

Foundation

So, you want to differentiate your website from the millions of others out there on the Internet? Great! Let's get started! Whether you're starting from scratch or just looking for a new approach, the hardest part of embarking on a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) campaign is knowing where to begin. In Part I, we walk you through a little self-reflection and search engine basics to lay the groundwork for Your SEO Plan:

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Clarify Your Goals

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A good SEO campaign needs to be laser-focused on your business goals, so it has to start with a healthy dose of thought and reflection. In this chapter, we'll walk you through the key questions you'll want to consider before you get started.

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What Is SEO?

OK, let's see a show of hands: How many of you are reading this book because you want a #1 rank in Google? Yeah, we thought so. As SEO consultants, we know how good it feels when your website makes it to the top of the heap. Listen, we sincerely hope you get your #1 Google rank, but it won't help you if it's bringing in the wrong audience or pointing them to a dead-end website. So don't think of SEO as just a way to improve your site's ranking.

The term *Search Engine Optimization* describes a diverse set of activities that you can perform to increase the number of desirable visitors who come to your website via search engines (you may also have heard these activities called Search Engine Marketing or Search Marketing). This includes things you do to your site itself, such as making changes to your text and HTML code. It also includes communicating directly with the search engines, or pursuing other sources of traffic by making requests for listings or links. Tracking, research, and competitive review are also part of the SEO package.

SEO is not advertising, although it may include an advertising component. It is not public relations (PR), although it includes communication tasks similar to PR. As a continually evolving area of online marketing, SEO may sound complicated, but it is very simple in its fundamental goal: gaining targeted visitors.

Do I Need to Perform SEO for My Website?

It may seem like a no-brainer, but actually, the answer is not necessarily yes. If any of the following examples apply to you, you may not be in need of an SEO campaign right now:

- You have a website that you really don't want strangers to find, such as a training tool for your employees or a classroom tool for your students.
- Your site is already ranking well, you're satisfied with your sales, and you don't want to rock the boat.
- You're in a big hurry—say, you'll go out of business without a major upswing in revenue in the next couple of months. This is not to say that SEO can't help you, but good SEO takes time. You may need to focus your energies elsewhere right now.
- Your site is going to be completely rebuilt or redesigned in the next couple of months. If that's the case, read Shari Thurow's *Search Engine Visibility* (Peachpit Press, 2007) to learn how to build a search-friendly site from the ground up. You'll want to keep our book on hand, though, for use as soon as your new site is launched.

If this list doesn't apply to you, we think you're ready to begin your SEO adventure!

What's Your Excuse?

We often encounter people who offer the following reasons not to do SEO:

"I don't have enough money." If you don't have any money in your budget for SEO, simply follow our plan with a focus on organic (that means low-cost or no-cost!) optimization. Believe it or not, you can make substantial improvements without spending a dime.

"I don't have enough time." SEO is a very flexible process. If you don't have an hour a day, use whatever time you *do* have and work through the plan over a longer period. Be sure to look at Chapter 10, "Extra Credit and Guilt-Free Slacking," for advice. (Not that we mean to call you a slacker...)

"My website sucks!" Don't give up! This is a very common problem for folks setting out on an SEO campaign. If everybody waited until their site was perfect before doing SEO, nobody would do SEO. This book will give you some practical workarounds for your situation.

It is a rare site indeed that couldn't use a little improvement in the SEO department. And, with the importance of SEO on the rise, if you don't need it today, it's a good bet you'll need to brush up your SEO smarts for tomorrow. So even if you don't think you need SEO right now, we recommend that you take the time to work through the questions in this chapter and make sure that your goals aren't begging for a little help.

What Are the Overall Goals of My Business?

