"Teaching search engine optimization in marketing research"

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Teaching search engine optimization in marketing research

Abstract

This paper describes how marketing educators can teach search engine optimization in a marketing research class. An outline of weekly marketing research topics and teaching materials for each weekly topic are included. The effectiveness of teaching search engine optimization in a marketing research is examined based on a survey of the author's marketing research classes, based on Google Analytics data from the website the author used to teach marketing research, and based on YouTube data from videos that were created for the author's marketing research classes.

Keywords: search engine optimization, marketing research.

Introduction

Search engine optimization and inbound marketing are hot marketing topics (Fishkin, 2011). However, not all marketing research classes teach search engine optimization (SEO) even though popular tools like Google Analytics (BestVendor, 2012) that provide observational marketing research data are becoming more common in the workplace. Furthermore, not all marketing research classes provide business students with the opportunity to apply HTML, CSS, and other web design skills that are also becoming more commonly used by marketers in the workplace in the context of email marketing, social media marketing, blogging, and more (Gardner, 2011).

1. Search engine optimization in a marketing research class

To incorporate SEO into the current marketing curriculum, this paper identifies how SEO was can be taught in a marketing research class. Marketing research methods can be classified as based either on questioning subjects or the observation of subjects (Wikimedia Foundation, 2012a). Marketing research methods based on questioning include qualitative methods based on questioning such as interviews and focus groups, while quantitative methods based on questioning include surveys. Qualitative and quantitative research methods based on questioning are well established in marketing research classes.

Marketing research methods based on the observation of subjects include ethnographic observation, experimental techniques, and other observational methods. Ethnographic observation and experimental techniques are well established in marketing research classes. However, observational research methods based on computer tracking, such as Nielson ratings data, are not as well established in marketing research classes (Wikimedia Foundation 2012b). The rise in popularity of Google Analytics, Google AdWords, and computer tracking data from

Facebook, YouTube, and other popular services has created a need for this computer tracking data to be incorporated into marketing research classes.

2. Innovation outline

The goal of the instructor was to provide marketing students with fundamental SEO skills. With fundamental SEO skills, marketing students who are interested in the topic can pursue more advanced skills without having to start from scratch. Fundamental SEO skills include how to start a website, how to customize a website, how to integrate a website with Google and social media tools, how to optimize a website for search engines based on specific keywords, and how to use Google Analytics and Google AdWords to analyze website traffic. In order to help marketing educators teach SEO in a marketing research class, this section describes how a marketing educator can both learn SEO and teach SEO.

There are great resources to learn SEO. SEOmoz has instructional videos and a free .pdf titled "The Free Beginner's Guide to SEO" (SEOmoz, 2012a). Lynda.com has pages dedicated to SEO (Lynda.com, 2012a), online marketing (Lynda.com, 2012b) and Google (Lynda.com, 2012c). In addition, a longer and more comprehensive .pdf titled "Getting to Know SEO" is available at Rockable Press (Kibbe, 2012). These video tutorials and .pdf ebooks are great resources marketing educators can use to learn SEO and to teach SEO.

When students show up to class on the first day of an undergraduate marketing research class they are shown the 16-week semester outline, with each week of class devoted to a specific weekly topic, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Marketing research semester outline

1	Google apps
2	Tumblr themes
3	HTML, CSS and Firebug
4	Google and social media
5	Social media buttons
6	Search engine optimization
7	Google Analytics and Google AdWords

Table 1 (cont.). Marketing research semester outline

8	Interviews and focus groups
9	Video editing
10	PollDaddy surveys
11	Illustrator infographics
12	Photoshop infographics
13	InDesign reports
14	Google website optimizer a/b tests
15	Screenr screencasts
16	Final

This 16-week semester outline is repeated in the syllabus, in Moodle where students are required to submit weekly assignments, in the Moodle grade book where students are given credit for completing each weekly assignment, and on the author's website where students are provided links to teaching materials and video screencasts for each weekly topic. By repeating this 16-week semester outline it becomes clear to students what topic is going to be covered each week in the computer labs on campus during the 16-week semester, and students get in the habit of submitting their work to Moodle each week. Weeks 1 through 7 in the outline above will now be described in more detail. Weeks 1 through 7 are the weekly topics that pertain to SEO:

1. Google apps. In the first week of class students purchase a domain name and learn how to create a custom email account using the free Google Apps service (Google, 2012a). This is a challenging week and it lets undergraduate marketing students know that they are going to have to be ready to focus and work hard in the computer labs. Google offers some instructions on how to verify domain name ownership (Google, 2012b) and how to configure email delivery (Google, 2012c), but these instructions are not the easiest to follow for the first time.
2. Tumblr Themes. With their domain names purchased, students can create free Tumblr accounts and map their domain names to their Tumblr websites (Tumblr, 2012). Lynda.com offers a great video tutorial series on how to learn Tumblr (Seeley, 2012) and there are custom Tumblr Themes that students can purchase at ThemeForest (Envato, 2012).
3. HTML, CSS and Firebug. Learning SEO does require some HTML knowledge, and most undergraduate marketing students do not use HTML on a regular basis. In addition, most undergraduate marketing students have never made custom changes to a Tumblr website. Therefore, it is important to spend a week teaching students how to customize HTML and CSS on Tumblr websites. There is a great video tutorial series and ebook on how Tumblr

Themes are designed entitled "Theme Tumblr Like a Pro" by Rockable Press (Way, 2012). Additional tutorials on HTML (Lynda.com, 2012d) and CSS (Lynda.com 2012e) are available at Lynda.com.

