

SEO, Web Design & Your Software Firm: The Essentials

*Everything you need to know about search engine optimization
and web design best practices for software firms.*



Search Engine Optimization & Web Design: A Partnership

Search engine optimization cannot live without great web design. Great web design cannot get exposure or attract the right audience without search engine optimization. The two must truly go hand-in-hand to create an effective online web presence. As a software company looking to get your business and services in front of new prospects, it's essential to create a strong online presence by using effective SEO practices and building an engaging website.

In this eBook, we are going to take a look at whether you need a new website to improve your SEO, how to partner with the right website agency for great SEO, where responsive design sits with search engines, and how SEO informs your web design.

Do You Need a New Website?

Search engine optimization starts with your website. It includes many other factors as well, but a properly optimized website is where you should begin. A major SEO component of your website is the actual design and structure. Now, you may be asking, "Does my company really need a new website?"

At its core, a website is the digital face of your software firm and often the first step a prospect takes in evaluating your firm. Did you know that it's actually fairly common for potential clients to determine if your business is credible and trustworthy based on your website design alone? At a minimum, your website design needs to create a great first impression and earn the trust of your potential clients.

It can be tough to determine whether your business needs a website design overhaul. How do you determine if now is the time for a re-design or launch of a new website? We've put together a simple checklist that you can go through to see if your existing website design is maximizing your ROI and positively impacting your SEO.

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Complete the B2B Website Checklist

Is Your Current Website...

- Showcasing accurate, up-to-date information?
- Properly branded for your business?
- Reflecting the goals and mission of your organization?
- Building up the credibility of your products and services?
- Accurately showcasing your expertise?
- Consistent with the quality standards of your business?
- Hosting engaging and helpful content?
- Addressing common client questions?
- Complying with SEO best practices?
- Showing up in search engine results for prospects?
- Responsive or mobile optimized?
- Getting traffic from visitors that fit your ideal client profile?
- Integrated with social media sites like Facebook and Twitter?
- Able to showcase video content?
- Increasing the reach of your business?
- Using effective calls to action (CTAs)?
- Generating and capturing leads for your sales team?
- Easy to update and maintain?
- Inviting and easy to navigate?
- Creating a great experience for clients and prospects?
- Acting as a useful resource for existing and prospective clients?
- Equipping your business for success?
- The best possible digital face of your business?

Did You Answer “No”?

If you answered “No” to any of the questions on the checklist, it’s time to take a serious look at your website design. Your clients and prospects have certain expectations of your company’s digital presence. A simple website with 2-3 pages of content won’t help a prospective client learn more about your business, your software services or products, or what differentiates you from other software companies out there.

Today, if a website design isn’t responsive, user-friendly, informative, and an effective lead generator, then it’s not adding value to your organization. A weak digital presence sends the message that your company is outdated and behind the times, not to mention that people won’t see your website when they perform a simple Google search.

My Website Needs a Redesign, Now What?

The great news is that there are many things you can do to overhaul your website design, properly implement SEO best practices, and increase the ROI of your website. If you have worked through the Website Design Checklist and discovered the weak points in your current website design, you can create a concrete strategy for updating your digital presence. After you have determined your requirements and identified the decision makers, you can start looking for a qualified web design firm that has experience creating websites for software firms.

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How to Choose a Website Design Firm

The decision has been made. Your firm has finally decided to revamp or launch a new website that accurately represents your cutting-edge services and is built with a strong SEO foundation. What next? As a busy software company, you probably don't have the time to manage all the procedures and processes that go into building a custom website from the ground up AND hire an SEO Manager. Your best option is to hire a qualified website design firm to handle the day-to-day activities of building an effectively optimized website.

Choosing a qualified website design firm can seem like an overwhelming task, but with a little preparation before you start, it can be a breeze. Once your company has decided to move forward with building a new website and opted to hire a website design agency with an SEO background, there are several questions you can answer to streamline the selection process.

