



Ann Arbor Real Estate Professionals

How To Be #1 In the Search Engines or for those who see the glass half empty... How to Waste Money and Get Banned from Them

Is your website receiving the attention it deserves? Is it bringing you the traffic and exposure that it was designed to do? A good website is a vital marketing tool, but as with any other initiative, utterly useless if no one knows about it.

The bottom line: if your site is not on the first page of search results, you are virtually invisible to your customers.

Go to Google and type in keywords “real estate” and Ann Arbor, if you haven’t already.

Aren’t you just a little bit curious how www.realestateone.com got to be #1?

Is it because they read this paper?

Ann Arbor’s Leaderboard



1. realestateone.com
2. realtor.com
3. mlive.com
4. davidsellsmichigan.com
5. annarbor.craigslist.org
6. mckinley.com
7. epoweredprofessionals.com
8. ann-arbor.mi.house.info
9. clickannarbor.com
10. piperpartners.com



1. annarbornomeistings.com
2. homesofannarbor.com
3. kathytoth.com
4. atlantismortgage.com
5. annarborcondoconnection.com
6. therealtytour.com
7. semihomes.com
8. newhomesource.com
9. toledohomesellers.com
10. reinhartrealtors.com

(as of March, 2007)

When agents say, "I need SEO!" what they are really saying is "I want more traffic, I want my phone to ring, I want more leads!" But SEO is not some snap-your-fingers magic that happens overnight.

If there is one undeniable truth about SEO, it is the fact that it is a time-consuming endeavor that requires consistent effort, creativity, specific market knowledge, clear understanding of optimization techniques, and yes, risks. It is a conscious effort done by someone who is able to set a well-defined target and find ways to get there.

In short, it's not rocket science but it's also not something to be trivialized.

We have encountered many times this "easy to do" attitude - to varying degrees. This ranges from clients that realize that SEO implies some work, but do not really understand how much, or the role that they have to play in it, to the naive expectation that, once set up, the website will automatically be "highly visible" to the search engines. In other words, a complete lack of knowledge that such a field of expertise may even exist.

Why You Should Read This

This is for agents and brokers that have their own websites and want more from them by improving search engine rankings. It does not intend to explain in detail how to build your SEO strategy. Such a subject can easily fill pages and, unless you want to get knee-dip into such effort, it may get really confusing or boring, especially if you're not the computer-savvy type.

Instead, the following pages attempt to only develop your awareness related to what SEO involves and why you should reevaluate your expectation that your website will land on the first pages of search engine results through some kind of magic.

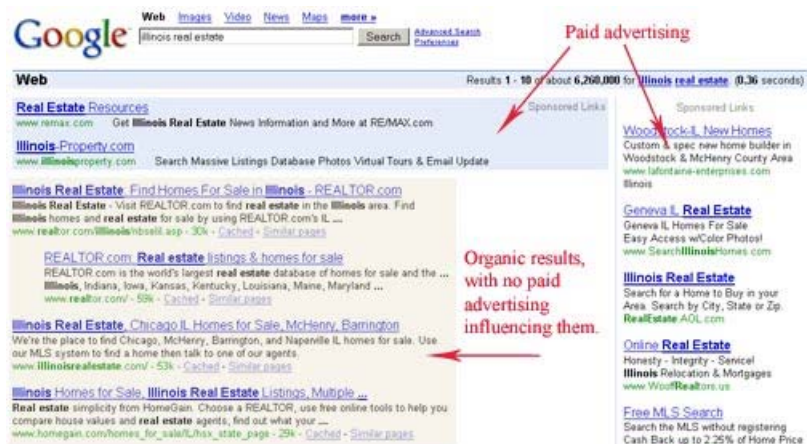
What you will learn:

- What is SEO?
- Why do I need SEO?
- How long does it take to see results?
- What does a SEO plan involve?
- Are there any shortcuts?
- What is my role in the process?
- How can I measure my results?
- Is SEO maintenance necessary?

1. What is SEO?

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is the part of the website optimization strategy that aims to making search engines easily find your website and place it among their top results. A well-designed SEO strategy will drive traffic to your site, as it will appear in the first pages of results for specific queries.

An alternative to SEO is a paid advertisement campaign. While we can help in that field too, this paper does not address this subject. What we are focusing on is that your website will become part of the top organic results, that account for 60-70% of users's clicks.



2. Why do I need SEO?

You have a website and want people to know about it -- so you need SEO. If you want your website to become an additional source of profit instead of an expensive little vanity product that you have for the sake of having it, you need SEO - period.

Implementing a good SEO strategy is a necessary part of your marketing solutions - and it may turn out to be the most important one. When your website appears among the top results for a popular search, the exposure that you get can bring fantastic results in the form of leads which we all know, is step #1 to listings and sales.

Provided your SEO strategy is effective, the money you spend on it will be one of your best advertising efforts. Unlike placing an ad in the newspaper, once your site has been “optimized” your SEO efforts last beyond the initial expense.

