

17 SEO Myths

You Should Leave Behind in
2016



17 SEO MYTHS YOU SHOULD LEAVE BEHIND IN 2016



INTRODUCTION

To say SEO has "changed a lot" would be the understatement of the decade. We'll often see multiple updates per year from Google, including this year's Mobilegeddon update from Spring 2015. Not to mention how Google's Panda, Penguin, and Hummingbird updates totally shook up the world of SEO. Marketers and SEO agencies worldwide halted their link-building and keyword-obsessed ways and swapped them for a long overdue focus on quality content.

But does that mean an SEO specialist's job is just to pump out high-quality, keyword-optimized content? Far from it. In fact, SEO has changed so much in the past several years that many marketers aren't sure what's outdated, what's important, what will actually move the needle, and what's simply wasted effort. This guide is going to point out all of the most common myths and assumptions about how SEO works and debunk them for you, so you're not wasting a single moment on things that simply don't matter for SEO in 2016. Let's get started.

MYTH #1: "I must submit my site to Google"

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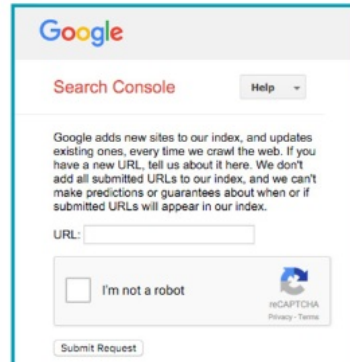
When you do a Google search, you aren't actually searching the web. You're searching Google's index of the web, or at least as much of it as we can find.

We do this with software programs called spiders. Spiders start by fetching a few web pages, then they follow the links on those pages and fetch the pages they point to; and follow all the links on those pages, and fetch the pages they link to, and so on, until we've indexed a pretty big chunk of the web; many billions of pages stored on thousands of machines.”

- Matt Cutts in Lesson 1.3 of How Search Works

The idea that you need to submit your website to Google in order to appear in search results (or rank) is nonsense. While a brand new site can submit its URL to Google directly, a search engine like Google will still find your site without you submitting it, and Matt Cutts' quote explains exactly how this works.

Even if you do submit your site to Google, a submission does not guarantee anything. Crawlers will find your site and index it in due time, so don't worry about this idea of needing to "tell" Google about your site.



The image shows a screenshot of the Google Search Console interface. At the top, it says "Google" and "Search Console" with a "Help" dropdown. Below that, there is a text box explaining that Google adds new sites to its index and updates existing ones. A "URL:" input field is present. There is a checkbox for "I'm not a robot" and a CAPTCHA icon. At the bottom, there is a "Submit Request" button.

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MYTH #2: "More links are better than more content"



In the past, building as many links as possible without analyzing the linking domain was how SEO typically worked. By doing this, your website was sure to rank higher.

Building links is still a very important part of ranking factors. According to Searchmetrics, it is still top 5 most important rankings factors, but you must build links in a much different manner than you used to.

Around Penguin 2.0, which was released in May of 2013, all of this changed. Nowadays, it is important to focus on the quality of links you are obtaining, rather than the quantity. Sometimes less can be more if you know how exactly to build links the proper way.

This is something that often comes along with the question, "Which should I invest in, link building or content generation?" Links are an important part of your website's authority (even with the changing link landscape). However, if you have budget to invest in your website, I would say, "Hire someone to write for you."

Too often, when businesses hire someone to do link building, they focus on the quantity of links rather than their quality -- but linking is not a numbers game anymore (far from it, actually). You should focus on having relevant and diverse sources that link to relevant pages.

When you invest in content, that content can be used for webpages, blog posts, lead generation offers, and guest posts on other sites -- all content types that will bring more links with them over time.

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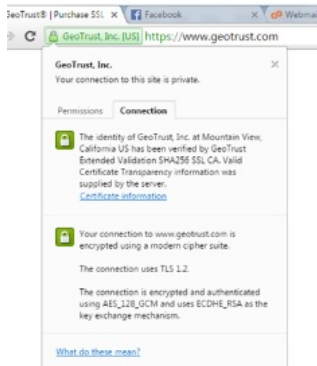
MYTH #3:

““Having a secure (HTTPS encrypted) site isn't important for SEO””



SSL is the standard security technology for establishing an encrypted link between a web server and a browser. This link ensures that all data passed between the web server and browser remain private.”

