

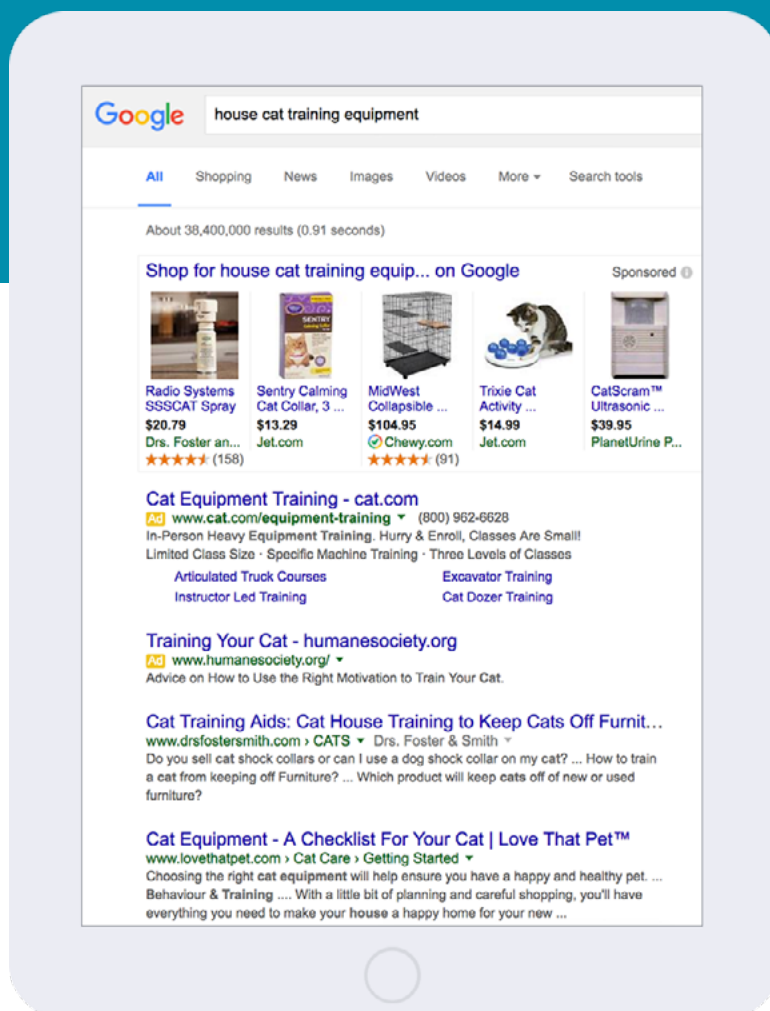


DIY SEO

A Beginner's Guide to
Ecommerce Website Optimization

If you own an online store, you want your products to be found in the organic search results. These are the natural, unpaid results that search engines deliver when a term or phrase (a.k.a. keyword) is searched on Google.

In the following image, all the listings below the image-based Google shopping results and ads are organic search results. Google believes that these pages are most relevant to the above query. So how did Doctors Foster & Smith and Love That Pet beat out the likes of Amazon and Petsmart to end up at the top of the results? We'll answer that question, along with providing on- and off-page SEO best practices you can begin implementing today.



For example, if you wanted to train your cat (good luck!), you might use Google (or Bing...or Yahoo) to search "house cat training equipment," and get the following search engine results page (SERP) returned to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: A DIY SEO Manual.....	4
2. Keyword Research: Build the Foundation.....	5
3. On-Page Content: Prep the Interior.....	7
4. Meta Tags & URLs: Define the Space.....	9
5. Blogging: Express Yourself.....	12
6. Social Media: Get Noticed.....	14
7. Networking & Link Earning: Meet the Neighbors.....	16
8. Combining Channels: Diversify the Abode.....	18
9. Data Analysis: Maintain and Improve the Space.....	20
10. Conclusion: SEO is an Ongoing Project.....	21

Introduction: A DIY SEO Manual

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a collection of marketing techniques aimed at building a website's authority, trust and topical relevance. These are the three main components that search engines use to determine a website's organic visibility. SEO is about increasing organic traffic and revenue for relevant queries. It is not about "ranking" or gaming the search engines. There are no tricks here – just hard work. And even the best SEO takes time to yield results, so we recommend pairing paid advertising and social media with SEO. The good news is, once SEO momentum picks up, the payout is substantial and builds on its own success.

Why organic traffic?

- Makes up roughly 50% of all website traffic
- Often perceived as trustworthy – the search engines are vouching for you
- Good medium for website and brand "discovery" – organic search can introduce you to shoppers
- Excellent medium for very specific searches, which typically have higher conversion

Why does SEO take time to yield results?

- Search engines want to deliver the best results; they are not going to rank something overnight
- Trust is earned over time
- Competition varies (our internal SEO team sets the expectation that traction happens in 3 to 6 months depending on the industry and current state of the website)

Before we dive in to specifics, it is important to note that SEO is often categorized into two groups, both of which are critical to search engine success.

