



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION:

A PLAY-BY-PLAY GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS



SPORTSCONNECT.COM



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INTRO

Picture this: My child is getting old enough to start playing sports and has shown interest in a few already. My job is to find a fun, positive, and supportive local sports program for her to join. I go online and search “youth sports in my area.” The top results include a local soccer club, a YMCA, and a Little League® baseball and softball program. After clicking through each of their websites, I decide to sign my child up for the one that looks the most promising.

Why do certain sports organizations show up higher in my search results? The answer is search engine optimization (SEO), or the process of gaining visibility in search engine unpaid results.

For a youth sports program, being at the top of a search engine results page can be the difference between gaining a new member or losing them to another organization. In this ebook, we will help you understand the value of SEO and how a few simple best practices can improve your organization’s online visibility.

LET’S START WITH THE BASICS.

CHAPTER 1: BASICS OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

WHAT IS SEO?

Search engine optimization refers to steps that you take to help your website rank higher on search engine results pages (SERPs). When done properly, this means that your youth sports program will be one of the first websites to appear (after paid ads) when parents are looking for a sports program using search engines like Google, Yahoo!, and Bing.

HOW DO SEARCH ENGINES WORK?

THERE ARE NEARLY 1.7 BILLION WEBSITES ON THE INTERNET, INCLUDING WEBSITES FOR THE COUNTLESS YOUTH SPORTS PROGRAMS ACROSS THE GLOBE. IN FACT, ACCORDING TO ESPN, YOUTH SPORTS IN THE UNITED STATES ALONE IS “SO BIG THAT NO ONE KNOWS QUITE HOW BIG IT IS.”

In order for search engines to cut through the noise and give users the most relevant results, they use complex programs which scan every website to gather and organize information. When your organization's website is scanned, the search engine is looking at each URL and the topics covered on those web-pages (such as field location and upcoming camps) and for links to other websites (more on this later). The more your website content matches what the parent is searching, the higher your website appears in the order. This natural placement of websites is referred to as “organic search.”

Optimizing your website for organic search will be the focus of this ebook.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH YOUTH SPORTS?

In correlation with a decline in funding and increased registration costs, many youth sport organizations are experiencing a decrease in participation numbers. Knowing this, it's more important than ever for your program to have a strong online presence. While traditional grassroots marketing methods (word-of-mouth, flyers, etc.) might have done the job in the past, the thriving digital age means that your prospective athletes and parents are now turning to the internet for current information. In fact, there are nearly 3.5 million Google searches made online every day.

When the new parent mentioned earlier is searching for a youth sports program in your area, you want to be sure your organization is at the top of the search engine results page. In turn, this helps you market to a wider audience and grow your membership. In this ebook, we will teach you how to do just that.



CHAPTER 2: APPLYING SEO TO YOUTH SPORTS

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION IS IMPORTANT TO WEBSITES IN EVERY INDUSTRY, INCLUDING YOUTH SPORTS, AND ANYONE CAN DO IT.

SEO might seem like a daunting task to take on, especially for a volunteer running an entire website in their spare time. The truth is, there is no exact formula for SEO and anyone can do the basics. In fact, you are probably already performing a few SEO best practices without realizing it. Investing a little time will result in a substantial improvement for your program's website.

CONTENT IS KING

You may have heard the marketing phrase "content is king." This simply means that content, or any form of media that communicates your message, is the most important factor in building a successful website. Content can include blog posts, photos, infographics, downloadable forms, and more.

QUALITY OF CONTENT

When it comes to creating the best content for your website, you should consider what information current and prospective parents want to see when they come to your page. Use this knowledge to create keywords for each individual page. The keyword serves as the page topic or focus. For example, if your program has a summer camp, the camp webpage title (which appears on the page tab in the viewer's web browser) could be "Atlanta Baseball Summer Camp" and the keyword(s) used throughout the page would be "summer camp."

Be sure to remember "quality over quantity." You don't want the quality of the content to diminish by over-using the same word. **A good rule-of-thumb is to stick to using your keyword 4-6 times per page.** Supplemental keywords should also be considered when creating content on your webpages. These relate to the main topic of the page and add value and meaning. For our summer camp example, supplemental keywords on the page could include: youth sports, your city name, player age range, etc. This process of incorporating relevant keywords should be applied to every page on your site.