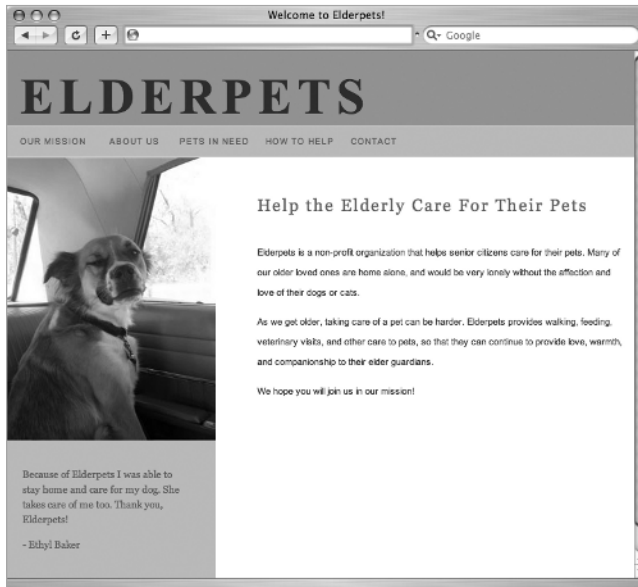
We get it: The fundamental goal of your business is to make money by selling a product or service. But let's take a moment to define your goals in a little more detail.

Perhaps yours is a large company with branding as an important long-term goal. Maybe your company wants to make money with certain products but is willing to take a loss in other areas. Maybe you are starting up with investor backing and do not need to turn a profit for years. Perhaps your company's branding and reputation is your top concern—you need to be perceived as high tech, or luxurious, or as the hippest in your competitive space. Or maybe you work for a nonprofit, with a goal to improve the world and inspire others to do the same. You may be working toward 2,000 small sales this year, or be thrilled to get just three new clients. Whatever way you're leaning, your business goals will affect your SEO campaign strategy.

For instance, consider the fictional situation of Jason, a founding partner at Babyfuzzkin, a company selling unique, high-end baby clothes. This business makes its money directly through online sales. It's a small operation, so there is a limit to how many orders the business can handle. The Babyfuzzkin fantasy would be a steady flow of, say, 100 orders per month. But there is more to the story: Eventually, the partners would love to get out of the direct fulfillment of orders and instead secure some contracts with big-name brick-and-mortar vendors.



In the case of Elizabeth, a marketing director at ElderPets, we have a different situation. ElderPets is a fictional nonprofit organization that provides meals, walks, and veterinary care assistance to animals belonging to elderly and infirm owners. The company relies on financial contributions and volunteers to fulfill its mission. At ElderPets, their fantasy is to decrease the time and effort spent on fundraising activities, such as silent auctions and community dog washes, and begin attracting more contributions online, which would in turn allow them to help more pets in need. In addition, they are constantly looking for more volunteers.



Though Jason and Elizabeth have different goals, we have an exercise they can both perform to get the most out of their planned SEO. We've created a Goals Worksheet to guide clients like Jason and Elizabeth, and you can use it as you consider the questions in this chapter. You can download the Goals Worksheet at our companion website, www.yourseoplan.com. At key points throughout this chapter, we'll ask you to stop, reflect on your own business, and write down your own vital statistics. Once you've worked through the questions, you'll have a strong vision of the "why" of your SEO campaign—and you'll be ready to move on to the "what" and "how" in Parts II and III.

Now: Download the Goals Worksheet from www.yourseoplan.com.



Now take a moment and look at "Business Goals" on your Goals Worksheet. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show how Jason of Babyfuzzkin and Elizabeth at ElderPets might fill out theirs, respectively.

► **Table 1.1** Summary of Business Goals for Babyfuzzkin

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Primary Goal | Sell clothes directly to consumers online |
| Additional Goal | Sign brick-and-mortar contracts |

► **Table 1.2** Summary of Business Goals for ElderPets

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Primary Goal | Help more animals in need |
| Additional Goal | Attract more donations |
| Additional Goal | Attract more volunteers |

Now: Take a few minutes to write down your overall business goals in "Business Goals" on your Goals Worksheet. Don't be afraid to indulge in fantasy!



