

8 SEO Strategies to Increase Traffic

Search Engine Optimization
Recommendations for the
Financial Services Industry

A William Mills Agency White Paper



Prospective evaluators and buyers of products and services within the financial services industry increasingly use the Internet to identify and evaluate providers. Research reports indicate that up to 70 percent of B2B buyers perform two to three rounds of online research to assist with their product selection process. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the term used to describe the processes involved in elevating a company's position, or page rank, on a search engine's results page for a keyword that relates to a company.

A previous report from Forrester Research established SEO as the most important source of targeted traffic business owners can have for their websites and expect this trend to continue despite the growing popularity of other traffic sources like social networks and other channels.

In some cases, SEO may not be relevant for your particular business. There are several critical factors that you should consider before you pursue an SEO project. These factors include the size of your market, the level of brand name awareness for your company's products and services and the number of people who actually look for your products and services using a search engine. We have several clients who only market to the top 10 banks or loan servicing organizations. Several of our clients are well-known market leaders for a particular product or service, having invested considerably over many years in establishing a

leadership position within the market and will always be on a short list of vendors. Some of our clients simply find that very few people search for the keywords associated with their company's offerings – maybe due to the specific buyers or the small size of the market opportunity.

The majority of our clients, however, operate in markets with well-defined product categories that receive hundreds or thousands of search engine requests every month. For example, Google reports a U.S. monthly average of 390 searches for "loan origination software," 1,300

searches for "remote deposit capture," and 260 for "image processing software." The problem is that your company probably never shows up at the top of the list for your key search terms, eliminating an opportunity for creating awareness and interest within prospective buyers and being contacted by those who are actively looking for a solution.

To remain competitive in today's ever-changing digital marketplace, businesses must invest and implement SEO tactics as part of their overall digital marketing. To be successful, follow our recommendations and best practices for improving website page rank for your keywords.

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Identify the
Keywords and
Phrases Most
Important for
Your Business

1 The first step is to put yourself into the minds of your customer. What words would they use to find a company like yours? These words and phrases are often well-known product categories, but might also be extremely competitive and used by hundreds of companies. Consider adding qualifiers to the base keyword phrase, often called developing “long-tail keywords.” For example: “mobile banking” might also have the following alternatives: mobile banking software, mobile banking apps, or mobile banking check capture.

You also need to think through all of the potential variations on the words and phrases, especially as it relates to identifying the problem keywords associated with a topic. Examples such as “how to streamline loan approval processes” or “rdc risk assessment” might be very relevant keywords associated with a general product category. While average search volumes for some of these

individual keywords may be low, these terms may be the terms that highly qualified prospects actually use while digging for information.

Look at top performing competitor sites and review their targeted keywords and use these as a catalyst to brainstorm other opportunities.

Once you build a good starting list, research just how often these keywords are actually searched within Google, Bing and Yahoo. Google dominates the search engine market, owning a market share in excess of 65 percent over Yahoo and Bing. A simple, and free, keyword analysis will tell you which words are important and help you prioritize your list.

Once you have completed your analysis, prioritize the list of keywords and phrases, based on both each term’s search volume and overall relevancy, and focus on your top 10 to 20 phrases.

Broad Keywords		VS	Long-tail Keywords	
+	General to your business High search volume Lots of competition		Specific to your business Low search volume Little competition	+
	= These are difficult to rank & get traffic for. The visitors from these keywords are less likely to become leads.		= These are easy to rank & get traffic for. The visitors from these keywords are more likely to become leads.	



Content is King

2 Arguably the most important SEO tactic is publishing quality content on your website that provides insights about your area of expertise while incorporating your priority keywords. Keywords need to be used in page headlines and body copy as well as the meta titles and descriptions.

While it is important that your content include your keywords and phrases, it is also important to create valuable content that attracts, acquires, and engages the desired target audience. This content should educate customers and potential customers rather than simply promote products or services. Today's website content needs to be more informational and conversational, pointing to solutions rather than products. This helps potential customers feel more informed and intelligent about your benefits and key capabilities.

