2020 SEO Guide

SEO is often misused as a blanket term for digital marketing. In fact, SEO is just one part of every successful digital marketing strategy, but possibly the most important part.

After you read the SEO Guide, you'll be able to make more informed choices about your SEO strategy. Hopefully, you'll know what you can do in-house, and where you may need a digital marketing agency to help you get found more often on Google.

The 2020 SEO Guide:

- Gives clear and concise definitions of key SEO terms.
- Shares best practices for getting you closer to the top of Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs).
- Demonstrates how SEO and digital marketing work together to help your business.

What is SEO?

SEO is the acronym for Search Engine Optimization, the process of structuring websites and accompanying content to obtain traffic from search engines such as Google and Bing (this guide will focus on Google, as it holds the lion's share of search volume). Rather than a single product or practice, SEO is an umbrella term for techniques and tactics designed to:

- Increase both organic (traffic from search results) and paid (traffic from ads) search traffic
- Ensure your target audience finds your site when they search for products and services online
- Make it easier for search engine bots to read and rank websites

Does Your Website Need SEO?

To put it simply; yes.... No question. Without a doubt. No matter the industry, the age of business, or status of competitors, every business should at least implement basic SEO strategies to help their offerings get found on Google. WIthout simple SEO in place, your business may not be a result on Google when a customer is specifically looking for your business! Additionally, the more competitive an industry a business is in, the more resources it should allocate to SEO. You may be asking yourself, 'why SEO and not another marketing strategy?'.

If data from earlier this year is any indication, the Internet is well on its way to housing 2 billion websites— with more being added daily. If you could use 20 times more chances for web traffic, 3 times better results than social, and returns on investment that will only increase over time, SEO must be a priority.

- 82% of marketers say that the effectiveness of SEO is on an upward trajectory (via MarketDive).
- 300% more traffic comes from search than from social media (via Ironpaper).

Can You Do SEO Yourself?

Every business—and every team—has unique assets and strengths. How much SEO you can do yourself depends on how much bandwidth you have, how complex your site structure is, and your web development knowledge.

While there are tips and tricks everyone can try, the challenge is having the time, resources, and tech-savvy to constantly tweak your SEO strategies. With Google changing their algorithms as many as 500 times every year, keeping up gets overwhelming for many who don't have the dedicated tools and expertise of a digital marketing agency in their corner.

On-Page vs. Off-Page SEO

The purpose of SEO is to get a website ranked as high as possible on search engines, such as Google. But, what are the factors that Google looks at to rank websites? That answer is a little more complex and nobody but Google has the exact answer. What we do know is that Google uses an algorithm to rank websites based on two main factors: on-page SEO and off-page SEO.

On-page Examples	Off-page Examples
Concise website building and structuring	Submitting pages for indexing or listing in directories
Keyword research and placement	Building and developing links
Content creation	Affiliate/influencer marketing campaigns
You have internal site access and are able to manipulate site structure and content.	**You are promoting your content on other websites and online platforms.**

On-page SEO

On-page SEO refers to every strategy, technique, and tool you use within your site to optimize your web pages and content for search engines. Now, pay close attention to the components that make up on-page SEO, as this is where non-SEO experts will be able to make the most meaningful impact on their search engine rankings.

Keywords

A Keyword can be defined as the topic that your content is about; it doesn't necessarily have to be just one word. To reiterate, keywords are the topics or ideas that your content is about and the search queries potential customers will use when looking for products or services like yours.

We will get into how to select the best keywords for your business later in this SEO guide, but it is best for you to know how to use them, as they are referenced throughout this section. Keywords, while not being as important to SEO ranking as they once were, still play an important role. You should pick keywords that are most relevant to your business and the content on the page. To get the most out of your keywords, have them present in the first 100 words on your page.

Additionally, there is no need to "keyword stuff", or overuse the term/phrase in an attempt to trick Google. In fact, Google will punish web pages that have too high of a concentration of a keyword. We suggest that your keywords make up no more than 2 percent of all words on the page.

Content

Content is king and SEO proves that. No matter how well you optimize your website for search engines (we'll show you how below), it won't rank well if you are offering poor content. If readers are not getting value from the content your website provides, Google will not place you higher in the SERPs. It is Google's goal to provide its users with the most useful and relevant information possible to keep them using their services time and time again.

