WordPress SEO Success

Search Engine Optimization for Your WordPress Website or Blog

Jacob Aull

WordPress® SEO Success

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About the Author

Jacob Aull has been in the Internet marketing business since such a label existed. Drawing from his BFA in graphic design from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 1994, Jake began doing web design and branding in the late 1990s as a partner in his own creative agency. While transitioning deeper into online marketing strategies, research, and search engine optimization, Jake achieved an M.S. in Marketing from Georgia State University's Robinson College of Business in 2009. There he customized his degree program and executed an independent capstone thesis project on social media marketing. In late 2010, GSU RCB asked him to write and teach its first course on Social Media Marketing, which he continues today, bringing in real-world companies and projects for students.

He was an editor for Pearson-Prentice Hall's first *Social Media Marketing* textbook, and was the author for its accompanying instructor's manual. He has been published with articles and interviews in sources such as the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, *OZ Magazine,* renown bloggers, GSU's *The Biz Magazine*, and Atlanta Business Radio X.

He was a cofounder and chair for the Atlanta Interactive Marketing Association Social Media SIG, speaking and bringing in prominent experts for Atlanta business community seminars. He has spoken in many associations and venues on social media marketing and search engine optimization. He is president of SCAD Alumni in Atlanta and is principal of Zen Fires Digital Marketing, providing SEO and digital marketing services to a variety of eCommerce and other clients.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my marvelous, supportive wife and child!

Acknowledgments

We Want to Hear from You!

As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

We welcome your comments. You can email or write to let us know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

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Introduction

This book is for:

- Beginners (WordPress.com, new bloggers, copywriters in WordPress)
- WordPress and SEO familiars (web designers/developers, SEO copy-writers, SEMs)
- Advanced SEO (SEOs new to WordPress, WordPress SEOs wanting to learn more)

Why a Book?

Okay, I have a confession. I read books on digital marketing. I like them. Prior to writing this book, I wrote the *Instructor's Manual* for Tuten and Solomon's *Social Media Marketing* textbook. I raise the point not to gloat but to address a common question: When people know my field and my outlook on books, they ask, "Why a book? The field changes too fast!" A good point, but the major thing I find missing in the digital marketing industry is strategic outlook. There are a lot of questions and focus on technology changes and tactics, but very little strategy. This is what you can glean from books that is much harder to obtain from random blog posts. Books are holistic and strategic. They give the reader an overall approach instead of the fragmented thoughts of the business web today. So this has been my driving goal: to educate others on strategic outlook and planning for WordPress and

search engine optimization success. That or try to come up with a decent joke to put in a big book on technology. One of the two.

SEO and the World Today

The amazing thing about the practice of search engine optimization (and search engine marketing, or SEM) is that it crosses so many boundaries. I come from a web design background (started in the late 1990s), so I always had familiarity with SEO and input the basics when building a website, even in the Web 1.0 days. However, I got heavy into SEO when studying social media and digital marketing in my M.S. program at Georgia State University. So I thought of these as marketing disciplines rather than something else. Going into bookstores, however, I would find SEM/PPC and social media in the marketing section (presumably because it is "advertising") but not SEO. SEO books would not be in the programming section, but in the graphic and web design section (beside books on Photoshop, Fireworks, and prominent web design firms and trends). This fascinates me because I thought of SEO as more the copywriter's role, or the social media marketer's role, or even the developer/programmer's role than the designer's. But, it did fit my own progression, so perhaps there was some alignment there.

Regardless, the fascinating thing about SEO is that I believe it applies to all aforementioned parties. How can a copywriter write good, organic web copy without knowing any SEO principles? How can a marketer plan online marketing strategies and campaigns without understanding the principles, role, and value of SEO? And how can a developer build a site without knowing how to execute SEO essentials in the code and server documents? Arguably, all these are the roles of a good SEO practitioner. But it is essential that the other parties grasp the value and process involved for best success. And with that, let's throw another role onto the table—the web project manager. How else can we know when to incorporate and ask questions of the SEO in the total web creation process?

Organic content strategy (and hence social media) plays heavily with SEO. It is the honey that attracts searchers, binds media, and fills the architecture. Because content crosses so many media, it makes sense. So think of it that way. Read this book, learn the value of SEO and how to execute it, and meet the web user goals you want met. Best success to you and your WordPress blog and/or website—the World Wide Web awaits!

3

A Strategic SEO Upfront Content Approach

Chapter objectives and questions:

- How do we start the SEO and content strategy?
- What are the best SEO content objectives, plans, and guides?
- How do I pick the best keywords?
- How do I captain this ship and manage the sails (the WordPress SEO tools)?

It is instrumental to form strategic plans to drive the web build and SEO process. Each of these steps is explored in depth in this chapter:

1. Conduct digital audits.
2. Write the digital strategy brief.
3. Conduct the keyword research.
4. Plan network architecture.
5. Sitemapping.
6. Assess content and keywords.
7. Write SEO page forms.

Step 1: Conduct Digital Audits

Your blog or website does not exist in a vacuum. This is an important driver for doing an audit of your digital footprint. Even if you didn't have a website before, if your name has existed, chances are you have a digital footprint. So often companies don't realize that their presence can already be found on so many existing directories, social sites, and blogs. Location-based business directories such as whitepages.com pull business license registrations and include the business info in their listings for consumer convenience. Social sites can also contain information about you and your company history by trading info with other databases. Years ago, Plaxo.net attempted to be a networking site with calendaring but never gained a huge following. Today it still retains valuable information. All these digital assets can contribute to SEO benefits, such as inbound links and social reputation.

Tip

Researching Digital Footprints

Regardless of how heavy a digital footprint you think you do or do not have, it's invaluable to research the channels of your industry. Specifically,

- Traditional industry and services' competitors' websites
- Keyword and content competitors in the SERP
- Industry experts and bloggers
- Trade publications
- Third-party landing pages, web promotional pages, and microsites
- Industry online advertising and listings
- PR and article resources
- Social reputations (social profiles, additional inbound links, local directories and reviews)
- Overall SEO data and observations about the preceding items

You might think you already know these characters, but you'll be surprised, particularly by keyword and content competitors. These are sites that are already coming up top-of-the-list for the keyword search results that you want! Often these can be sites that you don't consider to be true competitors at all, such as directories or content resources such as Wikipedia or About.com. Either way, you must be aware that they are beating you at the keyword and content game.

If Wikipedia is winning, what is their content about? Is it of interest to your audience? You might want to be writing content like that on your own site, especially if Wikipedia's version of your brand name presents a nocturnal marsupial in New Guinea that sucks entire chickens down through hollow tree limbs to feast on their blood—sweet! Your guiding digital audits can help you in all respects. These digital audits can guide you to define your new site's competitive positioning. Do you want to fit or break the mold of your overall industry? Now's your chance to achieve your brand messaging differentiation.

What Should You Check These Sites For?

You'll want to refer to a checklist for your audit, so try using the list that follows. All this will give you great, valuable data for an audit report. But be careful with the time investment; if you're an SEO conducting this work for a client, be sure the budget will cover the checklist. If not, balance the most important SEO activities for the buck (or for the bang!).

What to Research on Sites

- **Canonicalization:** Canonicalization is a big word that sounds important, and it is. Since the beginning of the web, we have identified website URLs as either http://example.com or http://www.example.com/. These are subtle differences to you and me, but very, very important differences to search engines. If an SEO hasn't done her job to tell the search engines correctly, the engines see both examples as two different websites. They don't know which to serve in results, and they don't know how to rank them as one. You'll start accumulating inbound links for both URLs (read more about this in the "Inbound Links" bullet item), and eventually giant meteors hit us as the sky is falling! Don't let this happen to you. We'll get more into how to fix canonicalization errors in Chapter 4, "WordPress On-Page Architecture and Basic SEO Execution," and Chapter 5, "Real-World Blogging," but for now you should understand what they are. If your competitor has them, that's an easy win for you right there! The web analysis tools you use for your digital audits can reveal if canonicalization errors exist.
- **Social and keyword monitoring (reputation management):** Important research to do, for both your own brand and competitors', is social reputation monitoring. Where do brand names appear online? What are people saying about them? In which social and local channels do they appear, and where don't they? (See the tools for social and keyword monitoring in the "Tools to Use for Your Audit" section).

- **Rank and authority:** The search engines and analytics tools examine the websites for SEO quality and use their algorithms to assign rank and authority scores to these sites. Basically, the higher the better. Read more on this in Chapter 7, "Analytics for WordPress."

- **Search engine traffic:** Yes, you can see what kind of web traffic your competitors have been getting! This assumes that their site is search-engine friendly and has been achieving good, regular visitors. Remember that the data from these analysis and spy tools is not as reliable as Google Analytics. But some data is better than no data!