What Function Does My Website Serve?

It's not uncommon to hear that the reason a company built a website is "to have a website." While we all love a bit of circular logic before breakfast, if you're going to put a lot of time and money into promoting your website, it's important to have a good idea of what it's doing for you.

Most websites are built out of a combination of basic building blocks. Whether your site is a web-based store seeking online sales; a personal blog seeking community connections; a political or religious outlet seeking to persuade, uplift, or inspire; a corporate “brochure” displaying branding identity and company information; or just about any other type of website you can imagine, it will likely include some or all of the following features or elements:

- ✓ Corporate history, news, and press releases
- ✓ Executive biographies
- ✓ Product and service information
- ✓ Online purchasing/donation
- ✓ Support for existing customers/clients/students
- ✓ News and current events
- ✓ Articles, white papers
- ✓ Religious, philosophical, or political content
- ✓ Online request for information (RFI) forms
- ✓ Login for restricted information
- ✓ Instructions for making contact offline or via e-mail
- ✓ Directions, hours of operation, etc., for brick-and-mortar location
- ✓ Links to other resources
- ✓ Customer testimonials
- ✓ Fun, games, or entertainment
- ✓ A strong brand identity
- ✓ Art or craft portfolio
- ✓ Educational materials
- ✓ Information specifically for geographically local visitors
- ✓ Software or documents available for download
- ✓ Media (pictures, audio, video) available for viewing/downloading
- ✓ Site map
- ✓ Site search function
- ✓ Live help/live contact function
- ✓ Ways for members of the community to connect with each other on the site (forums, bulletin boards, etc.)
- ✓ Blog postings and reader comments
- ✓ Methods for your users to help promote your site (e-mail a friend, “Digg this,” etc.)

Now, spend some time clicking around your website. You should be able to tell which of the features in the preceding list are included. How well is each component doing its job? For now, think in terms of presentation and functionality. (Is your product information up-to-date? Is your online store full of technical glitches? Are your forms asking the right questions?) Give each feature that you find a ranking of Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Obviously, this isn’t going to be a scientific process—just make your best estimate.

Now: On your Goals Worksheet, check off the boxes in “Website Features” that apply to your current site, making sure to note any features you hope to add in the future. Add your assessment in the rating column.



Jason’s and Elizabeth’s checklists might look something like Tables 1.3 and 1.4.

► **Table 1.3** Ratings for Babyfuzzkin Features

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Online purchasing/donation | Excellent |
| Product and service information | Good |
| A strong brand identity | Good |
| Instructions for making contact offline or via e-mail | Good |

► **Table 1.4** Ratings for ElderPets Features

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Corporate history, news, and press releases | Excellent |
| Executive biographies | Excellent |
| Online purchasing/donation | Future Goal |
| Educational materials | Good |
| Online request for information (RFI) forms | Good |

How Is My Website Connecting with the Goals of My Business?

Take a look at what you’ve written on your Goals Worksheet. Is there a disconnect between your business goals and your current website? Is your website focused on corporate info or, worse yet, executive bios instead of your business goals? Or does the website provide only content geared toward supporting existing clients when the primary business goal is to gain new clients?

Now: Take a moment to write down any disconnects you’ve identified in “Connecting Goals” on your Goals Worksheet.



Jason at Babyfuzzkin is in good shape: The business goals and website features are in alignment, with an Excellent rating on the top business priority. Since the business goal includes not only sales but also a strong push toward future deals, the SEO campaign will need to support both.

On the other hand, Elizabeth at ElderPets may be in trouble. One of its primary goals is to get donations, but its website is currently focused on describing its mission and founders, and it doesn't even have online donation capability yet. This could pose a challenge throughout the SEO campaign.

Remember the big picture here:



Pearl of Wisdom: Your SEO campaign must support the overall business goals, not just your website.

