advertising
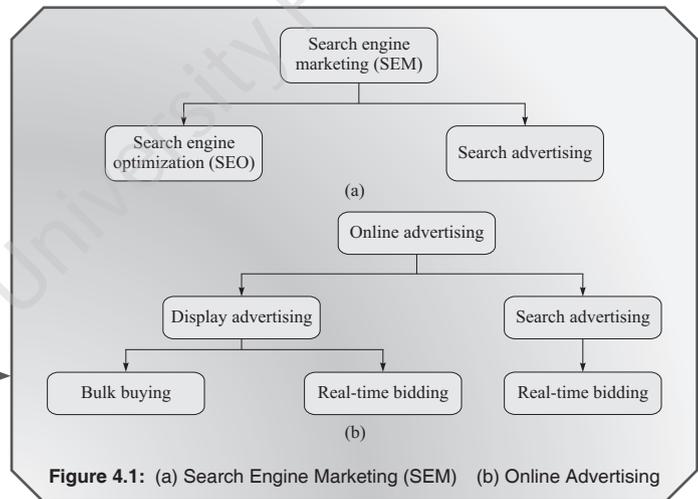
Insight 5.1

Conversion is anything that the manager wants the visitor to do on a website. Conversion is not necessarily always a sale. In a typical information search scenario on the Internet, a person visits a search engine, inserts a keyword into the search box, and requests the search engine for results. The search engine provides the results, which include results for natural search as well as those for sponsored listings. When a visitor clicks on a link, either a natural listing or a sponsored listing, she is taken to the associated website. In case of a sponsored listing, there is usually a purpose for which the visitor is taken to a specific page. The purpose could be that of filling up a form or a direct sale. When a visitor is asked to fill up a form, it is usually for the purpose of lead generation.

Conversion needs to be defined by the web manager in advance. Since the Internet is a medium where sales, especially B2B sales do not easily happen, it is necessary to define what conversion is for that specific website. Therefore, a conversion can be getting the visitor to fill up a form, download a whitepaper, or undertake a sale.

the Book

Choose any two companies dealing with similar products (e.g., Britannia and Parle G, or Dell and HP). For each of these companies, identify the activities that are currently being undertaken by the company on social media.

Mini Activities: Activities have been provided to aid students in understanding the practical aspect of the concept

Chapter End Exercises: Each chapter contains concept review, critical thinking questions, and project assignments that can be used for classroom discussion to enhance learning.

EXERCISES

Concept Review Questions

1. What is mobile marketing?
2. What are the different forms of mobile marketing?
3. What are some mobile device-specific limitations that may have detrimental effect on consumer experiences?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Why do you think that e-commerce companies in India are investing more in developing mobile phone applications over the open net?

Projects/Assignments/Internet-based Exercises

1. Log on to your favourite e-commerce (e.g., ticketing, apparel) app on your mobile device. What kinds of advertisements do you see? Make a listing of the advertisements and the time during which you see those ads. Now, click on some of the ads. Do you keep seeing these ads over and over again? Why do you think this happens (Hint: See Chapter 3).

REFERENCES

1. Johnston, Norm (2015), "How the 'Third Wave' will Transform Mobile Marketing," MMA APAC 2015 Yearbook, Ed. Madanmohan Rao, Mobile Marketing Association

6. I. Clarke III, Emerging value propositions for m-commerce, *Journal of Business Strategies*, 25 (2) (2008), pp. 41-57.

CASE 2.1

PLAN MY BOOKS

The case was prepared by: Yadwinder Mittal, Riki Achinta, Saransh Mehrotra, Udit Bhatnagar, and Varone Burman

INTRODUCTION: THE DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY

Seven hundred and thirty million is the projected Internet user base in India in 2020 per latest statistics - a doubling of the user base from 350 million at 2015-end, as reported by Masco and Economic times.com. This exponential growth in user base will enable India to overtake the US in terms of Internet users by 2020.

(a) Reach
(b) Growth
(c) Consumer buying behaviour
(d) E-commerce platforms leveraging just in time inventory
(e) Easily searchable and sortable inventory base
(f) Faster access to information
(g) Value chain integration

Case Studies: Chapter end case studies have been provided in every chapter to consolidate one's understanding of the concepts discussed in the chapter.

Brief Contents

Detailed Contents

Search Engine Optimization

Learning Objectives

After going through this chapter, readers will be able to:
- distinguish between search engine marketing (SEM) and search engine optimization (SEO)
- understand the core concepts involved in SEO
- know how to manage the different aspects of SEO
- appreciate that the process of SEO is constantly evolving
- recognize that SEO is a long-term strategy

VIGNETTE

After months of hard work and close consideration to what needs to be included on the website, Natarajan M., the owner of ABC Enterprise was satisfied with the look of his company's website. Mr. Natarajan had hired a local organization that promised to optimize the website. Vivid images and bold colours called attention to the content across the pages of the website. Trials were conducted by employees to ensure that the website performed well in terms of usability, that is, it was ensured that a typical consumer would have little trouble finding what they were looking for. However, a month after the website was launched, its rankings across the leading search engines disappeared. Traffic to the website was down, adding to Natarajan's list of things to worry about. People at the organization were confused, asking questions, and demanding answers. What happened? How can Natarajan get his rankings and traffic back?

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Think of yourself sitting in front of a computer, getting ready to undertake a search for information on a particular product or service, with the possibility of purchasing the item (if you happen to like the offer). What do you typically find yourself doing? Most consumers will pull up a search engine, type in a word or a phrase (usually referred to as a keyword, but more on that later) into the search box, and hit enter. What happens next is that the search engine provides the searcher with a list of websites that *according to the search engine* are of interest to you and match with what you are presumably looking for. Now, note that certain words in the previous sentence appear in italics. The sentence indicates that the search engine decides on what results to show on the results page. In other words, the search engine plays a major role in what we, as general consumers and users of the Internet, get to see. The search engine acts as the gate keeper. Therefore, as a marketer, the importance of this fact cannot be ignored. The marketer needs to understand how search engines work, which is valuable input in planning how to leverage the search engine for the purposes of marketing.

2.2 SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

To that extent, the marketing efforts undertaken on search engines are referred to as search engine marketing, (SEM). Some researchers divide SEM into search engine optimization (SEO), which consists of unpaid content, and search engine advertising, which consists of paid content (e.g., Charlesworth 2009). A commonly accepted definition for SEM is provided below:

Search engine marketing, or SEM, is a form of Internet marketing that seeks to promote websites by increasing their visibility in search engine result pages (SERPs) through the use of search engine optimization, search advertising, paid placement, contextual advertising, and paid inclusion (Searchland 2011). Refer to Insight 2.1.

The above definition brings up a whole host of questions: What are SERPs? What is search engine optimization? How are paid placement, contextual advertising, and paid inclusion similar or different from each other? We will examine each question separately. (We will discuss paid placement and contextual advertising in Chapters 3 and 4).

Insight 2.1

As per the data available for 2015, the search share market (i.e., the market share of search engines) in India is dominated by Google (95.29%), followed by Yahoo! (1.8%), Bing (1.36%) and Ask (1.02%).

In the USA, though Google (64.0%) till leads the pack, followed by Bing (20.4%), Yahoo! (12.7%), Ask (1.8%) and AOL (1.02%), the other search engines have a stronger presence than in India.

Data sourced from:
http://inboundmarketing.inboundmantra.com/blog/search-engine-market-share-will-bing-bang-google
http://searchengineland.com/google-controls-65-percent-of-search-bing-33-percent-comscore-228765

2.2.1 Search Engine Results Page

Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) include everything that appears on a search engine page after a request for a query is run. Therefore, it contains organic listings as well as paid content (e.g., sponsored listings), as is elucidated by the Figure 2.1 below. The section highlighted in red contains the organic listings, whereas the section highlighted in yellow contains paid content. These sponsored listings are advertisements for which the advertiser pays the search engine on a 'per-click' basis, hence the moniker pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.
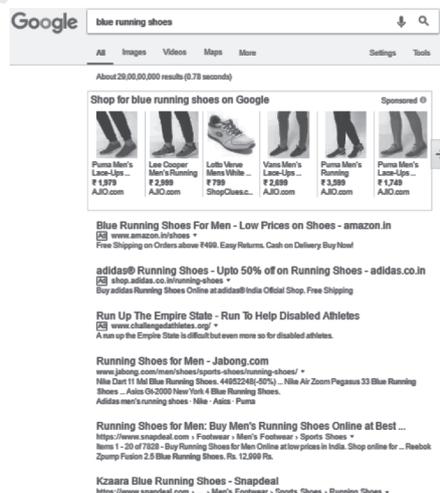
Figure 2.1: Search Engine Results Pages
Courtesy: Google, last accessed on May 22, 2015

In order to display specific results on the SERPs, search engines make use of computer programs or algorithms that sort thousands of websites (that can potentially answer a query made by a user) in order to generate the SERPs. Search engine algorithms, therefore, have the mandate of providing the searchers a list of potential answers to their queries. In order to prepare such a list, search engine algorithms work to:

(a) disqualify or restrict all websites that do not meet specific criteria, set by the engineers or managers who handle the algorithm

(b) prepare a list of sites that are relevant

(c) rank and prioritize those sites in order of importance

Note that *no single factor* is sufficient to provide the ranking and prioritizing criteria. All search engines use algorithms that often include many factors and most of these factors are *not known to anybody* other than those who directly set these algorithms. Although the exact formula that a search engine uses for ranking websites is not known, a variety of factors are considered, which are discussed in this chapter.

However, it is important to note that search engines tweak their algorithms on a regular basis. The marketer needs a holistic understanding of the historical trends that are associated with the broad developments that the search engines have undergone (see section 2.5). It is not enough to note the occurrences in the past, as the marketer needs to keep up with the changes that are part of the current landscape.

Note that due to the frequently-changing nature of search algorithms, wherein search engines tweak their algorithms in order to address consumer expectations better, most search engines have begun incorporating elements of personalized and local content. Therefore, it is entirely possible that two persons searching for the same keyword (maybe in different parts of the world, or even sitting side-by-side), might see two somewhat different results' pages, even on the same search engine. Search engine results take into account one's location as well as browsing histories when serving personalized content.

It also needs to be mentioned that each search engine has its proprietary algorithm that may produce different results pages even for the same person. For example, Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show the results displayed for the phrase or keyword, 'red running shoes', on the two search engines.

Note that these searches were undertaken on the same day, at the same time, by the same person from the same computer.

Figure 2.2: Results for 'Red Running Shoes' on Bing
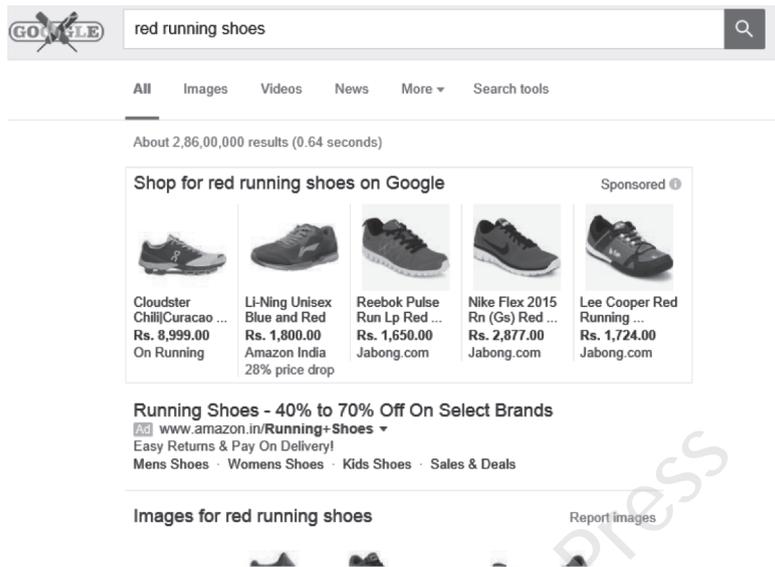
Figure 2.3: Results for 'Red Running Shoes' on Google

How do Search Engines Work?

How does a search engine work in order to produce SERPs? Search engines regularly send out crawlers or spiders to read or 'crawl' the web (web crawlers are widely referred to as crawlers for convenience). These crawlers or spiders are computer program that browse the World Wide Web (WWW), visiting websites and collecting content. Search engines use this method in order to collect content and keep content up-to-date. Spiders crawl the web to find new documents like webpages, typically by following hyperlinks from websites already in the database.

Search engines index the content in these documents (e.g., text), by adding them to their huge databases and periodically updating the database. After the crawlers collect the data, the search engine index categorizes the contents in accordance to their relevance and stores them. Indexing of the data is required for fast retrieval of information.

The task of indexing content is ongoing. Crawlers from search engines are constantly crawling the WWW for new content. The same website may be visited may times during a single day by crawlers from the same search engine, depending upon how often the content of that specific website is updated.

Fresh and updated content ensures that crawlers from search engine visit a website often. Therefore, marketers need to work on updating content on their websites on a regular basis. When crawlers do not find new content on websites, they may visit the website less often, which may have a negative impact on the ranking of the website.

Search engines search their own databases when a user enters a query in the search box to find related documents (not searching webpages in real-time). Search engines rank resulting documents using algorithms (mathematical formulae) that assign various weights to various ranking factors.

Therefore, when a user requests for some information from a search engine, the search engine produces the SERPs from the data that has already been indexed in the search engine index and delivers that to the user in a fraction of a second.

Find below the search engine share by volume and visits (Table 2.1). Add to this, the statistic that most people do not look beyond the first 30 results served up by a search engine. The above discussion provides compelling reasons for undertaking SEM.