- SSL.com



Have you ever noticed that some URLs start with "http://" while others start with "https://"? Perhaps you noticed that extra "s" when you were browsing websites that require giving over sensitive information, like when you were paying bills online.

To put it simply, the extra "s" means your connection to that website is encrypted so hackers can't intercept any of your data. The technology that powers that little "s" is called SSL, which stands for Secure Sockets Layer. In August of 2014, Google announced that it had started using HTTPS as a signal in their ranking algorithms, which means if your website still relies on standard HTTP, your rankings could suffer as a result.

For now, however, HTTPS remains a "lightweight" signal, affecting fewer than 1% of global queries (according to Google). So while it's clear that Google wants everyone to move over to the more secure HTTPS protocol, don't freak out if you haven't done it yet. There are more important factors that Google is looking at, such as the presence of high-quality content.



MYTH #4:

“SEO is all about ranking”

Ranking for what? I'm sure we all remember those 'Guaranteed to get you to #1 on Google!' ads. But they never said what for. Rather than obsessing about ranking, be useful -- then your readers will bring about more consumers because they'll share your stuff.”

- Alisa Meredith

While there's a strong correlation between search results placement and clickthrough rates, ranking is not the supreme end goal that it used to be.

Studies of clickthrough rates and user behavior have shown that searchers favor the top search results -- particularly the top-three listings. However, it's also been shown that on subsequent pages, being listed toward the top of the page shows similar click behavior. And with search results now being appended with rich text/snippets, results that appear below the top-three search results are getting much higher clickthrough rates.

Even before all of that was applied, rankings did not guarantee success. Theoretically, you could rank quite well for a term, get tons of traffic, and not make a dime from it. Is that what you really want? I don't think so.

This is a big misconception -- that higher rankings mean more search traffic. It is true that people will see your listing, but it does not mean you will get more click-throughs. There are a couple of reasons for this:

1. You do not have the correct keyword strategy because you are trying to rank for keywords that are unrelated to your field.
2. Your meta descriptions are not appealing and inviting for the user.

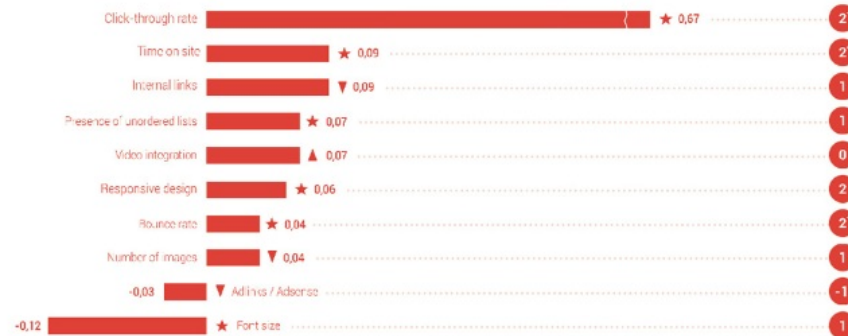
To solve these problems, try using Google Adwords to create a great keyword strategy relating to your business, and be sure to use enticing meta descriptions to get people to the site. It is a good rule of thumb to think about what would entice you to click through.



MYTH #5: "Meta descriptions have a huge impact on search rankings"

Meta descriptions are HTML attributes that concisely explain the contents of webpages. You've seen them before on Google's search engine results pages (SERPs), where they're commonly used as preview snippets. So, it'd make sense that Google's algorithm would take these meta descriptions into account when determining search rankings ... right? Well, not so much.

Google announced, all the way back in 2009, that meta descriptions (and meta keywords) have no bearing on search rankings. That's not to say, however, that these descriptions aren't important for SEO. On the contrary: Meta descriptions present a major opportunity to separate yourself from the riff-raff and convince searchers that your page is worth navigating to. Having a relevant, compelling meta description can be the difference between a searcher who clicks through to your page and one who clicks elsewhere. And, guess what. Clickthrough rate is Google's #1 ranking factor in 2015.



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MYTH #6: "Keyword optimization is THE key to SEO"

Until search engines are able to enter our brains and read our thoughts, we'll always need to use written language in order to make search queries. We need to use keywords to communicate.

It used to be important that you write your content with the keyword incorporated exact match, but now Google uses latent semantic indexing (LSI), which was conceived around February of 2004 and became more and more prominent within search through every update.