The SEO You Have, Not the One You Want

In an ideal world, you could take your Goals Worksheet to your boss and say, “Hey! We’ve got a disconnect here. Let’s fix it!” But let’s just suppose that *ideal* is not the word you would use to describe your organization. The fact is, your SEO campaign may need to work with certain handicaps.

Over the years, we’ve worked with a lot of folks who have had to support their business goals with a less-than-perfect website. Here are the most common reasons we’ve seen for this:

- There is political opposition to change.
- There are scheduling bottlenecks: Everybody else’s project comes before our own site.
- The current marketing team inherited an outdated or lousy website.
- The site is floating along and isn’t really anybody’s responsibility.

Some Interim Solutions

It’s your job as the in-house SEO expert to lobby for a website that will deliver for your company. But you may be wondering, “If my site is far less than perfect and—for whatever reason—I can’t fix it right now, should I even bother with SEO?” Probably. Here are some ideas for approaching SEO while you’re waiting for your site to come up to speed with your company’s goals:

- Work on getting traffic, but lower your expectations for sales (or whatever action you want your visitors to perform) for the time being. When you assess your website’s performance, you may notice an upswing in traffic, which you can use to motivate your people to make some positive changes to the site.
- Ask for “ownership” of just one page, or just one section, and try to bring it up to snuff. Can’t get a whole page? We’ve had customers who were given just one chunk of the home page to do with as they wished. Surprisingly, site maps actually represent good SEO opportunities, and it may be easier to convince your boss to give you ownership of yours!

- Use your powers of competitive analysis. Take special care to note if your competitors' sites are doing things well in the areas in which your site is lacking (we'll give you a chance to do this in Chapter 6, "Your One-Month Prep: Baseline and Keywords"). This may motivate those in power to give your recommended changes a higher priority.
- Focus on *off-page* SEO activities. While you're waiting to get your site spiffed up, you can always work on removing outdated listings and cleaning up old links to your site.
- As a last resort, if your current site is so hopeless that it's actually doing your business more harm than good, you might decide to take drastic measures and "disinvite" the search engines. We'll show you how in Part III, "Your SEO Plan."

SEO Infighting at UpperCut and Jab, Inc.



Here's a true story involving UpperCut and Jab, Inc. (company name and some identifying details have been changed to prevent embarrassment), which provides IT consulting and solutions for large businesses. One of the company's primary goals is new-client acquisition.

In This Corner: A Sales Force with Very Practical Needs With their hands already full, the sales team does not want to waste their time responding to unqualified leads. They like to have lots of corporate information, white papers, and case studies online, which they use as sales tools while they are meeting with potential clients. Sounds like a great use of a website, and one that doesn't require any SEO or any sort of call to action.

In This Corner: A Marketing Team with a Vision The marketing team, on the other hand, wants the website to gather leads. They want a functioning request for information (RFI) form and a generously budgeted SEO campaign to drive traffic to it.

The Plan of Attack The marketing team controls the website, so it's decided: The site will be outfitted with an RFI form, and a large SEO campaign will ensue to drive general-interest traffic to it.

So Who Wins? Unfortunately, nobody. The marketing team was successful in driving a great deal of traffic to the RFI form! But, uh-oh, a vast majority of forms were filled out by unqualified leads. ("Does so-and-so still work there?" "Can you help me with a broken printer?") Looks like they forgot about defining their target audience. The RFI form—a potentially great lead generation tool—was eventually dropped. In this case, the SEO campaign was a waste of time and money because it was not fine-tuned to attract high-quality leads.

The Moral of the Story Bringing traffic to your site is not necessarily the same as meeting your company's goals!

Who Do I Want to Visit My Website?

In the introduction, we pointed out the fact that the person who you *most* want to find your website is the person who is searching for your website! And, of course, this is true. But now let's dig a little deeper and describe your ideal audience so that you can help them make their way to you.

Who is the target audience for your website? Surely it will include potential clients/customers. But don't forget that it may also include members of the press, employees at your own company, current and past customers seeking support, even potential investors nosing about for the inside scoop!

