



Professional Travel Websites

YOUR *SEO* MARKETING GUIDE



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I hate to be the one to break it to you,
but your website is not the *Field of Dreams*.

INTRODUCTION

This article was written by Richard Earls, CEO and publisher at Travel Research Online

I am excited about this particular session because marketing your website is one of the most interesting aspects of website ownership and digital marketing.

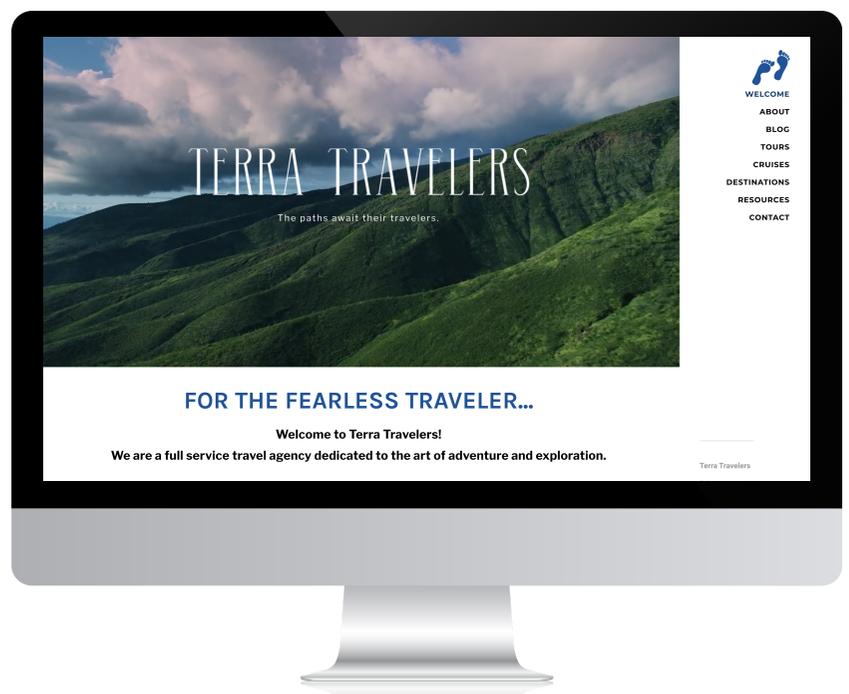
We sometimes exhibit an auto-magical thinking about websites much like the movie *Field of Dreams*.

We believe if we build a site, then people will just come to it and “Sales” will happen.

I hate to break it to you but that is not the way it works.

Your website has to be marketed.

Ironic that one of your key marketing tools has to be marketed, but it does and that is what this section of our course is all about.





Search Engine Marketing Search Engine Optimization

SEM vs SEO

Everyone treats these topics like some type of black art, but in essence, they are really very simple.

Let me provide a word of warning about SEO – it can be for many a discouraging topic because it seems so mysterious and so expensive. I will tell you, however, it is not the end-all, be-all, of website marketing. There are other tactics you can use to increase traffic to your site. One of the best aspects of SEO, however, is if you are doing a good job at SEO you are creating great, useful content that will serve you well on your website. In addition, it is not really mysterious and it need not be expensive. It does, however, require the efforts we discuss below.

The **basics** of SEM and SEO are absolutely essential and important for your travel agency website. Beyond the basics, however, you can start to spend a great deal of time and money for quickly diminishing returns. My advice is to focus on the basics and take advantage of as much solid, natural traffic as you can generate. Then, based on your results and [your particular niche and marketing plan](#), delve more deeply into fine-tuning results if you can cost-justify the effort. Herein, we will cover the basics.

