



Improving New Customer Acquisition with SEO

Case study: hiustuotteet.fi

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ABSTRACT

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Search engine optimisation has become an important aspect for businesses to be found on the internet. This Bachelor's Thesis studies literature about search engines' functions, search engine optimisation and their effect on new customer acquisition. The subject itself is very broad, therefore this thesis focuses on the basics of search engine optimisation and introduces solutions on how to properly implement SEO to improve new customer acquisition.

The commissioner of this thesis, hiustuotteet.fi, is a recently launched (December 2019) e-commerce site focused in the sales of hair related products. This thesis was written to help the website acquire new customers with SEO as the primary method.

A website audit was conducted to study the current state of the website, and a quantitative online questionnaire served as the primary data-collection method, giving information on how to build the website for customers. In addition, a literature review gave an overall understanding of the subject and matters relating to the studied topics. Based on the data and information gathered, beneficial suggestions and solutions are introduced.

The results show the importance of search engine optimisation, and explore how customers should be taken into consideration while optimising an e-commerce site. Ultimately, the suggestions introduced explain methods that can be utilized to differentiate from competition and to improve new customer acquisition.

Key words: SEO, New Customer Acquisition, Search Engine, Keywords

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Bachelor's Thesis is to seek out ways to improve the search engine optimisation (SEO) of an e-commerce site to improve new customer acquisition. It is important to have a well optimised website in order to attract new customers, who nowadays rely more on internet search than ever before (Wiefel 2016).

This thesis introduces the way search engines function today, and how search engine optimisation can be properly executed in order to maximize the results. To give out reliable information around the subject, this thesis compiles different theories together, analyses them and seeks out ways for the case company to utilize them.

This paper will also use an online questionnaire to support or challenge introduced theories to be able to argue the suggested methods. To test the optimisation of the commissioner's website, a full-length site audit was conducted in order to provide more useful information.

1.1 Objective

The objective of this thesis is to give useful and relevant information on how an e-commerce site should be designed and optimised in order to stand out from its competition, and ultimately gain a good customer base. This thesis focuses on finding ways to optimise a website, how to attract new customers and how to essentially help convert the site visitors into satisfied and returning customers.

This thesis is written to support a recently developed business to become a recognised e-commerce site in its own business field. The solutions and findings are meant to be implemented right away, but they are also meant to still be viable in the near future.

1.2 Research method

To be able to reach the objective of this thesis a survey-based research was conducted. The research method used in this thesis is an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted fully anonymously, and the data was analysed quantitatively. The reason why only a quantitative method was chosen is to improve the recently launched website to achieve the necessary data in order to be in *shape* to be further developed in the future. When a solid customer base has been built, a more in-depth qualitative survey can be conducted to see what can be improved further.

The online questionnaire's aim was to answer the research question: How to differentiate as a new e-commerce site? It was structured to give data around different important aspects of an e-commerce site in order to give sufficient information.

1.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into five parts. The first part being a descriptive and informative introduction to the subject, research objective and research. The second part will give theoretical background information on search engines and their optimisation that is crucial to the subject, while laying the *foundation* on what the research is written about, and gives the reader all necessary information about the main topics. The third part continues where the second left off, and goes deeper into the actual topic (new customer acquisition with SEO) and explains it more thoroughly. The fourth part includes the research methodology, case study and survey results, and the last, fifth part, sums up the findings and concludes this thesis.

2 UNDERSTANDING SEARCH ENGINES AND SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

2.1 History of search engines

Content analyst Jerri L. Ledford (2009) states that search engines as we know them today, originate from 1990's, when a student named Alan Emtage at McGill University in Montreal created the first search tool used on the Internet, *Archie*. Archie's purpose was to make it easier to find different files from the Internet, which back then, was nothing like it is today; The Internet consisted only from *File Transfer Protocol (FTP)* sites, which were used for downloading or uploading files (Ledford 2009). Archie indexed the files from public FTP servers, which made it possible for users to find and download them (Steblen 2013).

In 1991 Mark McCahill, a student at the University of Minnesota, created a program named *Gopher*, which made it possible to search for plain text references in the files and to index them. To make it possible to find references within Gopher's indices *Veronica* and *Jughead* were created. (Ledford 2009.) These programs were essentially alike, and made it possible for users to search indexed information by using a keyword. This is the point, where Internet search began to advance and find its course to what it is today.

The first search engine to look like what we have today was *Wandex*, which was created by Matthew Gray in 1993. First of its kind, Wandex was the only program able to index and search the index of pages on the Web. This technology paved the way for the search engines we are familiar with today. (Ledford 2009.)

The timeline of major search engines according to Ledford (2009):

- Excite – 1993
- Yahoo! – 1994
- Web Crawler – 1994
- Lycos – 1994
- Infoseek – 1995

- AltaVista – 1995
- Inktomi – 1996
- Ask Jeeves – 1997
- Google – 1997
- MSN Search – 1998

2.1.1 How search engines work

To understand *Search Engine Optimization* (SEO), it is important to understand how search engines are made and their key working functions. The query interface is what most of us are familiar with, it is the *User Interface* (UI) that users see when navigating to a search engine (Figure 1-1).



Figure 1-1. Webcrawler's UI (webcrawel.com 2020)

The only other parts of the query interface visible to users are the *Search Engine Result Pages* (SERPs), which are the set of pages shown after a search term is entered and the search is executed (Figure 1-2) (Ledford 2009).

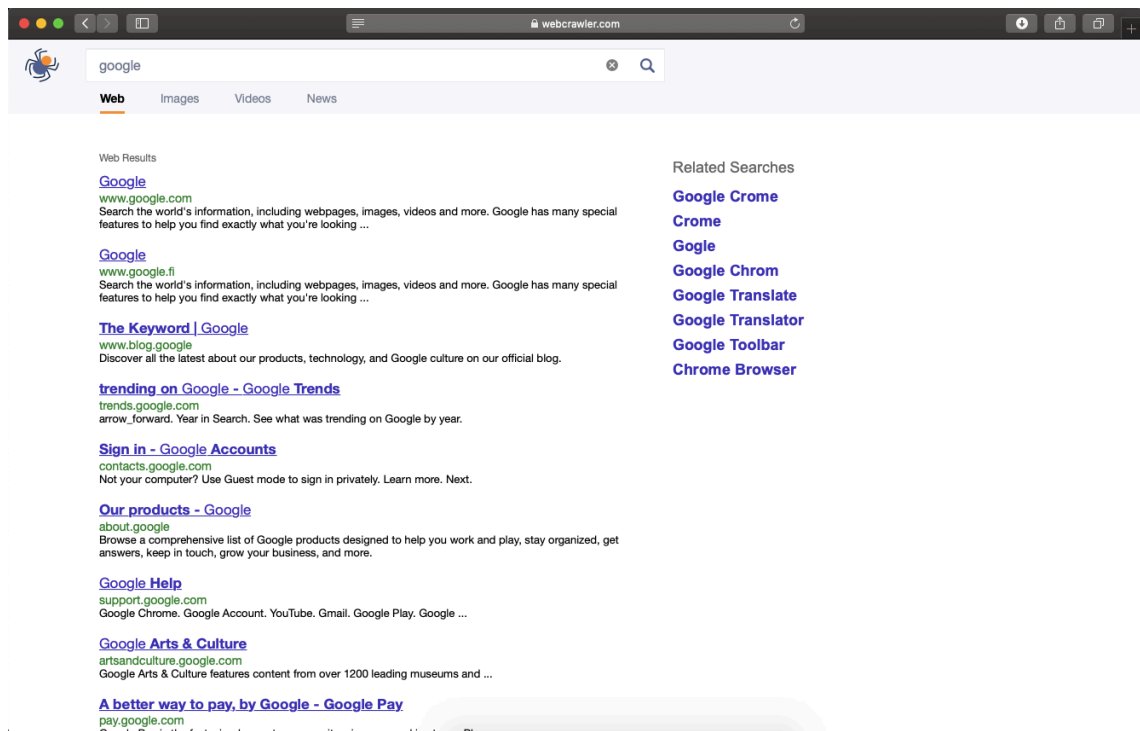


Figure 1-2. Webcrawler's SERPs for search term 'google' (2020)

As seen in figure 1-2, search engine result pages include a list of webpages matching the searched keyword, showing the titles, link and a short description of where the keyword is used within the webpage. Users often restrict the full usage of the SERPs by focusing only on the first page and the top-to-middle results (Pabitha C. 2012). Figure 1-3 shows a heat-map of where the users' eyes focus when looking at SERPs; the top-left area (sometimes referred to as the *Golden Triangle* in marketing) is where users focus their eyes on (Stricchiola, Enge & Spencer 2015).

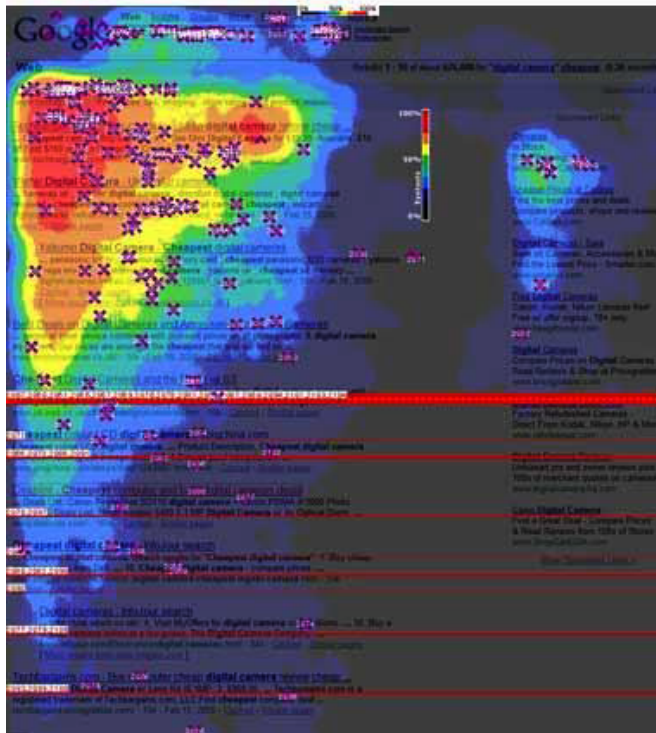


Figure 1-3. Enquiro eye-tracking results (Stricchiola et al. 2015)

As stated before, the query interface and SERPs are the only parts visible for search engine users. According to Ledford (2009), to understand the whole function of a search engine, one must acquire knowledge of the background activities as well; To gather information from the Web, search engines use *spiders*, *robots* and *crawlers* – which essentially mean the same thing, and from this point onward are referred to as *crawlers*. Crawlers gather information about every web *Uniform Resource Locator* (URL), catalogue the information accordingly and store the information into a database (Figure1-3). When a search engine executes a search to find something on the Web, the database is scanned through and search results are shown from the collected data. (Ledford 2009.) Search engine crawlers are continuously seeking for new and updated data, and search engines indices are updated regularly (Thurow 2007).