DETERMINING KEYWORDS

When considering keywords to incorporate into your webpages, ask yourself, what terms will our example parent from the beginning of this ebook search? Write these keywords down to use throughout your content.

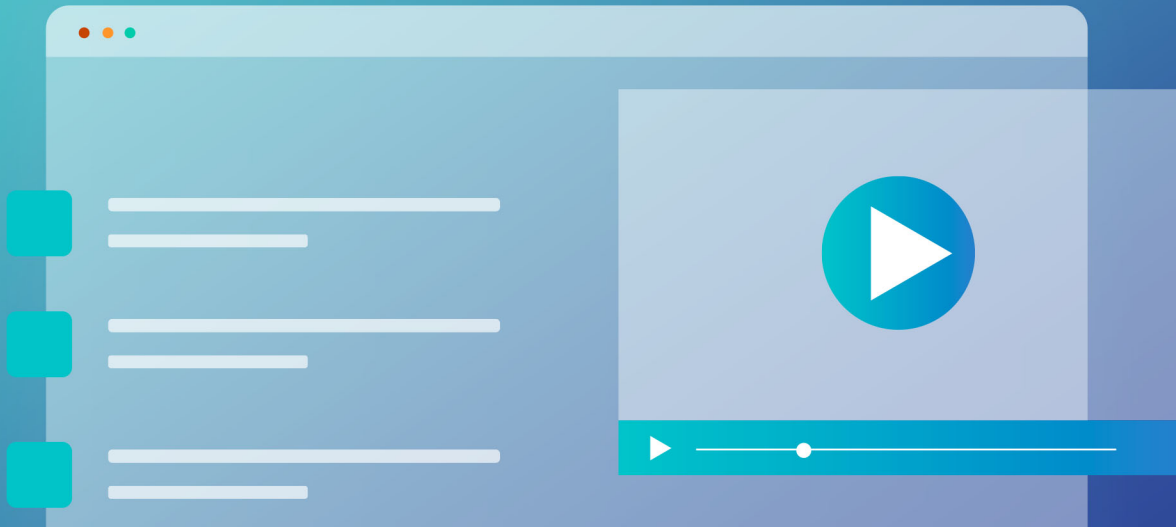
Each page of your website will have a different topic, such as schedules, summer camps, field openings, etc. In addition to likely search terms, you should also base your keywords around these topics. On your homepage, keywords that are specific to your town, fields, team name, and affiliation name (if applicable) are a good place to start.

As you build your website, keep both the inquiring and involved parent in mind.

- Get feedback from the people who are visiting your site (parents, volunteers, participants, etc.). Ask them if the website and information they are looking for is easy to find.
- Test Google Autocomplete. When you begin typing a search into Google, it will often autocomplete the most commonly searched phrases. These pre-populated searches are actual keywords people are using. Take these keywords and see how you can effectively incorporate the relevant keywords into your website. [UberSuggest](#) is a great free tool for employing this approach.

A few keyword examples that a Georgia-based youth baseball program might include throughout their main website page would be:

- Georgia youth baseball league
- Team name + youth baseball
- Team name + player age range
- Team name + affiliation name
- "Opening day date" + field name



QUANTITY OF CONTENT

While “quality over quantity” remains true, it is also important to maintain an active website. Updating your website regularly and keeping content fresh is not only valuable to your members, it improves your SEO.

Many youth sport related topics are evergreen, meaning they will always be relevant. Don’t be afraid to re-share evergreen content (such as player safety) when there has been new findings or whenever you can provide a fresh perspective. The more often you can update your program’s website, the better it will perform in organic search.

As a volunteer, updating your program’s website should not be a full-time job. Creating new content even once per month will significantly help your website generate a regular recurring audience. You may consider inviting other volunteers and parents to share the responsibility of content creation to take the demand off of one individual volunteer.

CHAPTER 3: STEPS TO IMPROVE SEO

Now that you understand the basics of SEO and why it is important to help grow your youth sports program, here are a few next steps you can apply to your Sports Connect website to make sure your program shows up when a potential new parent or player is looking for you.