On-page optimization is the work done on the website. It includes technical optimization and increasing the website's relevance for appropriate keyword phrases by optimizing URLs, content and tags. Effective on-page optimization allows search engines to easily determine the subject of each page and the site as a whole, so they can deliver the best landing page to users performing relevant searches.

Off-page optimization refers to SEO activities that happen off the website. Some effective off-page SEO tactics include earning inbound links and citations, establishing the website as an authority in the industry and building an active social media presence.

From here on out, we will provide an overview of the most important aspects of search engine optimization from both an on- and off-page perspective.



Chapter 2

Keyword Research: Build the Foundation

Keyword research is the backbone of SEO, much like a well-poured foundation is the backbone and structure of a house. A “keyword” is a multi-word phrase that searchers use when trying to find your website or a specific page or product on your website.

Note: When we refer to “keywords” we are not referring to the keyword tag. You can ignore the keyword tag, as it is not important and hasn’t been used by search engines in years. In Chapter 4, we will cover how to utilize keywords correctly. For now, we will focus on selecting keywords for your pages.

A site with pages optimized for industry-appropriate keyword terms will help send signals to search engines that your site is relevant for the phrase being searched by the end user. This, in turn, will help your site appear more frequently and more prominently in the search engine results pages (SERPs), like the one we showed earlier for the cat training equipment.

So how do you choose a keyword?

Relevancy

You wouldn’t use standard sidewalk concrete to pour your foundation, would you? No, the foundation for a house would require sturdy, thick and weather-resistant concrete to do the job correctly. Relevancy is hands-down the most important factor in keyword selection. Your cat training website might be for cat lovers, but “cat lovers” is not an appropriate keyword term for your website’s home page.

“Feline training equipment” and “cat training supplies” are better options. Ask yourself: what would my target market search for to seek out this page? If they are searching “cat lovers,” we can pretty much guarantee that they are not looking for cat training equipment.

You should also consider the purpose of a page and where your customers are in the purchasing funnel before selecting keywords. If you have a large number of pages on your site that are more informational than product-driven, then your keywords should reflect that. For example, if you have a page dedicated to cat leash training (it’s a thing!), you would want to target keywords that reflect that theme – such as “how to leash train your cat” (again, good luck with that).



Your site is a pyramid, so develop a keyword hierarchy

When conducting keyword research, you need to think strategically about the layout and structure of your site, much like you would consider a house's layout from front door to back porch. If you sell cat training equipment and supplies, for example, you would want to categorize your site based on the different types of training, then target keywords for each area accordingly. The home page would target broader terms like "cat training supplies" where a deeper category page devoted to agility training might target "cat agility products" (it's also a thing!) and another category targeting cat leash training might target "cat leash training kit."

Be descriptive

Long-tail keywords (i.e. highly descriptive ones) have been increasing in importance over the last decade, and this trend is not slowing. People are becoming more descriptive in how they search, and your keywords should adjust accordingly. So don't target "cat supplies," target "cat training supplies."

Increase the descriptive nature of the keywords as you get closer to product pages. This will help you deliver the right page to a user's search query and increase your chance of ranking for more specific phrases than generic ones. The cherry on top? These long-tail queries convert at a much higher rate.

Spy on the competition

Millions of businesses review their competitors to gain a better idea of where they may have cornered the market. Review your competitors' websites to see what sort of site structure and keywords they may be using on their site and develop a strategy that fits your site.

Stay focused

We recommend targeting 3 to 5 keywords per page. This allows you to accurately describe what it is you're offering without overloading the search engines with information. It also frees you up to use a secondary keyword elsewhere on the site.



On-Page Content: Prep the Interior

Now that you have a keyword strategy in place (your foundation has been poured), you need to fill your various categories, sub-categories and product pages with unique and descriptive content that naturally incorporates these phrases (framing and drywall). The end-goal of on-page content is twofold: provide customers with information about the products or page and provide search engines with more signals as to what your site's pages are about.

Serve the page's purpose

Content should be written with an end-goal in mind to reflect the page's purpose. What part of the purchase funnel is this visitor in? Is the purpose of the page to explain how easy it is to leash train your cat or are you trying to convince them to add a cat leash training kit to their cart? Unique content should be created to serve the page's purpose and direct the right kind of traffic to the page. All pages should have a clear Call to Action (CTA) that tells visitors what to do next.

Avoid duplicate content

Content duplicated from page to page on a site or duplicated between websites not only confuses search engines as to which of your website's pages are most relevant to a query, but often leads to diminished search engine visibility as well, meaning less website traffic and fewer sales. Google has developed an arm of their search algorithm to specifically root out sites with duplicate content.

Important: If you are a reseller of goods from a manufacturer, do not copy and paste content they have on their site's category and product pages. While it may be tempting to borrow a well-written description of a product or range of products, it will negatively impact your site's organic visibility. Writing unique descriptions for your category and product pages may seem daunting, but it is a beneficial process. Approach it by writing descriptions for your best-selling products or most frequently-visited pages first and work your way through the rest of your site.