Avoid Thin Content

One aspect of SEO is link building, which we will discuss just below, which often leads to thin content. Thin content is content that users do not find valuable. We see this most often in Blogs, where there is very little content at all on the page. The bare

minimum that Google is looking for is at least 300 words on every page on your website. It has been noted that pages with more than 2000 words tend to rank the highest. With that in mind, our suggestion to you is; if you have something important to write, make sure you write it in at least 2000 words.

Avoid Duplicate Content
A common mistake that a lot of SEO beginners make is creating duplicate content. Duplicate content can be defined as the same content living in more than one place (more than one web page). While you may think of plagiarism when you hear that definition, it usually happens in far less nefarious scenarios. You shouldn't use the same exact content on any two pages. Instead, rewrite content that needs to be on multiple pages in creative ways. You need to avoid duplicate content because it can kill your search engine rankings. If you create killer content but reuse it in multiple places, Google will not know what the original source was and where to send the traffic.

Note: sharing your content on social media DOES NOT create duplicate content. In fact, we suggest you share your best content on every platform you can!

URL Structure
To begin, you want to optimize your URL for search engines. Many platforms, such as WordPress, have a generic URL structure that does absolutely nothing to help your SEO. They look something like: www.yourwebsite.com/blog/p=124.

Instead, you want to include your keywords in the URL and try to keep it as short as possible. Also, be sure to remove any stop words, such as: a, and, is, etc.

EXAMPLE:

Page Title: The Return of Image SEO: What You Need to Know
Correct URL: https://roiamplified.com/insights/return-image-seo/

Title Tag

Your title tag is possibly the most important on-page SEO factor. It's one of the first things that users read and it tells Google what the following content is going to be about. Just like in your URL, you want to be sure to include your keywords in the title tag. Additionally, you should make an effort to put it as early in the title as possible.

Header Tags

Once you craft a great title for your webpage, wrap it in an H1 tag. The H1 tag tells Google that this is the start of the content on the page and what the content should be about. If you use a platform such as WordPress, the platform will automatically wrap your title in an H1 tag for you. For traditional websites, made up of multiple pages, each page should have only one H1 tag. Subsequent section headers, or subheaders, of each page, can be wrapped in lower H tags (H2, H3, etc) for better readability for both human users and Google.

If your website is a one-pager, a website that consists of only 1 page, you can use H1 tags to separate important sections of the page. Whenever Google sees an H1 tag, it reads it as completely new and unrelated content to the previous content.

> **<h1>**Custom Digital Marketing Solutions**</h1>**
>
> **<h2>**Innovative strategies, transparent reporting, proven results.**</h2>**

Meta Descriptions

Even though meta descriptions are not a ranking factor for search engines, they do hold value for your website and are a part of your SEO presence. When your webpage is displayed on a SERP, three things are always displayed: the title of the page, the URL of the page, and the meta description. Meta descriptions give users a brief description of what your webpage is going to be about and are located directly under the title and URL of the search engine result. Be sure to include your keywords in the meta description.

Traditionally, Google has shown meta descriptions up to 160 characters. They changed this character length to around 320 early in 2018, but have switched back to the 160 limit. Due to the character limit that Google shows, we suggest keeping your meta descriptions under 160 characters.
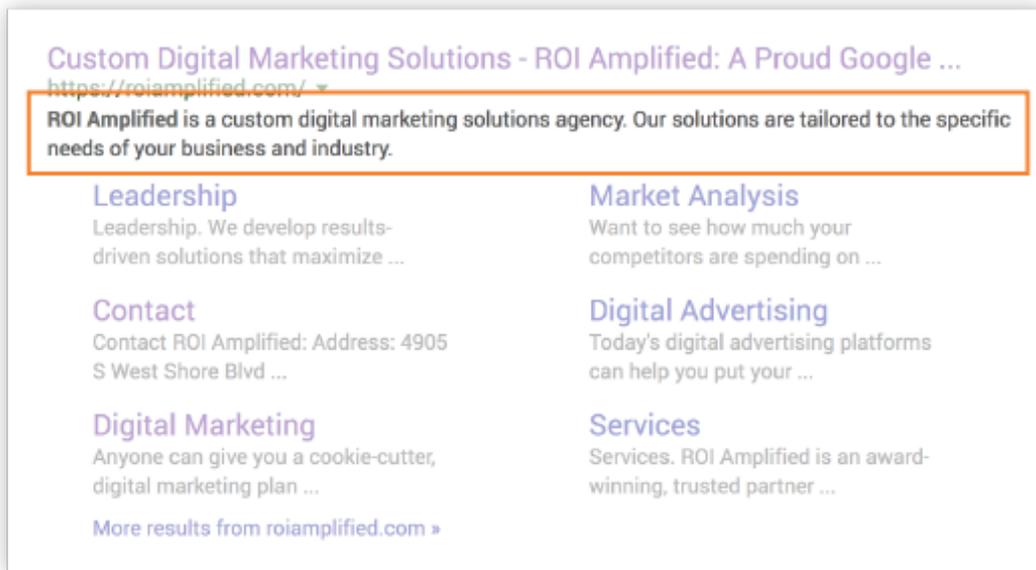
Image File Name & Alt Text

