Foundation

So, you want to differentiate your website from the millions of others out there on the Internet? Great! Let's get started! Whether you're starting from scratch or just looking for a new approach, the hardest part of embarking on a search engine optimization (SEO) campaign is knowing where to begin. In Part I, we walk you through a little self-reflection and search engine basics to lay the groundwork for Your SEO Plan:

I

Clarify Your Goals

1

A good SEO campaign needs to be laser-focused on your business goals, so it has to start with a healthy dose of thought and reflection. In this chapter, we'll walk you through the key questions you'll want to consider before you get started.

Chapter Contents

What Is SEO?

OK, let's see a show of hands: How many of you are reading this book because you want a #1 rank in Google? Yeah, we thought so. As SEO consultants, we know how good it feels when your website makes it to the top of the heap. Listen, we sincerely hope you get your #1 Google rank, but it won't help you if it's bringing in the wrong audience or pointing them to a dead-end website. So don't think of SEO as just a way to improve your site's ranking.

The term *search engine optimization* describes a diverse set of activities that you can perform to increase the number of desirable visitors who come to your website via search engines (you may also have heard these activities called *search engine marketing* or *search marketing*). This includes things you do to your site itself, such as making changes to your text and HTML code. It also includes using specially formatted text or documents to communicate directly with the search engines, or pursuing other sources of traffic by creating listings or attracting links. Tracking, research, and competitive review are also part of the SEO package.

SEO is not advertising, although it may include an advertising component. It is not public relations (PR), although it includes monitoring your reputation and crafting your branding similar to PR. As a continually evolving area of online marketing, SEO may sound complicated, but it is very simple in its fundamental goal: gaining targeted visitors.

Do I Need to Perform SEO for My Website?

It may seem like a no-brainer, but actually, the answer is not necessarily yes. If any of the following examples apply to you, you may not be in need of an SEO campaign right now:

- You have a website that you really don't want strangers to find, such as a training tool for your employees or a classroom tool for your students.
- Your site is already ranking well, you're satisfied with your sales, and you don't want to rock the boat.
- You're in a big hurry—say, you'll go out of business without a major upswing in revenue in the next couple of months. This is not to say that SEO can't help you, but good SEO takes time. You may need to focus your energies elsewhere right now.

If this list doesn't apply to you, we think you're ready to begin your SEO adventure!

It is a rare site indeed that couldn't use a little improvement in the SEO department. Solid SEO is a prerequisite for a successful website these days, so if you don't need it today, it's a good bet you'll need to brush up your SEO smarts for tomorrow. So even if you don't think you need SEO right now, we recommend that you take the time to work through the questions in this chapter and make sure your goals aren't begging for a little help.

What Are the Overall Goals of My Business?

We get it: The fundamental goal of your business is to make money by selling a product or service. But let's take a moment to define your goals in a little more detail.

Perhaps yours is a large company with branding as an important long-term goal. Maybe your company wants to make money with certain products but is willing to take a loss in other areas. Maybe you are starting up with investor backing and don't need to turn a profit for years. Perhaps your company's branding and reputation is your top concern—you need to be perceived as high tech, or luxurious, or as the hippest in your competitive space. Or maybe you work for a nonprofit, with a goal to improve the world and inspire others to do the same. You may be working toward 2,000 small sales this year or be thrilled to get just 3 new clients. Whatever way you're leaning, your business goals will affect your SEO campaign strategy.

For instance, consider the fictional situation of Jason, a founding partner at Babyfuzzkin, a company selling unique, high-end baby clothes. This business makes its money directly through online sales. It's a small operation, so there is a limit to how many orders the business can handle. The Babyfuzzkin fantasy would be a steady flow of, say, 100 orders per month. But there is more to the story: The partners would love to get out of the direct fulfillment of orders and instead secure some contracts with big-name brick-and-mortar vendors.