Supplement with secondary media

Shoppers crave information and reassurance. Provide them with thorough descriptions, multiple images and even videos (which are great for SEO!). Consider developing a how-to video via YouTube and embed it onto the most relevant product page. Optimize your YouTube videos with keyword-minded titles and descriptions. Not only do these videos make their way into Google search results, but YouTube is a search engine all on its own.

Videos do not need to be professionally produced to be effective. Simply produce a video in a well-lit area with a clear picture and audible sound. Every product page in the backend of Volusion's software can easily feature a YouTube video by simply including the video's URL.

Category pages can also feature YouTube videos by using the embed feature directly from YouTube, which provides you with a small piece of HTML code to add to your page.

Home page optimization

Optimize your home page's content to appear above Featured Products by accessing Article 2 within your site's backend system. To place it below Featured Products, access Article 71. While it is better for site readability to place any content higher up on the page, some home pages might be very visually driven, meaning content needs to be placed toward the bottom of the page.

Category page optimization

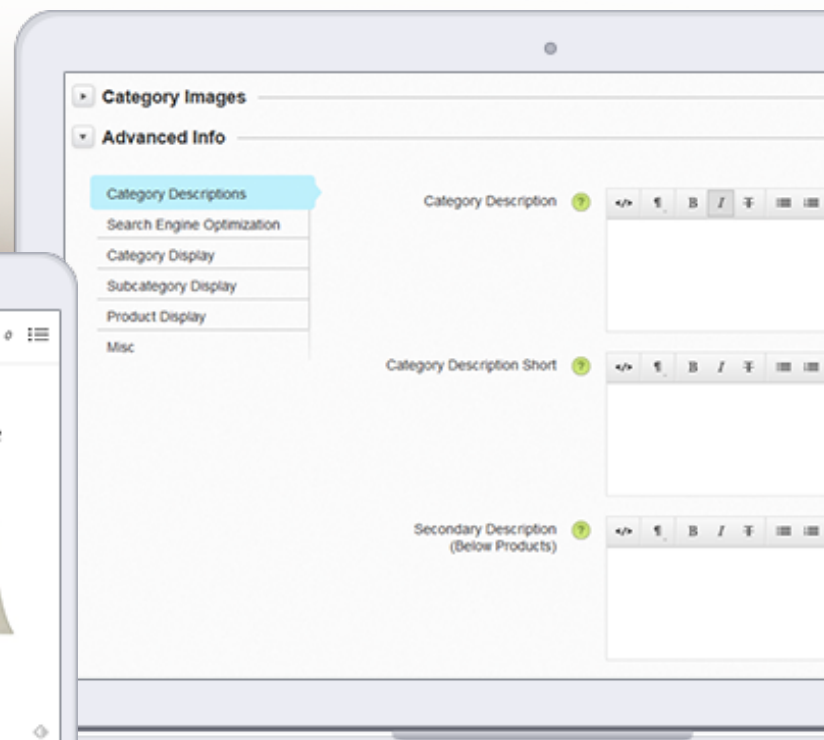
To optimize a category's on-page content, modify the Category Descriptions tab within the Advanced Info menu of the category in question. If the page is heavily image-driven, place your content in the Secondary Description field so it appears below your products.

You can also write a Category Description Short if you're optimizing a sub-category that might appear elsewhere on the site in a clickable list.

Product page optimization

Optimize your product page's description by modifying the Description field within the Basic Info menu of the product in question. You can also modify the product's name in this menu to make sure it is appropriately descriptive and unique compared to other products.

We recently hosted a [Product Page Optimization Webinar](#), to help you increase your product page visibility as well as Google Shopping placement. Highly recommended!



Chapter 4

Meta Tags & URLs: Define the Space

Well-written Meta title tags and descriptions, category and product URLs and photo alt tags are important on-page SEO factors. Treat these like the windows, trim and other items that make each room of your house unique. You don't want to repeat the same design in each space!

