website
M U S T - H A V E S

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A beautifully designed website and well-written content are important considerations when building your online presence. But a great website isn't so great if no one visits it. While it is important to choose a website builder that makes it easy to build, change, and add content, you also must consider your strategy for climbing to the top of the search results. Here are five website must-haves that no one will ever see.

Basic ABC's of SEO

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an absolute must-have to any website strategy, but it takes hard work and consistency when aiming for the top spot. These tips will help get you on your way to increasing your organic (non-paid) search engine rankings. Optimization starts with keywords, which are the queries that users input to perform their searches.

- Pick a primary keyword for each page, and focus on optimizing that page for that word.

- Place your primary keywords in your headline and sub-headline. These areas of content have greater weight to search engines.

- Include the keywords in the body content, but don't use them out of context.

- Include keywords in the file name of images or use them in the ALT tag.

- Include the keywords in the page URL name, and keep the URL clean and simple.

Facebook Pixels

Do you remember the last time you searched online for those perfect shoes to wear out? Then, the next time you went to Facebook, those same exact shoes were there. Facebook Pixels are common across most advertising platforms. They're used to drop a cookie that will track visitors on your website, so you can advertise to them later. Wouldn't you like to show up on their Facebook feed just like those shoes?

A Facebook Pixel is an analytics tool that consists of a code that you can put on your website. This data allows you to retarget those users with Facebook ads in the

future. It needs to be in the head section of your index page so that it appears on every page on your website. No matter which page is loaded, the pixel will fire and track visitors. Once they return to Facebook, your ads will be placed on their feed.

Google Tools

Using Google Maps and YouTube videos can help increase your website visibility and drive more active users to your website. Placing Google Maps on your pages for users to locate a local business, such as the closest REALTOR®, will also help improve your search results. Adding YouTube videos will also increase your ranking in search results because videos are displayed as search results. Google knows that users respond well to video and that they are looking to videos to answer the questions they have.

While these are both great tools, the best tool is Google Analytics, which allows you to analyze your website traffic for free. It is a simple code that can be placed in the header of your website. Google Analytics offers a ton of valuable information that will help you determine what's working and what isn't for your website.

Here are the benefits of using Google Analytics:

- Tracks the number of visitors on your website

- Provides the location of your visitors

- Offers info on your website's mobile compatibility

- Shows the most popular pages on your website

- Tracks your conversion rate

HTTPS and SSL

According to Google, HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) should be used on all websites for it provides secure communication over a computer network. Sites not using HTTPS will be marked as unsecured when viewed using Google Chrome. (If the site isn't secure, then you'll see the non-secure HTTP in its place.)

Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificates are quickly becoming a necessity, as they do a lot more than just give you a ranking and trust boost. Ask your current website provider to upgrade your site to a secured site with an SSL certificate.

XML Sitemaps and Online Directories

Did you know that you need to submit your website to online search engine directories such as Google and Bing? This is an easy way to start boosting your rankings quickly.

If you haven't, don't worry, Crawlers and Spiders will eventually find you, but it takes longer. Before you submit your site, you will first need to create an XML sitemap.

XML sitemaps are designed to help search engines crawl your website. You can either do this by hand or use online tools that will do it for you. The XML file must then be uploaded to the root directory of your website and updated regularly. If you use WordPress, there are plugins that will generate and update the XML sitemap automatically.

I know this is a lot of (boring) info, but if you can go down this list and put a checkmark next to each item, chances are your website is already ranking well. If not, any one thing you can implement will improve your search engine ranking.
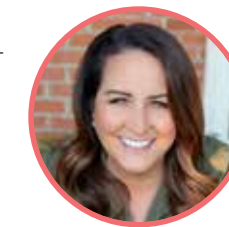
Dawn Riley has been selling homes in Maryland for 20 years. Before her real estate career, she owned an information technology company and worked as a Database Administrator (DBA). She has four children, six grandchildren, and when she's (rarely) not working, she's spending time in her garden or on the Patuxent River.