

The Eventbrite logo, featuring the word "Eventbrite" in a white, sans-serif font inside a white rounded rectangle. The background of the entire page is a blurred photograph of a conference. In the foreground, the back of a person's head with short brown hair is visible. In the background, a man in a dark suit is standing at a white podium, speaking into a microphone. A large screen is visible behind him, displaying some text. The overall scene is a professional conference setting.

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The Complete Guide To SEO For Conferences

Everything you need to know about SEO, so you can improve your conference's Google ranking, increase sales and beat your competitors.



How important is SEO to your conference? When you want to buy something, review something or learn something, what's the first thing you turn to? The dusty Encyclopaedia Britannica from circa 1998? Perhaps your wise old neighbour? Or is it Google?

Right! Along with the majority of the population with an Internet connection, you'll probably type in a Google search, looking for your answer. Despite the power of social networks and new publishing platforms, this default behaviour still makes Google the centre of the universe for almost any business – including your conference.

For all intents and purposes, Google = SEO, which means SEO is very, very important for your conference, and you should consider working hard to improve (or maintain) yours.

If you want to be the first result clicked on after a potential delegate or sponsor has searched for a relevant term associated with your event (and you do – see the box below) then this is the guide for you.

Google Position & Average Click Through Rate										Source: MathSight.org
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
36.3%	12.7%	9.2%	7.3%	5.6%	3.8%	3.4%	3.2%	2.8%	2.1%	

When to Start

SEO is not like an email or promotional campaign. It isn't seasonal, and you can't just 'turn it on' like a tap.

Therefore the sooner you start proactively improving your conference's SEO, the better. It's also worth noting that Google has a surprisingly high regard for legacy content (that meets certain criteria), so if you do things well, you'll continue to reap the benefits for years to come.

Andreas Voniatis, Managing Director at Alchemy Viral, explains "The main benefits of SEO are ensuring your company appears prominently against searches for what it is you do.

More importantly, you want to ensure the correct product/service page appears for a given search. That way, the user knows they're on the right page and you're more likely to enjoy higher conversion rates from SEO.

From a near standing start, typically a company will achieve their SEO campaign objectives after 7 months, providing they follow all the advice given in terms of optimising the site, executing the content strategy, and creating search optimised online PR. Of course the benefits may be seen as early as Month 1, depending on the competitiveness of the search space in the target market."

So, given that context, let's get cracking!

Where to Start

As with any marketing campaign, you need to start at the end – what do you hope to achieve? Some typical goals for SEO improvement might be:

Absolute: Rank No. 1 for the term "Technology conference" or "Healthcare Thought Leaders" etc;

Relative: Improve your organic ranking from 12th to 4th for "Best Marketing Conference UK" or "Future of Big Data" etc;

Outcome-based: Increase organic search traffic by 50%.

Whatever your goals, once you have them, you can then work backwards to figure out how to make them happen.

A standard SEO process will then look something like this:

- Define goals
- Find the phrases and words you want to rank for by using keyword research, competitor profiles and Google trends
- Find out who currently ranks well for your chosen search terms and why
- Build a content publishing plan to improve your SEO for those key phrases
- Build a partner plan (i.e. who will you partner with to publish your content and gain valuable 3rd party credibility in Google's eyes) (Spammy backlink building will not help your SEO and may hinder it, so don't try to shortcut this part!)
- Measure your success against your goals

Andreas explains how he tackles the keyword and competitor research stages:

"When it comes to keyword research, businesses should consider the following angles:

The competition: successful online competitors have often done the research beforehand so looking at the search phrases in their title tags can be a rich source of search phrases that drive revenue or enquiries. Using a tool like Deep Crawl can help businesses crawl large sites to get a database of a competitor's title tags.

The buyer cycle: People use Google to get answers to problems, the best thing to do is literally brainstorm with a blank piece of paper the kind of searches your customer would use to find you and buy off you.

Analytics: If you're trying to decide which keywords are performing for you either in terms of engagement or revenue, analysing your web analytics package will help you see which keywords are worth chasing and others being left alone.

