

Timeline for SEO Results

INTRODUCTION

There is one important factor to remember whenever you are involved in improving the organic rankings of a website, and that factor is time. One of the most common questions is "How long till I start to see results?" This article is dedicated to anyone who has ever asked that question.

It doesn't matter what industry you are involved in, or what techniques you follow, in all cases you will be a prisoner of time. In the vast majority of cases search engine rankings don't come over night.

Regardless of the scope of the SEO campaign you are undertaking, you will have to wait for results. It doesn't matter if you are undertaking a massive link building & social media campaign combined with extreme content development - you will still have to wait for those results. Just how long you need to wait however, will depend on a large number of factors.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

How long it will take for rankings starts with a few key factors:

How optimized is your site before SEO?

If your established site has no optimization in place at all, and has navigation that is blocking search engine spiders, sometimes opening the site up can result in a rather quick turn-around for results.

How many inbound links does your site have?

If you have an old site with no links, this will add to the time you need to wait. If you have a number of links already, Google will probably be in to check out things within a week or so of updating.

How new is your website?

A brand new site with no links has to wait. Google may find you, but probably not. If you do nothing, your site may not ever be indexed - you must get a few links, and an XML sitemap if you want to stand a chance with a new site.

How flexible is your site?

If your site utilizes a content management system, how flexible is this system for customization? If your current back end will not allow for SEO based changes, this will drastically slow down your ranking progress.

How competitive is your target phrase?

This is huge. The more competitive a target phrase is, the longer you will likely have to wait, and the more links, pages, and fresh content you will probably need. Picking a target phrase that has searches, but modest competition is your best bet to get started. As long as your "dream phrase" is relevant, you can go after the bigger fish once your site has some links, content, and has started to find its place on the map.

Is your site positioned to be able to compete?

Take a look at the top 10 sites for your target phrase. If on average the ranking sites have 10,000 inbound links and 1,000 plus pages, and your site has 7 links and 12 pages, you're likely doomed. You don't need to match the numbers of the top 10, but you do need to be in the ball park. If the top 10 is littered with all the big guys like Amazon, eBay, and the dreaded Wikipedia, you might just want to consider reevaluating your goals. If your site is not in a comparable position with the rest of the top 10, then you need to either step up your efforts in order to compete, or plan on waiting a very long time.

GET GOOGLE TO VISIT YOUR SITE

How long it takes to start seeing results starts with Google. Once Google spiders your site you will still have to wait for the updated cache to appear in Google's index, and in most cases, you will have to wait longer still to see any impact in the search rankings.

In most cases getting Google to your site is relatively easy, but it can sometimes take a month or longer.

Even a site with some inbound links and an XML sitemap, may have to wait a while.

Typically an established active website will seldom have to wait more than a month to get Google's eyes; however, if your site has been sitting stagnant for several years, it may take longer.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR RANKINGS

You now know some of the determining factors, but how long will it take for your site to see an improvement in its organic rankings? With such a vast array of variables there is no way to know for sure. However, the timelines below are fairly accurate.

Niche Industry

A niche industry is represented by phrases that are relatively specific, such as "widgets Bellingham". While they don't require a geographic modifier, phrases focused on a very specific area often are considered niche. Phrases used for a niche site will also often return less than 100,000 results in a Google search. The top 10 ranking sites will also often have less than 100 inbound links each.

Timeline:

- **Brand New Site: Possibly as little as a few months**
- **Established Site: Potentially it could literally be over night, but most likely around 6 weeks.**

Medium Industry

Medium Industry terms are slightly more general, but still include some kind of modifier, such as a state or color; "Washington Widgets" or "Blue Widgets". These phrases often represent no more than a few million results in a typical Google search with the top 10 ranking sites having between 100-1,000 inbound links.

