

SEO guide for plumbers

You're a skilled professional, you've got your business set up and your books in order and now there's one thing left to do: increase your online hits.

But the question is how and of course why? Let's take the second half of this question first and explore how to get your name up in there in the Google stars when it comes to searching for your business

In many ways, the answer to this is self explanatory – more hits on your website means more customers looking at you and, hopefully, more, business coming your way. But what are the real benefits from having a fully SEO (that's Search Engine Optimised) website? Well you may have noticed already but the Yellow Pages has well and truly become a thing of the past. Nowadays, we use search engines to find not just generalised information or tailored information, but localised businesses in our own areas, near us, recommended to us and recognised by us. Thanks to apps such as Google Maps, this search can even narrow a local business down to just a few kilometres of the searcher.

So, according to web stats from Google, some 97% of consumers search for local businesses online. That's not to say your eye catching truck or well placed advertising hasn't been successful more that, like a phone book, search engines are used more and more as the quickest way to get contact details.

But having an SEO website is just half the battle, getting it up towards the top of the listings is equally as important. Ask yourself, if you're looking for a business or service in your home town, how often do you scroll as far as page two?

Another reason to consider maxing up your SEO content is to do with your audience. Driving around your local town will get you so far. It will get your customers who see your advertising. With SEO content, your website can be seen by people searching by town, district or even a radius – set by you, spreading the message of your brilliant service far and wide.

Of course you might be tempted to abandon the work that goes into SEO and pay for an ad, a so-called pay-per-click. This is fine if you have oodles of cash to pour into a bottomless pit of advertising but there are two reasons you might change your mind. Firstly, many people are put off by ads, they prefer to see a more 'natural' filtering of results. Secondly, once you stop paying for that service, it's gone. Just like that, you're several pages down a search. Investing time in SEO content is a far wiser use of time and resources.

If you're the one pulling the strings behind your website content and don't want to pay for a professional then with a little bit of know how you can make a big difference in where your business appears in searches. We've looked at why you should invest some time in SEO, let's now turn our attention to how.

First of all, take a deep breath and figure out what you think people will type in to find you, the keywords they use when they search for a plumber in your town. Maybe it will be something like "plumber in Stoke" or "plumber in West Midlands", there will be a quite a few variants. Don't worry, you don't have to do this stage alone, there are a fair amount of SEO keyword websites that will help you find your list and help you decide which words or phrases to use.

Using these keyword tools will quickly help you narrow down the keywords that give you the greatest volume (number of returns). Try to find a balance between a good size volume and one that is too large and will put you in competition with too many other businesses.

What follows after you've got your keywords in mind is probably the most technically challenging aspect but with just a little bit of information, it's entirely possible

Naturally you want to appear in Google rankings, you can't argue with it, Google is the place to be though of course other search engines are available but with Google there are many tools available through the site itself that makes this whole process easier.

Start by making sure you've got your plug-ins installed. What are plug-ins? They help Google create what you see on the page and form your search result. There are loads of plug-ins available such as All in One or Yoast, which will do the job for you.

You'll also have to set up a couple of pages to make Google see you. You'll need to add the following: An HTML sitemap and XML sitemap. These simply help searches see your pages. Also your business address. This of course helps Google show exactly where your business is and how close it is in a local search. A privacy policy page. This simply shows Google that you understand how your data is being used.

Got all that in place? Excellent, now you're ready to add the keywords, to sprinkle them like a salt shaker across your homepage to make sure that Google picks them up. Make sure your word count is high enough, at least 500 on your website to make sure it shows up.

Using all of Google's business tools is key to making sure you get noticed so have a look at the Google My Business page, and make sure you've got this in your tool belt. This Google extra makes sure your business address is seen in a list linked to location and is well worth the extra time of going through and registering your address.

Perhaps now we should take a step backwards at this point. The assumption here is that you already have a functional website, designed specifically to promote your plumbing business. Hopefully this is true but if you are starting from scratch, here are a few pointers to make sure your website doesn't disappoint when found in Google. There's very little point getting noticed and making use of your SEO skills if there's nothing to back it up.