Google's Hummingbird algorithm provides more highly targeted results based on the meaning of the entire search phrase, rather than each individual keyword. This will have a big impact on SEO moving forward as the results displayed will be based on overall context of the copy. This will force organizations to focus more on providing high quality content that will be valuable to their prospects.

Ensuring you are producing quality content to develop meaningful interactions with users can be measured in a variety of ways. Search engines can measure how long users stay on your page; did they click-through to your site but then immediately bounce back to the results to try something else; or how long viewers are spending on your content in relation to similar content on other sites, all these help determine the value of your content.



Blogging

3 Constantly changing and updating content on your website is also critical. Posting new content helps increase your search engine visibility and generate more leads and sales for your business. A powerful tool that

helps accomplish this is a blog. Blogs are useful because each post becomes another Web page of high-quality content, and every Web page is another opportunity to rank well for a specific search a potential customer is conducting.

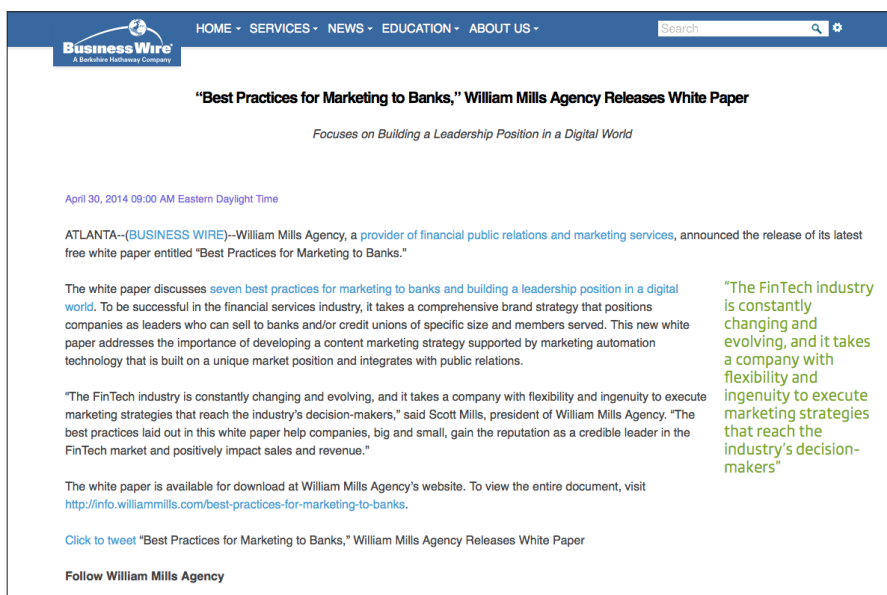
Public Relations Should Be Your Vehicle for Creating Inbound Links

4 Next to your content itself, inbound links from credible websites that point back to your site are probably the next most important ingredient in a successful SEO effort. Distributing your press releases over a professional wire service provides broad access for your company's news to thousands of credible news and industry websites. Your press releases and the associated industry sites and social media networks that repost them, are important allies in your SEO campaign, as they create the signposts back to your website that tell the search engines that your company's information is important.

However, for this linking strategy to be successful, press releases must be written for SEO, meaning that search engine spiders can find and rank a website using your priority keywords, which happens by including keywords appropriately in titles and throughout the body of the press release. Hyperlinks should also be included; while they will not be "counted" by Google's search algorithm, they still provide important direct access to your website.

Every press release should include several keywords with hyperlinks to various pages within your site. Link individual products and services written in your release to specific product or service Web pages and not just to your homepage. In addition, adding calls-to-actions (CTAs) that point to landing pages, which can be created using today's inbound marketing automation software, will have a positive impact. Using a range of multi-media, photos, illustrations and video as a part of your traditional press release are also important tools that raise visibility of your content.

Authorship is now also an important element to consider. Having the ability to link any content online that is created by the same company or author helps enhance the overall SEO strategy.



