

Why Isn't Our Site #1 on Google ?!

How will my target audience find me on the web ? Why isn't our site #1 on Google ? At Isotope Media, our clients often ask us those questions and for good reason. Search engines like Google, Bing, and others are the primary avenue for your target audience to find you on the web. Your firm needs to be visible to its potential, clients, partners, industry colleagues, and select media. In order to recognize a return on your website investment, search result rankings matter. This holds true even if regulatory restrictions limit your ability to advertise or provide certain information to the public.

When it comes to improving your website's search visibility, the good news is that it's definitely an achievable goal. The sobering news is that there is no magic method, and it will require a regular investment of time on your part. Make this part of your routine marketing efforts and I expect that you'll be happy with the results.¹

Should we hire a search engine optimization (SEO) specialist ?

The simple truth is that there is *absolutely no way* to easily or quickly force Google to give your site a higher ranking. Would GOOG stock would be worth \$400+ a share if their core product could be manipulated to produce biased results ? There are thousands of snake oil salespeople who will take your money based on the premise that they have some secret knowledge, but the only productive service they can provide are the steps I describe in the recommendations below. You may be inclined to hire a consultant so that you don't have to spend your own time on this effort, but you'll get better results if you do the work yourself and adhere to the advice that follows. It's like physical fitness, in that there are no shortcuts and only habitual, focused effort will yield results. A trainer might help you achieve your goal, but you still must do the heavy lifting yourself. Hopefully, all the training you need will be provided in this article.

Why does my LinkedIn profile (or wedding photo) show up before my company's website ?

When you search for your name or company, relatively popular sites that include these phrases such as major news outlets, LinkedIn, Flickr, and Facebook almost always rank higher than your own. This is because these sites receive vastly more traffic than yours could ever hope (or want) to, and because many more third-party sites link to them. The most important factors in Google rank include the following : Amount of site traffic and the quantity of legitimate incoming links.

How do we generate more traffic to our website ?

More traffic will be a natural byproduct of successful SEO efforts. Given that you're in a niche industry (compared to, say, Hollywood or national politics) your primary concern should be generating *quality* traffic. You could boost your website visitor count by somehow enticing 20-year-old surfers to visit it, but that won't lead to investments or sales.² Instead you should target your traffic-generating efforts on people who can help your business grow. For starters that includes potential clients, investors, colleagues, and select media outlets. By successfully reaching out to these people you'll initiate a snowball effect that will garner more incoming links to your site.

¹ There are also several one-time technical steps that are fundamental to search engine optimization (SEO). If Isotope Media built your website, we already implemented these techniques. If we didn't build it, give us a call and we'll fix it.

² To date, none of our clients sell surfboards !

Tell me more about these incoming links . . .

Take a moment to find out how many other websites link to yours. Perform a Google search for link:www.yoursitename.com If the number of results is a dozen or more then you're off and running. If the result is closer to zero, then an exciting opportunity beckons to you ! (That's a polite way of saying that you need to get out of the starting blocks.)

Whether you have few or many incoming links, the next natural question is how to increase them.

Let me pause to offer another warning about snake oil : You may have heard of 'link exchanges', probably in a spam e-mail inviting you to enroll in one. Google's systems quickly recognize these irrelevant reciprocal links for what they are and will actually *reduce* your site ranking as a penalty for trying to game their system. Remember that \$400+ stock price ?

Use these legitimate means to increase incoming links. All but the first are free and require only an investment of time.