- **Primary keywords:** What are the most relevant keywords for the sites in question? This is great info to have. But what do you do with this info after discovery? First, in most cases you do want to focus your own website SEO for short-tail keywords—you know, lone keywords such as "pie," "shoes," or "software." These are the most competitive, but you still want to integrate them into your site and have content devoted to them (chances are, you will anyway, by default). But this is also your opportunity to differentiate your "sweet spot" and chase after those keywords. The total process of online industry audits, as well as a client strategic marketing interview, can all funnel toward this knowledge. I once had a law firm client who, when they hired me, started by saying they served anyone and everyone and wanted their SEO to reflect that. By the end of the marketing interview, we identified that that wasn't their sweet spot, those weren't good clients for them, and that didn't present their best services. So we targeted the work at which they excelled and optimized for long-tail keyword phrases, such as "surety contract litigation Atlanta." They were now differentiated and branded. They could promote their expertise on their website and get discovered for those specific keywords more often than their competitors.

- **Inbound links:** Inbound links are also called backlinks. If they send you web traffic, they are referrals. But they are links, located on web properties outside of your website, which are directed back to your site. Conversely, outbound links are the links you have on your site to send traffic elsewhere. These backlink web properties are critical to assess for several reasons:

  - The more of them you have, the higher rank you achieve in the search engines.

- You want to know who's giving you "props" (and if it's only your own social sites).

- It's best if the links are all from various sites. However, they may all be from one referral domain. Either way, you want to know (and if it's the latter, set a strategy to achieve the former).

- Are you, in turn, providing reciprocal links (that is, two-way links; one-way links are best)?

- Who has the link juice, the higher authority score? Are you the gainer or the loser in the equation?

Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools provide some indications of your own inbound links, but other tools exist whose sole purpose is this reporting; they will provide this info whether the site is yours or a competitor's. MajesticSEO, Blekko, and OpenSiteExplorer—all featured sites within the SEO Book Toolbar—will conveniently report backlinks for the site in question. Not only is this info good for gauging competitive SEO, it also reveals good sources for industry, competitive content, and content quality. Remember, third-party content sources, such as industry directories or trade pubs, can be huge and beneficial to your own SEO.

You can see Google Analytics only for your own site's data. But often website owners have no idea if or where they have such accounts. I hear the story once a month—they had their website built three years ago, they've lost touch with the designer, they don't have emails or paperwork on special accounts' access, and they don't even know if the website ever had Google Analytics turned on. Fortunately, this is an easy assessment for you to make.

🔍 Tip

Finding Google Analytics

Want to know if a site already has Google Analytics set up? A good way to start is to view the home page source code in your browser (such as Google Chrome, see Figure 3.1), pull up the website in question, and through the web developer options, view the source code or developer tools. On viewing the code, do a simple search for "Google." Does it reveal Google Analytics code or not?

Figure 3.1   Google Chrome Web Developer Tools source code.

If the code is there for your own site, you should do everything in your power to obtain access to that account. Try logging in to Analytics.Google.com with the company's existing Gmail account. Don't know the password? Ask Google for a temporary password. Still no go? Try hunting down the web designer; search in LinkedIn, Facebook, wherever. Check all old email accounts, ask the previous digital marketer. You can start from scratch with new code if you absolutely need to, but you will not have any previous data shown if you do. All this goes for Bing as well, but the truth is, not many web developers or SEOs care to go that deep for the much smaller Bing, especially because Google Analytics will already show the quantity of Bing referrals to the site. Enjoy your quest for the holy data!

✉ Note

Exploring Website Code

I know it's scary, but there are a number of reasons that it's worthwhile to examine the code of a website:

- You can identify the platform in some cases (for example, if it is PHP/WordPress, traditional HTML, and so on).

- You can see if it has some SEO sophistication already built in, such as Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools code.

- You can identify the types of linking structures—are there noFollows or noIndex operators there?

- Google Chrome has great tools for viewing the page source in browsers. It will highlight which areas and style sheets apply to each other and potential errors in the site. It will preview the site in one pane and the code in another, and show the code and its corresponding visual sections. It's a beautiful thing.

The Tools to Use for Your Audit

- **SEO Book Tools:** SEOBook.com is a great, free, SEO industry resource of information and technology (see Figure 3.2). You'll find a number of great tools there, offering some data that even WordPress analytics and the coveted Google Analytics don't easily provide. However, remember that all different tools and different algorithmic data need a baseline in common. The best way to operate on this with these tools is in competitive measure. To say it more specifically, SEO Book Tools and spy tools (discussed later) are great for understanding competitive strengths and weaknesses in the digital space. Using the same tool to compare an inbound link's quantity and quality across your competitors and your own website is worthy research. Using a common tool to measure web traffic or search referrals, across major competitors, gives you a common benchmark and worthy data. The further we get away from apples and apples, however, makes it more difficult to justify. I believe that some data is better than no data, so dive into these tools and have fun! Just don't forget to click all the "?"s and "i"s within the tools and algorithms to understand exactly what they're measuring for you.

- **How to do it?** First, you should already have the Firefox browser installed. If not, find Firefox via your existing web browser; download, install, and run Firefox. Then go to http://tools.seobook.com/seo-toolbar/ and download and install the SEO Book Toolbar (see the toolbar within Firefox and some of its tools in Figure 3.2). You will instantly notice the plethora of analytics tools right there on the top of your browser. Try them out and see what they do. Some of them, such as Quantcast, OpenSiteExplorer, Blekko, and MajesticSEO, have already been discussed.

- **Spy Tools:** Spy tools allow you to "spy" on any sites on the web. Examine their primary keyword drivers, their PPC ads, web traffic, ranking, and so on. These are typically freemium tools (meaning they provide both free and advanced paid levels). Revisit the Note on these in Chapter 2, "The Search Engines, WordPress, and SEO Tools," for more info.

Figure 3.2   SEO Book Tools and the SEO Book Toolbar for Firefox.

- **SocialMention.com:** Input any brand name or keyword to discover where mentions occur. In the words of SocialMention, "From across the universe...." (See more on SocialMention.com results and analytics in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, "Social Media Connectivity.") This is similar to Google Alerts. You can set up your Google Alerts to email you whenever and wherever specific brand name or keyword mentions occur.

- **HootSuite:** Technically it is a social dashboard, and I will go into more depth in Chapter 8 on integrating social functionality with WordPress. But for our purposes here, it is a social dashboard useful for monitoring your brand name and keywords for Twitter and Facebook (and others). You set up an account (it can be the free version) in HootSuite and sync with your Twitter and Facebook accounts. HootSuite then gives you the option to set up "streams," cascades, like your social walls, to view preferred content. By setting up streams to search for your various words, such as brand names, you can see all this data in one resource. So if you're mentioned in the social space, you can find it, judge the SEO value, and determine if there's an opportunity to reach out and request an inbound link to your site, if it's not already there.

What Should a Good Competitive Audit Look Like?

Here's the type of research the data might reveal:

- A site achieves 30,000 searches for the brand name per month.
- The most common brand services industry keyword searches receive 35,000 a month at most.
- The site's search engine traffic continually trends up.
- Unique visitors (first-time visitors to the website) trend down.
- The observations that you as an SEO might make here are that the brand has become a household name and when people want facial tissues they search the brand name Kleenex. Because of this occurrence, the majority of website visitors already know the name and have previously visited the site. All this is good, but there must be fringe keywords for services that can align SEO for this site.
- The digital audit should present these observations, data, and recommendations accordingly.

Step 2: Write Your Strategy Brief

A good digital audit is instrumental in driving your SEO strategy brief. But there is other input that must be taken into account as well. For my SEO client contracts I discuss all the following issues with them and then issue the final document of my notes back to them before proceeding to the next step: keyword research.

- **Objective:** Is your primary objective to achieve more sales leads from the site? Or perhaps to spread brand awareness? Be careful here, because what the SEO might presume for a primary objective can be very different from expectations from the information architect or others. (This, along with the need for compromise, is discussed in the "Compromises in Digital Planning" section.)
- **Marketing plan and pieces:** Do you have an existing marketing or digital plan to work with? What kinds of existing media and pieces has the company tried? What examples do you have to reference for branding, messaging, and the like?
- **Drivers/Problems:** Why are these your objectives? What are the market drivers in the mix? What business or industry problems occur to drive these objectives?

- **Target audience and search behavior:** You want to identify your primary audience for your website keywords and copy. One of the things discussed later is that you may have different objectives for your SEO than for the rest of your digital marketing. Likewise, you may want to target a different audience than your typical customer. Your existing customers have most likely already visited your site, know how and where to find what they want, and how to contact you.

