Some Good Reasons to Choose SEO as Your Career

1   High demand for SEO services

Once SEO was not a separate profession - Web masters performed some basic SEO for the sites they managed and that was all. But as sites began to grow and make money, it became more reasonable to hire a dedicated SEO specialist than to have the Web master do it. The demand for good SEO experts is high and is constantly on the rise.

2   A LOT of people have made a successful SEO career

There are many living proofs that SEO is a viable business. The list is too long to be quoted here but some of the names include Rob from Blackwood Productions, Jill Wahlen from High Rankings, Rand Fishkin from SEO Moz and many others.

3   Search Engine Optimizers make Good Money !

SEO is a profession that can be practiced while working for a company or as a solo practitioner. There are many jobboards like Dice and Craigslist that publish SEO job advertisements. It is worth noting that the compensation for SEO employees is equal to or even higher than that of developers, designers and marketers. Salaries over $80K per annum are not an exception for SEO jobs.
As a solo SEO practitioner you can make even more money. Almost all freelance sites have sections for SEO services and offers for $50 an hour or more are quite common. If you are still not confident that you can work on your own, you can start a SEO job, learn a bit and then start your own company.
If you already feel confident that you know a lot about SEO, you can take this quiz and see how you score. Well, don't get depressed if you didn't pass - here is a great checklist that will teach you a lot, even if you are already familiar with SEO.

4   Only Web-Designing MAY NOT be enough

Many companies offer turn-key solutions that include Web design, Web development AND SEO optimization. In fact, many clients expect that when they hire somebody to make their site, the site will be SEO friendly, so if you are good both as a designer and a SEO expert, you will be a truely valuable professional.
On the other hand, many other companies are dealing with SEO only because they feel that this way they can concentrate their efforts on their major strength – SEO, so you can consider this possibility as well.

5   Logical step ahead if you come from marketing or advertising

The Web has changed the way companies do business, so to some extent today's marketers and advertisers need to have at least some SEO knowledge if they want to be successful. SEO is also a great career for linguists.

6   Lots of Learning

For somebody who comes from design, development or web administration, SEO might look not technical enough and you might feel that you will downgrade if you move to SEO. Don't worry so much - you can learn a LOT from SEO, so if you are a talented techie, you are not downgrading but you are actually upgrading your skills packages.

7   SEO is already recognized as a career

Finally, if you need some more proof that SEO is a great career, have a look at the available courses and exams for SEO practitioners. Well, they might not be a CISCO certification but still they help to institutionalize the SEO profession.

Some Ugly Aspects of SEO

1   Dependent on search engines

It is true that in any career there are many things that are outside of your control but for SEO this is a rule number one. Search engines frequently change their algorithms and what is worse – these changes are not made public, so even the greatest SEO gurus admit that they make a lot of educated guesses about how things work. It is very discouraging to make everything perfect and then to learn that due to a change in the algorithm, your sites dropped 100 positions down. But the worst part is that you need to communicate this to clients, who are not satisfied with their sinking ratings.

2   No fixed rules

Probably this will change over time but for now the rule is that there are no rules – or at least not written ones. You can work very hard, follow everything that looks like a rule and still success is not coming. Currently you can't even rely on bringing a search engine to court because of the damages they have done to your business because search engines are not obliged to rank high sites that have made efforts to get optimized.

3   Rapid changes in rankings

But even if you somehow manage to get to the top for a particular keyword, keeping the position requires constant efforts. Well, many other businesses are like that, so this is hardly a reason to complain – except when an angry customer starts shouting at you that this week their ratings are sinking and of course this is all your fault.

4   SEO requires Patience

The SEO professional and customers both need to understand that SEO takes constant effort and time. It could take months to move ahead in the ratings, or to build tens of links. Additionally, if you stop optimizing for some time, most likely you will experience a considerable drop in

ratings. You need lots of motivation and patience not to give up when things are not going your way.

5   Black hat SEO

Black hat SEO is probably one of the biggest concerns for the would-be SEO practitioner. Fraud and unfair competition are present in any industry and those who are good and ethical suffer from this but black hat SEO is still pretty widespread. It is true that search engines penalize black hat practices but still black hat SEO is a major concern for the industry.

So, let's hope that by telling you about the pros and cons of choosing SEO as your career we have helped you make an informed decision about your future.

Black Hat SEO

Google makes it clear that it disapproves of certain SEO tactics, such as hiding keywords with invisible text, or showing one page to Google's spider and another to actual human visitors. (See what Google recommends and what they don't.) Methods that conform to what the search engines like are called **White Hat SEO**, and disapproved methods are called **Black Hat SEO.** There is a lot of controversy about whether Black Hat SEO is really "bad" in the ethical sense. White Hatters say that Black Hatters are unfairly trying to manipulate the SERPs. Black Hatters counter, "What constitutes 'fair'? Isn't *any* change you make to your page for SEO purposes an attempt to influence rankings? Why is one method less pure than another when we're all just trying to get our pages to rank higher? Further, if an engine is ranking a bunch of irrelevant sites above mine, what's so wrong about using any method at my disposal to get my relevant site ranked above them? Doing so doesn't benefit just me, it benefits the searchers because it gives them what they're searching for. And it also benefits the engine, because searchers will think better of the engine for giving them more relevant results than it would have otherwise."