Table 2.1: Top Search Engine – Volume

comScore Explicit Core Search Share Report* January 2014 vs. December 2013 Total U.S. – Home & Work Locations Source: comScore qSearch			
Core Search Entity	Explicit Core Search Share (%)		
	Dec-13	Jan-14	Point Change
Total Explicit Core Search	*100.0%*	*100.0%*	*N/A*
Google Slite	67.3%	67.6%	0.3
Microsoft Sites	18.2%	18.3%	0.1
Yahoo Sites	10.8%	10.4%	−0.4
Ask Network	2.5%	2.4%	−0.1
AOL, Inc.	1.3%	1.3%	0.0

Courtesy: http://www.comscore.com/Insights/Press-Releases/2014/2/comScore-Releases-January-2014-US-Search-Engine-Rankings, last accessed on May 22, 2015

2.3 SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process that a website undertakes in order to increase its visibility over other websites in SERPs when a user undertakes an *organic* search (also known as *unpaid/ algorithmic/ natural* search). Note that SEO has nothing to do with optimizing the search engines. Rather, it is about what the marketing team decides to do with their website in order to appear somewhere towards the top of the listings presented by the SERPs, with a constant endeavour to achieve the top spot. Therefore, the marketer needs to obtain a good understanding of SEO.

Usually, an outside agency is given the contract of undertaking SEO on the company's website. While the marketer may not undertake SEO by themselves, the marketer should never lose sight of the fact that the website is a piece of marketing content, and the marketer understands the consumer better than the outside agency. Therefore, though the agency may advise the marketer on SEO, the final call on every activity that the brand or company will undertake online, should be taken by the marketer.

The marketer needs to remember that the company website is created for users. SEO is there to help the marketer get visitors.

SEO is direct-marketing and a long-term strategy. It takes time and effort, and needs to be constantly monitored and tweaked. Undertaking SEO will take time to show results, that is, an improvement in your search engine listings. Like a new company requires time and resources to grow, so will the process of SEO take time to unfold and yield dividend for the company.

Broadly speaking, search engines are looking for *authority (on-page and off-page factors), content* (quality and depth of content, frequency of new content updates), and *social signals* (reads and shares on social media), on a website. In order to work on these three components, there are various areas that marketers should pay attention to including, *website structure*, *website content*, *keyword research*, *overall onsite SEO*, *relevant link-building strategies (including social media)*, and *SEO measurement*. Each of these is considered separately next.

Addressing the different components of SEO improves the possibility of *increasing traffic to the website*. Therefore, *each component is important* from the perspective of improving search engine rankings of a website, and hence, attracting more users to the website.

Even the best SEOs are not magicians. They can't simply place a site at the top of the engines when there are hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of others that offer basically the same thing, and provide basically the same information. If they could, you'd see a whole lot more millionaire SEOs.

– Jill Whalen – highrankings.com

The marketer needs to keep in perspective that not everything in the digital space can be controlled by the marketer. Some of the things that the marketer cannot control, but which may have implications for SEO, include domain name, domain registration date, competition's activities, and (some) incoming links.

The domain name of a company's or brand's website, often, is the brand name of the company (or, is closely related to the brand name). The marketer may have little or no control over the brand name. However, the website URL (name and structure) provides important signals to the crawlers about what the website represents or stands for. Hence, the URL should be carefully chosen and structured. A well-chosen URL is likely to push the website's rankings up.

The marketer also needs to realize that every website has a *history* with every search engine. So, a new website, trying to rank for the same keyword as an older website, will find it more difficult. For example, a new website offering herbal shampoos, may find it difficult to rank well for single keywords like 'shampoo' on a search engine. This happens because there are many existing websites of brands of shampoos that may be in existence for a longer period of time as compared to the new website, and therefore, each such website has a *history* with search engines. However, over a period of time, by undertaking SEO, the new company is likely to rank well for the keyword 'shampoo'.

The marketer, of course, has no control on the activity undertaken by competition. Similarly, the marketer sometimes may not have control over all incoming links to their website. Incoming links are hyperlinks from another website. For example, in the Figure 2.4, the links that appear in blue colour are hyperlinked to other pages.

A hyperlink is a reference to another place in the same document or to entirely new document that the reader can directly follow either by clicking or by hovering. As highlighted in the figure, the text links to the websites Google, Yahoo!, and Bing. However, the linking has been undertaken by the website moz.com and the other websites have little control of who link to their websites.
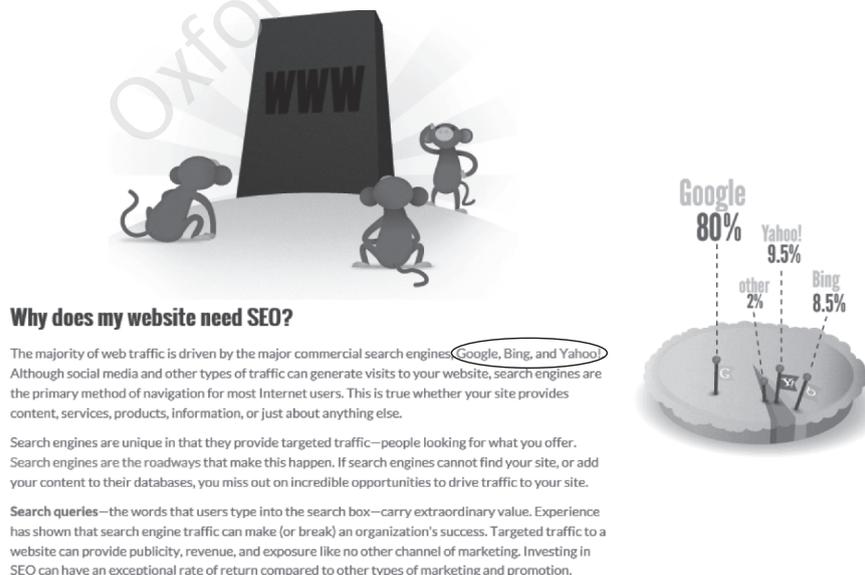
Figure 2.4: A webpage from the website moz.com
Courtesy: https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo

2.3.1 Website Structure

The structure of a website lays the path for user navigation. Website structure, therefore, is important especially from a user experience perspective, which is of special interest to those in marketing. The website structure should be such that it leads the consumer or visitor along a pre-determined path to conversion. (For a larger discussion on website design, see Chapter 6).

Mini Activity 1

Think of a website on which you *were able* to quickly find whatever it was that you were looking for. Is this a website that you often visit?

In addition, think of a website on which you *were not able* to quickly find whatever it was that you were looking for. Is this a website that you often visit?

You will note that as consumers we are likely to return to websites that have a clear navigation structure. How does this activity on part of the user (i.e., visitor behaviour) affect SEO?

Usually, one should start with the question what is the goal of the website? The answer to the above question should be reflected in the site design and structure. For example, take two websites A and B. Website A's target audience are women consumers between 16 and 35 years of age, whereas website B is a B2B site. The primary goal of website A is to engage with the audience, create interactions, and hence increase consumer involvement. Website B, on the other hand, wants to generate leads for its business. Note that neither of the two websites want to sell anything on their sites. However, their goals are different. Therefore, each website's goal is to obtain leads see Figure 2.5). Do the pre-determined paths lead visitors to pages within the website that will prompt them to leave their contact information? In other words, every page should have clear goals that play relevant roles at the juncture in which the page appears.

It needs to be remembered that SEO is a source that obtains visitors for a website. Improving SEO improves the traffic to the website. SEO can obtain visitors but, if the structure of the website is not intuitive, visitors will not stay back, let alone the re-visit. Refer to Insight 2.2 for structuring a good website.

Figure 2.5: A B2B website with clear set of goals for the user
Courtesy: http://www.steelez.com/Default.aspx

Insight 2.2

Plan out a hierarchy before you develop your website Even before you start creating pages in a content management system (CMS), plan out the structure of the website. You can do it on a whiteboard, a spreadsheet program (e.g., Excel and Google Drive Spreadsheets), and most word processors. A 'hierarchy' is nothing more than a way to organize your information. Your hierarchy (shown in Figure 2.6) will also become your navigation and your URL structure.
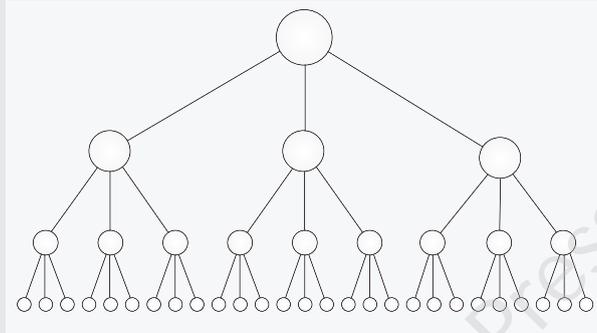
Figure 2.6: Hierarchy

There are a few features of hierarchy that one may keep in mind:
- Keep the hierarchy logical: A logical hierarchy helps crawlers and users. Each main category should be unique and distinct. Each subcategory should relate to the main category under which it is located.
- Keep the number of main categories limited: There should be only a few main categories. A suggested maximum number of categories is seven. Each category has sub-categories.

Create a URL structure that follows the navigation hierarchy The second main element in developing strong site structure is the URL structure. Let's say the hierarchy looks like as shown in Figure 2.7.
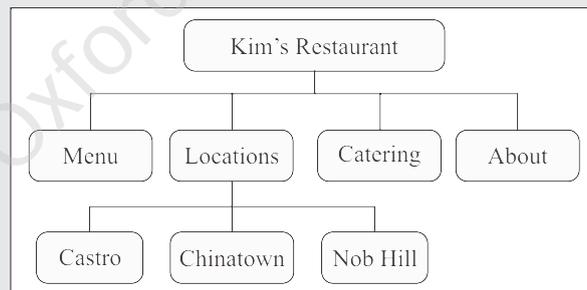
Figure 2.7: The URL structure for the Chinatown location

The URL structure will be organized according to the site hierarchy. It is desirable that the URLs should have real words (not symbols) and appropriate keyword coverage.

Create the site navigation in HTML or CSS It is desirable to create the navigation coding simple. HTML and CSS are your safest approach. Coding in JavaScript, Flash, and Ajax will limit the crawler's ability to cover your site's well-thought out navigation and hierarchy.

Use a 'shallow' depth navigation structure The navigation structure should be such that important pages are not buried too deep within the site. Shallow sites work better, both from a usability and crawler perspective. A shallow website is one that requires three or fewer clicks to reach every page.

Create a header that lists your main navigation pages The top header should list out the main pages, preferably through text links.

> **Develop a comprehensive internal linking structure**   Strong internal linking is essential for ease of website navigation and crawler activity on the website, and for communicating the information logic of the website. The linking should be such that every page on the website should have some link *to* and some link *from* another page on the website. The more internal linking you have across all pages, the better.

2.3.2 Website Content

Good content is imperative for a website to do well and be accepted among users or potential customers. Content is the key to users not only liking the website, but ultimately sharing the website with others in their professional and personal networks. However, creating good content takes time and expertise. It is desirable to have good graphics, but aesthetics alone will not keep visitors coming back or, expanding your user base.

In addition, the content that you provide on your website should be original. If a search engine detects that your content is duplicate, which means the content exits somewhere on the Internet, the website can be severely penalized. Duplicate content gives the signal that the website is probably not serious about its consumers. It is of course fine to talk about similar content from other Websites, as long as the source is acknowledged or shared through links.

Marketers, often, overlook the need to investing in resource that can produce good content. An SEO agency that is hired for optimizing the website, may not always be suited for producing great content. The role of a dedicated writer and a creative person on the team cannot be overemphasized.

Any piece of content that is created should have text associated with it, describing the content. The crawlers usually search the WWW for text-based content. Although crawlers can search image-based content as well, the deployment of such capabilities has not been undertaken by the leading search engines, yet. Therefore, each piece of image that may be included on the website (i.e., blog and social media), needs to have an adequate description that is associated with the image. Let us remember that a website's content is the most important factor in terms of a website's long-term success.

Good content ensures that a website is accessible through search engines. It might take the form of a comic strip, or it might be a Wikipedia page that provides the definition of Web 3.0. It can be an image, a video, a sound, or text. A piece of content must answer a demand in order to be considered good content.

From an SEO perspective, a piece of content is not good, if it is not linkable. Search engines will not give a webpage its due (even if objectively speaking it has good content), unless there are other websites that link to that page. A webpage may not receive links for several reasons. A few examples of this include AJAX-powered image slide shows, content only accessible after logging in, and content that can't be reproduced or shared. Insight 2.3 discusses the update of Google Panda.