Two more important SEO factors that are far too often overlooked are image file name and alt text. Almost every web page should include at least one image, and it is crucial that you optimize your image(s) for Google. The first aspect of optimizing images is including your keywords in the image file name (seo_guide.jpg).

The other aspect is the image alt text, which helps with website accessibility by describing images to visitors who are unable to see them. Users who would be unable to view images primarily consist of users whose browsers block them and

visually-impaired users. Again, you want to be sure to include your keyword(s) in the alt text.
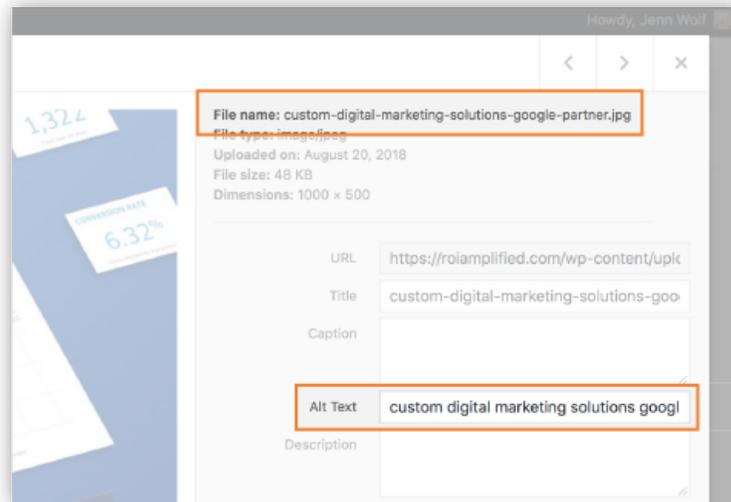
Outbound Links

Outbound links are links on your website that link to other web-sites and could seem to some readers as counterproductive: 'why would I want to link to someone else's content?'. The reason for this is to help Google determine what your webpage is about and that your web page is a source for quality information. While you shouldn't force it, we recommend having at least one outbound link on most web pages.
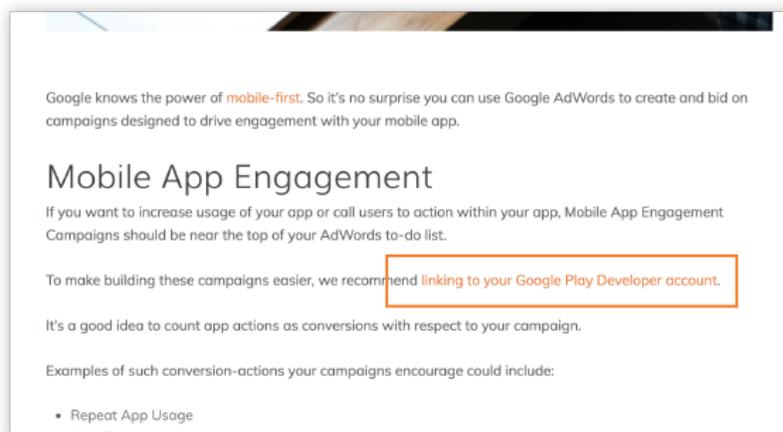
Internal Links

More on the complex side of things is internal linking. Internal links are links on a webpage that link to other web pages on your website. The purpose of internal links is to provide context to your content and allow users to navigate your website naturally. From an SEO perspective, you want to have more internal links pointing to your most important content. For example, if you were to write an SEO Guide, you would want to link to that guide in blog posts and on other web pages.