In the case of Elizabeth, a marketing director at Elderpets, we have a different situation. Elderpets is a fictional nonprofit organization that provides meals, walks, and veterinary care assistance to animals belonging to elderly and infirm owners. The company relies on financial contributions and volunteers to fulfill its mission. At Elderpets, their fantasy is to decrease the time and effort spent on fundraising activities, such as silent auctions and community dog washes, and begin attracting more contributions online, which would in turn allow them to help more pets in need. In addition, they are constantly looking for more volunteers.
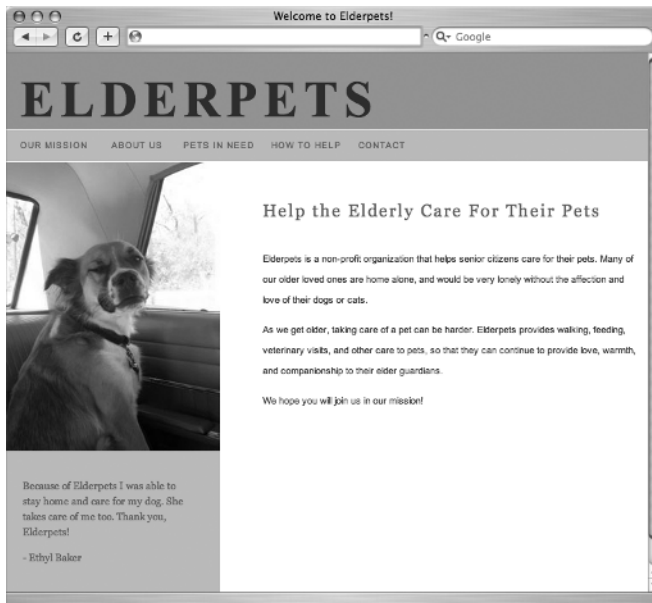
Though Babyfuzzkin and Elderpets have different goals, we have an exercise they can both perform to get the most out of their SEO plan. We've created a Goals Worksheet to guide clients like Jason and Elizabeth, and you can use it as you consider the questions in this chapter. You can download the Goals Worksheet at our companion website, `www.yourseoplan.com`. At key points throughout this chapter, we'll ask you to stop, reflect on your own business, and write down your own vital statistics. Once you've worked through the questions, you'll have a strong vision of the *why* of your SEO campaign—and you'll be ready to move on to the *what* and *how* in Parts II and III.

Now: Download the Goals Worksheet from `www.yourseoplan.com`.

Now take a moment and look at "Business Goals" on your Goals Worksheet. Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 show how Jason at Babyfuzzkin and Elizabeth at Elderpets might fill out theirs, respectively.

▶ **Table 1.1** Summary of Business Goals for Babyfuzzkin

Goals	Description
Primary goal	Sell clothes directly to consumers online.
Additional goal	Attract brick-and-mortar stores to sell our clothes.

▶ **Table 1.2** Summary of Business Goals for Elderpets

Goals	Description
Primary goal	Help more animals in need.
Additional goal	Attract more donations.
Additional goal	Attract more volunteers.

Now: Take a few minutes to write down your overall business goals in "Business Goals" on your Goals Worksheet. Don't be afraid to indulge in fantasy!

What Function Does My Website Serve?

It's not uncommon to hear that the reason a company built a website is "to have a website." While we all love a bit of circular logic before breakfast, if you're going to put a lot of time and money into promoting your website, it's important to have a good idea of what it's doing for you.

Most websites are built out of a combination of basic building blocks. Whether your site is an online store seeking sales; a personal blog seeking community connections; a political or religious outlet seeking to persuade, uplift, or inspire; a corporate brochure displaying branding identity and company information; or just about any other type of website you can imagine, it will likely include some or all of the following features or elements:

Corporate history, news, and press releases	Fun, games, or entertainment
Executive biographies	A strong brand identity
Product and service information	Art or craft portfolio
Online purchasing/donation	Educational materials
Support for existing customers, clients, and students	Information specifically for geographically local visitors
News and current events	Software or documents available for download
Articles, white papers	Media (pictures, audio, video) available for viewing/downloading
Religious, philosophical, or political content	Site map
Online lead generation forms	Site search function
Login for restricted information	Live help/live contact function
Instructions for making contact offline or via email	Ways for members of the community to connect with each other on the site (forums, bulletin boards, etc.)
Directions, hours of operation, etc., for brick-and-mortar location	Blog postings and reader comments
Links to other resources	Methods for your users to help promote your site (share on Facebook, Digg, etc.)
Customer testimonials or reviews	

Now, spend some time clicking around your website. You should be able to tell which of the features in the preceding list are included. How well is each component doing its job? For now, think in terms of presentation and functionality. (Is your product information up-to-date? Is your online store full of technical glitches? Are your forms asking the right questions?) Give each feature that you find a ranking of Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. Obviously, this isn't going to be a scientific process— just make your best estimate.