Timeline:

- **Brand New Site: 6 months to a year**
- **Established Site: 2-4 months**

Highly Competitive Industry

These pages are those with phrases that are rather broad and seldom have any modifiers, such as simply "widgets". You will often find tens or even hundreds of millions of competing pages in Google for your target phrase. Often the links required for the top 10 will be in the thousands, or tens of thousands (sometimes even in the millions).

Timeline:

- **Brand New Site: Anywhere from 1 to 5 years**
- **Established Site: Could be as long as a year or more**

For a brand new site, starting with nothing, in most cases you will be looking at around a year before you start to see significant ranking changes. You may get the odd ranking here and there, and start to see some traffic, but for any phrases that are remotely competitive, it can take quite a while. Unless you have a very tight niche, expect to wait at least 6 months before you see any movement at all. This is not to say that you can't get quick results, but in the majority of cases it is quite rare.

For more established sites, rankings tend to come much more quickly. One significant factor in determining time is links. If your established site has lots, but the site itself is simply lacking fundamental SEO or proper navigation, then you can sometimes see results rather quickly. If you have no links and need to build them, it significantly increases the wait time. Even for an established site, achieving links in a competitive industry can still take some time.

RANKINGS ARE TAKING FOREVER

There are a number of reasons why your site may not achieve results. If you find that your campaign has been going on for a long time and you have seen no movement what-so-ever, it is possible that one of the following is hindering your efforts.

Spamming & Penalties

In some cases your site may take forever to achieve rankings, or the rankings may not come at all. If your

site has been previously penalized for spamming, you absolutely must clean up all traces of the past dirtiness.

Once the site is entirely cleaned up, then you can apply for re-inclusion. This is certainly no assurance that Google will ever pay your site any attention again, but it's the first step to the land of maybe.

Duplicate Content

If your site has utilized mass amounts of duplicate content, chances are you will not ever see rankings until you replace it all with something original and meaningful. There is no "duplicate content" penalty per-se, but you are essentially penalizing yourself if you copy content. Google tends to look at the first instance it finds online for a piece of content as the official source (not always the case).

If you copy content that is already out there and indexed by Google, they will discount your content as it is already indexed somewhere else, and your site or page will simply not get any rankings for it - and rightfully so.

Links (or lack thereof)

If your site has no links, you probably will not get any rankings, even after you are fully indexed. This is not always the case, I have seen sites rank well for various phrases with zero inbound links - but it is rare, and should not be relied on.

On the flip side of this, let's say your site has thousands of links, but they are from free for all sites, link farms, or "bad neighborhoods", and so on - they won't help you. These links won't necessarily hurt you, but will be essentially ignored. You need quality, relevant links.

Competition

You just may be out of your league. If you have a small operation, and are competing for a major ultra competitive term, chances are you won't ever see the light of day. Not to say it is not possible, but if you are competing in a well established industry where literally 10's of thousands of links are required, and your target phrase is experiencing millions of searches a month, you need to weigh your targets. Chances are your keywords need to be re-evaluated as your chances of success are slim.

Not Listening

If your SEO gives you actionable recommendations, follow them. Recommendations are given for a reason, to help you achieve rankings. If you are not willing to implement what is suggested, then your campaign may go nowhere. I have seen websites fail to rank simply because clients ignored recommendations. Your SEO will not be able to help you if you refuse to implement their advice.

A LITTLE SUCCESS STORY

Rankings can come literally within hours. It is very rare but it happens. In one specific example a blog post was put up on a very specific niche topic that had almost no coverage online. Google coincidentally spidered the blog within an hour or so of posting, and within an hour from that, the blog post was #1 in the organic results for the most relevant phrase. The site saw a giant spike in traffic for the next couple days while the phrase was a hot topic. (The search phrase was very specific and localized: "election results"). This shows that for a site with an established link base, and a good reputation in Google, rankings can sometimes come extremely quickly.

Regardless of industry and target phrases, you will have to wait for your search results. Just how long you will wait varies on far too many factors to give a solid number, but expect to wait for results anywhere from a few days to several years.- *Scott Van Achte*