  So it is very common for websites to target prospects and new visitors. There's more on this discussed throughout this chapter, but it's something to focus your website strategy. To aid you in this process, you can also research the demographics of a specific website's visitors with tools like Quantcast and GoogleTrends, and overall analysis of web and social users with resources like Pew Internet Research.

  Important questions to ask yourself here include these: What do you think the target's search approach is for your services? At what point of the process do you think prospects search? What is their role with social media relative to your industry?

- **Positioning and messaging:** What is your brand positioning and your brand voice? Should you take a more niche, differentiated positioning for your online representation and your online messaging? Do you need more differentiation online versus competitors?

- **Any additional selling points:** Spell out your services as benefits for the customer. What are the deliverables, sought by customers, which your company provides? Why would customers want them from you?

- **Integrated marketing communications (IMC), ad campaigns, and the like:** What other marketing materials does your SEO integrate with? Is it part of an ad campaign, or is it overall corporate branding? Will there also be SEM/PPC advertising?

- **Web strategy:** You have your primary objective; what's your web strategy? Will you focus heavily on location-based SEO? PPC advertising to support the SEO? Google Images or YouTube video?

- **Starting, preliminary, suggested keywords, or terminology:** The client or project approver usually has some good input on industry phrases, customer phrases, and potential keywords. These are instrumental to starting the keyword research phase (along with the digital audit).

- **Future, ongoing SEO, and social media:** What are you planning for implementation between this new site-build SEO and ongoing post-build SEO efforts? After the foundation of your web content and

keyword integration is complete, blogging and social media are great for ongoing SEO success. A critical component to social media (and organic search content overall) is to know your resources; don't commit to time or content you won't be able to achieve. Identify and plan accordingly.

Your digital strategy brief is your guide, and it's crucial. Refer to it constantly throughout your website and SEO process. It is the leading hand that guides your next steps and your SEO page plans. Even so, don't forget to get the necessary approvals, and don't forget about the necessary compromises. Compromises? We don't need no stinking compromises! Actually, yes, we do.

Compromises in Digital Planning

Some areas of digital marketing may have to be compromised in spite of SEO; you can't meet all aspects of perfect SEO upfront. There are other contributors to digital marketing that must be consulted in the planning and generation processes. From these parties and compromises, the website objectives and digital strategy brief can be formed. The parties, personnel, and roles that may have to be consulted and accommodated prior to website SEO execution can include the following:

- **Branding:** Brand messaging may be very different from optimal SEO messaging, and often the branding goals may be very different from the SEO goals. For example, you may want your SEO to serve a new target audience in contrast to traditional brand positioning to customers and your market at large. Or you may want SEO for a product promotion goal in contrast to SEO for overall corporate brand awareness.

  Whatever your relationship with branding, I always recommend using keyword research (for both keyword/consumer demand, as well as competition) as part of the branding process. This is why I say great branding and brand positioning are uniquely tied to consumer search. What do the people want? What do they search for? And what are competitors NOT providing? Search can reveal all; that is, keyword research can show the actual products/services customers are searching for and the actual language they use to describe them. So why not be "the what" that people are searching for?

- **Target audience:** Every market's target audience is different and behaves differently in social media. For example, someone in a financial forum asking questions about investments is going to have a different approach and phraseology than one commenting on a blog about sci-fi animated films. Take the same principle and apply it to

search—not only the terminology, but the casualness of approach will differentiate target audiences and search behavior. The better you know your audience, the better you'll know the content to serve them—and the strings of words they'll enter into search engines.

- **Image/design:** Search engines love relevant and unique content—the more the better. This can be in conflict if your company is striving for a simplified content, graphic-heavy web look (especially if it's Adobe Flash, which spiders really can't crawl!).

- **User interface and web usability:** Although many will argue that what is good for usability is good for the search engines, there can still be road blocks here. A good information architect's (IA) focus is to serve the web user more than the search engines.

- **Copywriting:** A good copywriter will often find issues with specific keyword phrases and an SEO's attempt to force them in copy and headlines. But like the IA, his/her best interest is in serving the web user. So a compromise is often necessary between these roles and SEO. However, a good copywriter can also be the SEO's best friend; both should work together for aspects such as the strategy and value of link-baiting and writing for semantic content indexing. (Don't worry, we'll dive into this in Chapter 6, "In-Depth Hands-On SEO Execution.")

- **A/B or multivariate testing:** Testing is yet an alternative, different goal for digital marketing. The effects for this type of optimization are quite different. Testing requires a clear, controlled environment. Often, such search marketing testing requires subtle differences between isolated, singular web landing pages, such as for campaigns. You can have one campaign directed to one landing page or microsite and another directed to the alternative. There's a lot of fun stuff to get into when we discuss such testing. So if you want to skip ahead and dive in, you'll find more in Chapter 7.

- **Sales lead-generation and copy-behind forms:** Sales departments will often prefer websites to act as lead-generation (as discussed elsewhere in this book). This is all good and fine, but lead-generation typically requires incentivized content behind a lead-generation form (customer info-capture, see Figure 3.3). Any content behind a form cannot be crawled, so it becomes an SEO barrier. Again, valid SEO compromises must take place. Who was that politician who said that the middle of the road was only for road kill? I'm not sure how successful he would have been as a digital marketer.
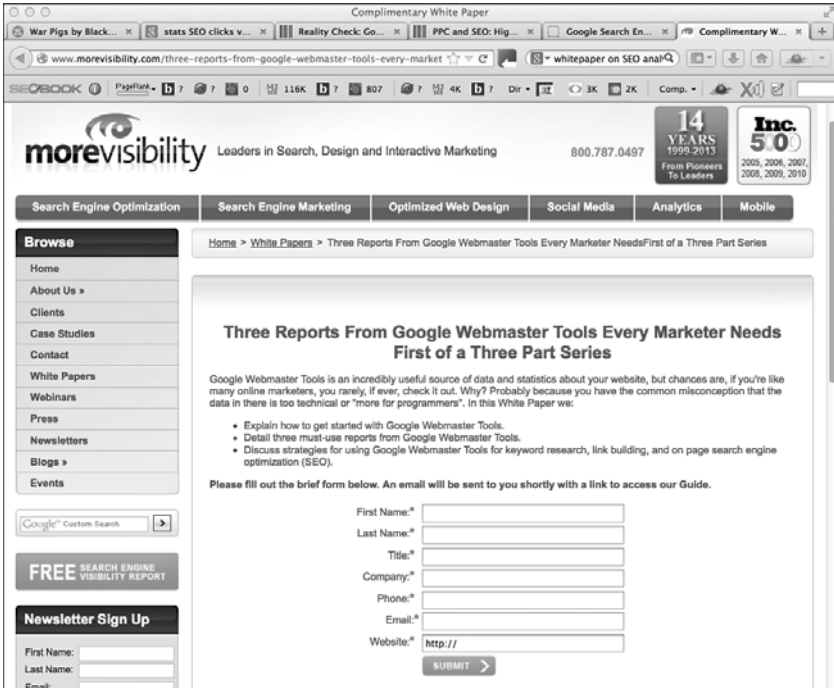
Figure 3.3   Customer incentive lead-generation form.

- **Programmers root for best, fast, cleanest web development:** Iterative
  compromises are required between technology developments. The best
  tools for the programmer are often not what are best for SEO. Deep-
  web IT security measures may daunt crawlers. Although IT may want
  more content behind a login form, for SEO it is best the other way.
  Hard-core programmers are also often not fans of WordPress—they
  prefer other tools for CMS (content management system; platform
  allowing for easy user content editing) within their platforms. This
  allows them more customization and integrations. Programmers
  may want to use more iFrames and .js/jQuery functionality, pip-
  ing in certain content and linking out to other servers or third-party
  services—more items acting as robot stumbling blocks. IP address,
  dynamic URLs, and server hosting issues can also be contested between
  IT programmers and SEOs. After all IA issues are on the table and
  agreements or compromises have been met, it is best to document a
  timeline of SEO, site changes, and analytics. In other words, the two
  will often be working down separate paths, with the SEO optimizing
  and the programmer building and testing. Without good communica-
  tion (as is usually the case), multiple problems ensue. Hence, a timeline