- **What Do You Expect From a Website?**

Although a website may act in a variety of capacities, it's best to narrow it down to one major objective so you can choose the proper design.

- **Do You Have a Budget and a Price Range?**

The phrase, "You get what you pay for" definitely holds true when it comes to website design and effective SEO implementation.

- **When Do You Need the Website Completed By?**

Since your website is the online face of your company, set attainable timelines that work for the decision makers in your organization and allows enough website design time to create a professionally branded product that integrates SEO best practices.

- **Do You Need Cutting-Edge Technology?**

You don't need to layout all the different tools you need as long as you have a good idea of what type of technology you want in your website.

- **Can You Look at a Portfolio of Software Websites?**

A firm's portfolio is a great way to get a good idea of what types of designs the firm creates and what other software firms have used in their designs.

- **Do They Have Experience with Software Websites?**

Select a website design firm that has experience working with software firms, as it will streamline the process and they will understand your challenges, needs, and your market.

- **Does the Web Design Include SEO Best Practices?**

The structure and coding of your website has a large impact on a website's SEO. Working with a web design agency familiar with SEO best practices for copywriting, structure, development, and coding ensures your website is set up for success.

- **Are Content and Copywriting Included?**

Ask the website design firms you interview if SEO copywriting is included and to what extent.

- **What Is the Maintenance After Launch?**

Ask what happens after the website is launched. Find out if there is any post-launch monitoring and maintenance.

Making the Final Selection of a Website Design & SEO Agency

The process to choose an agency should be a fun process for your company as you get to see all the possibilities of a new website for your organization. By answering the questions laid out here and gathering the necessary information you need to get accurate proposals, the process can be a breeze. The final decision on an agency may not be easy, but with due diligence, you should be able to find the right fit.

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Responsive Web Design & SEO for Google

Responsive web design is not just a buzzword in website design or a passing trend to ignore. Rather, it's the new standard in professional web design and search engine optimization.

What Is Responsive Design?

First, it is not synonymous with mobile optimized design. Responsive design is called “responsive” because it responds to the device used to search the internet. All of the content, images, videos, and structure of the website remains the same on any device but shrinks or expands to accommodate the screen size. In other words, a desktop user and a smartphone user see the same website, but as a different size.

A mobile optimized website isn't “responsive” in the same sense as a responsive website. A mobile optimized website is a secondary website that web visitors are directed to when they access a website on a mobile device, such as a smartphone. A business with a mobile optimized website has two websites, a desktop website and a mobile website. The websites are independent of each other and need to be updated separately.

Google Says Yes to Responsive

Google has the largest share (67%+) of online search by a huge margin. While Bing and Yahoo are also contenders, their market share is nowhere near the amount of market Google owns. This is why so many web developers, marketers, and SEOs follow the guidelines and best practices created by Google. Google not only says that responsive design is great, it recommends responsive design as the top website configuration.

Why Is Responsive Design Preferred?

There are a number of reasons that Google recommends responsive design for websites. One of the main reasons is that a responsive website has only one URL and the same HTML across all devices. This makes it easier for Google to bot crawl the website, index the pages, and categorize them according to its algorithm. Anything you can do to make your software firm's website easier to crawl will positively impact your search engine rankings.

Better User Experience

Google continually talks about improving the user experience. A responsive website creates a better user experience because the website is viewable on any device the user is employing to search online. A website that conforms to the needs of each user reduces the bounce rate of a website because users don't get frustrated and leave a site. Website visitors who can easily access the information on a website enjoy a great user experience.

A responsive website design also makes sharing links with other users easy. If a user shares a link to a website from their mobile device, a desktop user who clicks on the link will see a website that is expanded to fit the desktop screen. Anticipating the needs of your website visitors always creates a better user experience.

The Mobile Movement

Statistics show mobile web browsing outranks desktop web browsing. This means that people, including professionals, are using mobile devices to access web sites. Also, it's common for people to use multi-screen browsing, meaning they may access a website on desktop, then a laptop, and then later on a smartphone. A responsive website ensures that a website design for your software company looks great and functions well on every device a user employs to search online, including smartphones.

