

9 ways to become an SEO problem-solver

SEO is a big thing. Yes, it is made up of a lot of small things. Some connected, some not.

We'd all love to stay on track, on plan and have everything go smoothly.

But the reality is that, at some point, something won't perform as expected or a resource won't come through.

That's why, to some degree, SEO is based on problem-solving as a whole.

We have to be ready for those situations and know what to do because SEO roadblocks and challenges are inevitable.

Some SEOs are great strategists, others great implementers. Few excel at both. Everyone has different strengths and levels of idea generation, strategy development and tactical implementation disciplines.

With so many stakeholders and variables involved in SEO, what does it takes to be a successful SEO problem-solver? Here are nine ways to become an SEO problem-solver.

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1. Understand your stakeholders

(all of them)

SEO success (fair or not) is often judged by non-SEOs and, at the same time, can be held back or negatively impacted by others as well.

Problem-solving gets easier when you already know the expectations, identify possible roadblocks in advance and have a full context. Whether it is company politics, differing levels of understanding of SEO subject matter, or wildly different expectations for performance and timing, you need to know all the players and assess what challenges might be ahead.

The more you can manage the stakeholder mix and expectations, the easier it will be to troubleshoot issues or to go down the right path when they happen. And yes, that's a "when," not an "if." I'm not being snarky, but nothing ever goes according to plan.

2. Set up roles and communication plans

Beyond the full set of stakeholders, there are distinct people who you work with. That may include people on your team, within your agency, within your department and/or other functions whether agency-side or client-side.

You will need others to be successful unless you have the skills and roles beyond SEO of writer, designer, developer and approver.

Establish clear roles and responsibilities. Know who your go-to people are for the different functions you need. Learn their processes and sync them up with yours.

Understand lead times and turnaround times. Make sure they

know that unplanned requests and things will happen.

Make it crystal clear what you know you need and what you might need, and how timing and responsiveness will impact SEO performance. Build allies and include them in your problem-solving and troubleshooting process and work to gain as much agility with resources that you can.

3. Maintain baselines and goals

You want to have as much objectivity and cause and effect as you can in any SEO effort.

There are so many misunderstood and gray areas that, without baselines and goals of where the effort is going, you can get way off track with resources, why something isn't going according to plan, and more.

There are often many ways to accomplish your goals. We can get lost down a rabbit hole on a technical issue if we can't tie it back to a baseline or impact on a goal.

We also can take a step back and reprioritize our efforts when we receive resistance or a roadblock if we find out that a dev update to resolve a technical issue might take six months.

4. Leverage your strategy and plan

First, I hope you have a defined strategy and plan. If you don't have it or your baselines and goals (noted above), take a step back and work on this. Otherwise, it is hard to be proactive and lead in the SEO effort as you'll always chase down issues.

With your strategy and plan, you can further build on the objective aspects of the campaign or cause that your baselines and goals help with.

As I noted in the intro, SEOs can be great at big picture strategy, some at detailed implementation, and many have a range of experience and favorite parts (technical vs. content, etc.).

Unification around a strategy and plan will allow you to know how hard to push for a specific fix versus moving on to bigger impact items. However, it allows you to adjust expectations. If the content writer or approval process is booked for months out, you can raise the red flag about how that will cause a change in the plan and expected timing and what that might do to push results further out.

Using your plan and any changes that come to manage expectations will help you get resources or engage others who can help you.

5. Go off-script and be agile

Even with the best plan and all the resources you could want at your disposal, things often play out in different ways that we project or anticipate. Sure, we work through all of the title and meta description tags and they are “perfectly” optimized. Yet we might find that there are issues that remain with duplicate tags or how they are being indexed.

- Should we check off the box and move on?
- Should we do another round of optimization?
- Should we start doing other things in the plan in parallel?
- Do we need to get a developer or copywriter involved?

Again, things don't always go according to plan. Sometimes we have to double down in certain areas.

Finding the right balance of adjusting the plan and being agile while you go versus sticking to the plan is probably the most important troubleshooting or problem-solving ability that

an SEO can have.

6. Develop technical skills and/or resources

Knowing the “what” and “why” of an SEO issue is powerful. This is a step beyond being able to rely on tools or performance issues as indicators that something is not performing according to expectations.

If you can dig into the XML sitemap, robots.txt, HTML code or other related factors yourself to get to the root of the problem, you can get deeper into problem-solving directly.

At a minimum level, you need to be able to quarterback a situation by bringing your resources together. However, with the ability to solve issues yourself or speak the same language and be highly prescriptive and direct with your resources, you’ll have a better chance of getting a resolution to your satisfaction and hopefully quicker.

7. Have content backup plans

One of the top reasons plans and performance get off track: not getting the quality and volume of content needed.

I don’t know many SEOs who still are writing or making content edits. In most cases, SEOs rely on a client, another resource, or a partner responsible for writing and producing content. In some industries, this is also shaped by legal and compliance requirements.

Content resources can get booked up even if you have a content calendar and needs established.

- What happens when your content resource is unavailable or gets off track from the initial plan?
- Do you have backup resources?

- Do you go deeper into technical and off-page optimization to compensate?

It is one thing to be a problem-solver when content isn't performing. It is another when you can't get the content you need.

8. Be patient, but don't wait

Be a team player and respectful of your partners and resources you collaborate with.

Pushing too much and/or not being tactful won't help your cause. Give some grace and have patience, but also don't wait.

If you're stuck on content (per the section above), or a dev edit, or a technical update or on any specific resources beyond your control, find ways to move things around in the plan.

You can always prioritize link building, tag updates, or some other type of audit or update to keep things moving forward.

It might take some creativity, but don't sit idle while waiting on others. Keep moving something forward.

9. See roadblocks as opportunities

My tone has probably been pretty strong because there will be challenges, roadblocks and things to troubleshoot. That's the nature of SEO and the web in general.

A problem-solver mentality is important.

Accepting this reality and being positive in the face of adversity, being a realist and getting others on board with this reality are critical.

SEO is hard for everyone. We're trying to be the best possible

with our website and strategy.

If it were easy, everyone would be good at it, and we'd have a different set of problems.

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About The Author

Corey Morris is a skilled marketing professional with 15+ years of experience developing award-winning, ROI-generating digital strategies for local and national brands. He was recently honored as the recipient of the KCDMA 2019 Marketer of the Year award. Corey serves as the chief strategy officer at Voltage—a marketing firm based in Kansas City, MO. Previously, he founded the KC Search Marketing Conference to help build a local community for search marketers for career growth. He was recognized for his involvement in the conference and invited to join the global board of SEMPO (now part of DAA) as the VP of Cities.

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