

White Paper

Job Posting SEO How HR can Make an Impact

HireGround Software Solutions

For those not familiar with the term, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the practice of increasing a webpage's ranking in an online search. There are plenty of general SEO resources out there, but this paper focuses on SEO for recruiting, and what should be done to give your job postings and careers pages better visibility.

I'm in HR... is SEO really that important?

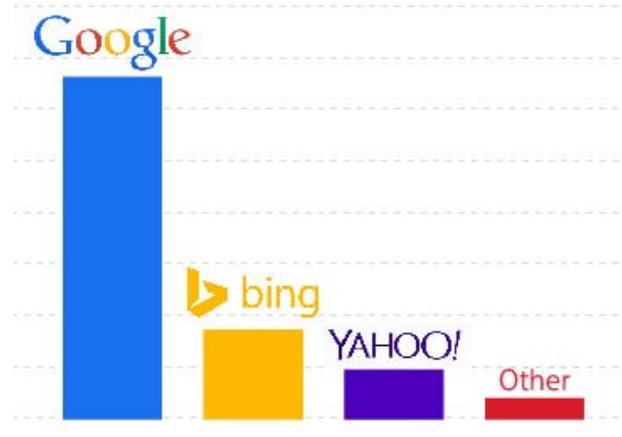
If you are looking to attract more candidates, more qualified candidates and trim your budget, then yes, SEO should matter to you. Good search engine optimization means better visibility in online searches, and higher views on your job postings. Optimizing for relevant keywords means people searching with those terms will find your job more easily. What's more, with optimized postings, you can advertise your open positions in fewer places, saving money in job board fees. With these benefits, and more, SEO can make a positive impact in your hiring.

By the numbers

The three major search engines, Google, Bing and Yahoo, are used for the billions of searches performed each month. In February 2014 the US, Google accounts for 67.5% of searches, with Bing rising to 18.3% of the share and Yahoo trailing with just over 10% of total searches.¹

While Google, Microsoft and Yahoo all have their unique algorithms to determine which results are shown, Google's ranking algorithm is considered the gold standard, and the one to optimize for. Google returns search results beyond simple keyword matching, reflecting the underlying reason behind each search. Each major algorithm update, from Penguin to Panda to Hummingbird, are analyzed, discussed and revered as the next step forward in online searching. For this reason, SEO experts typically focus on optimizing for Google first and foremost.

Search engine optimization can be extremely rewarding when done successfully, with plenty of research showing the value of being on the first page of search results. Of course, you can pay to be at the top, whether through Google Adwords, Bing or other search engines, however, 70% of users click on organic results only.² Most people will ignore, or never click on the sponsored links. Therefore, while paying money may put your page in front of more eyes, it won't convert to as many clicks as a high natural ranking.



1 Comscore – March 2014 (www.comscore.com/Insights/Press_Releases/2014/3/comScore_Releases_February_2014_U.S._Search_Engine_Rankings)

2 Search Engine Journal – April 2012 (www.searchenginejournal.com/24-eye-popping-seo-statistics/42665/)

In addition, more than half of searchers click on the first link,³ and a full three quarters of searchers never leave the first page.⁴ This is very much dependent on the industry and type of search being performed, but it does mean that if your job listing is in 17th place, a searcher is unlikely to find it; a job in 21st place will remain hidden to all but a few.

So what does it take to get your company in the top 10 spots?

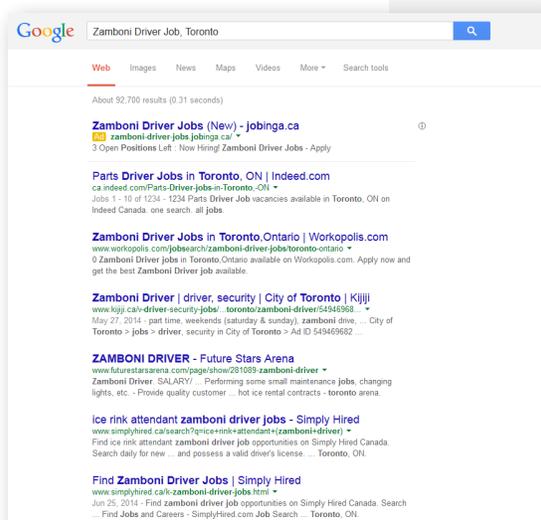
Job Boards are dominating the results – how can my company break through?

Perform any number of common job searches (job title or profession + city) and the first couple pages of results are likely to be the job boards. These websites have the top results locked in – after all, finding jobs is the main purpose of their site. SimplyHired, Indeed, Eluta, WowJobs and others all fight for the top positions. How can a company's career page compete?

The good news is that in a results list dominated with generic job board search category results, a true company really does stand out, without needing to be in the top 5 results. The more specific a job someone is searching for, the more likely a direct link to a company's job will appear among the top results.