3. How long does it take to see results?

All clients that buy SEO services invariably ask this question. To their disappointment, much too often they are answered: it depends.

This is our answer too.

SEO is not a recipe with steps written in stone, which can guarantee results when followed correctly. It is rather a combination of marketing strategies, that, as all such strategies, involve risks and uncertainties. Success in the SEO area is much similar to success in your industry. It depends on how competitive the market is, how much effort or resources you are willing to put into it, and how fiercely your competitors are doing the same.

If any firm promises quick top rank results, run away. The reason for this: nobody but the search engines has complete control over the outcomes of a specific search. There are many rules that search engines use in selecting results, and few are made public. All a SEO professional can do is use techniques that are well known as effective, and study the behavior of successful (or unsuccessful) websites, in order to figure out what works and what does not.

All this aside, you should see results in about three months. Remember this is not a guarantee. How high your site will rank will depend on what you do and how sharp your competition is. Consider this a sporting event. Just because you land the triple axle, doesn't mean the gold medal. Play your own game, be patient and don't worry about being first.

Also remember that search engines are moody. They can be difficult to please, and you won't know for weeks or months the effectiveness of your strategy.

The natural conclusion is that what you should look for is not necessarily a fast rise among the first ranked sites, which no one can guarantee, but steady progression towards page one results. With patience and commitment, your website can end up somewhere near the top.

4. What does SEO involve?

Go to Google, and type in the words that describe the type of product, services or information that you are offering (e.g., "Ann Arbor" "real estate") Look at the number of results that Google comes up with. As of today, Google will tell you there are 1,040,000 results.

Your question should be, how did realestateone.com get to the top of the list?

If you're not on page one, then the conclusion is simple: You must be different than you are now. Different isn't always better, but better is always different. And if you're not on page one, then you must change something. But "better" does not come overnight. It takes work, commitment, knowledge, and beyond everything else - time.

The task may seem impossible but it's not. There are techniques known to work, and you can always find a way to outrun the others, but it takes patience. Don't let all this overwhelm you, but instead inject you with a dose of realism and motivation.

There are many SEO techniques that can yield an improved ranking for your site. Here are the basic ones, without which it is impossible to impress any search engine:

Valuable Content (#1 thing you need)

Value cannot be overrated. Random pages thrown into a messy design will not take you far. Without good content, ranking isn't all that important. So you must create copy that people want to read!

Search engines use sophisticated lexical analysis to evaluate the relevance of your content. Therefore, a great deal of time should be spent on substantial, useful, original and plentiful copy.

Size matters. More is more. If you want to compete in this industry your web site needs lots of content on many pages that people are willing to click through. Search engines know when someone connects, then hits the BACK button. If you don't have a home page that keeps visitors there, your ranking will suffer -- and of course it won't do much for lead generation either. Your site is often the first impression you will make with a new client so it's critical you gain their trust, immediately. Keep this same attitude when you're looking to impress search engines.

As you already know, is it necessary to research the market to learn what type of information your potential clients want. The content must be designed from the beginning according to some important rules, as relevance to the keywords that you want to target, web copy structure, natural flow through pages.

To create huge value with your content, reserve 15 minutes per day to write or find something new that adds value to your site.

Inbound Linking (must be meaningful)

Search engines endeavor to find the most relevant resources for a certain topic. If many other sites with similar or adjacent content link back to you, search engines will be inclined to consider you a valuable resource and give you a higher rank.

Getting other sites to link to you is a seriously important task. It involves a great deal of patience, research, networking, and marketing abilities.

Also, very important is your website's internal linking structure. From the search engines point of view, these links will serve both as hints for the content of your website, and as their facilitators in getting to pages with a not so obvious position on your website. The path to each page must be clearly defined.

Networking (should be your favorite)

As in the case of your other marketing strategies, your website needs to get as much exposure as possible. This involves being listed in directories, press releases, presence on relevant forums, participating in community blogs, creating relationships with credible and established entities or field experts whose acknowledgement can boost your own credibility.

There are many businesses that are complimentary to real estate. You come in contact with them every day. Any business that has a website should be a potential place where you can establish a reciprocal link relationship. **“You add me, I’ll add you” should be your default attitude.**

Metatags and keywords (are over-rated)

Metatags are elements that describe the content of your site. They are not visible to humans, unless of course you do Ctrl-U from any browser :) They must be relevant, accurate and cleverly populated with keywords that you are competing for. Choosing them is an art and a science as are all the other elements of a SEO strategy. Some people still think this is something to study. It’s just one step in the many.

There are many other things to consider when optimizing your site: forms and applications functionality, files size, navigation, design, usability etc. SEO is the art of fine tuning all these elements into a product that suggests professionalism such that visitors trust you and stick around to click things.

Tip: Always learn from others. If you perform a search and find a competitor is ranked well, do a Ctrl-U and see how they have structured their metatags. What keywords does RealEstateOne use?

