

*The*

# BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

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# Introduction to SEO

SEO stands for “search engine optimization.”

That’s a long phrase isn’t it? It can seem scary, but it doesn’t have to be. Trust me, I was very intimidated by the term SEO when I started learning it over a decade ago. I’m not scared of it anymore, but that is because I’ve spent the time to learn about it and understand it.

This eBook is designed to teach you about the basics of SEO in an easy to understand manner.

We are going to not just talk about the how of SEO. Instead, we’ll explore the how and why. Knowing the why will help you understand the importance of the how and you’ll be in a better place to apply this knowledge to your own website or blog.

I’m not going to promise you SEO is easy, because it isn’t. You’re not going to learn how to perform SEO in a few hours. SEO doesn’t work that way and anyone who tells you otherwise is lying to you. I’ve seen books and courses titled *Simple SEO* and *Easy SEO*. But guess what? They are 100% crap.

SEO is not simple and it is not easy. It is part art, part science, and part instinct. But know this – once you get it, you get it and it becomes common sense.

What I will promise you is that anyone and everyone can learn SEO.

With enough time and effort, SEO can be learned and mastered by virtually anyone. I've witnessed it within myself and with others.

The question is not if you can learn SEO. The question is do you want to learn it.

If the answer to that is yes, then let's start exploring SEO and all that it has to offer. I promise this journey will be rewarding and if you follow my process, you will have great results.

## Let's Start at the Basics

SEO is simply the process of getting website traffic from “free” or “organic” search results in search engines like Google, Bing, or Yahoo. All major search engines have primary search results that are ranked based on what the search engine considers most relevant to users. SEO helps maximize the number of visitors to a particular website or page by ensuring that the site appears high on the list of results returned by a search engine.

Here is [Google's definition](#) of SEO:

*Search engine optimization is often about making small modifications to parts of your website. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic*

*search results. You're likely already familiar with many of the topics in this guide, because they're essential ingredients for any webpage, but you may not be making the most out of them.*

Notice how Google states they are small modifications? They are, but there are many. But making changes together, in a planned and methodical manner, can have big results.

## SEO Factors Work In Combination With Each Other

An SEO factor is something that influences where a website or piece of content will rank in search engines. No single SEO factor will produce top search engine rankings. It is the combination of research, planning, and optimization within the website and outside of the website that produces results.

SEO factors have varying weights and no SEO consultant knows the exact weight of each or when these weights change. We're not going to talk about every SEO factor. This is because Google has over 200 SEO factors and over 10,000 sub-signals for ranking. That is way too much information to digest and remember.

And guess what? You don't have to remember or even know all of the factors that influence SEO. You need to learn about what is important and why it matters. Once you have that down, the rest of the details fall into place.

# Why SEO is Vital to Your Website or Blog

If you're like most website owners, at one time or another, you've asked if your website really needs SEO. It's a fair question, but one I can quickly dismiss.

The majority of web traffic is driven by the major search engines like Google, Yahoo! or Bing. Although social media and other types of traffic can route users to your website, the bulk of website traffic is driven by search engines. This statement is true regardless of your website's purpose.

Search engines are powerful because they provide targeted traffic. Or in other words, search engines bring users that are seeking what you offer or sell. Targeted website traffic provides revenue and exposure like no other channel of marketing. Investing in SEO can have a much higher rate of return when compared to other types of marketing efforts.

I have long believed in the power of organic SEO (organic meaning natural and not paid). I've been using it for well over a decade and I've been screaming it from the rooftop for over five years.

This isn't just an idea or thought, it is a strong conviction that is rooted in the core of who I am and it is central to what I believe. I know SEO works because I've proven it. And I want to prove it to you.

Not convinced yet? Let's look at some data. I love data!

## Some Interesting Stats on Search

- There are over 3.2 billion internet users in the world
- There are over 1 billion websites in the world
- There are over 16 million websites using WordPress
- Google processes over 3.5 billion searches per day
- Organic search drives 51% of all visitors to business-to-business and business-to-consumer websites
- Paid-search drives an average of 10% of traffic
- Social drives an average of 5% of traffic
- 89% of customers begin their buying process with a search engine
- 50% of mobile searches visit a store within 1 day

Those are some powerful statistics that clearly show search is a powerhouse of marketing that is worthy of your time.