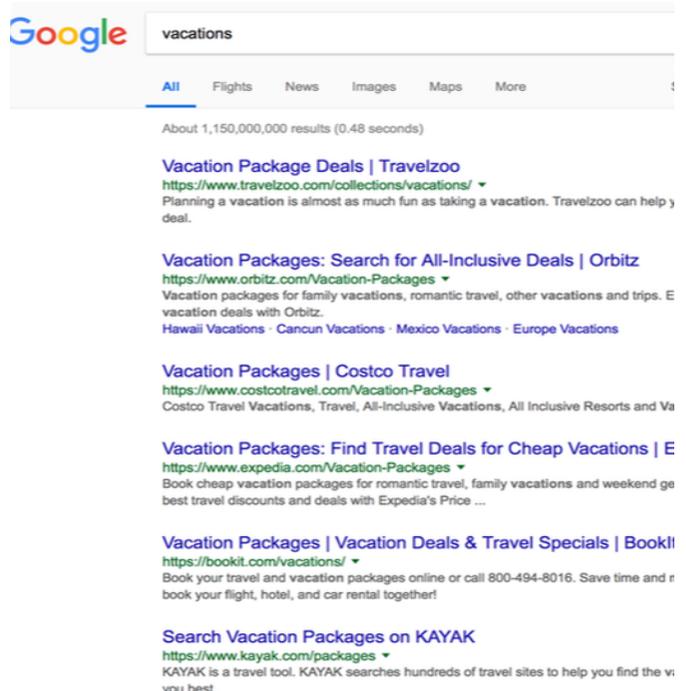
Naturally occurring traffic is generated by the content on your site and is called ORGANIC. There is also PAID SEM where you essentially pay Google or other Search Engines for search result traffic, you bid for the results, and there are some markets, particularly if you are in a niche market, where you will want to do so.

Paid SEM is a topic all to itself, and we will be covering it in a later session. Here we are going to focus mostly on organic SEO.

Marketing and Optimization

- Organic vs paid
- Original content using common search terms
- Structured data (html tagging)
- Mobile responsive

Let's begin by searching the word "vacations" on Google. We will obtain a result much like the image to the right below:



Using a term like "Vacations" will not get either you or the consumer very far. That is obviously a very broad and not specific search term and brings in an unbelievable 1.15 Billion results. Naturally, making it to the first page of that search is going to be very difficult! But most serious consumers are going to be a bit more specific in their searches. Rather than searching just the word "vacations", they are more likely to look for "vacations in Iceland", "Northern lights in Iceland" or, better yet, "Nashville travel agents". The goal is to be as close as possible to the top of the first page of results in a Google, Bing or Yahoo Search.



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The key to good SEO is:

1. good quality, original content
2. written in a manner that mirrors the way people search

To be effective as content per se and for purposes of SEO, your content must be useful to your audience. Your content must be authoritative and meet their needs of your readers as those needs are expressed in their search efforts. You want your site to be well structured, using good HTML and you want to make sure it is mobile responsive as Google in particular gives priority to mobile responsive sites.

The idea of structuring your writing and SEO efforts to mimic the way people search is sometimes referred to as "long tail searches" - they will typically get less traffic than the more specific searches like "vacations" but the conversion ratio is higher because the match with the searcher's intent is greater.

Take a look at this example: Let's say we want to go to Ireland. If we google "Ireland vacations" we obtain approximately 2.8 million results. However, search the term "[Ireland off season](#)". Look at the top result. That is an article from the Travelhoppers site I wrote.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "ireland off season". The search results show approximately 177,000,000 results in 0.55 seconds. The top result is from Travelhoppers, titled "Ireland Off-Season | Travelhoppers" with a URL of <https://www.travelhoppers.com/articles/ireland-off-season/>. The snippet reads: "Shoulder season in Ireland is April, May, early June and early October. Shoulder season has the distinct advantage of retaining many summer travel perks: longer days, good weather and extended shopping hours. Low season is November through March – the winter-weather months in Ireland. Jul 20, 2017". Below the main result is a "People also ask" section with questions like "What is the cheapest time of year to fly to Ireland?", "What is the best month to go to Ireland?", "What is the tourist season in Ireland?", and "What is the best month for weather in Ireland?". Other search results include "Benefits of Travelling to Ireland off season (February) - Ireland ..." and "Cheapest Times to Travel to Ireland | USA Today".

Now, it is no coincidence the title is the same as the search inquiry, and it demonstrates a great tactic: name articles the same as you would expect people to search for your topic. Gracefully lace all of your content with the same terms consumers are likely to be searching. By choosing a "long tail" search term, that admittedly fewer people use, my article comes up first and is likely to be read by someone interested in traveling off season to Ireland.