Now: On your Goals Worksheet, check off the boxes in "Website Features" that apply to your current site; be sure to note any features you hope to add in the future. Add your assessment in the rating column.

Jason's and Elizabeth's checklists might look something like Table 1.3 and Table 1.4, respectively.

▶ **Table 1.3** Ratings for Babyfuzzkin Features

Feature	Rating
Online purchasing/donation	Excellent
Product and service information	Good
A strong brand identity	Good
Instructions for making contact offline or via email	Good

▶ **Table 1.4** Ratings for Elderpets Features

Feature	Rating
Corporate history, news, and press releases	Excellent
Executive biographies	Excellent
Online purchasing/donation	Future Goal
Educational materials	Good
Online lead generation forms (volunteer signup)	Good

How Is My Website Connecting with the Goals of My Business?

Take a look at what you've written on your Goals Worksheet. Is there a disconnect between your business goals and your current website? Is your website focused on corporate info or, worse yet, executive bios instead of your business goals? Or does the website provide mostly content geared toward supporting existing clients when the primary business goal is to gain new clients?

> **Now:** Take a moment to write down any disconnects you've identified in "Connecting Goals" on your Goals Worksheet.

Jason at Babyfuzzkin is in good shape: The business goals and website features are in alignment, with an Excellent rating on the top business priority. Since the business goal includes not only sales but also a strong push toward future deals, the SEO campaign will need to support both.

On the other hand, Elizabeth at Elderpets may be in trouble. One of its primary goals is to get donations, but its website is currently focused on describing its mission and founders, and it doesn't even have online donation capability yet. This could pose a challenge throughout the SEO campaign.

Remember the big picture here:

The SEO You Have, Not the One You Want

In an ideal world, you could take your Goals Worksheet to your boss and say, "Hey! We've got a disconnect here. Let's fix it!" But let's just suppose that *ideal* is not the word you would use to describe your organization. The fact is, your SEO campaign may need to work with certain handicaps.

Over the years, we've worked with a lot of folks who have had to support their business goals with a less-than-perfect website. Here are the most common reasons we've seen for this:

- There is political opposition to change.
- There are scheduling bottlenecks: Everybody else's project comes before our own site.
- The current marketing team inherited an outdated or lousy website.
- Marketing the site isn't really anybody's responsibility.

Some Interim Solutions

It's your job as the in-house SEO expert to lobby for a website that will deliver for your company. But you may be wondering, "If my site is far less than perfect and—for whatever reason—I can't fix it right now, should I even bother with SEO?" Probably. Here are some ideas for approaching SEO while you're waiting for your site to come up to speed with your company's goals:

- Work on getting traffic, but lower your expectations for sales (or whatever action you want your visitors to perform) for the time being. When you assess your website's performance, you may notice an upswing in traffic, which you can use to motivate your people to make positive changes to the site.
- Ask for ownership of just one page, or just one section, and try to bring it up to snuff. Can't get a whole page? We've had customers who were given just one chunk of the home page to do with as they wished.
- Use your powers of competitive analysis. Take special care to note if your competitors' sites are doing things well in the areas in which your site is lacking (we'll give you a chance to do this in Chapter 6, "Your One-Month Prep: Keywords, Priorities, and Goals"). This may motivate those in power to give your recommended changes a higher priority.

- Focus on *off-page* SEO activities. While you're waiting to get your site spiffed up, you can always work on improving inbound links, attracting new Twitter followers, or posting news and specials on Facebook.
- As a last resort, if your current site is so hopeless that it's actually doing your business more harm than good, you might decide to take drastic measures and disinvite the search engines. We'll show you how in Chapter 7, "Month One: Kick It into Gear."

SEO Infighting at UpperCut and Jab

Here's a true story involving the Law Offices of UpperCut and Jab (the company name and some identifying details have been changed to prevent embarrassment), which specializes in medical malpractice suits. One of the firm's primary goals for its website is new-client acquisition.

In This Corner: A Legal Team Looking for Prospects Like many law firms, UpperCut and Jab relies on the searching public for a portion of its new clients, so every online inquiry is screened promptly by qualified staffers to determine if and how to follow up. They've customized the messaging on their site to speak to potential clients who are a good fit for their legal talents and courtroom experience.