## SEO Offers Sustainable Growth and Long-Term Results

When you architect a website and you place SEO at the forefront of a web project, you're doing two things simultaneously. You're making sure your website will be usable by search engines and your actual website visitors.

And when I say usable, I mean that real people will search for content, find your website, and learn from it.

They will do this because the search engines clearly understand your content, how it is laid out, and they will know what terms would be the best match for a given page or post.

When you incorporate real SEO into your website, you've made a conscious decision to plant a seed, nurture that seed, and help it grow over time. This long-term strategy and efforts produce high-quality results that continue to produce results year and year.

For SEO to truly work and be sustainable, it needs to include a process of build up. Any SEO consultant who says otherwise is fooling you. SEO is an ongoing effort, but one that is totally worth it.

## A Beautiful Website Doesn't Matter if No One Can Find It

You need solid SEO to compete online and to obtain traffic. Period.

I've had companies show me a beautiful website that they spent lots of money on, but completely forgot about SEO. Guess what happened in those situations? They built it and no one came. No one saw the beautiful website they spent months working on.

Beauty is important and usability is even more critical, however, neither will work for your revenue stream if no one comes to the website.

SEO is the tool to drive people to your website.

# The Anatomy of a Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

A [search engine results page](#) (abbreviated to SERP) is the listing of results returned by a search engine in response to a query for a keyword or phrase. Search engines, like Google and Bing, will return many pages of content results for a given search term.

There is a massive amount of content available on the internet, but none is more important to website owners and marketers than search engine results pages (SERPs).

Website owners all want their content to be placed at the top of page one of search results. This is because very few website searches ever go beyond page one of results.

In many cases, the higher you are on page one the more traffic you will receive. The farther down your content is positioned on the page of results, the fewer people will click on your content listing and visit your website.

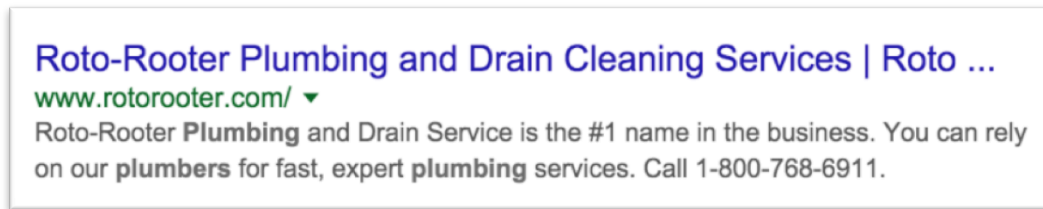
In some industries, I have seen a drastic fall off of clicks once someone gets past the first few listings. But this isn't for all industries or searches.

The more complex the search term is, the more willing users are to explore search listings beyond the first few positions.

## Three Components of a Listing on SERP



Each listing on the SERP has three core components, which include the page title, page description, and page URL. An example of this is given in the image below.



The above search result was given for a basic search for the word plumber. Let's review the three items in more depth.

**Page Title** – This is the first line of a given result, in the example, it is blue underlined which indicates it is a clickable text. This text comes from your page's title or meta title if they are being used. It is important for this text to clearly represent the content and be easy to read and digest.

**Description** – This text is a description of the page's content. It can come from your page's meta description (if populated) or it can be pulled from within the page's content itself. I have found Google will normally adhere to what you have set up as a meta description if it adequately describes the page and it matches the search used.

The interesting thing about the meta description is you can control this and it is your first opportunity to reach website visitors. They see this well before they reach your website or blog, so make sure this description is an

easy to read sentence and make sure you write it so it entices the visitor to click through to the content.

**URL** – This is the actual address where the page lives. This isn't super important to the searcher, but is important to the search engines. In most cases your URL should use actual words and you should avoid page IDs.

## Looking Closer at Search Engine Results Pages

Every SERP is unique, even for search queries performed on the same search engine using the same keywords or search queries. This is because virtually all search engines customize the experience for their users by presenting results based on a wide range of factors beyond their search terms.

These factors can include such things as the user's physical location, browsing history, and social settings. In fact, two SERPs may appear identical, and contain many of the same results, but will often feature subtle differences.

The appearance of search engine results pages is constantly in flux due to changes in the **algorithm**.

What the heck is an algorithm? I'm glad you asked.

An algorithm is a formula or calculation a search engine uses to decide who appears within the SERP. Google, for example, has over 200 data points or **ranking signals**.

