



Seasons India is a fashion garment house in Santa Cruz, Mumbai. In early 2002, the company realised that it had a great website (www.seasonsindia.com), with extremely good content related to women and fashion. However, it did not have enough people visiting the website. After some research the company found out that Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) could get the required exposure for the website.

“We did a search and came across Milind Mody and eBrandz (www.ebrandz.com), a Search Engine Optimisation company based in Mumbai. We did a check on their credentials and were very impressed. After that, we had a few meetings with them where they explained to us the shortcomings of our website from a search engine point of view. One of the most interesting comments was related to our website programming. They explained why search engines were not able to read content from our website. If they could not read content from our website, then naturally they would be unable to rank our website,” explains Kalpesh Patel, CEO, Seasons Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. Incidentally, eBrandz is a Mumbai-based company that is one of the world leaders in SEO—an Indian company winning on the global playing field.

Can Your Customers Find Your Product First On The Net

What do you do when you want information about where to procure a product or service? You go online and search using Google, Yahoo! or other such search engines. That is exactly what your customers will also be doing. Don't you want to be there on the first page of search results when they search for keywords relating to the product or service you offer? It's time to learn about Search Engine Optimisation and let the world know you exist.

This was followed by an in depth analysis of the Seasons India website, and eBrandz came up with recommendations and a strategy to optimise the website for search engines. Seasons India started implementing the strategy and the changes in website code that eBrandz recommended. They also started closely monitoring their website traffic and statistics.

“What followed was unimaginable for us! We had traffic of 30,000 unique visitors in a month. This increased to 1,80,000 unique visitors per month within the next six months, and currently we have about 2,50,000 unique visitors per month. This is comparable to the traffic of eBay India. And that, without any print or television advertising!” exclaims Patel.

“This also helped us a lot in increasing sales through our website, and in the overall growth of the company. It’s difficult to sell garments on the Net because of the ‘touch and feel’ and ‘colour matching the skin’ issues. Also the measurements of customised Indian ethnic garments are always a challenge. However eBrandz worked extensively with us and referred us to some of the sites that had solved these issues. Gradually sales started shooting up and in the last accounting year, we did online sales of nearly Rs. 3 crores. And it’s still showing a 10 per cent increase month on month.”

So, what is Search Engine Optimisation that helped Seasons India so phenomenally? Sounds like magic, doesn’t it? SEO is a systematic, inexpensive, thought-intensive procedure that helps a website get a higher ranking in search engines. In simple words, effective SEO makes sure that your page appears within the top results when somebody searches for related keywords on Google, Yahoo,



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MSN, or other such search engines. In this cyber age it is as, or more effective a marketing tool than print and television advertising.

When you want to market a product online, you have three popular choices. One, register with an online directory; two, advertise online using MSN India Ads, Google AdSense, and other such advertising services; or, optimise your website so that people can find it the moment they search for related keywords. The last option is by far the most effective. Because in this cyber

age, people habitually go to a search engine the moment they need any information. If I wanted to order a salwar kameez online, I would go to Google and type in ‘salwar kameez’. Thanks to SEO efforts by eBrandz and Seasons India, the first site I would see is Seasons India. (Try it. Seasons India really is the first on Google’s search results for the key phrase ‘salwar kameez’ and for several such key phrases relevant to Seasons India).

If you searched for, ‘electrical parts for Maruti’ on Google or MSN, you would have seen Pramod Maruti Parts (www.pramodautomotiveparts.com) displayed as the first result. No points for guessing how this happened. Yes, they went in for SEO too. Based in New Delhi, Pramod Maruti Parts has been a name to be reckoned with in the automotive components industry for over a decade.

Most websites on the Internet today, are just an added expense to the companies without bringing in anything in return. Not wanting that to be the case, Pramod Maruti Parts asked Magic Infomedia (www.magicinfomedia.com) to promote their website in the major search engines and directories. The challenge was to list and achieve top ranking with their most popular keywords to get clients and business e-mails/enquiries from the overseas market. They wanted their website to rank above their competitor’s website



Seasons India website



e Brands website



Pramod Maruti Parts website



Magic Infomedia website

in major search engines. Since it was a relatively new site with low Web traffic, Saurabh Juneja of Magic Infomedia was faced with the challenge of starting the SEO activity from scratch.

The hard work paid off, though. "Within one-and-a-half months, our website got listed successfully in all major search engines and directories with top positions for the important keywords and key phrases. The ranking on major search engines such as Google, Yahoo and MSN also improved phenomenally. Unique visits to our site increased and as a result we have been able to take advantage of interactive opportunities to reach our target market," explains Kamini, Pramod Maruti Parts' export coordinator.

“Don't bother talking to me about it”

If you can get an SEO expert like eBrandz or Magic Infomedia to do the job for you, then why would you have to know about SEO? The truth is that not all SEO experts are as ethical as eBrandz or Magic Infomedia. They could indulge in a lot of malpractices and shortcuts to achieve top rankings for your website and it is you who would suffer. Search engines are smart. If they detect the slightest malpractice, your site will be de-listed. Let that sink in... your website will never be listed by the search engine at all.

Open Google and search for 'BMW Germany.' In addition to the BMW International and BMW Germany pages, you will also see pages titled "German BMW banned from Google", "Google de-lists BMW Germany", and more. What's this all about? In February 2006, BMW Germany adopted certain unethical practices to get their site a

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Export Coordinator, Pramod Maruti Parts, New Delhi

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high ranking on Google. A few bloggers got wind of this and publicised it. When Google found out, they served BMW Germany the "Google Death Penalty". The site was assigned a page rank of zero. Essentially, it was de-listed. It was only after BMW apologised to Google and promised that this would never happen again that the site was listed again. However, the harm has already been done. Today you see all those damaging news items with the BMW Germany site on the first page of search results.

Some basic knowledge of SEO would help even when you are working with ethical SEO experts.

Well, we are sure we have set you thinking about the importance of SEO. And that a zillion questions have arisen in your mind now, right from how a search engine works to how your site can be optimised to rank high in all major search engines. Would you be able to contain your curiosity till next month? We are going to present a technical overview of search engine optimisation (spiced up with opinions from SEO experts like Milind Mody of eBrandz and Saurabh Juneja of Magic Infomedia). Or are you off to search for 'SEO' on your favourite search engine? ■

—Janani Gopalakrishnan is a freelance writer and columnist based in Chennai. She writes on a variety of topics, her forte being business and technology.