Using your Goals Worksheet, describe your target audience with as much detail as possible: professional status, technical vs. nontechnical (this will affect how they search or even which engines they use), age, workplace vs. home users, and geographic locality.

Knowing your target audience(s) will help you make important decisions—such as *keyword* choices, directory site submittals, and budget for *paid listings*—when you start your SEO campaign. It will also help you segment your site for each audience, which can improve your sales and other goals, as well as usability.

Jason at Babyfuzzkin says, “Our target audience is parents of infants and small children, with a great sense of style and plenty of surplus income. They are probably fairly technically savvy, maybe a little short on time because of the kids—that's why they're shopping online. Also, a lot of our customers are grandparents, buying the clothes as gifts. Some parents don't want to spend as much on clothes they know are just going to get covered in oatmeal and grass stains! And the grandparents, they are a lot less savvy with the Internet. They use it from home, maybe with a slow connection, and they're located nationwide.”

Elizabeth at ElderPets describes her target audience as “Caregivers or relatives of the elderly or infirm—they're usually the ones who contact us about our services. Our volunteers range from high school students hoping to beef up their college applications to retirees who don't have much money but want to do something worthwhile with their time. And then there's our donors, who can be all over the map in terms of age and income and their status as individual, family, or business. The one thing that ties them together is that they love animals.”

Jason's and Elizabeth's goals and corresponding target audiences are shown in Tables 1.5 and 1.6.

► **Table 1.5** Babyfuzzkin Goals and Corresponding Target Audiences

| Goals | | Target Audience | |
|-----------------|---|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Primary goal | Sell clothes directly to consumers online | Primary Audience: | Parents of small children |
| | | Secondary Audience: | Grandparents and friends |
| Additional goal | Brick-and-mortar contracts | Primary Audience: | Buyers working for retailers |

► **Table 1.6** ElderPets Goals and Corresponding Target Audiences

| Goals | | Target Audience | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Primary goal | Help more animals in need | Primary Audience: | Caregivers of the elderly or infirm |
| Additional goal | Attract more donations | Primary Audience: | Pet lovers with surplus income |
| Additional goal | Attract more volunteers | Primary Audience: | High school students, retirees |

Now: Go to the “Conversions” table on your Goals Worksheet and fill out your target audiences under the appropriate column. Be as specific as you can!



What Do I Want Visitors to Do on My Website?

In SEO, the term *conversion* has come to mean your website users doing whatever it is you want them to do. So when we say “conversion,” think of it as shorthand for “Score one for you—you’re accomplishing your goals!”

Wondering what your site’s conversion is? One of the really fun facts about SEO is this:

Pearl of Wisdom: For your site, you can define a “conversion” however you want.



It’s *your* party—you decide what you want your guests to do. Now that you have all of your goals written down in black and white, defining a conversion should be easy. Here are a few likely examples: users “convert” when they:

- Purchase a product
- Fill out an RFI form
- View a certain page on the site
- Subscribe to a mailing list
- Comment on a blog
- Phone your 1-800 sales number
- Drive to your retail store
- Contribute to your political campaign
- Change their mind about something
- Find the information they were looking for
- Read a classified ad

Now look at the “Conversions” table on your Goals Worksheet. You will need to have a conversion defined next to each goal. Some of the conversion definitions will be straightforward; others may seem vague or touchy-feely. There’s no harm in writing them all—we’ll help you sort them out later in your SEO campaign when you’re measuring results.

Jason’s and Elizabeth’s worksheets are shown in Tables 1.7 and 1.8.