4. Google and social media. Now students have a Tumblr website that they know how to customize, they can integrate their site with Google Webmaster, Google Analytics, FeedBurner, social media, and additional services and tools. An SEOmoz blog post titled "Launching a New Website: 18 Steps to Successful Metrics & Marketing" is a good resource to share with students (Fishkin, 2012).
5. Social media buttons. It is important that students understand how Facebook Social Plugins (Facebook, 2012), Twitter Buttons (Twitter, 2012), and Google+ Badges (Google, 2012d) can be added to a website.
6. Search Engine Optimization. Finally, students are ready to customize their websites for search engines. They can customize their Tumblr title tags (SEOmoz, 2012b), meta descriptions (SEOmoz, 2012c), and other on-page factors (SEOmoz, 2012d). The teaching materials discussed in the previous section on learning SEO can also be shared with students this week.
7. Google Analytics and Google AdWords. Because students installed Google Analytics three weeks ago, they should have some Google Analytics data to examine. Google offers some free resources that students can use to learn Google Analytics (Google, 2012e), and Lynda.com has a video tutorial series on Google Analytics (Lynda.com, 2012f). Google AdWords offers free $100 coupons (Google, 2012f) that students can use to learn AdWords. For more help with Google AdWords, students can use Google's resources to learn Google AdWords (Google, 2012g) and Lynda.com's tutorial series on Google Adwords (Lynda 2012g). Finally, Rockable Press offers a .pdf ebook on Google Adwords titled "Get Going with Google Adwords" (Nguyen, 2012).

3. Assessment of the innovation's effectiveness

The effectiveness of teaching SEO in marketing research is evident based on a spring 2012 survey of the author's marketing research classes, based on Google Analytics data from the website the author used to teach marketing research, and based on YouTube videos that were created for the author's marketing research classes. During the 14th week of the author's marketing research classes students were asked to rate the 13 items listed in Table 2 on a five-point scale ranging from "Disagree" to "Agree".

Table 2. Questionnaire items

1	Learning about Google Apps was helpful this semester
2	Learning about Tumblr was helpful this semester
3	Learning about HTML, CSS and Firebug was helpful this semester
4	Learning about Google and social media was helpful this semester
5	Learning about social media buttons was helpful this semester
6	Learning about Search Engine Optimization was helpful this semester
7	Learning about Google Analytics and Google AdWords was helpful this semester
8	Learning about interviews and focus groups was helpful this semester
9	Learning about video editing was helpful this semester
10	Learning about PollDaddy Surveys was helpful this semester
11	Learning about illustrator infographics was helpful this semester
12	Learning about Photoshop infographics was helpful this semester
13	Learning about InDesign Reports was helpful this semester

Students were also asked to provide qualitative comments about the class. 80 students from two marketing research sections participated in the survey. The quantitative results suggest that students found the week on SEO to be the most helpful (average = 4.58). In Table 3 the survey results are ranked based on the average rating of each of the 13 items.

Table 3. Survey results

Rank	Average	Item
1	4.58	Learning about search engine optimization was helpful this semester
2	4.51	Learning about Google and social media was helpful this semester
3	4.46	Learning about Google Apps was helpful this semester
4	4.43	Learning about Photoshop infographics was helpful this semester
5	4.40	Learning about Tumblr was helpful this semester
6	4.40	Learning about HTML, CSS and Firebug was helpful this semester
7	4.34	Learning about Google Analytics and Google AdWords was helpful this semester
8	4.33	Learning about video editing was helpful this semester
9	4.29	Learning about illustrator infographics was helpful this semester
10	4.29	Learning about InDesign Reports was helpful this semester
11	4.25	Learning about social media buttons was helpful this semester
12	4.11	Learning about PollDaddy Surveys was helpful this semester
13	3.86	Learning about interviews and focus groups was helpful this semester

The qualitative results from 3 of the 80 total responses contained positive statements about SEO:

"I think spending more time on either SEO or Photoshop would be better."

"Had fun really enjoyed SEO/HTML/CSS/Firebug."

"Learning about social media & SEO are key for our futures as marketers. SEO should have an entire class designated on."

These results demonstrate that students found learning SEO in a marketing research class helpful.

Google Analytics data from the personal website that the author used to teach marketing research in the spring 2012 semester was examined. Traffic spikes of over 100 visits occurred on Tuesdays, the day of the week when marketing research students were in the computer labs. In addition, the largest traffic spike of 182 visits occurred on February 21,

2012 when the weekly topic was SEO. This data also suggests that students found learning SEO in a marketing research class helpful.

In order to help students learn SEO, the author has created his own video screencasts and embedded the YouTube video on the website that he uses to teach students marketing research. One of the author's YouTube videos that he created for his marketing research class has over 23,000 views (a link to this video would reveal the author's identity, but will be provided with the submission). The topic of this video relates to customizing Tumblr HTML and CSS. In addition, other videos that the author created for the marketing research class to help students learn SEO have hundreds or thousands of views. This YouTube data suggests that students and the public in general found learning SEO helpful.

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