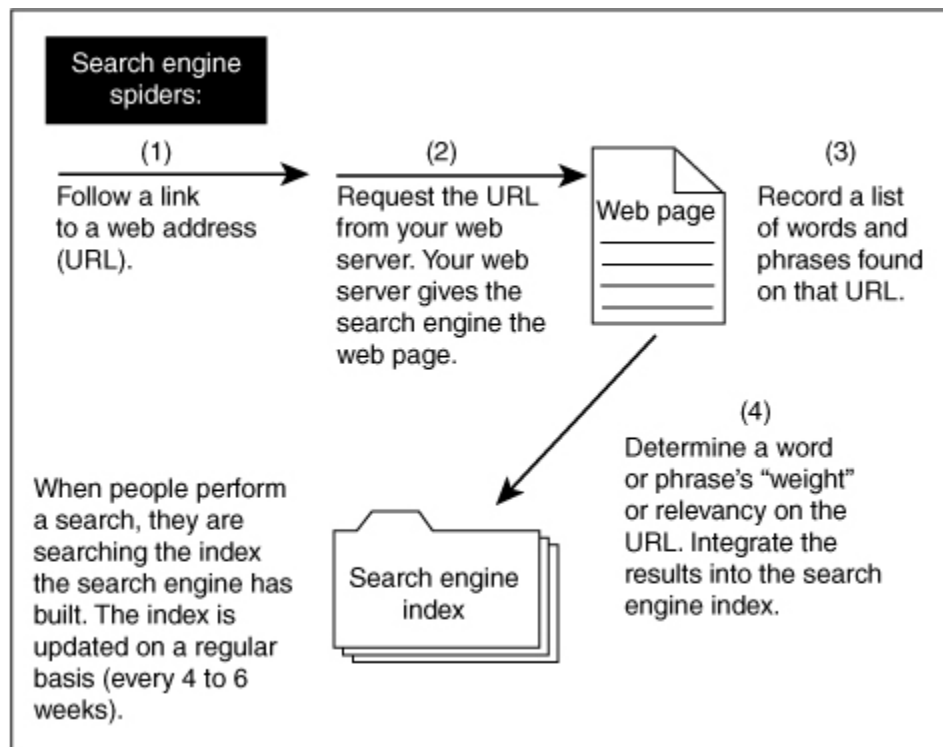


Figure 1-3. How search engines crawl Web pages (Thurow 2007)

Thurow (2007) explains that every search engine works a bit differently when determining the most relevant URL's for a search, but most of them assign a certain *weight* to individual words and phrases found in the text information on a webpage. Some search engines assign more weight depending on the number of times a word or a phrase appears on a page, or if a word can be found in the *title*, *subheadings* or *meta tags*. How the weight is assigned depends on the search engine's algorithms, which vary from one search engine to another, and are highly confidential and change almost daily. (Thurow 2007.)

However, search engine algorithms can be divided into three categories: *on-page*, *whole-site* and *off-site* algorithms. Each of these focus on a website a bit differently. On-page algorithms measure does the webpage content include the keywords and how well other words relate to the keyword (e.g., keyword: house, other relating words: wall, floor, roof, etc.). Whole-site algorithms focus more on the overall picture of the website; How well the content relates on different pages (e.g. does the home page's content relate to the information page's content). Off-site algorithms are not focused on the website itself, but rather in the incoming traffic from other websites. When the website is planned accordingly and provides value to the visitor, they will show it to other potential visitors, which increases the

traffic on the website. This is a very valuable tool regarding SEO. Incoming links improve the visitor rate, which gives more value to the website, which attracts crawlers and gives the website better ranking in the SERP. (Ledford, 2009.)

2.1.2 Understanding search engine results

Search results are a combination of organic search results and paid advertisements. The paid advertisements are shown in the very top of the results page, and the organic search results are shown beneath them (Figure 2-1).

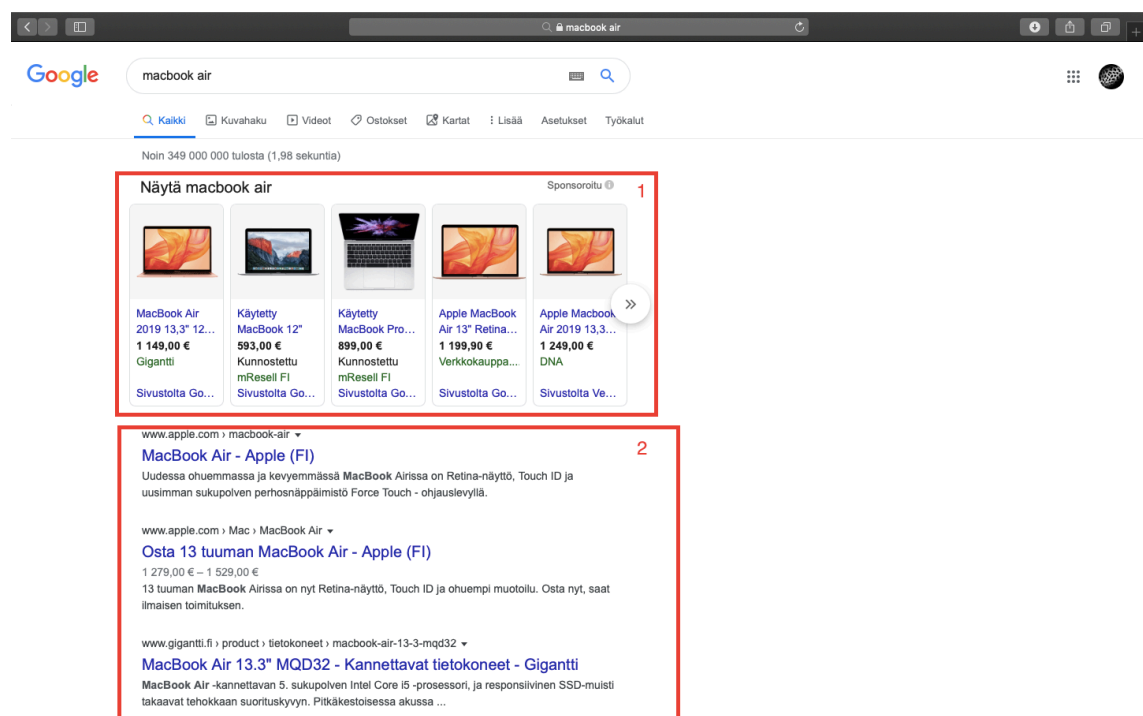


Figure 2-1. Layout of Google search results for “macbook air” (2020)

Dividing and explaining Google’s search results:

1. Paid search advertising (Figure 2-1, rectangle numbered 1.)

Companies that use Google AdWords can purchase ads that appear on the very top of the first results page. The order of the paid ad results varies from relevance (click-through rate, use of keywords in the ad and landing page relevance) and bid amount (bids are compared against other advertisers’ bids). (Stricchiola et al. 2015.)

2. Organic/Natural/Algorithmic results (Figure 2-1, rectangle numbered 2.)

These results are found from search engines' indices and are ranked according to their relevance based to the algorithms (Stricchiola et. al. 2015). To rank higher in the organic results, a website must be optimized well. Creating a website with the goal of gaining a high search engine ranking is the key in search engine optimisation. To be able to do so, the website must be designed to be favourable for crawlers. The page titles must match the content and the website structure must include multiple subpages and links. In addition to these, the website has to have a set of keywords (words and terms users search for), HTML and meta-tagging (Ledford 2009).

2.2 Use of search engines in practice

Even though search engines' functions can be broken down to small logical pieces, one major part of understanding how search engines work is to understand how users use them; How do users find what they are looking for? Ledford (2009) uses Chris Anderson's article '*The Long Tail*' to explain how users search with different keywords and terms. According to Anderson (2004), the economy is not only relying on the few products that are very popular and demanded, but also on products that are only a fraction as popular as the high demand items; when the less popular products' income is summed together, they can generate the equal or even larger amount of income than what the few very popular products generate.

To apply the same ideology to searching means, that when determining the key search terms or keywords, the focus should not be entirely in the most searched keywords or terms (referred to as *Broad Head terms*), but also in the less searched ones (referred to as *Long Tail terms*) (Ledford 2009). Boykin & Jones (2013) explain that the Broad Head terms are the most popular searched terms and tend to have only one or two keywords, whereas the Long Tail terms are

typically longer combinations of words (three or more), but have much less search volume and are more specific. An effective search engine optimization strategy has a combination of Long Tail terms and Broad Head terms to generate a variety of traffic. (Boykin & Jones 2013.)

2.2.1 Website structure

A website needs to be built the correct way in order to be successfully optimized. Search engine crawlers determine how well the website performs in a search by focusing on the following criteria: text (keywords), HTML and meta tags, links and popularity (Ledford 2009). Stricchiola et al. (2015) claim that the text should be in HTML text form, and the links between pages should be easily accessible. The more straightforward the navigation is between pages (e.g. homepage – information page) the better crawlers can index them. (Stricchiola et al. 2015.)

An ideal website structure should be *pyramid* like, with the homepage at the top and subpages and subcategories beneath it (figure 2-2). When a website is not properly structured, the *bounce rate* (the time users spend on a website before leaving) will be higher which will result in lower visibility of the site. Google's crawlers take note of how long users tend to spend on a website, and the more time a user stays shifting through subpages and reading the content, the smaller the bounce rate will be, eventually resulting in an improved ranking of the website. (Bhasin 2019.)