The screenshot shows a Business Wire press release. The header includes the Business Wire logo and navigation links: HOME, SERVICES, NEWS, EDUCATION, ABOUT US. A search bar is also present. The main title of the release is "Best Practices for Marketing to Banks," William Mills Agency Releases White Paper. Below the title is a subtitle: "Focuses on Building a Leadership Position in a Digital World". The date and time are listed as April 30, 2014 09:00 AM Eastern Daylight Time. The body of the release starts with "ATLANTA--(BUSINESS WIRE)--William Mills Agency, a provider of financial public relations and marketing services, announced the release of its latest free white paper entitled 'Best Practices for Marketing to Banks.'". It then discusses the white paper's content, mentioning seven best practices for marketing to banks and building a leadership position in a digital world. A quote from Scott Mills, president of William Mills Agency, is included: "The FinTech industry is constantly changing and evolving, and it takes a company with flexibility and ingenuity to execute marketing strategies that reach the industry's decision-makers". A link to download the white paper is provided: "The white paper is available for download at William Mills Agency's website. To view the entire document, visit http://info.williammills.com/best-practices-for-marketing-to-banks." At the bottom, there is a link to tweet the release and a follow button for William Mills Agency.

Social Media

5 The rules used to calculate your page rank changed with the emergence of social media, which is now a critical component of your search engine rankings. With the advent of social media sites, Google, Bing and Yahoo are now looking at your presence within social media sites in the calculation of your page rank. Implementation of Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter strategies can be used to effectively move your site from the bottom to the top of the page rank listings. Today's marketplace calls for a more dynamic, engaged, and interactive environment, and social media is the only place this can happen.

Using social media in a professional manner serves as a way to promote the sharing of and enhance the

visibility of your keyword-rich content while also ensuring better search engine results.

Sharing information, such as a blog post, on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn, enables your followers to also share that information in real time. To encourage sharing, add appropriate share buttons to pages. This will help drive traffic to and interest in your website. Even if a post, Tweet or a LinkedIn update doesn't boost your overall ranking, it can introduce you to a blogger who links to your post, which does carry search engine weight.

However, in order for this strategy to work you must be active and routinely post new, relevant content. This can be the fastest way to multiply your online presence.



Be Sure Your Website Can Be Read By The Search Engines

6 Search engines use programs known as "spiders, bots or crawlers" to read the content on your site and determine the relevancy of the site to various keywords. These programs have sophisticated algorithms for developing your page rank and include a number of factors that we have mentioned including meta data, page content and links to and from your site. Meta data is HTML

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code that is invisible to viewers of Website pages, but is used as a kind of table of contents by the search engine spiders and crawlers. Each Web page should have a distinct title and description as well as a list of relevant keywords and phrases. You should target one or two keywords per page. A common mistake many companies make is to list twenty or thirty keywords and to use the same keywords for every page.

Google, Bing and Yahoo Sitemaps

7 Google, Bing and Yahoo sitemaps are not to be confused with the sitemap listed on your Web site. These are specific bits of XML code, with specific protocols, that must be submitted to Google, Bing and Yahoo. They help guide the page crawlers through your site and serve as navigation guides.

Make Your Website Mobile Friendly

8 Today's websites need to use responsive design for mobile devices so that visitors can easily find and read content. Without ensuring your site can automatically adjust its layout depending on the screen a visitor is using to view the website, you run the risk of losing prospects as many

will turn elsewhere for solutions and information. Research suggests that approximately 64 percent of today's online buyers use a smartphone and 54 percent use a tablet, so ensuring your website and content can be easily viewed is imperative.



Jerry Goldstein is senior vice president of the William Mills Agency, a provider of financial public relations and marketing services. For more information, visit the company's website at www.williammills.com.



About William Mills Agency

William Mills Agency is the nation's largest independent public relations and marketing firm to the financial services industry. Founded in 1977, the Atlanta-based company has established its reputation in the industry through the successful execution of media relations, marketing services and crisis communications campaigns for hundreds of companies ranging in size from entrepreneurial start-ups to large, publicly traded corporations throughout North America, Europe and India.

For more information, please contact:

Kelly Williams,
Executive Vice President
404-291-0944 cell
678-781-7202 office
Kelly@williammills.com