



Small Business SEO: Starter Guide

Who is this guide for?

This Starter Guide was created for those with beginner to medium-level knowledge on Small Business SEO. For other online marketing resources, read our blog or visit our resources page.

What is Small Business SEO?

Maintaining a strong presence in the online world is essential for small businesses in the modern age. Small Business SEO is all about improving online visibility so your customers and potential customers can easily find and interact with your website.

We are experts at Small Business SEO, having worked with thousands of business owners to help them grow their online presence. Using data collected from this customer base, we've constructed this Starter Guide specifically tailored to your business' needs to help you understand the essentials of Small Business SEO.



We address key questions such as:

- What is SEO?
- What's the difference between large enterprise and small business SEO?
- How do you optimise your website for your small business?
- How do you determine your budget?
- What skills are needed for successful SEO?
- What tools are available for small business SEO?
- How can you tell SEO is working?
- How do you choose the best SEO agency?



What is SEO?



Let's start with the basics – what exactly is SEO?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation. Search Engine Optimisation is a collection of strategies and tactics to improve the visibility of an online property or website in the organic search engine results pages (SERPs). 'Organic' search engine results are distinguished from 'paid' search engine results, or ads – organic listings have to be earned, not bought. Appearing highly in the organic search results is often referred to as 'ranking.'

Search engines are the primary vehicle people use to discover content online. Your potential customers are already using search engines to search for information related to your business, so it's important that you are visible to people performing these searches. Otherwise, how will they find you?

New Zealanders use Google as their primary search engine. Approximately 95% of all online searches undertaken in New Zealand are performed on Google. Optimising your website for Google means improving its structure and authority so that it is more likely to show up near the top of the search engine results when people search for your products or services.

If your potential customers can find your small business online, this increases your leads and in turn grows your customer base.

Small Business SEO vs Large Enterprise SEO

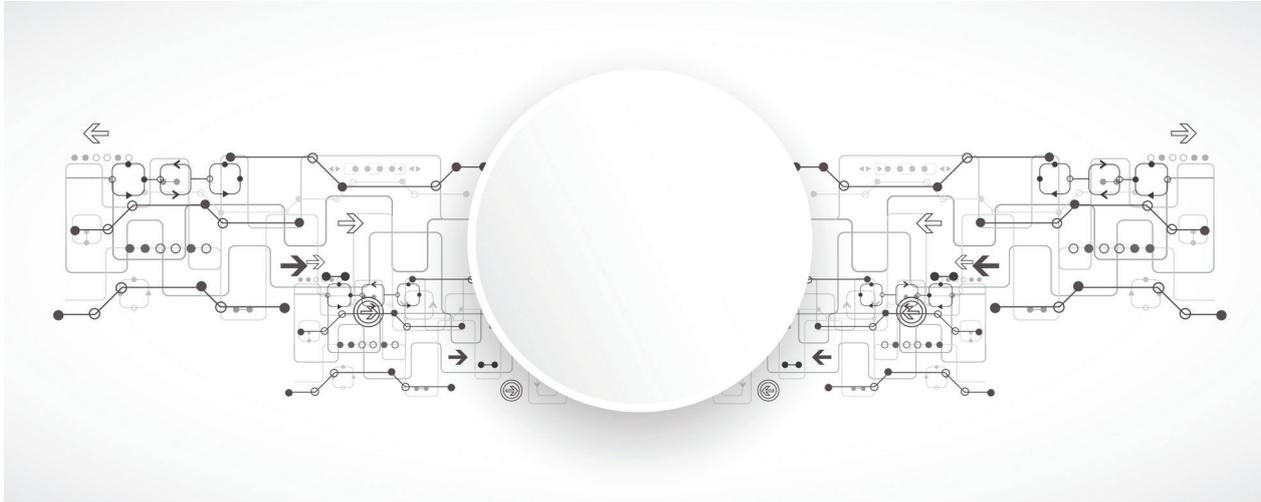
Both Large Enterprise SEO and Small Business SEO share the same goal: maximise visibility in the SERPs to increase customer visits, leads and sales. However, the approach to SEO is different for small and large businesses.

