

USER EXPERIENCE TRUMPS SEO

Editor's Note: *Jamie Jamison Adams, a member of SAF's Technology Vendor Partners program, is one of several guest columnists who, periodically, will be invited to contribute their tech expertise to Floral Management in Renato Sogueco's monthly Plugged In column.*

➤ Small-business owners often ask, "How do I make search engines fall in love with my website?" They should instead be asking, "How do I make my customers fall in love with my website?"

Google's priority is and will always be user experience. For years, search engines have suggested that websites should be built for the user, not the search engines. This is no longer a suggestion. It's a necessity.

What does this mean for small businesses and search engine optimization (SEO)? Every page on your website must inform, entertain or provide users with answers. Visitors should want to engage with the website and share it with others. This means your website is not about you; it's all about the user.

Content is still king, but usability is queen. And as we all know, the queen really rules the kingdom.

Focus On User Experience

Creating a website focused on user experience requires you to think like a customer. Analyze customer engagement in terms of buying cycle activities: Learn → Shop → Buy → Get → Use. You can enhance user experience if you consider and incorporate the following:

- **Social Media.** Go where your customers are. Creating and maintaining a social media profile for your business gives you access to their social communities. As a part of their social group, you can build brand awareness, trust and authority. Having a presence is not enough; you must engage and interact in a genuine manner. Provide a way for customers to share your website's information on their social media pages through share buttons on your website. (See how www.blumengartenflowers.com does this.)
- **Quality Content Over Quantity.** Just as mediocre customer

service or messy displays can turn a customer off in-store, low-quality web content can ruin an online experience. Look at your content and ask yourself: Does it inform, entertain or answer a question? If the answer is no, rethink your content.

- **Multi-Media.** We live in a visual world. Images and videos will often offer a better customer experience than plain text.
- **Offline Marketing and Brand Awareness.** Offline marketing can build brand awareness, which helps drive customers directly to your website. If you have a strong brand, will you need the search engines?
- **Detailed Product Descriptions.** Giving customers in-depth details about your product can move a user from the learning phase to the buying phase. (See the product descriptions at www.baybouquet.com.)
- **Mobile Experience.** More customers are using mobile devices. Make sure your website gives users a good mobile experience: one that's fast, well organized and easy to navigate.
- **Reviews.** Let your customers sing your praises, or let you know where you are missing the boat. Either way, users will know you value them. (Check out testimonials at www.jonesboroarflowers.com.)
- **Freshness.** Adding or changing content keeps users coming back and search engines interested.



LEARN TO SHARE Making it easy for customers and visitors to share what they like on your website is essential to building brand awareness, trust and authority.

Feed The Search Engine's Hidden Needs

User experience is essential, but you can't forget the search engines. Spoon-feeding structured information to search engines ensures your web pages will be recognized by major search providers (Google, Bing, Yahoo, Yanex, etc.). Learn more about structured data at schema.org, but here's a sampling of essential structured data to help your search results:

GEO-Targeting and Location

Markups. Local businesses should dominate local search. Adding location based markups, such as geo-coordinates (longitude, latitude), postal address (physical street address, city, state and zip) and telephone (local number), reinforces your local relevancy.

Product Markup. Websites need to attract users in various stages of the buying cycle. Product markup can help search engines and the user by providing shopping information: special offers, price, availability and descriptions.

Review Markup. Google uses reviews as a measurement in user confidence. Providing review information in a structured way gives Google an easy and efficient measurement.

Google+. Google values quality, relevant, original content and social (especially Google +) signals. The company currently validates "good" content through authorship tied to an established Google+ page. To take advantage of this approach, use either Rel="author" or Rel="publisher" when you post. Rel="author" is best suited for blogs or single articles; Rel="publisher" has a broader focus and establishes website's brand as a whole.

In everything you do — online and in-store — remember that your efforts should focus on creating the best user experience possible. When you can accomplish this, you will make both search engines and your customers happy. 🐦

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For upcoming developments in search engine optimization, see [Prep for the Future](#), p. 6.