> **Insight 2.3**
>
> The Google Panda (update to the Google algorithm) was first rolled out in February 2011 and there have been several updates that have been rolled out since then. The focus of the Panda update has been to eliminate websites from SERPs that contain low-quality content. The Panda update favours those websites that display content that discuss topics in-depth (as opposed to 'thin' content), and those that are regularly updated. Websites that have poor navigation and use a lot of advertisement, and therefore compromise of user experience, are also not favoured.
>
> The rise of content marketing has increased, whereby a brand or website needs to pay close attention to blogs, on-site content, off-site content, and social media participation for the purposes of SEO.
>
> On Google's Webmaster Central Blog, the company provides *a list of questions* that will help content providers (and web masters) ascertain the factors that are important for adjudging the quality of content on their websites. These questions act as guidelines that may be used to create and evaluate content, as well as to avoid violations that probably need to be avoided. All the questions provided below that appear in italics are as they appear on Google's website:

- *Would you trust the information presented in this article?*
- *Is this article written by an expert or enthusiast who knows the topic well, or is it more-shallow in nature?*
- *Does the site have duplicate, overlapping, or redundant articles on the same or similar topics with slightly different keyword variations?*
- *Would you be comfortable giving your credit card information to this site?*
- *Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?*
- *Are the topics driven by genuine interests of readers of the site, or does the site generate content by attempting to guess what might rank well in search engines?*
- *Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?*
- *Does the page provide substantial value when compared to other pages in search results?*
- *How much quality control is done on content?*
- *Does the article describe both sides of a story?*
- *Is the site a recognized authority on its topic?*
- *Is the content mass-produced by or outsourced to a large number of creators, or spread across a large network of sites, so that individual pages or sites don't get as much attention or care?*
- *Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?*
- *For a health related query, would you trust information from this site?*
- *Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?*
- *Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?*
- *Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?*
- *Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?*
- *Does this article have an excessive amount of ads that distract from or interfere with the main content?*
- *Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopedia or book?*
- *Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?*
- *Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?*
- *Would users complain when they see pages from this site?*

Data sourced from:
https://webmasters.googleblog.com/2011/05/more-guidance-on-building-high-quality.html
http://searchengineland.com/library/google/google-panda-update

2.3.3 Onsite Optimization

Onsite optimization refers to the process of undertaking a series of changes on your website so as to ensure that search engines find the website that delivers relevant content to potential users. Onsite optimization includes paying attention to user experience, using appropriate tags within each page on the website (i.e., title tags and meta tags), choosing appropriate keywords, keeping the URL structure simple (a clean URL, e.g., www.salesforce.com – a series of numbers does not really tell the search engine anything to the user), providing the heading, image tags and sitemap, making the website accessible through multiple devices including social sharing plugins that allow for easy sharing of the content, and making the website searchable by crawlers (Figure 2.8).

Page title and headers, and content are important from the perspective of telling the user as well as the crawler what the page is about. A complete description of what the company offers is required. In addition, more importantly, all of these need to match. It needs to be established that the website is speaking in a single voice.

Elements of an Optimized Page

Uniquely Valuable
→ Page provides authentic, obvious value beyond self-promotion of the host site/author
→ Content quality stands apart from the crowd by a significant margin
→ Text, images, & multimedia are remarkable
→ Page would be described by 80%+ of visitors as useful, high quality, & unique
→ Searchers who visit would be unlikely to go "back" from the page to choose a different result

Provides Phenomenal UX
→ Content and navigation elements are easily consumed/understood by users
→ Design is aesthetically polished, high quality, and fit authentically with the brand
→ Page layout makes scanning easy & important content elements obvious
→ Page renders fast (<0.5 secs to first response; <4 secs to primary content loaded)
→ A minimal number of browser requests are required to fully load the page
→ Page is browser & device responsive (or specifically optimized to each as appropriate)

Keyword-Targeted
→ Page targets a single searcher intent (and associated keyword phrases)
→ Primary keyword phrase is the first words of the title element
→ Primary keyword phrase appears in page URL
→ Content is logical & comprehensive, employing related terms/phrases
→ Keyword phrases are highlighted with bold/italic/sizing/etc as appropriate
→ Primary keywords are used prominently in the page headline
→ Primary keyword is found in the body content 2X+
→ Secondary keywords appear in headline(s)/title/body as appropriate
→ Images on the page employ descriptive, keyword-rich alt attributes
→ Descriptive anchor text is used in links pointing to the page

Crawler/Bot Accessible
→ URL is static (contains no dynamic parameters)
→ Content is unique to this URL (all duplicates canonicalize to it)
→ Content loads in page's HTML (not via post-load JS/AJAX/iFrames/etc)
→ No more than 4 clicks are required from any page on the site to reach the URL
→ Redirects from other/older versions use 301s or rel=canonical (not 302s)
→ Redirects from other/older versions come direct (no redirect chains)
→ If the page is temporarily unavailable, status code 503 is returned by the server
→ As appropriate, page is included in an RSS feed; RSS URL is canonicalized/redirects to original
→ Meta robots tag allows crawling & indexing
→ Robots.txt file does not block crawler access
→ Host server does not restrict search crawler IPs
→ Key page elements are character length limited:
  - Title <75 characters
  - URL <90 characters
  - Meta Description <160 characters
→ URL is included in site's XML Sitemaps file

Built to be Shared through Social Networks
→ URL is descriptive and makes the page's topic obvious
→ Includes sharing options to the optimal social networks for the page's audience
→ Page has inherent sharing value (i.e. those who share it will be praised by their audiences, and additional amplification is likely)
→ As appropriate, employ tags for Facebook Open Graph, Twitter Cards, etc

Multi-Device Ready
→ Renders in every (popular) browser properly
→ Optimized to render legibly & elegantly on every screen size
→ Employs the same URL when requested/loaded on every device

Authorship, Meta Data, Schema & Rich Snippets
→ Page content is associated with the author/publisher in the markup via Google+ rel="author" or rel="publisher" attribution
→ As appropriate to the content/topic/vertical, page includes schema.org microdata markup options
→ As appropriate to the content/topic/vertical, page includes Google's rich snippets markup options
→ Employs primary & secondary keywords in the meta description
→ Meta description inspires interest & click-through from SERPs/social
→ Generally avoids meta keywords (unless used for internal search)
→ As appropriate to country/language, page employs hreflang

Created by Rand Fishkin
MOZ

Figure 2.8: A B2B website with clear set of goals for the user
Courtesy: https://moz.com/learn/seo/on-page-factors

Consider this: For whom does the website need to look attractive, for the visitor or for the crawler from the search engine? In addition to looking attractive to the human eye, the on-page content has to be 'attractive' (i.e., make sense) to a crawler as well. The search engine indexes pages under specific categories. The categories under which the search engine will index these pages are determined by the content present on the pages. Therefore, the onsite elements should all speak in the same voice. Insight 2.4 provides figures for the same.

Insight 2.4

India has 220 mobile Internet users as of today, with 20 million additional users being added every quarter. Although English language content accounts for 56 per cent of the content on the Internet, Indian languages account for less than 0.1 per cent. If we assume all those who could speak English were the earliest adopters of the mobile Internet, India still has anywhere between 100 million users and 160 million users that have no comprehension of the content presented to them.

Data sourced from:
https://yourstory.com/2015/08/indian-Internet-vernacular-languages-laas/
http://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/yourstory-epaper-yourstory/one+laas+thing+building+the+indian+Internet+in+vernacular+languages-newsid-43656014

User Experience

User experience should be of paramount importance for the marketer from the point of view of bringing users back to the website, and motivating them to use the system. The website needs to be aesthetically pleasing

and functionally useful. For example, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis 1989) suggests that the two most important parameters for using any technology (e.g., software and website), are *Ease of Use* and *Usefulness*.

Therefore, the ease of using the website (e.g., navigation, layout of the website, or finding information easily), and the usefulness (e.g., information that is helpful) are fundamental to the success of any website. The website should load fast, and as the image in Figure 2.9 suggests, 25 per cent of the traffic is lost for websites that take about 4 seconds to load and that page abandonment rate increases as page load time increases (Figure 2.10).

From the perspective of user experience, another important consideration is the internal linking structure of the website. The internal linking structure is the way in which pages in a website are linked with one another. Some site administrators advocate that no page should be more than three clicks away from the home page. The use of *bread crumbs* is advocated, as these are category pointers that show the current location of a page within specific categories (Figure 2.11).
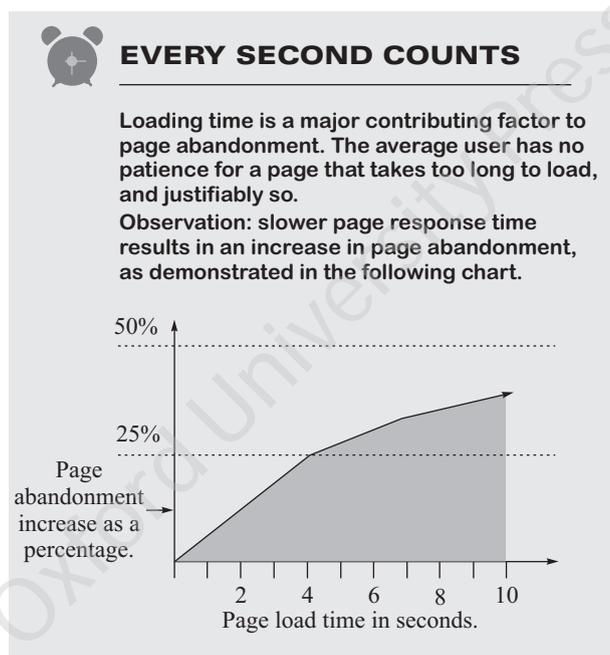
Figure 2.9: Page load time vs abandonment rate
Courtesy: http://www.hobo-web.co.uk/your-website-design-should-load-in-4-seconds/

Impact of page slowdown on completed transactions
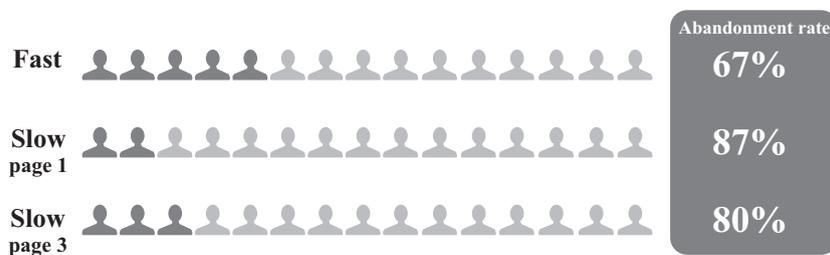
Figure 2.10: Page load time vs abandonment rate
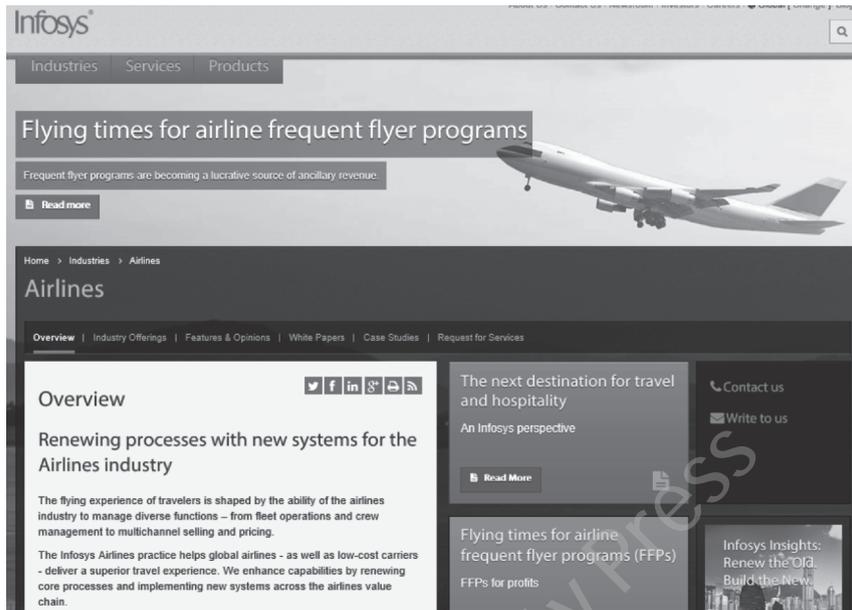
Figure 2.11: Example of breadcrumbs
Courtesy: https://www.infosys.com/industries/airlines/

In addition, use anchor text as much as possible. Anchor text is usually a word or phrase on a webpage which is hyperlinked to another page within the website. The word or phrase needs to be representative of the content of the page to which it is linked (else, users may be misled into clicking a page that is not relevant to the user). Similarly, crawlers also use the anchor text to evaluate the relevancy and the topic of the page to which the anchor text is leading to. Coherence needs to be there between the anchor text and the page that it leads to.

There should not be any broken links, and all categories should be accessible from headers and footers.

Search engines constantly work on the algorithms that are used to rank pages on the search engine results pages for that particular search engine. We have also noted that Google is the leading search engine in India. Therefore, it will be meaningful to take note of the three major updates that have been undertaken by Google over the past five years, as they have direct and deep implications for SEO. These three updates are Panda, Penguin, and Hummingbird.

Giving users a *good user experience* is at the heart of all these updates that have been undertaken by the Google search engine. Note that the three updates are discussed in various places throughout the chapter.

Title and Meta Tags

For the Internet marketer, it is desirable to have some working knowledge of HTML (HyperText Markup language), since most websites are created using HTML. Meta tags are codes on a wWebpage that are not visible to the human eye, but can be read by search engine crawlers. These meta tags are used to provide the required information to the crawlers regarding what constitutes the keywords and hence the essence of the document, as described by the tags.

Title tag The description that is seen in the left corner of the top blue bar of a browser window is the title tag. The title tag is important since any search engine will pick up the information that is provided in the title tag. Each page on a website is different and should have a pertinent title tag to correctly reflect what the page promises to provide the user.

Typically, a wWebpage that has an optimized title tag will fare better in the search engine results than a page that is not optimized to accurately reflect what it stands for.

In addition, the crawler picks up that the page is about something called an 'air product'. However, it is unlikely that any user will ever search for an 'air product'. Therefore, it is important to specifically identify what it is that people are looking for and represent it accurately on the page. Else, the page will not likely show up for the query that asks for the same product, but the product is wrongly identified on the webpage.

Meta tags Meta tags hold descriptions of the webpage. Once again, these tags are not visible to the human eye, and are provided for the machines only. The description in these tags should be such that it provides a description of what the page is about in a few short sentences.

Heading and Image Tags

There are six levels of heading tags in HTML: h1 to h6. These tags provide the option of indicating headings and sub-headings upto six levels. The heading at the level of h1 appears in the biggest font and is considered as the most important heading by crawlers. Therefore, ideally, headings should contain the keywords. Images should always be described with an 'alt' (alternate) tag. This practice is especially desirable when pictures are used to provide a link to other pages.