With this type of indexing, the contents of a webpage are crawled by the search engine and the most common words or phrases are combined and identified as the keywords of that page. LSI also looks for synonyms that related to your target keywords. Today, it's important to optimize your page for the user experience; this means that you do not have to place your keywords word-for-word in the content. Write the content for the user. By using synonyms and related terms, the search engines will still understand what your goal is. That being said, it's important to realize that Google is no longer trying to match the keywords you type into its search engine to the keywords of a web page. Instead, it's trying to understand the intent behind the keywords you type so it can match that intent to relevant, high-quality content. The bottom line: search engines of the future aren't going to punish folks for under using keywords or failing to have an expertly crafted, keyword-optimized page title ... but they will continue to punish folks for overusing keywords.

Keyword Optimization: Why Optimizing for the Right Keywords is 'Do or Die' Keyword optimization (also known as **keyword research**) is the act of researching, analyzing and selecting the best **keywords** to target to drive qualified traffic from search engines to your website. Apr 14, 2010



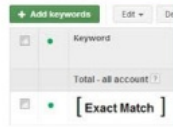
[Keyword Optimization: How to Optimize for the Top Search ...](http://www.wordstream.com/blogs/ws/2010/04/14/keyword-optimization)
www.wordstream.com/blogs/ws/2010/04/14/keyword-optimization

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MYTH #7: "Keywords need to be an exact match"

Exact match is a Google AdWords match type which allows you to show your ad only when a searcher types the **exact** word or phrase you signify in your account. An **exact match** keyword in Google AdWords ad will only trigger on an **exact match** search.

What is Exact Match? - WordStream
www.wordstream.com/exact-match



Keywords do not need to be repeated verbatim throughout a piece of content. In a headline, in particular, you want to use a keyword (or keywords) in a way that makes the most sense to your audience. The goal should be to write a stellar headline (somewhere between 4-9 words) that clearly explains what a piece of content is about.

Nothing is more of a buzzkill than having a headline that's awkwardly framed around one keyword phrase or, worse, that forcibly repeats a keyword phrase.

This rule applies not only to headlines, but also the content on the page: the goal should be to inform the reader, not to inform the search engines.

Keyword stuffing is the act of shoving as many keywords onto the page as possible. Google's own, Matt Cutts, warned us in 2007 against stuffing your page with keywords to rank higher in the search results.



Some webmasters did not take this to heart, until Google continuously came out with new algorithm updates, like Panda, every year that were meant to target bad content.

Keyword stuffing is 100% against Google's Webmaster Guidelines and is a dangerous game. Because of Google's algorithm getting more advanced each year, you are likely to get your website penalized.

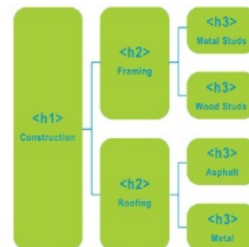


MYTH #8: "The H1 is the most important on-page element"

Your H1 is still important, but it's not the most important. Think of the content structure on your webpage as an outline. It's a tiered approach to presenting information to users and search engines. What title tag your headline is wrapped in has little to no influence on your overall SEO -- that title tag (whether it's an H1, H2, H3, etc.) is only used for styling purposes.

The H1 is part of your CSS (custom style sheet) that a designer puts together to reference what font styling and size will be applied to a particular piece of content. This used to be more important, but search engines are smarter these days, and -- unfortunately -- people spammed this to death.

So, it really doesn't matter what header tag you use, as long as you present your most important concepts upfront and closer to the top of the page. Remember, you're optimizing your page for users first and foremost, which means that you want to tell them ASAP what your page is about through a clear headline.



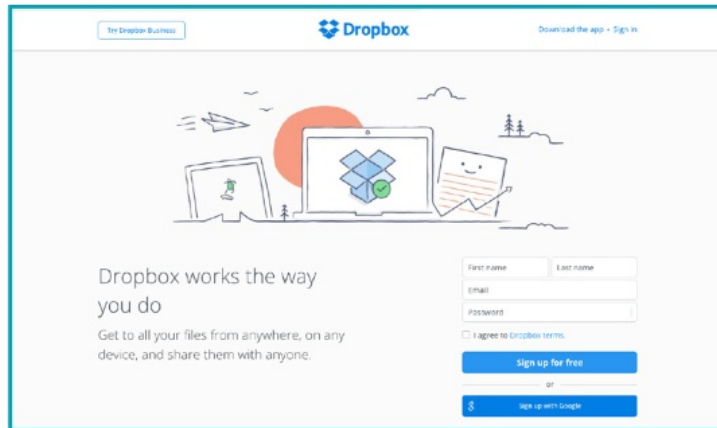
Moz's Search Engine Ranking Factors 2015:



