

Eight Steps to Search Success

Your website is the shop window of your business, and you need to make it attractive to passers-by and to get on top of SEO to make sure traffic is being driven in your direction.

WORDS & IMAGES ALAN HUTCHISON

THIS MONTH I'M focusing on what is essentially the shop window for your business, namely your website. If you happened to be running a traditional brick and mortar store, then the physical shop window would be a crucial part of its marketing mix. It would need to be attractive and inviting, with the ability to draw potential clients off the street and through your front door.

Of course, on the physical High Street you would be focusing on footfall, namely the number of potential clients passing through that store front each day. In modern online marketing, footfall translates into the website traffic that might visit your website each day.

If you've owned a website for any length of time you'll know by now that this traffic doesn't make its way to your site without a little help. Usually, it arrives in one of two ways, either through 'organic' means or 'paid for.'

Organic traffic is the result of Search Engine Optimisation techniques being employed to make your website more attractive to search engines, such as Google and Bing. The aim of SEO is to improve your website's search engine rankings, so that when people are searching online for photography-related terms, your site appears as high up the list of results returned as possible.

Paid traffic meanwhile is where you



essentially invest to have your website advertised on search engines or other websites. This is known as Search Engine Marketing (SEM), and the most common form of this is Google AdWords, where you bid on certain keywords and then your ad will appear next to the search results when people search for those terms.

There are pros and cons to consider with both organic and paid traffic. Paid traffic will generally get you results

quicker, but it can be much more expensive in the long run. Organic traffic meanwhile is more of a slow burner, but it's usually much cheaper and more sustainable in the long term.

The main aim of your website should be to generate as much traffic as possible. Once you have a steady stream of visitors to your site, you can start to convert them into customers or clients. But how do you set about generating this traffic? I'm going to focus on how SEO can help you here and how it can be used to flag your site up to those who are searching online.

What is SEO?

As we've mentioned already, the role of SEO is to make your website more attractive to search engines. Generally, when we talk about this subject, we focus on either 'on-site' optimisation, which is work directly done on your own website, or 'off-site,' which relates to activities on sites that link back to your website.

I'm going to be looking here more at the on-site side of things, and the work you can easily do to improve your website's search engine rankings. However, before we go any further, we need to decide what search terms are relevant to our business and to consider how many times these are likely to be used by our potential clients.

Search terms are generally two-to-four-word phrases, which are known



as a 'keyword.' For example, someone searching for a wedding photographer in Leeds might type the phrase 'Leeds Wedding Photographer' into Google. However, they might also type in 'find me a wedding photographer in Leeds,' or one of many similar phrases, so how do we know the best keyword to rank for?

This is done quite simply, using a process called keyword research. This involves using online tools to analyse Google's traffic data to establish which keyword(s) might be the most popular and relevant to your particular business.

Google provides this information readily through its Keyword Planner tool, which you can access when you set up a free Google Ads Account. However, the problem is that it's not granular enough, meaning that Google doesn't provide enough detail for keywords that might have low volumes of searches.

Unfortunately, the only way to access much more accurate data is to use a paid service from SEO service providers such as Semrush.com, AHREFS.com or Ubersuggest.com. You can however set up a free trial account for a short period on these kinds of services and grab the data



you need before the inevitably expensive billing period kicks in.

The main focus when carrying out keyword research should be 'monthly search volume.' This is the number of times that a particular keyword might typically be used each month. For most keywords relating to wedding photography this will typically be in the 300-600 range, although you'll find that

keywords that relate to large geographical areas, such as 'London,' will invariably generate much higher volumes.

The other thing that needs to be taken into consideration is keyword difficulty. Typically those keywords with higher monthly search volumes will have more websites vying for their attention, so the better optimised your website is, the more chance you'll have of being found nearer the top of search results.

My advice for newer photography businesses therefore is to seek the lower hanging fruit first. You need to look for less competitive keywords (around the 100-150 level) and then seek to rank for those search terms first.

Where Do We Place Keywords?

At this point, I should point out that every single page on your website should be optimised for a different keyword. The simple reason for this is that you don't want to be competing against your own website to rank for the same keyword. Your home page should, however, be reserved for your most important and relevant keyword, so let's focus on how

