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Update Your Virtual Mullet

By Heather Lloyd-Martin

Seven steps to a content strategy makeover

Tom Chu and Dominic Leung, owners of Luster Forever, found themselves in need of an extreme search engine optimization content strategy makeover.

The partners launched their jewelry Web site in July 2008. Chu, previous owner of another successful site, eAutoWorks.com, created the design. Leung wrote the initial copy. They worked with a consultant to nail down the target market—fashion-forward women ages 18-35. The partners even traveled to China and hand-picked hard-to-find pieces.

Their launch met with so-so success. The copy wasn't converting, average order volume was low and the site wasn't seeing significant organic search rankings.

So, the co-owners made a savvy search engine move: They developed an SEO content strategy—and their rankings, conversions and average order volume transformed from drab into fab.

If your company hasn't uploaded new copy since President Bush (No. 43) left office, read on. It's time to update your SEO content strategy in seven easy steps.

No. 1: Find Your Site's Unique Corporate Style and Benefits

Some sites suffer from a mishmash of competing voices; a consistent tone and feel is nowhere to be found. Or, the tone, feel and benefit statements are outdated for today's target prospect.

Consider the best approach to reach your target audience today (as opposed to what worked a year ago). What benefit statements work best? How should your new copy read? Will it have a fun and irreverent style like Despair Inc. and Clear? Will it read best if it is tightly targeted toward women, like Femail Creations? Or if it is benefit-oriented B-to-B, such as Cisco?

Finding your site's unique tone, feel and style means trying on different content approaches, testing the results (Google's Website Optimizer is great for analyzing copy) and modifying your messaging. You'll find that like a custom-tailored jacket, a customized tone and feel sprinkled with tightly honed benefits gets noticed right away.

Luster Forever faced a major tone and feel switch as part of its content strategy. Like many sites, the writing style appealed to everyone but was targeted toward no one (the writing referred to the hottest young adult trends and Oscar de la Renta in the same sentence). Now, the text is closely targeted toward trend-setting hipsters. And the conversion rates have been slammin' since.

No. 2: Check Out the Latest Keyword Trends

It's one thing to know what keywords are relevant for your site. It's another to know what phrases are hot, hot, hot during a particular season. For instance, Keyword Discovery tells us the phrase "leather bracelet" sees significantly more search volume in July and September. Google's Keyword Tool tells us that "stone silver jewelry" is trendy in June, but not so much in January.

Review your top keywords, determine the search trends and build keyword-rich content that meets your prospects' burning desires. This gives you the power to upload the hottest content exactly when your customers demand it.

No. 3: Conquer the Departmental Cliques

Sometimes, working with different corporate divisions is like reliving junior high school. The SEO department doesn't share data with the pay-per-click department. Print advertising doesn't share data with online advertising. The marketing and advertising budget isn't maximized. And nobody wins. Case in point, Reprise Media's 2009 Search Marketing Scorecard, which found that companies like Budweiser and Taco Bell were "next to invisible online"—despite the \$3 million price tag for their 30-second Super Bowl commercials.

Work with other departments, and outline major marketing milestones, project launches and promotions. This ensures that your messaging is consistent from television ad to print ad to SEO landing page—and you're building consistent buzz across all channels.

No. 4: Leverage Your Site's Current Content Assets

Despite the fact that the Luster Forever blog, TotallyMyStyle.com, had great content, it was slowly sucking budget with no desirable results. Today, the blog is facing its own extreme makeover—with new metrics, a new focus and better integration with the main site. Like perusing your closet for new outfits pieced together from your favorite clothes, determine what content initiatives have worked really well and make them better. Do your existing product reviews tend to position well in the search engines—and you're thinking of adding more? Would changing your blog's focus revitalize the writing—gaining an entirely new readership? Would remarketing a white paper increase your RFPs?

Put yourself in your prospects' shoes and take a hard look at your content assets, or have a consultant provide an expert opinion. You may learn how to make an existing section "pop" in the search engines, gaining improved rankings and new customers.

No. 5: Make Over Your Content Mullets

Just like the '80s-dated mullet hairstyle, content mullets (incredibly outdated content) give your prospects pause—and not in a good way. Some mullet-suffering companies forget to update their “press” and “conferences” pages, making it look like nothing of significance has happened in years. Other companies showcase old and obviously outdated content (this especially means you if your content contains the words “new media,” “convergence” or “granular”). Remember, prospects notice (and not in a good way) out-of-date “about us” pages, forgotten blogs and dated verbiage. If your site’s content looks *so* 2005, it’s time for a makeover.

No. 6: Set Your SEO Content Calendar

There’s nothing sadder than an e-commerce company uploading its Valentine’s Day content on Feb. 1—and hoping that it’ll immediately gain top search rankings. New Web pages may take days or months to gain initial positioning, so savvy planning is crucial. Some steps to follow are:

- Create an editorial calendar at least three to six months in advance, outlining the publication date for all content initiatives (new product or service pages, articles, promotional pages, content rewrites/edits, and corporate announcements). Build in additional time for meetings, legal approval and last-second content crises. You know they’ll happen, so you may as well plan for them.
- Post the calendar so everyone can see the topics, deadlines and duties—and confirm copy initiatives with other departments (IT, display advertising, PPC, PR). This is a living document, so you can schedule new copy initiatives as they surface.

No. 7: Experiment With the Latest Content Trends

Just like blue eye shadow or man-purses, Twitter (as well as other new marketing avenues) may not be the best fit for your organization, no matter how well it works for others. But if you are interested in riding the Twitter waves, it could prove to be a savvy content accessory. Retailer Zappos has seen tremendous success using Twitter as a “relationship channel,” with 438 of its employees Tweeting it up—as well as its CEO (who has more than 77,700 Twitter followers). Who knows? Creating community in 140 characters or less could be a new way for your company to build brand.

The Payoff

Today, Leung and Chu are happy their site underwent an SEO content strategy makeover. After just five months, conversion rates have increased more than 300 percent and average order volume has increased more than 96 percent. Plus, the partners are seeing a number of top 10 rankings for their main keywords. Seems like a smart SEO content strategy is always in fashion. “Creating a content strategy definitely helped our business,” says Chu. “It’s the smartest thing we could have done.”

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