MYTH #9: "My homepage needs a lot of content"

Have you ever come across a homepage littered with copy? Or, on the opposite spectrum, a homepage with barely any content at all? Think of your homepage as the gateway to your business. Visualize it! This is your chance to make a first impression and convey what you're all about. Maybe your value proposition is simplicity -- in that case, just a single login makes sense (especially if your name is Dropbox).

For most marketers, however, there is a need for a bit more content and context than that. Your homepage content should be long enough to clarify who you are, what you do, where you're located (if you're local), your value proposition, and what visitors should do next. These visitors should leave satisfied, not overwhelmed or underwhelmed -- and certainly not confused.



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MYTH #10: "The more pages I have, the better"

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In the past, SEO was all about manipulating data and keywords to gain search engine rankings. However with the leak of Google's Quality Rating Guide back in August, it has become crystal clear that modern SEO is all about adding quality rather than quantity. We shifted our entire content marketing strategy to be about the user, creating engaging content that compels our audience to take action.

- Phil Laboon, Eyeflow Internet Marketing

Some people have the notion that if you have more pages, you will get more traffic to your website. Just like link building, creating content just to have more pages will not help you. Make sure you are focusing your content on quality not quantity. If you do not have good content, you will not rank well and all of those pages you created will not help your cause.

Logically, you would think that the larger the footprint of your website, the better you would rank -- but it's simply not true.

First, not everything you publish gets indexed (and rightfully so). Second, sometimes, pages get indexed, but don't remain in the index. And third, just because you have pages indexed doesn't mean they will drive qualified traffic and leads.

Unfortunately, those who strive to have lots of pages on their website also tend to overlook the quality of that content -- and realistically, it's difficult to strive for both. The aim should be to publish what is most relevant. Have your content be at its best.

Introduced in February, 2011, Google's Panda algorithm updates have been getting better and better at detecting bad content. Nowadays, if you have poor content it is possible you may face a Google penalty, so make sure you are creating great content that users want to read.

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MYTH #11: "Good user experience is an added bonus, not a requirement"



Where do take your SEO strategy when you've got links, titles, and content covered? Recently we've revamped our site to offer a better user experience. Within three months of rolling out the changes, time on site is up 30% and our bounce rate is down 9%, all while our search traffic is up almost 110%. Google is looking for quality indicators. Make sure your user experience isn't sending the wrong ones.

- Nick Reese, BroadbandNow

As Google began to provide better results to it's users, they were able to invest more in their search algorithm. Through this investment, they began to incorporate new metrics such as a user's experience and website engagement into their ranking algorithm.

It makes sense. If Google sends you to a web page, they want to make sure you have a good experience on that page. They are after all a business too, and thus they want to delight their users. Think about it from the search engine's point of view: they didn't create the webpage themselves, but they are endorsing it. They need to ensure that users have a good experience on that page to keep people coming back to Google.

To improve your website's user experience, you'll want to focus on things like page load time, bounce rate, time on page, page views per visit, and how far a person scrolls down the page.

As long as you satisfy the number one goal of creating quality content that people can easily digest and enjoy, your content will naturally satisfy a search engine's ranking algorithms, helping your content to organically rise to the top.



MYTH #12: "Local SEO doesn't matter anymore"



If you are a local business, having a website isn't enough to rank well in Google's local search listings. If you want to rank well you need to unlock, verify, and optimize a Google+ Business Page (referred to more recently as a Google My Business Page). If you want to maximize your search traffic from Google, treat your Google Business Page as you would your website, and optimize accordingly.

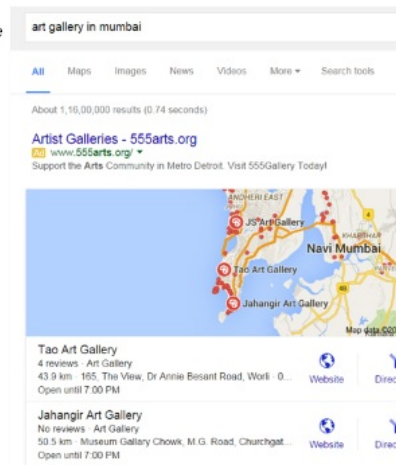
- Kristopher Jones, LSEO.com

This myth couldn't be further from the truth. If you're a local business, optimizing for local search won't only help you get found, but it will help you get found by people who are nearby and more likely to buy from you.