The search engines are always trying to improve the quality of their results and because of this, the ranking signals are adjusted daily. In most cases these are very minor tweaks, but they are changes nonetheless.

A SERP typically contains two types of content – “organic” results and paid results.

**Organic results** are listings of web pages that appear as a result of the search engine’s algorithm and the content itself.

These results are based on the quality of content and how closely it matches the search term or phrase used in the query.



**Paid results** are listings that are presented as a result of an advertiser buying an ad. These are commonly called PPC or pay per click.

**Angie's List™ Reviews - angieslist.com**  
**Ad** [www.angieslist.com/plumbing-service](http://www.angieslist.com/plumbing-service) ▼  
 Browse Detailed Reviews & Ratings Of **Plumbing** Services In Your Area!

**Find a Reliable Plumber**  
 Search Angie's List For Local Plumbers And Save Time and Money!

**Guide To Hiring A Plumber**  
 Check Out This Handy Guide To Make Sure You Hire The Right Plumber.

**Find Local Plumbers - Enter Zip Code for Local Plumbers**  
**Ad** [www.plumbersnearyou.com/](http://www.plumbersnearyou.com/) ▼  
 Expert **Plumbers** Available. Call Now  
 Call a Plumber Now · Fast & Reliable · Trusted Local Plumbers  
 Certified Plumbers - Toilet Repairs - Pipe Repairs - Plumbing Installations

**Plumber in My Area - Available 24/7. Courteous Workers**  
**Ad** [www.mr-rooterplumbing.com/](http://www.mr-rooterplumbing.com/) ▼ (877) 731-4776  
 Extensive **Plumbing** Experience.

In our example search for a plumber, we are also seeing **local results** that are being pulled from Google+ and Google maps. These change drastically based on the physical location of the searcher.

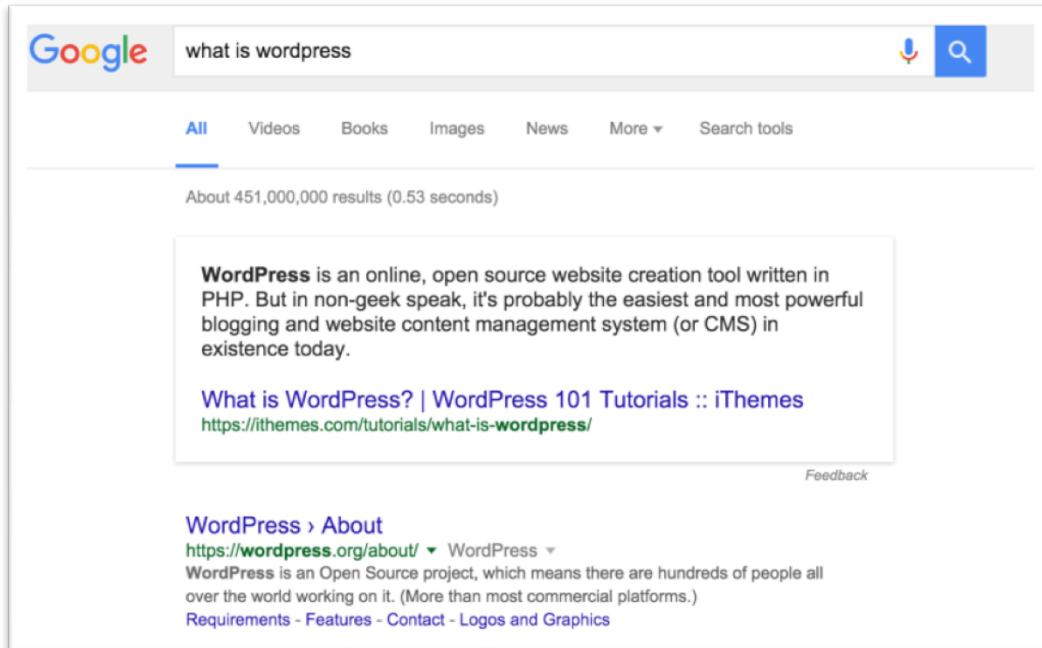
Map data ©2016 Goog

<b>Brian's Plumbing and Heating</b> No reviews · Plumber 3290 M-65 · (989) 728-3295	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Directions</a>
<b>Colvin's Plumbing &amp; Heating</b> No reviews · Heating Contractor 130 Ansley St · (989) 728-5955	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Directions</a>
<b>Bernard Building Center</b> 2 reviews · Lumber Store 395 S., washington · (989) 728-2211 <b>Closed today</b>	<a href="#">Website</a>	<a href="#">Directions</a>

[More places](#)

Now if we want to get really crazy, we can start talking about **knowledge graph** results. This is a results type that Google first introduced in 2012. It

pulls data to commonly asked questions from trusted sources and it provides a concise answer to questions in one central location on the SERP.