The bottom line is when web users are happy, able to view content and images, and get the information they want and need, then Google is happy. A responsive website design is an effective way to create a great user experience while improving your search engine optimization too.

SEO Tips for Web Design

For many software firms, SEO and web design are often considered two separate but equally important entities. However, to be effective, they need to work as a unit. We've put together SEO tips that specifically apply to web design.

Responsive Web Design (Because Google Says So?)

Ok, so implementing responsive web design (RWD) should not simply be done just because Google says so. It should be implemented because it makes for a fantastic user experience. If users can't view, navigate, read, or share your website, you should just pack it in right now. Responsive web design allows users on any device (smartphones, desktops, laptops, tablets, smartwatches) to easily view and navigate around your website.

In addition to being great for SEO and for users, RWD is great for your software company. Why? Because you won't have to worry about duplicate content being indexed on your mobile website and you only need to update one website. It may have a larger investment upfront in building the website, but in the long run, responsive web design saves valuable time on engineering, updating, and managing the website.

Site Structure (Parallax and SEO)

You may or may not have heard the term "parallax" before. If you have, then you know it's a popular trend in web design since it makes a website a visual piece with depth and moving elements. The upsides are that it looks great, you control the path of the visitor, and you can carefully tell your story through depth and moving images. The downsides are that it may not accommodate much written content. As Parallax design is engaging and innovative, there are several options for addressing these SEO issues, such as creating internal pages and using proper semantic mark-up.

If SEO is a priority, consider website structures that accommodate users and search engines. A best practice for SEO web design is to have one row of top-level navigation. These tabs address the main topics of interest for your clients. The main takeaway for web designers optimizing for search engines (and users) is to keep it simple and straightforward. All sub-pages should relate directly to the main tab they fall under.

Meta Data (It's Like a Map)

The best way to explain the importance of meta data is the map analogy. Meta data (titles, descriptions, tags, keywords, etc.) gives specific directions to users and to search engines. Meta titles tell search engines and users what the page is about and meta descriptions give a snippet of information about the page. Meta data should be included and completed for each page. Think of the user and the search engine (think keywords) when completing this information. A homepage meta title should not simply say "Home." Instead, it should give information about your software firm and what the webpage discusses. As an example, the Bop Design homepage meta title says who we are and what we do: B2B Marketing Firm, San Diego Website Design.

Usability (Form & Function = SEO)

That might be a simplified formula to describe the essentials of a web design's usability, but it is the foundation of SEO. Here is where sacrifices must be made. Large-scale images, fancy script and Flash can make a website really "pop," but that's only when they are viewed on a desktop with all the right plug-ins. When it comes to the functionality of your software firm's website, some of these things don't make sense since it may turn away visitors or not even appear for other visitors.

When considering web design for SEO, load times, legible font, flash and pop-ups are all relevant. Optimized web designs have low website load times, show legible font to any visitor, exclude flash, and do not host any pop-ups. It's important to consider these things when building the website design to ensure a fluid, cohesive design that positively contributes to search rankings.

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Bounce Rates & Navigation

The average bounce rate for a website hovers around 40.5% (KISSmetrics). Search engines reward sites that have lower bounce rates because a bounce rate is an indication that the user is finding the right or the wrong content.

The web design and navigation of a software services website can have a significant impact on bounce rates. Simplifying navigation and providing a clear path to specific content can significantly improve bounce rates. Again, page load time also affects bounce rate since visitors don't have the patience to wait for a page to load. Thinking practically about how a user will navigate through a website and making design choices that minimize page load time can pave the way for great SEO.

Web Design Is for the End User

It's easy to overlook SEO when designing a website. There are so many different factors to consider that SEO can be forgotten. However, great web design includes SEO best practices, because at its core, SEO creates a great user experience.

Learn more web design tips by visiting the [Bop Blog](#), or [contact us today](#) to discuss what we can do for your software firm.