Looking forward, Google will continue to take steps to bubble the best local content to the surface of search results. Need some proof? In July of 2014,

Google took a major step in this direction with the release of its new Pigeon algorithm. The algorithm treats local search rankings more like traditional search rankings, taking hundreds of ranking signals into account. Pigeon also improved the way Google evaluates distance when determining rankings.

The bottom line: local SEO matters, probably more so now than ever before.



MYTH #13: "Google will never know if I have bad sites linking to me"

With penalty algorithms, negative SEO can now impact businesses that are not carefully watching their backlinks and other metrics. There have even been studies of sites hit by negative SEOs that sent bogus traffic and negatively impacted bounce rate and CTR from Google SERPs. Watch your link profile, analytics, and be on the lookout for misuse.

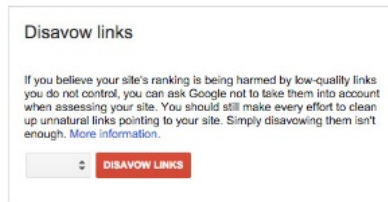
- Marcela DeVivo, Gryffin Media

Yes, they will

Just like Santa Claus knows if you've been good or bad. Just like the Tooth Fairy knows when you've lost a tooth. Just like your parents can sense when you've missed your curfew.

The point is Google knows (everything). Don't try to fool them -- especially post-Panda, -Penguin, and -Hummingbird, or you will be sent to your room (well, in this case, penalized).

If you know you have bad sites linking to you, that's okay. It's not too late. Just make sure you disavow them!

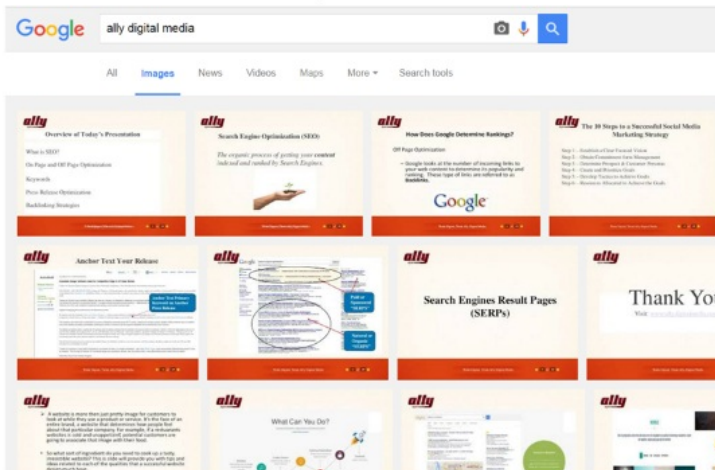


MYTH #14: "Images don't require any optimization"

For a long time, it was okay to neglect the images on your site and still rank without using alt text and image file names to boost your page relevance. On-page SEO is more important than ever, so excluding images will prevent your website's SEO from being the best it can be.

Search engines cannot see images on websites, so it is important to give the image an alt text and relevant file name to ensure Google knows what the image is about. By not creating this text, you lose a huge opportunity to be as visible as possible online.

It helps Google if the text on the page where the image is located mentions the image, too, so always try to reference your images in your text, close to where it lives on the page, using keywords similar



to the alt text/filename of the image. Google also recommends providing descriptive titles and captions for your images, so consider adding those when relevant.

The image types Google can index include BMP, GIF, JPEG, PNG, WebP, and SVG, so be sure to only use these image file types on your website to make it possible for Google to index them. Name your image files something that is indicative of what the image is itself, rather than something like IMG2394870.jpg. Yes, keywords matter here!