For example, a search for “Zamboni Driver Job, Toronto” returns a specific posting in the top 5 results from a website which would otherwise not rank highly. What does this mean for you? It means that if you regularly hire within a certain niche, there is less competition from the job boards.

However, unless the searcher is looking for an extremely specific and unique job title, a more realistic goal for most companies is to rank on the second page of results for a more generic search term. One example of this is Enbridge. A Google search for “human resources advisor jobs Calgary” at first returned the typical array of job board HR category pages, but in the middle of the second page a listing jumped out: Human Resources Advisor at Enbridge. In terms of SEO, they are doing a lot of things right with their career pages.



3 Search Engine Watch – October 2012 (searchenginewatch.com/article/2215868/53-of-Organic-Search-Clicks-Go-to-First-Link-Study)

4 Hubspot – May 2011 (blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/14416/100-Awesome-Marketing-Stats-Charts-Graphs-Data.aspx)

An organization's careers section should be set up by your web design/brand marketing firm for strong SEO from the start. It can be very challenging to make significant changes as an employee outside of the IT or marketing field. Here's part of what the team at Enbridge has done to make their page so successful:

- They have a unique Jobs website. The company career page and job descriptions are all hosted on a subdomain (jobs.enbridge.com) which means that the entire site can be optimized for career searching. If their career information was hosted at the main www.enbridge.com site, the main site information would detract from the specific job information. The jobs subdomain is not optimized for learning about natural gas, and similarly, the main Enbridge website is not optimized for finding jobs.
- They have a category summary. "About Human Resources" is the heading on the search result page, with a few sentences about that role and department at Enbridge. Keywords such as 'job' and 'Human Resources' appear frequently, and are not contained in a job description that soon disappears from the site.
- The small technical details aren't overlooked. Programming minutiae can be easily disregarded by a time-crunched web team or an inexperienced company project team. Details such as unique page titles, relevant headings, site maps and url structure all come together to have a significant impact on SEO.

Being ranked 15th in a search is comparatively good for a company, but with a few changes we wonder if that number could be even lower. Here are some additional steps not seen in the Enbridge example which should help any company's ranking:

- Having supplementary pages of information on the same jobs subdomain. While this is useful for job seekers to learn more about the company, it is also useful for building SEO. At Enbridge, almost all links direct users to the main site, away from the jobs site the company is trying to optimize. Supplementary pages can contain descriptions about what it is like to work in a particular role, or how a role is a key part of the organization's structure. This type of content tells search engines that this site is a good source of quality information, and therefore worthy of being ranked higher.
- Using a .jobs extension (ie. www.Enbridge.jobs). This is more significant than it first appears – this particular domain extension can only be used for company career pages. General job boards and job listing sites are not allowed to use it. Therefore, simply by using a .jobs extension, a company would be telling the search engines "there are good quality jobs here!" This is one advantage any business can have over those free job posting sites.
- Consider mobility. Over 70% of job seekers are now on mobile devices and that number is only expected to increase. While Google's algorithm does not currently give greater advantage to websites that are responsive or mobile-friendly, it does punish the sites that are difficult and slow to view on mobile devices.



What's more, almost half of mobile web users are unlikely to return to a website they had trouble accessing from their phone and an even greater number are unlikely to recommend the site.⁵ Page load times and a responsive layout that changes to fit the screen size will be vital elements of high ranking careers pages in the near future.

Make an impact at the job posting level

It's understandable that many HR professionals don't have a lot of immediate control over the design and development of their company's careers pages. On the other hand, HR can create and modify the content, and this can have a powerful impact.

Pay close attention to the job title

Job titles that aren't descriptive enough, or are too descriptive are a major block to attracting interested candidates.

When job seekers perform a search, the closer your job title matches what keywords they are searching, the higher it will rank in the results. Research has shown that job descriptions and titles often don't match what job seekers actually search for! For example, common search terms in the healthcare category include "nurse", "technician", "nursing", "practitioner" and "pharmacy" however, employer's job titles and descriptions used the terms "care", "health", "medical" and "patient".⁶ Job seekers search using role-based terms, while employers describe the job with general industry buzzwords. Consider your own industry, and use words specific to each role instead of more general terms. Ensuring the terminology you use matches common search criteria is one of the single most important things you can do to get your description in front of more eyes.

Another good rule is to omit any superlatives. Words like 'guru', 'excellent' or 'qualified' should not appear in the title. It may seem to make the position more attractive, but there are major drawbacks to this strategy. For example, consider the job title 'Programming Rock Star.' First, superlatives such as ninja, rock star, or guru are not always thought highly of by candidates – it could make it look like the company is trying too hard to appear 'young'. Second, it is unlikely this job will come up in any search. Job seekers typically search using the location and job title, ie 'Calgary computer programmer'. No mention of rock stars. For common positions, add an additional keyword which further describes the job. This can be a key skill, such as 'Javascript' or 'PHP', or it can relate to the position, such as 'Senior', or 'Part-time'.



