

DO YOU HAVE BOT-APPEAL?

Using the example of vegan protein powder, Helen Pollitt shows how to catch the eye of search engine ranking bots.

vegan protein powder



Helen Pollitt is Head of Digital at digital marketing agency Avenue Digital.

increase sales and brand awareness. However, for any brand to benefit from an online presence, the first step needs to be considering search engine optimisation (SEO).

SEO should be the bedrock of any digital marketing campaign. The techniques used to boost a webpage's rankings in the organic search results will not only be hugely beneficial for driving traffic to site but will also have a significant knock-on benefit for other marketing channels.

RELEVANCY

One of the main ways a webpage can be optimised to rank in the organic search results is to improve its relevancy for search terms that shoppers will use to find or buy a product. For instance, there is a high volume of people searching for "vegan protein powder" each month. For a health food retailer to see its product page capitalise

on that search interest, there must be references to protein powder suitable for vegans on it.

It may seem a simple change, but this honing of a page's theme to meet the search terms that shoppers are using will also assist in conversions. If a shopper arrives on a page that contains vegan protein powder products for sale, using terminology that is popular with shoppers as determined by keyword research will help to reinforce that the product is the one they should buy over other competitors.

Increasing the relevancy of a page for key search terms not only benefits SEO campaigns. Relevancy can have the added benefit of improving the performance of a 'pay-per-click' campaign by targeting the same search terms, which will increase conversions and mean they receive a higher quality score, leading to a lower cost-per-click.



Return on investment will far exceed the effort and budget used

TECHNICAL SET-UP

For health food retailers with a digital presence, the main concern is often that available stock can be found through the website. For a retailer's SEO campaign to be successful, the way the website functions and the ease with which a search "bot" can find pages is also important. These two go hand-in-hand. By optimising a search bot's journey through the site and linking pages together in a way that demonstrates their importance as well as their relevancy, the website is also being made more consumer friendly.

Another instance of where fine-tuning the technical set-up of a site can benefit both customer and search bot is the handling of out-of-stock products. For instance, if a product is out of stock online then it might result in a "404" server error code – a dead page. For a user landing on this page expecting to be able to read product information, or even buy something, this is a frustrating experience.

The search engines will not continue to rank a page that is returning a "404" error code. After a while the page will disappear from the search results. However, this page may have ranked well in the past. An e-commerce SEO strategy will ensure that the page is either redirected to another relevant page, such as the newer version of that product, or messaging on the out of stock page leads users to view similar products they might like. This provides a much better experience for consumers and will keep them on the ecommerce site for longer, ultimately increasing the chance of a conversion.

LONGEVITY

The main benefit for health food retailers of using SEO is that if it is successful, the return on investment will far exceed the effort and budget used. Optimising a product page so it begins to rank well for "vegan protein powder" will likely have the added benefit of causing it to rank well for terms such as "lactose free protein powder" and "plant based protein supplement".

Unlike other media, such as pay-per-click advertising, which requires adverts to constantly be backed by budget, SEO efforts are long lasting and cost-effective. Site-wide improvements, such as technical fixes or improving the website's authority through digital PR, can benefit pages that have not

yet been optimised. The budget does not need to be spent continually on a page for it to appear in the search results.

ACCESSIBILITY

Making your website accessible is imperative to ensure all potential purchasers of your products can access and buy from your website.

Many factors that go into optimising a website for organic search will also benefit users with additional accessibility needs. For example, one method of helping search engines understand the content of an image is done through adding a bit of code that labels the image.

This "alt attribute" on an image tag tells the search engine robots that are not always capable of determining the content of an image, exactly what that image contains. This descriptive piece of text can include your keywords. For instance, the page selling vegan protein powder will likely have an image of the products on offer. These can contain terms such as "vegan protein powder" within the alt attribute of each image. This will help to reinforce to the search bots that the page is highly relevant to users searching for protein powder that is suitable for vegans.

The process of adding this descriptive code to an image also aids screen readers in understanding what it is. When a user who is visually impaired visits a webpage using a screen reader it will be able to read the alt attribute of an image to describe what the image is of. For this reason, it is very important not to write an alt attribute purely for the SEO benefit, but for its original purpose of assisting visually impaired users to understand your content.

Another website accessibility improvement that is often driven by SEO is the use of header tags. These bits of code denote when text is a heading or sub-heading, and can be used for SEO to enhance the relevancy of a page through the strategic inclusion of keywords.

For example, the page selling vegan protein powder may have a main heading of "vegan protein powder" and sub-headings breaking the content up into "vegan protein powder products", "benefits of plant based protein" and "how to use vegan protein as part of a balanced diet". These sub-headings introduce each section of the page, giving the search engines a clear picture of

Pay attention to your backlinks

A critical role of SEO in any campaign is ensuring the growth of the site's "backlink" profile. A backlink is a link from another webpage to your retail site. It works like a vote of confidence, a third-party endorsement for the search engines to determine how popular, relevant and authoritative a webpage is.

SEOs will look to earn your website backlinks through digital PR – the creation of informative, relevant and shareworthy content will entice relevant websites to link to yours. The process of doing so brings a greater awareness of your products and brand, benefiting your offline marketing too.

what each section is about. This has the additional benefit of making it easier for screen reader users to navigate around the page.

USABILITY

There are many refinements made to a website through SEO that have the added benefit of improving the experience for users. For instance, the speed with which a webpage loads is one factor that determines how Google will rank that page. This is particularly important for websites accessed on a mobile device.

Akamai conducted a study in 2017 that suggested a 100-millisecond delay in a page's load speed could harm conversion by 7% and that 53% of mobile phone users will leave a page after three seconds if it has not loaded. A common element of technical SEO will be to lower the load speed of a webpage so the search engines view it more favourably. Ultimately, this could have a huge impact on your site's revenue, both through increasing organic traffic to it and improving the rate of conversion of visitors.

CONCLUSION

SEO is a marketing channel that not only brings about its own return on investment, but in turn also benefits broader marketing plans. Any health food and lifestyle retailer that wants to be found by its health-conscious consumers in a competitive online arena must consider SEO as a critical step.

Avenue Digital specialises in organic and paid search performance.
www.avenuedigital.com



53% of mobile phone users will leave a page after three seconds if it has not loaded