

Matter. How SEOs Can Help... Now – Whiteboard Friday

As SEOs, we hold a surprising amount of influence over how the world gets its information. In times like these, when businesses of all stripes are facing uncertainty and we may be looking for ways to help, the skills you use in your day job can be your superpower. In today's Whiteboard Friday, Russ Jones outlines five ways SEOs can make a difference amid the chaos of COVID-19 – just by doing your job and doing it well.

Click on the whiteboard image above to open a high-resolution version in a new tab!

Video Transcription

Hey, folks. This is Russ Jones here, Adjunct Search Scientist at Moz and Principal Search Scientist at System1. Today is my first day giving a Whiteboard Friday from my home here in Cary, North Carolina.

Unfortunately, it's with a somber attitude as many of you are at home right now realizing what's going on in the world. Normally, at this time of night, I figured I'd be having a scotch, so maybe I'll start with that. You see, we all need to relax a bit because things are tough and difficult.

But at the same time one of the things that's been troubling me a lot lately through this whole crisis has been how much do I matter? How do I make myself matter? Now, sure, I've got kids and a wife, so I work and I do things that help them to thrive.

But in my day-to-day job, most of what I do is work on search

engine optimization and trying to get sites to rank, which can sometimes be really good and sometimes be really bad, and most of the time it's just somewhere in the middle. You're helping businesses do better.

How can SEOs help now?

But in a time like this, it almost feels like there's a calling for us to do something more. Today I want to talk a little bit about some of the ideas I've had on how as search engine optimizers and web professionals in general we might be able to matter just a little bit more and make just a little bit more of a difference during this pressing time.

So let's start off. How can SEOs help now?

1. Combat misinformation

Well, I think one of the first things that search engine optimizers have the ability to do obviously is to influence the search results. But we know right now that a serious problem that's plaguing social media and search engines and really just to all information in general is misinformation, information getting out there about what works and what doesn't to try and help stop the coronavirus.

Whether this information is well-intentioned or not is of no impact if it actually does cause harm. So as a search engine optimizer, one of the things that you have the ability to do is actually try and help out the sites that deserve to rank, the sites that are providing information.

I noticed if you were to search in Google for alternate cures for COVID, the first two things that would come up were colloidal silver and garlic. It seems like for some reason

everything can be cured with the same stuff that kills vampires and werewolves. I'm not sure where this came from, but regardless it's there.

It's in the SERPs. In fact, you can search right now for how to cure COVID-19 with silver, and you'll find sites that rank that try and tell you this works, and we know it doesn't. So I'm not telling you that we should Google-bomb everybody out there who has a good website that's doing the right thing and providing good information.

But perhaps when you're writing your blog posts or presenting information online to your customers about COVID-19, you should take the time to think about: **Who can I link to, what sites can I link to that are going to give information that will help my customers, and not just think of them as customers, but help their families?**

So when you write an article about the discount that your business is offering, perhaps you might want to link to maybe the CDC's website, which will list off the different treatments available. Or if you run a local business, perhaps you can list off the various sites which are available for COVID testing. Now there are lots of different ways that we can go about this, and I'm not going to give you a list of sites that you should link to.

But there are probably sites that you visit almost every day, checking on the stats, seeing how things are going, and perhaps you should share those with the world and share them in a way that can make Google better.

2. Hire the best writers

Now the second thing that I want to bring up right now is actually an interesting opportunity. You see, right now, a lot of professionals, a lot of experts are simply out of work.

You see, as much as it's nice to be a search engine optimizer and work on a computer where you could be on the beach or in the basement or in a cubicle if you have to, but where you can work from anywhere, that's just not the case for most people in America. In fact, a recent study came out and said that only 40% of jobs could possibly be completed remotely, and that's *possibly*.

That's not meaning that they will be or that it's easy to or efficient to or effective to, just possible. That number is staggering. But there is one thing that we can tap into in these times, and that thing we can tap into is **expertise**.