In the above image, I had performed a query for *What is WordPress* and in return Google gave me a brief answer and a link to further information.

This data was pulled from my friend Cory Miller's website [ithemes.com](https://ithemes.com). Cory's website is displayed because he provides a great piece of content and because he is a trusted source within the WordPress community. Cory's website has been around for over eight years and he is a major player in our WordPress community.

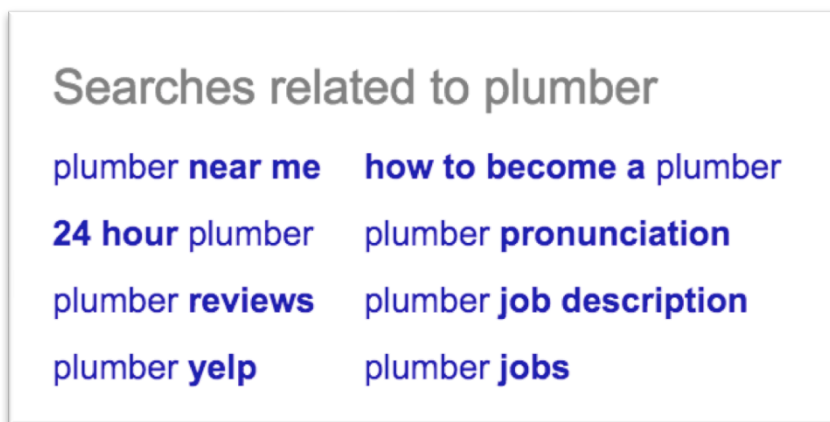
While some people worry that this answer will stop searchers from clicking through to a website, it really doesn't. Users can see [ithemes.com](https://ithemes.com) provides a good answer, which entices them to click through to the page to read more.

And guess what happens then? These same users will see that Cory sells a ton of really great products for building WordPress websites and they'll buy something from him.

What just happened? The user gets a great response for his search, he buys product from iThemes, which rewards Cory for writing killer content, and the user is happy because the experience was positive.

This means they will continue to use Google for search. This makes Google happy. When Google is happy, we're all happy.

Finally, we have what is called [related searches](#). Related searches are Google's suggestions on other search terms a user might want to consider for a given phrase or word.



In our example for the plumber search, Google also suggested the following terms as illustrated in the image above. Search phrases like 24-hour plumber or plumber reviews would make a nice search if I needed to find a new plugin. Thanks Google!

I feel these related phrases are important and I use them in keyword research and in creating my seed list of phrases.

## What Does All This Mean to Website Owners?

As you look at the above examples, don't be concerned if you feel like you don't have all the variances mastered. These variations simply mean you have more opportunities to show up on the SERP.

In my mind, winning in organic SEO is about doing the right thing and making your best effort to [think like Google](#).

The more you focus on Google and doing the right thing for website visitors, the more you'll win at SEO.

So don't be intimidated by all of this information. Let it empower you to learn best practices and learn the right way to create and optimize websites.

# What's Important in SEO

If I've convinced you of the importance of SEO, you're probably starting to wondering how you perform SEO and what it entails. These are valid thoughts and important ones too.

SEO isn't magic or voodoo. I know some SEO consultants will make you believe they possess magical powers and only they can optimize your website, but don't listen to them.

With a good education, you can learn how to weave SEO best practices into your website. You can perform DIY SEO if you have the right education and you get yourself on the right path.

Over the last decade, I've had lots of success with SEO on my website and that of my clients. In all cases, I did the right things and I stayed clear away from tactics that offered quick returns or were geared towards manipulating Google.

Okay well, I one time I did try some less than stellar tactics and Google promptly booted me out of their index. That was a great learning lesson and one I will never forget.

But we won't focus on my failures. Instead, let's focus on the wins and review what was done right so you can learn what really matters with SEO.