Whatever angle you take, Google Adwords provides a free tool which shows you useful data to help guide your research by showing the number of monthly searches, the competitiveness and the seasonality. If you're targeting different languages and countries, Adwords has the data you need.



Nothing beats modelling a leading competitor to see what it is that's working in SEO for your target keyword. Given most of the game changing factors in SEO are content and online PR driven, we have listed a number of tools that can help you analyse what it is the competitor does so well:

Google Site search: by typing `site:competitor.com` into Google you'll instantly see how many pages the competitor has – this will broadly speaking tell you whether you have enough content or not.

AHREFS: This service will provide a reliable list of sites linking to your competitor. The list can also be prioritised by Domain Rank (an estimator of Google's PageRank which measures content authority, so you may want to sort by this if you care about the quality of a potential partners content); or Alexa Rank (an estimator of the site's traffic volume, which you may want to prioritise if you're looking for big audiences).

MathSight: The list from AHREFs or any other source can be analysed using MathSight's algorithms for Flesch Kincaid¹ reading ease, to discount links likely to be punished by Google's Penguin².

Using the tools above will help you build a list of sites that are likely to:

Send you relevant site traffic.

Expose your brand to new audiences.

Link to your website that benefits your SEO.

The next step is to work out why did those sites link to the competitor?

The most likely answer is the competitor produced content those sites cared about and attributed the content or research to the competitor in the form of a link."

Short-Term Strategies

If you're like most conference companies, time and resources won't be on your side, so you'll need to see some relatively quick results.

Here are a few simple, quick-wins that will get you into good habits and start to shift your conference's standing within Google's organic search results.

Index and optimise existing content.

If you have a repeat event, it's likely you're going to have a ton of content that could be indexed for Google and used to help boost your conference website.

¹ These are readability tests designed to indicate comprehension difficulty when reading a passage of contemporary academic English.

² To learn more about discount links and Google's Penguin update, take a look at Andrea's interview here: <http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2323727/Dissecting-Google-Penguin-2.1-What-Factors-Mattered-Study>



Particularly if you have videos from the last event, consider getting them transcribed (it's cheaper than you think these days), put any speaker interviews you might have into a dedicated resources page, and ensure photos or other non-text assets are properly tagged and have descriptive text around them.

Keep your web forms to a minimum.

If you require a user to sign-up to access your content, chances are that Google won't be indexing anything behind that webform. This makes webforms your enemy when it comes to SEO!

As Andreas explains, "Where possible avoid web forms like the plague. Search engines like Google are a public service, and therefore treat content behind web forms as not intended for the public. In most cases, search engines cannot access content that require a web form."

You may feel that the leads they generate outweigh any SEO benefits you'd get, but do think about it seriously. Unless you're generating a ton of leads every week, the additional exposure to your content from a much wider audience, and the boost you'd get in organic search results, could be a smarter strategy.



Brite Tip:

If a web form is required, a technique the FT.com use is to put a CSS overlay asking the user to subscribe. The search engines can still read the content underneath whilst the user will be redirected to the home page if they don't subscribe.

Keep it frequent.

Google loves sites that offer fresh content. It shows you're trying to stay relevant to reader's interests by creating value on a regular basis.

Make sure you're frequently updating your key pages, adding posts to a blog, and increasing the content available in your resource centre.

The more frequently you update things, the more often Google will crawl your site, and the faster you can climb the rankings.

Guest blogging.

You may be aware that many people have declared guest blogging dead after Matt Cutts, the head of Google's Webspam team, publicly decried the practice because it has become so spammy.

However, there hasn't yet been an official change to the algorithms penalising guest blogs, and so long as you are not sending out spammy content for building backlinks with dubious sites, but rather cultivating strong relationships with reputable media partners, it should never hurt you.

Andreas explains, "Evaluate the sites you're thinking of guest blogging for. Do they accept any writer? What is the current standard of guest post writing? Do the other guest blog authors have any real credibility? Do real people use this site? If the answers are positive on all counts, the risk of getting penalised for working with such a site is very low."