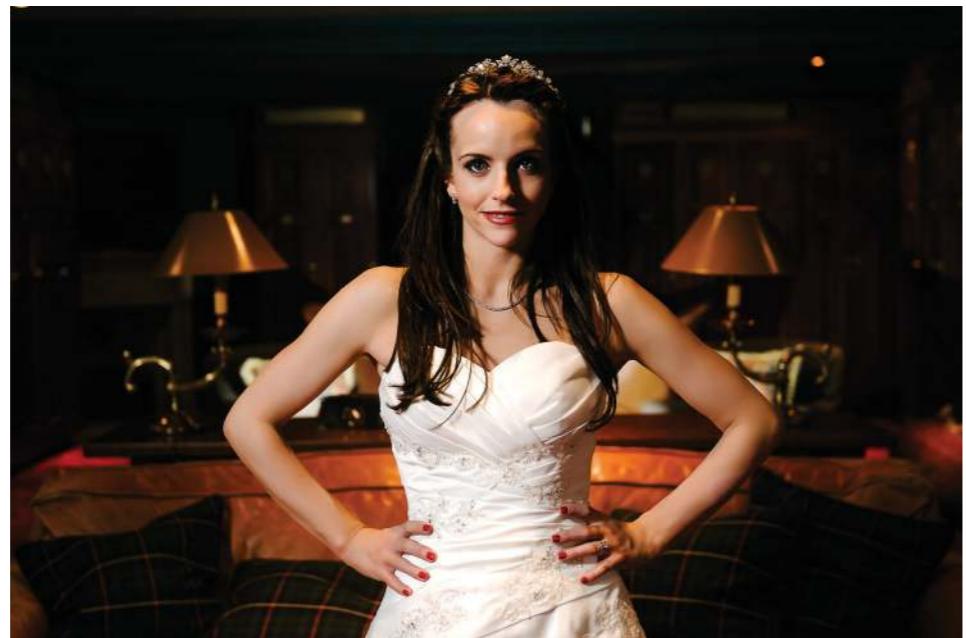
we optimise this prime position.

When I look to optimise a website's home page for Google, I usually look to follow a step-by-step process:

STEP 1

Keyword Research

We've already discussed this in this feature, and the remaining steps revolve around where we should place our keyword within the content of our home page. Let's take a closer look at each of the options in turn, using 'Leeds Wedding Photographer' as our chosen keyword.



STEP 2

Site Title

Every website platform (WordPress, Squarespace, Wix etc) has a 'site title,' which is usually found in your settings. The best placement of your keyword will be within this, followed by a '-' and then your brand name. So, in this particular case I would be looking to change my site title to 'Leeds Wedding Photographer - Alan Hutchison Photography'

STEP 3

Site Meta Description

The site meta description is the snippet of text that you see when you do a search on Google. Google displays the site title/name followed by a short description of the site, and this is also found in your settings. Think of this description as a short 'elevator pitch' to Google and potential visitors to your site.

This description should include your keyword early in the text and should read something like this: 'Alan Hutchison is a Leeds-based wedding photographer who photographs events at select venues throughout Yorkshire. Alan has won multiple awards for his photography and can be contacted on 01234 567890.'

STEP 4

H1 Title Tag

Your keyword should be included in an H1 Title Tag at the start of your home page. H1 is an HTML code that indicates the fact that this text is an important heading. On some website platforms this will just be shown as "H1". You should be looking to include the keyword in a way that looks sensible as a heading at the top of your website's home page. For example, I might be looking to put 'Welcome to the website of Leeds wedding photographer Alan Hutchison' as my heading.

STEP 5

Home Page Text Over 1000 Words

For Google, text is king, and to give your website a fighting chance in the rankings, you need to ensure that you have over 1000 words of text on your home page.

STEP 6

Regular keyword Mentions

You need to ensure that Google knows that the subject of your home page is related to your keyword. Therefore, it's important that you mention it in the first paragraph, in the last and also in another three places within the content of the page. You also need to ensure the use of the keyword is natural and is used within the proper context of a sentence.

PP

STEP 7

Add Two H2 Sub-headings and Keywords

You should be looking to intersperse your home page content with sub-heads, and at least two of these should include your keyword. For example, here it would be 'Awards for Leeds wedding photographer Alan Hutchison' or 'Reviews for Leeds wedding photographer Alan Hutchison'

STEP 8

Image Filename and Alt-Tags Should Include Keyword

Make sure that Google knows that any images used on your home page relate

to your target keyword. Therefore, for filenames, instead of using something that's just been assigned in-camera, such as 'DSC_3407.jpg,' make sure your files are re-named using your main keyword. For example, I would put something like: 'leeds-wedding-photographer-01.jpg.' Similarly, the alt-tag for the image should be including your keyword, e.g. 'Leeds wedding photographer – bride at top of manor house steps.'

If you follow these eight simple steps, you'll definitely see an improvement in your search engine results and, consequently, will also find you have more traffic coming through to your website. SEO is a huge topic, but taking care of the basic fundamentals like this can make a huge difference for what, when you get into the swing of things, will be very little additional effort.

Next Month

Alan looks at Search Engine Marketing techniques, and explores the fundamentals of growing your business using Google AdWords.

Alan Hutchison

Alan Hutchison is recognised within the industry as an SEO and marketing specialist, and he provides training to help photographers grow their businesses. Pick up more tips about building a successful business at:

marketingforphotographers.com



MPB AD