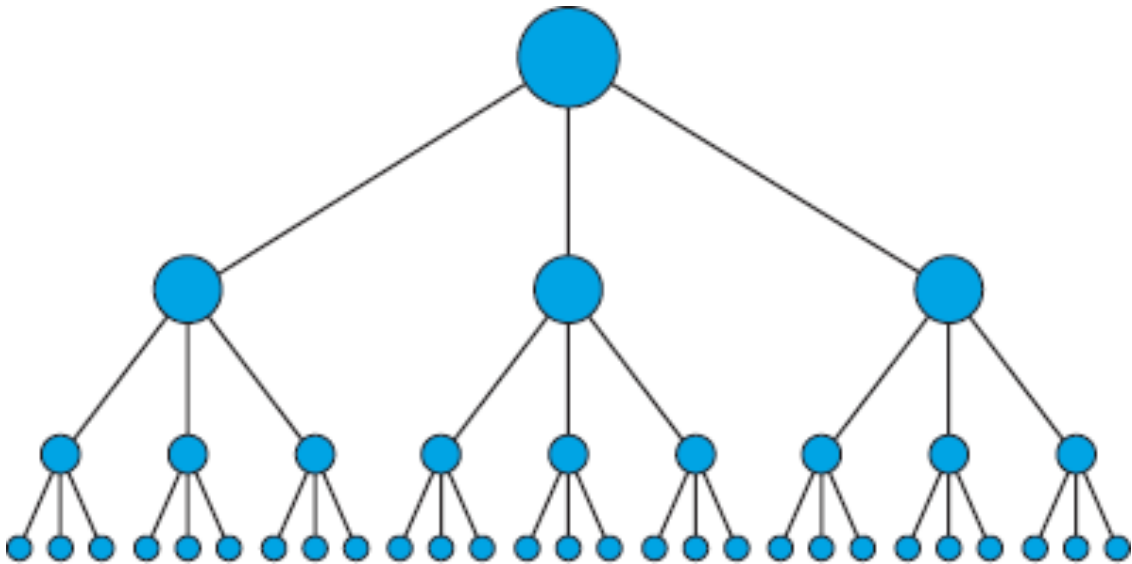


Figure 2-2. Optimal website structure (Dover 2011)

Also, when structuring the website, it is important to have the correct URL structure as well. This means, that if a certain page is made to give information on basic photography tips, the HTML file should be named as follows: `www.website.fi/basic-photography-tips.html`, which will help the crawlers index the page and show it in the SERPs when a user searches for photography tips. (Elmansy 2013.)

2.2.2 Optimizing a website

The most important page of a website is the homepage, and it is meant to tell the readers and crawlers what the website is about. This is why the homepage should include the most used Broad Head terms that represent the overall theme of the website. The subpages should include more specific Broad Head terms and Long Tail terms with the aim of gaining more targeted traffic. The content within a webpage should essentially be created from the keywords, not for the keywords, meaning, that the text is written after the keywords are defined not vice versa. (Boykin & Jones 2013.) The Broad Head and Long Tail terms must be used multiple times within the content, and they must be chosen to match the phrases and words that users will search (Ledford 2009).

When designing website content, the writer should keep in mind the two most important attributes of quality content; The content must feed a demand, and it must be linkable. To feed a demand, the content could be answering a specific

question, giving advice on anything or be designed to entertain site visitors. The content should also be easily linkable, which means, that any user can easily share whatever the content is to their own network or friends. The latter attribute plays a crucial role from an SEO perspective, since linkable content will improve search engine ranking. (Dover 2011.)

According to Dover (2011), the ideal content page does all of the following:

- Include only relevant information regarding a specific topic (product or object)
- Title tag includes the subject
- URL includes the subject
- Image alt text includes the subject
- Mention the subject multiple times throughout the written content
- Introduce the subject with unique content
- Include a link back to the category page
- Include a link to the subcategory page
- Include a link back to the homepage (which most often is done by having a clickable image link within the website logo)

Even though keywords are very important in a successful SEO strategy, Ledford (2009) and Boykin & Jones (2013) suggest to use only two or three keywords per topic and page. Search engines, especially Google, are strict with keyword density, and rank pages that fill the content with keywords much lower in the SERPs, or might even disregard them completely.

3 NEW CUSTOMER ACQUISITION WITH SEO

The whole idea behind SEO (Search engine optimisation) is to make a website or an online-store more attractive to search engines, which makes it easier for customers to find it when using a search engine (e.g. Google or Bing) (Mallon 2018). SEO is a key part of digital marketing strategies, and it improves the amount and quality of customer traffic on to a certain website or online-store (Khraim 2015). Dover (2011) introduced an SEO pyramid for guidance on how to build an effectively optimized site; for the best results, the website itself needs to be easily accessible and include high quality content. When these requirements are met, the focus should be to find the best and most relevant keywords for the site. In order to benefit from these, a carefully thought out link building strategy should be thought of and also figure out how to get the visitors to engage with the website. (Figure 3-1). (Dover 2011.)



Figure 3-1. SEO Pyramid (Dover 2011)

SEO is very cost effective, since it requires no investment to begin with. This is the reason SEO gives better results than paid advertising in the long run. Good SEO will lead to increased visibility among potential customers, which will inevitably lead to more on-site customers; Increased number of on-site customers lead to higher sales. (Khraim; Lourdes and Paloma 2015.)

Eric Enge (2014) summarizes a study by *Searchmetrics*, where terms like boots, shoes and women occur in an e-commerce site, which also has words like shipping, sale, cart and other e-commerce related words. The combination of these words signals search engines, that this site should have something to do with selling women's footwear, even though the website does not include the phrase *selling women's footwear* or anything similar. Google understands that the website's theme is e-commerce, and ranks it accordingly. This is why finding the right keywords is crucial for the success of any kind of a website. (Enge 2014.)

3.1 Keywords

Determining the right keywords is crucial for the success of a website. As introduced earlier, there are two types of keywords; Broad Head terms and Long Tail terms. In a perfect world, a website will have a combination of these terms in a page. Ledford (2009) suggests to ask the question "Who needs the service that I offer?" to determine which types of keywords should be selected for a website. Odden (2012) explains that the same question is also being asked when determining the buyer personas (which help understand *who* the potential customers really are; what job do they have, where they live, what routines they have, how big their family is etc.) and by combining the buyer persona and the keywords they might use for searching will most likely lead to the right path in keyword generation. (Odden 2012.)

The keywords chosen should not be too broad (e.g. car, soap, soda), and they should be words and terms that customers actually use (even if needed, including common spelling mistakes works). One way to find out what types of keywords work best is to ask potential customers how they would search for a product or service. This gives real data of the search process, and gives invaluable information on how customers think. (Ledford 2009.)

Google released an update in September 2013 called Google Hummingbird, which was a big change to its algorithms, and made it possible for Google's AI (Artificial Intelligence) to try and understand the intentions behind a search query. After this update, Google started ranking the results in SERPs according to the meaning behind a search query rather than focusing on the exact terms, which made Long Tail terms more important. The more defined a keyword is, the better results it will get; if a website is made for teaching English, limiting the use of terms to 'speak English' will get worse results than expanding the length to 'learn how to speak English'. (Butters 2014.)

Stricchiola et al. (2015) claim that users change the search terms progressively; first they try certain words or terms, click on some websites, go back and refine the terms and repeat the process until they come across a website that has the information they are looking for. Keeping this in mind when selecting the key terms is crucial to better understand the behaviour of the target customer group.

3.1.1 Keywords and PPC

PPC stands for pay-per-click, which means that a bid is placed for a certain keyword within the content, which essentially allows the elevation of the websites position in SERPs. Each time a user clicks on the PPC link in the SERP, the bid amount is paid from the Google AdWords account (if using Google). (McClurg 2013.) Ledford (2009) explains that it is possible to have keywords without PPC, but it is not advisable. PPC is a program with multiple available services all having the goal of increasing site traffic. The main advantages of using PPC programs are the ease of implementation and that the website itself requires no adaptation or redesigning. When including PPC in an SEO campaign, the results will be much quicker comparing to a strictly organic campaign (with no PPC included). (Ledford 2009.)

Kauppila (2017) sides with Ledford (2009) in a blog text saying that the most beneficial way of getting high visibility in the SERPs is to optimize PPC and organic SEO (unpaid) together. She claims that PPC can also be used to grow the

brand image of the business by using continuous PPC campaigns and by using the flagship products to boost the marketing.

It is important to be creative when designing the content, launching a PPC campaign and selecting keywords. If there are keywords no one else is bidding on, they will be significantly cheaper, and they can be used to attract new customers by creating an ad that differentiates the website from the competition. (Boykin & Jones 2013.)

3.1.2 Converting site visitors to customers

CTR (Click-through rate) can be improved by focusing on what the ad copy (text shown in a PPC ad) says. Ledford (2009) suggests to include special offers and incentives in the ad copy, and if the prices of the products are very low, contradictory to the common opinion, including those too. She defends her opinion by claiming that people are drawn to offers, bargains and specials. By including these in the ad copy, the website traffic should increase.

To convert site visitors to customers, the website needs to serve content which is carefully thought out and addresses the visitor's needs. This is done by creating content and using keywords and -terms that provide real value, that do not only target visibility. (Kauppila 2017.) On top of having content that answers the visitor's needs, the website must include several ways the visitors can engage with the business. Halligan & Shah (2014) say this can be done by helping visitors take action by subscribing to an e-mail newsletter, answering to a poll, registering to the website or requesting a demo (if the product allows demos). A website should include multiple ways the visitors can take action, because not every visitor on the website is on the same step of their *buyer's journey*. (Halligan & Shah 2014).

Halligan & Shah (2014) also state, that the engaging aspects of a website should never be limited to the homepage, since visitors might enter the website from any page depending on what search terms were used. So, including ways to engage

in every page will increase the probability visitors will actually do it. Because not every visitor will read the content from top to bottom, Boykin & Jones (2013) suggest to include call-to-actions not only to the bottom of the page, but the middle and top as well.

To understand what makes the site visitors convert to customers is a process, that needs to be adjusted along the way; it starts from having an assumption on how the potential visitors and customers will interact with the website and adjusting the marketing and sales process according to the outcome. Measuring the way visitors interact with the website, call-to-actions and newly launched ad campaigns is an ongoing process, which needs to be measured all the time. The website is adjusted by measuring the visitor's interactions. (Saleh & Shukairy 2010.)

3.2 Managing SEO

To know what to improve and what to maintain on a website, it is important to establish site search KPIs (key performance indicator is the measurement of how effective an approach is in achieving the wanted goals). These KPIs can be for example tracking search terms that provide no results, tracking pages with high exit rates, tracking which pages generate most traffic and tracking the number of pages crawled. (Chaters 2011.)

