



Implementing a SEO Program Roundtable Recap

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Are you considering search engine optimization (SEO)? Have you committed to a SEO program but would like to learn more about it and how you can participate in the process? If so, you should have attended the April 28 AAM "Implementing a SEO Program" roundtable with Brian Swanson, of Flashpoint Marketing, and Katie Tolin, Rea & Associates, Inc.

Didn't make the call? That's ok. The following is a recap of the discussion. Topics included:

- What are the benefits of SEO?
- Do it yourself or outsource?
- How to obtain partner buy-in
- Developing a keyword strategy
- Link building
- Measuring results

The benefits of SEO

You can have the most functional, informative site, but if clients and prospects can't find you through searches, your efforts are ineffective. SEO is among the important tools you should use to effectively manage your website. The following are several benefits discussed on the call:

- Expand geographic/marketing footprint
- Lead generation
- Warmer leads
- Maximize chargeable hours
- Larger pipeline

SEO: Do it yourself or outsource?

When deciding whether to take on SEO in-house or outsource it, consider your goals and the timeframe you expect results. Be honest about what are you trying to accomplish. Available time, education and budget are key drivers in determining whether to do SEO in-house or outsource it.

In-house: The following are things to consider before making the decision to DIY:

- How well do you know the industry?
- Be honest with your skills and abilities.
- Do you have the time, energy and human capital?
- Are you willing to learn?
- What platform is your site built on? Is your CMS 'SEO friendly'?

Outsourcing: The following are items to consider before making the decision to outsource:

- How familiar are they with the accounting industry? There may be a learning curve.
- How flexible is the campaign? A law passes; can you change your campaign to capitalize on it?
- A third party probably has knowledge and tools you don't.
- Set rates per month.
- Do your homework. Are you talking to Web developers or SEO experts?

Tip: Ask your vendor to put measurable stats right on the invoice. This helps when expenses get cut and helps with any questioning.

Obtaining partner buy-in

How do you get partners to believe you should spend time on SEO? In most cases, they don't understand what it is or why you should invest in it. The following are items to consider when making your case:

- Use pride to sell internally. Put in a search term and show you're not coming up on the first page.
- There are huge benefits to coming up first in a search, but it will take time to see results. You can't optimize this month and see leads next month.
- There is value in seeing "website" written in the referral source column of your pipeline report - and even more value when you close the deal!
- Convert. Coming up in the search is not enough. The search results in only one-half of the equation. Now you must win the business.

Developing a keyword strategy

Key words drive how people find you. The following are some items to consider when developing your strategy:

- Use the terms people might use, not what *you* think they want to use.
- Ask your clients what they would use to search for accounting services.
- Shorter search phrases are searched more often.
- Use Google's keyword analyzer - <http://bit.ly/9FqW8F>.

Link building

This strategy is becoming more common and is viewed as a vote of confidence in a website. Backlinks are the incoming links to your website. It is important to spread these out over time (100 in one month isn't viewed well). Inbound links are valuable, but be careful. If outsourcing your link-building efforts, know who's doing the linking and how they're doing it. Be careful of people offering to pay. It is better to have none than have bad ones. Tips:

- An **.edu** link is huge in credibility. Try to work this into your strategy
- Buy a link in a directory. It generates SEO but provides links via their site.

Measuring results

We all know accountants like numbers and ROI. So how do you measure your SEO efforts and prove to management that it is paying off?

- Use Google analytics. It's free and easy to put on your site.
 - Key metrics: total site visits, total page hits, increase in traffic based on what you've been doing, direct vs. search traffic
- Number of conversions
- Number of new leads
- Increased/positive momentum in site traffic
- Conversions: interacting with site vs. new business.
- Pipeline: leads generated, response time, etc.

Tip: To the extent you can, make sure leads come straight to you and not anyone else. If the partner or director fail to mention the lead came through the website, your SEO program gets no credit.

As you can see, the SEO roundtable discussion provided attendees with insight from accounting marketing professionals who have practical experience with SEO. Interested in other upcoming AAM educational events? Visit www.accountingmarketing.org/events.asp to view and or register.