Title tags

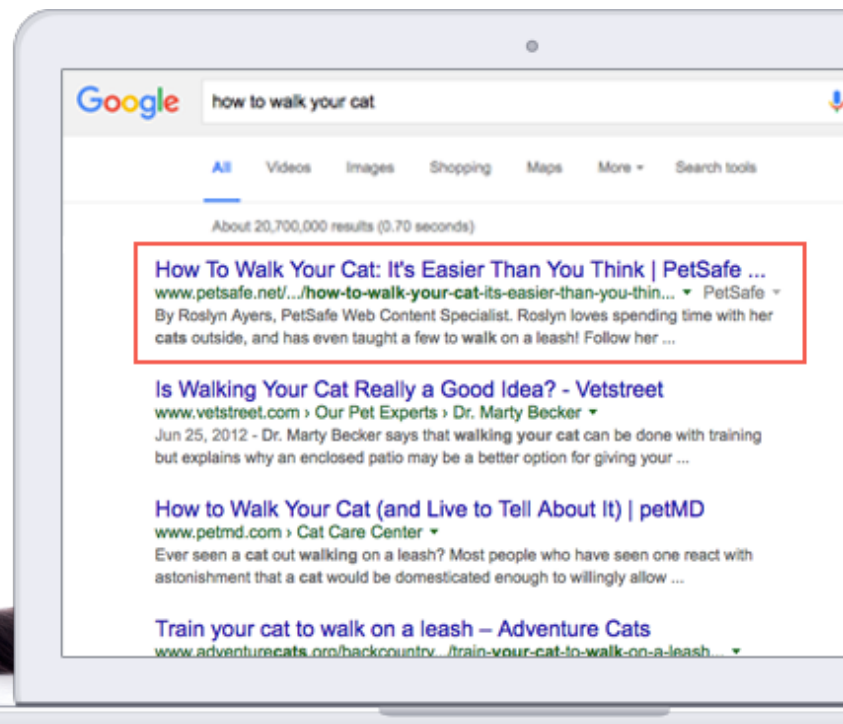
A Meta title tag (commonly called a title tag) is the title of the page and arguably the most important SEO real estate on a page. While not visible on the page, it will appear on the clickable tab at the top of your browser and serve as the title of search results in the form of a blue, clickable link.

In the SERP example below, PetSafe's title tag is "How To Walk Your Cat: It's Easier Than You Think | PetSafe® Articles." This isn't a bad title tag as it speaks to the audience, but we might adjust it to read "How To Walk Your Cat on a Leash | Cat Leash Training Tips" for more keyword diversity.

Title tags are generally keyword focused and succinctly describe what the page is about. Search engines very regularly list results based on, among other things, what a page's title tag says. Use a root keyword that accurately describes the entire page's offering and then supplement it with secondary keywords using a hyphen or a vertical bar.

The key here is to be specific about what the page offers. Simply saying "leash training" in the title tag would be missing the mark. It's too broad and doesn't help search engines understand what the page is about.

A title tag should be around 60 characters in length. Title tags that are too long will be cut off by the SERP and the end of the tag will be replaced with an ellipsis, potentially removing important words from the view of the web user.



Like the title tag, the Meta description is not visible on your website, but appears in SERPs. It is the marketing copy that appears beneath the title tag. Its purpose is to reaffirm what your page is about and convince the searcher to click through to your page versus another listing. To that end, a Meta description is less focused on keywords (though keywords will be bolded in the search results) and should convey the value of your products or some sort of edge you have over your competition. We don't know about you, but we find the Meta description below compelling – it's begging for a click. And so glad we did – look at the happy chappy on the right!

Banana hats aside, Meta descriptions should be around 156 characters in length to make sure the entire message is displayed in search results. Any longer and the end of the message will be cut off and replaced with an ellipsis.

Use a **Google SERP optimization tool** to craft your title tags and Meta descriptions before you place them on your site.

Optimized URLs

Optimizing your category and product URLs is a simple way to organize your pages and provide your customers with reassurance that they have reached the right page. It is also another tool for search engines to index the pages of your site and potentially list you in a SERP. Additionally, properly optimized URLs will aid in paid search efforts such as Pay-Per-Click advertising and Comparison Shopping Engines (Shopping Feeds) where product URLs are predominantly displayed. Use keywords specific to the category or product in question when you optimize a URL, and keep them succinct so as to avoid confusing-looking URLs. Likewise, avoid punctuation, which will result in unwanted dashes and a confusing URL.