So far, the successful SEO strategy is somewhat covered thoroughly, but it is also very important to understand a bit more about the buying journey and the buying stages of site visitors. Saleh & Shukairy (2010) introduce five buying stages that consumers go through when making a buying decision:

1. Recognizing need
2. Searching for information
3. Evaluating the options
4. Purchase
5. Post-purchase evaluation

The key is to understand, that not every visitor will systematically follow the buyer's journey from start to finish. Some visitors might be near the end while others in the beginning. When structuring the website's pages and content to give information regarding every step of the buying process, it is important to analyse the keywords picked out to see what is the intention the visitor is using it for, giving a clue on what stage on the buyer's journey they are on. (Saleh & Shukairy 2010.)

According to Ledford (2009), every page on a website needs to have a purpose. He reflects to the buying stages with what kind of content different pages should have (Table 1).

Buying Stage	Content
1	Giving an answer to questions regarding why consumers might want what the website offers, and how they would benefit from it. Often leveraged by companies with pre-release hype.
2	Answering more in-depth questions, such as comparing to other available solutions, giving reviews and giving additional information.
3	Defining value, at this stage the consumer has made the decision of purchasing, but is still evaluating which option is the best.
4	By providing content on the earlier buying stages, the purchasing decision is a bit easier because of the trust built. Having consumers sign on newsletters or making an account makes them more likely to visit again.
5	Sending out new information about changes in products, reviews, articles or anything related to previous purchases helps the consumer to start the buying cycle all over again.

Table 1. Website content depending on the buying stage

3.2.1 Essential tools

According to Statcounter, a website providing statistics on different topics, the most used search engine in Finland (from Jan 2019 to Jan 2020) is Google with the market share of 96,62% (figure 3-2). This means, that Google will be the

most important search engine to work with. Shenoy & Prabhu (2016) also state, that Google is the most used search engine across the globe. They introduce some of the main tools to be used to help with SEO, from where the most important ones being: Google AdWords Keyword Planner, Google Trends and Google Analytics.

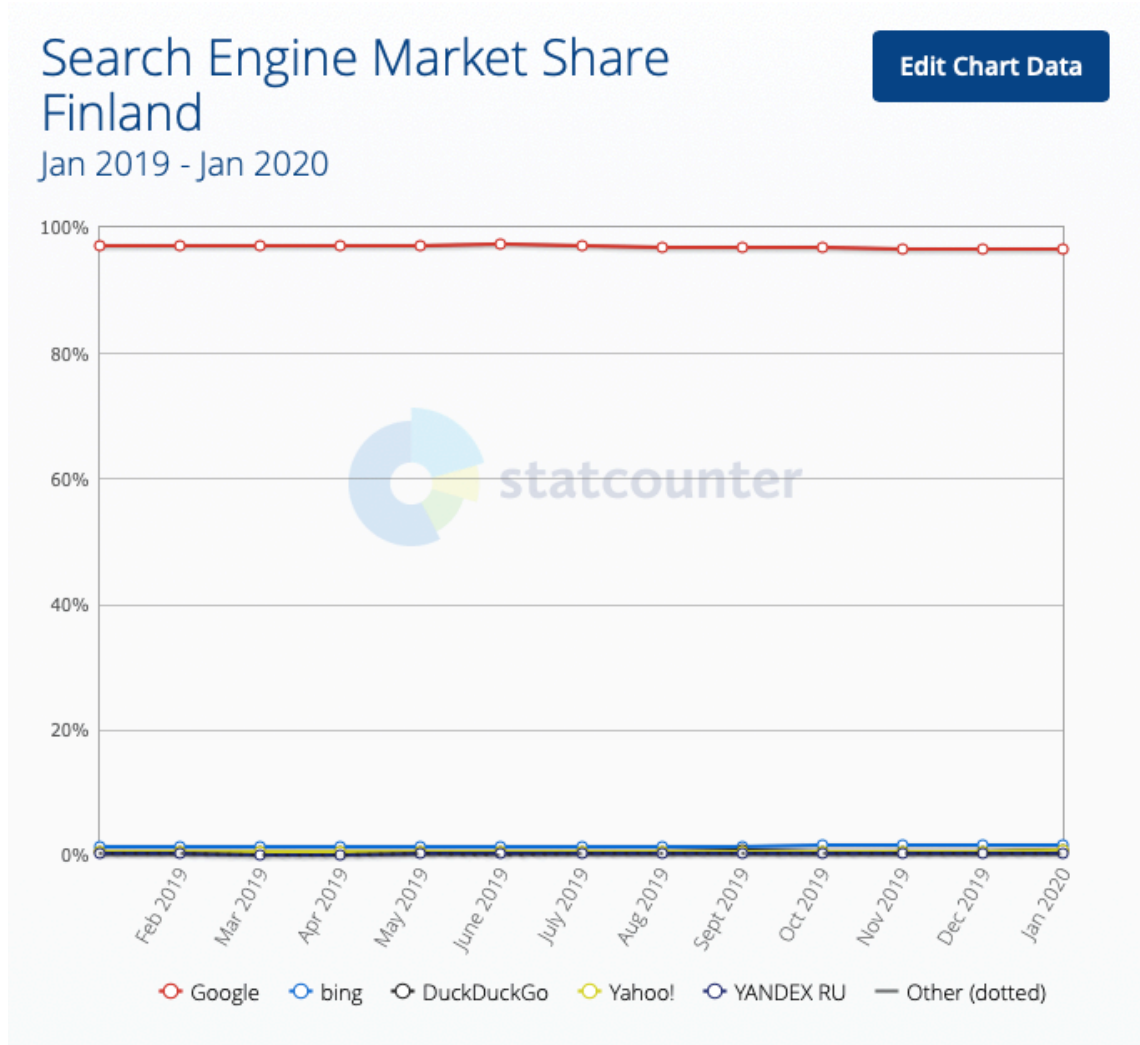


Figure 3-2. Search engine market share in Finland (Statcounter 2020)

Google AdWords Keyword Planner

To help coming up with keywords, Google has a special tool for creating keywords. With this tool, it is possible to develop words and terms and filter them based on location. It helps determining the volume for certain keywords and - terms to predict the bid amount (PPC). The Google Adwords Keyword Planner is especially good when determining Long Tail terms, because it will help

choose terms that go well together. (Shenoy & Prabhu 2016.) As discussed before, the Long Tail terms are used to get specific users directed to a website. Chaters (2011) reminds, that even though the Google Adwords Keyword Planner can be used when going for a PPC campaign, it can also bring value to pure SEO; it helps estimate the search volumes for keywords and -terms chosen. (Chaters 2011.)

Google Trends

Google Trends gives information on current search terms. This can help determining the right keywords for a website and comparing the ones in use to the one's competitors use. (Chaters 2011.) Shenoy & Prabhu (2016) explain that when picking out keywords, it is beneficial to use the comparing feature of Google Trends to see, which one is the best for the occasion. Google Trends can also be used for content development, since it provides information on what are the most popular terms and phrases. (Shenoy & Prabhu 2016.)

Google Analytics

With Google Analytics it is possible to measure multiple aspects of PPC campaigns, which include the conversions, exit and entry path, time spent on site and keywords used to find the website. Campaigns run through Google AdWords can be implemented easily to Google Analytics, which will enable a better overall view on how the campaign performed. (Ledford 2009.) Chaters (2011) suggests Google Analytics to be used as the main data source for small- to medium-sized businesses.

Google Analytics gives valuable information on the user location and what pages are visited the most often. This can especially help e-commerce sites determine how to structure their pages according to the data; with tracking visitor engagement and metrics it is easier to improve the marketing strategies to attract more customers, as well as change content on pages that have high bounce rates. (Shenoy & Prabhu 2016.)

A/B Testing

A/B Testing allows to test which of two possible solutions work best. It is usually used for determining the best design for the website. A/B testing gives concrete results on which of the two solutions should be taken in use (figure 3-3). (Saleh & Shukairy 2010.)

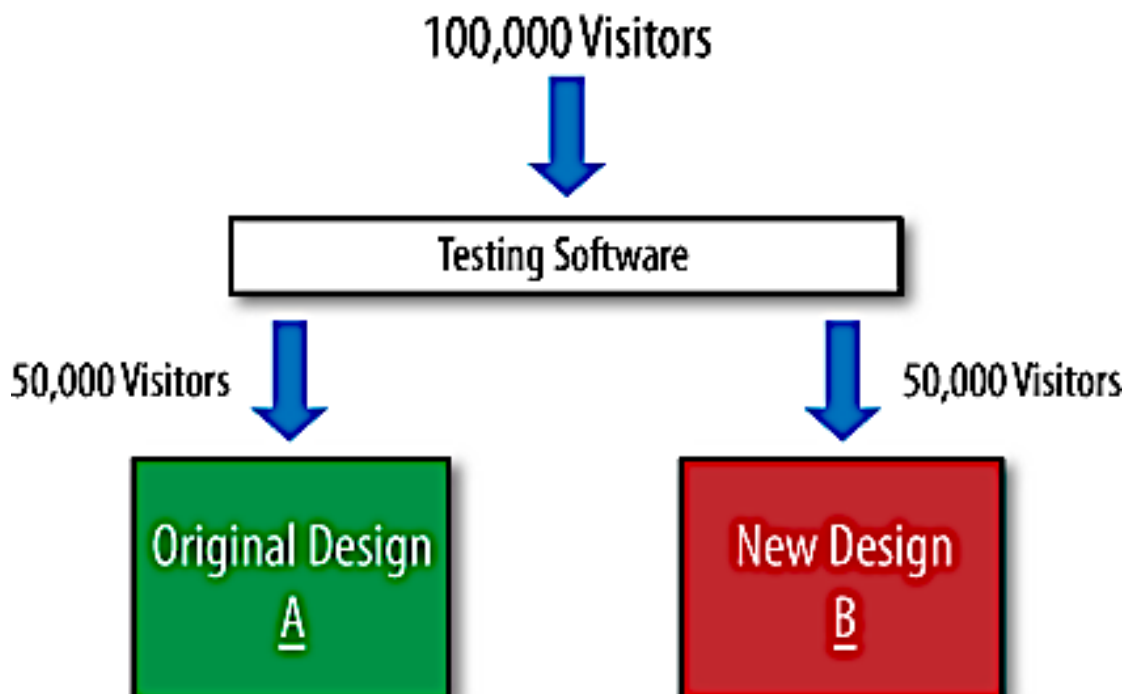


Figure 3-3. A/B testing in website design (Saleh & Shukairy 2010)

Typically, the metric that is followed to determine which of the options is better is the conversion rate. The only downside of A/B testing however is, that it does not give concrete insight on which were the factors affecting the results. To start measuring which of two options is better, it is suggested to select a webpage where visitors can complete one call-to-action; subscribing to a newsletter, making an account, or some other action (e.g. clicking on a link). (Beasley 2013.) Chaters (2011) recommends to use Google Website Optimizer when planning to run an A/B test. It makes A/B testing easier, and more efficient.