MYTH #15: "Answer boxes only matter if you're Wikipedia"



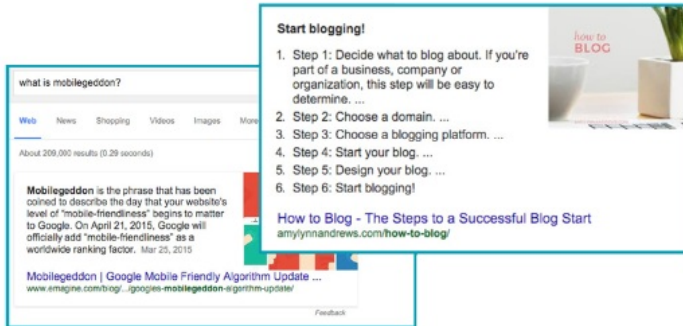
Pages that Google selects for quick answers on our site are high-authority pages with quality, well-structured content that is theme-relevant and optimized for a great user experience, and answer specific questions closely matching the query.

- Kirill Kronrod

Though it may seem like an impossible feat to beat out Wikipedia for Google's answer box spot, it's completely doable. See these images below as an example of two websites that outbeat Wikipedia because they created content that was more highly relevant. One example focuses on Google's big update from 2015: Mobilegeddon. The other example shows a list-based post when I search "how to blog." This list-based option came up first because it is the most digestible piece of information

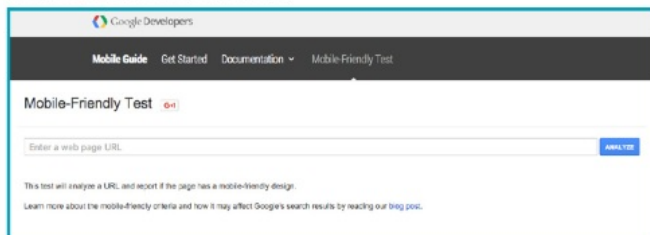
Google could find on this topic. You also might be wondering if answer boxes drive any traffic, and if optimizing for this even worth your time. The short answer is yes. These boxes help you skip the line and rank even above #1 as a special feature.

You'll also see the examples below give you a clear link to the article so you can read on to get more detail on a particular topic. Give this a try for yourself! Go search for some terms in Google and see where you find opportunities for your own blog or website.



MYTH #16: "I don't need a mobile optimization strategy"

In the spring of 2015, Google had a algorithm update called "Mobilegeddon," which expanded Google's use of mobilefriendliness as a ranking signal. The update rewards mobile-friendly websites and penalizes those that aren't fully optimized for mobile in mobile search results.



After an analysis of more than 15,000 of our customers' websites, here's what we found: Websites that aren't mobile optimized had an average of 5% decline in organic traffic.

If your web presence screams 2009, you should be thinking about a comprehensive strategy to modernize

your site and bring it in line with consumer expectations. If you're limited by the technology you have in place, it may even be time to move to a modern website platform that delivers a responsive experience. The optimal experience for your visitors and your own performance is to implement responsive design. Responsive design makes your page adapt to the visitor and will display information that is sized and zoomed appropriately so it's easy to read on whatever device he or she is using.

Note: For customers hosting your website with HubSpot, you automatically get responsive design included with your COS Website. Your website should be mobile-friendly by default and look beautiful for visitors from any device.



MYTH #17: "SEO is something I can hand off to IT"



SEO is one of those acronyms that sounds like a flavor of rocket fuel -- something that belongs in the hands of technoids with html street cred. With every new iteration of Google algorithms though, we are learning that SEO should really stand for being Simply Excellent Online. In other words, create remarkable content first, THEN work with the IT folks to make sure that what reads well also scores well technically.

- Paul Furiga

There seems to be a perception that SEO requires some technical expertise, and since it is technical, IT can just do the work. While there is a technical component to SEO, it requires way more than just technical chops, so I'd think long and hard before handing an entire project to IT or a web designer.

Though you may need some of those individuals to assist you during the course of optimizing your website, it's far from ideal to just give SEO duties to IT and expect best practices to be adhered to.

While many IT professionals are adept in many technical areas -- for instance, making sure your website is crawlable and setting up redirects and XML sitemap files -- just remember that many IT personnel also work on things like setting up printers, which is ... well ... a different skill set than what's needed to effectively run an SEO strategy.



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CONCLUSION

Now that you know what the common SEO myths are, what are you doing that isn't moving the needle? Or worse, what are you doing that's making your SEO efforts worse? Understanding these SEO truths will make you both more effective and more efficient with your organic search strategy.

If you can take one thing away from this guide, it's this: More than anything else, SEO is about the overall experience for a searcher, and that experience starts the moment they enter a search query. The better their experience with you -- from your SERP listing, to the quality and relevancy of the content on your site, to the ease with which they can move through your site -- the better your SEO will be, too.



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