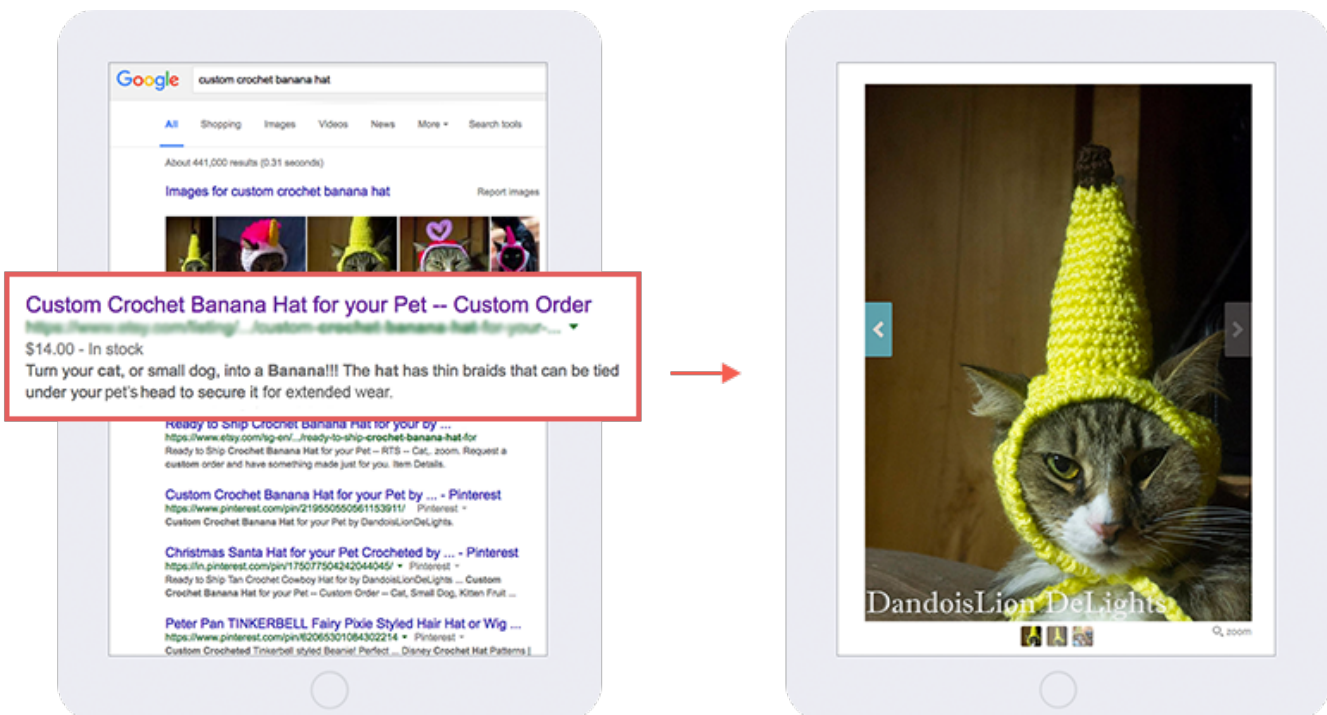


Photo alt text tags

Within the Volusion software, every product you sell can be further optimized with a photo alt text tag. The purpose of this tag is to provide your product images with improved accessibility for sight-impaired users, as well as an added boost for any end user conducting an image search. Since search engines cannot currently “see” images, the Photo Alt Text field is an important section to address to make sure your products are as visible as possible. Treat this field simply as a way to describe the product in question, similar to the title tag.

Where can I find these tags in Volusion?

To optimize your home page’s Meta tag information, refer to the Home Page tab within the SEO section of your Marketing folder in your site’s backend manager.

For category pages, you can modify your Meta tags and URLs within the Search Engine Optimization tab under the Advanced Info menu of the category in question.

For product pages, modify your Meta tags, URLs and Photo Alt Text tags within the Search Engine Optimization tab under the Advanced Info menu of the product in question.



Chapter 5

Blogging: Express Yourself

The layout of the house is done and the walls are up. Now it's time to give your space some style and personality. An engaging blog is an effective way to establish your site as an industry authority and build your website's topical relevance, both of which will boost SEO.

Choose a blogging platform

Two of the most common blogging platforms are WordPress and Blogger. WordPress offers more customization options and many users find it easier to use and navigate through, while Blogger is a Google-owned service that can be a bit more restricted in its functionality. Ultimately, your blogging platform comes down to personal preference.

Blog regularly

In order for your blog to take hold and start garnering new visitors and engagement, it needs to be updated regularly. When a blog-worthy topic comes to light, take the time to write about it as soon as possible so you can capture any of the hype traffic associated with it.

Blog with a purpose

A blog that includes hundreds of blog posts that add no value to your website or your customers is missing the mark. Blog about topics that are important to your target market, website and industry. Use it to answer common questions, comment on current trends or provide more information about topics that could use further explanation.



Promote across multiple channels

A well-written and thoughtful blog post is pointless if no one knows that it exists. Once you've posted your article, video or infographic, let your customers know about it by promoting it on social media channels like Facebook, Pinterest or Twitter.

Use visual cues

Blog articles that feature an image are much more likely to be viewed by users than a text-only article. Use the opportunity to add topic-specific images to your blog. If you've created an infographic or video that would work for the article, then include it as well. Just make sure the images are of a good quality and the infographic or video is something people would want to engage with and potentially share with others.