"When you are working with editors on a guest blog, make sure it is well written either by hiring a professional writer (usually a journalist by trade), or if you have the time and inclination, learn to write well. Brushing up on the correct use of English by reading Fowlers and Essential English by Harold Evans will convince editors that you can write and you are up to the job."

"Another tip is to aim for a Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease score of 40 so that your complex ideas are being written in a manner that is easily understood to the reader. There are a number of free tools to check this, such as Mancko (<http://www.mancko.com/readability-tests/en/>) and the tool is also included in Microsoft Word."



Long-Term Strategies

Once you've built some good habits and started seeing an improvement in your SEO rankings (and site traffic), it's important to keep up the good work, but also evolve it for long-term sustainable success.

Here are a few tips for achieving this:

Prominent guest blogs.

As you build a reputation for publishing quality content, you will probably be able to increase the size and influence of the media outlets you publish in.

Perhaps even better, with increased traffic and prominence, you can now probably attract other big names to start writing and guest blogging for your site, reducing the burden of creating fresh posts while maintaining frequency.

Author rank

Google is starting to roll out a feature called Author Rank, which in simple terms means it will be measuring authors in a similar way to how it measures websites i.e. how often are they publishing, where, and how good is their content?

In turn, a high ranked author will help their content be ranked more highly – along with the website it appears on.

Therefore it would be worth investing in building up the reputation of one or two of your team members, so that their Author Rank increases, and with it the overall SEO of your conference website.



Brite Tip:

Think about assigning your conference producer to be the main source of online credibility, as the challenge of consistently creating original content should tie-in naturally with their day-to-day research.

Quality and Consistency

The whole long-term success of your SEO strategy boils down to these two things – quality and consistency.

You need to focus on quality if you don't want to get penalised by Google. Think about the originality of your content. How valuable is it? If it offers real value, people will share it, reference it, link to it and so on – all actions that will improve your SEO performance over the long-term

It's also worth thinking about the length of your articles too – several prominent figures in the SEO and marketing industry have found that posts averaging 1500 words or more considerably outperform those around 500 words in terms of sharing. Short is not always the best strategy, even in the attention-span challenged online world!

Conclusion

If you want your conference to be found on the web, then you have to give SEO some serious consideration.

Yet while it has spawned a legion of consultants and is considered an industry in itself, Search Engine Optimisation at its heart is not a difficult concept to grasp. It boils down to one simple behaviour: consistently providing original content of value.

As an organiser of conferences, which are centred around quality content, this should actually be playing to your strengths, so you just have to figure out the most efficient way of harnessing your existing resources and practices to create that output.

Google should then do the rest, and you'll be rewarded with higher rankings in the search results, traffic, and ultimately more paying delegates.



Further Reading

To learn more about SEO, these are some consistently helpful blogs:

- <http://searchenginewatch.com/>
- <http://searchengineland.com>
- <http://www.searchenginejournal.com>
- <http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/>
- <http://moz.com/blog>

About our SEO Expert

Andreas Voniatis trained and qualified as a management accountant (ACMA) after graduating in Economics with honours from Leeds University. In 2003, pursued a career in Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and has since held various Head of Search roles for award winning agencies including Infectious Media and prestigious startups.

In 2010, Andreas founded Alchemy Viral to contract as an independent consultant to international agencies and brands worldwide providing SEO consultancy services and online PR, including Exxon Mobil, Tesco, HSBC, Zurich, as well as startups including Discount Vouchers.

His work has been featured in numerous media including the Telegraph and Search Engine Land, particularly for reverse engineering the Google Penguin algorithm to a 98% statistical confidence level in 2013.

About Eventbrite

Eventbrite provides a cost-effective, innovative ticketing, and registration platform to help festival and convention organizers set-up, manage and sell out their events. Ticket buyers find it easy to search and buy tickets online, and then share their excitement with their community. With more than 165M tickets sold as of March 2014, Eventbrite is one of the fastest growing ticketing providers worldwide and has powered more than 100,000 festivals and consumer events since its inception in 2006. To learn more, visit www.eventbrite.co.uk

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