As a rule of thumb, try to have at least two internal links on every page. The reason internal linking is a bit more complex is that you can get very detailed in your linking structure in an attempt to give authority, at varying degrees, to your content so that Google puts the most weight on the content you deem most important.
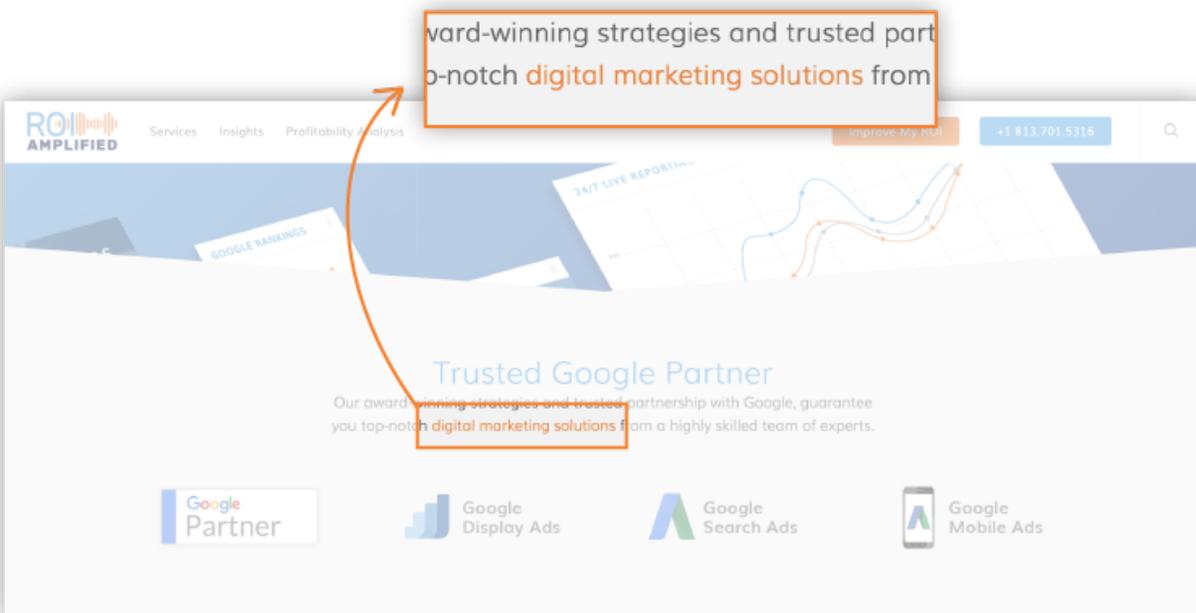
Off-page SEO
Off-page SEO refers to the actions taken outside of your own website that can help boost your search engine rankings.

Inbound Links
Google views inbound links, or links to your website, as a major plus. Inbound links are often referred to as backlinks, which is what we will refer to them as. The more authoritative the backlinks to your website are, the more authority they pass to you. The more authority your website has, the more likely Google is to show it on its SERPs. Getting backlinks is not easy and is a constant work in progress.

Some broad methods of getting backlinks are:
- Create compelling content that people want to read.
- Produce content that makes people want to share it.
- Create awesome visuals that people will want to share.

Social Signals
Google states that social media is not a direct SEO ranking factor, but most experts agree that things such as retweets and facebook shares DO, in fact, effect websites' rankings. From our perspective, social media is something that every business should utilize. It is a free marketing channel that allows you to get in front of potential customers.

Have you ever searched for a business on Facebook and they didn't have a page, or there page was inactive? If so, you probably didn't get a great feeling about that business. Obviously, a social media page that has more interaction is

going to bring bigger SEO benefits to a business than one that has less interaction, but merely having a social presence is a good start.

Other Off-page SEO Factors
Of the two SEO ranking factors, On-page SEO and Off-page SEO, Off-page SEO is much less understood and less clear how to exactly optimize for. Since this guide is meant for beginners and SEO veterans just looking to brush up on knowledge, we are opting not to dig any deeper into these often-argued tactics.

Some of these topics/tactics that we encourage you to research are:

- PageRank & TrustRank
- Page Load Speed
- Offline usage of brand & domain name
- Traffic usage metrics
- TF*IDF

Keyword Research

Solid knowledge of the keywords, questions, and phrases your ideal customers use to find your products and services is critical to effective SEO. Keyword research is how you uncover your unique framework for success. Effective keyword research combines an internal audit of what your most profitable products are and a look externally to determine the competitiveness and frequency of the keywords that would lead a user to those products.

