

PR needs to embrace SEO's key role

When I started a new position as a business development director at a Web design firm, my first order of business was to analyze the industry and see where my time and efforts would best be spent.

Upon doing research to identify PR agencies that would be good candidates for strategic partnerships, I ran across the Media, Myths & Realities survey by Ketchum and the University of Southern California Annenberg Strategic Public Relations Center.

I was taught to believe everything I read in print, so I fell for the research that stated: "Put word of mouth and search engine optimization strategies in place or miss out on tremendous potential for audience reach and sales."

I thought, "Hey this is great research that supports my cause of PR companies creating SEO Web sites for their clients."

As I started calling local PR firms, I repeatedly heard, "Nope that's not what we do. We have no need for your services."

I thought I would at least get a bunch of administrative assistants saying, "Sure, send over a CD [to

keep] on file if we need some custom SEO Web design." But apparently nobody has bothered to notify the PR industry of this new shift to SEO.

What gives? I thought a strategic alliance of PR and Web design would be a perfect match that would help elevate a client's presence and produce a cohesive brand.

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This isn't new technology – SEO Web design should be an integral part of every PR campaign.

When I asked a colleague why PR agencies haven't embraced the SEO design revolution, his reply was a bit cynical. "PR agencies do what the client asks them to do," he said. "They are not paid to come up with innovative online solutions. Most do what... they know."

Maybe PR firms hold misconceptions about SEO and Web design. After all, even the Wikipedia description is vague: "SEO is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a Web site from search engines via 'natural' ('organic' or 'algorithmic') search results for targeted keywords."

Many different interpretations exist on how to drive these keywords and a ton of snake oil salesmen don't help the cause.

Boardrooms everywhere heatedly discuss SEOs. It's a Google world out there and the best thing PR pros can do is to get their clients to come up on that first page in a Web search. The second best thing is to keep them there.

I think great PR initiatives should be coupled with SEO design to build upon each other. Web design is like a good foundation in a home. If the foundation is strong and well made, it will have more value when the rest of the house is built over it. ■

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