## My SEO Case Study from 2009

When I first started Web Savvy Marketing back in 2009 I had a client who quadrupled search traffic and doubled the company's revenue in one year. Guess what? It was due to SEO!

That's pretty exciting, right? Imagine if you could do the same to your website.

Before you get too excited, let me qualify this by saying Eric, the company president, did everything I asked and adhered 100% to my SEO advice. It was the perfect situation and this created exceptional results.

Sadly this isn't the norm. When I consult with companies on SEO, they don't generally follow my advice entirely and they also typically fail to deliver on their promises and their deliverables. This isn't out of lack of desire, but out of lack of focus. They have businesses to run and real world issues outside of their SEO efforts. This hampers our success.

That all being said, SEO can work and I want to review what we did for Eric's website and how we made such a huge impact in only twelve months.

First of all, we didn't participate in any link schemes, comment spamming, paid links or advertising banners. We simply focused on providing quality content, while also letting organic SEO and visitor personas lead the way. We tried to consider what our visitors would perceive as valuable content

and we tried to make sure we looked at all personas (or visitor types) that came to the website.

While this list won't cover everything we did, it will hit the SEO highlights:

- Performed a complete keyword discovery prior to writing content and website launch
- Selected three critical keywords, ten high additional high traffic keywords, and a bunch of long-tail keywords
- Mapped out the website and blog based on visitor personas and our targeted keywords
- Created a new WordPress website with an integrated blog
- Focused on a one keyword per page strategy
- Created strong content for each page that had keyword focus
- Created unique and optimized meta titles and meta descriptions for all keyword focused content
- Created deep internal links through pages and blog posts
- Utilized social media for link building and building a brand
- Performed an inbound linking campaign with very targeted pages and keywords
- Made sure we had a diverse set of new content being added to the website each week
- Worked on other, varied off-site tactics to build company branding and position Eric as the thought leader in his industry

Our keyword rich content included the following types of distribution:

- Two to three blog posts per week
- Press releases
- Webinars
- Polls
- YouTube videos
- Industry reports
- White papers
- Podcasts
- An industry directory with rating system
- Weekly newsletters

All of this together created the perfect storm of SEO activity.

The client's website ranked and ranked well. Our content ranked higher on SERP than major companies like Microsoft and it did so because we had a clearly defined strategy and that we closely followed and executed.

Here is the [secret sauce](#) to this entire yearlong campaign:

- We focused on doing the right thing and helping Google do its job.
- We followed Google's guidelines.
- We wrote quality content.
- We used off-site tactics to help promote what we were doing onsite.
- We were consistent and we followed a well-documented plan.

While the tactics above will shift some – it is years later after all – the core concept stays the same.

# Common Mistakes and Challenges

While there are lots of ways people can get off track with search engine optimization, here are a few very common issues I see. The good news is each item can be avoided.

## #1 – Lack of Education

SEO isn't something you learn overnight. If you want to perform your own SEO, you need to educate yourself. I've spent almost fifteen years learning about SEO and I'm thankful I did because I feel each hour of learning has paid itself back over and over again.

When thinking about education, consider the following places and types of content:

### Reputable SEO Consultants

- Online courses
- In-person seminars and classes
- Blog posts
- SlideShare presentations
- White papers
- Webinars
- Twitter announcements

### Google

- Getting started guide
- Blog
- YouTube videos
- Webmaster forum

### Trial and Error

- Set up a blog or website you can play with
- Test out theories on SEO
- Wait
- Check and see status
- Compare and contrast your efforts
- Document results

## #2 – Lack of Planning

Really good SEO is a process and it requires a detailed and well thought out plan. You cannot expect to execute quality SEO without listing out what you're going to do, documenting yourself along the way, and executing step by step.

You can plan on paper, in Word, or in a project management software package like Basecamp, which is what I use. The key is to know your steps and then follow these steps in order.

## #3 – Ignoring Off-site Factors

For SEO to work, the search engines must see off website activity. This means other websites need to mention you and/or link to you. This can be

derived from a variety of activities, but someone other than your mom needs to know your website or blogs exists.

If you're a nationally focused website, social media helps with this greatly. This would include popular networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+.

If you're a locally focused website, social media is still important but so is local directory listings and interaction with your local community.