You see, we always talk about producing evergreen content for our clients. I just gave a Whiteboard Friday a couple of days back about how it's difficult, as an SEO, to write content about things you are not an expert in. Well, for once, it turns out that there are lots of experts who need work and who would be let's just say the best opportunity you will ever have to produce truly evergreen content.

I mean think about the various areas of experts that are available to you. **Hospitality**, think about calling your local hotel and asking whether or not they can put you in touch with any concierge staff, even just by email. They know more about your city and about what tourists or individuals want in that city than perhaps anybody else.

Or you could talk about **travel agents**, and the same sort of information could be available to your website. You can understand how that if you're an SEO that works with a lot of local businesses, works with say a couple of different **restaurants**, well, then this concierge can then help provide you with third-party, unbiased information about these types of restaurants.

Then you can assist in the process of helping these restaurants move to an online and delivery service during their time of need. The same thing is true with **entertainment**. Recently an old employee of mine offered to fix the jingle, to come up with a new intro for some video production that Moz had made in the past. He's an incredibly talented individual. Luckily, he's also an SEO, so he can work remotely. But at the same time, maybe there's an opportunity to work with a truly talented artist or a truly talented musician to make the kinds of changes to your brand that you've always wanted to but have never been able to get access to.

Maybe the same thing is true if you're an information website and you write about **sports**, for example. Just because games aren't going on doesn't mean that the history of the sport doesn't need to be reported on and that there isn't an opportunity to produce some of the best content, the most reflective content that's ever existed on the web.

3. Adwords SMB credits

Then third I think we can tap into almost any kind of sales representative out there. These people not only pride themselves on the knowledge, but the knowledge that they have of the products that they sell is what makes them able to sell it. These types of sales reps, whether they're in technology, whether they're selling who knows, audiovisual equipment, it doesn't really matter.

What matters is the fact that they are experts and they have the unique capability to write about content better than anybody else. For once, for this short period of time, they're looking for that opportunity. So that's one thing that I want you to really focus on is the opportunity here for you to serve yourself and your customers and those in need all at the

same time.

It's possible if you only look in all of the right places. Now that's not all that we can do. Now one of the things that has been really interesting has been the response of a handful of the larger companies or organizations across the world. One of them – or two of them, for that matter – have been Google and Facebook.

Both of them have announced just enormous sums of money that they are going to pour into free credits for small and medium businesses inside of their representative ad platforms. But here's the thing. They can't really distinguish between the small businesses that are going to suffer and the small businesses that are going to do well during these times.

They're not necessarily sure whether or not the local store that's advertising on their website is already set up for e-commerce or whether or not they're just trying to bring people to the front door. Well, here's a unique opportunity, and I normally give a lot of grief to people in the paid search space because I think search engine optimization is just so wonderful.

But this is really for you paid search folks out here. What kind of opportunities are there amongst your clientele where you can co-market, where you can work with your customers who are healthy in this time of need to co-market on behalf of the customers who are not? You see, people are going to wake up with credits in their account.

Some of them are going to need it, and some of them are not. **You are in a unique position to put those people together.** Right now, if you're thinking about how you can help, I bet most of your customers are wondering how they might be able to as well. By simply putting them together, maybe, just maybe you'll have an opportunity to do well by all of your customers and hopefully help some people out who really need it.

4. Healthy business? Help out by making your offer free

The fourth thing I want to bring up is something we've seen a lot, which is how healthy businesses of all sizes are responding. A lot of them are providing some sort of discounts or offers. I want to be really careful here because I don't want to say that providing discounts and offers in these times is in any way let's say taking advantage or not giving respect to what's going on.

It's actually really important that we seek out opportunities to help those in times of need. But I think that you really ought to be careful and be thoughtful and respectful of those who you will be helping in this manner. So one of the first things that I want to say is that **if you are going to offer something, do your best to make it free.**

You see, there aren't lots of businesses right now who are going through just a little bit of hurt. There aren't a lot of people out there who are just going through a little bit of hurt. We're talking about a lot of people going through really difficult times. The deeper you can dig, even if it's carved out specifically for the individuals or businesses that are in the most desperate of times, the better it's going to be for them in the long run.