1. Consider enrolling in the [Google AdWords](#) program to purchase highlighted listings which appear at the top of searches for your firm's name or other key phrases. The program has a very low entry cost, and may be worth your time and money. It enables you to cap your daily spending on ads to test the waters. You can choose to risk as little as pennies a day. There are many options available, so contact us for advice about setting up your AdWords account and keywords.
2. Encourage your entire professional staff to create and maintain LinkedIn profiles. Despite the hullabaloo of 'social networking' being used by corporations ranging from CNN to McDonald's, Isotope Media remains skeptical about the wisdom of investing in this medium for the vast majority of our clients. The one exception is LinkedIn, which is exclusively business-oriented and has become ubiquitous and quite useful. Your profiles should include your firm's website, which will add incoming links from a highly-ranked site . . . exactly what you're seeking. Also,
 - o Associate your LinkedIn profiles with relevant industry groups. (See #5 below)
 - o If you volunteer with a (noncontroversial) nonprofit group, make that known in the Summary section of your profile. Beware of revealing information that might prejudice others from working with you.
 - o If you have time, observe how your competitors are using the site to extend their networks.

Facebook, MySpace, and other social networking sites are much less relevant for most industries. I'd go so far as to say that it would be silly for the vast majority of our clients to create a corporate presence in those channels. They are better suited for social exchanges and general-audience mass marketing and require constant upkeep. If your business is an exception and would benefit from mass appeal, we'll be happy to help establish your brand in these spaces.

3. Create Wikipedia entries for your company and / or officers, with links to your website. Wikipedia pages rank highly in Google. Add notes in your calendar to revisit the pages every month to add new content and ensure that others have not made inappropriate edits or deletions. *N.B.* Be aware that every authoring action you take on Wikipedia is transparent to other users, so do not make any edits you don't want traced back to you.³

³ This is a good rule for your on-line life in general. Nothing you do on the web is anonymous unless you take extraordinary measures to shield your identity. This is a pet topic of mine, but a subject for another time.

4. You could consider creating a Twitter feed for your firm if you publish news at least weekly, but your time would probably be invested better elsewhere. For most of our clients it is unlikely that a Twitter feed would attract enough 'followers' to have any real impact on their website's ranking. However, if you can get your company (and its site) mentioned favorably in others' popular feeds, that can't hurt.
5. Request incoming links from every industry organization and civic group with which you are affiliated. Such organizations should consider this mutually beneficial and be willing to oblige. You may need to drag them into the twenty-first century to make it happen, but we'll be happy to help you do that.
6. Publish fresh content on your website. Publish fresh content on your website. And also be sure to publish fresh content on your website. Stale content not only makes visitors think you that you have abandoned or neglected your site, it also signals to search engines that there is nothing currently relevant to be found there. Your website should be static only if your business is also static. And if your business is static, you have bigger problems that search engine rankings ! While adding fresh content will not necessarily *improve* your Google rank, it is necessary to prevent it from slipping.
 - Are you giving a presentation to a industry forum ? Make sure there's a way to list the event on your site in advance even if it is not open to the public.
 - Have you hired a new staff member ? Highlight their bio on your site.
 - Are you being interviewed for a news article or broadcast ? Post a notification on your website and add a link to the piece as soon as it's available.
7. The corollary to #6 is that whenever you make a public appearance related to your business, ask the publisher / host to include a link to your site in the story / event program. Plead. Cajole. Those incoming links will improve the stature and legitimacy of your website as far as Google is concerned.

How do we know it's working ?

Websites are unique among marketing methods in that there are data-driven tools which enable you to gauge the return on your investment statistically. If Isotope Media hosts your site, you already have access to a traffic analysis system. You can gain better insight into how Google sees your site by using their free [Webmaster Tools](#); drop us a line and we'll set that up and help you understand the results.

Begin today! The sooner you undertake this project the sooner you'll see results.

I hope that this information helps demystify the SEO process. Following the advice above and making it an ongoing project will eventually improve your website's rankings. As mentioned at the outset, you could hire an SEO consultant to keep up with these pursuits for you, but they cannot be adequately informed about your everyday business activities to seize all opportunities. To turn a profit they must fit your service into their template, so it's much more effective to make a habit of doing the work yourself. Once you get the ball rolling, maintaining momentum becomes much simpler and even enjoyable.

I wish you the best of luck with your SEO efforts, and look forward to seeing you 'above the fold'!

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