Think about it for a moment. If someone searches for "Ireland Off Season" does it not make sense the top search result would be an article about traveling to Ireland off-season? Remember to not sacrifice the quality of your writing for SEO, don't "spam" your audience (or the search engines) with search terms, but use the language of search terms in close proximity to each other and you will see results.

BACKLINKS



Backlinks are simply links from a third party site to your own. The more authoritative the site linking to you, the higher ranking the search engines give your article.

In fact, my Ireland article mentioned above was linked to by **USA Today**, which helped its search results enormously. We are going to talk more about such efforts in a moment when we discuss Blogging.

SEO Backlinks: Outreach Techniques

- Leverage relationships with local businesses. You link to them, they link to you
- Guest blog from sites in your niche
- Local links: Chamber of Commerce, newspaper articles, other businesses etc.
- Social media

One of the best ways to generate backlinks is to find other website owners who will trade links with you.

For example, the local yoga studio you attend might be willing to trade links to expose their clients to your clients and vice versa. Guest blog for each other or guest blog for a travel site. Get an article of yours published locally, by a newspaper or chamber of commerce. And, of course, develop links from your social media accounts.

Lists of travel agents are particularly strong, so sign up for supplier directories and be sure to list your site.

Practice Exercise:

Reach out to some local retailers in your area and work out a link exchange. Remember to treat the arrangement as a mutually beneficial effort.

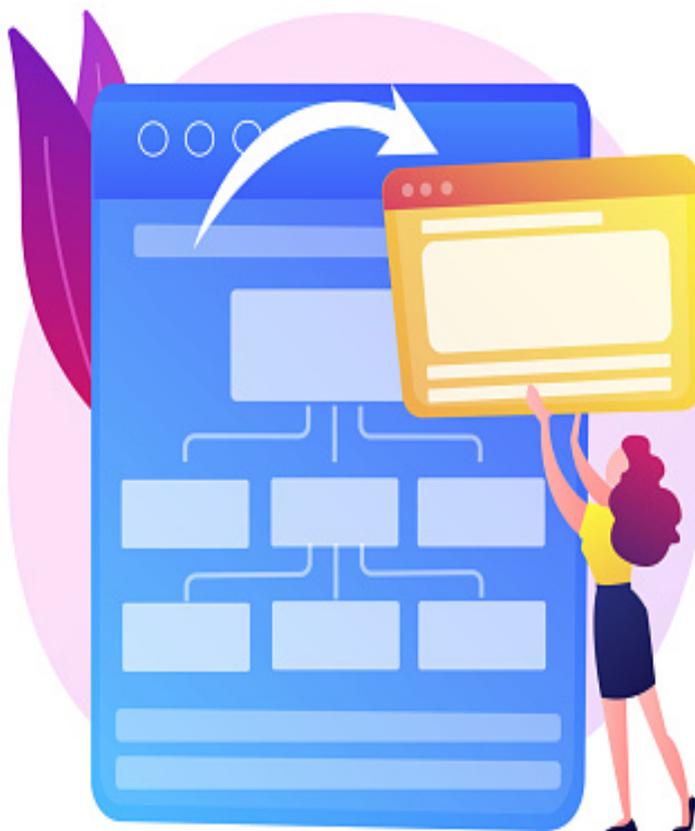
You might each write an article for the other, or you may simply include each other in a list of local businesses to patronize.

Consider writing an article for a local newspaper or magazine. Request the article link back to your site.

However, the backlinks should be from sources that are authoritative. It is a questionable technique used by some "blackout" SEO firms to create "link farms" where they place links without any relevance to good content simply to create a backlink.

Google and other search engines will penalize your site's SEO ranking for this type of spurious effort.

SITEMAPS



A Sitemap is an XML file that lists the URLs for a site. It allows webmasters to include additional information about each URL: when it was last updated, how often it changes, and how important it is in relation to other URLs in the site. This allows search engines to crawl the site more intelligently.

Some systems, like [Voyager](#), build sitemaps automatically. And there are plug-ins for WordPress sites.

If you have a custom built site, there are programs on the market that will build a site map for you and you can then register the site map with Google using the instructions in the additional reading materials provided below.