A/B Testing is not only to determine the best option for website design. It can also be used to find the best form to any campaign; e.g. defining the best content for an e-mail campaign or tracking if a link with a picture generates more traffic than a link with only text. Ultimately, tracking different things that can affect the overall performance of the website will improve the ROI. (Chaters 2011.)

3.2.2 Analysing the process

Because of the continuous change in search engine algorithms and competitor's SEO, the search engine rankings can change weekly. To keep up the high ranking, a website needs to be monitored and updated constantly. By constantly monitoring the process, determining the correct methods is easier (Ledford 2009). To help determine if the used methods are correct Stricchiola et al. (2015) suggest to define the goals of the website, whether it is e.g. generating sales, generating leads, generating donations or developing an audience (which can be used to attain other goals).

Once the website goals are defined, it is easier to pick out the parameters which give the correct information to determine if the goals are going to be fulfilled. The success parameters can be e.g. total traffic to the website (visitors), conversion rate, the rate of new visitors to returning visitors or which page gets most traffic. (Stricchiola et al. 2015.) Halligan & Shah (2014) mention the importance of tracking favourite keywords constantly in order to see how well they are performing. On top of tracking the keywords, it is also crucial to track which pages are getting ranked on search engines. This information helps determine which pages are the most important ones for the website (once this is determined, it is important to maintain and update the content on the most important pages). (Halligan & Shah 2014.)

On top of the mentioned parameters, some internal metrics to pay attention to are *the average time spent on site*, which gives indications on how invested the visitors are to the page, and *pages visited per visit*, which indicates how engaged

the visitors are with the website in general. One important external metric to follow is *the amount of inbound (incoming) links to the website*, which increases the authority of the website and leads to better rankings in SERPs. Having content that creates a reaction (whether positive or negative) in the visitor gets them to share the website to others, which essentially helps with search engine rankings. (Saleh & Shukairy 2010.)

3.2.3 Social Media and SEO

Nowadays, almost every successful business has some sort of presence in social media. Whether it is on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram or some other social medium, the presence is there. Ledford (2009) explains that the methods and strategies are a bit different than in SEO, but social media supports the success of a website tremendously. Businesses should use social media to create additional content to create relationships with the audience, to help generate more visibility and traffic, which ultimately will convert to more customers and more profit. (Ledford 2009.) Odden (2012) reminds to not choose a social medium based solely on popularity, since the potential and targeted customers might not be the users of that exact social medium.

Even though social media does not link directly to the success of SEO, it has its benefits; when a business has a social media presence on some platform, they allow the followers to react and share the content published on the social medium, which ultimately helps building links to the website, which affects positively on the rankings in SERPs. (Elmansy 2013.) Stricchiola et al. (2015) remind that social mediums should not be used as an advertising or direct-selling tool, but rather as a tool to give information to potential customers, and to help them make positive associations about the product or service sold through the website. Also, sharing content relating to the market will increase credibility in the eyes of the crowd. (Stricchiola et al. 2015.)

As SEO requires constant monitoring, so does social media. Depending on what type of social medium is in use, keeping an eye on how well the selected medium

is doing is important. Measuring e.g. click-rates and engagement will give valuable information on what type of content should be published. (Ledford 2009.) The longer social media and SEO have been in use, the better results will be gained.

4 CASE STUDY

4.1 The case company

Suomen Hius- ja Kauneustuotteet Oy (referred to from this point onwards as hiustuotteet.fi) is the company commissioning this thesis. Hiustuotteet.fi is an e-commerce site selling multiple hair and beauty products. The aim of the company is to give the opportunity to consumers to purchase high-end beauty products online, which are currently sold in hair salons. In the long run, hiustuotteet.fi aims to be a fully *green* company, as in selling only ecological and vegan products.

Hiustuotteet.fi launched their e-commerce site on December 2019, and are now looking for ways to help with new customer acquisition. With no existing customer base, the company had to start from scratch. The website was designed and coded by one of the founders, and they have been doing a bit of SEO and paid ad campaigns to start acquiring new customers. Due to the small customer base, it is fairly easy to follow how well new keywords and ad campaigns perform, and adapt according to the performance.

Improving visibility in a crowded market

Hiustuotteet.fi website has many competitors offering the same products with almost identical price. It is very hard to come as a new business to a market that is already crowded. The efforts made so far (marketing campaigns, discounts, etc.) have helped hiustuotteet.fi a lot, but there is still room for improvement. One way to get significantly more traffic to the website is by maximizing the use of social media. Social media plays a very important role in nowadays marketing strategies. To improve the businesses social media presence, on top of having a weekly or bi-weekly updated social media account, businesses should try and acquire customers who have their own social influence and following; By attracting or collaborating with people with a significant social media following, the reach of potential customers increases tremendously (Boykin & Jones 2013).

Another way of gaining a market share is to offer some kinds of incentives. Hiustuotteet.fi have already made a good use out of incentives by offering discounts,

having product bundles and limited time offers. Incentives can be just that; giving one product for free for a certain purchase, bundling products or running an *incentive* program. A great use of incentives not seen too often and what would get customers to visit the e-commerce site again would be to offer discounts only for signed up members. This would encourage the visitors to sign up for the website to enable these *member* discounts. (Saleh & Shukairy 2010.)

The author would recommend hiustuotteet.fi to test different techniques on differentiating themselves from their competition. One good idea could be to have an almost personalised thank-you note put inside every delivery box. This way once the customer receives their purchase, they get a friendly reminder, that their choice of store matters and that the business cares about them as a customer. This is something that bunch of businesses do in different markets; one example is a Finnish sunglass brand which sends a humorous note with every purchase. Concrete suggestions on how to differentiate from competition will be introduced in the 5. *Findings* part of this thesis.

4.2 E-commerce Site Audit: www.hiustuotteet.fi

In order to understand the current state of the website, a site audit was conducted following the steps and advice given by Dover (2011) on how to write an e-commerce site audit. Each step is defined according to the guidelines to let the reader know what has been evaluated and if something should be altered. Dover (2011) has done SEO consulting for multiple different e-commerce sites, and he bases his guidelines on his own findings.

4.2.1 The websites outlook and navigation

To prepare for the site audit, browser cookies were cleared and JavaScript disabled. The idea behind this was to help identify potential crawling errors. At the first glimpse, the homepage looked good. Dover (2011) notes, that the homepage should look almost identical whether JavaScript is enabled or not. With hiustuotteet.fi homepage this came true (figure 4-1 and figure 4-2).

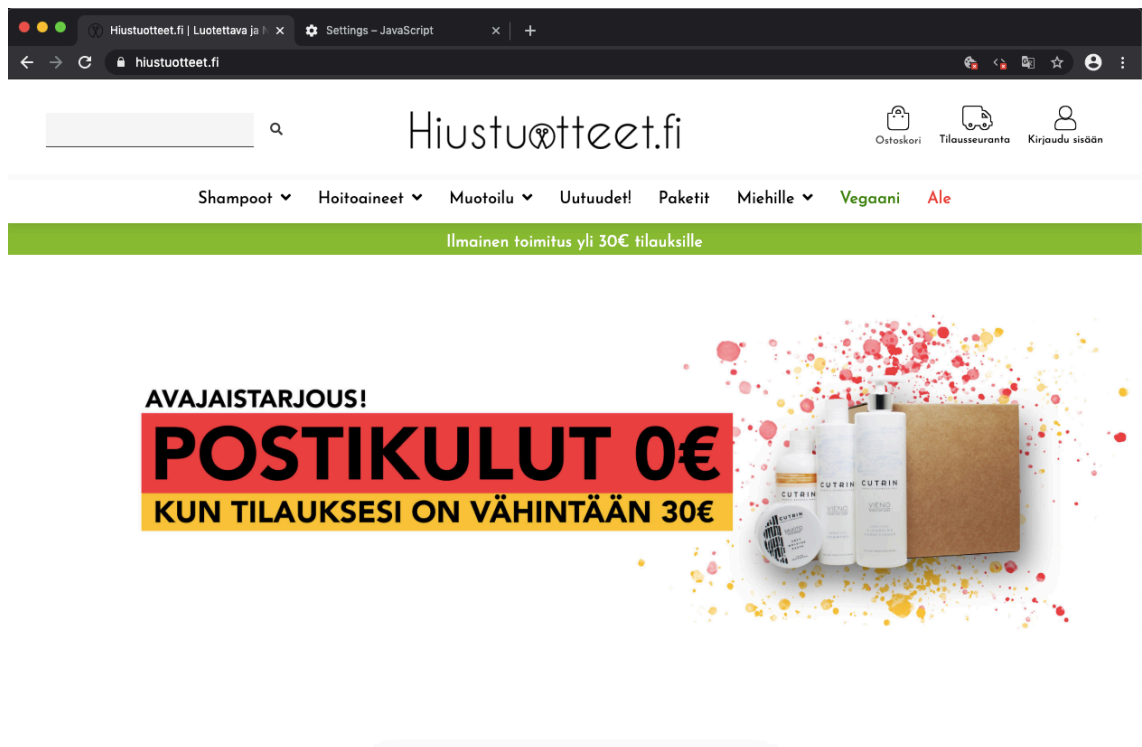


Figure 4-1. JavaScript disabled (hiustuotteet.fi 2020)

Minor changes can be seen on the website when enabling JavaScript; the search box on the top left corner has text and the image becomes *active*, switching automatically to other images (figure 4-2).