In This Corner: A Hotshot Web Developer with a Vision She has serious database skills and has her heart set on creating *link bait*, website offerings that are designed to attract attention and links from other sites. She wants UpperCut and Jab's site to offer a huge directory of pharmaceutical companies, saying, "This directory will be the most comprehensive on the Web and will be a great reference for lawyers and potential clients!"

The Plan of Attack The website, which is already well targeted to potential clients, is outfitted with a massive, searchable, browsable, comprehensive database of big and small pharma companies.

So Who Wins? Unfortunately, no one. The link bait database was successful in driving a great deal of traffic to the site, and online form submittals increased dramatically. But a vast majority of forms were filled out by unqualified leads. ("Please remove my company from your database." "Do you know how I can participate in a drug trial?" "Are generics just as effective as name-brand medicines?") Looks like they forgot that having a unique offering on your site isn't the same as having a unique, *targeted* offering! In this case, building and maintaining the huge pharma database was a waste of time and money because it was not properly targeted to attract high-quality leads.

The Moral of the Story Bringing traffic to your site is not necessarily the same as meeting your company's goals!

Who Do I Want to Visit My Website?

In the introduction, we pointed out that the person who you *most* want to find your website is the person who is searching for your website! And, of course, this is true. But now let's dig a little deeper and describe your ideal audience so that you can help them make their way to you.

Who is the target audience for your website? Surely it will include potential clients or customers. But don't forget that it may also include members of the press, employees at your own company, current and past customers seeking support, and even potential investors nosing about for the inside scoop!

Using your Goals Worksheet, describe your target audience with as much detail as possible: professional status, technical vs. nontechnical (this will affect how they search or even which engines they use), age, workplace vs. home users, and geographic locality.

Knowing your target audiences will help you make important decisions—such as keyword choices and budget for paid listings—when you start your SEO campaign. It will also help you segment your site for each audience, which can improve your sales and other goals, as well as usability.

Jason at Babyfuzzkin says, "Our target audience is parents of infants and small children with a great sense of style and plenty of surplus income. They're probably fairly technically savvy, maybe a little short on time because of the kids—that's why they're shopping online. Also, a lot of our customers are grandparents, buying the clothes as gifts. Some parents don't want to spend a lot on clothes they know are just going to get covered in oatmeal and grass stains! And the grandparents, they're a lot less savvy with the Internet. They use it from home, maybe with a slow connection, and they're located nationwide."

Elizabeth at Elderpets describes her target audience as "Caregivers or relatives of the elderly or infirm—they're usually the ones who contact us about our services. Our volunteers range from high school students hoping to beef up their college applications to retirees who don't have much money but want to do something worthwhile with their time. And then there are our donors, who can be all over the map in terms of age and income and in their status as individual, family, or business. The one thing that ties them together is that they love animals."

Jason's and Elizabeth's goals and corresponding target audiences are shown in Table 1.5 and Table 1.6, respectively.

▶ **Table 1.5** Babyfuzzkin Goals and Corresponding Target Audiences

Goals		Target Audience	
Primary goal	Sell clothes directly to consumers online.	Primary audience	Parents of small children
		Secondary audience	Grandparents and friends
Additional goal	Contracts with brick-and-mortar stores.	Primary audience	Buyers working for retailers

Goals		Target Audience	
Primary goal	Help more animals in need.	Primary audience	Caregivers of the elderly or infirm
Additional goal	Attract more donations.	Primary audience	Pet lovers with surplus income
Additional goal	Attract more volunteers.	Primary audience	High school students, retirees

Now: Go to the "Conversions" table on your Goals Worksheet and fill out your target audiences under the appropriate column. Be as specific as you can!

What Do I Want Visitors to Do on My Website?

In SEO, the term *conversion* has come to mean your website users doing whatever it is you want them to do. So when we say "conversion," think of it as shorthand for "Score one for you—you're accomplishing your goals!"

Wondering what your site's conversion is? Here's one of the really fun facts about SEO:

Pearl of Wisdom: For your site, you can define a *conversion* however you want.