Adding to the controversy about Black Hat SEO is the fact Google does allow a certain select few sites to operate contrary to its own stated policies. Danny Sullivan complains that Google's cloaking policy is inconsistent (more on cloaking below), and that the policy wording should be updated. He further notes that the reason Google allows some cloaking is that it improves searching rather than hinders it, and that it's therefore inappropriate to think of cloaking as synonymous with "bad".

Personally I think that what's good or bad is not the methods you use, but whether you're trying to get a ranking you deserve. If your site is really one of the best about, say, the history of baseball, then it doesn't really matter to me how it gets to the top of the SERPs for a search on that phrase. What's annoying to me, and to millions of people around the world, is when a crappy, useless site tricks its way to the top of the SERPs, usually in an attempt to get more visitors to there so they'll click on the ads there and make money for the webmaster. So to me it's not how you get to the top, but whether you should be at the top in the first place.

Whether you think Black Hat SEO is bad or not you should avoid it anway, because it can get you banned from the search engines, or at least reduce your ranking. Google has been known to

remove sites it felt weren't playing fair. Granted, this isn't likely, but why take that risk? Also, much Black Hat SEO involves some fairly technical work. If this article is your introduction to SEO, you likely don't have the skills to be a successful Black Hatter anyway -- at least one who doesn't get caught.

If you want to stay on Google's good side, here are some things to avoid:

- **Invisible text.** Don't put white text on a white background. In fact, don't put even very light yellow on a white background. The engines aren't stupid; just because the colors aren't exactly the same doesn't mean they can't figure out there's no contrast. Yes, there are clever ways to try to fool Google about what the background color actually is, but Google is probably aware of most of them anyway, and I won't cover them besides.
- **Cloaking.** Google knows what's on your site because periodically its automated robot called **Googlebot** visits all the pages in its index, and grabs all the page content so it can analyze it later. **Cloaking** means showing one page to Googlebot and a completely different page to real human visitors. Google despises this aplenty.
- **Keyword Stuffing.** The engines want your pages to be natural. Finding every place to cram your keywords onto your pages -- or worse, including a "paragraph" of nothing but keywords, especially if they're repeated ad nauseum -- is a big no-no. Do you consider pages with lists of keywords to be high quality? Neither does Google.
- **Doorway pages.** A doorway page is a page built specifically for the purpose of ranking well in the search engines and without any real content of its own, and which then links to the "real" destination page, or automatically redirects there. Doorway pages are a popular choice of some SEO firms, although Google has cracked down on this and many webmasters saw their pages disappear from the index. Some SEO firms call their doorway pages something else, in an effort to fool potential customers who know enough to know that they should avoid doorway pages. But a doorway page is still a doorway page even if you call it something else. Some engines may decide that an **orphaned** page is a doorway page, and if so then the page or the site might suffer a penalty.
- **Spam.** Spam has a special meaning with regards to SEO: worthless pages with no content, created specifically for the purpose of ranking well in the engines. You think they have what you're looking for, but when you get there it's just a bunch of ads or listings of other sites. The webmaster is either getting paid by the advertisers, or the page is a doorway page, with the webmaster hoping that you'll click over to the page s/he *really* wants you to go to.

Penalties

It's important to distinguish between the two punishments from search engines since they're entirely different. Being **banned** means your site is removed from the index completely. This is pretty rare; most people who think they've been banned are actually still in the index. It's easy to tell whether you've been banned by Google. Assuming your site was in the index to begin with, search Google for **site:yourdomain.com**. If you get any results, your site hasn't been banned.

Being **penalized** means having your rank reduced. Unfortunately I know of no way to test for this. I do think that most of the time a webmaster thinks they've been penalized they're wrong. Rankings change, sites drop -- it's all part of the way the search engines work. But often many people take it personally and feel they're being victimized.

I have spent a lot of time outlining the right things to do for SEO - things that are typically called White Hat SEO. Some of the practices I have written about would even lean a bit towards the Gray Hat arena. I have even discussed the 3 different hats of a search engine optimizer. But I have never outlined Black Hat SEO Practices. These are content practices, techniques, or methodologies that are sure to get your blog or web site banned from one, or all, of the major search engines. I list these here to help draw the line between what is acceptable, and what is not acceptable to the search engines. I do not list these techniques to advocate Black Hat practices.

Use These Techniques At Your Own Risk!

1. Astroturfing

This is when a false public relations campaign or fake social media in the blogosphere generate increased attention to a site, blog, or wiki.
* Livingston Buzz - Astroturfing on the Dark Side of the Moon

2. Buying Expired Domains

Domains that have expired can carry a large page rank. By purchasing the domain, throwing up repetitive content, and linking to your other web sites and domains, you can use link juice to distribute the page rank to those other sites.

