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With the holiday season quickly approaching, now is the time to think about holiday SEO for your site. While SEO is a long-term strategy to improve the organic ranking of a site, several short-term optimizations can give your site the boost it needs to attract more organic traffic this holiday season.

Implementing holiday-focused SEO on your site is a lot like throwing a holiday party: It requires proper planning and preparation, not to mention inviting the right people, the right way, and cleaning up when you're done. Here's how you can make your holiday SEO soiree successful.

### **1) Plan Properly for Peak Performance**

You start thinking about the holidays not too long after the leaves start to change color...what gifts you'll buy and what your get-togethers will be like. The same is true of your holiday SEO efforts. Searches that include the keyword "gift" start to rise the first week of November and peak in mid-December. During the holiday season, this word appears in up to 14% of the over-all search queries. Other keywords that trend upward during this time are "top 10" and "gift ideas." While many marketers use these types of keywords during holiday season for their paid campaigns, most forget to optimize for organic queries. For the 12 weeks leading up to December 25, 2010, organic traffic accounted for 88% of all traffic for the keyword "gift ideas (Hitwise, 2011)."

Google loves fresh content. Begin building content surrounding these seasonal terms in October in order to have them indexed in time to attract natural Search traffic. This is the time to update the company blog or press release section in order to build linkable content. It's not enough to attract the traffic, you must also influence them to result in a conversion. So, don't forget to include a call-to-action and an easy way for visitors to get to your conversion pages.

### **2) Send Invitations**

One of the most important parts of planning your holiday party is the invitations. You must select the right guest list, send the invitations far enough in advance for your guests to decide to attend your event instead of someone else's, and make sure that your invitations tell your guests everything they need to know about your party. Now that Search engines are showing your site's content for queries, how do you invite searchers to visit your site? Page titles and meta descriptions have a huge impact on the clickthrough rate (CTR). Including page-related keywords in the page title will not only boost rankings for the page, but also get these keywords to appear bolded on results pages. The bolded keywords draw the attention of searchers, and relevant and actionable keywords invite the searcher to click.

While meta descriptions do not directly influence ranking, they have an important role in attracting the attention of a searcher. Writing effective meta descriptions that improve the CTR of a page can help improve the rankings for that page. Personalized search uses past traffic information to deliver results; therefore, each visit to a site can boost your rankings for that user in related searches.

Utilize your analytics package or Google or Bing Webmaster tools to identify pages that rank well, but have low CTR. Improve the traffic to these pages by optimizing both your titles and

descriptions. Stay within recognized character limitations for the best results. Search engines will truncate titles and descriptions longer than the maximum character limit. Titles should be 70 characters or less, while meta descriptions should be 150 – 160 characters. And remember: don't leave your name off the invitation by going over these limits and letting your brand name get cut off!

### 3) Clean House and Get Ready

When getting ready to host a holiday party, you want to make sure that your house is spotless; you have everything you need and everything working properly. The same rule should apply to cleaning up your site in preparation for holiday traffic. This holiday season, make sure to take a look at your site from a Search engine's perspective. A review of Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools can tell you many things that you might not otherwise be aware of.

First, check to see if the account is alerting you to any errors, such as malware or an unusually high number of URLs on your site. You might have a stray parameter or an error in your robots.txt file that is allowing spiders into unwelcomed areas of your site. Correcting these issues will improve the crawl efficiency and trust of your site.

Next, you need to take a look at any reported crawl errors. Are there a lot of 404 (not found) pages on your site? If so, determine where the links to those pages are located and update them. Check over other site errors encountered for issues such as internal server errors or sitemap errors.

Finally, review the parameters indexed on your site. While duplicate content has presented indexing issues for some time, it has only been through recent updates that it has garnered a great deal of attention. Google's Panda update brought the importance of high quality, unique content to the forefront. There are many cases where parameters are added to a URL in order to perform tracking or some other function that does not change the page content. Unfortunately each time a parameter is added to a URL, it creates a new page. This is great if the content is changed, but not good if the page shown is an exact duplicate. By using the settings within Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools, you can tell the engines how you want them to handle each parameter they encounter. By configuring these tools to only crawl a unique copy of the page, you reduce the amount of duplicate content found on your site, improve the crawler efficiency, and focus the link value to one page. Everyone wins!

No matter what you do, make sure that your site meets the needs of not only the Search engines, but also the people who visit your site. Your content should be grammatically and factually correct, clear, concise, and compelling.

### 4) Clean Up Afterwards

Sometimes the hardest part of a party is the clean-up, especially since you are utterly exhausted from all the preparations and party itself. When the holidays and promotions are finished, you need to stay on top of your campaigns and decide the best course of action for "cleaning up" your site when the holiday season ends. High-demand promotions and holiday content may have attracted a great deal of link value. Don't lose that value to an orphaned page.

Unless you have future plans for the pages, such as holiday 2012, you should use a redirect to send the traffic and link value to an appropriate, related page. Permanent (301) redirects are recognized as the type of redirect to use to retain the most SEO value of a page. These links will pass link value to the resulting landing page, which will allow your holiday SEO efforts to have a lasting impact on your site after the decorations and gifts are put away.