It's *your* party—you decide what you want your guests to do. Now that you have all your goals written down in black and white, defining a conversion should be easy. Here are a few likely examples: Users convert when they

- Purchase a product.
- Fill out a form.
- View a certain page on the site.
- Subscribe to a mailing list.
- Comment on a blog.
- "Like" you on Facebook.
- Follow you on Twitter.
- Register to join your community.
- Post a review.
- Phone your 1-800 sales number.
- Drive to your retail store.
- Contribute to your political campaign.

- Change their mind about something.
- Find the information they were looking for.

Now look at the "Conversions" table on your Goals Worksheet. You will need to have a conversion defined next to each goal. Some of the conversion definitions will be straightforward; others may seem vague or touchy-feely. There's no harm in writing them all—we'll help you sort them out later in your SEO campaign when you're measuring results.

Jason's and Elizabeth's worksheets are shown in Table 1.7 and Table 1.8, respectively.

▶ **Table 1.7** Babyfuzzkin Goals and Corresponding Conversions

Goals		Target Audience		Conversion
Primary goal	Sell clothes directly to consumers online.	Primary audience	Parents of small children	Purchase via online store.
		Secondary audience	Grandparents and friends	
Additional goal	Brick-and-mortar clothing store contracts.	Primary audience	Buyers working for retailers	Make inquiry via online form or offline contact.

▶ **Table 1.8** Elderpets Goals and Corresponding Conversions

Goals		Target Audience		Conversion
Primary goal	Help more animals in need.	Primary audience	Caregivers of the elderly or infirm	View our mission statement.
Additional goal	Attract more donations.	Primary audience	Pet lovers with surplus income	Donate via online form or call our toll-free number.
Additional goal	Attract more volunteers.	Primary audience	High school students, retirees	Make inquiry via online form or offline contact.

With your goals, audiences, and conversions spelled out, it's easy to connect the dots from goal to audience to desired conversion:

To achieve my **goal**, I need my **target audience** to **convert** on this **page**.

For example, Babyfuzzkin would say this:

- To achieve more **clothing sales**, I need **parents of infants** to **buy my products** on the **Clothes for Under $20 page**.
- To achieve more **clothing sales**, I need **grandparents and friends of parents** to **buy my products** on the **Gift Sets page**.
- To achieve **brick-and-mortar clothing store contracts**, I need **buyers working for retailers** to **make an inquiry** using the **Contact Us page**.

And Elderpets might say this:

- To achieve **more online donations**, I need **pet lovers with surplus income** to **make a donation** on the **Donate Now page**.
- To achieve a **higher number of volunteers**, I need **stay-at-home parents and retirees** to **contact us** using the **Become a Volunteer page**.
- To achieve a **higher number of volunteers**, I need **high school students** to **contact us** using the **Students Volunteer Program page**.
- To achieve **being found by those in need**, I need **caretakers of elderly and infirm pet owners** to **visit** the **Our Mission page**.

> **Now:** Go back to the "Conversions" table on your Goals Worksheet and fill out your conversions under the appropriate column.

Which Pages Do I Most Want My Website Visitors to See?

Now it's time to start thinking about the top-priority pages for your SEO campaign. These are the pages you'll optimize when you get to your daily tasks in Part III. These are the pages that you most want people to get to from the search engines, and for best results, they should contain the most compelling content and the most useful information. Because your visitors land on these pages from the search engines, we call them *landing pages* (you might also hear them referred to as *entry pages*). The main functions of your landing pages are that they speak to your desired audience and contain a call to action for your desired conversion. Figure 1.1 illustrates possible paths through your website from entry to conversion.

Often, your landing page and your conversion page will be the same, as is the case with Babyfuzzkin's Gift Sets page. This is a great situation because your site visitor doesn't have to navigate within your site to complete a conversion. Other times, your conversion page will not be an appropriate entry page because your visitor will