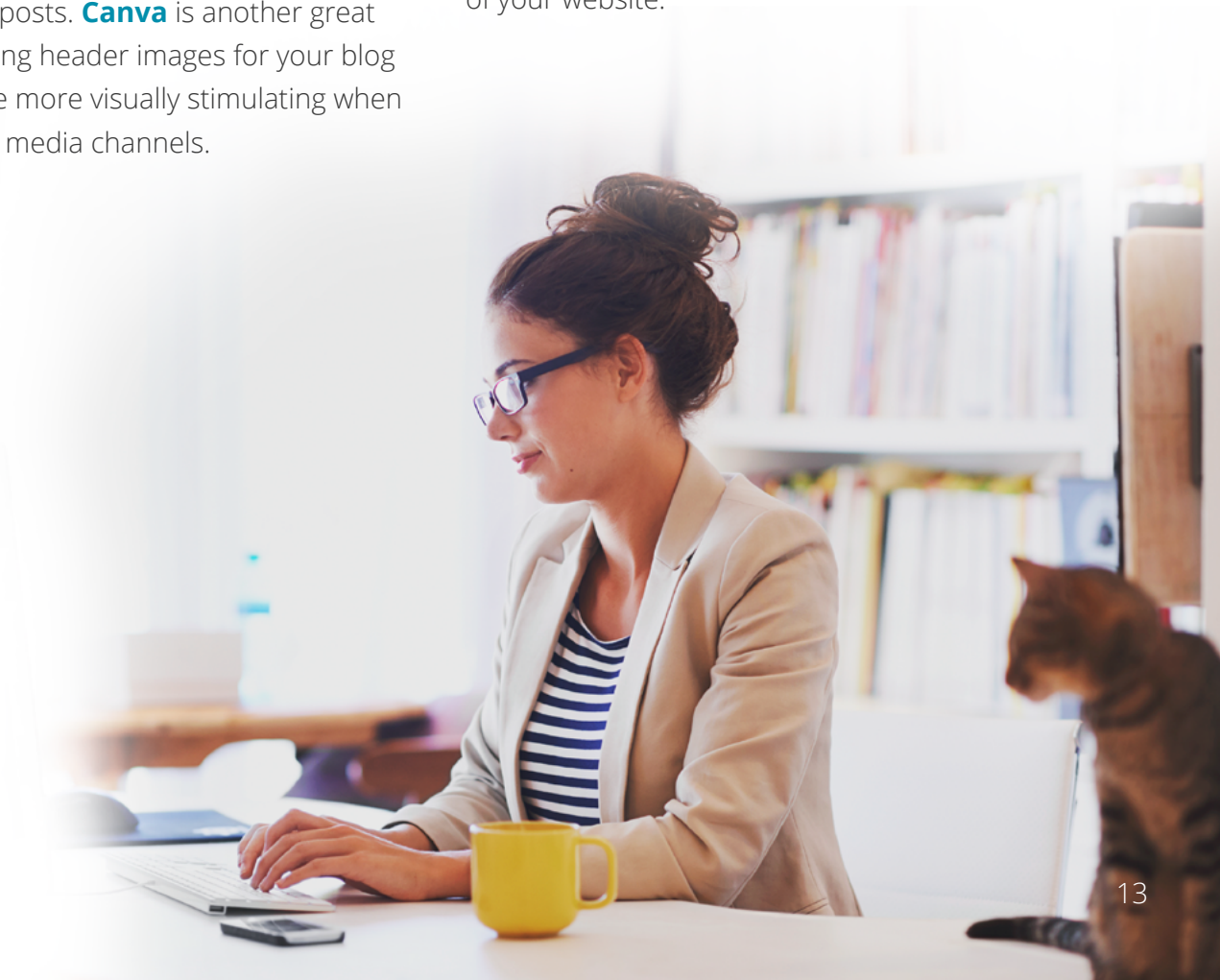
You can use services like **iStock** or **Shutterstock** for royalty-free images that you can use on blog posts. **Canva** is another great service for creating header images for your blog posts so they are more visually stimulating when shared on social media channels.

Lastly, consider a service like **Piktochart** or **Vennage** to produce attractive, professional infographics. It will put more eyes on the blog post and doubles as a chance to provide unique content to your social media channels which can pull in new followers.

Organize an on-site resource library

Your industry may have a lot of questions that naturally come with it, or you may find yourself dealing with a regular stream of customer questions. If you have several topics that would make sense being posted on your website and not on a blog, a resource library may be a good option for you.

For example, if you sell cat training supplies, a "How To" library would make a lot of sense and provide genuine value to your target market. Developing such resources not only helps your customers, but also increases the discoverability of your website.



Post regularly

Once you've figured out which networks to use and the kind of content to post, you need to schedule time each day to post on your social profiles. A profile that doesn't get regularly updated can miss out on time-sensitive topics and give followers the impression that you don't care about knowing your customers on a more personal level.

Use social media scheduling services like Hootsuite to schedule posts to all your channels and keep track of them in one organized space.

What works on one network may not work on another

The perfect post for your Facebook profile may not translate to your Twitter profile. A great post on Facebook should encourage discussion due to the commenting functionality. A great tweet, on the other hand, should get the important information across or ask a quick question of your followers. There isn't room for in-depth conversation due to the restrictive character count in tweets. Ultimately, you need to be more cognizant of your content and end goal as you cross-promote from network to network.

Check out our most recent [SEO and Social Media webinars](#) to see some simple ways to build and engage with your audience.



Chapter 7

Networking & Link Building: Meet the Neighbors

Your house is built and it looks great, so now it's time to meet the neighbors! Word-of-mouth advertising works by having others vouch for the products or services you offer and spread good information about you. Networking with websites related to yours and earning links from other sites pointing to yours are a digital means of word-of-mouth advertising. In order for your website to thrive, you need to develop relationships with other sites in your industry and gain reputable, high quality links back to your domain.