(see Figure 3.4) of events must be set up, documented, and followed for easy troubleshooting when there are problems. (Trust me, there are always problems in a build.)
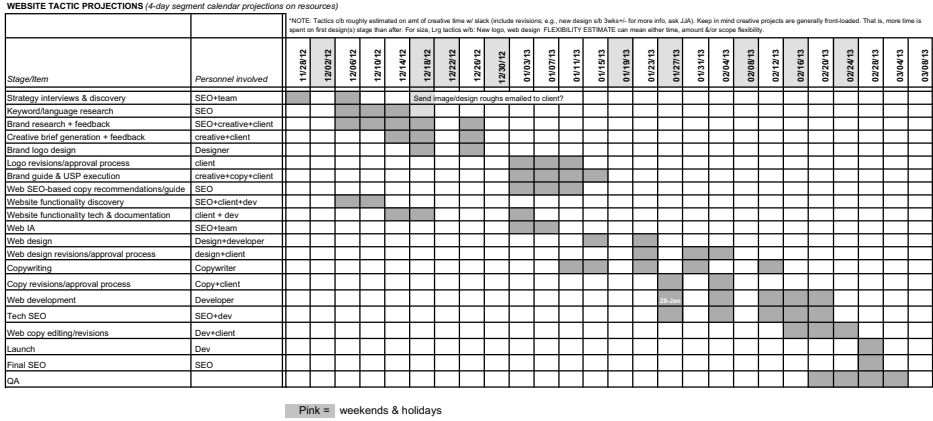
WEBSITE TACTIC PROJECTIONS *(4-day segment calendar projections on resources)*

NOTE: Tactics c/b roughly estimated on amt of creative time w/ slack (include revisions; e.g., new design s/b 3wks+/- for more info, ask JJA). Keep in mind creative projects are generally front-loaded. That is, more time is spent on first design(s) stage than after. For size, Lrg tactics w/b: New logo, web design FLEXIBILITY ESTIMATE can mean either time, amount &/or scope flexibility.

Stage/Item	Personnel involved	11/28/12	12/02/12	12/06/12	12/10/12	12/14/12	12/18/12	12/22/12	12/26/12	12/30/12	01/03/13	01/07/13	01/11/13	01/15/13	01/19/13	01/23/13	01/27/13	01/31/13	02/04/13	02/08/13	02/12/13	02/16/13	02/20/13	02/24/13	02/28/13	03/04/13	03/08/13
Strategy interviews & discovery	SEO+team						Send image/design roughs emailed to client?																				
Keyword/language research	SEO																										
Brand research + feedback	SEO+creative+client																										
Creative brief generation + feedback	creative+client																										
Brand logo design	Designer																										
Logo revisions/approval process	client																										
Brand guide & USP execution	creative+copy+client																										
Web SEO-based copy recommendations/guide	SEO																										
Website functionality discovery	SEO+client+dev																										
Website functionality tech & documentation	client + dev																										
Web IA	SEO+team																										
Web design	Design+developer																										
Web design revisions/approval process	design+client																										
Copywriting	Copywriter																										
Copy revisions/approval process	Copy+client																										
Web development	Developer																31-Jan										
Tech SEO	SEO+dev																										
Web copy editing/revisions	Dev+client																										
Launch	Dev																										
Final SEO	SEO																										
QA																											

Pink = weekends & holidays

Figure 3.4 A detailed timeline is crucial when trying to avoid communication issues.

Finally, there will always be some kind of compromise between the SEO and the client for unexpected reasons. (It's okay. It's not politics, just SEO.)

THE NATURE OF SEO AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WEBSITE MESSAGING AND POSITIONING

First, organic search, like social media, is about pull, rather than push, marketing. The point is to pull in customers, in contrast to "pushing" TV or web ads directly on them. Organic search is based on what people are actually looking for—the honey that draws them in. This is why it works. This is also a great demonstration of the value of inbound links. You can advertise all day long, but if you have organically pollinated links across the Web (or "the net," as we used to call it), again, you're pulling consumers in by interest rather than shouting at them.

So organic content needs to consider the topics at hand and how best to serve the reader. In marketing communications, we identify utilitarian versus hedonic consumer behavior, research, and product interest. Essentially, utilitarian approaches comprise researching factual "needs" such as costs, efficiency, and power features of appliances, for example. Whereas hedonic approaches involve emotional or impulsive desires—the color of a jet ski, its speed, décor, and so on. Content strategy should identify serving one, the other, or both types of consumers and products.

Taking these concepts one step further, it follows that there would be user approaches to keyword search also based on hedonic and utilitarian desires. This includes not only the keyword phrases input, but also the channels searched. For example, location-based search channels would most likely be utilitarian; that is, Yelp, YP.com, and Google Maps, whereas channels such as StumbleUpon or Pinterest would likely receive hedonic web users and searches.

Creative types, such as web designers, who need to search metaphors can be the extreme end of hedonic searches. A web designer might search for web icons to use on a project—metaphoric imagery or icons for copy about product benefits for the user, or a nonprofit's requests for reader donations. Stock art online catalogs are growing more and more accustomed to serving such searches.

Search engines have to evolve, just as they have from their beginning when algorithms attempted to understand how people searched. Over time, we learned how to predict effectively the way search engines thought (which became a two-way street as the technology did likewise). It is fair to say that theoretically this becomes an ongoing, back and forth evolution—a cross-pollination. Perhaps more future examples become the examples of entire books and libraries online, in which content can have, for example, more emotional poetic themes versus strictly technical manuals of steps and instructions.

Step 3: Identify and Research Your Keywords

To begin with, there are some commonly understood terms in keyword search. For example, in eCommerce, the difference is understood between searches entering "free" in their search terms versus "buy." Similarly, the search term "info" indicates desire for information over purchase. You should also consider optimizing for your keywords' synonyms, mistypes, and keyword stemming (verb tenses). I like to use Google's Keyword Planner, but I also like to use spy tools to identify best keywords and competitors' sites. Again, Keyword Spy and the SEOBook Toolbar are also great for providing tools for keyword analysis and recommendations.

How to do it? Keyword research is one of the easier (but extremely important) aspects of SEO. Start by gathering the keyword and terminology suggestions from the client or approver, and likewise the keywords discovered by your digital audits. Run these back through keyword research tools and get recommendations by search volume, just as we did in Chapter 2. The goal? Identify what are the most relevant keywords with the most search volume.

Keep in mind that Google tools are great. Google is the expert and knows its own data better than anyone, but valuable tools such as Google Trends show "indexed" results rather than true search volume (see Figure 3.5). This means that Google will take the gamut of the results and distribute them from 1 to 100. So the top

results shown are the top results (100), and likewise are the least. So all data is "indexed" or benchmarked. This is great for comparison, but not so good for hard volume numbers. Still, Google Trends conveniently shows not only the value of current searches for a keyword, but whether this is increasing or decreasing over time. Suddenly, that high-volume keyword phrase may not matter if it drops too low within the year. Google Trends also identifies the top geographic locations searching for specific keywords, which is also valuable to know. So suppose the top location searching for "white toilet seats" is Kalamazoo, MI. Wow—let's do some local SEO targeting for our business there! Regardless, if a location SEO strategy is essential for the project at hand, and if desired locations don't align with Google's list, I like to add a location name onto primary keyword phrases for the client. If we're targeting Chattanooga, TN, and the keyword phrase is "buy gray metal sutures," then it becomes "buy gray metal sutures Chattanooga."

Figure 3.5   Google Trends research.

✉ **Note**

Demographics Research

Google Trends is not the only tool to report geographic or other demographics data for search and websites. For more on these tools, as well as analytics indexing, see Chapter 7.

From all this data and background, the optimizer can list recommendations on top keywords for the client or approver and get their John Hancock before creating SEO page plans. Do you think John Hancock was thinking about SEO when he signed the Declaration of Independence? His signature is easy to find!

Step 4: Plan Network Architecture

Now that you've identified your digital footprint, you need to clean it up. One of the more obscure issues in SEO is that of shared IP addresses. Larger corporations often have their own dedicated server web hosting. And particularly if they have been buying up smaller companies, they represent multiple web properties. The larger corporation can host them together on the same server for reasons of IT security and convenience. The larger of these sites are presumably not WordPress because complex, large corporate sites must be integrated with a number of large technologies such as Customer Resource Management (CRM) databases for sales data or Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems with customer login accounts and finances. Smaller company websites or blogs (I would say less than 150 pages), however, may very well be WordPress. Regardless, an SEO might be tempted to set up inbound linking strategies and multiple content posting opportunities among the various sites.

You may have the same idea for setting up industry directories and multiple blogs for SEO effects on your own smaller-scale hosting service for, let's say, a small eCommerce site or multiple clients within the same industry you serve.

First, too many websites are like honeycombs where there are valuable pages full of honey but a lot of sections that have no value. Don't force your site structures to be so imbalanced. Don't spread all your link juice around your own field. In other words, do not devalue your own outbound links by passing their value to others of your same sites. Bigger than the loss of link juice within your own network, rumor has it that Google ignores (or possibly might penalize) heavy linking and content sharing within the same IP address. That's right—search engines look at IP addresses. So those 20 URLs you bought and have shared on the same GoDaddy server? Google knows—it always knows!

