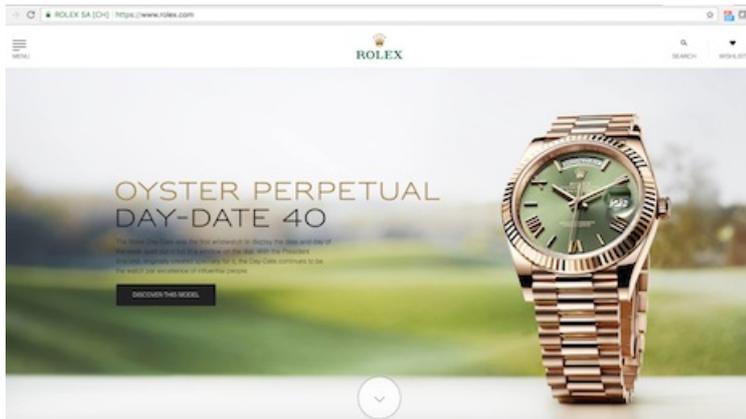


COLUMNS

Luxury brands need a comprehensive search strategy

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Rolex.com is the most popular watch brand Web site, aided by masterful search engine optimization

By **Michael Nelson**

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Five billion Internet searches are performed daily. And, according to a Moz.com study, more than 90 percent of Google users stop at page one of the results page.

If search engine optimization (SEO) is not an integral part of your marketing strategy, why is it not?

Brand's flagship

A Web site can attract exponentially more visitors than any of your bricks-and-mortar stores.

Take Louis Vuitton, for example: 5.2 million visitors found their way to louisvuitton.com in the last six months. Can the brand's Fifth Avenue store say that?



Louis Vuitton's Web site is one of the most visited among luxury brands

Your Web site is your flagship, the public face of your brand. But are you doing enough to help potential customers find it?

Hide and seek

So you spent hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars on your beautiful site. Do you not want people to visit? SEO, by far, is the most effective way to help consumers find your site.

According to a study of 30 luxury brands on Similarweb.com, 65 percent of those brands' Web traffic in the last six months was driven by search. That means two out of every three visitors to a site such as Chanel.com found it through Google, Bing, Yahoo or another search engine.

But despite its importance, many brands neglect SEO, or worse, ignore it altogether. Why? Because it is boring.

SEO requires constant researching, monitoring and testing. And while much goes into a comprehensive SEO strategy, here are four keys to consider when developing yours: keywords, links, user experience and mobile. They are all critical, so you will need to commit to mastering all four.

Keywords are still key

Keywords, such as your brand or product names, are important for your site's ranking, because most searches start there. But do not neglect long-tail keywords searches with more than four words. If you do, you could be losing a significant amount of traffic.

Let us look at Rolex.com, the most popular watch brand Web site.

In the past six months, 1.5 million visitors found the Rolex.com site through search engines. But less than 60 percent of those visitors entered a branded search term such as "Rolex" or "Rolex Daytona."

In total, more than 3,000 different search terms were used to find Rolex.com.

This happens because search engines use context to match a user's search to the best site. So filling your site with rich, relevant content will help improve your search results.

Oyster Perpetual Day-Date 40: The Rolex Day-Date was the first wristwatch to display the date and day of the week spelled out in full in a window on the dial. With the President bracelet, originally created specially for it, the Day-Date continues its run of popularity

To help determine the most relevant keywords for your industry, there are numerous tools available.

Google Keyword Planner, Google Trends, Bing Ad Intelligence and sites such as Moz.com and Searchmetrics.com all have tools to help you determine the optimal keywords for your site.

Missing links

Aside from search, there are generally two other ways to find a Web site.

The first is direct, where a consumer types the company's URL directly into her browser. The second is through referrals.

Referrals are links on other sites that visitors click to find your site. And search engines love links.

The more inbound links pointing to your site, the more important your site is deemed by the search engine.

The more important the site, the higher it will rank.

But be careful to maintain them, because too many broken links will hurt your search ranking.

Experiential marketing

If someone uses Bing to find a Web site and that Web site provided a good experience, that person will likely use Yahoo again for his search.

So search engines take user experience (UX) seriously, employing engagement metrics to determine the quality of the experience.

Data such as how long a visitor stays on a webpage, if they visit other pages, or if they return to the site, help measure engagement levels. Thus, maximizing engagement should be a priority.

Aside from the obvious benefits of developing a deeper bond with your customers, keeping them on your site longer will help your rankings. So be sure to provide a broad mix of relevant content, in addition to product information, to keep your visitors engaged.

But, aside from engagement, speed and ease of use also affect the user experience.

The longer a page takes to load, the more likely a visitor will leave the page. And if a site is difficult to navigate, a

user will abandon it quickly.

A fast, easy-to-navigate site will not only delight your existing customers, it will attract new ones through search.

Mobile is king

According to a Statcounter.com study, mobile accounted for 51 percent of all Web browsing last year.

Also, in 2016, Google launched its mobile-first index, which means a brand's mobile site is now the primary version considered by their search algorithm.

Clearly, mobile has become a force and brands must consider mobile and desktop separately when devising an SEO strategy. This is because popular keywords for desktop search might not rank as high in mobile.

In addition, location parameters are much more important for mobile than for desktop.

And load speeds are even more critical for the impatient mobile user.

All of this must be accounted for, while still providing a consistent user experience across platforms.

SEO HAS PROVEN to be the most effective tool for driving traffic to a Web site.

But it goes well beyond just improving search rankings. It is intertwined in your PR strategy through link building. It improves customer engagement through richer, more relevant content. And it improves how your customers experience your brand through fast and easy to navigate Web sites.

SEO is obviously a critical component to any marketing strategy. Is it a part of yours?

You would not throw a party and not send out invitations. So why would you build a Web site and not optimize for search?



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