5 Gomez – 2011 (www.gomez.com/resources/whitepapers/survey-report-what-users-want-from-mobile)

6 ERE – October 2013 (www.ere.net/2013/10/25/watch-your-words-job-seekers-arent-searching-for-the-ones-you-re-using)

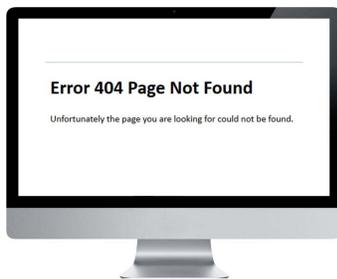
The issue occurs when it seems like the job simply isn't that exciting, so the description focuses on what a great company ABC Inc. is instead. The problem is when the job description contains nothing else. ABC may be a great company – but as a job seeker, why would I apply to a job I know nothing about? How would I find the job in a search when nothing is written about the role?

The solution: Always include a description of the role and the skills needed to apply. Any information is of value to an applicant: maybe it's 'no experience required' or 'entry-level position'.

The more useful your job description is to a candidate, the better it will be for SEO.

How about 'flexible hours', 'stable hours' or 'choose your own schedule'? There are pieces of information about every job, no matter how common, that are vital to a job seeker. It's nice to include that the company has a fun team environment, but that is not role-specific, and is an unlikely search term. Job seekers search for the things that are important to them, such as 'health plan' or 'flexible hours.' Even the most menial jobs have unique perks.

Another error that may harm your jobs' chances of being found is not having enough static content on your career's page. Remember that job postings are constantly being added and removed, with disparate roles that don't have much overlapping terminology. Search engines trying to determine if your careers pages are useful for a particular search term won't consistently find relevant information. The solution is to have pages



within your careers site that share information about the company, and about how various roles fit into the culture and structure. These pages will remain as a consistent source of information, even when there are fewer job postings. Many companies have started embracing this idea, which also serves the purpose of enticing and informing candidates. Including employee testimonials, 'day-in-a-life' descriptions and items

unique to your company's culture, city or industry are useful for job seekers and add depth to your careers site.

Further Considerations

The following are questions to ask your web admin, and your applicant tracking software provider (if applicable). These questions will shed some insight on how well your website is currently functioning and what is in the process of being improved.

What happens to the page once a job is deposited? If someone clicks a direct link to a job, and the job is no longer active, what does the user see? If they are shown a default '404 page not found' error, this is considered extremely bad practice. Not only in the eyes of Google, but it doesn't help the job seeker either – where do they go? How do they find out what happened to the job, and why they can't apply? Any job that is removed from a site should show a message explaining that the job is no longer active, along with options to go to other pages.

When will a mobile-friendly site be available? If your organization does not already have one, responsive websites should be on the horizon to meet the needs of any visitor to your site. The majority of job seekers are on mobile devices, and it's clear that the use of tablets and smartphones in day-to-day activities is now commonplace.

With a responsive site come further questions, such as how long do pages take to load? Internet users generally have short attention spans and they expect information quickly. Google recognizes this, and has made page speed a factor in their ranking algorithm.⁷ Not only is a fast page load time great for users and SEO, it has been proven to increase conversion rates. It's been shown that a one-second delay can cost you a 7% loss in conversions and a whopping 16% decrease in customer satisfaction.⁸ As HR, the conversion goal is to encourage people to apply to your open positions. Pages that load fast will keep mobile visitors on your site, and willing to hit that 'apply' button. If you use applicant tracking software, or are in the market, this is a serious question for the provider.

SEO is only the first step in the overall goal: getting good candidates to apply to your job.

The above technical considerations may not be part of the traditional HR role; however, correctly implementing them will directly benefit your online hiring efforts.

Summary

In addition to the technical work needed to optimize careers pages, HR can have a big impact on how searchable and attractive their job postings are. Company descriptions, employee testimonials, job posting titles and job descriptions are significant SEO factors, and more importantly, they determine how many people choose to apply to your jobs. It's when those four factors are misleading, poorly written or non-existent that both the amount of traffic and applicants decline.

For many companies, it's a tough challenge to have a career's site ranking higher than the second page of results for broader general search terms. For more specific searches, however, there is every opportunity for an individual organization to stand out above the generic job boards. As job seekers narrow their focus regarding features, benefits or skills, it's up to the recruiter to ensure that those features appear in the listing, or on their career's site.

7 UnBounce – May 2011 (unbounce.com/conversion-rate-optimization/a-fast-web-site-increases-conversions)

8 Copyblogger – January 2013 (www.copyblogger.com/website-speed-matters)