SEO Case Study

:: NIKEGOLF ✔

Grew Nike Golf's Organic Traffic by 250%+

Client: Nike Golf
Website: www.nikegolf.com
Goal: Increase visibility of the Nike Golf site in search to position the brand to attract site visitors during the golf season.
Strategy: Make the site search engine-accessible and surface research-informed content.

Background

Nike Golf is the golf-specific retail branch of Nike. The sub-brand is perhaps best known for decking out Tiger Woods for every tournament: from his golf balls and clubs, to his polos, and footwear. Idegila partnered with the digital marketing team at Nike Golf to maximize the site's organic potential and provide analysis of performance in search.

The Challenge

The SEO challenge that we faced at the beginning of our engagement was the lack of a focused keyword strategy and a site built in a way that was very difficult for search engines to crawl for content. The lack of a focused keyword strategy resulted in a situation in which the few SEO elements that could have potentially aided the site (page titles, meta descriptions, internal links from blog posts) we're far from effective. In order to develop a solution for both problems, our team collaborated to simultaneously perform deep keyword research and look into advanced technical solutions.

What users saw (left) and what search engines saw (right).

SEO Keyword Research

On the keyword side, we analyzed terminology used in Nike Golf's inaccessible content, dug into large volumes of keyword data, and analyzed search/industry trends. Our research helped us make decisions like whether we should target "golf apparel", "golf clothing", "golf clothes", or "golf sportswear". In that specific case, we found through our data, testing, and analysis of the search landscape that Google and Bing were treating these different variants as more or less distinct, that "golf apparel" was more frequently searched in the US, and that visitors who landed on the Nike Golf site through "golf apparel" searches stayed longer, dug deeper, and were more likely to convert. From there we developed a thorough keyword that would allow our team and the Nike Golf team to strategically work high opportunity keywords into specific pages.

Overcoming Accessibility Issues

On the technical side, we knew that improving search engine rankings would be exceedingly difficult while the site remained in flash. So, we weighed our options.

- Completely rebuilding the site would be a massive resource cost for Nike and was off the table from the beginning.
- Using the noscript tag (which the developers had included as a "fallback" for older browsers) to deliver SEO-specific content wasn't working.
- Using a newer technology that would work hand-in-hand with the old site and that wouldn't necessarily require a ton of upfront investment might be feasible.

What we settled on was an open-source JavaScript library called SWFObject2. The functionality would allow the site to essentially store a HTML-based version of the website behind the scenes which could be called forward whenever a user visited the site. While this was very helpful for site visitors on mobile devices (like the iPhone), it also provided content for search engine spiders.

Implementation seemed fairly straightforward and the solution was Google-approved for delivering alternate content. Still, we wanted to test the effectiveness of this solution before making an official recommendation to Nike Golf so we could be sure that it would be worth the cost of implementation. To do this, we implemented it on two sites; testing to see if that alternate content would make it's way into Google's index and rank in search. It worked in both tests, so we made the official recommendation.

Implementing the Solution & Initial Change

As with any Enterprise, implementing large code change across their platform required a proposal, approval, collaboration with the development team, and, of course, budget. That required us to wait for a new fiscal year, yet we were able to use that time to prepare the HTML-based alternate content we planned to deliver with SWFObject2.

With perfect timing, the revised site launched and the corresponding research-informed alternated content just before the start of the 2012 golf season. With a week, we noticed large jumps in rankings for the site's most important non-branded keywords. These rankings had been relatively stable for months, seeing only small gains every once in a while. For many keyword rankings, the launch of our solution correlated with ranking jumps of more than an entire page of results.

What users see now (left) and what search engines see now (right).

The Results

Things continued to improve over the golf season and now that the 2012 season has come to a close, we can see what our year-over-year gains really looked like.

Compared to the 2010 golf season, the 2011 golf season saw a 169% in total increase in organic search traffic. This includes both branded search (searches for "Nike" related terms) and non-branded. Between the 2011 and 2012 seasons, the site saw an additional 67% gain. In total, that's a 348% gain in 2012 over the 2010 golf season.

However, gains in total organic can be deceiving, since increased brand activity, influence, and attention can lead to big increases in branded search traffic. To truly assess an SEO campaign's effectiveness, we prefer to look primarily at search traffic from non-branded keywords.

Between the 2010 and 2011 seasons, non-branded traffic actually slipped by 17% as we were making our way through the process of resolving Nike Golf's challenges. However, once our plan was implemented, we saw significant growth. Between the 2011 and 2012 golf seasons, the site saw a 250% gain in traffic from non-branded searches.

The Reaction

The Nike Golf team was incredibly impressed by the magnitude of our SEO gains, month-over-month and year-over-year, during the 2012 golf season. Throughout this process, we've demonstrated the importance of both research-driven content optimization and search engine accessibility as a means of achieving business goals. These lessons were applied when Nike Golf 360 launched on a highly accessible HTML5-based platform.

The Lesson

When your objectives hinge on getting your brand in front of potential customers who shop online, you can't ignore organic search. While it absolutely pays for your site to provide a memorable visual experience, that can't come at the expense of accessibility. When building a website, make sure that the platform and the way you deliver content isn't secretly doing you a disservice in search.

Looking to grow your non-branded organic search traffic?

Idegila is a data driven measurement and digital marketing company focusing on providing the best SEO, analytics and digital marketing services for clients in the digital space. We help brands of all sizes use data to make the best decisions about their business and surpass their marketing and sales goals year over year.

Idegila can provide all the technical and strategic support you need for SEO and Google Analytics implementation. If you're interested in learning more about how you can grow your non-branded search traffic or just need help with your digital marketing program in general, let's talk.

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