Offer products to bloggers

If your business is product-focused, a great way to network and get links back to your site on third party sites is through influential blogs. If you sell a new cat training product, reach out to industry authorities who regularly publish on cat training topics. Offer them one of your products for free so they can test it out. The result is a trusted industry voice hopefully endorsing your product and linking back to your website.



Offer expertise to bloggers

Reach out to industry bloggers and other websites and offer to write them a piece of content that they can feature on their site. You'll be lending your expertise to a topic that reinforces you as a trusted resource in your industry, while they'll receive a free piece of great content for their site and credit you and your website for the information.

Find industry-specific directories

Some industries have website directories dedicated entirely to businesses like yours. While widespread adding of directory listings is not advised, picking and choosing real directories that are appropriate to your business can be a good link-earning tactic.

Directories play a large role in localized SEO. If you own a brick-and-mortar store in addition to your ecommerce store, make sure you're exploring local directories such as YellowPages and your local Better Business Bureau.

Rebuild broken links or request updates to unlinked mentions

Industry websites may link to a related website to add context to their pages or articles, and those links will occasionally become outdated and return as a 404 error page. If you have a comparable link, you can reach out to webmasters and offer a replacement link for the broken one. Use tools like **Moz's Open Site Explorer**, **Ahrefs** and **Screaming Frog** to find sites with 404 errors on their outbound links.

There is a chance that another website is referencing you in their web copy but isn't linking to you. By reaching out to them and asking for a link to your website, you can make sure mentions of your brand are properly linked. You can use Moz's Open Site Explorer or **Google Alerts** to find any mentions of your brand. **Google Search Console** is also a great resource for seeing what sort of inbound links your site has from outside sources.



Chapter 8

Combining Channels: Diversify the Abode

Most successful online stores are successful because they diversify their marketing efforts, just like a well-designed home has different themes, colors and designs throughout the space to add character and style.

Putting all your eggs in one basket is a risk... and you should diversify to mitigate against that risk. We recommend supplementing SEO efforts with additional marketing tactics, such as email marketing, Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising and Shopping Feeds. Paid efforts, such as PPC and Shopping Feeds are geared toward websites that sell tangible products and they offer more areas in which to appear on a SERP.

Paid search efforts are especially effective for gaining quick traffic to your site. Many SEO practices, such as product and category descriptions, will also benefit paid search ads.

There is also a known correlation between improved SEO rankings and an active presence in paid search advertising.

As discussed in a previous section, social media is another great way to build ecommerce equity outside of your site, and it helps develop a community around your brand. Lastly, a well-designed site is important not only for creating a great user experience, but for establishing trust in your site among users and search engines.

PPC Advertising

Pay-Per-Click ads help target and bring in motivated buyers who are ready to make a purchase today. With concisely written text ads that convey benefits and/or price advantages that your product has over the competition, PPC ads can get qualified traffic to your website quickly. You can manage PPC on your own or learn more about Volusion's PPC services [here](#).



Shopping Feeds

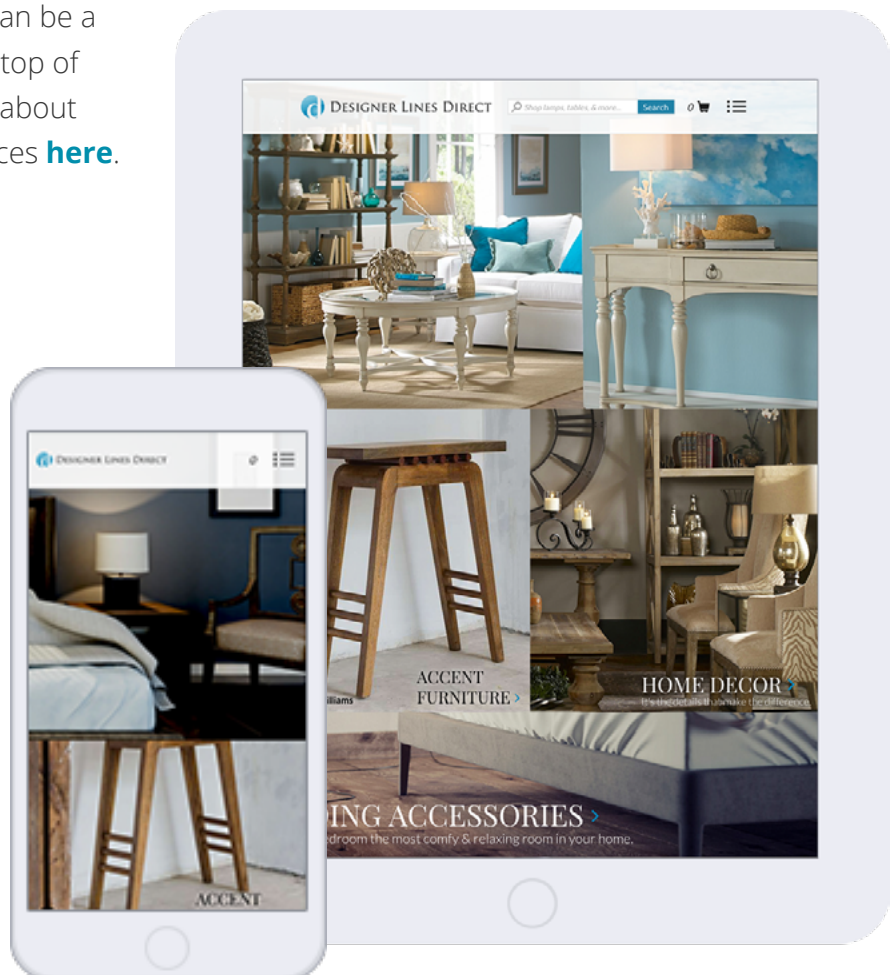
If you have great products, quality product images, competitive pricing and a benefit – such as free or discounted shipping – Comparison Shopping Engines are a smart option for you. If you find yourself interacting with a lot of price-conscious, deal-seeking customers, Shopping Feeds can give you a leg up on the competition and convey your product benefits clearly. Learn more about Volusion's in-house Shopping Feed management options [here](#).

