

Inside an Integrator's SEO Case History

Seven crucial steps define an optimization project at Chicago-area A/V integrator. *by Don Kreski*



HERE'S A COMMON PROBLEM: You've created a new website, but it doesn't bring in the business you expected.

Such was the case for MediaTech Intelligent Home Systems based in St. Charles, Ill. The residential firm began talking to us about its website less than a year after its launch. Commercial integrators, meanwhile, can learn from the search engine optimization (SEO) mistakes and corrections made.

"SEO takes a different set of skills than web development," explains Tim Grant of Gamma Partners of Chicago, who worked with me last summer to optimize the Media Tech site. "A failure to show up on the search results page is not necessarily a reflection on the developer. They just needed to get someone involved who specializes in search engine marketing."

Like most SEO efforts, the Media Tech optimization involved seven crucial steps.

1. Define your goals.

When I met with the owners of Media Tech, we identified two main issues. First, the website was not very visible in Google and Bing. Second, once someone found the site, they were not getting a strong picture of why they should give Media Tech their business. Solving these problems became our top priorities.

2. Craft a message.

I also asked the owners what is unique about their company. They answered that Media Tech provides a higher level of service than most A/V contractors and focuses on relatively expensive solutions, including home automation, home theater, lighting, shading and whole-house media distribution. They were not interested in selling individual A/V components or competing for smaller TV or audio installations. They also said they had strong relationships with Control 4, AMX, Savant and other manufacturers,

and that a significant amount of their business came from people looking for these brands.

3. Develop a keyword list.

We began our analysis by developing a list of possible key terms and phrases related to residential systems design and to the brands the owners highlighted.

This list came from terms used on the existing website, input from Media Tech owners and managers, and from our own knowledge of the industry. We built a list of 100-plus terms and then checked each in the Google Keyword tool, which returns the actual number of monthly searches for each term and suggests related terms. We delivered a final list of 230 key words and phrases, organized by their relation to Media Tech offerings.

When writing web copy, it's important that search engine "spiders" find that targeted terms are used prominently, but that's important for human readers as well.

Our next task, admittedly as much an art as a science, was to prioritize these terms so we could start fitting them into an update plan for the website. We were able to throw out many terms because, while we felt they described Media Tech's offerings, they were not often used by real searchers. Others were searched frequently but were so general that it seemed unlikely they would bring in potential customers. We prioritized a list of three terms or phrases per page. These were not necessarily the most frequently searched but

they did a good job of describing the type of systems Media Tech sells.

4. Develop a page plan.

With our keyword list in hand, we turned our focus to the structure of the updated website. We did not have an unlimited budget. While we developed key words and phrases for all of the Media Tech offerings, we knew upfront that we would write new copy only for the most important pages.

In the end, we fully optimized 10 pages. Five were existing pages: the home page and pages focused on home automation, home theater and lighting. We felt that one page about audio and video distribution systems was too broad and suggested we divide it into two pages. We also felt we needed individual pages for Control 4, AMX and Savant if we were going to attract people searching for these brands.

We asked the developer to create drop-down menus for all 13 of the pages that would describe Media Tech services. Google and Bing will rank a "first level" page more highly than pages further down in the menu structure, and we believe too that potential customers are more likely to visit pages accessible from the main navigation.

Since the wording of these links can also affect search engine indexing and client visits, we asked the developer to include the key phrases optimized for each target page both in text links and in the code behind the drop-downs. We also asked him to use priority keywords in the URLs for the new pages we created, but we did not change any of the older URLs.

5. Write new copy.

My first step in writing copy for Media Tech was simply to outline the company's

offerings and the benefits it brings to potential clients. I next wrote a lead, summing up those benefits in a way I hoped would be striking enough to draw readers into the page. As I wrote body copy, I included bullets whenever possible, to help readers find my main points quickly. Once I had a first draft, I checked it against our keyword list.

When writing web copy, it's important that search engine "spiders" find that targeted terms are used prominently, but that's important for human readers as well. They want to be sure that the page they've landed on provides what they're looking for so headlines, body copy and illustrations all must make clear what's being described or sold. For those reasons, I tried to use our highest priority terms in the headlines and other terms in subheads or in the first few lines of copy. I made sure I used each term at least once but no more than two or three times, to avoid the possibility of "spamming" the search engines.

I was also careful to mention the Media Tech name or brand prominently within the body copy, because studies have shown that readers must associate a brand immediately with the information in a marketing piece to remember the brand later. It's crucial to provide useful, compelling information, but if you do not associate it with your brand readers may remember what you say but not you.

Finally, I included a call to action on each page: the invitation to contact Media Tech to learn more. This call links to a form on the "Contact Us" page, but we were also careful to include the company name and phone number at the top of each page and the name, address, phone and a simple email link at the bottom.

6. Implement a local and mobile strategy.

While I was writing copy, Grant set up Google and Bing webmaster accounts and submitted Media Tech to Google Places and the Bing Business Portal. As the new pages came online, he created an XML sitemap and submitted it to these search engines.

Given a limited budget, the Media Tech owners decided not to build alter-

Integrators should learn the term, "page plan."

Identify what's unique about your offerings.

Ideally, these are words that should be used in searches.

Judge for yourself. Visit Media Tech at mediatechliving.com.

nate mobile-access pages at this time. I think that was a good decision. The site worked well on tablets and was very readable on smart phones, with one exception that we addressed.

Like many others in our industry, the original Media Tech home page included a slide show built in Flash that was not visible on iPads and iPhones. We asked the developer to recreate the show using Java script, and they did a nice job with this change.

Finally, we also helped the website get more recognition by beginning a basic link-accrual program.

7. Set up a means to measure effectiveness.

SEO is not an exact science. To build visits and sales leads takes time, and you want to be able to adjust the pages based on the results you see on an ongoing basis. For that reason, we installed Google Analytics on the Media Tech website, and we're looking at the measures it provides on a monthly basis. **GI**

DON KRESKI is president of Kreski Marketing Consultants. Find him at kreski.com/websites.