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# Getting Started with SEO

BY KIM KELLEY, FRBMA

**As you know,** there's a lot to know and understand in the world of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and how it affects your business. Probably too much to know. It can cause serious information overload. Some of those things are really important, but which ones?



When faced with a question such as this, it's best to just start at the beginning.

## What's the first step to a successful SEO campaign?

Everybody wants a successful SEO campaign, right? Of course, you don't want to be throwing money away; you want a solid return on your investment. But how? The first step is knowing the minimum requirements.

SEO, just like flying an airplane from A to B has a few bare minimums. When you're flying, the minimums are an airworthy plane, a capable pilot, an airport to take off from and land at, and enough fuel to get you there.

In the case of SEO, those requirements are:

### 1. A website that is able to be updated and the resources to do it.

SEO projects require actual changes

to the technical, behind-the-scenes code on your website. You need a site and a way to make changes to that site, whether that will be done by giving your SEO access, or by setting up a relationship between the SEO team and your own web team.

Do you have developers and writers in place who can handle these changes, or do you need to bring on some temporary support?

### 2. A team ready and willing to implement the plan.

Successful SEO requires that your entire team has been brought into the process and that they have been given the authority to make decisions. It takes a village to complete a great SEO strategy—managers, salespeople, designers, developers, and marketers. Everyone will need to work together for the success of the project, sometimes sacrificing their own priorities or sacred cows.

Being willing to implement the plan may also mean putting the customers above your latest ad campaign. When it comes to search, customers may not be using the language that you have worked so hard to craft...your painstakingly made marketing terms and brand names may need to take a backseat in order for customers to find you easily. Are you okay with that?

### 3. SEO will not make you a super hero.

SEO helps your website show up higher on search result pages, bringing you more, qualified traffic; the kind of traffic that is looking for exactly what you have to offer. We often abbreviate this idea by saying, "you'll rank better."

SEO does not erase bad reviews from your Yelp account. It can't make your sales staff better or improve your shipping delays or product quality. Instead, it is a targeted marketing effort that brings folks to your door.

Given these requirements, are you ready to take on SEO?

## Set goals for SEO

With the requirements met, let's turn our attention to the first steps of a successful SEO campaign.

### First: Set goals through listening.

When you're starting out, the first step is to ask questions and listen to get a lay of the land. Ask your sales staff what they've seen working. Ask your managers how they've been tying into online marketing efforts. Ask executives what measurements they need and what product and service lines they're trying to grow (and don't let them answer, "all of them"). Ask what new products and services are coming up that can be leveraged. Ask marketing which products and services have the best margin.

Sift through all of this information and identify where you are, where you're trying to get to, and who needs to be involved to make it happen. This is your overall strategy.


### Next: Prioritize.

Take everything you learned from listening and your overall strategy and start making the hard decisions to trim it down to something that is SMART (see this acronym fully explained at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART\\_criteria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria)).

- Specific
- Realistic
- Measurable
- Time-related
- Achievable

The most difficult of these in terms of SEO (in my experience) are achievable and realistic. It's just too easy to have a pie-in-the-sky vision when you're starting up SEO. The hard truth, though, is that if you're new to selling t-shirts, you're not going to beat out longtime, enormously invested competitors like Target and Walmart overnight... or even over a year. You'd be better served to find a small niche in which you can be incredibly successful and build from there.

That's why these items are difficult. They require aggressively focusing on the best opportunities and cutting away the rest. Narrowing the scope will result in more success that can grow.

Pick one or two SMART ideas and then move on to the next steps. Then look for more SEO tips in upcoming issues of the *RBMA Bulletin*. 



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