

## YOUR OTHER AUDIENCE: SEARCH ENGINES

> All your efforts to make your website as convenient, enticing, and customer friendly as your digital store will help to increase traffic to the site. But the sad truth is that it may take a little more than that to get as many new visitors to the site as you need for your business to thrive.

Potential new customers can arrive at your site in a number of ways — by typing the URL directly into their browser, for example, or via a link from another site. The best way, however, is via what is called “organic search.” This is what results when consumers enter a general search term, such as “florist in [Your Town],” into a search engine like Google or Bing.

Organic search drives the lion’s share of traffic to websites, according to Kirby Ryan, senior director of Teleflora’s eFlorist program, and one of the speakers featured during the Society of American Florists’ Reinvention Summit in July.

“The typical site sees well over 50 percent of their traffic come from

organic search on engines like Google or Bing. Organic visits also generally contribute to a significant share of online orders — more than half in many cases,” Ryan said. The trick is to get a high ranking, so that your business appears high up in the list of results. “In highly competitive searches, the difference in click volume between position 1 and position 2 can be as much as 55 percent of the total traffic volume, with volume falling off the further you move down the page.”

So, the success of your website depends mightily on what you do to achieve search engine optimization (SEO). And that in turn is all about understanding the complex algorithms used by the search engines (and especially the dominant search engine, Google) to rank results.

Those algorithms are constantly changing. Some of the factors they rely on are technical. Unless you are quite tech-savvy, they really depend on your website’s architecture as set up by your

provider. How well does the page load? Is it set up in a way that’s easy for the search engine to understand? Is it fast, responsive, and secure?

In the past, website designers have tried to trick the search engines with fraudulent techniques such as doorway pages (using multiple, relatively empty pages to attract traffic) and keyword stuffing, Ryan explained. But search engines are constantly being refined to sniff out these strategies, and in the end will detect and even penalize them in the rankings.

While you may rely on a professional service to keep track of all these factors, it helps to be aware of them and to work with your provider. Some of the elements that search engines respond to are present in code, underneath the surface, not immediately visible to you or to the user. Nonetheless, they tie in with your own specific offerings and expertise. Every image on your website should be “tagged” with a unique description that is specific to your brand.



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## What's in a Name?

All those are factors that the search engines can find on your website itself. But SEO is also influenced by off-page factors: florist directories, review sites that point to you, back links to partners in the community (are these from trusted and respectable players, Ryan asked, relevant to your business, your community, your operations and your customer base?), and finally, by your own social media accounts.

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On a basic level, all of these should be as congruent as possible. Is your business information consistent and accurate across listing sites, including the name, address and phone number, and the full URL? This is why you need to claim your Google listing: A customer should not find inconsistent information on your website, Google Maps, Apple Maps, and Yelp.

"Particularly in today's environment, where messages about contact-free delivery or in-store shopping or modified hours or pickup options are increasingly relevant, meeting customers in whatever channel they find you in with a consistent answer is key, not only for your ranking but also for a great customer experience," said Ryan.

Even your business name and URL can easily be listed differently in different locations (with or without an LLC, for example, and with or without a prefix for your website address such as <http://> or [www.](http://www.)). "Check your Facebook page," advised Sundaram Natarajan, CEO of GotFlowers, and another Reinvention Summit speaker. "Check your Pinterest page, Twitter,

and Yellow pages and make sure these are identical in every way possible."

There may well be dozens or scores of such references to your business online. If the task is daunting, consider hiring a third-party service to do the job. And remember, when you are speaking to the press, to check that they refer to your business and website in a consistent manner. Consistency in all of these online listings benefits SEO.

## Pay to Play

"Google search is like a dating app," said Natarajan: It tries to match the buyer up with the best possible supplier. But, this being the world of ecommerce, sometimes money paves the way to a first meeting with a prospect. Search engines like Google make substantial revenue from advertising, and advertising has become a nearly unavoidable cost for those who want to achieve a high rank in search results.

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Your goal, again, is to rank as high as possible in search results. "What's the best way to ensure you're staying in the consideration set without breaking the bank?" Ryan asks. "First, advertise where you will find the largest audience of high-intent shoppers. For the floral industry, that really boils down to Google and Yelp."

In the U.S., 88 percent of all search queries are on Google, Ryan shared. Globally, Google owns a 90 percent

## GO DEEPER

Get additional digital tips from SAF's Reinvention Summit at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).

market share for all mobile search. The second major player for large, high-intent audiences is Yelp, with 5 million florist searches and profile views every month. For both Google and Yelp, unbranded category searches are up significantly, year over year. And for both, search is strongly linked to purchasing, often within a day.

Google pay-per-click ads not only increase the likelihood that a customer can discover you while searching for flowers, but also help that customer to quickly see important information like hours, directions, and pickup information, Ryan pointed out. These ads can help you promote popular purchase occasions.

On social media, likewise, while it's important and worthwhile to provide organic content that connects you to your customers, paid advertising may be necessary to complement those efforts. "The estimate from Facebook is that only one in 10 followers see a post on your Facebook feed" unless that post gets a paid boost, said Ryan. "This means that paid advertising is required to capture the attention of new and really even of existing customers." A paid boost also allows you to leverage Facebook data on the demographics and interests of users to target a really specific audience.

A digital ad campaign can start small, Natarajan advised: "You can start at \$15 a day and slowly increase it, based on results. Make sure you set up your campaign to track web order conversions, not just pay for clicks." He shared an example of a campaign run for a GotFlowers member shop. The campaign garnered 500 clicks on the shop's website; of those, 51 turned into orders. The result was a conversion rate of \$12 per order, which Natarajan considers reasonable. 🌸

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