Keyword Research

Those who have tried to explore the Internet marketing space even to a small extent will have come across the phrase *keyword research*. However, what is a keyword in the context of SEO? *Keyword* is often used to refer to all of the following:

(a) the specific term (i.e., a word or a phrase, as is mostly the case) that is used on a website or webpage to capture the gist of the document (in the context of SEO)

(b) the specific term that the website bids on for its paid advertising (in the context of PPC advertising)

(c) the specific term that a user uses (i.e., puts into the search box of a search engine) in order to search for an item.

Therefore, before creating content for a website, the Internet marketer needs to have a clear understanding of the keywords that are being used by users to search for content that is similar to that website's offering. In this section, we will confine our discussion to keywords in the context of SEO only. The discussion on keywords in the context of PPC advertising will be taken up in a subsequent chapter.

Upon identifying the relevant keywords, the marketer needs to develop the website's content around those keywords. Remember, keyword research determines who sees your content. Missing out on important or relevant keywords might result in missing out on potential customers. Selecting a keyword requires practice and a deep understanding of your customer's behaviour. Responses to the below questions (and, this is by no means an exhaustive list) will hold keys to the set of keywords that you ultimately zero-in on.

• How does a typical customer search for your product?

• What are the words that she uses? What are the synonyms that she uses?

• Are you a global or a local company?

• What version of the English language does your target audience mostly speak?

The broader the keyword, the lesser is the chance that a consumer will search using only that keyword. Recent research demonstrates that consumers on the Internet are growing savvier in using more and more specific keywords when searching on search engines.

For example, a consumer looking to purchase a property in Gurgaon (in Haryana), is *unlikely* to use the keyword 'property' only when undertaking search on a search engine. There is a greater likelihood that the consumer will search with something similar to 'property in Gurgaon' or 'property in Gurgaon sector 42' when undertaking the search. In this example, the keyword 'property' is an example of a head keyword, and the others ('property in Gurgaon', property in Gurgaon sector 42) are examples of long tail keywords.
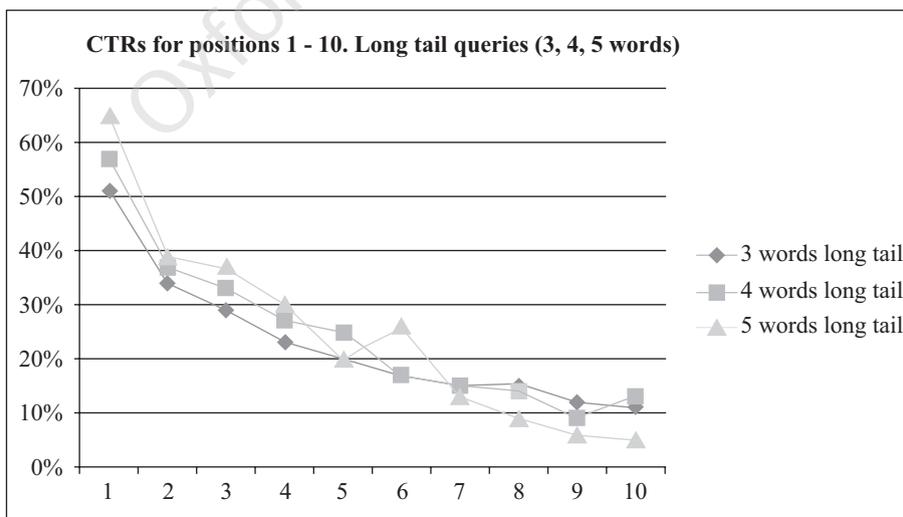
Figure 2.12: Long Tail (Chris Anderson 2004)
Courtesy: http://www.longtail.com/about.html

The idea of long tail was first discussed by Chris Anderson (in the *Wired* magazine in October 2004). The broad concept of the long tail is that consumers are moving away from a small number of leading brands or products at the head of the demand curve, and are increasingly becoming more interested in niche products represented towards the tail of the demand curve. This idea of the long tail has been applied to keywords, suggesting that broad keywords (i.e., keywords that are general and usually short), tend *not to* represent the user's query well, and will generate a lot of results in the SERP, which may not be meaningful to the users (Figure 2.12). However, long tail keywords are more likely to adequately represent the user's query since they are more focused, that is, keywords are longer and represent the query adequately.

Usually, it is expected that using shorter keywords on a search engine (e.g., 'property'), is likely to yield a lot of results, which means using head keywords only will result in volume of queries. However, the click-through-rates (CTRs) are likely to suffer. On the other hand, using long tail keywords is likely to provide more precise results for the queries and the CTRs are likely to increase. As Figure 2.13 demonstrates, CTRs are higher for longer tail keywords in the higher positions in an SERP. This positive correlation between longer keywords and CTR may not hold in the results that appear in the lower part of the search page.

Figure 2.13: CTRs for positions on SERPs (Long tail queries – 3, 4, 5 words)
Courtesy: https://moz.com/ugc/click-through-rates-in-google-serps-for-different-types-of-queries

The above discussion demonstrates that consumers are searching using keywords that are becoming more specific (or niche) in nature. In other words, it means that marketers need to segment their target audience more finely in order to capture these differences and ensure that they are served up an offering very close to what they are looking for. A related point is that a keyword has competition. The broader the keyword (i.e., the shorter the phrase), the greater is the competition for that keyword. This is because the generic nature of that keyword makes it a favourite among all marketers in that industry. This is another reason for trying to get as specific as possible. It is usually advisable to go after keywords that do not have too high competition.

Keywords with low competition are not necessarily bad, since they provide the marketer with an opportunity to attract more qualified users, that is, users that are more interested in that specific offering and hence are more likely to convert. The keywords must reflect the way in which consumers actually undertake search. In addition, the keywords must reflect the content of the pertinent webpages. There are paid as well as free tools that help in providing a list of potential keywords that a marketer can then choose from.

Undertaking keyword research is a time consuming activity. There are several commercial solutions that are available in the market that the marketer may take the help of for undertaking keyword research. Some of the top tools that have been advocated by a group of SEO professionals include SEMrush, Google Keyword Planner, Buzzsumo, and Longtail PRO, among others. Insight 2.5 discusses SEO challenges faced in India.

Insight 2.5

From 'Yeh dil maange more' to 'Yenna Rascala', it is obvious that India's usage of English is in a very free form. We very liberally shove an English word into a Hindi sentence or throw in words from our native tongue when we can't find the English analogue.

Imagine if Nitish, a college student in Allahabad, is feeling particularly dapper and decides that he wants to buy a pair of red shoes for Diwali, then he, while searching for red shoes on a fashion e-commerce website, can potentially type in at least four different strings such as 'Red Shoes', 'Laal Joota' (literal translation of red shoes in Hindi), 'Laal Shoes' or 'Red Joota'. In such cases, the search algorithm must be intelligent enough to identify that all these search terms mean the same thing and deliver identical results.

Indian users are accustomed to using vernacular languages interchangeably with English words and any search algorithm that hopes to work in the vernacular market must hold this to be axiomatic.

To offer a truly rich search experience to users in the vernacular languages, all the other elements of the stack namely fonts, font rendering, native and transliterative input, and domain-specific translation must work together intelligently. Moreover, the input strings may be served in Devanagiri script instead of Roman script, in which case the fluidity of language input must also be accounted for. Another aspect to be covered when it comes to intelligent user-friendly search is recognizing brand names and avoiding literal translation in such cases. For example, if one searches for John Players, a popular ITC brand of men's apparel, and requests results in Hindi, the translation algorithm should be able to identify the brand and not convert it to 'John Khiladi', which would be meaningless and yield no results. Therefore, we return to the criticality of domain specific search, because without context, there can be no comprehension and no search.

URL Structure, Site Maps

The URL structure should be simple and clean. Although a URL can technically include both alphabets and digits, it is advisable to use words in a manner such that the keywords are included.