► **Table 1.7** Babyfuzzkin Goals and Corresponding Conversions

| Goals | | Target Audience | | Conversion |
|-----------------|---|---------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Primary goal | Sell clothes directly to consumers online | Primary Audience: | Parents of small children | Purchase via online store |
| | | Secondary Audience: | Grandparents and friends | |
| Additional goal | Brick-and-mortar contracts | Primary Audience: | Buyers working for retailers | Make inquiry via online form or offline contact |

► **Table 1.8** ElderPets Goals and Corresponding Conversions

| Goals | | Target Audience | | Conversion |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Primary goal | Help more animals in need | Primary Audience: | Caregivers of the elderly or infirm | View our mission statement |
| Additional goal | Attract more donations | Primary Audience: | Pet lovers with surplus income | Donate via online form or call our toll-free number |
| Additional goal | Attract more volunteers | Primary Audience: | High school students, retirees | Make inquiry via online form or offline contact |

With your goals, audiences, and conversions spelled out, it’s easy to connect the dots from goal to audience to desired conversion:

To achieve my **goal**, I need my **target audience** to **convert** on **this page**.

For example, Babyfuzzkin would say this:

- To achieve more **clothing sales**, I need **parents of infants** to **buy my products** on the **Clothes for Under \$20 page**.
- To achieve more **clothing sales**, I need **grandparents and friends of parents** to **buy my products** on the **Gift Sets page**.

- To achieve **brick-and-mortar contracts**, I need **buyers working for retailers to make an inquiry** using the **Contact Us page**.
And ElderPets might say this:
- To achieve **more online donations**, I need **pet lovers with surplus income to make a donation** on the **Donate Now page**.
- To achieve a **higher number of volunteers**, I need **homemakers and retirees to contact us** using the **Become a Volunteer page**.
- To achieve a **higher number of volunteers**, I need **high school students to contact us** using the **Students Volunteer Program page**.
- To achieve **being found by those in need**, I need **caretakers of elderly and infirm pet owners to visit the Our Mission page**.

Now: Go back to the “Conversions” table on your Goals Worksheet and fill out your conversions under the appropriate column.



Which Pages Do I Most Want My Website Visitors to See?

Now it’s time to start thinking about the top-priority pages for your SEO campaign. These are the pages you’ll optimize when you get to your daily tasks in Part III. These are the pages that you most want people to get to from the search engines, and for best results, they should contain the most compelling content and the most useful information. Since your visitors “land” on these pages from the search engines, we call them *landing pages* (you might also hear them called *entry pages*). The main functions of your landing pages are that they speak to your desired audience and contain a call to action for your desired conversion. Figure 1.1 illustrates possible paths through your website from entry to conversion.

Often, your landing page and your conversion page will be the same, as is the case with Babyfuzzkin’s Gift Sets page. This is a great situation because your site visitor doesn’t have to navigate within your site to complete a conversion. Other times, your conversion page will not be an appropriate entry page because your visitor will need to review other information first and then make the decision to continue. After all, the Web is a highly nonlinear space, and your visitors are free to ramble around your site in all sorts of ways.