3. Cloaking

Cloaking is when a site is designed to show one set of content to your users, while showing a completely different set of content to crawlers, robots, and spiders. This is considered misrepresenting your content.

4. Comment Spamming

This method is implemented by leaving comments on sites with high PageRanks. These comments can be in the form of blog comments, guestbook entries, forum submissions, wiki pages, etc. The comments are filled with high density keywords, and have links back to the spamming site.

5. Doorway Pages

A doorway page is a "fake" page that the user will never see. It is purely for search engine spiders, and attempts to trick them into indexing the site higher. This method is dependent on useragent sniffing.

6. Fake CEO / Celebrity Avatars

This is when a blogger or forums user registers as if they are a person if significance, i.e. a CEO or celebrity. These people leave damaging messages that can sway a user in a specific direction about a product or service. This can swing the other way. A Celebrity or high level executive

can act as an anonymous user to leave disparaging remarks about another person, company, or product, drive traffic to their site, and ultimately increase sales.
* CopyWrite, Ink - Silencing Crisis: Whole Foods Market, Inc.

7. Google Bombing

This is accomplished by creating links on multiple sites linking to the same page with the same text. The text link may not necessarily be relevant to the linked site, thus creating the Google Bomb. The most common Google Bomb can be seen by searching "miserable failure" and seeing sites for George Bush appear at the top of the results page.

8. Google Bowling

Google is penalizing (or even banning) sites that purchase site-wide links. A site-wide link is a link that is on every page of the entire site. Google Bowling is buying site-wide links as a competitor to get them banned.
* Web Pro News - Google Bowling: How Competitors Can Sabotage You; What Google Should Do About It

9. Invisible Text or Hidden Text

This Black Hat method manifests itself in many forms. One method is to put lists of keywords in white text on a white background in hopes of attracting more search engine spiders. Another method is to embed and overload keywords into unseen places that crawlers look will get you banned as well. Places like alt tags, comments, JavaScript tags, noframe tags, div tags that are hidden, etc.

10. Interlinking

When multiple web sites are built by the same person or company, with similar content, with links pointing back and forth between them, in an attempt to increase each others' page ranks.

11. Keyword Stuffing

Filling your page with long lists of keywords in an attempt to rank higher for those words. You don't view this as high quality content, and neither will Google. This method is typically accompanied with the Hidden Text and Redirecting black hat methods.

12. Link Farming

Another name for a link farm is a free-for-all site. The objective of these sites is strictly to generate inbound links to your site at any cost. This will typically work in the short term, but hurt your site (or get it banned) long-term.
These kinds of sites are also known as mutual admiration societies.

13. Redirecting

Redirects are commonly used along with doorway pages, or spam pages filled with advertising. They are designed to take a user to a page that they did not want to go to. These can be both server side redirects, or client side redirects. Vicious redirect pages often get the user into an infinite loop that are difficult to break from.

14. Scraper Sites

Also known as Made-for-AdSense Sites, these pages are similar to spam pages, except that they are designed to scrape search engine results and dynamically "create" content pages. These are also used in conjunction with do

15. Selling PageRank

Sites can explicitly sell "advertising" (read inbound links) to your site. This essentially distributes some of the PageRank to the newly linked site, and its position in search engine results pages. This has been in the news a lot lately. Google has dropped the PageRank of anyone doing this. Both the buyer and seller of the link are dropped in PageRank.

16. Shill Blogs, Spam Blogs, or Splogs

Spam Blogs are when one person is paid to act as a fan for those who hired them. Generating a source of positive feedback and link sharing will increase inbound traffic and PageRank. These methods are similar in effect to a link farm.
* Business Week - Wal-Mart's Jim and Laura: The Real Story

17. Spam Pages

Spam Pages are web pages that rank well for specific keywords, but actually hold no content. They are typically full of advertisements, listings to other sites, or are part of a pay-per-click scam.

18. Sybil Attacks

When a single user creates multiple identities to generate additional traffic. This could be in the form of multiple web sites with similar, if not identical, content. This also could be in the form of multiple social bookmark accounts, multiple comments, etc.

19. Wiki Spam

Wikis, just like blogs, are intended to be an easy way to create and organize content for non-developers (read anyone). But the distributed and open editability of wikis make the susceptible to spamming. By placing links in wikis back to the spam site, you hijack the link juice of the wiki, pass the page rank on, and increase results frequency. The subject of the wiki page is typically irrelevant. This is why large wikis like wikipedia have added the nofollow attribute to

all of their links.

20. Resources

- http://www.beanstalk-inc.com/tactics/black-hat.htm
- http://seoblackhat.com/
- http://www.syndk8.net/
- http://websitehelpers.com/seo/blackhat.html
- http://websearch.about.com/od/seononos/a/spamseo.htm
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spamdexing

Are there any other Black Hat SEO techniques that you know of? Any other Black Hat resources that you know of? What do you think of Black Hat SEO? Let me know what you think by leaving me a comment.