



Nine Things Every Life Science Marketer Should Know About SEO

... and How Smaller Companies Can Achieve
Big Search Engine Ranks

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Introduction

Unpublished research which we conducted in 2011 found that almost all scientists considering a purchase will perform an internet search to find information at some point in their buying journey. In fact, in our moderate-sized survey population, literally 100% of respondents indicated that internet searches are a routine tool in aiding purchasing decisions). Additionally, we found that about 45% of scientists turn to search engines *first* when considering a purchase; roughly about the same amount as those who look to colleagues for advice first. Scientists' search engine of choice is, overwhelmingly, Google. With so many scientists looking to search engines for product and service information, it is undeniably important for companies to be visible to those scientist-searchers.

Search engine optimization (SEO), however, remains a mysterious topic to many life science marketers. While there are many aspects of SEO that should be reserved for experts, there are a number of things that every life science marketer should know about SEO such that they can readily improve search engine rankings through optimized web content. We discuss 9 things that we believe every life science marketer should know.

At the end of this article is bonus content on how smaller or younger companies can compete with the big guys and achieve breakthrough SEO results. This goes beyond on-site SEO into off-site SEO, and is a topic that should not be taken lightly but can provide results far beyond what would otherwise be possible.

9 Things Every Life Science Marketer Should Know About SEO

1: SEO Isn't Always the Answer

Before undertaking search engine optimization, be sure it's a worthwhile endeavor. Some people tend to think that SEO is some magic bullet which will open the floodgates and send legions of scientists to their website. Sure, SEO is great in many circumstances, but by no means is it always the answer to your demand generation problems.

In fact, sometimes SEO isn't even important. As with any form of search-based marketing, scientists need to be looking for your product or service in order for search to be useful. How can you know if they are searching for a given term? Ask Google. Sign up for an AdWords account if you don't have one already (signing up is free), then use the keyword tool to get an estimate of the amount of searchers for the terms in question. Just remember - for the purposes of SEO, AdWords effectively overestimates search volume¹. If people aren't searching for a particular term in question, then optimizing for that term is futile. If that is the case, spend your money on other forms of marketing.

Even when SEO is important, there are plenty of instances in which it's not worthwhile. Some keywords are just too competitive. Especially for small or midsize companies, it probably wouldn't be worthwhile to optimize for "bioinformatics" or "centrifuge" or "contract research organization." Generally, the more popular a term is, the more competitive it is. That's not always true, however. If you want to get a better understanding of how competitive a term is, there are a number of tools which you may use. At BioBM, we use Market Samurai. It costs \$149 but there is a free trial. Just ignore the gimmicky-looking website; the tool itself is actually quite useful to determine the competitiveness of keywords and well worth the price if you'll even be doing occasional keyword research.

Also, SEO is only effective if your website can effectively convert the searchers into leads or sales. "Visitors," taken independently, is a "vanity metric." A high number of visitors looks good, but it doesn't mean much. Leads and sales are what matters.

¹ This is because AdWords doesn't care about the order of words in a term or if there are additional words. For example, AdWords currently reports the search volume for "PCR" at about 1.8 million searches per month. However, this includes any and all searches including the word "PCR" (PCR protocols, for instance). For SEO purposes, however, optimizing for "PCR" and "PCR protocols" is two largely separate efforts.

2: The Three Most Important Attributes: Title, URL, Heading

If you're posting content on the internet, it might as well be optimized. The most important things to optimize for SEO are, in descending order, the title tag, the URL, and the first heading on the page.

For those who are internet novices, the title tag is a meta tag. It does not actually display on the page directly, but rather instructs web browsers and search engine crawlers what the page is about. If you perform a Google search, the blue hyper-linked text in the results is [usually] each page's title attribute. Additionally, most web browsers will display the title in the tab at the top of the window. Almost all CMS will have an area to input the title. For websites not using a CMS, the title can be modified within the <title> tag.

Keywords within URLs are stronger the fewer words the URL contains. In other words, each additional word in the URL will "dilute" the value of the keyword somewhat.

Headings provide the most "SEO juice" when they are at the top of the page. Search engines read heading tags, such as <h1> tags, as an additional indication of what the page is about.

Ideally, the term you wish to target will be within the title, URL, and heading.

3. Internally Link Your Content

Many companies underutilize internal links both for SEO and for user experience (UX). Internal links - links from a page on your website to another page on your website - can help users find related content, help search engine crawlers find all of your pages, and tell the crawlers that the linked-to page is important for the topic in question.

Ideally, the link's anchor text (the text that is hyperlinked) will be relevant to a term that you wish to optimize the target page for. Do not, however, use the same anchor text all the time. That looks spammy to search engines and can get you penalized.

The full paper can be requested free of charge at:

<http://biobm.com/idea-farm/reports-papers/>



About the Authors

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About BioBM Consulting™

BioBM Consulting is a boutique consultancy providing wide-ranging life science marketing, business, and operations services to life science tools and services companies. BioBM specializes in providing affordable, effective, high-ROI solutions to small and start-up companies in these sectors. For more information on BioBM and the services it provides, please go to www.biobm.com, e-mail info@biobm.com, or call +1 313-312-4626 (+1 313-31-BIOBM).

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