The main advantage small businesses have over large enterprises is that smaller companies are generally community-based, and the bonds between a customer and their service provider are stronger. Small businesses are more local, offer personalised service, and have unique products that large-scale companies don't have. Small Business SEO plays with these strengths.

Small businesses can win with SEO by optimising their website to build authority in their local community and by creating strong customer relationships through providing tailored solutions. Read on for more detail about best practices for small business SEO.

The Basics of Small Business SEO

Keyword Research



Keyword research is the core of SEO. Keywords are the words and phrases your potential customers type into their search engine of choice. Search engines match these keywords against the content of your website to determine how relevant your website is to the user's search query. Therefore, finding the right keywords that your audience is using and including them in all key areas of your content is essential. Small Business SEO professionals use a variety of tools to perform keyword research.

Small Business SEO Practice: Instead of using broad keywords like 'cleaners', promote your product or service with focus keywords such as 'cleaners in the north shore'. People searching for specific keywords may be fewer in number, but they are generally closer to a point-of-purchase since they know exactly what they're looking for.

Long-tail keywords contain more than three words in one phrase and should be your main tool for Small Business SEO. As opposed to broader short-tail keywords, long-tail keywords are specific and generally have less competition. For a small business going up against the big guys, these less competitive keywords are where the real money is.

A Professional, Optimised Website

Is your website copy search engine optimised? Your website copy should be well-written and seamlessly include relevant keywords from your keyword research. It should also be engaging, relevant, concise, and most importantly helpful to the reader. To achieve this, you must first know what your customer wants, which is where keyword research comes into play.

However, there is such a thing as too much of a good thing, and 'over-optimising' your website for keywords is a strategy that is likely to backfire. You don't want to bombard your customers with 'spammy' and repeated keyword use. This provides a poor user experience, and Google is likely to penalise websites that engage in such spammy tactics.

Small Business SEO Practice: On top of placing relevant keywords strategically in your website content, you should also include keywords in key areas including the title tag, headers, meta descriptions, image alt tags and URL. This practice is called on-page optimisation. Read more about on-page optimisation [here](#).

Localised Content

There are two types of content that are essential for SEO: on-site and off-site content.

On-site content includes things such as relevant blog posts and landing pages, while off-site content includes things such as reviews and directories. Off-site content is important because it helps localise your website and direct potential buyers to it. It also helps with link building (read more about link building below).

Small Business SEO Best Practice: If you are a location-specific business, make sure to include your location(s) in your keywords as well. For example, optimising a webpage for the keyword 'cleaners in the north shore' will help improve your visibility for such location-specific search queries.



Link Building

Growing your business' local authority and credibility is essential, and one aspect of SEO that achieves this is link building. Link building means creating off-site content that links back to your website to build industry credibility.

If people are recommending your services or expertise by including links to your website on their own platforms, search engines will conclude that your website contains high-quality content that searchers are looking for. Think of a link like a vote. The more votes your website has, the more authoritative and credible it is in the eyes of Google.

Small Business SEO Best Practice: Utilise your strong customer relationships by asking happy customers to write reviews of your products. Chances are you can find customers that are already big fans of your business, and they will be more than happy to leave positive reviews on your social channels and business directory listings.

One caveat here is that not all links are created equal. A link or 'vote' from a highly credible website like the New Zealand Herald will count for a lot. A thousand links from low-quality websites that link to hundreds of other low-quality websites won't count for much at all, and could actually harm your website's credibility and rankings.



Personalised Social Media

Nothing helps small businesses connect with customers better than personalised social media. Small businesses have this ability to be more personal because of their smaller focus and community connections. Capture the attention of your customers through attractive images, engaging Facebook posts and relevant tweets.



Small Business SEO Best Practice: Allow your customers to get more involved in your social media strategy by reposting their purchased product photos on your page. This will make them feel like they've truly contributed to the growth of your company, while promoting your products at the same time.

Mobile Friendliness

There's a good chance your potential customer will be using their mobile phone to search for information about the products and services you offer, especially if you are a small local business. It is therefore essential that your mobile website offers an easy-to-use experience with simple menu navigation, visible site search tools and calls-to-action that are front and centre.