XML (Extensible Markup Language) sitemaps should be provided for the ease of the crawler. The purpose is to ensure that the site gets indexed on the search engine. This sitemap is not for your visitors (Figure 2.14). On the other hand, HTML site maps should be provided for the ease of users. The pages on a website should be properly interlinked in order to facilitate the movement of the spider as well as the user from one page to the other. Create a linking structure that makes sense to your users. Linking should be intuitive and one page should automatically flow from the other. Most search engines have their Webmaster Tools and guidelines, and reading these closely helps in further understanding how best to optimize your site.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" ?>
- <urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
  - <url>
      <loc>http://www.makemytrip.com/</loc>
      <lastmod>2010-06-14T18:14:21+00:00</lastmod>
      <changefreq>daily</changefreq>
      <priority>1</priority>
    </url>
  - <url>
      <loc>http://www.makemytrip.com/sitemap-flights.xml</loc>
      <lastmod>2010-06-14T18:14:21+00:00</lastmod>
      <changefreq>daily</changefreq>
      <priority>1</priority>
    </url>
  - <url>
      <loc>http://www.makemytrip.com/sitemap-hotels.xml</loc>
      <lastmod>2010-06-14T18:14:21+00:00</lastmod>
      <changefreq>daily</changefreq>
      <priority>1</priority>
    </url>
  - <url>
      <loc>http://www.makemytrip.com/sitemap-holidays.xml</loc>
      <lastmod>2010-06-14T18:14:21+00:00</lastmod>
      <changefreq>daily</changefreq>
      <priority>1</priority>
    </url>
  - <url>
      <loc>http://www.makemytrip.com/sitemap-bus.xml</loc>
      <lastmod>2010-06-14T18:14:21+00:00</lastmod>
      <changefreq>daily</changefreq>
      <priority>1</priority>
    </url>
```

Figure 2.14: An Example of part of an XML site map (for the website www.makemytrip.com)

Website Usage Metrics

The Panda update in 2011 (several updates to the initial Panda update have already happened), was put in place by the Google search engine in order to stop poor quality websites from making its way into SERPs. Following the Panda update, the user and usage metrics on a website have gained importance in terms of their contribution to the ranking of a website on the Google search engine. Conceptually, the reasoning is that users are more likely to visit (and revisit) and stay for a longer period on a website if the user's experience on the website is good. Conversely, the user will abandon the site if the user experience is not what the user expects.

Such usage metrics include number of visits, number of visitors (e.g., repeat and new visitors), time per visit, and bounce rate, among others. An extensive discussion on specific web analytics metrics is undertaken in the chapter on Web Analytics (Chapter 5).

Access through Multiple Devices

The website needs to be *responsive*, that is, the same HTML code is used on the same URL regardless of the user's device (e,g., desktop, tablet, mobile, or non-visual browser), but the webpage displays differently (i.e., 'responds differently') based on the screen size (Developers.Google.com). Responsive design is Google's recommended design pattern. Following such design practices impacts a website's SEO efforts positively, and the website is likely to rank higher on SERPs. Insight 2.6 discusses update of Google Hummingbird.

Insight 2.6

The Google Hummingbird (update to the Google algorithm) was announced in 2013, which introduced contextual search.

"*Hummingbird is a definite expansion of Google's semantic capability evident at the search interface level that reveals, significantly, two things. First, Google has increased its ability to deal with complex search queries, which means that it also has got better at indexing entities in web documents. Second, it has got a lot better at relationally linking search queries and web documents, which means that its Knowledge Graph must be considerably enriched.*

From a strategy point of view, this opens the horizon for companies and webmasters considerably. From a practical perspective, the need to identify the USP of each business and become authoritative within it is now a key criteria for continued SEO success. The comparison element that has been integrated suggests that semantic mark-up may begin to confer an advantage now when it comes to helping index information in products and services."

- David Amerland, search engine expert and author of *Google Semantic Search.*

Data sourced from:

http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/what-googles-hummingbird-update-really-means

http://searchengineland.com/google-hummingbird-172816

Access, through multiple devices, to content on the Internet is changing the way in which people are searching for content – from voice commands to the use of short forms of many words – the user of search engines is using many 'conversational' tactics to access content, reflecting the natural way in which we speak and ask questions. Hummingbird is helping to ensure that Google is poised to understand and meet that demand.

Access through Crawlers

It is important to ensure that crawlers are able to access the website content in order to categorize specific pages as per the content of the page. Else, those pages (and maybe all pages on the entire website) will not get ranked and this statement may hold true for websites that live behind passwords and firewalls. Therefore, there is a need to manage the porosity of websites. For example, the newspaper New York Times has a metered system in place for users, which means an individual user can access only 10 free articles every month, beyond which the user has to make payments in order to access the content of the website. The newspaper manages its porosity to allow crawlers to crawl enough content on every page so as not to affect its rankings.

Blog on the Company Website's Main Domain

A blog on the company website's main domain is advocated as it will attract search traffic to the main site. Any website without a blog is likely to find it difficult to attract inbound links. However, a blog that is frequently updated with high-quality content is more likely to naturally attract links and rank for long-tail, high-intent search queries.

Mini Activity 2

Visit the website https://website.grader.com/. Pick any website of your choice and use the website grader tool to grade the health of the website. What are your findings? What advice will you give regarding the website?

2.3.4 Link Building (Offsite Optimization)

The previous section deals with onsite optimization elements. In other words, these are elements that are part of the website itself. The counterpart of onsite optimization is offsite optimization or link building. As the name suggests, this activity involves undertaking steps that deal with attracting other websites to hyperlink to one's own website, that is, an anchor text on another website is hyperlinked to one's website. Link building involves distributing one's website's URL across websites over the World Wide Web. It is not only about trust from your visitors for the website, but also building trust with the search engines.

Link building is the practice and ongoing campaign to increase your website and company's brand and visibility in the search engines, and online in general. Link building should not be just to get one-way links pointing to your website to boost your search engine keyword position and rankings. Link building is placing

your website in areas on the Internet that provide good quality links and can help generate visitors to your website. It seeks to build your website as an 'authority' in the industry. Google Penguin update is discussed in Insight 2.7.

The objective is not to 'make your links appear natural'; the objective is that your links are natural.

– Matt Cutts – mattcutts.com

Insight 2.7

Google's Penguin (update to the Google algorithm) released in April 2012, is the search engine's attempt to sieve out and block websites from appearing on SERPs that practice manipulative link building. Such websites focus on creating links for the sake of creating links, rather than for user experience (and legitimate links). Practices that are frowned upon by the Penguin update included link buying, building thin sites simply for the purpose of linking back to a main site, and trading exchange.

Such an update by the search engine Google requires that site owners or managers to view link building as an integral part of enhancing the website rather than indulging in any activity that will only increase the number of links and not contribute to the value of the site or the user experience on the site. The website owner or manager is held responsible for the volume, quality, source, and content of the links to website, requiring the website manager to check the link profile of the website often.

A link-audit on a regular basis is advisable and every attempt should be made to remove poor-quality links that are linking to the website. For building new links, the website manager will benefit from answering the following questions:

Is the website a high-quality site? What does that other website's link profile look like?

Is the link relevant? Will the other website use a variety of 'anchor text' to point to the site?

Data sourced from:

http://mashable.com/2012/07/03/penguin-google-seo/

http://searchengineland.com/library/google/google-penguin-update

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Consumers usually trust a friend's recommendations. For example, when a friend recommends a brand or product to us, they usually say things like: 'I like brand X', or, 'Brand X is an expert in the field'. The above examples indicate that the user usually trusts Brand X. Similarly, inbound links to a website are like endorsements from other websites regarding the worthiness of that website.

Therefore, a link coming into a website from another site is like a 'vote' from that website. Examples of inbound links include:

(a)   a link to brand X's website from a blog

(b)   a link to brand X's website from a newspaper

Linking to another site should always be through pertinent 'anchor text'. Anchor text is the text or label that is visible or highlighted, when that text is used to hyperlink to another website. It is the clickable portion of the text. The words that are used in these situations need to take into account the content of the website it is linking to. The anchor text, therefore, should try to use words that closely represent the content to which it is providing a link. It needs to be remembered that the greater the number of inbound links, the greater is the possibility that the website will rank higher on a SERP.

Link building is marketing a website's content on the Internet. Linking to other relevant websites, on which your target consumers might be, is a strategy that no Internet marketer can ignore. To that extent, one needs to have an understanding of how to go about undertaking a link-building strategy. A website can substantially increase its electronic footprint through directory submissions, blogging and commenting on other blogs that have similar content, press releases, article submissions, social networking, and video marketing. In addition, remember that it is desirable to have more inbound links (and of course 'quality' inbound links) than outbound links. As of the year 2016, social media is part of SEO, which means the activities that a marketer undertakes on social media have a direct impact on SEO. Therefore, the marketer needs to pay attention to the social signals that emanate from their social media platforms.

Online Publicity

Noteworthy press releases can be written and distributed using websites that offer press release services. Some websites charge fees for these services, whereas some provide it for free. Press releases provide a website with the opportunity of 'making an occasion' of something small, that might otherwise be considered as not being significant enough to demand media attention.

In each press release, the marketer should try to embed a few links that lead back to the parent site. In the online world, this translates into more links. However, a caveat needs to be sounded here. One must remember not to put in too many links in these press releases, which might be considered as spamming or black-hat by search engines.

Directory Submission and Local Search Engines

Good online directories should also be considered in the journey of building links. Here, too, there are paid inclusions and those that are free. There are directories that will accept and list the links of websites upon payment to those directories (note that directories are websites that list other websites). Such an inclusion in the directories for a payment is referred to as paid inclusion. Whether the submission process is free or paid, it helps the website to build links, and therefore, contributes to SEO. One such open directory is the Open Directory project (Dmoz listings) (free listing). Anybody can submit the URLs for possible inclusion in the list. Usually, these directories have pre-defined categories and those that are submitting to these directories are encouraged to carefully evaluate the 'fit' of the website to the category to which it is being submitted. Submissions might not get included (especially in the free directories) if they do not match the guidelines laid down by these directories. Some leading directories in India are Justdial (www.justdial.com), Sulekha (www.sulekha.com), and Indiamart (www.indiamart.com). Such websites can list B2C (business-to-consumers) as well as B2B (business-to-business) offerings (products and services). Industry-specific directories are also available such as www.fundoodata.com. Make sure these directories are well-visited, that is, submission to these directories will result in visitors visiting your website. A few good-quality inbound links are more important as compared to a number of bad quality links.

Local search engines provide a business with an opportunity for listing their businesses in databases that cater to a local audience. The advantages of being part of such listings are at least two-fold.

One, there are many organizations for which users usually end up looking for a local provider. In those circumstances, if one's business is listed on a specific local search engine, there is a greater chance that customers looking for that service will reach out to those service providers when they are in need of those services.

Two, listing on local search engines, in addition to global and national-level search engines, adds to a website's SEO efforts. Local search engines not only allow the listing of the contents, but also a listing of the geography in which the business is functioning. Some examples of search engines that provide the option of 'local' listings as well, include Google maps, Yahoo!Local, and YellowPages. Some of the popular local search engines in India are www.asklaila.com, www.grotal.com, and www.khoj.com.

There is a need to include keywords on the local search listings that relate to your website. It is important to include keywords in the company's local profile. It is very important to include your website URL and contact information in the local listings.

Social Networking

Profiles of your business and some active users in the company need to be created on some of the top networking sites. For example, most organizations now have a presence of Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter. Similar to the directories, industry-specific social networking sites are available too. Becoming active in the social community helps build your brand and reputation when connecting (and interacting) with customers.
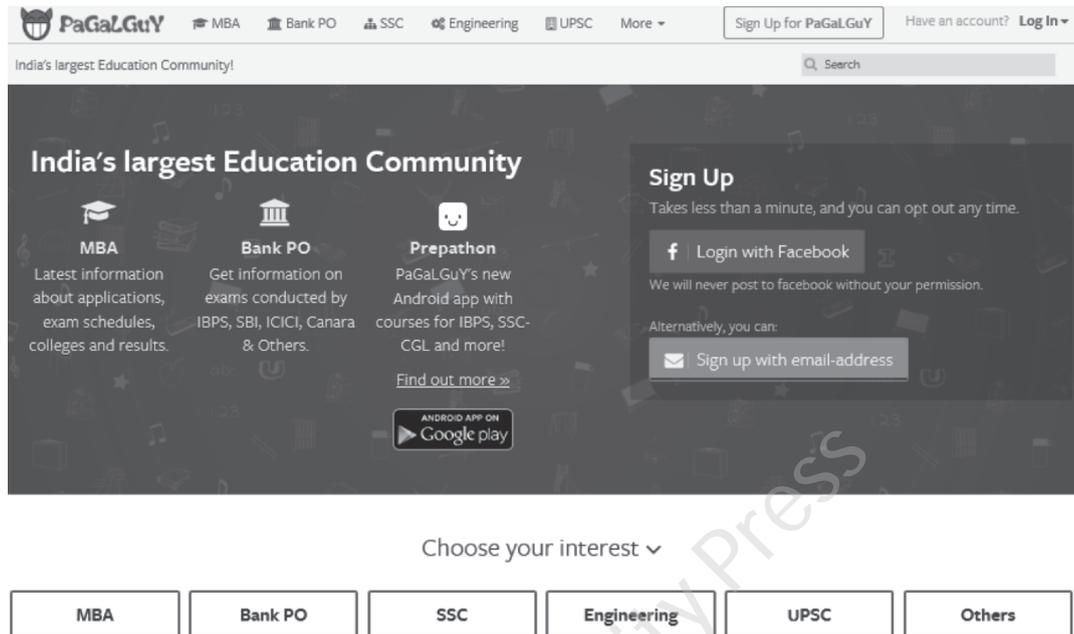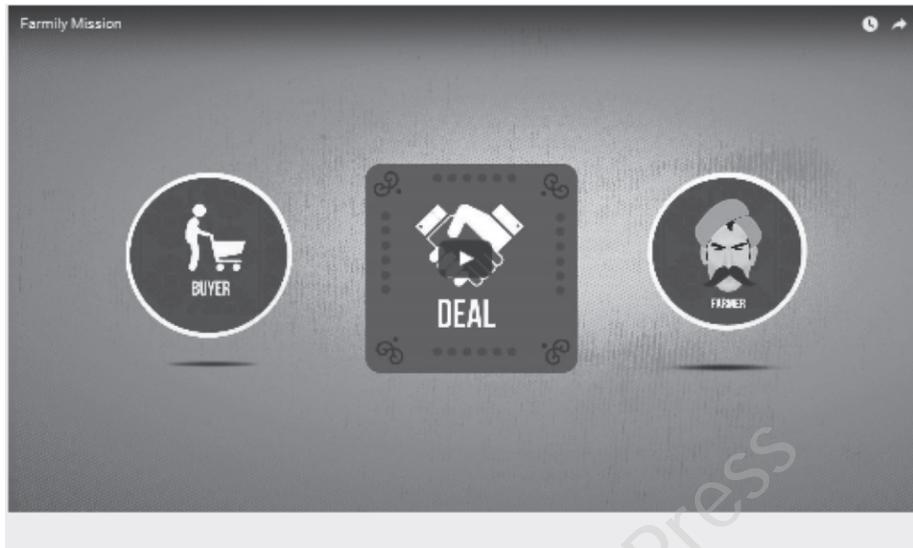
Figure 2.15: Social networking site for students in India
Courtesy: http://www.pagalguy.com/

While the social networking sites that are mentioned in the paragraph above are the leading social networking sites across the world, there are some social networking sites that have appeal for the audience in India. Some of these sites are www.shtyle.fm, www.bharatstudent.com, and www.goibibo.com. In addition to general sites, there are niche social networking sites that have an appeal for specific types of audience. www.pagalguy.com (see Figure 2.15).

Some social networking platforms have been developed to suit the unique needs of the farming community. For example, the Tata Consultancy Services developed a mobile phone–based platform, GappaGoshthi™, for the rural communities in the state of Maharashtra in India. Addressing the need to a group of people who have difficulty understanding computer interfaces, have limited access to broadband and fast mobile networks, and have limited literacy in the English language, this platform allows community members to speak to each other through their mobile phone service provider. The platform was offered through Vodafone in rural Maharashtra and the services began in 2009. Subscribers may become part of the community through a pre-paid mechanism and then communications to members within the community are charged a lower rate than those that are not in the community.

The core service of GappaGoshti™ is the ability to make and receive messages in multimedia format. To avoid texting, the platform lets a user make posts in multimedia format such as in voice, video, and image. A user can make a voice post to share an opinion, to ask a question, or to give some information. Images or videos may be posted as well, meaning a user can take the photograph or video of an object or situation so that others can witness it. Along with social collaboration, the platform provides localized micro-region weather information. The weather information is a weekly prediction of temperature, cloud and rain, and is in a pictorial graph format. The platform also provides news feeds and yellow pages information, that is, useful local information like banks that are located in the vicinity, information on local trains, and bus time table, among others. The platform also provides a service called *Krushi Dyankosh* (Charity Cell for Farmers) that is a repository of videos, images, and audio files containing information about some good practices that farmers can follow.

Figure 2.16: Social networking site connecting farmers and consumers
Courtesy: https://farmily.com/en

A more recent development is the social networking site Farmily (www.farmily.com) (Figure 2.16), which proposes to bring the consumers and the farming community closer to each other. The core proposition of this social networking site is to channelize food production and distribution for a sustainable world.

Blogging and Commenting

Blogs are the shortened version of *weblogs* (Blood 2000), which are part of a website, and are maintained by either an individual or an organization in order to provide meaningful content for the users of the blogs. These contents can be in the form of text, audio, graphics or video, depending on how the blogger wants to communicate with the visitors to the blog or website. Blogs are usually used for the purpose of reaching out to a user base through a discussion of issues that might be of interest to this user population. To that extent, blogs are a tool that can be used to involve and engage with the user community.

From the perspective of undertaking SEO, blogs can also be used in order to increase a website's electronic footprint on the WWW. It is advisable to have at least one company blog. The blog allows the company to not only communicate with its customers, but also make announcements and attract potential new customers. The company might also choose to have separate blogs for separate segments of users or customers, depending on their needs and interests.