That is also why I recommend to clients that they spend the extra web hosting dollars to get a dedicated IP address (not necessarily a dedicated server, just a singular IP address for their domain/s). You don't want Google affiliating you with porn sites or directory/advertising scam sites that might be housed on the shared IP hosting offered by your web server.

So you've said your mea culpa, placed your most important content building on one primary domain to preserve link juice, identified any questionable outbound links and made notes for "noFollows," and so on. You still have those 50 other domains you purchased. What to do?

▶ Caution

Cloaked Domains and Redirects

At one time I had a client set up "cloaked domains," in which, regardless of the domain name you typed in, you would see the same website content on the specific URL at hand. Good idea, right? If you said "Yeah, perfect idea, sign me up, let's do it right now!" then you need to reread the previous chapters and smack your wrist with your iPhone. This perpetuates not only a canonicalization problem, but also an inbound link problem and even a branding problem. Solve it, solve it now, and set up your 301 redirects and traditional domain forwarding on the server side. Still, if you have 50 or even 20 domains being forwarded to the same URL, it looks a little fishy. I have a friend SEO who says never to do anything that porn sites might do. Good tip.

So now we know not to architect or encourage elaborate linking networks or build content across multiple sites and blogs that could be forged to enhance our one major site. But what if our digital audit reveals multiple past blogs, online articles, social profiles, and the like (assuming we can still access the content and profiles within)? List those and draw a diagram if you can to help keep your web resources in check (see Figure 3.6). However, if you have found old sites with blog content, that may be exported and imported into your new, primary WordPress site (if it makes sense to do so).
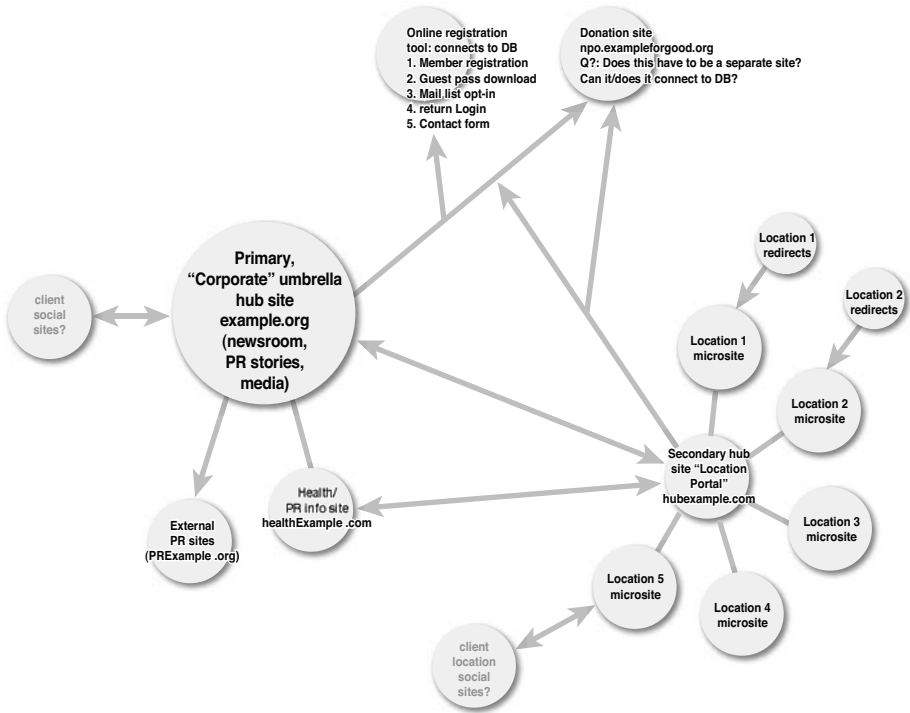
Figure 3.6   Planning network architecture.

🔍 Tip

Repurposing Old Web Content

While old digital content may be out there, old blogs may not have the best content for our new orientation, and old social networks (such as Plaxo or Myspace) aren't really going anywhere worthy of continual posting or direct-ing traffic to. (Big hint here: Don't direct new traffic to those old sites.) And that's fine. There's still some SEO value there for inbound links. And those old social sites can still come up in Google. Remember Flickr—the original Pinterest? Back in the days of the cavemen? That still comes up in the Google SERP, as well as Yahoo!. Just ensure those old sites have your current business info there, and link to your site. In fact, you could even provide a link to a subpage of your site that you specifically would like to see accumulate more traffic and better search engine rankings, such as your resources page or a page of your videos.

These are the elements of network architecture; identify them, think through them, and use them to your best SEO advantage rather then merely let old web resources sit without thought. Remember, they still represent your reputation out there on the Web.

After you have identified all appropriate assets of your own digital footprint, you need to identify specifically if and how you want them changed. So often these old web properties will list incorrect official company/brand names, URLs, and contact info (location directories are a prime example—we'll dive more into these in Chapters 7 and 8). I recommend filling out a form for each web property to follow up on.

Identification of Brand Mentions' Third-Party Web Assets to Change

- Description of the web channel.
- List the URL or mobile app.
- What's the problem, or incorrect copy?
- Do you control it? If so, list the account access URL, username, and password.
- Who to contact?
- Is it better to remove the mention/web asset altogether, or change it? Why?
- What do you want to change it to?
- Ideally when would you like it changed?
- Date of contact.
- What transpired?
- Backup plan if nothing can be changed.

Step 5: Sitemapping

In SEO we talk a lot about the word "sitemap." In most SEO contexts, however, we mean the sitemap.xml file that needs to be submitted to the search engines on a regular basis to aid the robots in crawling the site after it's built. We'll discuss this in Chapter 4. In this case, we're discussing the information architecture aspect of sitemapping. The IA act of designing the sitemap involves identifying web goals, existing content, web properties, and web traffic (and, hopefully, SEO and keyword input) to achieve a completed website according to objectives.

What is IA and where/when does it apply? As we've mentioned, IA stands for information architecture—the process of strategically identifying how your site can best be constructed with navigation, third-party tools, and so on. Early on in the

process, I start discussions with clients about a new website with a standard, basic sitemap layout in Excel—although Microsoft's Visio is a more common IA and UI package for these purposes, and PowerPoint is another poor man's alternative. We discuss, and the client takes and adapts for further discussion. After the client approves page count, basic layout, and architecture, we proceed to web design and/ or if necessary, wireframes. For large clients and websites, this can be an elaborate, time-consuming process and even involve professional IA personnel. But for small business WordPress websites, this should be included as part of the price and standard web design process.

What makes the SEO unique here is that a good optimizer can direct the website architecture for easy crawlability. And a website should not be architected without SEO in mind. Why design and build a website that the spiders can't crawl? For example, it may be tempting to build a website with deeper and deeper pages, getting further into more detail about a specific topic. In fact, theoretically this idea sounds good for SEO as well—why not dive fully into your niche content? The problem is, all these deeper layers can inhibit spiders. Some SEOs will argue that if cleanly architected and linked, these deeper pages are very valid for SEO. Maybe so, but the closer to the surface of your domain, the quicker the crawlers can find it. What we're discussing here is a shallow architecture. For most WordPress websites (which have fewer pages than large corporate Fortune 1000 sites) this can be the best approach.

Another SEO opportunity in the sitemap design is to assign SEO-friendly menu page labels. This has to be a delicate maneuver, because the longer the menu labels, the more it can visually break the menu (especially when web visitors zoom in on their browser). So the web developer will want menu labels as short as possible (and rightfully so), while for the SEO, the more keywords integrated, the better. Again, there must be compromise. Regardless of the top menu, the SEO should have his way on the footer menu. Strategic footer menus are great for SEO, and I recommend fleshing those out with full keywords in the pages' listings (even if they don't exist on the top menu). Often you will see gray-hat SEOs abuse the footer with links such as these:

SmallTown lawyer | MainStreet pain attorney | BigCity attorney

Not only are these much heavier SEO tricks and less for usability (and don't fit the top menu at all), but they also often link off the site to SEO landing pages. These are the kinds of things search engines are cracking down on.

Here's an example of the Excel spreadsheet I consult with clients on. In this case it is very keyword friendly (see Figure 3.7).

SEO Sitemap Guide for 20-25pg Website	Home					

Main Navigation

Floor Services	Success Stories	Who We Serve	About Acme Floor	Floorwork Photos	Contact	News & Blog
Hardwood	Floor Case Studies	Commercial Floors	Hardwood Experts	Hardwood Photos	Directions	Press
Home Carpet	Testimonials	Home Flooring	Carpet Experts	Carpet Images		Decor Blog
Office Floors		Decor Partners	Mission/Vision	Business Floors		

(footer menu):   Home   - - -   *Legal?*

LEGEND:

Box Item	= Menu/Sub menu item.
Dotted Box	= Possible, future menu item?
Green &/or Italic Text	= Descriptor text not going on website.