Small Business SEO Best Practice: One way of optimising your website for mobile is to implement responsive web design – your webpages should change size and layout depending on the device a person is using to access them.

What to Budget



If you want your website to place on the first page of Google, investing in SEO is absolutely essential. According to Forbes, somewhere between 80-90% of customers now check online reviews prior to making a purchase. Engaging in an SEO campaign means you will be able to control much of the information that is visible about your product or service online. And remember, if your potential customers don't find you, they will find your competitors.

For every one click on a paid search result, the organic results generate 8.5 clicks.

Compared to other forms of online marketing such as Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising and Google AdWords, SEO is cost-effective as it provides great long-term ROI. The former may drive quick revenue, but a great SEO campaign remains the strong bedrock of your online presence for years to come.

The budget you allocate for Small Business SEO can vary depending on how much initial and on-going SEO work you require. During the first stages, it is important to analyse your audience – are they looking for reviews on your product online, or are they looking for relevant content regarding your specific industry? Perhaps they are looking for both. Your audience's behaviour will impact the SEO strategy and the amount of work required.

Different types of SEO content such as blog posts, off-site content, or landing page copy cost varying amounts. After studying all your options, invest in an SEO campaign suitable for your needs. A typical Small Business SEO campaign through an agency will range anywhere from \$750 to \$2,000 per month, depending on the specific requirements.

The bottom-line is: you get what you pay for, or what you don't pay for. Your small business will definitely need to invest in a great SEO strategy if you want to succeed in online marketing and be found on the highly coveted first page of Google's search results.

Roles and Responsibilities



Implementing a successful Small Business SEO campaign requires a whole team of skilled experts with complementary degrees of expertise and responsibilities. If you are employing an SEO agency, your campaign will likely be handled by people with titles similar to the ones below. Get to know your team so you know exactly who to turn to!

Digital Specialists/Coordinators

Digital specialists or coordinators are directly responsible for performing SEO tasks, such as keyword research, link building and copy writing for on-page and off-page optimisation.



Digital Strategists

Digital marketing strategists are the brains of your SEO. They analyse your website to spot potential areas of improvement, provide the best SEO solutions and wholly define your SEO strategy from a technical perspective.



Account Managers

Account Managers are the face of the company. They meet with clients to explain the best ways SEO can grow their business, and manage client accounts to make sure all their goals are being met in a timely and efficient manner.



SEO Tools



Small Business SEO requires expertise in a wide variety of digital marketing tools to efficiently research, monitor, and impact search performance.

Some of the most popular tools that are used include:

Google Analytics:

Google's web analytics platform is the most widely used web analytics platform on the internet. This tool allows webmasters and SEO agencies to understand how users interact with a website or online property (e.g. how many people visited it and from which locations). This information is invaluable when formulating an SEO strategy and measuring its success.

Google AdWords Keyword Planner:

Google AdWords is Google's online advertising service, which is used to create paid search engine ads. However, the Google AdWords Keyword Planner tool can also be useful when performing keyword research for SEO. It reveals how many people search for a given keyword each month on average, based on their location and device.

Google Search Console:

Google Search Console is another free web service developed by Google. It allows webmasters to identify technical issues with a website and influence how Google indexes it. It also reveals the top organic search queries that are currently bringing people to your website, which can be useful when performing keyword research.

MozPro:

MozPro is a suite of tools developed by Moz, which is widely recognised as a leader in the SEO software industry. These tools allow SEO professionals to gather and interpret technical data related to an SEO campaign, such as how many links a website has pointing to it and how authoritative or credible a website is in the eyes of Google.

Ahrefs:

Ahrefs is another online tool that is widely used by SEO professionals. With Ahrefs, you can determine a website's link profile, explore ideas for new SEO-friendly content and perform keyword research.