need to review other information first and then make the decision to continue. After all, the Web is a highly nonlinear space, and your visitors are free to ramble around your site in all sorts of ways.
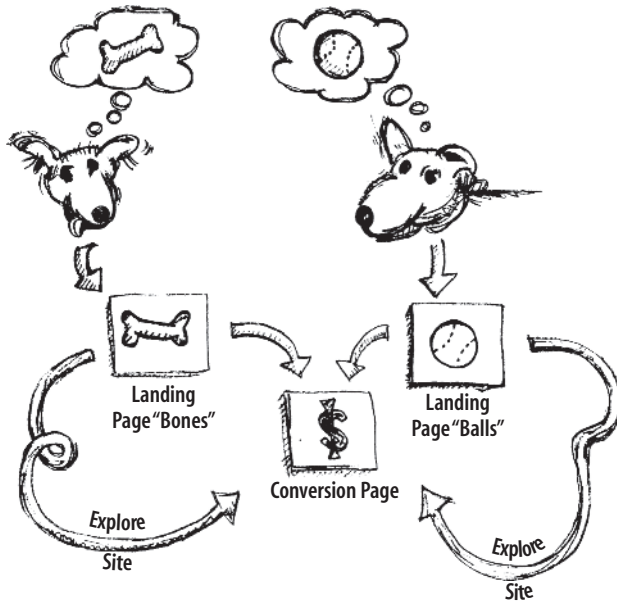

Figure 1.1 Possible paths to conversion

For the purposes of your SEO campaign, you need to ensure that for each type of conversion, there is at least one clear path between the search engine and the conversion outcome. We find it helpful to think backward: First consider where you want your visitor to end up, and then work backward to find a great page for them to enter your site.

For example, consider the Elderpets conversion:

To achieve **more online donations**, I need **pet lovers with surplus income** to **make a donation** on the **Donate Now page**.

Next, Elizabeth might work backward, starting from the Donate Now page and clicking through the website to find a possible landing page:

Donate Now page → How Can I Help page → Dogs in Need page

In this scenario, the Dogs in Need page is the chosen landing page. Why? Because it's a very convincing, compelling page for this specific audience.

What makes a good landing page? One with just the right information that your target audience is looking for. It should reassure your visitors that they've come to the right place (for example, a tight focus on a specific product line, not just a link to "view products"), and make it easy for visitors to take the next step (for example, a prominent "sign up now" button, not just "learn more"). In Part III, we'll walk you through the specifics of how to choose your landing pages and how to make sure the right information is on those pages. For now, we want you to begin thinking about what pages might work. If you don't have any pages that fit the bill, don't despair! Get some landing pages built if you can, or think about ways you can add compelling content to existing pages to turn them into excellent landing pages. And just a heads-up: Once you start your SEO campaign, all of your top-priority pages will probably need to be revised at least a bit as part of the optimization process.

Notice that the landing page Elderpets chose for this conversion is *not* the home page. Many site owners don't think in terms of deeper pages and think that they just want their home page to be found on the search engines. But in truth, your home page is probably only good for achieving the most general of your goals. Your deeper pages are more likely to contain a wealth of *specific* information and *specific* calls to action that you'd be thrilled for a *specific audience* to find one click away from a search engine!

Now: Go back to the "Conversions" table on your Goals Worksheet and enter your landing pages in the appropriate column.

How Will I Measure the Success of This SEO Campaign?

Most companies understand the importance of measuring the performance of their websites, and lots of useful tools are available to help you do just that. Adoption of web analytics programs has grown enormously between 2005 and 2010, but in our experience, many companies—especially the small ones—aren't taking the best advantage of this data. A 2009 study found that 52 percent of those who use analytics tools "fail to effectively use more than half of all capabilities offered by their tools." Why are so many companies missing out? We think the cause is a combination of factors:

Lack of Definition When goals or conversions are never defined, there's no way to measure your accomplishments.

Lack of Communication Different departments or individuals with different goals may not be sharing information.

Math Anxiety Herding conversion data into a tidy, meaningful spreadsheet can be harder than it sounds, and busy business owners may not be in the mood to relearn high school math.

Technical Difficulty Even with the slickest web analytics tools at your disposal, some SEO metrics are difficult, or impossible, to track with out-of-the-box features.

Hitch up your high waters and get ready for another painful truth:

Pearl of Wisdom: You must track the accomplishments of your SEO campaign.

There are a few good reasons why. Let's discuss them next.

Tracking Lets You Drop the Duds

Have you ever heard this military strategy riddle? You are waging battles on two fronts. One front is winning decisively; the other is being severely trounced. You have 10,000 additional troops ready to deploy. Where do you send them? The answer: Send them to the winning front as reinforcements. Strange as it sounds, it makes more sense to reinforce a winning battle than to throw efforts into a losing one.

This strategy is also reflected in the maxim "Don't throw good money after bad." You need to know which of your efforts are bringing you good results so you can send in the reinforcements, and you need to know which efforts are not working so you can bail out on them. And the only way to know this is to *track results*.