Figure 3.7   Simple Microsoft Excel drawn sitemap.

For either scenario, you're still finding the balance of page-level URL length. You want to maximize the keywords in URLs for SEO, but at the same time the URL can't have an unlimited length (even in the age of URL shorteners). You'll assign the page-level URLs in SEO page form, but a good guide is not to exceed 115 characters, and also not to use "stop" words in your URL, such as "the," "of," "and," "to," "with," and the like. Remember not to duplicate your keywords, or do keyword-stuffing, within a page URL. And longer URLs can dilute a specific keyword. However you go, you definitely don't want dynamic URLs (a rarity in WordPress) or default WordPress permalinks. For more on URL length, here is a great post: http://moz.com/blog/should-i-change-my-urls-for-seo.

Although shallow sites are a good SEO goal, you still want the site's content, on a page-to-deeper-page basis, to venture from light, intro, and marketing "fluff" copy on surface pages to in-depth content on the deepest page. For example, I always highly recommend that a site should have sectional landing pages or navigational pages. These are intro pages to a section and listings of its page contents and URLs. Although the links are already accessible via the menu, these navigational pages provide good bytes of info for those unsure of where they're going—and they've become a web standard. So if your site has a section on "zoo reptiles," that sectional intro page, accessible as the top-level navigation item, can tell you about the pages within it on snakes versus lizards versus turtles (good things to know!).

Set sitemap/customer journey goals: If you're redoing your website, chances are you also need to redo your sitemap. Navigation trends change. For example, it used to be popular for jump menus to allow users to select their preference of what type of content to visit next (outside of the menu navigation). And breadcrumbs are not used nearly as much these days as they once were. Remember? That list at

the top of your page showing you started at Home, then went to About, then went to Foot Corns Services, to Foot Corns Induction and down the yellow-brick road to Oz, and all of that was how you got to where you are now? From a web usability standpoint, if you already have good menu navigation (and for larger sites, both top-level navigation and section-level side navigation), a detailed footer menu, as well as a call-to-action or list of relevant links within your current page content—well, how many menu navigation options do you need? Is your site that confusing? And what about the added consumption of real estate? Some SEOs feel that breadcrumbs are another good opportunity for valuable anchor text.

Personally, I place emphasis on the aforementioned anchor text locations that you already have and have strategic control over. Additional links might dilute the more strategic anchor text, such as in your page text calls-to-action. At times you may need to consider such elements because of other SEO barriers. Perhaps you have a corporate site founded on an ERP, or an IT-heavy hosting platform template that is SEO prohibitive. In these cases, you need all the help you can get. So if, for example, you are not able to rename dynamic URLs, such as http://www.example.com/7=fekl?12#$J90n, but are able to use breadcrumbs, that might help your overall SEO.

Regardless, a goal for your new sitemap should be clean, simple navigation (and shallow navigation is a good SEO goal as discussed). But gauge your other IA and web marketing goals to help drive your new sitemap along with your SEO goals. Do you want to get visitors to the shopping cart more easily? Does the nav not do justice to the library of content resources customers are asking for?

A common IA upfront approach is to survey; customers, company representatives, or those completely unfamiliar with your site can all have valuable input. From this research you can glean priorities of content and functionality. But this is also the time to do your keyword research. Do the survey results suggest keywords and desirable web content in line with the keyword phrases being searched online? If not, why do you think there's a difference?

The last thing I'll say on this point is to serve your target audience. Your existing customers and staff know what they expect from your website, but this should be very different from that of a prospect visiting your site for the first time. Past visitors will know what they want from your site, where (roughly) to find it, where to find your contact info, and so on. Unique visitors (first-time visitors to your site) will not. So how can you attract them, incentivize them, and move them through your site to achieve the objective? Let your website plan identify and prioritize these aspects.

A common web marketing motif is the funnel; I like to discuss the digital marketing funnel with clients and how it applies to their website. Namely, your website goal is the bottom of the funnel. The primary start, when Google users search and

see your listing and click through to the home page, is the top or mouth of the funnel. From there, what is the optimal journey to filter visitors down to the spout or goal? What was the typical journey on your previous site? How can it be better? Keep in mind that this is also how to think like Google Analytics, which provides a funnel as part of its reports (which we'll dive into in Chapter 7), showing the most common paths web users took and how they aligned with your desired paths to the goal.

Don't look at those lost along the way as failures. Your website needs to serve those as well, and if it's any good, it already does. This is why I discuss having light, marketing intro copy to sectional entry pages, and deep industry copy deeper into the site. You will have web visitors who are not yet ready to purchase or call you; they have to think about it. Maybe they're new to your industry or the sales cycle and they need to learn more on their way up. Maybe they're reviewing info information from a number of different vendors to rate and compare before purchase. How are you serving these prospects? Do you have the web content to give them now and keep them coming back later? You always want to keep your funnel full, hence serve prospects at all levels. Take this conceptual figure to heart and into content and page planning for your new site (see Figure 3.8).

Website Funnel for Customer Journey
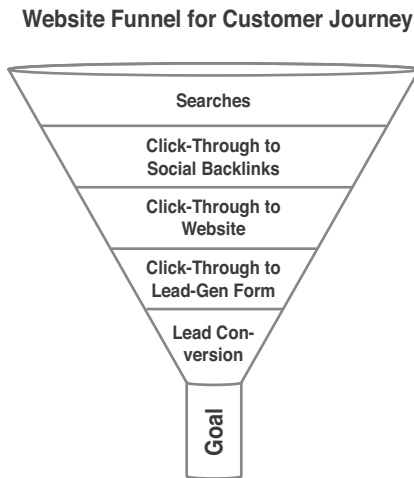
Figure 3.8   The Customer journey and website goals.

After you have objectives nailed down, it's time to get into the nitty-gritty of the sitemap design itself and all its fun issues. One issue with redoing your sitemap and site content is that typically the page-level URLs change as well. Again, this is a good thing; you have probably altered SEO keywords since your last website build. Your new page-level URLs should reflect these new keyword phrases, and you

should have all this in your updated SEO strategic planning. You just have to ensure that you have set up the new pages and their URLs with 301-redirects from your old website's indexed pages. 3-oh-what-what-whats? Relax. We'll get into implementing 301 redirects in Chapter 4.

The point here is that you want to be very clear about what existing pages you have coming up in Google for what keywords and what reader content. You'll want to know where to direct search engine bots, and your web visitors, to go instead. All this should be represented in your new sitemap documentation and SEO page forms. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let's identify what exactly this site you're creating is supposed to achieve.

Suppose you're a small business in B-to-B (business-to-business, in contrast to retail business-to-consumer) and you want your website to facilitate lead generation. How can a website serve you leads? By capturing web visitor contact info for follow-up or by inciting customers to contact you. One way to incentivize info capture is to offer industry-specific, valuable content that requires login registration. So if a business sells high-end display monitors, it might have a video demo on the future of 3D monitor technology for business or a whitepaper on rating and comparing functionality of monitors for video conferencing (which could require registration/login to view). A real customer would find this information valuable enough to provide contact information in order to access.

As smart as this lead-capture approach is, however, it doesn't help SEO. Spiders can't crawl to the other side of lead-generation forms, leaving valuable content out of the SEO and SERP spectrum. From an SEO perspective, you want your best, most demanded content optimized. But again this shows the balancing act of SEO when presented with alternative web roles, goals, and personnel.

Identifying the Different Roles of Web and Blogsites

Although the web has advanced tremendously since the 1990s, it's still worth referencing the basic web channel approaches from back then to identify the primary, driving purpose of your website features. Then, in the world of Web 1.0, it was fairly clear what type of website you were visiting by its functionality. The content was very often awful and confusing; navigation was all over the place; design (if there was any design at all) was "experimental"; and the brand name may not be mentioned anywhere close to the top, but the functionality would make itself known. It had to. Programmers then didn't have all the quick and easy resources to integrate every type of functionality under the sun. Page load times were a big issue—the Internet ran on slow, noisy modems, monitors were set to low resolution limiting display to 600x400 pixels, and browser frames were large and clunky, consuming more real estate than today. The costs of programming, inexperienced

programmers, the incompatibilities of web languages and browsers, and the limitations of HTML web frames all directed the primary focal functionality of sites. Sound like your own private circle of hell? Believe it or not in some ways the limitations were advantageous, in that they elicited clear paths of web purpose and use.