To demonstrate how to do an internal audit and identify keywords, below is an in-depth example for a small business owner. Let's say Sue owns a Shoe Store: *Sue's Shoes*.

Sue's keyword research begins with some central questions (and yours should too):

- What style, type, size, brand, etc. of shoes are people most often searching for?
    - Who is searching for these terms?
    - What is their age, income, and location?
    - How do they like to make purchases?
    - Where do they spend time online?
    - How often do they check email?
- When are people searching for their next pair of shoes?
    - Which shoes are most popular at certain times of the year?
- How are people searching for shoes?
    - What words do they use when they search?

- Which questions do they ask?
- Do they shop for shoes more often on social, on a desktop, or on a mobile device?
- Why are people shopping for shoes?
  - Getting ready for a particular season?
  - Are they buying in response to a new popular trend or style?
  - Are they looking for organically/ethically-made shoes?
  - Finding a gift for a loved one?
  - Is there a wedding or special event coming up?
  - Is it time for their growing kiddos to go back to school?
- How can Sue create content that answers all her customers' questions, and helps them find the perfect pair of shoes every time they shop?

This isn't an exhaustive list. There are always more things to learn—and more questions to ask—to refine SEO. But this process helps Sue narrow down her keywords, and make her content more relevant to customers' searches. What else should Sue (and you) consider when building keyword strategies?

Keyword Value

Your keywords should be prioritized in order of their value to your business. You will craft your SEO strategy around the keywords that will lead customers to your most profitable products. Which shoes in Sue's inventory are the most valuable and profitable? She can prioritize those sizes, colors, and types of shoes when crafting her content and creating her digital advertising campaigns.

Long-tail Keywords

Keywords that are more specific and describe a product or service more in depth can be considered long-tail keywords. These terms are searched for less often than broad keywords but are easier to win for small businesses. Additionally, long-tail keywords often lead consumers to exactly what they're looking for, as they are providing more details to the search engine. Some of Sue's long-tail keywords may include things like: "Blue shoes size 9" & "High-heeled leather pumps".

Synonyms

After you spend the time crafting the perfect keyword for your business, you will want to determine what words or phrases are similar to your keyword and what words or phrases will people use when they are actually searching for your keyword. For example, when you were searching for a guide to help you learn about SEO, you may have searched 'SEO guide'.

Another phrase that you could have typed in your search engine while looking for the same exact content is 'Search Engine Optimization guide'. This scenario is a clear example of when you would want to use synonyms. To implement, use these variations of your keyword throughout your content. If you're having trouble determining what synonyms to use for your keyword, type your keyword into Google and then scroll to the bottom of the SERP. Google will provide a list of searches related to your keyword; these will work great. Additionally, plugins such as Yoast, make it very simple to set up synonyms.

Keyword Potential

After you've curated a list of keywords that meet the criteria listed above, you should determine the potential each of these keywords has. Specifically, you need to know how many times people are searching for those keywords. We use a keyword research tool called Spyfu, to determine not only how many times a keyword is searched, but also how much it would cost to bid on that keyword. We highly recommend using some type of keyword research tool.

Once Sue has a list of keywords and queries, she needs to know they're effective for getting clicks on her ads and webpages. As her business, web traffic, and customer base grow, Sue will need some outside support for keeping her SEO on track so she can continue to sell the best shoes on the block.

Researching and improving your keywords doesn't stop with the fundamentals. After all, there are many thousands of businesses and entrepreneurs touting their wares online, including your competitors. So you have to make sure your SEO allows you to stand out from the competition.

Local SEO

When customers are searching for local products and services, Google attempts to show them the businesses it feels will best fit their need. This is where Local SEO becomes a factor that can either help your business flourish or completely crush it. While it's particularly important if you own brick-and-mortar stores, it can also affect your e-commerce depending on your shipping charges, and how they change with proximity to your business.

Google My Business

Google My Business is Google's business directory and, thus, ultra important to your local SEO Listed businesses with the best SEO will appear in the Local 3-Pack, the batch of 3 featured businesses nearest you that show up when you do a relevant local search. It has many benefits, but here are a few of our favorites.

- It's free to use for eligible businesses.
- You control what is displayed in the listing.
- The listing itself gives you data and analytics.
- Someone can call your business from the listing.