START WITH SETTING UP YOUR DOMAIN

A great place to start in order to gain a better ranking on Google is to acquire a unique domain name. Your Sports Connect website comes with a default URL. Purchasing a unique domain name through an independent provider, such as GoDaddy.com, will make your website easier to find.

While deciding on a domain, remember to make it something easy to type. Custom URLs make it simple for parents to find you; meaning your website will receive more traffic and rank higher on the search engine results page. If possible, you should incorporate your organization's name and location into your domain.

A great example of a simple and effective URL is Big Walnut Youth Sports:

<https://www.bigwalnutyouthsports.com>



Domains eventually expire and you will be required by the provider to renew them. If you don't renew, it will become available for purchase by others, so be sure to stay on top of this.

EASY NEXT STEPS

1

SET UP A GOOGLE ANALYTICS ACCOUNT.

- [Google Analytics](#) is a free service which gives a website owner, or administrator, information about incoming traffic. This data helps you learn more about your site's visitors. You will see how many people are visiting your site, where they're coming from, which pages they visit most, and how long they stick around on each page - all in real time. If your youth sports program is a non-profit, set up "Google For NonProfits," which has other helpful tools that non-profit sports leagues can use for free.
- Once your Google Analytics account is set up, it is easy to integrate into your Sports Connect website. Check out our [support article](#).

2

EDIT PAGE TITLES in [each page's settings](#). When writing your page title, include the organization name followed by the topic.

- If we were creating a Programs page on the Sombrero United Sports website; the Page Name would be "Programs" and the Page Title would be "Sombrero United Sports - Programs."

3

USE KEYWORD-RICH CONTENT, including words and phrases a search engine user would likely enter to find your site. Make sure the content of each page has keywords that match the page titles. For example, Sombrero United Sports would use the keywords Sombrero, United, Multi-sport, Atlanta, Youth Sports, etc. throughout the page content.

4

ADD PHOTOS AND VIDEOS to engage your members and potential participants and improve your SEO ranking. When adding photos to your rotator, you are able to add a URL and an image description. This could be linked to a different page on your website, or an external website, such as your organization's Facebook page. Consider adding relevant keywords and alternate text to images, as well.

5

MAINTAIN YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS and include links back to your website.

6

USE INBOUND LINKS - Inbound links are when other websites include a link to your program's website, allowing Google to see your site as a trusted source of information. A great place to start is on your program's social media pages. Add a link to your website in the information sections of your social media pages. You can also share content from your website in social media posts and include a link.

7

UPDATE YOUR SITE REGULARLY; especially your homepage. SEO is constantly changing as algorithms are altered and [Googlebot](#) continues scanning for new and updated web pages.

HOW DO I KNOW MY EFFORTS ARE SUCCESSFUL?

Following these simple steps can make a big difference in how people find you, but how can you track how much of an impact this is having?

There are many analytics tools that are easy to use and can be incorporated into your website. Your Sports Connect website is set up to connect with a Google Analytics account, which is free to set up and presents data in a simple format. Google Analytics dashboards show important metrics about your traffic such as when parents are visiting your site, where they come from, what pages are most visited, and much more.

Having this information at your fingertips will allow you to assess many aspects of your website. Looking at where visitors come from can indicate whether your SEO strategy is working. Page visits can show you what content is most popular among members. Learn more about [Google Analytics](#) and how it can work for your organization.

CONCLUSION

Now that you have taken the first step to improve your website's SEO by reading this ebook, it is time to get to work! No one is a SEO pro overnight, so don't be scared to take it slow and incorporate small changes over time. Here is what we recommend doing next:

1. Create a custom URL if you do not already have one and reach out to Sports Connect support to have your website updated.
2. Talk to parents and other volunteers to get insight into how the site can be improved and what they would search to find your program.
3. Follow the outlined steps above to improve your title pages, imagery, and use of keywords.
4. Practice. The more you practice updating your website with SEO in mind, the more comfortable you will become.
5. Research. The rules of SEO are always changing. You can also find plenty of information online using other reliable sources such as Moz and Hubspot.
6. Have fun. Remember, you are a volunteer! Your efforts will be appreciated by your program and community.