Screaming Frog:

Screaming Frog is a desktop program that crawls a website's various elements (including links, images, HTML and CSS elements) the same way a search engine would. It is widely used by SEO Specialists to evaluate on-site SEO for potential areas of improvement.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)



Website Performance

There are many ways to track website performance. The main metrics for Small Business SEO include:

- Organic visits and overall visits to your website by year or month
- Visits per medium such as organic or paid visits
- Bounce Rate (i.e. the percentage of visitors who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page)
- Visitor location
- Keyword rankings (i.e. which position your main keywords are appearing on the SERPs)
- Conversions (i.e. desired actions) resulting from organic visits

Keyword Rankings

It is essential to regularly check and analyse keyword rankings for your selected keywords on the SERPs. If your rankings are increasing, build on that momentum by writing content (including off-site content) relevant to that keyword. If your rankings are dropping, the same can be done to rank it back up. Most importantly, make sure your landing pages contain the keywords you want to rank for in well-written copy.

Standard Metrics

General metrics such as the number of customers walking into your physical store, and the amount of successful sales and conversions, can be indications of good SEO. Make sure to track your numbers before and after an SEO campaign is implemented to better analyse your results.

Small Business SEO Challenges



Small businesses may face many challenges when it comes to implementing an SEO campaign. These challenges can be financial, organisational, technical or content-related in nature.

Financial Challenges

Financial challenges are a reality for many small businesses. Given that a typical Small Business SEO campaign through an agency will cost anywhere from \$750 to \$2,000 per month, it can be difficult for a small business to find the funds necessary to engage in one. Even though the return on investment from SEO typically more than makes up for the cost, making room for this investment in the budget can be a challenge initially, before the returns start kicking in.

Content Challenges

Small businesses often have small websites. This lack of content can make it difficult for search engines to determine the relevancy of the website in relation to different keywords. A Small Business SEO campaign will usually involve some element of content creation.

In addition to a lack of content, outdated content is another common challenge faced by Small Businesses. Outdated content can cause inconvenient disparities of information between you and your customer. On top of making sure all standard information such as your opening/closing times, FAQs and About Us page are up to date, make sure to constantly update your on-site content including blog posts and Service/Product pages.

Technical Challenges

Small businesses often don't have the technical know-how to understand a lot of the elements involved in an SEO campaign. That is why many small businesses employ an SEO agency to take care of things. Often, SEO agencies will identify areas of improvement that a client needs to action on their end. In these cases, it is important for the agency to explain what needs to be done in simple terms and emphasise the importance of getting it done, so as not to impede SEO success.

Organisational Challenges

Small businesses may be short-staffed and may not even have a dedicated person in charge of marketing. For these businesses, SEO may be low on the priority list due to time constraints. For businesses that do not have the organisational capacity to handle SEO in-house, employing a full-service agency is essential.

How to Choose Your SEO Agency

Choosing an SEO Agency with proven expertise in Small Business SEO is essential. To select the best SEO agency to grow your business' online presence, here are some important things to keep in mind:

Experience

A good SEO agency has the experience to support their claims of meeting client expectations. Explore their case studies to find past experience in handling SEO campaigns for businesses similar to yours.

Reputation

Read up on testimonials and reviews from an agency's past or current clients, or find mutual contacts that can give you useful references.

Proficiencies

Ensure your chosen SEO agency has a broad skillset for getting the best results out of an SEO campaign, including managing an SEO audit/setup, providing accurate reporting, writing engaging search engine optimised content, and drawing meaningful insights from large data.

Technological Expertise

SEO is constantly evolving, so it is important to ensure that SEO agency partners are keeping up with technological advances to stay competitive in the industry. Their expertise in innovative SEO tactics will impact the results of your SEO campaign.

Conclusion

Small Business SEO is a growing industry in New Zealand, as more and more small businesses realise the value of optimising their online presence. Unfortunately, this growing trend means that the SEO landscape is becoming more competitive. Standing out from the crowd means devoting the necessary resources to an ongoing SEO campaign that utilises modern-day best practices.

At Pure SEO, we have helped hundreds of small businesses increase their organic traffic, leads and revenue through Search Engine Optimisation. We know how to do this well since we were a small business ourselves not that long ago!

If you are a small business looking for some help with your SEO, get in touch with us for a free SEO consultation.