

Unicorns and fairy dust: The mythical land of SEO

 By [Richard Bensted](#)

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Like unicorns and fairy dust, SEO often comes across as this strangely complex and difficult to define concept that lives only in the minds of the chosen few. For the marketer that wants to take advantage of its power, there are far too many questions that go unanswered. What is the return on investment? What value does it deliver to the business? What factors should be considered before anything worth happening, does?



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Great questions.

The first answer is simple. Determining the return on an SEO investment relies on setting key performance indicators (KPIs) that are both realistic and measurable. These need to make sense and need to be relevant to what your business is trying to achieve and include:

- An increase in rankings – know where your rankings are now and have a realistic view of where you would like these to be in the future. Also, understand exactly what movement in the rankings means for the business. As the saying goes, you could bury a body on Google's second page...
- Keyword phrase movement – have you selected the right keyword phrases and are they shifting in the right direction. Is it time to relook the phrases or to tweak them to better align with marketing goals and messaging?
- An increase in organic traffic – this is perhaps the most important clue to SEO success. A rise in organic traffic means that your SEO provider is getting your users to your website. That's more than a big tick in the right box, it's a giant one.

SEO is brutal

Track the efficiency of your campaign carefully using reporting tools that outline the above factors clearly. Also, try and get reports that aren't long reams of complicated terms, numbers and figures. These are often designed to confuse, not inform, and hide the fact that the numbers aren't great. Just find out if you are getting the movement on the top three points and then find out why if you aren't.



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The thing is, SEO is brutal. It's not a task for the unskilled or the vaguely informed. Regular and consistent updates to search engine algorithms, trends, changes in user behaviour and shifts in political landscape all impact on how SEO works and its efficiency. Many individual variables make up the ranking factors and you will always need to experiment and adapt plans to ensure things are always up to date and on target.

ROI is a vital metric

Return on investment is a vital metric so there should be some metrics in place to measure it. The business wants to know that X spend equals Y return in customer spend or engagement. Taking into consideration the three-metrics outlined above, the next step is to precisely establish exactly what your ROI expectations are so the results can deliver to those expectations. For example, if you measure by average monthly visits and e-commerce conversion, then establish the values up front.



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There are plenty of articles written about this topic, but the one which hits the nail on the head is by Himanshu Sharma, founder of OptmizeSmart who says:

“SEO not only helps in completing a conversation but also helps to initiate and assist the conversions which are completed by other marketing channels (like PPC, email, display, referral etc).”

It's essential that you understand these qualities of SEO before embarking on a campaign that does little and costs lots. Make sure that you know exactly the number of keywords that are being used to drive your traffic and the keyword search volume, find out the number of pages that are being indexed by search engines, and always analyse the quality of your links. Choose an agency that knows the technical ins and outs of SEO, that has hands dirtied by the ebb and flow of algorithm and user demand, and that can handle the grind of getting it right.

ABOUT RICHARD BENSTED

Richard Bensted started iShack with partner Wayne Berger, but he takes the lead on brand and presence. The company focuses on creating inventive online branding solutions for organisations that want to boost their online presence and gain realistic impressions with SEO and Adwords. Richard is very knowledgeable about the topic and can provide insight into: when an agency is selling fake SEO, how to tell if your SEO is working, the difference between Adwords and SEO and so much more.

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