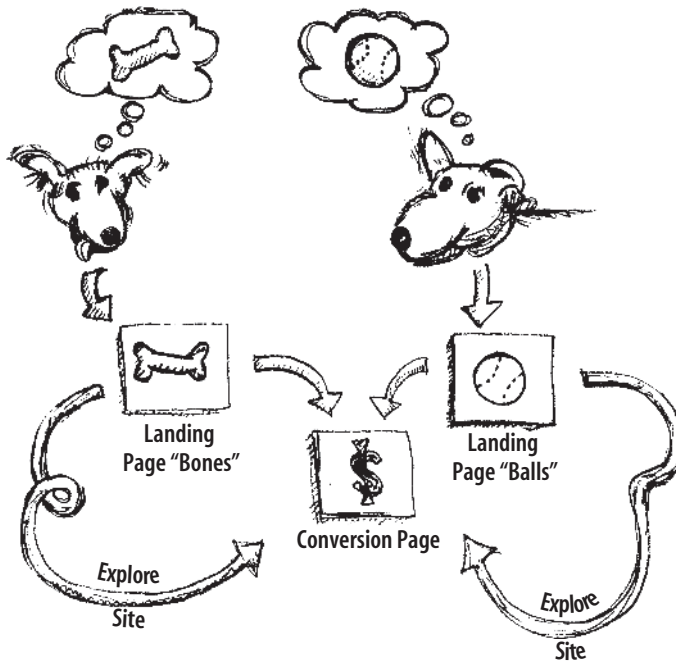


Figure 1.1 Possible paths to conversion

For the purposes of your SEO campaign, you need to ensure that for each type of conversion, there is at least one clear path between the search engine and the conversion outcome. We find it helpful to think backward: First consider where you want your visitor to end up, and then work backward to find a great page for them to enter your site.

For example, consider the ElderPets conversion:

To achieve **more online donations**, I need **pet lovers with surplus income to make a donation** on the **Donate Now page**.

Next, Elizabeth might work backward, starting from the Donate Now page and clicking through the website to find a possible landing page:

Donate Now page → How Can I Help page → Dogs in Need page

In this scenario, the Dogs in Need page is the chosen landing page. Why? Because it's a very convincing, compelling page for this specific audience.



What makes a good landing page? One with just the right information that your target audience is looking for. Vague enough for you? Don't worry; in Part III, we'll walk you through the specifics of how to choose your landing pages and how to make sure the "right" information is on those pages. For now, we want you to begin thinking about what pages might work. If you don't have any pages that fit the bill, don't despair! Get some landing pages built if you can, or think about ways you can add compelling content to existing pages to turn them into excellent landing pages. And just a heads-up: Once you start your SEO campaign, all of your top-priority pages will probably need to be revised at least a little bit as part of the optimization process.

Notice that the landing page ElderPets chose for this conversion is *not* the home page. Many site owners don't think in terms of deeper pages and think that they just want their home page to be found on the search engines. But in truth, your home page is probably only good for achieving the most general of your goals. Your deeper pages are more likely to contain a wealth of *specific* information and *specific* calls to action that you'd be thrilled for a *specific audience* to find one click away from a search engine!



Now: Go back to the “Conversions” table on your Goals Worksheet and enter your conversion pages in the appropriate column.

How Will I Measure the Success of This SEO Campaign?

Most companies understand the importance of measuring the performance of their websites, and there are lots of useful tools available to help you do just that. But in our experience, many companies—especially the small ones—aren’t tracking at all! And in a 2007 survey, 81 percent of *web analytics* professionals reported that the practice is “poorly understood” in their companies. Why are so many companies missing out? We think the cause is a combination of factors:

Lack of definition When goals or conversions are never defined, there’s no way to measure your accomplishments.

Lack of communication Different departments or individuals with different goals may not be sharing information.

Math anxiety Herding conversion data into a tidy, meaningful spreadsheet can be harder than it sounds, and basic algebra is probably not in the job description of most CEOs and marketers.

Technical difficulty Even with the slickest web analytics tools at your disposal, some types of conversions are difficult, if not impossible, to track.

Hitch up your high waters and get ready for another painful truth:



Pearl of Wisdom: You must track the accomplishments of your SEO campaign.

There are a few good reasons why. Let’s discuss them here.

Tracking Lets You Drop the Duds

Have you ever heard this military strategy riddle? You are waging battles on two fronts. One front is winning decisively. The other is being severely trounced. You have 10,000 additional troops ready to deploy. Where do you send them? The answer is, you send them to the winning front as reinforcements. Strange as it sounds, it makes more sense to reinforce a winning battle than to throw efforts into a losing one.

This strategy is also reflected in the maxim “Don’t throw good money after bad.” You need to know which of your efforts are bringing you good results so you can send in the reinforcements, and you need to know which efforts are not working so you can bail out on them. And the only way to know this is to *track results*.