Tracking Will Help You Keep Your Job

If you work for yourself, you're the president of your own company, or you're reading this book for a hobby site or your blog, feel free to skip this section. For just about everyone else, we suspect that someone, somewhere is *paying* you to do this work.

Eventually, that someone is going to wonder whether they have been spending their money wisely. Even if your boss ignores you every time you walk in the office with a report, even if your department head refuses to back you up when you try to get IT support for *conversion tracking*, even if Sales tells you there's absolutely no way you can track sales back to the website, trust us; someday, someone is going to want this information—preferably in a bar chart, with pretty colors, and summarized in five words or less. If you don't have the information, the measure of your accomplishments is going to default to this:

Are we #1 on Google?

And, if you're not, get ready for some repercussions!

Tracking Helps You Stay Up-to-Date

"Do it right the first time." It's a great motto and a great goal, but it's not a realistic plan for your SEO campaign. For one thing, you will need to continually re-prioritize your efforts as you drop the duds. But there's also another, unavoidable reason that your SEO campaign will need to constantly evolve: The search engines are changing, too! Don't worry; this book sets you up with best practices that should have a nice, long life span (in Internet years, that is!). But you will inevitably need to be prepared for some changes. What works best today will not be exactly the same as what works best three years down the road. And the only way to know what has changed is to track your campaign.

Now that you are convinced that tracking is important, take a look at your list of conversions. Some of them will be easy to track; some may be difficult or close to impossible. Later, we'll take some time to think through possible ways to track your successes (and failures). Here are the methods that Babyfuzzkin and Elderpets are considering for measuring their SEO campaign results:

Jason at Babyfuzzkin says, "We're using Google Analytics for tracking our web traffic, but we don't really understand what we're looking at in there. Since our primary goal is online sales, I'm going to figure out how to use some of the goal tracking features. Then, it will be easier to use Google Analytics to determine if SEO causes an increase in sales. Our secondary goal is attracting attention from vendors. We'll track those leads back to SEO by asking any vendors that contact us how they heard about us."

Elizabeth at Elderpets describes her tracking plans by saying, "Our primary goal is donations, so we'll be watching for an increase in the number of individual donations after we start our SEO campaign. As for volunteers, we'll add a 'How did you find us?' question to our volunteer applications."

Clearly Jason and Elizabeth are on the right path. They've examined their goals and their websites. They've identified their targeted audiences and target pages, and they're even thinking ahead to tracking. If you're stuck on any of these answers for your own company, take some time now to put your head together with others in your

organization and hash it out. Understanding your own goals is a basic element of your upstart SEO campaign, and you'll do best if you have a firm grasp on them before you move on.

How Much Tracking Do I Need to Do?

Tracking can seem like a daunting task if you've never given any thought to it. Site owners like Jason and Elizabeth are wondering: Should tracking be approached with baby steps like the rest of SEO?

The Left Brain says, "Whoa there, Jason and Elizabeth: You're going to be collecting flawed data! Elizabeth, how can you be sure that a change in donations is tied to your SEO efforts and not to something else, like the start of the holiday season? And Jason, if those vendors contacted you via an online form, you can use your analytics program to find out specifics about how they found you, which is a lot more reliable than the information they'll give you themselves. And, forget the goal tracking feature in Google Analytics—there's something even more robust: e-commerce tracking! You'll finally be able to tell how much revenue is coming from each traffic source!"

The Right Brain says, "I admire your left-brained hunger for irrefutable facts. However, it can be tricky to set up advanced tracking features, and even if you have all the data in the world, most people are too busy to make numbers-watching their highest priority. I say we encourage any effort at all to track conversions, as long as it's based on some logic and is done consistently. Even a little bit of tracking can bring up some interesting findings. And these findings often get people interested in learning more, which may in turn motivate people to do more detailed tracking. Believe it or not, tracking can be a creative process!"

Wow! You've done a lot of thinking in this chapter. You now know that you probably need SEO for your website. You have a great grasp on your overall business goals. You know what your website is doing and whether these things are good or bad for your company. You know your target audience and your desired conversions. And, we trust, you are convinced that tracking is a necessity. Now, meet us in Chapter 2, "Customize Your Approach," for some light reading about your favorite subject: you!