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In This Issue

Optimizing Your Website to Bring in New Customers

These days, most construction businesses have websites that advertise their company's services and provide information about the business to clients and contacts in the industry. But if your company's website starts to slide in the results of major search engines, prospective customers may fail to find your business. By consistently providing exceptional customer service and publicizing your projects, you may be able to boost your company's web presence without resorting to arcane digital marketing tricks.

By now, most business owners are familiar with the term "search engine optimization, (SEO)" an Internet marketing strategy that tailors the code, links, and content on a website to better match the criteria that search engines use when indexing and displaying "natural"—or nonpaid—search results. If your company lacks a dedicated SEO expert, you may decide to outsource the task to a marketing firm, or attempt to keep up with the latest trends in SEO yourself by studying changes in search engine algorithms and the websites of close competitors. But like many business owners, you may neglect SEO altogether until your website has fallen so far in the rankings that you are noticing a decline in business.

If you choose to tackle SEO on your company's website yourself, take the time to learn about basic optimization techniques like adding keywords and links, metatag coding, and setting up URL redirects. It is also essential that your website has a sitemap and layout that are easy for search engine crawlers to navigate. In addition, it should prominently

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Preventing and Minimizing Water Damage Losses

Water damage during construction is one of the biggest risks contractors face, as water damage losses can lead to missed deadlines and reduced profitability. While it may not be possible to completely stop water from infiltrating a building under construction, avoiding construction defects and proper weather protection can help your construction company prevent or mitigate the impact of water damage.

On a construction site, water damage generally occurs as a result of water penetrating the building envelope due to rain or groundwater flooding; or from internal releases of water, often caused by pipes or boilers leaking or bursting, fire sprinklers malfunctioning, or simply condensation. According to insurers, water damage is one of the leading triggers of builders' risk claims during construction, and is often attributable to human error or preventable wear and tear. Although insurance often covers water damage losses, at least a portion of these losses are usually borne by the contractor.

Serious damage can also lead to delays and client frustration, which can negatively affect your company's bottom line and reputation. Other costs that can arise from water damage incidents include expenses related to repairing and replacing equipment and materials, mold remediation, and additional inspection and legal fees. Fortunately, it is possible to avoid many forms of water damage, and to implement procedures to prevent water damage from becoming more serious once it occurs.

Water intrusion can come from a wide range of sources, including improperly secured or deficient doors, windows, roofs, gutters, and exterior walls; failures of the plumbing, drainage, mechanical, or fire protection systems; cracks in the foundation or structural elements; and improperly installed building envelope elements. The severity of water damage usually depends on the time it takes to detect the problem, and the extent to which the water has been allowed to infiltrate the structure. Among the strategies you can use to help manage the risks associated with these exposures are identifying any areas susceptible to water intrusion prior to the start of the project, protecting the worksite, conducting tests and inspections throughout the project, and having a plan to take action in the event of severe weather or a water damage incident.

To reduce the risk of weather-related water damage, the site should be graded to ensure that water is diverted away from the structure and excavations. Window and door openings should be covered when not under construction, and temporary roofs may be installed over elevator shafts, stairwells, and mechanical openings. Debris or pools of water on roofs or around drains should be regularly cleared. Floors may be protected with waterproofing and sealing. Whenever possible, set up connections to sewer and water storm systems prior to the start of construction, and avoid storing mechanical and electrical equipment in areas where water may collect.

Before interior finishes are installed, the structure of the building should be fully enclosed, and all windows, doors, walls, and roofs should be complete. If moisture-sensitive materials are stored onsite prior to installation, they should be on pallets and adequately covered. As water damage can also result from improper or incomplete pipe installation and preparation, conduct an air pressurization test to identify incomplete fittings and other problems before allowing water to enter a new pipe system.

Finally, consider installing remote monitoring systems, such as leak detectors that alert you to potential pipe system problems and can be programmed to shut off the water supply, and flooding alarms that signal when water has reached a certain level on the floor of a basement or exposed area. Backup power and pumping systems should also be in place to help ensure that any water intrusion during construction does not spread widely, and that any damage that does occur can be remediated quickly.

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display contact details and inquiry and quote request forms. But your main focus in building your company's online presence should be on improving the overall look and content of your website.