Reach for the 5 Stars

A 2016 study found 87 percent of people won't even consider buying a product or service unless they see three-to-five star reviews of the company. The same report found fewer than 10 positive reviews are needed for customers to buy. Asking for a few reviews (and posting them on your GMB, website, social, etc.) goes a long way toward getting you better rankings, and more referrals— who doesn't want that?

Local Keywords

You can think of local keywords as those terms that you would use to find a restaurant near you or the closest ATM. For example, if you wanted to find the closest Macy's, you would probably search 'Macys near me': this is what we would consider a local keyword.

Let's go back to Sue's Shoes for a more detailed example. Sue is on her way to having a great keyword strategy, but if she wants anyone in her neighborhood to walk into her store, she must include local keywords specific to her city, address, and community:

- "Sues shoes Denver"
- "Sues shoes downtown Denver"
- "Shoe store Denver art district"

How to Implement Local Keywords

On-Page SEO:

As mentioned above, your keyword should be present throughout your webpage. Consider adding modifiers, such as the city that your business is in, before your keyword to give more specific information to Google.

A great H1 tag (also the Title and URL of the web page) for Sue's Shoes located in Denver would be: *Sue's Shoes of Denver*

Local Directories & Business Listings:

Yelp, Yellowpages, and other similar business listing websites are a great place to start. Be sure you have up-to-date contact

information on sites such as these so that Google never finds conflicting data about your location. The more of websites like these, including social media sites that allow you to list an address, that you can have the correct location information the better.

Since Sue's Shoes is in Denver, she can try getting listed in online Denver directory sites. This expands her opportunities to sell shoes to people new to her area looking for things to do and places to shop. If you're having trouble finding a good directory for your business, your local Chamber of Commerce site is a great place to start.

Local Structured Data Markup:
Local structured data markup is a type of coding that tells search engines more about your business by making your sites easier for search engine bots to read. If you're able to invest the time and resources into your markup, you'll be ahead of 70% of websites when it comes to optimizing for local search.

About 70% of sites do not use local structured data markup.

Measuring & Tracking

One of the most important things you can do as part of a comprehensive SEO strategy is to measure, test, and track your results. You can prevent wasted hours (and advertising dollars) and get more of your valuable content on page one of your ideal customers' search results. We can recommend a few tools we consider especially intuitive and user-friendly.

Google Analytics
Google's free tool for tracking SEO is invaluable if you're trying to increase your visibility on the world's most popular search engine. There are numerous features and tutorials to help you get the most out of every campaign.

SpyFu & WebCEO
These tools allow you to gain insights about your competitors' keywords and other key information they use for SEO. When doing keyword research, these tools are invaluable and can give you a leg up. They will help you determine how much you need to spend on paid advertising and how competitive your keywords are.

White Hat or Black Hat?

As long as search engines have been ranking websites, people have been trying to game the system. They use many tactics to get their websites ranked higher than the content they provide deserves. From keyword stuffing to link buying, the SEO landscape has seen numerous black-hat tricks — and Google always catches on.

Not only are black-hat tactics only short-term solutions, Google often punishes websites with these tactics and can even completely remove them from their SERPs. Whether working with an agency or handling SEO in-house, make sure your tactics are 100% White Hat.

White Hat SEO
Strategies that follow search engine rules and guidelines and focus on building value for site visitors.

Black Hat SEO
Subversive techniques designed to overtake search engines with spam and fool their bots into indexing and ranking websites.

Black Hat tactics get you big-time penalties. You could be fined until you're put out of business. Either way, Black Hat is disastrous for your bottom line, and your reputation; White Hat is a much safer investment, with much better returns.

2020 SEO Guide Conclusion

There is no quick fix or simple solution for Search Engine Optimization. Instead, doing it correctly takes a detailed plan before you begin tackling the ranking factors mentioned above. The 2020 SEO Guide was created to give you a better understanding of core SEO tactics and determine if doing it yourself is something you and your team will be able to accomplish. We'd be happy to talk with you about your current SEO strategy and how we can get you found on Google!

At ROI Amplified, we've seen firsthand what customized Search Engine Optimization, transparent reporting, and up-to-the-minute insights can do for business owners, and we know it can be a full-time job.

ROI Amplified
myroi@roiamplified.com
+1 813.701.5316