So what were those identifiable site functions? Let's see what we can come up with:

- **Directories:** If you were visiting a directory, you knew it. It was a listing full of company names, URLs, and maybe email addresses and phone numbers for these, with brief company bios (if you were lucky). There also may have been banner ads.

- **Brochureware:** A corporate website was typically what we called "brochureware"—marketing fluff copy about the company, bios, and contact info. Often with a "mandatory" 1990s Flash intro. Essentially, it was brochure copy converted into a website, hence "brochureware."

- **Ad campaign landing pages:** These were basically single pages on the backend of a domain that achieved hits from banner ads, redirects, or even magazine ads.

- **Black-hat SEO pages:** These pages could have a variety of forms, but would often be full of meaningless jibber-jabber content and advertising (and metatags, and more metatags!). They would perform their SEO tricks to capture search hits from the various search engines to prove advertising value. Because such sites ruled search results, two things happened:

  - Valid directories became more important and would receive more traffic for people to find what they were looking for. Some of these even survive today. Yahoo! still has many legacy directories (local, sports, and so on).

  - Google was birthed out of the chaos to reward valid content for better search results and the age when metatags ruled search was dead.

- **Online news and magazine sites:** These sites were either large, pushing the envelope and attempting to solve the profit game (such as *The Wall Street Journal*, which continues the fight to this day) or were merely online articles displaying banner ads.

- **Content Aggregator Portals:** For lack of a better term, even then there were content aggregator sites which, like RSS feeds today, would pull in a variety of content options (images and/or text displayed across different frames) for the viewer to choose among for a deep dive. Today we can see such choose-your-content options displayed in paper.li, visual sites such as Pinterest and Tumblr, and as mentioned, RSS readers.

- **eCommerce:** This was constantly being re-approached (in fact, an entire bubble was blown and burst). But out of this Amazon survived and continually contributed to the advent of social media (such as with its innovative consumer reviews, ratings, and recommendations engines). The majority of America's side startup eCommerce sites didn't fare so well.

- **Login Portals:** Bigger corporations could have login "portals" where members could login to stores of niche industry information, specific data, or applications.

- **Encyclopedias and dictionaries:** These were, as expected, lists of searchable content listings. Even back then the legendary *Encyclopedia Britannica* began its attempts to achieve revenue online. But Wikipedia also was created from this web content model and, as a nonprofit, content-collaborative, Web 2.0 "wiki," it killed other encyclopedias as an industry. One of the ancient Web 1.0 golden oldies, still full of frames and all is NetLingo.com, which I reference to this day.

- **Forums:** The predecessor to social media was the forum. Clunky, unattractive, text threads going in all directions—but they were great for social engagement, consumer content, prosumer (consumer turned producer) expert advice from the groundswell and pure hobby fun discussions. They remain extremely relevant today. People are still very active in forums, with similar online behavior. They show up in search results because they tend to be focused on a specific niche topic or industry, are full of content and various contributors, and achieve a lot of return visits and activity. Don't knock them as antiquated. There are forum plug-ins for WordPress sites and are worth considering if helpful to your audience, such as a tech support forum.

Ironically, today's website channels are not so clear-cut. Although we can physically walk into a book store, coffee shop, or grocery store and immediately know the difference among all three, today's websites are full of myriad functionality and user content options. If asked, "What is social media?" we may immediately cite social networking software such as Facebook or Twitter. But the truth is almost every website out there today is social media. Incorporating social sharing, social follow, blogs, RSS feeds, ratings, reviews, and commenting, the state of Web 2.0 is the era of web-wide social media. Is a blog a blog or a magazine? Is a website primarily a website or a blog? And guess what: WordPress is driving this crazy train. It easily integrates all of these and more into sites. These functionality options are all available even for the simplest blog sites via the free WordPress.com. So, go nuts! If you're reading this book, you're already halfway there.

Refer back to my breakdown on these in Chapter 1, "What Is SEO and Do I Really Need It?"; even today, such examination can be good consideration to identify the major functional purpose of your site to serve your audience. Even with a free blogsite on wordpress.com you can strategically architect this way, with website, content aggregation, and social functionality (see Figure 3.9).
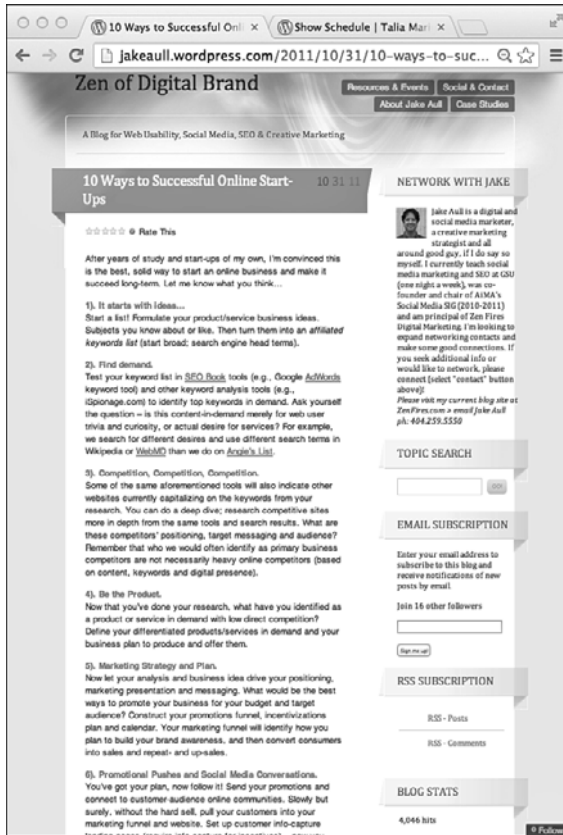
Figure 3.9   Free WordPress.com site with content tabs and social functionality.

After you've identified that the major purpose here is, for example, eCommerce sales, the navigation must be set up to conduct web visitors to your eCommerce goals for the site. If you want your site to maximize long-term customer retention sales, the site should accommodate this with customer program information or redemption vouchers. It doesn't always work out that there is alignment between SEO, IA, and the web marketing goals, but via linking, all three areas might find unity. How about that—what does that make this? Tri-partisan?

SEO Value and Authority-Based Architecture

When you have a sitemap near completion, you want to identify your linking strategy. Links have the most value when inbound from other websites. However, even within your own site, there is some value on which to capitalize. I recommend setting up a link wheel with calls-to-action going from (example) page: "home/bathroom-decor/ceramic-tile," to page: "home/kitchen-decor/tile-backboard," and from there to page: "home/outdoor-decor/barbeque-counter." Part of the reason for this is to input anchor text. Anchor links have text within the link itself (in contrast to just a spelled-out URL, or instead of saying "click here" you want to say "See our great bathroom decor ceramic tiles!"). This text can be valuable in SEO for the recipient page.

It is also valuable for the distribution of page-authority link juice. Just as the SEO analysis and SEO Book Tools assign authority scores to websites and specific web pages, you want to consider these valuation approaches within your own website linking.

I look at SEO architecture as a house of cards. The more cards you have in the mix is like the most pages of a website. You can set up the house of cards as a wide, endless structure that's only two levels tall. But your table to hold this house can be only so wide (like a website top-level menu can be only so wide). How equitable is weight-distribution at only two levels? The pyramid can't physically be too vertical and narrow; three cards can't be stacked on only three cards. So balance your weight and cards, a.k.a. web pages, optimally.

You should also be conscious of authority, yet another weight-balance issue. You can't have too many links on a page (regardless of website structure) because the spiders will be confused and devalue the page or links. The strongest, most crawl-friendly web page (like the home page) should be a good conduit for passing link juice (SEO page authority) to the next level of pages. But in most cases you don't just want to direct the web visitor primarily back to the home page (with a call-to-action, and so on). Why not? Let me count the ways:

- That's typically the page that comes up before all others in the search engine results page (SERP).
- Your web visitor probably visited there first.
- The home page is typically light, marketing intro copy that won't likely get your visitor closer to the goal.
- If the web visitor wanted to start the journey over, finding the home page is usually obvious. In other words, visitors already know how to get home—they just may not know how to find exactly what they're looking for.

- So give credit, link juice, to the pages of your site that may not achieve all the general web traffic, yet still contain valuable content.
- You want a call-to-action (CTA).

🔍 Tip

Composing the Call-to-Action

You always want good CTAs—on website pages, blog posts, social media, you name it—to keep offering the visitor more, and a place to go, closer to the web marketing and site goal. This is also a great place to integrate links with anchor text. For example:

"And that's not all! Like it? See more on accounting for dog groomers here!" or:

"Now that you know all about them, expose yourself to purchasing and shipping options for cold metal sutures!"

So for your on-page linking, how can you accommodate these, while addressing similar page interest and relevance for the reader? How to keep the crawlers in order and passing authority, without having too many links on the page? There's no perfect answer here; you just have to look at your house of cards.