Your link on Google will go straight to your landing page, your homepage. And it's this first introduction to who you are that's make or break for many small businesses, plumbers included. What should you have on your landing page? It's as easy to answer what you shouldn't have. For a start avoid reams and reams of text, creating a text wall. It's impenetrable, hard to read and encourages the reader to give up. Instead make use of this page to highlight your services and how to get contact you. Sell yourself and your products. If you're using images, make sure they are excellent quality and relevant to your business. Where possible use professional images. However try and make sure they're not so hi-res they slow down your loading speed. To check this have a look at Google's speed test [tool](#).

Use a drop down menu or tabs to take your visitor to your other pages, your content pages. These might include testimonials, your blog, contact page with opening hours and an expansion of the services you offer. Make use of these content pages to install other searched for words or phrases specific to the plumbing industry, such as "how do you unblock a toilet" or similar. Anything that might show up in a search for a solution rather than a localised service. Content pages don't have to be complicated but they do have to look competent. Spelling, grammatical or literal errors stand out,

they devalue the hard work you've done. If you're going to outsource any of your web work, get a proof reader. Get it right.

Consider too, adding a Frequently Asked Questions page, an opportunity to showcase your knowledge, add keywords and help instil confidence in your abilities.

A blog is also an excellent method of keeping your website relevant and searchable. Use it again as a way of demonstrating the 'liveness' of your brand. An up-to-date blog shows a brand keen to communicate. Aim for somewhere between 300-500 words and update monthly.

Don't neglect your social media too. It might sound all too much but a well timed tweet, Insta update or special offer on Facebook will help keep your brand relevant and reaching a greater audience, not to mention being picked up by Google.

Like all professional use of social media, you don't have to tweet or post on the fly but rather keep a calendar and reminder of when you will be updating your sites, to coincide with an expected quiet patch for example. Just a little forward planning can take the panic out of using your various social media outlets.

And how do you keep up with all this social media, professional or personal? I'd imagine through your mobile or tablet. Most website builders will factor in the switch from desktop site to mobile device and change accordingly but if you are using a desktop to build your site, do make sure you've got all your viewing platforms covered.

You've made your website SEO friendly, you've made it accessible and attractive now it's time to make sure that you're not just listed by Google, you're listed high up the rankings, facing down the competition.

There are several ways of doing this but a quick and effective way is to harness the power of directories. Simply put, get yourself listed in an online directory and see Google point people back from these sites to yours. Just make sure that you use the leading directories and not ones that may be cheaper but are rarely used. These directories might be just for your sector or they might be a national business director. Either way, choose wisely. You might also think about using professional sites, such as your local Chamber of Commerce, if you can be listed in their local directory. Consider too asking friends if a mutually beneficial arrangement can be shared where links to your site feature on theirs and vice versa, all this is taken in by Google.

There are two further things to consider to get the best from your website and Google searches. Post great reviews. In fact make sure you have an area for feedback and reviews on your website. Potential customers love reading reviews and trust that what appears in searches is, for the most part at least, totally true.

Last but by no means least, do not waste your time by setting all of this up and then leaving it languishing in a forgotten corner of your office. Back up the impressive efforts you have made.

The only way to see if SEO is working for you, is to see if SEO is working for you! Whether you use Google Analytics, or another monitoring tool, take time to look through your data at least once a month. Use the evidence to see which pages are attracting the most hits and which don't see much action at all. See where the traffic is being sent from, which key words are working for you. See where problems might be arising and now make an action plan on how to fix them.

Harnessing the power of SEO ready websites and all the available tools can seem daunting and too much to take on alongside actually running a business! But with some careful planning and a little bit of time to invest in setting it all up, you are bound to see some great results. If you are going to invest in one thing, invest in getting your website SEO ready. Don't leave it in unused corridor of the

internet, pages and pages down a search engine, but instead let it drive traffic towards your plumbing business and firmly into the 21st century.

Once established, maintenance of your website is fairly low key and should become regular set of actions that don't take any more than a few hours to complete, once a month.

Don't be afraid to experiment and try out new ideas on your website, they can always be removed or improved and you might just find a unique niche that works well for you.

Your business deserves the best and you're the one who knows it inside and out so don't delay, beat the competition and place yourself high up those local rankings. In an age where everyone has a website, a smart phone and Google at their fingertips, can you afford to be left behind?