It is also desirable to always provide sharing tools on the blogs. This option allows a user to easily share a piece of content from your blog with anybody among her friends and acquaintances. For example, Dell, on its website, www.dell.com, allows those interested in following them to do so through RSS (really simple syndication) feeds. The site also allows users to add the blog on to their social networks, and to that end the blog displays the logos of the prominent social networking sites.

Making content accessible drives traffic to your site. For example, when a piece of content is shared by a regular user of a blog with her friends, the user forwards the URL of the website, which then ensures that the friends visit the blog, and hence the website. This presents the website with opportunity for acquiring new users. The website then can offer new content like newsletters and white papers to new users that register at the blog.

Another important and often overlooked aspect is writing guest posts for other websites or blogs. Although guest posts are usually on an invite-only basis, and therefore, take time to happen, an effort should be made to connect with blog owners who maintain similar blogs. This exercise requires effort, but does go a long way in attracting more visitors to your own website. The crucial thing to remember is to leave back-links to your website. In addition, it is a good practice to leave meaningful and insightful comments at other blogs that participate in the same professional space. These could be blogs that relate to your industry, customers, and businesses. The objective of doing so is to establish the individual or the organization as a leader in the professional space. Make sure that you are adding value to the conversation, that is, an intelligent comment.

Commenting on *relevant* blogs makes you come across as an expert in the field. Ensure that you leave your website URL and contact information upon leaving your comment on the blog. Recent data suggests that organizations that maintain a blog are more likely to have a greater number of inbound links than organizations that do not maintain a blog (refer to Figure 2.17). This statistic should be incentive enough for maintaining a blog.

However, some caveats are in order. Choose these blogs with care. Do take time to research a blog well before leaving a comment. The blogs that you associate yourself with should be of a quality that you would want to be associated with. You want it to be a good quality blog.
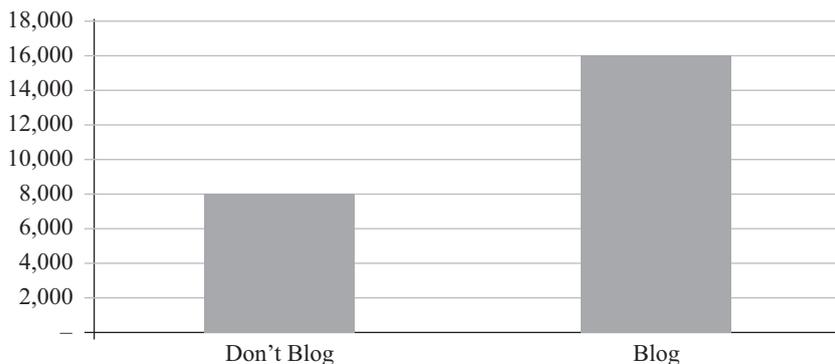
Figure 2.17: Blogging increases inbound links
Courtesy: Hubspot (http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/53/file-13208129-pdf/docs/seo_social_search_lead_generation_
webinar_hubspot_may_2010_pdf.pdf), last accessed on May 23, 2015

Industry Association Memberships and Article Submission

Many-a-times, the memberships to the local business or commercial bodies are ignored. It is important to recognize that once a business becomes a member of these local or national trade associations, there is an opportunity for getting listed on their websites. Therefore, becoming a member of your local chamber of commerce or trade associations offers the potential of linking back to your website. Usually, these memberships are not free. However, it provides an additional opportunity for increasing the virtual footprint of your website on cyberspace.

In addition, these associations help build credibility and trust, and provide legitimacy to any business, something that the new businesses find really useful. For example, new visitors are more likely to visit a website that has the official approval of some of the local trade associations, especially if they are new ones. It also helps to write articles and submit them to directories. For example, websites like www.Ezine.com provide with an opportunity to write articles on any topic and submit it under the appropriate category for inclusion on their website.

Online Videos and Podcasts

The use of videos is often questioned for their efficacy, with many traditional marketers suspecting the role that they play in Internet marketing. It is true that creating meaningful and creative videos does require not only time and effort, but has substantial costs associated with it. However, videos and podcasts can be used as tools for building the reputation of your brand. There are a number of video hosting sites that will host videos for free. Many video hosting sites are available that allow anybody to upload content.

The appropriate labelling of the videos with pertinent keywords will serve as an SEO tool. If the content of the videos is created with care, the videos might go viral, creating more awareness among users than they would have otherwise. In addition, the role of virtual events, webinars, and eBooks also need to be underscored. Announcing these on various forums and blogs can drive traffic to your website.

Natural Links

As your website grows over time, and is perceived as an authority in the field, it is desirable that other websites link to your website. It is important to be perceived as an authority in the field. High-quality content will ensure that others link to your website and quote those contents found on your website as a source of authority. In order to reach this point, a website usually will take time, but if you can make it happen, this pays rich dividends in terms of increasing your footprint on the WWW, as well as visitor footfall on your website.

Building Links

It is usually best if the link building exercises are clearly scheduled over a period of 8 to 12 months. It is usually recommended that you undertake about five activities each month. Begin with a link audit. Look at all the links that are in-coming to your site. You can do the above with the help of search engine webmaster tools (e.g., Google, Bing, etc.). Then, schedule link building activities for each month. Establishing trust with the search engines will result in nice positioning, and therefore, more visitors and sales.

2.3.5 Black Hat Techniques

A note of caution needs to be sounded at this point of time. While SEO is a powerful strategy for increasing website visibility, credibility, and hence, traffic, Internet marketers need to understand the SEO process as best as they can. Search engines are constantly tweaking their algorithms.

These changes have a direct impact on website listings. However, no one apart from a top few within the search engine company really knows what exactly constitutes the algorithm of a particular search engine. SEO practitioners do try to keep themselves updated with what these potential changes might be, but nobody outside these organizations know the exact formulation of the algorithms that determine the ordering of the

search results. Therefore, an Internet marketer, too, needs to develop a close understanding of how the SEO process is evolving.

To begin with, an Internet marketer must be aware that SEO rankings on the SERPs cannot be guaranteed. If any SEO practicing firm promises this kind of an outcome, it warrants a closer examination of that organization. An SEO tactic, technique, or method is considered white hat if it conforms to the search engines' guidelines and involves no attempt to deceive the search engine. When put differently, the search engines are concerned about the 'genuineness' of a website and practices that try to 'fool' the search engine into believing that a website is a genuine one, are not looked upon very kindly by the search engines. These deception tactics often practiced by some SEO practitioners, either out of ignorance or by design, are collectively referred to as black hat tactics.

These black hat tactics not only try to deceive the website, but they also do not hold any promise for the website visitor. Black hat tactics might bring visitors to a website, but they will not stay there. When black hat techniques are used to a great extent, then the website usually has very little meaningful content to offer to its visitors. Especially in these cases, the visitors to these websites will soon realize that this is not really the website that they are looking for.

The site might even face the possibility of being blacklisted by the search engine from appearing anywhere on the SERPs. The white hat (or, by-the-book) SEO tactics, on the other hand, will serve the organization well. In addition, the site will not face the possibility of being blacklisted by the search engines.

Black hat SEO refers to those practices generally thought of as cheating the search engine as well as the customer. Next are discussed some of the leading black hat tactics:

(a) *Cloaking* is the practice of presenting different versions of webpage contents to search engines and human visitors. For example, when a user searches for some product, they usually click on the URL of a website in the SERPs based on the description and title that is displayed. However, the actual website that the user is taken to might not be the one described in SERPs, and might be a totally different one. This is one such practice that is designed to manipulate search engines and deceive users by directing them to sites that they probably did not want to visit. This practice is referred to as cloaking, and providing content solely for the benefit of search engines should be avoided.

Some organizations create multiple websites with the same content. The domain name might be different, but the content of the webpages remains the same. This practice is referred to as *duplicate content* and is undertaken in order to increase the organization's presence on the web. There is nothing wrong in an organization having more than one website, in fact, for the purpose of SEO, the more the better. However, each website should have legitimate creative content, and *not* be replicas of existing websites, even if all these websites are owned by the same organization. Search engines will soon detect duplicate content and might penalize the website in the SERPs.

(b) *Keyword stuffing* is the practice of filling a webpage with keywords in an attempt to manipulate a site's ranking in search engine's results. Simply putting in a lot of keywords on a webpage does not contribute to the user experience and should definitely be avoided. Over use of keywords is often not meaningful to the user and search engines might penalize websites for indulging in this practice. This directive applies to text-based content as well as image tags.

A related practice is including *hidden text* on webpages in an attempt to influence the SERP rankings of a website. Additional text that has no meaningful value for the user can be hidden in a variety of ways on a webpage. Some of the ways it can be done include writing text in the same coloured font as that of the background colour and hiding text behind images. This practice sends a definite signal to the crawlers that this site might not be trustworthy and a website that practices this might be completely removed from the search engine index.

(c) *Linking to bad neighbourhood* consists of linking to other websites that have spam content or are in-turn linked to sites that seek to deceive users and spiders. Some link farms are created as networks of sites that contain numerous links to one another. Nearly all search engines remove link farms from their

directories when they find them and many also penalize other sites that link to them. It is not a good idea to link to a link farm, if you rely at all on organic search for page views.

Following from the previous paragraph, it is also advocated that buying placements in *low-quality directories* should be avoided. The quality of the directory has an impact on the overall quality of the website as well, as a low quality directory can pull the quality of an otherwise good-quality website down.

(d) *Link exchanges* through affiliate programs are frowned upon by the search engines. Such practices were probably okay till 2011, but the Penguin Update (by Google) in 2012 incorporates provisions in the Google algorithm that looks to penalize websites that build inbound links through link exchanges. Such exchanges are not considered natural linking by the search engine, as many-a-times, this kind of exchange has *little to do* with the content of the page.

Some other bad practices include *title stacking* and creating *link farms*. In case of title stacking, website developers use more than one title, where the best practice is to keep it to one title per page. A link farm is a website set up with the sole purpose of increasing the link popularity of other sites by increasing the number of incoming links to those sites. They are typically made up of long lists of unrelated links.

Some search engines could also be *bombed* by users. This phenomenon occurs when a group of people conspire to artificially elevate a website in any search engine's web search results ranking by linking a particular word or phrase to that particular website.

There are links to JCPenney.com's dresses page on sites about diseases, cameras, cars, dogs, aluminium sheets, travel, snoring, diamond drills, bathroom tiles, hotel furniture, online games, commodities, fishing, Adobe Flash, glass shower doors, jokes and dentists -and the list goes on

–David Segal, New York Times, Feb 12, 2011

For example, during the duration of the holiday season in 2010 in the United States, searching terms like 'dresses', 'bedding', and 'area rugs', Segal (*The New York Times*, 2011) points out, was a regular result of J.C. Penney turning up No. 1 for each inquiry. Although a spokeswoman for Penny's shared that the company did not authorize and was not involved with or aware of, the posting of the links. The situation warrants attention considering the stunt was pulled during the height of online shopping season. In addition, *The New York Times* points out crippling revenue figures for the department store that might explain why desperate times might have called for desperate measures (*The New York Times*, 2011).

JC Penny was using what is referred to as 'link schemes' and that is frowned upon by most search engines. Similar deceptions have been used in the past by other big companies. In 2006, BMW's German language website was found by Google to be using alternate techniques to boost its rankings, with the result of the website (www.bmw.de) being removed from search results for some time. JC Penny suffered as its results stopped showing up at the number 1 spot, soon after their practices were established.

2.4 MEASURING SEO SUCCESS

It is important to track the response that the website receives to SEO undertaken on the website. How does the marketer measure or track the success of SEO efforts? What are the appropriate metrics that the marketer should follow in order to ensure that the SEO process is on track? Are these metrics leads, or sales, or number of visitors to the site, or ROI?

In order to track user activity on the website, marketers have some free as well as a lot of paid tools at their disposal. For example, Google Analytics (http://www.google.com/analytics/) is the leading free web analytics tool that is available on the Internet today.

Web analytics helps the marketer to track how the web traffic interacts with the website. This understanding of user activity on the website is very important to know in order to make the necessary changes that may be required on an ongoing basis. Analytics also tracks the keywords that led visitors to your website. A detailed discussion on web analytics is undertaken in Chapter 5.

Remember that *visit* and *visitor* metrics are important for the purposes of SEO. Especially after the Panda Update, it is increasingly important for the marketer to pay attention to these metrics as these have implications for page rank (on SERPs) and hence traffic to the website.

(See Section 2.3.3 in this chapter and Chapter 5)

2.5 MAPPING THE SEO JOURNEY

Search engines have evolved over the last fifteen odd years that they have been around. The first generation of search engines that came into existence before the year 2000 mostly concentrated on the content of the website. In other words, these search engines took the context of the website into consideration when indexing websites and displaying results. Some examples of these early search engines include AltaVista and WebCrawler.

The algorithms used by the search engines prior to the year 2000 were mostly the function of context. Being able to get a good ranking on the SERPs could be achieved by getting most of the basic on-page SEO in place. In other words, the Internet marketer could concentrate on the meta descriptors, keywords, title and description, and hope to have a fair ranking on the SERPs. In addition, during this phase, most search engines did not penalize what are known as the black hat techniques today, as there were no black hat techniques at that point of time and most of the practices that are described above were not looked down or frowned upon by the websites. Therefore, before 2000, SEO consisted of lots of pages, spider-friendly context and keyword-rich content.

Between 2000 and 2013, in addition to the content of the website, the idea of 'authority' or the inbound link became important. It was important for websites to be able to establish themselves as not only trustworthy, but to be perceived as a specialist in their chosen field. The most representative search engine of this era was undoubtedly Google. The search engine set search standards that were soon followed by some of the other search engines. To rank well on these search engines, Internet marketers had to make the effort to establish links from other websites to their own website.

Usually, the longer the website has been around, the greater number of links it will have. With the idea of 'trust' or 'authority' from other websites gaining in importance, off-page SEO techniques became as important (if not more important) as the on-page SEO techniques. Off-page techniques included blogs (e.g., www.wordpress.com, www.blogspot.com), podcasts, videos (e.g., www.youtube.com), photographs (e.g., www.flickr.com), presentations (e.g., www.slideshare.com), eBooks, and new releases (on a company's website that would ensure that repeat visit was high). In summary, over this decade, SEO consisted of lots of pages, search spider friendly context, keyword-rich content, and link-worthy content. It was important to promote this content to get links.

As we moved beyond 2010, in addition to the content and the inbound links, personalization (social media and personal information) becomes an important element even on your website. Representative search engines that demand user attention include Google, Bing, and Yahoo! However, the phenomenon of the social networks cannot be ignored any more.

One can actually 'search' for information on websites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Most search engines anticipate that users like to be served up personalized content. Personalization includes taking the availability of social content into consideration. Therefore, there is an effort by most search engines to take a number of 'personal' indicators into consideration when producing the SERPs. For example, today, your research results might change, depending on where you are, what browser you use, what machine you are searching from, and how often you search for a specific content, to name only a few.

Your computer might have certain cached pages and you have looked for a particular thing in the past. These cached results will influence the search results that you will see. Therefore, a person who has looked for 'CRM software' in the past and is now searching for 'business software', is more likely to pull up www.salesforce.com as the top result, whereas a person who has looked for 'Internet marketing software' in the past and is now searching for 'business software' is more likely to pull up www.hubspot.com as the top result.