Note that site maps are really just another way of presenting your navigation system to be crawled by the search engines but are not as necessary for simple sites as they are for more complex sites.

Additional Reading:

[Build and Submit a Site Map to Google](#)

developers.google.com/search/docs/advanced/sitemaps/build-sitemap

GOOGLE TOOLKIT

Be sure to make use of all the resources available to you!

Google My Business

Home How it Works Resources Partners

SIGN IN MANAGE NOW

Make the most of your free Google listing.

Show up when customers search for your business or businesses like yours on Google Search and Maps. Google My Business lets you post updates to showcase what's new, respond to reviews to build loyalty and add photos to highlight what makes your business special.

MANAGE NOW

Have questions? Give us a call: [1-844-491-9665](tel:1-844-491-9665)*

01 Listing your business with Google

When you do, you will begin to show up on their local ad spots like this one. Remember, many consumers are likely to conduct a search just as I have done here “Travel Agents Nashville” so you want to ensure you come up on the list locally as well.

If you have a storefront travel agency, it is possible to link your website, address and a map to your agency's listing. Contrary to what many home based agencies believe, however, it IS NOT *necessary* to list an address. Home-based businesses can list a service area instead.

https://support.google.com/business/answer/9157481?visit_id=637764007794313195-2105230227&rd=1

Once your business is listed with Google Local Search, your company name will be in a list of similar businesses when someone makes a search on your locality.

Exercise: *List with Google My Business*

This exercise will be the most effort intensive of our program, but stick with it and get it done. The effort will pay off for you in local search results and by setting up your company for Reputation Management.

List your business with Google by working through the information here:

<https://support.google.com/business/#topic=4539639>

02 Knowledge Panels, Destination Cards, & FAQs

The **Knowledge Panel** is a key information typically displayed to the right of the search results, that summarizes relevant details about the search topic. If a traveler searches ‘things to do in Italy,’ the Knowledge Card shows the location on the map as well as some general information.

Destination Cards are similar, but appears above the search results, often as a gallery with images or links. With our example ‘things to do in Italy,’ the Destination Card displays popular tourist destinations, while ‘Thailand hotels’ lists the top accommodation choices.

The other section above the search results is **People also ask**, more commonly known as **FAQs**. This shows frequently asked questions on the search topic with answers Google has pulled from sites across the web. One of those sites could be your's, if you have set up your content correctly. If you are an Italy expert, you might include a FAQ section in the Italy page on your website that asks and answers some of the questions your clients might have and be searching for online.

When you better understand how the search engines work, you can use your site content to better target these specific pieces and increase your website traffic, visibility, and sales.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "things to do in Italy". The search results include a link to "13 Top Things to Do in Italy | PlanetWare" with a brief description of activities like hiking in Cinque Terre and touring Tuscan towns. A COVID-19 travel restriction notice is displayed, stating that proof of vaccination and a negative test are required for travel to Italy, with a link to salute.gov.it. The "People also ask" section contains three questions: "What should you not miss in Italy?", "Where should I go for my first trip to Italy?", and "What are common activities in Italy?". The "Destination Cards" section features three cards for the Colosseum, Cinque Terre, and the Pantheon, each with a rating and a brief description. The "Knowledge Panel" on the right provides a map of Italy, its location in Europe, and key facts: Capital: Rome, Dialing code: +39, Population: 59.55 million (2020), Currency: Euro, and President: Sergio Mattarella. It also offers a "Plan a trip" section with a flight duration of 11h 50min and a list of destinations including Rome, Venice, Florence, Milan, and Naples.

03 Keyword Analysis

Keyword Analysis is a way of determining the best terms and phrases used by the public when searching for topics in any given area of interest. These are the words you will want to use when writing your original content like articles or blog posts.