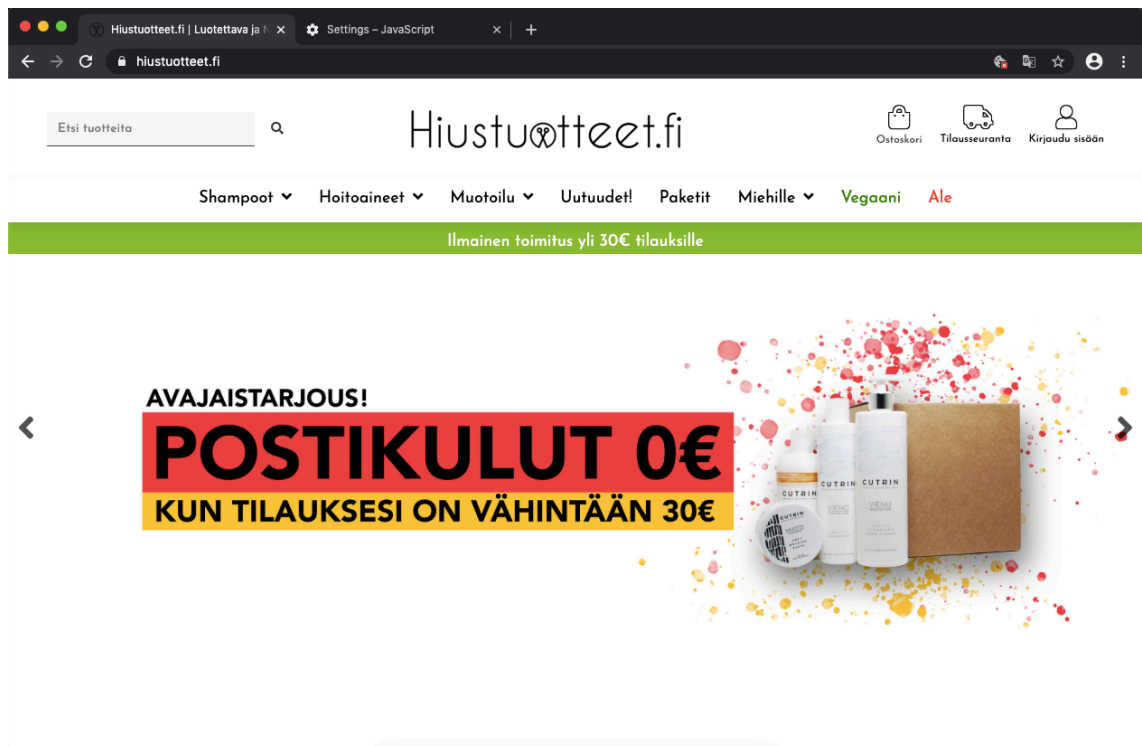


Figure 4-2. JavaScript enabled (hiustuotteet.fi 2020)

After checking the outlook of the page, the author proceeded to see if the navigation panel at the top of the page works even though JavaScript is disabled. It did. For a website to be highly optimized, the site architecture must work whether or not JavaScript is enabled. When the navigation panel works, the website will not face any indexing issues (Dover 2011). One of the best practices with SEO is to have a pyramid-like website structure (shown previously in figure 2-2), which can be achieved by having navigation links to subcategory pages on the homepage, and the subcategory pages having even more detailed links within them. This is how hiustuotteet.fi website is structured, which makes it easier for the crawlers to index the page.

4.2.2 Title tags

Title tags of content pages are very important and a key factor when talking about SEO. In figure 4-3 the title tag is inside the red rectangle. According to Dover (2011), the best format of a title tag is as follows: Primary Keywords – Secondary Keywords | Brand name. A title tag will also be written on the page tab. In hiustuotteet.fi case this format is applied on the website throughout, although it could be even more beneficial to have the subcategory pages include the primary and secondary keyword; e.g. for the subcategory page of gentle shampoo's the title tag should be, Shampooot – Hennoille Hiuksille | Hiustuotteet.fi (compared to the current format; Hennoille Hiuksille | Hiustuotteet.fi).

Noin 483 000 000 tulosta (0,50 sekuntia)

Mainos · www.lyko.fi/Shampoot ▾

Shampoot | Parhaat & suosituimmat merkit | lyko.fi

Oikea **shampoo** on hiustenhoidon A ja Ö. Suodata hiustyypin mukaan ja löydä se oikea. Lykon hius- ja kauneusmaailma. Tilaa helposti ja nopeasti. Makeup & hajurvedet. Professional ihonhoito. Suositut tuotemerkit. Professional Hiustenhoito.

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HIUKSET > Shampoot | Kauneuden verkkokauppa | Cocopanda

Shampoo jokaiseen hiustyypiin. Parhaat merkit kuten TIGI, Wella, Loreal, Redken, Neccin ja Macadamia.

[Vaaleat hiukset](#) · [Syväpuhdistavat shampoo](#) · [Shampoo miehille](#)

Figure 4-3. Search results for the search query “Shampoot” (2020)

4.2.3 Meta description

In SERPs, the meta description can be found underneath the title tag (inside the blue rectangle in figure 4-3). The meta description needs to be written in a way, that it compels users. Dover (2011) also suggests to include relevant keywords in the meta description at least twice because the matching words will be bolded (as seen in the figure 4-3 the word “shampoo”). Moving forward in the site audit next in line was checking the URL. In this case the URL for the page including all the shampoos was “hiustuotteet.fi/category/28/shampoot” which is not ideal. The URL is short, but the word “category” and number “28” should be deleted or at least renamed. “Just like Danny Devito, URLs should be short, relevant, and easy to remember’.” (Danny Dover 2011).

4.2.4 Indexable content

To make sure search engines index the content pages, the author conducted a search for a random sentence found in a product page: “*Auttaa poistamaan hilsettä ja kutinaa sekä tasapainottaa hiuspohjan liiallista rasvoittumista.*”, and the

outcome was both positive and negative. The positive side was that search engines index the page as they are supposed to, but the negative side was that the sentence used is the manufacturer's description for the product, and the SERP showed multiple sites with the exact same sentence. According to Dover (2011), even though we are talking about product descriptions, it is important to have the content stand out from competition in order to earn links which will help ranking the page higher. This could be done by rephrasing the product description and making it more personal to the user.

4.2.5 Evaluating the content

Having relevant content is necessary for good SEO, but with an e-commerce site it is more difficult to produce compared to other websites. Currently, the product pages of hiustuotteet.fi are decent, but with just a few more sentences it would be possible to make the product description more compelling to the visitor and much more personal. Dover (2011) suggests that one possibility could be to include a client recommendation in quotation marks on the product page and add a compelling description for the product, instead of listing the same description as all other competitors. It is important to remember, that content is the reason a user visits a webpage. (Dover 2011.) Also, detailed product descriptions have a positive impact on organic visibility of the product, which increases the crawler's perceived value of the page and will result in higher SERP rankings (Darrohn 2017).

Sanders (2015) recommends e-commerce sites to pay attention to the product description, and to write it in the most informative manner possible, without using the exact same descriptions as other websites. She also recommends to use customer testimonials, in order to create trust in other users. One thing she also points out regarding the product descriptions is, that the word count should be closer to 300 in order to give out necessary details and other useful information (e.g. customer reviews). Dover's (2011) suggestion is almost alike to Sander's (2015); she recommends a product page to have the minimum of three paragraphs of information about the given product. This helps the actual site visitor and also brings value to crawlers.

4.2.6 Analysing the links

As defined earlier, links are vitally important to crawlers and search engine algorithms. This is why it is crucial to analyse the links on a website. Dover (2011) suggests to use SEOmoz's Open Site Explorer to see how many internal and external links are on a website. The suggested tool was used, and the results are shown in figure 4-4.



Figure 4-4. Internal and external links to root domain: www.hiustuotteet.fi (analytics.moz.com 2020)

The Domain Authority is not relevant in this case, since it compares the root domain to international websites, and the case website is written fully in Finnish. Linking Domains tells the number of external links to the website, and Inbound Links the number of unique webpages linking to a specific target.

Next, data was gathered on the anchor text of inbound links through SEOmoz's Open Site Explorer. Data gathered is shown in figure 4-5. Anchor text refers to the hyperlink's text visible for the user. Shenoy & Prabhu (2016) suggest that the keywords used in anchor text should be as specific as possible and relating to the content on the linked webpage. This helps crawlers identify the relevance of the links.

1- 10 Anchor Text

Anchor Text ⁱ	Linking Domains ⁱ	Followed External Links	Top Links
"www.hiustuotteet.fi"	3	10	<input type="checkbox"/>
"hiustuotteet.fi"	3	6	<input type="checkbox"/>
"http://www.hiustuotteet.fi"	2	20	<input type="checkbox"/>
[no anchor text]	2	7	<input type="checkbox"/>
"hiustuotteet"	1	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
"http://www.hiustuotteet.fi/"	1	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
"oribe"	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
"acceptar"	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
"» shampoo"	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
"sevenhair oy"	1	2	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 4-5. Anchor text for root domain: www.hiustuotteet.fi (analytics.moz.com 2020)

Keeping in mind how recently launched the hiustuotteet.fi website is, the anchor text data is acceptable. However, as some of the links are from old blog texts dating nearly 10 years back (when the domain name was under a different business), the value gained from the links is not as good as it could be. The links do give value to crawlers and help rank the website a bit better, but current day users are not going to find hiustuotteet.fi website out of these blogs. To overcome this “issue”, the author would recommend to find a way to get a few links to up-to-date blogs, or to start publishing content that users would want to share.

4.2.7 Search engine inclusion

The next step was to see how does Google work with the data gathered in the previous steps. The first thing was to make sure the domain name is not penalised by making a search query with the domain name: “hiustuotteet.fi”. As the result, the actual domain appeared as the first result as it should have. If, however, this would not have been the case, it would mean that the website has major optimization issues, and has been ignored by crawlers completely (Dover 2011).

An important aspect was to see how well the website's pages are indexed. This was done by following Dover's (2011) instructions and making a search query using site command: "site:hiustuotteet.fi". The number of results shown in the SERPs was about 365. Dover (2011) explains, that the results should be as close to the real number of pages on the website as possible. If the search results outnumber the actual pages, the website is having duplicated content and if the website has more pages than shown in the search results, there is an indexation problem. With hiustuotteet.fi this is a bit harder to determine, since there is no way of telling how many pages are on the website, but it can be assumed the actual number of pages was very close to the number of search results.

After taking a look at how the website appears on search engines, the author moved on to see how well the website ranks compared to competition. Dover (2011) suggests to choose three highly competitive keywords to see how the website ranks. The following keywords were chosen: "shampoo", "hoitoaineet" and "hiusten hoito". The ranking results are from Seobility's Free Website Ranking Checker tool and are shown in figure 4-6.