The browser history of the searcher and the geographic location of searcher are going to play a greater role as we go forward. In the context of social connections, the social graph of the searcher is likely to be taken into consideration. Some of the questions that need to be weighed include:

- How are people connected online?
- What are the ids of the same person on FB, Twitter, LinkedIn, Gmail, and Yahoo! Mail?
- What are the common connections?
- What does the social graph look like?

Search Engines are looking to map the graphs, so that when a person is looking for something, results can include links from friends and their connections. Therefore, it is entirely possible that two people will get somewhat different SERPs on the same sear term, even if they are sitting side-by-side in the same location. Some researchers point to the fact that the 'social authority' of pages will be taken into consideration by search engines when producing SERPs, that is, the search engines will consider the networks of the networks.

For example, let's take Google +. Every user of Google is probably aware of the 1+ button that has started appearing beside every search result that the search engine lists. The search engine probably anticipates creating a pool of websites that are referred to by individual users and then websites from these can be suggested to other users if that matches their search query.

In addition, some search engines have also introduced up-to-the-second trend that will appear much higher than dated content. Therefore, the same keyword search can pull up your website as No., 1, 8, or 30 (on an SERP), depending on who you are, where you are searching from and what is happening.

Therefore, it is probably time that websites start paying attention to ways in which they can make sharing of content among their users easy and seamless. It is important to provide users with tools (and these are widely available, but more on these in a later chapter!) that they can easily use to disseminate content and share with their friends what they like. For example, RSS feeds can be sent to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, as well as an individual's e-mail. This helps users to distribute information much more easily and efficiently.

A website interested in taking advantage of such a dissemination process can start groups on individual topics on their websites and participate in discussions on social networking sites. Therefore, beyond 2010, SEO will probably consist of websites publishing more creative content more often, building large social followings, and engaging with the social followings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although there is a clear movement towards personalizing search, one might be somewhat sceptical of this process though, especially in the case of objective information. For example, do I want to see what my friends are recommending, or, do I want to know what 'objectively' may be categorized as good content? In other words, it might be interesting to learn what other people are searching on, but, when it comes to getting objective information, how effective is this information that is being suggested by other people?

In addition, it needs to be noted from the above discussion that such personalization also leads search fractionalization. It is also now emerging that people probably go to different search engines to search for different things. So, what is the future of search, and hence, SEO?

KEY TERMS

Algorithmic search The listings on search engine results pages that appear because of their relevance to the search terms, as opposed to their being advertisements. In contrast, non-organic search results may include pay-per-click advertising.

Black-hat techniques Such techniques in the context of SEO refer to the use of aggressive SEO strategies, techniques, and tactics that focus only on search engines and not a human audience, and usually does not obey search engines' guidelines.

Link building The process aimed at increasing the number and quality of inbound links to a webpage.

Natural search Same as algorithmic search.

Offsite optimization Same as link building.

Onsite optimization The process of incorporating specific elements to webpage-level content with the goal of improving the position of the webpage in search engine results

Organic search Same as algorithmic search

SEM The process of building and marketing a website with the goal of improving its position in search engine results. SEM includes both search engine optimization (SEO) and search advertising, or paid search.

SEO is the process of making a site and its content highly relevant for both search engines and searchers. SEO includes technical tasks to make it easier for search engines to find and index a site for the appropriate keywords, as well as marketing-focused tasks to make a site more appealing to users. Successful search marketing helps a site gain top positioning for relevant words and phrases.

Search engine results pages (SERPs) The page searchers see after they've entered their query into the search box. This page lists several webpages related to the searcher's query, sorted by relevance. Increasingly, search engines are returning blended search results, which include images, videos, and results from specialty databases on their SERPs.

Keyword A word or phrase entered into a search engine in an effort to get the search engine to return matching and relevant results. Many websites offer advertising targeted by keywords, so an ad will only show when a specific keyword is entered.

Social media Social Media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Such applications allow people to create, share or exchange information, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks.

EXERCISES

Concept Review Questions

1. What is the difference between SEM and SEO?
2. What are the components of SEO?
3. What is on-page optimization?
4. What is off-page optimization?
5. What are black-hat techniques?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. SEO is a one-time activity that a marketer undertakes on a website. Please comment.
2. SEO is an activity that the company may want to keep in-house, or may want to out-source. Discuss.

Projects/Assignments/Internet-based Exercises

1. Create your own blog or set up your own website and optimize it. Develop a list of keywords for each page. Undertake specific changes every day and monitor the traffic that reaches your blog or website.
2. Choose a product or service and describe:
 (a) How will you go about searching about that product or service on the Internet? What keywords will you use? Draw up a list of keywords.
 (b) Which are the top websites that appear for those keywords?
 (c) Comment on their onsite optimization strategy

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CASE 2.1

PLAN MY BOOKS

The case was prepared by: Yadwinder Mittal, Riki Achinta, Saransh Mehrotra, Udit Bhatnagar, and Varone Burman

INTRODUCTION: THE DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY

Seven hundred and thirty million is the projected Internet user base in India in 2020 per latest statistics - a doubling of the user base from 350 million at 2015-end, as reported by Masco and Economic times.com. This exponential growth in user base will enable India to overtake the US in terms of Internet users by 2020.

With a 13.5 per cent share of the world's Internet user base, the Internet penetration in India currently stands at approximately 35 per cent - this translates into a humongous 46 Crore- strong user count.

E-commerce has emerged as one of the most prominent uses of the Internet in India.. The Indian e-commerce market is slated to grow by 240 per cent by 2020 (from $23.3 billion in 2016 to $79.4 billion in 2020) as shown in Figure 2.18.

This is what players like Amazon, Flipkart, and Alibaba are banking on. E-commerce in India, while in its nascent stages, is finding growing acceptability, especially among tier 2 and 3 towns. In fact, the rural populace is slated to contribute upto 75 per cent to the growth in Internet users by 2020.

At the heart of this growing popularity of the online e-commerce channel are the underlying advantages that the Internet channel offers:

(a) Reach
(b) Growth
(c) Consumer buying behaviour
(d) E-commerce platforms leveraging just in time inventory
(e) Easily searchable and sortable inventory base
(f) Faster access to information
(g) Value chain integration

Our Real-world Venture – Planmybooks.com

PLAN MY Books (PMB) is a comprehensive web-based, single-stop solution for school education segment. The objective of PMB is to help and facilitate a school with comprehensive services covering all aspects of the school education and associated services.

Plan My Books' vision is to create India's most impactful digital commerce ecosystem that creates life-changing experiences for the school education system.

Plan My Books is the shopping destination for Internet users across the country, delivering to 5000+ cities and towns in India. During its journey till now, Plan My Books has partnered with several recognized school chains and individual schools.

*Duration: 12 months, billed annually, single license

2015
• 13.31
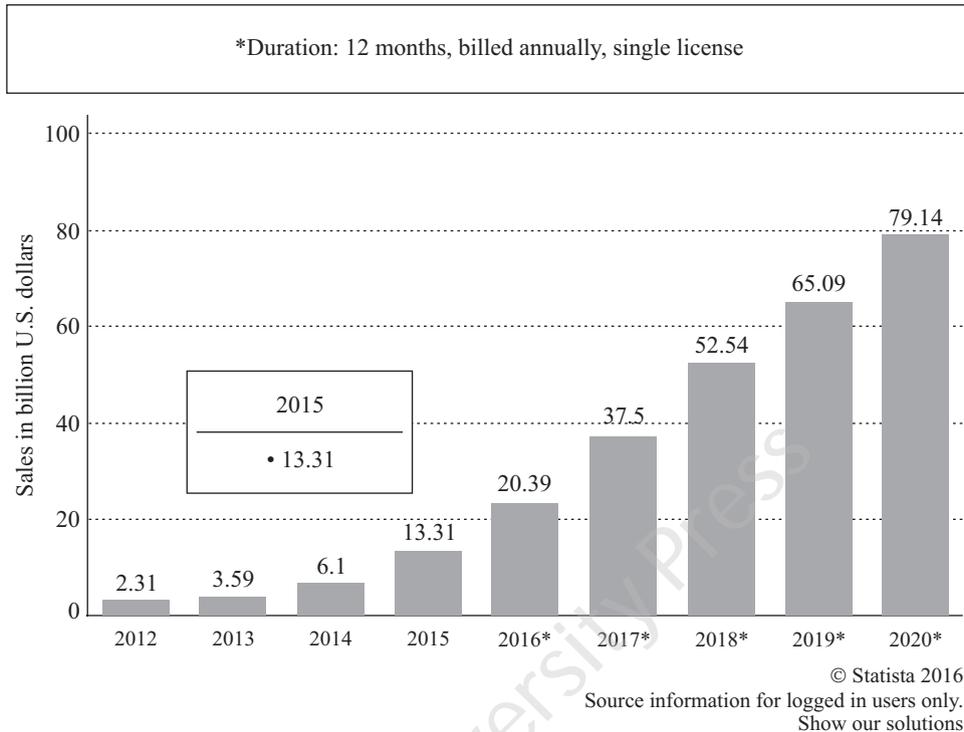
Figure 2.18: Growth of Indian e-commerce market

Source: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/Internet/indias-Internet-users-to-double-to-730-million-by-2020-leaving-us-far-behind/articleshow/53736924.cms

At Plan My Books, we strive to achieve the highest level of 'Customer Satisfaction' possible. Our cutting-edge, e-commerce platform, highly experienced buying team, agile warehouse systems and state-of-the-art customer care center provides customer with:

(a) Superior buying experience
(b) On-time delivery of products
(c) Quick resolution of any concerns

Business Model

Traditionally, a book store is considered as a point of purchase for books, uniform, stationery, and other school supplies. Generally, students identify their choice of book store for all their purchases and refer that to as 'my book store'.

We are trying to create a book store where students can buy all the things related to their educational needs and experience a superior service to their existing book store, and can relate to their personal book stores. Online book store dedicated to K-12 segment in India should provide:

(a) Convenience – Planmybooks will be the book store of choice for parents and students studying in class KG to 12.

(b) Relevance – Students studying in these classes have their specific needs, but all available options in the market cater to multiple segments, therefore, they are clumsy to browse and search for relevant information

(c) Largest database of school supplies
Planmybooks is currently hosting more than 50 suppliers and 10,000 books. This number is projected to reach 1,00,000 books by March 2017 and would become the largest book store for school books.

Vision and Mission

Vision To work for the betterment of the education system by empowering students with the use of technology and innovation, creating an ecosystem of knowledge.

Mission To become the country's largest store for K-12 segment by creating the largest database for the school books and stationery items. We endeavour to be niche in our services and provide students with all the necessities related to their education.

Environment Analysis

The political, economical, socio-cultural, and techno-logical analysis is discussed below:

Political

The digital economy act was developed in 2010. This was designed as an attempt to control illegal sharing of files. This website complies with all regulations and privacy policy.

Economical

The e-commerce portal helps providing an economic channel for buying school books at economical price with home delivery.

Socio-cultural

Today is a world of Zero moment of truth consumers are changing in ways to obtain information. They are now already aware what they want due to availability of information on social media. Hence, having a positive social presence is need of the hour.

Technological

Integration of digital marketing and analytics has become the eye for the marketer. With development in technology, online sites provide efficient experience to the users. It has helped in tracking and targeting the right customer.

Competitor Analysis

The competitor analysis is given below:

Only School Books

Their aim is to make the life of school students and their parents easier by supplying quality, diverse, and original range of text books at the lowest price. One can expect all their required schoolbooks for CBSE, ICSE and state boards at the lowest prices (see Figure 2.19). The advantages are listed below:

(a) Timely delivery and prompt customer support
(b) Bulk quantity at lowest price
(c) COD facility
(d) Allowing others to post advertisement on the website

The Competition Website

The competition, for example any local publisher, extends from nursery to the senior secondary levels and provides top-quality text books, work books, guided reading books, and supplementary reading books on almost all subjects included in the school curriculums. The advantages are:

(a) Highly motivated marketing professional
(b) High categorized book structure
(c) Allowing others to post advertisement on the website

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis is shown in Table 2.2.

Customer and Behaviour

The demography, psychography, geography, and usage and benefit variable are shown in Table 2.3.

Figure 2.19: Only School Books website
https://www.onlyschoolbooks.com

Table 2.2: SWOT analysis

Strength	Weakness
• Personal book store • Emerging content information • Increasing number of users • Cater at national level as per curriculum complete package • Different and fresh user interface	• New in the market • Low Revenue so far • Need to make it interactive with users
Opportunity	**Threat**
• Wide range of opportunities. • Can collaborate with various schools, publishers, and other service providers • Increase number of customers, especially parents by using recommendation from friends and acquaintances for products/services	• Need to keep up with online competition in the area • Need to keep users interested so they do not want to move away • Low entry barrier industry so high threat from entrants • Constantly keep adding contents to attract new users

Table 2.3: Target Market/ TG

Demography	Psychography
• 12-40 years of age	• Technology enthusiast
• Parents	• Internet shopper
• Working professionals	• Seeking economic benefits
• Middle and upper class	
• School students	
Geography	**Usage and Benefit variable**
• India	• One stop shop – complete school-book packages
• Metros	• Time saving
• Tier 1, Tier 2 & Tier 3 cities	• Home delivery

The Internet interactions with these users provided the insight about the website and the gaps' analysis which can be used as next step for the website.

MARKETING STRATEGY

The marketing strategy includes:
(a) Building critical mass
  (i) Tie-up with top publishers of the country for book supply at negative margin
  (ii) Tie-up with schools
  (iii) Technology integration
  (iv) Create custom APIs for integrating with current customer solutions/software
  (v) Free package delivery
(b) Visibility
(c) reputed education forums/blogs
  (i) Seminars/summits on education
Marketing plan is shown in Figure 2.20

Internet Marketing

The Internet has created a business environment in which time and distance are less important, people have access to more information to help them make decisions and consumers have better access to a broader range of products and services. A significant benefit for entrepreneurs is that the initial investment for starting up an e-business is generally lower than the costs associated with starting an equivalent business using a traditional model. The technology used to setup and operate an e-business is becoming more advanced whilst also becoming cheaper to obtain.

Objectives of using Internet as the strategic tool:
(a) Internet reach
(b) Internet growth
(c) Consumer buying behaviour
(d) E-commerce platforms – just in time inventory
(e) Easily searchable and sortable large inventory base
(f) Faster access to information
(g) Value chain integration

Head	Activity	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Influence	Conversations on availability of complete school-book packages												
	Discount on repeat orders - pre-school season												
	Educational Seminar												
Collaborate	Add schools to network												
	Add publishers to network												
	Outreach to customers on improvement areas												
Deliver	Develop funcitonality of website												
	Build & enhance Book database - 1Lakh books in 6 months												

Figure 2.20: Marketing plan

Search Engine Optimization

Keyword research or finding appropriate keywords is the most important aspect of search engine optimization (SEO). Keywords are the phrases used by users to find out solutions to their problems. If we have good understanding of most searched 'relevant' keywords, we can use them for our search engine optimization techniques and for content generation.

 (a) On-site optimizations using title tags, meta-tags, H1 tags, URLs, site map, content, components, page load time, internal linking structure (refer to Figure 2.21)

   Onsite SEO techniques such as use of appropriate keywords in URLs, highlighting important keywords using title tags, H1 tags, and creating sitemap for users as well as for web crawlers were used to do basic level search engine optimization.

Figure 2.21: Search engine optimization

 (b) Keywords mining and content generation according to highly searched keywords

   Keyword mining was done using Google's auto suggestion feature. When a user enters some partial keywords, Google search engine lists auto suggestion keywords. These keywords are the most searched keywords relevant to search phrase already entered.

Google auto-suggestion gives us idea about most sought-after keywords relevant to our website. So, we used these suggested keywords to write our website content. For our website, we got some keyword suggestions like 'text books' and 'class school books' (see Figure 2.22). We have created new content using these keywords so that whenever these keywords are searched, our page lists in the search engine result page. This helped us to increase the organic traffic to our website.

Figure 2.22: Targeted keywords

 (c) Use of Google Analytics tool

   Google Search Analytics Tool provides list of keywords which resulted in page view for the website. We used this tool to get following data for each keyword - search keywords, clicks, impressions, CTR, position (see Figure 2.23).

Figure 2.23: Google Analytics Tool
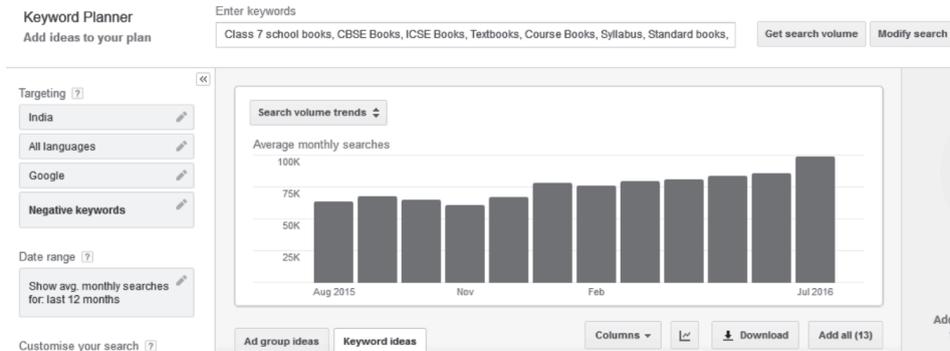
(a)

(b)

Figure 2.24: (a) Keyword Planner (b) Display Planner

Selecting keywords with high impression number and high CTR gives us list of keywords that are relevant to our website and are searched by users. We have created separate articles for these keywords so as to increase web-page chances of listing in the organic search.

(d) Use of other available paid/ free tools
Tools such as Keyword Planner and Display Planner are also used (see Figure 2.24).
Keyword planner - *https://adwords.google.co.in/keywordplanner*
Übersuggest - *https://ubersuggest.io/*

(e) Analytics script
Given below is the Javascript code generated by Google Analytics that was inserted on each page of the website so as to enable Google to track user activity on those pages.
`<script>`