Google provides a free tool to do such analysis with their Keyword Planner:

<https://ads.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>

Keyword	Min search volume	Max search volume	Competition	Top of page bid (low range)	Top of page bid (high range)
ireland vacations	10,000	100,000	High	1.84	4.26
trips to ireland	10,000	100,000	High	1.28	3.18
ireland vacation packages	1,000	10,000	High	1.95	4.3
ireland tours	10,000	100,000	High	2.4	6
visit ireland	1,000	10,000	Medium	0.49	3.7
ireland travel	1,000	10,000	High	0.92	4.02
ireland vacation packages 2016	10	100	Unknown		
ireland travel packages	1,000	10,000	High	1.83	3.95
ireland vacation packages 2017	10	100	Unknown		
ireland packages	100	1,000	High	1.55	3.24
ireland tour packages	100	1,000	High	2.53	7.21
trips to ireland 2017	10	100	Unknown		
ireland vacations 2017	10	100	High		
ireland tours 2017	100	1,000	Low		
ireland trips 2017	10	100	Low		
holidays in ireland	100	1,000	Low	0.56	2
ireland travel guide	1,000	10,000	High	0.51	5.81
ireland holidays	100	1,000	Low	0.57	2
deals ireland	100	1,000	High	0.72	1.65
ireland getaways	100	1,000	High	0.58	1.86
ireland travel deals	100	1,000	High	1.44	3.6
planning a trip to ireland	1,000	10,000	High	1.29	3.48
ireland vacations 2016	0	10	Unknown		
ireland trip packages	100	1,000	High	1.68	3.57
best ireland tours	100	1,000	High	2.8	6.15
ireland vacation packages all inclusive	1,000	10,000	High	1.64	3.89
all inclusive ireland vacations	100	1,000	High	1.59	4.28
ireland vacation spots	100	1,000	Medium	1.33	2.44
ireland tours 2016	10	100	Unknown		
package holidays from ireland	10	100	High	1.58	2.73
best ireland vacations	100	1,000	High	2	3.85
all inclusive trips to ireland	1,000	10,000	High	1.28	4.01
irish vacations	100	1,000	High	1.47	3.01
ireland vacation deals	100	1,000	High	1.47	3.85
guided tours of ireland	100	1,000	High	3	6.45
trip to ireland cost	1,000	10,000	Medium	0.73	2.06
ireland trips 2016	10	100	Unknown		
trips to ireland 2016	10	100	Unknown		

In the example above, I searched the Keyword Planner for "Irish Vacations." Google provides the analysis above hoping I will use Google AdWords and purchase opportunities with paid SEM to direct traffic to my site.

However, the tool has also indicated the most frequently used terms for searching for Irish vacations, so I can begin working those search terms into my articles and other content.

Practice Exercise:

Using Google's Keyword Planner, search for good keywords for your own niche markets and for articles you are going to write.

Then, when you write a blog post, when you do a Facebook post when you write an article, use your key words in a natural fashion to make the search engines take notice of your writing when someone searches using the keywords!

<https://ads.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>

Page Names & HTML

Be sure to give your pages names that are descriptive and geared to good SEO. When the page name contains keywords oriented to SEO, the page will be optimized in the way people search for information

The words will automatically be used in so many of the elements on the page that are important to SEO.

Thus, naming your website page "www.abctravel.com/destinationweddings" is much stronger than naming it "www.abctravel.com/page5"

However, more important is to now create good content on the topic of destination weddings throughout your site.

Although Weebly does not use H1 tags, it is possible to generate H1 Tags through a couple of hacks requiring altering the CSS of your Weebly site or by using the page names as suggested here.

While this is possible, the effort to do so is seldom worth the effort as the overall impact on SEO is minimal.

Original blog content is far more important than the particular HTML elements in which the content is displayed.

Be sure to read through these page setting suggestions for your site:

Boosting Website SEO

<https://xsideas.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115000499494-Boosting-Website-SEO>

SEO Checklist



Unique

Don't just copy and paste, write your own original content



Focused

Content should be based on your research, keywords, insights, and your niche



Fresh

Update you site regularly to help increase you search ranking.



Appealing

Format and layout matter too! The site should be attractive and welcoming



Optimized

Plan the user experience and be sure to test the page speed



Mobile-friendly

Check your site on multiple devices to see how your users experience it



Searchable

Check for any problems that might affect the 'crawlability' of your site



Voyager Websites

We create sites using our content and then allow individuals to customize their websites to reflect their travel agency's personality and focus.

<https://www.voyagerwebsites.com/seo>