Keyword Information

Keyword	shampoo
Search engine	Google.fi
Search volume (FI)	140

Keyword Information

Keyword	hoitoaineet
Search engine	Google.fi
Search volume (FI)	30

Keyword Information

Keyword	hiusten hoito
Search engine	Google.fi
Search volume (FI)	320

Your rank



Your rank



Your rank



Figure 4-6. Keyword rankings (Seobility 2020)

Given the time the website has been active, the results are understandable. However, improvements can surely be made. The results indicate, that among highly competitive keywords the website ranks very poorly, which leads to not gaining

any traffic from these keywords. The website should be optimized so, that on top of using the highly competitive keywords, the webpages would have other keywords with lesser competition. The combination of using both types of keywords will make it much more likely to rank better in the future.

4.3 Methodology

This study employs a survey method as its primary empirical data collection method. The findings of this thesis are thus based purely on a quantitative research. A quantitative research approach is used, when the research can rely on statistical data. The most common way to collect quantitative data is by conducting a well-structured survey (Adams, Khan & Reaside 2014, 6-20). Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2008) mention, that making use of only quantitative data might have its downsides; there is always a chance that the people who answer a survey will not answer truthfully or seriously, or they might have misunderstood the question. While this is true, the quantitative method was chosen, in order to be able to collect as much data as possible. The questions were made simple and easy to understand so, that answering them will require little to no effort.

The data for the survey was gathered by using an internet-based questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to a group of people with no specific age, sex or background. The reason behind this was, to be able to gather information from all kinds of people with different online buying behaviour.

4.3.1 Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire was done by using Google Forms. The reason this platform was chosen was the simplicity and ease of use. Google Forms works on almost any device and browser, which makes it easy for people to answer. The questionnaire was made to answer the following research question: "How to differentiate as a new e-commerce site?". The questionnaire consisted of the following questions (full questionnaire can be found in the appendices):

- “How often do you purchase products from e-commerce sites (online stores)?”
- “What would make you subscribe to an e-commerce newsletter?”
- “If you chose to subscribe to a newsletter, how many times per month would you feel comfortable receiving an e-mail from the website?”
- “How does the promised delivery time affect your buying decision?”
- “Would receiving a personalised “Thank you”-note inside the delivery box increase the likelihood to purchase from the same website again?”
- “Would receiving a discount code after a purchase increase the likelihood of purchasing from the same website again?”
- “When comparing different e-commerce sites, what matters to you?”
- “Does the product description matter?”
- “Would you choose to use a certain e-commerce site if it offered some sort of additional content on the website?”
- “What type of content would you be interested in reading on an e-commerce site?”

The questions were built around the theoretical framework of this thesis and to find out, what an e-commerce site should include to be able to differentiate from the competition. The data analysis is done using the charts retrieved from Google Forms. All of the questions had ready-made answers in order to make it as easy as possible for the people to answer.

4.3.2 The questionnaire results

The questionnaire was answered by 41 fully anonymous people. No data was gathered about the respondents, because personal information is not needed to answer the research question. Next, the questionnaire results are presented and analysed.

Question 1: How often do you purchase products from e-commerce sites (online stores)?

Most of the respondents (97,6%) purchase products from e-commerce sites (Figure 4-7). The meaning of *occasionally* and *often* was not defined, because the main objective was to find out, *do* the respondents use e-commerce sites in general.

How often do you purchase products from e-commerce sites (online stores)?

41 vastausta

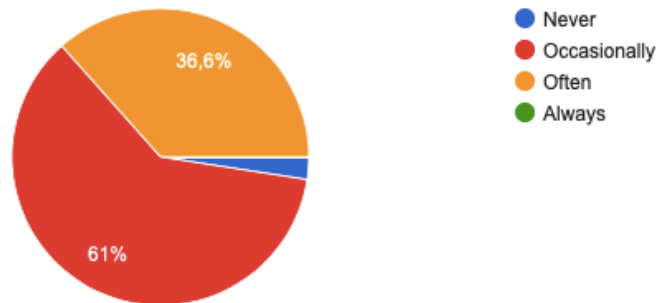


Figure 4-7. Question 1

The data gives valuable information on how popular e-commerce sites have become, and how a business can be run only using an online store.

Question 2: What would make you subscribe to an e-commerce newsletter?

The main goal of this question was to get an answer to two different things; would the respondents be willing to subscribe to a newsletter and if so, what type of information would they be willing to receive. 78% of the total respondents would be willing to subscribe to a newsletter if they receive discounts, and 31,7% would subscribe to a newsletter, if they would receive also additional information on top of discounts (Figure 4-8).

What would make you subscribe to an e-commerce newsletter?

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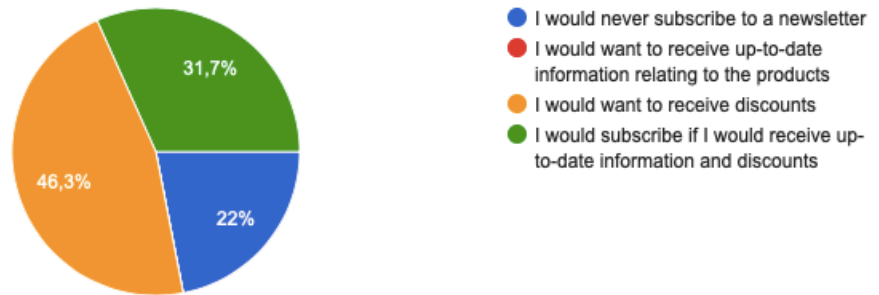


Figure 4-8. Question 2

As mentioned earlier, Halligan & Shah (2014) suggest to use an e-mail newsletter as a way to convert site visitors into customers. The question 2 was used to gather information on what type of content would activate the site visitors to a newsletter. Ledford (2009) also used newsletters as a great example of serving site visitors with valuable information to make them more likely to purchase (table 1).

Question 3. If you chose to subscribe to a newsletter, how many times per month would you feel comfortable receiving an e-mail from the website?

This question was made only for the respondents who chose to subscribe to a newsletter. The main idea behind this question was, to gather information on what is seen appropriate amount of e-mails per month from a newsletter. As pictured in figure 4-9, half of the respondents chose they would be comfortable in receiving only 1 e-mail per month.

If you chose not to subscribe, skip this question If you chose to subscribe to a newsletter, how many times per month would you feel comfortable receiving an e-mail from the website?

30 vastausta

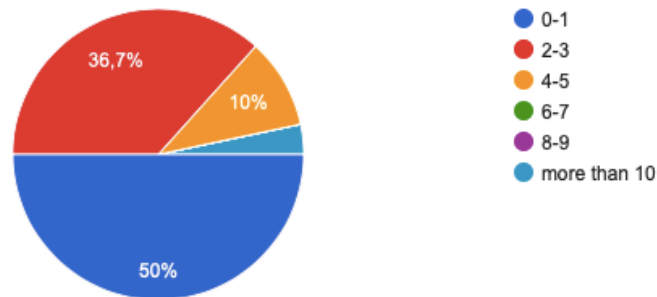


Figure 4-9. Question 3

This question supports the previous question, and the data gives more information about the newsletters. The collected data is important, because it is crucial to know how often do people think it is okay to receive a promotional or informational newsletter from a website. By looking at the data, it is safe to say that an e-commerce site should put out a newsletter at least once a month, and it would still be seen *okay* if the amount would differ from 1 to 4.

To test how many newsletters should be sent per month, an A/B test could be conducted. (Figure 3-3) The subscribers could be divided into two different groups receiving different amounts of newsletters for a certain period of time, and then analysing the outcomes.

Question 4. How does the promised delivery time affect your buying decision?

The idea behind this question was to see, if the delivery time effects user's buying behaviour. 39% of the respondents accept a 3-5 working day delivery, 34,1% of respondents accept a 7 working day delivery while 24,4% of the respondents claim that the delivery time has no effect on their buying decision at all (Figure 5).

How does the promised delivery time affect your buying decision?

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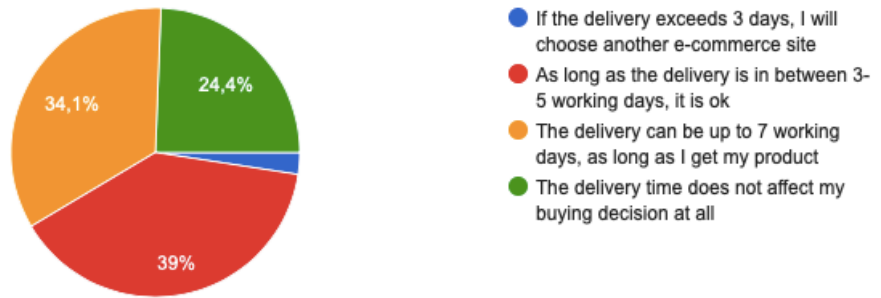


Figure 5. Question 4

A short delivery time can often be seen advertised by different e-commerce sites. To see, if it really does matter for the users, Question 4 was asked. According to the data, the delivery time does not affect the buying decision too much, however it is still an important aspect to tell to the potential customers (especially if an e-commerce site has a very fast delivery time).

Question 5. Would receiving a personalised “Thank you”-note inside the delivery box increase the likelihood to purchase from the same website again?

The purpose of this question was to find out if a small personalized touch would have a positive effect on the future buying behaviour. Based on the responses, 58,5% say they would be positively affected by a personalized “thank you”-note, and it would make them more likely to visit the same e-commerce site again for more purchases (Figure 5-1).

Would receiving a personalised "Thank you"-note inside the delivery box increase the likelihood to purchase from the same website again?

41 vastausta

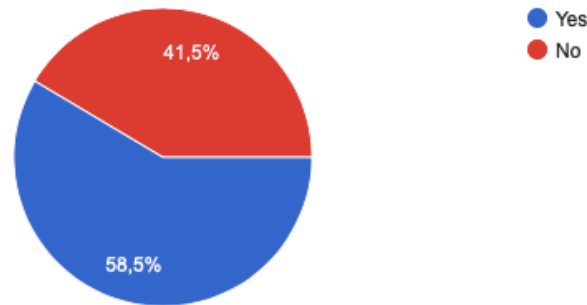


Figure 5-1. Question 5

One way to differ from competition could be to have a personalised message in every delivery box. This is an easy way to stand out, and as seen from the data gathered, it would have a positive impact to the customers.