Fortunately, WordPress has great vehicles for testing all this. Don't over test and constantly change your primary navigation, because it will confuse both crawlers and web visitors. But keep in mind that with WordPress you have categories, tags, archiving—all additional navigational options for your blog. And you can build your primary nav to integrate menu items easily for a specific category on-the-fly (for any blog posts you label with that category name; for example, under your top level Success Stories label, you could feature your content category Hardwood Replacements). Or you can link from one content page to a specific archive of blog posts by time period, common tag, or whatever.

Although these are interesting possibilities for testing visitor click throughs, don't forget the canonicalization and "noFollow" issues inherent here (as discussed in this chapter). The last thing I will say here is very important. If you suspect specific user-content interest, or if your testing reveals this, it is far better to structure such content yourself in the site with actual navigation and linking. If you architect the site purposefully, directing to specific, individual pages and blog posts based on related interest (for example, with calls-to-action at the bottom of a page or post's content), it will make sense to the spiders. You will also thereby fully allow the spiders to crawl the links and content (instead of going through automated, noFollow URLs).

How to sum up simply? After you know what the people want, and the spiders want, give it to them directly, within a clear structure, like a sturdy pyramid of cards.

Step 6: Assessing Content and Keyword Relationships

What To Do and What Not To Do for Web Content

Ask the right questions upfront: Can you produce enough good content for search engines and your audience on your WordPress site? If the company has existed for a while, you can find and repurpose old content—brochures, articles, white-papers, and ads, for example. Such content can be placed in the news/PR or even blog section and displayed with old dates to demonstrate history and longevity for the company and help SEO with content that can be indexed. If the content is not already electronic text, it can be scanned and run through optical character recog-nition (OCR) software to convert to electronic text. Going through old PR, awards, and news article research can even excite the client, rather like going through old family albums. Memories or laughter can be sparked by the discovery process. You don't have to clutter the site with this—just organize useful content and optimize it for full search engine potential.

You also might have the idea to share content or blogging with others. That's a good idea, but be careful—there are good SEO ways to do this and bad ways. We'll dive deeper into this in Chapter 5. However, there are still big "no-nos" for con-tent topics where search engines are concerned. The following is a paraphrased blog post from a group discussion on regularly debated content types in regard to search engine blocks. This is a good debate topic (try it at your next alumni event or Friday happy hour!), but realize that such content is dicey for search engines. It's best to stay away from these topics in your own blogging if you can:

- Viruses and malware.
- Leaked personal ID info (such as credit card numbers).
- Porn.
- Violent images (note that some people find this more debatable, and some sites are focused on this, such as news sites or activist sites).
- Hate content (some also find this in some cases pertinent; for example, to research hate messaging and groups).
- Hacking instructions.
- Bomb-making instructions.

- Pro-eating disorder sites (sites that teach people to enact anorexia or other disorders; some consider this helpful for research by parents or doctors).

- Satanism and Wiccanism (there seems to be a case for freedom of expression or religion for this type of content).

- Necrophilia (some feel this still has bearing for research as cultural phenomenon).

- Content farms (remember that this is bad for SEO, but the smart ones are hard to identify as such; gray hat is hard to nail down).

- Blackhat SEO boards—This might be helpful to research the spam tactics you should shield yourself against.

✉ Note

Want to Learn More?

For more, see the full discussion post: http://www.brafton.com/news/ matt-cutts-on-search-content-standards-sessf.

Associating Best Keywords to Web Pages or Blog Posts

After doing keyword research, I like to write a simple plan to associate each primary keyword with a specific web page or blog post on the existing site (assuming this is a rebuild rather than a new site with no content). After I've read over the existing site's content, I take my client-approved keyword list and attach one primary keyword each. The list looks something like this:

Keyword-to-Page List

- **Primary keyword phrase:** 'Custom crystal awards'
  For which web page: "Art Gallery"
  URL = example.com/glassblowing/glass-art-gallery

- **Primary keyword phrase:** 'Glass custom trophies'
  For which blog post: "Studio Tours"
  URL = example.com/custom-glass-blog/glassblowers-studio-tours

- **Primary keyword phrase:** 'Corporate awards trophies'

  For which web page: "Testimonials"
  URL = example.com/glasswork-testimonials

Step 7: Writing the SEO Page Forms

You've made it to the end of the chapter—we're down to the final strategic step before implementation! After you've identified your primary keywords (and in the case of existing website content, what keywords you want to plant within which web pages), you want to produce what I call an SEO page form for each new web page/blog post and its new primary keyword. This is a great thought practice. It's more work than it looks like, and once it is completed you have the primary needs identified to execute for SEO on your new site.

As discussed in Chapter 2, some of the WordPress plug-ins for SEO, such as Yoast, are so advanced that they provide many of the recommendations for these fields for you. So here's my advice: If you're optimizing your own site and you have the authority to make these decisions, this SEO page form can be a more fluid process. You can work between the form and the plug-in's recommendations to execute your on-page optimization (just be sure to dot your "t"s and cross your eyes). But it's still helpful to have this tangible checklist outside of the website plug-ins to reference and document.

If you are performing SEO for a client or superior, you should fill out all SEO page forms and get sign-offs of approval before executing. Because after you're "live," there can be huge implications. Suppose the company's legal team has required a brand name to be buried, changed, or removed from public view (on the page you're optimizing). Or suppose the company is suddenly removing the very service for which you're optimizing verbiage. In many business scenarios, communication problems occur on a regular basis. Try the best you can to prepare for those, for you and your colleagues. Some of the items on this form may not make sense yet; that's okay, you have the rest of this book to learn. So look over the form, use it or abuse it, and complete your SEO strategy so you can get on with the rest of the book and the fun part—doing the work itself! (How's that for a CTA?)

The SEO Page Form Example

SEO Page Form for Individual Web Content Page or Blog Post

To be used for individual website pages, blog posts or other social media posts. Note: Please reference or fill this form out with all applicable info, and get approval, before publishing important web content online.

ITEM	VISIBLE WEB PROPERTIES (To be filled in below):
Existing Web Page or Post URL or Description (web location):	Current URL = http://example.com/blog/current-page-text
Content Headline; H1 (should contain major keywords):	Internal Corporate Communications Video Production
Content Subhead; H2 (Use keywords if sensible):	If you're seeking help on producing your internal corporate video, start here.
Links (list any links to be in the post, & their descriptions. NOTE: always use keywords, never use "click here" when putting links in copy):	"Read more on our internal communications video productions" URL = http://example.com/next-page-link
Primary and Secondary Keywords for Tags (major keywords and/or locations to be programmed into tags on this page in the code)?	PAGE PRIMARY KEYWORD: Internal communications video productions company Atlanta SAME PAGE SECONDARY KEYWORD: Georgia production video company
Blog Post Categories (preferably 1 or 2 categories to a post referencing keywords)?	Communications Videos
Blog Post Tags (blog content tags should also reference keywords)?	Communications, video production, Atlanta video

SEO EFFECTS	BELOW FOR PAGE CODE
Primary Image/Vid (if applicable, list image filename & title/ description & alt tag to use):	• Filename: internal-communications-video-acme.jpg • Alt tag: "Internal communications video productions"
Secondary Images/ Vids (if applicable, list image filename & title/ description & alt tag to use):	• Filename: atlanta-video-communications-aaa.jpg • Alt tag: "Atlanta video communications"
More Images/Vids (if applicable, list image filename & title/ description & alt tag to use):	
Web Page or Post SEO URL (web location):	New URL = http://example.com/blog-communicate/internal-communications-videos
Browser Page Title (in the code; should contain major keywords):	Internal Corporate Communications Video Production
Content Meta Description (what is the text on this page or post about? This will be the hidden meta description in code. Use one primary keyword.):	Internal communications video productions company Roswell, GA.; Event Video is a production video company to create your business videos.
Microdata, Rich Snippets, and Auto Tags (This will be the hidden in code. Opportunities to use more keywords per page.):	Auto tags: "communications," "videos" Show 4.5* reviews rich snippets
Notes/Other:	

The following is an example version of an internal document you could use to start the video production process:

INTERNAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS VIDEO PRODUCTION

If you're seeking help on producing your internal corporate video, start here.

We recognize that internal communications video is one of many compelling tactics to help companies engage employees. We help our clients determine how and when to successfully use video production for communications strategies.

Our customers use video for business-critical information worldwide. Our video production solutions are an alternative to out-of-office meetings and trade shows. Office-based staff can access internal communications videos online and as needed when their schedules allow.

Ready to discuss your internal communications video production? Let's go! (*insert links to "Contact" page*).

Signature: _____

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