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<meta name="keywords" content="Michigan Real Estate, Northern Michigan Real Estate, Detroit Real Estate, Michigan Home For Sale, Michigan Home, Real Estate in Michigan, Ann Arbor Real Estate, Michigan Real Estate Listing, Detroit Real Estate Agent, Michigan Vacation Homes">
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5. Are there shortcuts? (yes, some that will hurt you)

If all this seems too much for you, you may be tempted to go for shortcuts and fall for promises that nobody can deliver. As in every other aspect of your life, whenever something is too good to be true, the statement is usually correct.

We have seen this happening, from individuals or products that offer generous link exchanges to companies that require that you subscribe to their "guaranteed" services for one year, often because their techniques are not worth much. If you do pay a firm to do this, make sure their site is proof of their skills.

A bad SEO strategy can backfire. Beware of quick fixes, or of the unethical "black hat" strategies. Things like "link farms" can have the opposite result and cause search engines to penalize or ban you. Once you fall in disgrace it can be a long hard climb back up.

6. What can you do? (don't panic, take your time, but do it)

As you may have guessed, all the techniques above will take time to implement. You may soon discover that you will have to play a role in the process. You may come up with content following the specific request of your SEO team, or you may have to submit information. You may have to work on networking, a role much similar to the one that you play in your company's everyday exposure. You may have to allocate time and efforts to some basic training of the SEO team. After all, they must understand how you do business before marketing it.

Tip: You don't need to hire an expensive SEO firm to do this! As long as you have a strategy, you can pay high school students to do most of what needs doing.

7. How do you measure results? (slowly)

When paying for SEO services, they should come with periodical reports on the progress of your site. Such reports should take into consideration factors such as incoming links, traffic or rank, and give you a good enough feeling about the success or inadequacies of the SEO strategies followed. You should be reviewing your ranking stats at least once per month.

8. Once my site ranks well, is more work needed?

Yes! As you know, there are always sharks in the water. The balance of forces within your specific market (and on the internet) is constantly changing. Websites are added every day. However, it is your choice if you want to outsource this service, or transfer them to your in-house team, for such work as monitoring search engine rankings, traffic tracking, adding new content, website structure and navigation tweaking.

Develop a SEO strategy, then stick to it. Do your 15 minutes a day and the rest will fall into place.

Now that you know what to do, let us finish with our ten favorite ways to waste time and money. A few of these are so effective at this, you can jump your Google page rank to Zero!

10 Quick Ways To Kill Your Reputation with Search Engines

- 1. Be overly focused on keyword metatags** - They are important and are use, but not for page ranking. This trick ended years ago. Search engines rely visible text in your site. Do not ignore these, but don't think they are your bottom line.
- 2. Stuff keywords** all over the place and add some as invisible text. If you do this with any intensity, your Google rank will drop to zero... with almost no chance to recover!
- 3. Try to buy your way to the top with purchased links** - Ever end up at a page that's stuffed full of Google ads? Google doesn't think all too highly of that. So a good link is a real one that was put there because it has real meaning to the surrounding content... and to the humans too.
- 4. Keep it all to yourself (Be a link scrooge)** - This used to be "rank leak" thinking that if you have lots of outbound links you are less valuable. That's stupid. Lots of useful links are valuable to humans? This is how the search engines think now. Put GOOD links all over the place, just stay on-topic.
- 5. Engage in Meaningless Link Swap** - In the old days you could pay some company with no mailing address \$19 a month to have your domain name sprayed all over their millions of crappy web pages. Now, that's a really bad idea. Never swap with anyone that doesn't have real value for your human visitors. Your mantra: I wan't good traffic
- 6. Duplicate Your Content** - Less is now more. Again in the old days, search engines were not so clever. If you had 1000 pages to crawl, you might have been ten times as good as someone with 100. If you have 1000 pages of content, it better be good stuff as your overall score will be factored by that number.
- 7. Use Session IDs on your URLs** - Put your parameters in a cookie. Live with the fact that 3% of the paranoid surfing public disables cookies. If your URLs look like something from NASA or the CIA, you're not going to impress any search engines.
- 8. Use lots of Flash to look "really cool"** - Flash is one of the biggest rank killers because it's invisible to search engines. I think there should be a search engine of "most invisible sites" so we can easily find all the Flash maniacs out there.
- 9. Use lots of Javascript to dazzle them mouseover fireworks** - If you're Pink Floyd, accomplished artist or a movie production company, you can ignore this one and #8. Everyone else, get with it!
- 10. Try your hand at cloaking. Go ahead, we dare you!** - Ever see an ad that "PROMISED" to launch you to the top of page 1 overnight. This is a pure SCAM now with a nasty downside: Cloaking is a great way to end up being blacklisted by every search engine in town, and in this case, it's a really small world. (because search engines share references, just like we do)



Confused? Don't worry!
Call or email us and we'll tell you what to do next

seo@apin.com
734.622.0231