Tracking Will Help You Keep Your Job

If you work for yourself, you’re the president of your own company, or you’re reading this book for a hobby site or your blog, feel free to skip this section. For just about everyone else, we suspect that someone, somewhere is *paying* you to do this work. Eventually, that someone is going to wonder whether they have been spending their money wisely. Even if your boss ignores you every time you walk in the office with a report, even if your department head refuses to back you up when you try to get IT support for *conversion tracking*, even if Sales tells you there’s absolutely no way you can track sales back to the website, trust us; someday someone is going to want this information—preferably in a bar chart, with pretty colors, and summarized in five words or less. If you don’t have the information, the measure of your accomplishments is going to default to this:

Are we #1 on Google?

And, if you’re not, get ready for some repercussions!

Tracking Helps You Stay Up-to-Date

“Do it right the first time.” It’s a great motto and a great goal, but it’s not a realistic plan for your SEO campaign. For one thing, you will need to continually re-prioritize your efforts as you drop the duds. But there’s also another, unavoidable reason that your SEO campaign will need to constantly evolve: The search engines are changing, too! Don’t worry, this book sets you up with best practices that should have a nice, long life span (in Internet years that is!). But you will inevitably need to be prepared for some changes. What works best today will not be exactly the same as what works best three years down the road. And the only way to know what has changed is to track your campaign.

Now that you are convinced that tracking is important, take a look at your list of conversions. Some of them will be easy to track; some may be difficult or close to impossible. Later, we’ll take some time to think through possible ways to track your successes (and failures). Here are the methods that Jason and Elizabeth are considering for measuring their SEO campaign results:

Jason at Babyfuzzkin says, “Our primary goal is online sales. Probably the simplest way to track to our SEO campaign is to compare online sales numbers before and after the campaign. Our secondary goal is attracting attention from vendors. We’ll track these leads back to the SEO campaign by asking any vendors that contact us how they heard about us.”

Elizabeth at ElderPets describes her tracking plans by saying, “Our primary goal is donations, so we’ll be watching for an increase in the number of individual donations after we start our SEO campaign. As for volunteers, we’ll add a ‘How did you find us?’ question to our volunteer applications. As for just being found by people who need us, our website also has a visitors counter. I’ve never paid much attention to it, but as a start, I’ll see if I can figure out if we’re getting more traffic than we used to.”

Clearly Jason and Elizabeth are on the right path. They’ve examined their goals and their websites. They’ve identified their targeted audiences and target pages, and they’re even thinking ahead to tracking. If you’re really stuck on any of these answers for your own company, take some time now to put your head together with others in your organization and hash it out. Understanding your own goals is a basic element of your upstart SEO campaign, and you’ll do best if you have a firm grasp on them before you move on.



How Much Tracking Do I Need to Do?

Tracking can seem like a daunting task if you’ve never given any thought to it. Site owners like Jason and Elizabeth are wondering: Should tracking be approached with “baby steps” like the rest of SEO?

The Left Brain says, “Whoa there, Jason and Elizabeth: You’re going to be collecting flawed data! Jason, how can you be sure that your increase in sales is tied to your SEO efforts and not something else, like the start of the holiday season? And Elizabeth, that hit counter is not going to cut it! You need to gather data about where these people are coming from and how many of them are unique visitors. Don’t you know that your counter can increase every time someone’s cat steps on the ‘refresh’ button?”

The Right Brain says, “I admire your left-brained hunger for irrefutable facts. However, most people are too busy to make numbers-watching on that level their highest priority. I say we encourage any effort at all to track conversions, as long as it’s based on some logic and is done consistently. Even a little bit of tracking can bring up some interesting findings. And these findings often get people interested in learning more, which may in turn motivate people to do more detailed tracking. Believe it or not, tracking can be a creative process!”

Wow! You’ve done a lot of thinking in this chapter. You now know that you probably need SEO for your website. You have a great grasp on your overall business goals. You know what your website is doing and whether these things are good or bad for your company. You know your target audience and your desired conversions. And, we trust, you are convinced that tracking is a necessity. Now, meet us in Chapter 2, “Customize Your Approach,” for some light reading about your favorite subject: you!