#### #4 – Unrealistic Expectations

SEO takes time, resources, and money if you outsource. You need to go into this journey expecting to spend time working on SEO for the long-term.

SEO is a long-term commitment that offers long-term results. Know that good SEO isn't going to take a few days and you won't see huge results in weeks. SEO takes months, but the benefits last for years.

If you can't make the long-term commitment needed, consider spending your money on pay per click ads.

#### #5 – Hiring Crappy SEO Consultants

Good SEO consultants are hard to locate and they are even harder to hire. This is because there aren't a lot of high-quality SEO consultants available

for hire. There are lots and lots of bad SEO consultants or young entrepreneurs who think they know SEO.

Be careful. What you don't know can and will hurt you.

Here are my tips for reviewing and hiring SEO consultants:

- Make sure any SEO consultant you hire has years of real-world SEO experience.
- Make sure their own website easily shows up in search.
- Ask for examples of their work.
- Ask lots of questions.
- Know what they are going to do and don't accept non-answers on their direction.
- Expect to pay top dollar for a high-quality consultant.

Google has even more tips and you can find them at:

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/35291?hl=en>

# The Next Steps on Your SEO Journey

This eBook was designed to give you an overview of search engine optimization, and more importantly, why it matters to your website or blog.

I hope it has provided a better understanding of SEO and empowered you to feel more in control of your online destiny.

That all said, this is just the beginning.

You now have to continue your education of SEO and use this introductory knowledge as a foundation for optimizing your own web property. In doing so, you can learn about SEO and perform SEO yourself or you can hire a third party consultant to help.

Both are great options, but as I've cautioned you above, make sure you use credible resources that have proven, real-world knowledge in search engine optimization.

If you'd enjoyed this eBook and you'd like to have additional SEO education in the same type of easy to use information, consider signing up for our online SEO course at [DIYSEOCourses.com](http://DIYSEOCourses.com).

The online course is self-paced and offers a full eight hours of education in the form of videos, written tutorials, template downloads, and quizzes.



## About the Author

My name is Rebecca Gill. I'm the founder of Web Savvy Marketing and the SEO instructor at [DIYSEOCourses.com](http://DIYSEOCourses.com).

It's great to virtually meet you!

SEO is a passion of mine and my goal is to help you take control of your online destiny by teaching you how efficiently and effectively use search engine optimization to drive free traffic to your website or blog.



I love SEO and all of the opportunities it offers to bloggers and website owners. I want to share this love of SEO with you and help show you what SEO can do for your website or blog.

I'd like to take a moment and give you a brief overview of me and my personal history. I think it is important for you to know a little bit about me so you can see what drives me and what fuels my approach to SEO.

### The Backstory

I've been working with sales, marketing, and SEO for almost twenty years.

I start there because you need to know I've been doing this for a while and my eBook, blog posts, and online SEO courses are based on two decades of education and real-world experience.

While I am very fond of sales and marketing as a whole, I love SEO. I always have and I'm quite sure I can attribute this love of SEO to my upbringing and personal history.

I had a very non-traditional childhood and for much of it, I lived with my grandparents in a small town in northern Michigan. My Grandmother was a significant influence in my life and she taught me many things as she raised me.

One of the core concepts my Grandmother instilled in me was the value of hard work and doing the right thing.

This may seem irrelevant, but if you work with me on an SEO consulting project or take one of my SEO courses, you'll discover this is the focus of everything I do.

I never take the easy route in anything. Instead, I evaluate the situation – many times with data – and I choose the path of hard work and long-term results. And, as a baseline of everything I do, I make sure I live true to my values along the way.

In business, and particularly the internet, I believe this is even more important.

Everything I've done in SEO has been focused on this pursuit of the right path and the honorable path. Work hard, do the right thing for the visitor, and live by the rules set forth by the search engines.

My success in website promotion was started early with my Grandmother in that small northern Michigan town and it lives strong within me today. She taught me life wasn't full of shortcuts and that true success was derived from planning and hard work. I want to show you how this philosophy applies to SEO and how it can help grow your website or blog traffic.

This eBook, my free blog posts, and my SEO courses are designed to teach you to do just that!

Succeed with internet marketing by working hard, smart, and always staying focused on the visitor and creating a positive user experience.

Learning SEO and applying it to your website or blog is about working hard. If you pursue this path with earnest, you'll be rewarded for your efforts.