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## Social Media Optimisation (SMO) and SEO A Reality.

SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) is the latest buzz word amongst webmasters and marketers. Everyone's competing for that top spot on the search engine results page, but with so many racing to overtake the one in front of them, website owners are becoming desperate and are 'clutching at straws' to try to beat their competitors.

We have barely digested the term SEO and already we're hearing new jargon such as SMO (Social Media Optimisation) creeping in. Don't be fooled into thinking that this is simply a preview of things to come on the web. It's already here and pioneering companies have already grasped the concept and are ensuring that their internet marketing strategy extends beyond traditional e-Marketing and into the area of Search Engine Optimisation, Search Engine Advertising and Social Media Optimisation.

Pioneering companies will win:

Sadly, few South African companies realise the significance of optimising their websites for top search engine rankings and social popularity. There are many extraordinary looking websites being launched onto the Internet daily, yet their splashy entry pages and dazzling creative's seldom does the company any good. These websites occupy space on the web; however they are by no means optimised to attract the correct target audiences. Few web designers are taught the skill of optimising the websites that they design for search engine rankings. From the start of the web development project, companies should commission experienced search engine marketers or analysts to be involved in preparing the website brief for the developer by defining the essential elements that should be incorporated, if the website is to be positioned anywhere of significance on search engine results pages.

There are more than a hundred varying criteria that search engines include as part of their ranking algorithm. Website owners, web designers and marketers should take cognisance of the fact that it is simply not good enough to publish a fancy looking website onto the Internet and expect it to start attracting and converting customers in the hope of producing income from its online presence. It takes skill and careful planning to create a website that will be recognised by search engines as relevant enough to rank in the top ten results, and then to take this one step further by ensuring that the user experience is one that will convert a researcher into a customer. And remember the modern customer is one that is in control.

Today's consumer is in control:

The new consumer is actively participating in social networks, they are bookmarking websites on social search engines and they are blogging about you. Ensure that your website is optimised to generate publicity through social media, online communities and social networks. There are websites that consist of user generated ranking systems. Make sure that your website can be bookmarked, linked to and tagged easily enough by the user. Create a company blog or user community within your own website. If you create something that allows your user to engage with you, and it is compelling enough for them to spread the word and to bookmark you then you are half way there.

You can't fake it until you make it:

Blue Magnet's Internet Marketing Strategist & SEO Analyst, Gillian Meier says: "Getting ranked highly on search engine results is not a quick fix. It is a process that requires a great deal of planning, editing and monitoring in order to first climb into the top ranking positions and then to try to remain there. With the algorithms changing at will, there is no one technique 'cast in stone' that will guarantee top rankings." She continues: "If you want to reap the rewards, you need to invest time and effort into properly researching your competitor's position, and then carefully plan a strategy that will hopefully outrank them, while at the same time attracting the long tail." Gillian further warns against companies promising to have websites ranked in the top ten results pages within weeks. "Although some websites do rank much faster than others, those companies practicing spamming techniques may get websites ranking in a matter of weeks but, in return they can expect to be dropped from the rankings – or even worse, be blacklisted by the search engines within as little as six weeks," comments Gillian.

Companies should be careful to approach search engine optimisation from an ethical – spam free – perspective if they want to thrive in this very competitive environment. Until such time that a website ranks highly, there certainly is a place for paid advertising (pay-per-click).

Blue Magnet has launched a one day Search Engine Marketing training course that teaches the skill of Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimisation and Social Media Optimisation. The courses are interactive and the content is easily understood by non-techies, marketers and web designers.

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