Don't set time traps

Now one of the first tips I want to say is don't set time traps. I don't know what the word is for this, but I call them time traps. They're popping up left and right, which is, "Hey, we're going to give you the first X number of days free. Put in your credit card." It's a subtle but pretty obvious attempt

that, over time, these individuals will forget about the credit card and hope that they end up just rolling into some payments that they otherwise wouldn't make.

Don't do that. If at all possible inside of your payment system, make some free trials or some free tools available to people that just don't require a credit card. That credit card right now is often meaning food for some of these people. So let's just be thoughtful.

Do target those most affected

Now what you can do is target those who are most affected.

For example, a lot of businesses are offering services and discounts specifically for the families of first responders, doctors, and any kind of individual who's been identified as an employee or a place of business that must be open, like your pharmacy. Now the reason why you want to target these people is they're having to put their lives on the line literally every day, even though that's not something they really signed up for when they got into the business. So the least we can do is offer them our biggest discounts.

Do target those most helpful

Third, we've got to be able to target those who are most helpful as well. You see, it's not just about the people who are in need. It's about the people who are helping those in need. I'll give you an example. Right now there's a serious crisis with domestic abuse in America.

You see, the quarantine has meant that people have had to stay home. It's, in that time, meant that the abused have had to spend more and more time with their abusers. Now there's probably a dozen domestic shelters within your area if you live in a larger city and certainly those across the state.

But how easy is it for those resources to be found? How much

can they actually handle at this point? What do they need donations of? Do they need money? Do they need food? These are things you can find out and take advantage of.

But most importantly, as an SEO, **you can help these organizations be easily discoverable**, which is incredibly important right now, because people are in dire situations and need information fast. So there are opportunities here for you to offer services yourself, for the businesses that you support to offer services, and **for you as an individual to simply contribute to all sorts of different individuals who are doing their best to get us through this crisis.**

5. Online transition army

Now the fifth thing I'd like to think about is some sort of online transition army. Now most of us here are some sort of web professional or we own a business that has a website. But in all that we have done, there is some degree of experience that involves putting a business online or putting an organization online.

Whatever that skill is that you've developed – maybe it's e-commerce, maybe it's shipping, maybe it's paid search, who knows what it is – it's time to pick up the phone and start calling the organizations that don't have this kind of representation and help them make the transition.

We know that there are tens of thousands of talented SEOs across the country and even more search marketers and even more web designers and developers. We know that they've got free cycles. I know I do. I'm recording this right now at I think it's about 9:30 EST. It was either this or Netflix.

We have the opportunity to make a really big difference. So

whether that's helping a local business create an e-commerce version or helping them with shipping or even more often than not helping nonprofits collect donations online, there are just tons of opportunities for you and your organization to get involved and help make a difference for the companies that aren't already online.

Now I know you could think about this from the other direction, which is to say my business and my clients are online, and now is our chance to win because our competitors just weren't prepared. This is one of those times where I think you've got to question whether or not you really want to bring that karma upon you.

Now is the opportunity to matter.

The last thing I would recommend is to **let your employees and your benefactors and your deeds speak for themselves**. You don't need to go out touting left and right all of the things that you're doing.

Certainly you should **advertise the offers** that you're giving so that you actually extend the reach. Certainly you should **advertise the fact that you're looking for nonprofit organizations to help out online**. While you should do that, the question you should ask yourself before you put out any kind of information about what you've done, about how you've helped is whether or not the time you're spending putting together that information and the dollars that you're spending putting out that information is worth the cost of the good that you could have done with that time and money doing something else.

Share your ideas in the comments

Now I want to end on a positive note. These are difficult times. But if there's one thing that I've seen time and time again is that people in our industry care and they're trying

to make a difference. Now these are just some of the ideas that I came up with, and I'm betting in the Moz audience and across the Twittersphere and Reddit and all of social media that there are people who have other excellent ideas.

I want you to fill the comments with those types of ideas, and we'll do our best to promote them. Thank you again for spending another Whiteboard Friday with me. God bless. Be healthy and I'll see you soon again. Bye.

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