Keep in mind that search engines tend to give higher ranking to web pages they deem to be "authoritative," which generally means providing informative and unique content relevant to the market sector. At an optimized site, each type of service or product line offered will have its own page that describes the scope of the services or the product specifications, and what differentiates your company's offerings from those of your competitors. For example, your site may have separate pages for "designing your new home," "barrier-free living," or "kitchen remodeling." Ideally, each of these web pages should feature photos and other images of completed or current projects, and have between 1,000 and 2,000 words of original written content that contain relevant keywords. The content may, for example, provide answers to questions frequently asked by clients, such as about financing or design options. The pages could also include testimonials from satisfied customers, along with photos of their finished projects.

Another key method to drive traffic to your website is through backlinks, or links to your site from other websites. Search engines tend to favor websites that have a large number of backlinks, as this indicates that the sites are considered authoritative by others in the industry. Easy ways to increase the number of backlinks to your site include adding your company profile to industry-specific web directories and business-review sites, and posting news items and images on social media sites. Sending out press releases and speaking to journalists and industry experts can also garner online press mentions or blog citations that link to your company's site.

As you improve your website, you can measure the impact of each change using analytics tools, which allow you to track the number of visitors who access your website, where visitors are spending their time, and at what location they are leaving the site. If even after optimizing the site you are failing to attract enough web visitors or to convert them into leads, you may want to consider purchasing search ads, and seeking advice from a digital marketing agency.

Zero-Energy Building Market Expected to Expand

As businesses, homeowners, and public agencies seek to reduce their energy costs and minimize the carbon footprint of their buildings, worldwide revenue from zero-energy building (ZEB) solutions is expected to grow from $629 million annually in 2014 to more than $1.4 trillion in 2035, according to a new report from Navigant Research.

A ZEB brings together existing energy-efficient technologies to create a high-performance structure that uses as much energy over the course of the year as it generates from onsite renewable power sources, such as solar photovoltaic (PV) panels. The study

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construction trend data

Following an exceptionally high volume of activity in July, new construction starts retreated 9% in August. Total construction starts for the first eight months of 2014 amounted to $361.4 billion, up 4% from the same period a year ago. From July to August, nonresidential construction declined 19%, residential building increased 2%, and nonbuilding construction fell 12%.

The decrease in the nonbuilding sector was attributable in large part to a 30% drop in the miscellaneous public works category in August. By contrast, the water supply category rose 7% in August, and gains were reported for highways (7%) and bridges (9%).

The sharp decline in nonresidential building in August was preceded by strong growth over the previous two months. The manufacturing plant category plunged 81%, but the commercial building categories advanced 6%, and the institutional building categories registered gains of 12%.

The modest increase in residential building activity in August was driven by a 10% rise in multifamily housing, which helped to offset the 1% decline in single-family housing.

Total new construction starts by region for the first eight months of 2014 were as follows: South Central, up 15%; Northeast, up 5%; Midwest, down 1%; West, up 1%; and South Atlantic, unchanged.

Robert A. Murray, chief economist for McGraw Hill Construction, observed that the recovery for single family housing has now been stalled for two-thirds of 2014, "and it remains to be seen whether the recent easing of lending standards for residential mortgages . . . will be able to help single family housing regain its upward track."

Year-to-Date Construction Contract Value
Unadjusted Totals, In Millions

	8 Mos. 2014	8 Mos. 2013	% Change
Nonresidential Building	$127,429	$112,313	+13
Residential Building	148,656	141,018	+5
Nonbuilding Construction	85,285	94,212	–9
Total Construction	$361,370	$347,543	+4

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Zero-Energy Building Market Expected to Expand

found that the rapid development of new technologies, materials, and equipment associated with the building envelope are lowering the soft costs of ZEBs. Researchers observed that this focus on improved envelopes—already present in the passive house standard—is expected to improve the greater building ecosystem, reducing energy costs for non-ZEBs as well.

The report also noted that innovative manufacturing techniques for windows and glazing are helping to lower the energy use intensity of buildings. Moreover, as solar PV panels become cheaper, more efficient, and more reliable, they are being offered as an add-on option in some production home lines. Other technologies that are playing a significant role in ZEBs include energy-efficient lighting, advanced wall insulation, and energy-efficient HVAC systems.

Researchers further observed that policy, regulations, codes, and incentives are being introduced worldwide to create an emerging market that integrates highly energy-efficient building technologies with renewable power, and that a small number of large-scale pilots are paving the way for the widespread adoption of ZEBs in a few innovative regions, such as California and the European Union. They added, however, that the variety of definitions of a ZEB and the lack of a single standards body could make it difficult for vendors to serve multiple countries.