



# OPTIMIZE

*HOW TO ATTRACT AND  
ENGAGE MORE CUSTOMERS  
BY INTEGRATING SEO,  
SOCIAL MEDIA, AND  
CONTENT MARKETING*



LEE ODDEN



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## Foreword

It's time to leave some of the old wisdom behind and develop some new wisdom.

—Mike Grehan being interviewed by Lee Odden in 2007

I keep bumping into Lee Odden. All over the world, in fact. For the past four or five years, at conferences from New York to San Francisco, London to Barcelona, and Hong Kong to Singapore, we've discussed the subject of Internet marketing. These are deeply engaging conversations for one very important reason. When it comes to marketing, Lee Odden gets it.

As a classically trained marketer, Lee cuts through the clutter of the pipes-and-tubes element of Internet marketing to focus on content and customers. Already, he has a huge following on social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. This is largely due to his steady transition from popular blogger and industry commentator to recognized thought leader.

Inspired by a "lightbulb moment" in conversation with a Google engineer, he was prompted into thinking about Internet marketing and business in new and different ways. It's a new kind of wisdom, partly based on practical experience and partly based on training his mind to see around corners.

We've had an era of search marketing being front and center. But as we move into a new era of the constantly connected consumer with the prediction that, in a few years there'll be 50 billion connected devices on the planet, it really is time to change the way we think about marketing. And this is not being driven purely by technology, it's more about the change in the consumer—the new, transient media consumer.

Much of what we've learned in marketing is undergoing reconsideration. Major changes are taking place in consumer and business markets. Consumers no longer act independently of each other but are more connected to other consumers, to other channel members, and often to brands. Consequently, brands and companies are now vying for central positions inside consumer networks.

Consumers have become attracted to third-party information providers, through collaborative product reviews, ranking, rating, and price-comparison services. There are new and more complex concepts being applied to modern marketing. Lee Odden will help you craft new strategies and tactics in line with this new marketing environment.

In my capacity as chair of the SES Global Advisory Board, I'm honored to have Lee as a valuable member and supporter. I've watched him many times, either as a solo speaker or as a panelist at conferences. And without fail, when he begins to speak, keyboards begin to click as the audience takes note after note.

It's funny, but a classic movie scene popped into my mind after reading something Lee says in this book. It's from the movie *City Slickers*. Tough cowboy Curly (Jack Palance) holds up one finger, looks at Mitch (Billy Crystal), and says: "Do you know what the secret to life is?" Mitch replies, "Your finger?" "Just one thing," says Curly. "What's the one thing?" asks Mitch. To which Curly replies, "That's what *you* have to find out," and then gallops off into the distance.

I don't know about life, but when it comes to marketing and business, this book is about just one thing you can do to improve it: *Optimize!*

## Preface

At a large search marketing conference several years ago, I had a conversation with Maile Ohye from Google about public speaking, noting how impressive she was. As an active public speaker myself, I shared with her how I was able to get by with good information and enthusiasm, but without much polish. What she said next hit me like a ton of bricks: “You’re an SEO and you optimize websites for better performance in search engines, right?” To which I replied yes. Her follow-up was, “Then why don’t you optimize your speaking skills?”

Have you ever watched a movie where the camera is tight on a scene and, for dramatic effect, it pulls back in a blur? That’s what I was feeling when Maile made her simple, yet powerful recommendation. What hit me wasn’t just that I should work on my speaking skills, but the broader notion of optimization and how it applies to a persistent effort at improving just about anything for better performance.

## ADAPT OR DIE

Reading this book is a great first step toward a new way of thinking about how you can apply optimization principles to your business. The sheer volume of content created each day, coupled with the explosive growth of social media accessed on the Internet and on mobile and tablet devices, can be overwhelming. I've spent an incredible amount of time testing and making sense of the search and social web. My hope is that you'll find this book a quick study on the big-picture topics and deep on the practical resources for planning, implementing, and scaling a socialized and optimized content marketing strategy.

Millions of websites, with billions of pages and media, are indexed by search engines. Google alone handles more than 1 billion searches each day. A large number of the companies publishing information online that expect traffic from search engines have difficulty creating great content, let alone producing compelling content on a regular basis. Even companies that do create high-quality content often neglect how search engine optimization and social media marketing can expedite engagement between buyers and what the brand has to offer.

There's nothing static about Internet marketing, but the one constant we can all count on is the persistent effort by search engines to improve search quality and user experience. Such continuous improvements can affect how content is discovered, indexed, and sorted in search results as well as what external signals are considered to determine authority. Companies that ignore the current state of affairs with search technology and quality guidelines may feel the sting, as many website owners did with Google's Panda updates in 2011.

In addition to monitoring search engines, it's essential for results-oriented Internet marketing and communications professionals to understand the online information discovery, consumption, and engagement preferences of the people they're trying to reach. A better grasp of how customers find and seek out resources, the content topics and formats that motivate them, and the social media platforms and tools they use to engage and recommend things can be incredibly powerful for successful Internet marketing programs. Putting those insights into action means developing a proactive, adaptive, and integrated approach to content, search engine optimization, and social media marketing. Those



companies that have adapted, such as Dell, Intel, and Zappos, have thrived. Businesses that have ignored the transformation of consumer trends and web technology have not fared so well.

