

Search, Social, and Analytics,

Oh My!

HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR FESTIVAL

By Brandy Hartley



These days, when people look to find out about upcoming festivals and other events, the first places they go are usually the Google search boxes and social networks. If your name doesn't come up quickly, they may give up in frustration and never make it to the event. In this article, we will break down everything from choosing a unique and memorable name for your event, to linking your social media profiles to increase your performance in search engines, and using free tools like Google Analytics to see how people are finding out about your event and what you can do to get more people to your website and keep them around longer.

Connect Search and Social Media to Boost Visibility

The rise of the search box truly changed the world online. It's hard to type in website addresses when you can just Google what you're looking for (or Bing or Yahoo it, if that's the way you roll). A website's rank on search engine result pages (SERPs) remains crucial, especially when attracting consumers new to your business.

Social media accounts are valuable channels that help you reach people who want to connect with your brand. If you cultivate your voice on those channels and interact with fans and followers, you can grow your marketing base tremendously. They also give you the opportunity to improve your page ranking in search, a huge win-win for your festival.

I can hear you asking, "But how?" There are countless companies offering the one magic key to improving your search engine optimization (SEO), usually at a hefty price. The strategies they use, like link-farming and keyword-stuffing, aren't just sketchy and expensive; they're well-known to search engines by now and often have little to no effect on rankings. One of the key changes in search over the last few years has been the balancing of popularity signals, defined as the quality and quantity of links and the context in which they are shared, with relevancy signals, which are combinations of terms that help search engines deliver more precise results (also known as phrase indexing).

The good news is that you can win in the SEO game by simply being yourself, and making sure that you follow through on your messaging, stay organized, and keep consistent. At the end of the day, creating interesting content that's relevant to your festival and popular with your target audience is the most effective way to optimize for search engines. How can you make this work?

Step One: Include your website link and links to your other social channels across all your social media accounts.

Including links will help search engines identify the legitimate relationship between these disparate channels, creating

strong inbound and outbound links. It also makes it easier for users to find you on their preferred channels.

Step Two: Use the same description of your festival as often as possible, including keywords you want associated with your business.

A consistent description helps strengthen the relationship of those social media accounts with your festival, which directly impacts search results. Want to be known for more than just your name? Then say so! Include details like your location, target audience, philosophy, and anything else that you think your target audience would find compelling about your event. Here's a very basic template: "NAME is the most ADJECTIVE festival in the LOCATION, featuring ACTIVITY, KIND OF FOOD, and MUSIC HEADLINER."

Step Three: Regularly create new content via social media.

Don't be boring, spend some time on your social media posts! You want user engagement with your content. Try asking open-ended questions or posting interesting articles on topics related to your event. Well-chosen photos are very popular on Facebook, and often get a lot of engagement. If you want to get a little bit more advanced, try experimenting with contests and giveaways (be sure to look into the laws governing online contests first). Social actions such as shares, retweets, and

comments about posts increase the visibility of your channels to search engines, by indicating that there is interesting new content to index on these accounts, which are tied to your website. Be sure to respond to comments and questions in a timely manner, to encourage people to continue to engage with you online.

Step Four: Claim your Google+ business profile and your Yelp profile.

This is a critical step with the new introduction of sidebar knowledge panes in Google search results and Bing results. The first step is to claim your Google Places account and establish your Google+ business profile. Then, when a festival link is clicked, Google Places and Google+ power the knowledge pane on the right hand side of Google search results. Reviews of your festival from Google-owned Zagat will display there. Google explicitly states on their Webmaster Tools site that linking a Google+ profile to your website provides information used "to determine the relevancy of your site" in search. Own that profile!

As for Yelp, Bing search results include sidebars with Yelp user reviews of your business, and Bing is the search engine used by Facebook. Bing searchers who connect their Facebook accounts see messaging from friends about your venue. You should own the messaging, it's that simple.

You want to control the search results so that you are either driving traffic directly to your site via your website link, or indirectly to your site via your social media outlets. The goal? End up with a search results page that is covered with your channels. Now go forth and optimize! Of course, with all this new traffic to your festival site, now's the time to get up to speed on understanding your site data.