```
(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){
(i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o),
m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.
insertBefore(a,m)
})(window,document,'script','https://www.
google-analytics.com/analytics.js','ga');
ga('create', 'UA-82377617-1', 'auto');
ga('send', 'pageview');
</script>
```

(f) Online advertisement
Refer to Figure 2.25.
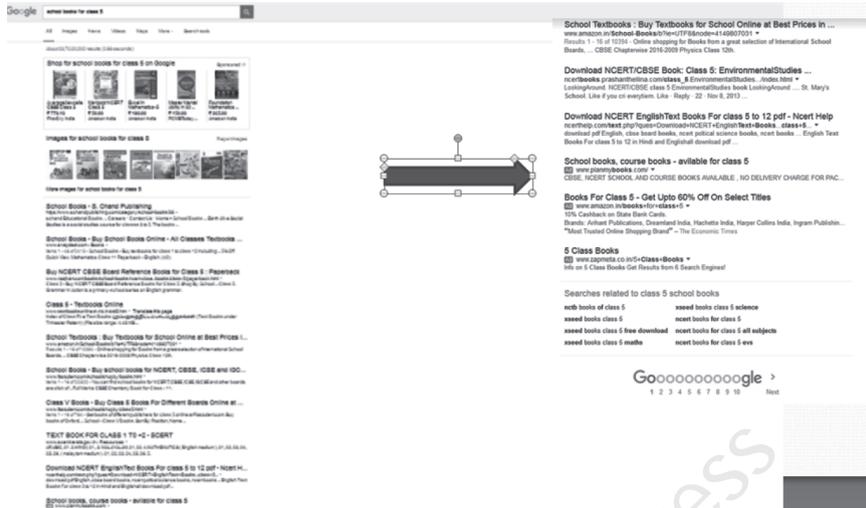
Figure 2.25: Online advertisement

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) can be done through Facebook, blogs, Wordpress, etc. (refer to Figures 2.26, 2.27, and 2.28).
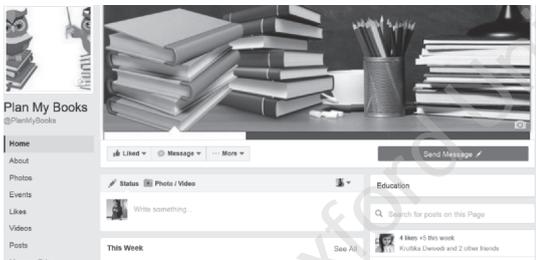
Figure 2.26: SMM through Facebook
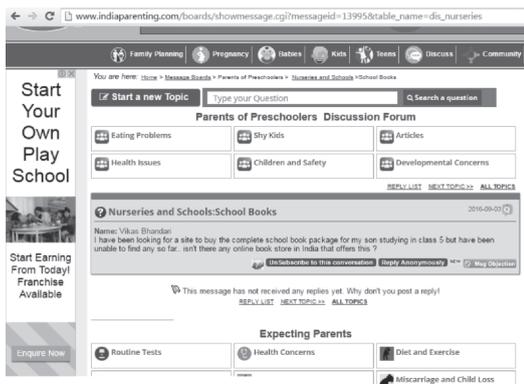
Figure 2.27: SMM through blogs
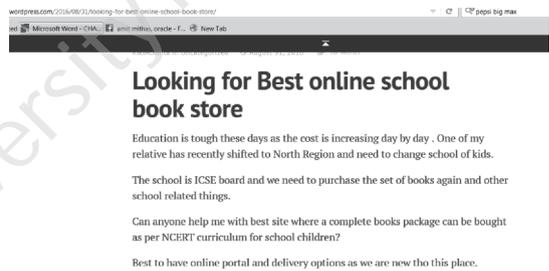
Figure 2.28: SMM through Wordpress

EVALUATION

Perspectives of the website are shown in Figures 2.29, 2.30. 2.31, 2.32, and 2.33. It covers number of site visits per sessions, performance, and most recent posts.

Figure 2.29: Traffic analysis
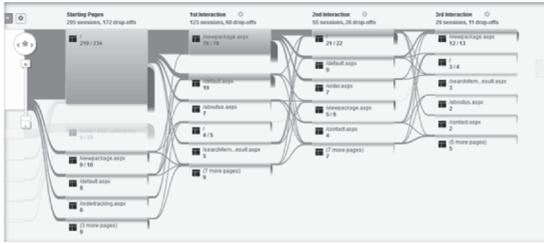
Figure 2.30: User flow analysis
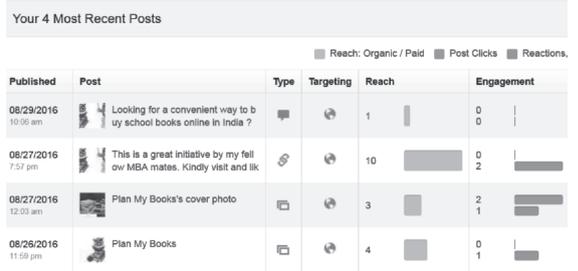
Figure 2.32: Most recent posts
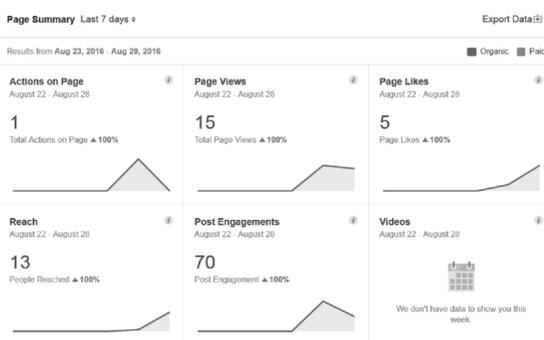
Figure 2.31: Performance on social media marketing
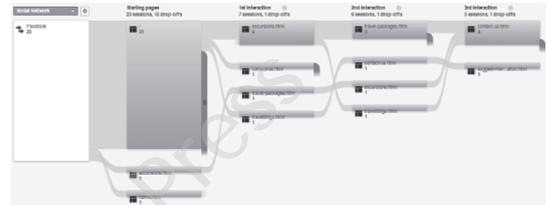
Figure 2.33: Social users' flow to site

Consumer Behaviour Analysis (Google Analytics)

The consumer behaviour analysis for new versus returning visitor is shown in Figure 2.34.

Figure 2.34: New vs returning visitor

Qualitative Analysis – In-depth Interviews

To understand the Internet user's perspective with respect to our website *'planmybooks.com'*, we conducted few in-depth interviews to find out consumer insight.

Please find below the questionnaire:

- Have you ever surfed on net regarding 'buying school books for class X'?
- What do you expect to see; when somebody introduce you to any website of this kind?
- What all information will you expect in this website?
- Do you want personalized feedback for purchase based on your likes/dislikes/demographic/psychographic characteristic? Or, you just will scroll through information provided in sites?
- Will you like to see other people experiences/blog share for that particular class books purchase?
- Would you like to receive newsletter if we have some new books package page added?
- What factors will make you visit our website again & again?
- Will you be willing to pay for the additional services provided by websites?
- Which website comes to your mind when you think of purchasing class textbooks online?

Key Consumer Insights

These are discussed below:

(a) In this age of digital era, quite often, people search online for giving them suggestion for every small thing they plan. Hence, the Internet users/consumers liked the idea of *getting personalized travel destination for their holiday planning on website*.

(b) They expect the website to be enriched with world-wide travel destinations' options and quite lucid and conspicuous.

(c) Consumers insisted that they would like to have a personal login feature where the user can get customized feedback on buying options *based on their demographic/psychographic characteristics and purchase motives.* In addition to this, they would like to keep history of *places surfed in recent past, personalized recommendations received, and any textbooks packages booked or seen*. More like an activity log feature just like in Facebook.

(d) Consumers *would like to receive newsletter fortnightly* whenever we add some new books package per curriculum in their area of interest.

(e) In our interview, *two sites emerged as our major competitor* www.onlyschoolbooks.com and www.raajkart.com.

(f) Consumers insisted that they would like to *have interactive platform* where everyone can share their experience and would like to have *Star ratings* feature for each purchase

THE ROAD AHEAD

We want *'planmybooks.com'* to become the most interactive bookstore site which enables parents to plan for their school books. There will be wide research-based advice and planning features and tools available on our website.

What we will offer:

Best package of books as per needs To make our website more interactive and personalized, we will be creating login ids for consumers.

Verified reviews and photos We can't be everywhere every day, but our customers can. In future, we want to have the biggest database of reviews and photos, providing provision for customers to share their experiences of purchase and provide reviews.

Low price guaranteed We will get a fantastic trip with lowest possible price. We will save the time of searching with our low-price guarantee. Now, your wallet can relax like it is on vacation, too.

24/7 live support with a live person We will have our own contact centre. People can call or email us anytime of the day considering the national reach our website will have.

Easy anywhere anytime We will be all about making things easier for people. People want to search for information at home from a laptop? They have got it. They want to explore school books on the go while they are actually there, from phone or mobile device? Currently, target market is decided on rudimentary factors, so we will be expanding our customer base.

Delivery notifications Sending messages on seasonal offers and deals on customer's mail.

Newsletter subscriptions Yearly/half-yearly newsletter about the current curriculum books

Collaborating with reputed publishers To show best books packages as per class, standard, and course.

Questions

1. What are the aspects of marketing strategy that PlanMyBooks undertake before launching its Internet portal?

2. What were the goals of PlanMyBooks for undertaking SEO?

3. Discuss the company's SEO strategy.

4. PlanMyBooks took a staggered approach, optimizing different parts and aspects of the website in a phased manner. Why did the company not undertake these activities all at once?