Social Media Management & Consulting

Managing the brand personality of your company isn't as easy as it sounds. You need to find the right customer base, advertise effectively to them and provide the kind of content and interaction they want from your company. It's also a job that requires constant monitoring and management, which can be a lot for a business owner to handle on top of everyday responsibilities. Learn more about Volusion's in-house social media services [here](#).

Design

The look and feel of your site is having more of an impact on SEO than ever before, and it certainly plays a role in helping establish your brand and build trust with your customers. You can try to design and code a great website yourself, but it requires a lot of experience and understanding of how components work together to keep everything running smoothly. Let our creative team of designers and developers help you build the website you've always wanted and make it function exactly the way it should. Learn more about our great design services [here](#). You can also review our [library](#) for additional design resources and videos that can help you improve the look and feel of your website.



Chapter 9

Data Analysis: Maintain & Improve the Space

Even the most well-built houses will see a few cracks or chipped paint after a while.

If you don't measure how your website is performing, you won't be able to gauge the effectiveness of your marketing efforts. It's important to utilize and understand all of the data and metrics available to you so you can make educated decisions about strategies for promoting your website.

Google Analytics

The wealth of data available in Google Analytics can seem overwhelming, but once you break it down you will find several pieces of information that can help you clearly understand your website's organic health and daily traffic. Google offers plenty of instructional videos on many areas of Google Analytics, and the Volusion Marketing Services department also has a useful [webinar](#) that discusses how you can easily use Google Analytics to your advantage.

Google Search Console (formerly Google Webmaster Tools)

A companion tool to Google Analytics, Google Search Console looks more closely at how your site performs from a technical standpoint. If you have any 404 errors on your site or need to take a closer look at websites that are linking to you, Search Console can help you process that information easily. It's also a good way to see if there are any areas of your site that need to be revised for duplicate Meta tag issues, or if your site has received manual ranking penalties from Google that need to be addressed.

Additional tools

The previous section on Networking/Link Earning discussed various third party tools you can use to learn more about your website's linking profile. [Moz's Open Site Explorer](#), [SEMrush](#) and [Majestic](#) are all great tools for seeing your website's performance from a variety of angles.



Conclusion: SEO is an Ongoing Project

Just as there is always something to fix when you own a home, SEO is multi-faceted and always changing. Keeping your on-page content unique and fresh will help signal to search engines that you have the best content for your products and your industry.

Building an off-page blogging strategy shares your expertise with your customer base, while a strong social media presence is crucial to building your brand's voice and personality so you can connect with your customers on a more personal level.

Supplementary work, such as paid search advertising and website design, helps feature your company in more places on search engine results pages, builds trust that your site functions as it should and creates a pleasant user experience.

So many moving parts require the time and patience to appropriately handle all of them, which can be a daunting task for any person.

Utilizing the resources of a full, in-house digital marketing agency ensures that your website is in good hands, freeing you up to handle the everyday management of your business. You can learn more about our in-house marketing team [here](#). If budgets and strategy don't allow you to outsource your efforts, the information that has been covered in this ebook provides a roadmap for you to pursue these activities independently.

Interested in learning more? Here are some recommendations:

- Review our [Ecommerce Bootcamp Webinar slides](#) to get your site into shape
- Get assistance on planning out your SEO strategy with this webinar about [Setting Realistic SEO Goals](#)
- Better understand the language of SEO with our webinar that [Demystifies SEO](#) and explains how it works with ecommerce
- Learn more about how all the digital marketing pieces fit together with our [Marketing Panel Q&A Webinar](#)