Get Analytical: Using Google to Understand Your Site

Google Analytics is the most fundamental and valuable tool to understand who's visiting your site and what they're doing there. The best part? It's FREE! If you still aren't convinced, check out some of the most important reasons to use Google Analytics.

Customer Insights

First of all, Google Analytics gives you an immense amount of insight into your customers. You can quickly view the number of new and returning customers, where they're located around the country and world, the devices and operating systems they use (iPhone, Android, Mac, PC, etc.).

Traffic Insights

You can also quickly see how people arrive at your site (search, direct links, social media, etc.), which social media networks refer the most traffic, and how search terms are used to find your festival. You can even combine this data with the customer insights to see how different groups of customers move through your website. Maybe mobile visitors to your site leave within a minute because you don't have an optimized mobile experience, or a key part of your site doesn't work for a certain browser, operating system, or language.

Content Insights

Once you know who your visitors are and how they find your content, you can drill down to a more granular level and discover which pages draw the highest traffic and keep people the most engaged. As above, you can cross-reference this information with segments of your audience and traffic sources; maybe one part of your site is really popular on Twitter, or your "Getting Here" page draws in a bunch of

people from a nearby city (better make sure you give them clear directions).

Getting Started

It's simple to get going with Google Analytics. First, create an account at the Google Analytics homepage and set up a tracker on your website. Festivals who work with Ticketfly and have Ticketfly-powered websites are already set up with Google Analytics by default, and can track actual ticket sales conversions back to different traffic sources.

When you click into the Analytics site for reporting, Google drops you into the "Audience Overview" for the past month. You can use the left-hand navigation to move through the different reporting options. If you adjust the reporting date range, it will carry over to each report you visit.

We recommend that you take some time and look around these reports, comparing different date ranges or selecting longer date ranges if you want to see changes over time. The date range selector makes setting up the comparisons simple.

There is a detailed Google Analytics Help page that answers questions from the basics to advanced features such as adding in dimensions and metrics, and adding custom segments of visitors to your report. It's easy to get caught up in the rabbit hole of data that Google provides, but if you start off simple and follow these guidelines you'll be amazed how much impact it can have on your festival's marketing tactics and success.

Ticketfly is an integrated ticketing and marketing platform for event promoters of any size, from standing-room-only clubs to festival grounds and arenas with reserved seating. The Ticketfly platform provides a full suite of integrated ticketing, mobile and social marketing, email and analytics tools that streamline operations and increase ticket sales. Prominent Ticketfly festival clients in the U.S. and Canada include Camp Bisco (NY), Life is good™ festival (MA), the Original Renaissance Pleasure Faire, Southern Ground Music & Food Festival (Nashville and Charleston), Noise Pop (San Francisco), Riot Fest (Chicago, Denver, and Toronto), the Preakness Stakes and InfieldFest (Baltimore), and Virgin Mobile FreeFest (DC).

To find events near you, visit ticketfly.com. For more information about Ticketfly, visit start.ticketfly.com, connect on Facebook at [facebook.com/ticketfly](https://www.facebook.com/ticketfly), or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/ticketfly.

Important Google Analytics Reports

"**Behavior: New vs. Returning**" is a quick hit report that shows your visitor breakdown. If you are actively driving traffic to your website (for example via paid advertising), this is a good metric to monitor before and after impact, to see how many new visitors show up.

"**Mobile: Overview**" shows you visits by desktop, tablet, and mobile. As more people view sites on mobile phones, this data can help you decide whether to create a separate mobile site or to redesign your site to optimize for mobile and desktop users.

"**Traffic: Overview**" allows you to slice the total traffic by keywords used in search, referring source, and tagged ad campaigns. Keywords are useful for search engine marketing, and to improve your search ranking by including them in your site content.

"**Content: Site Content: All Pages**" will show which pages are of interest to your visitors. In addition, if you click into a specific page report, you can select the In-Page Analytics option and see a heatmap of where users click to see if your calls to action are effective.