## OPTIMIZED STATE OF MIND

Many companies treat their Internet marketing the same way I was treating my presentation skills. They get by with checklist SEO tactics, disconnected and difficult-to-measure social media marketing. On top of that, there's the challenge of creating high-quality content on a regular basis over a long period of time. If a company doesn't see the bigger-picture synergy of how to break social media, content, and SEO efforts out of departmental silos and approach Internet marketing and public relations holistically, how can they grow and remain competitive? To me, the notion of optimization is more about brands and customers than it is about keywords and rankings on search engines. Being "optimized" is a state of mind, and with this book, I hope to convert you into becoming more optimized in your marketing and communications.

If there's one thing I've learned over the past 14-plus years of working in the Internet marketing industry is the uncanny ability that high-performing SEO professionals have to use out-of-the-box creative, analytical, and lateral thinking to proactively solve marketing problems and find competitive advantages. At the same time, my work in the public relations field has shown me how messaging, influence, and engagement sync perfectly to help brands become the most relevant solution for their category, whether it's through search, social media, or other forms of online communications. The notion of search optimization might have a strong history with keywords, links, and pages in search engines, but an "optimize" mentality is a way of thinking that can give organizations like yours a competitive advantage in any area of a business that creates content online, from marketing and PR to customer service and human resources.

In that context, I encourage you to ask the same kinds of questions I pondered in my discussion with Maile, "Are your SEO, social media, and content marketing efforts optimized to work together? Are your marketing and communications optimized for specific audiences and outcomes?"



## **THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU**

This book is for the marketers, public relations professionals, small- to medium-sized business owners, and large company marketing executives who want to understand and implement a road map that incorporates the synergies of content, social media, and search engine optimization. In the three phases of this book, we build a crystal clear picture of how to plan, execute, and scale an integrated approach to social media optimization and content marketing.

### **What This Book Will Teach You**

- Phase 1 guides you in understanding the changing nature of consumer preferences and behaviors with search, social media, and content, as well as what that means for your online marketing strategy.
- Phase 2 explores optimized content marketing tactics from developing personas to social networking to content planning and measurement. We dig into key insights and examples of holistic search engine optimization for more effective search and social media marketing.
- Phase 3 is about scale and discusses processes and training you'll need to grow and maintain an integrated social media, SEO, and content marketing program in your organization.

Are you ready to get optimized? Let's get started.

## Acknowledgments

So much more goes into creating a book than anyone realizes, especially for a first-time author. Even though I've been blogging for over eight years and have written over 2,000 articles and blog posts on my own, writing a book is by no means a solitary activity. Numerous people contribute to the ideas, perspectives, and knowledge that come together in a book's creation. I've made many connections with amazingly smart, curious, and interesting people over many years of blogging, speaking at conferences, client consulting, and from being a participant on the social web at large. All the good people I've connected with have played a part in developing the point of view, insights, and perspectives shared in this book. For that I thank you all.

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**PHASE 1**

**PLANNING**





# CHAPTER 1

## Setting the Stage for an Optimized State of Mind

Several years ago my family established a tradition of celebrating the tenth birthday of each of our children by taking them on a trip to a city of their choosing somewhere in North America. My son Dominic picked New York City. While I travel to New York several times a year for business, I really had no idea what kid-friendly activities we could find for a five-day vacation in one of the world's greatest cities. Where did I go for advice and information? Some people reading this book will think of a search engine like Google or Bing. For others, Facebook or Twitter will come to mind. Some might even know specific people they could e-mail for travel tips or specialty travel websites that focus on New York. What did I do? I used all of these ideas.

I posted on Twitter that I would be bringing my son to New York for his tenth birthday and that we were looking for kid-friendly activities and places to see. Numerous suggestions were offered, and from them I made a list. Dominic and I used Google to research each destination and to find out details such as available activities, location, fees, and schedules. Based on what we found, we further refined our search phrases, which influenced follow-up questions posted on social networks. Some of the websites we found posted ratings from customers; others had links to blogs, photos on Flickr, and Facebook fan pages.

From our research conducted through a combination of search engines, social networking websites, and e-mail, we settled on our itinerary and had a fantastic time.

We didn't stop there, though. As we explored the city from Manhattan to the Bronx Zoo to Broadway to see *The Lion King*, I tweeted comments about our experiences and uploaded photos to Flickr, Twitter, and Facebook so the people who had made suggestions for our trip could see the impact they had on this once-in-a-lifetime experience. My social network experienced our adventures right along with us interacting, sharing, and engaging from all over the world. The content and media I posted online became findable on Google and has undoubtedly provided helpful ideas to others who are looking for information on kid-friendly activities in New York for years to come.

Our experience in planning that trip to New York with content discovered through search and social media represents a fundamental change that's emerged in consumer behaviors for information discovery, consumption, and engagement. While search engines continue to represent the most popular method of finding specific information, the influence of social networking, shared social media, and the proliferation of platforms for individuals to publish content all intersect to create tremendous opportunities to better attract and engage customers.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the importance, relevance, and need to master each of these changing consumer preferences is essential for businesses to succeed online.

### **CONTENT MARKETING TRILOGY: DISCOVERY, CONSUMPTION, AND ENGAGEMENT**

The web is flush with change and innovation. Gone are the days of linear information flow and incremental growth. Content flows in every direction through a variety of platforms, formats, and devices. The mass adoption of the social and mobile web has facilitated a revolution of information access, sharing, and publishing at a scale never before experienced. (See Figure 1.1.)

Access to information for discovery is most often associated with search engines. For people who have some idea of what they want or need, it's second nature to search and then sort through the results for