

# Google U

Can your business be found online?

You “Google” a search term related to your business and what comes up on the first page of search engine results? Not your website, sorry to say ... rather, the first 10 results are links to some of your competitors’ websites!

Do you scratch your head and wonder, how did those guys get so lucky to get on Page 1 of the almighty Google’s picks? You already know how companies show up in the “sponsored links” on the page of search results; they buy them.

But how do you get your website listed in the organic (natural) search results – those juicy spots that no one can pay Google to list. Is it even possible to influence and effect change in your site’s ranking?

Yes, it is – but changing page rank requires a fairly deep knowledge of a practice known as search engine optimization (SEO) that involves:

- Researching the keyword phrases (search terms) that your prospects type into their Google inquiry bar.
- Using those keywords in writing the content of your website, both on-page (what readers see) and behind the page in the source code.
- Building the site with the right navigational structure that is compatible with SEO (e.g. lean code).
- Designing the site with maximum usability (e.g. call-to-actions) so that increased traffic from SEO practices will convert to sales and/or leads.
- Promoting the newly search engine-optimized site via article marketing, directory submissions and other link-building practices.

If it sounds technical, that’s because it is – and if you have the time and patience to immerse yourself in SEO knowledge on the Web, you can do it yourself. The problem with that, however, is that the rules of SEO can change and keeping abreast of Google’s criteria for desirable websites is time-consuming. Not to mention that programming languages and deep research using specialized tools just might not be your thing.

Custom Orthotic Design Group, Ltd., a maker and



“Search engine optimization is a constantly evolving practice”

Heather Angus-Lee,  
PRESIDENT OF  
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supplier of custom orthoses and braces with a retail location inside St. Joseph’s Hospital in Hamilton, started to see its new business dry up in recent months.

But they didn’t want to invest in any more offline advertising; last year they spent \$10,000 on a local radio ad campaign that drew some prospects for a few months, but trickled off to nothing after that.

Custom Orthotic recently began carrying two new products and they wanted to get the word out to both customers and prospects via the way the vast majority of people find products and services nowadays: through web searches.

Linda Laakso, one of the owners of Custom Orthotic, handles marketing for the five-person company. She has a very tight marketing budget and didn’t like the return on investment of buying Google AdWords – the “sponsored links” that show up on search result pages.

Only about 30 per cent of web searchers click on sponsored links; virtually 100 per cent of them click on organic links.

Laakso, whose company also has a store inside Creditview Hospital in Mississauga and a manufacturing/fitting facility in Mississauga, wasn’t sure what to do to draw eyeballs to their website featuring their new products.

Then Laakso learned about the science and art of getting found online. She admits she was amazed – and a little overwhelmed at first. “I had heard the term SEO, but didn’t really know what it could do for a business. I admit that it all sounded pretty technical and complicated when it was first explained to me.”

Laakso turned to a professional SEO agency that conducted extensive keyword research, wrote the pages to SEO specifications and conducted link-building – all with the purpose of getting those two web pages ranked high on Google’s list of search results. Within two weeks, Custom Orthotic was listed in the top five results for the search terms specif-

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ic to her new products! The investment of a few hundred dollars gave her web exposure like she'd never had before.

Search engine optimization is a constantly evolving practice. As Google increasingly favours video and image results rather than just text, a smart company will look into creating and optimizing videos for search engines.

Local search is another area of expertise on the rise; if your company caters to a specific geographic region, you're best to find an SEO vendor who can optimize your site for those local search results.

*Heather Angus-Lee is the president of writingSEO.com, a Dundas-based agency specializing in search engine and social media optimization.*

### How to find a good search engine optimizer

Investing in an SEO specialist can save you the hassle of trying to do it yourself, and could give you a faster return on your investment. A good SEO will:

Offer full transparency on all their work on your behalf (online reputation management is critical – once damaged it is not easily remedied).

Offer scalable services – not one scope fits all. You should be able to choose from various modules. For example, if you can only afford to optimize a few pages for now and will get to the rest of the site next quarter. Or, you don't need a re-design, but your content needs a lot of work and rewrite/edits.

Stay completely away from what's known in the business as "black hat" SEO practices, such as buying links from "link farms" or linking your site to spammy sites or "cloaking" information to try to trick Google. (The Big G cannot be tricked. Period.)

Give you references of clients they've done SEO work for and evidence of successful page rankings as a result of that work.

Educate you in the world of search – at the very least, explain the terminology used in SEO.

Sign a non-compete clause that guarantees they won't conduct SEO for one of your competitors (as you define them).

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