Question 6. Would receiving a discount code after a purchase increase the likelihood of purchasing from the same website again?

To be able to define the buying behaviour of the respondents even more, this question was made to see if a discount code given after a purchase would increase the likelihood of purchasing again. Only 9,8% of the respondents answered that they would not be affected by a discount code, and 34,1% would be more likely to shop from the same website again, no matter the discount percentage (Figure 5-2). 24,4% of the respondents answered they would be more likely to purchase again if the discount percentage would be more than 10%, and 31,7% answered that the discount percentage has to be more than 20% to affect their future buying decision.

Would receiving a discount code after a purchase increase the likelihood of purchasing from the same website again?

41 vastausta

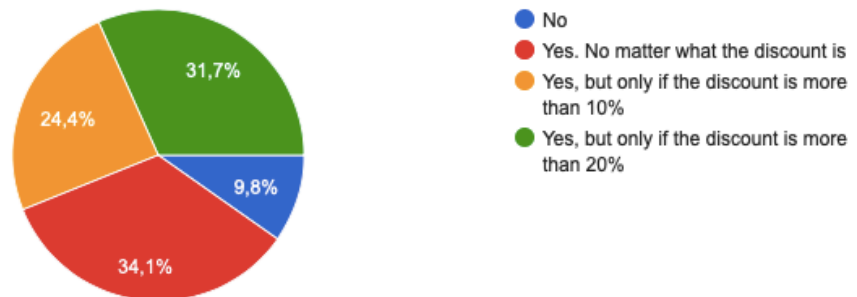


Figure 5-2. Question 6

As mentioned earlier, discounts are a significant way to affect people's buying behaviour. As seen from the data and according to Saleh & Shukairy (2010), having discount codes after a purchase as an incentive would positively affect the likelihood of re-visiting the same e-commerce site to make another purchase.

Question 7. When comparing different e-commerce sites, what matters to you?

This question was the only multiple-choice question in the online questionnaire. Here the respondents could choose which of the given answers affect their decision most when comparing different e-commerce sites. Price was the most important aspect when comparing websites against competition; 87,8% of the respondents chose price as a matter of comparison (Figure 5-3). The second most important matter was the product descriptions, which affect 68,3% of the respondent's when choosing an e-commerce site. The brand of the website matters for over the half of the respondents (58,5%). The ease of use and the design of the website overall affects the decision of 51,2% of the respondents. The least matter was the delivery time, which *only* affected 43,9% of the respondents.

When comparing different e-commerce sites, what matters to you? (Multiple choice)

41 vastausta

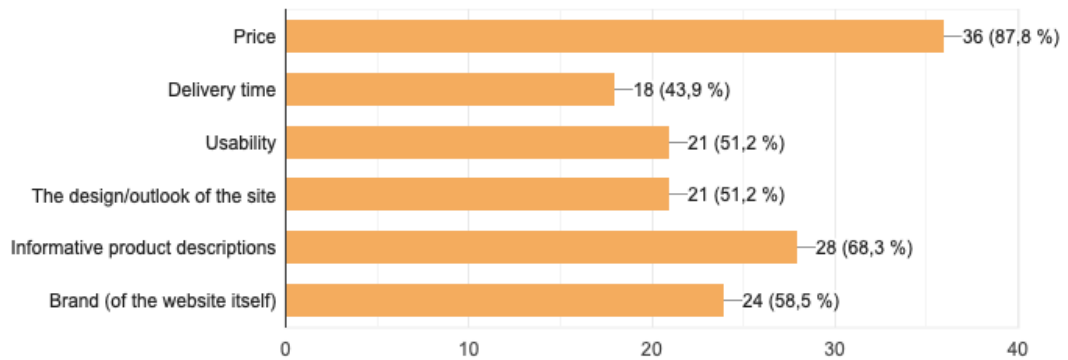


Figure 5-3. Question 7

The gathered data shows, that brand image of the e-commerce site does matter when deciding which website to use, so it is important to focus on creating a good and well-known brand image. As stated earlier, Kauppila (2017) suggested to make use of PPC campaigns to boost brand image.

Question 8. Does the product description matter?

The purpose of this question was to determine, how important is the product description for the respondents. No one answered that the product description does not matter (Figure 5-4). 36,6% of the respondents answered that the product description should only include necessary information. 29,3% answered that the product description should include a bit more information than just the necessary information. 34,1% answered that the product description should be very informative; the description should include customer testimonials, tips and other additional information if applicable on top of having the necessary product information.

Does the product description matter?

41 vastausta

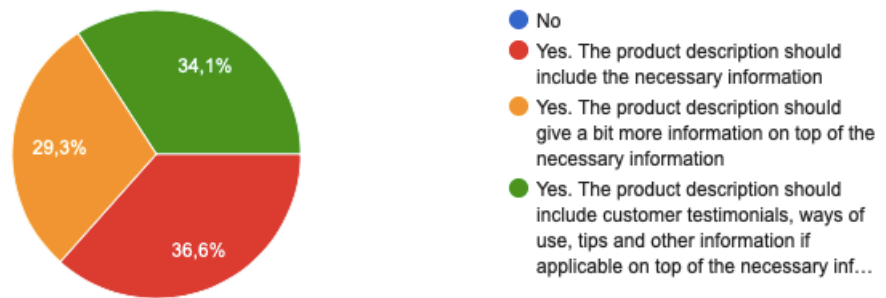


Figure 5-4. Question 8

As discussed, multiple times, the product description has a tremendous effect on how well a website gets optimised. As seen from the gathered data, the product description also matters to the users. As Dover (2011), Darrohn (2017) and Sanders (2015) suggested, having a descriptive but content-driven product description that differs from what every other competitor, will improve the success of an e-commerce site a lot, not only in the face of crawlers but also in the face of end users.

Question 9. Would you choose to use certain e-commerce site if it offered some sort of additional content on the website?

This question was asked to see, if e-commerce sites should offer additional content and not only the sold products. Figure 5-5 shows that 56,1% of the respondents think that additional content would make them more likely to use a certain e-commerce site.

Would you choose to use a certain e-commerce site if it offered some sort of additional content on the website?

41 vastausta

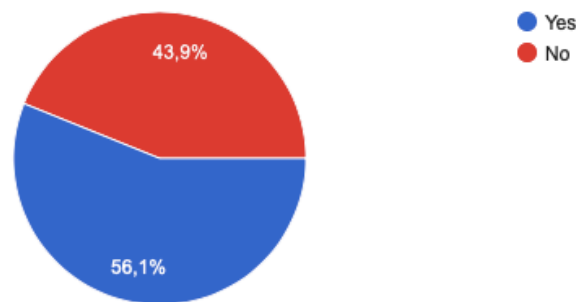


Figure 5-5. Question 9

From an SEO perspective, this question gives out very valuable data. It proves that content matters to both crawlers and website visitors, which means it should be a matter to perfect. As mentioned before, at least Ledford (2009), Bhasin (2019), Boykin & Jones (2013) and Dover (2011) side on how important it is for a website to have informative and differentiating content throughout the site.

Question 10. What type of content would you be interested in reading on an e-commerce site?

This question supports the earlier one, and it was meant to give out information regarding the content published on an e-commerce site. As seen in figure 5-6, 31,7% of the respondents would like to see content relating to the sold products. 19,5% would like to read a regularly updated blog with publications around the field of business of the e-commerce site, more information about the products and other relevant topics relating closely to the website's target market. 14,6% of the respondents would like to read content only relating to the field of business of the website, and 34,1% answered they do not care what type of content is published on an e-commerce site.

What type of content would you be interested in reading on an e-commerce site?

41 vastausta

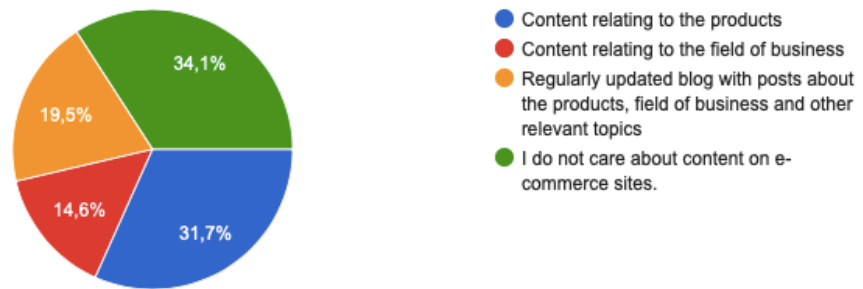


Figure 5-6. Question 10

The answers give the possibility to get a glimpse on what type of content would be expected from an e-commerce site according to users. As seen, the content does not need to be anything too fancy, but by having some additional content turns the website more user friendly, which affects positively on buying behaviour.

Additional question. Question 11. If you purchase a product online which will eventually run out (e.g. hair products), would you choose a subscription-based option, where you would receive automatically the chosen product(s) after they run out (the time in between deliveries would be up to you)?

This question was an additional one, to figure out if a subscription-based model could work with products. The subscription idea could be an interesting way of differentiating from the competition, because of the increase in use of subscription-based services such as Netflix, HBO, Spotify and others. The idea behind it sounded promising; purchasing your favourite shampoo from an e-commerce site and have it delivered to your home every three months. In theory it sounded promising, and the online questionnaire gave a good platform to see how the respondents would feel about the idea. The results were not as promising as hoped; 58,5% of the respondents answered they would not choose a subscription-based option even if available (Figure 5-7). This information is nonetheless valuable, and maybe it could be developed further on and be applied to certain products later on.

If you purchase a product online which will eventually run out (e.g. hair products), would you choose a subscription based option, where you would receive automatically the chosen product(s) after they run out (the time in between deliveries would be up to you)?

41 vastausta

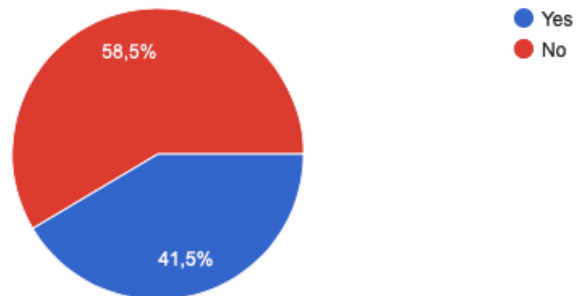


Figure 5-7. Question 11

A subscription-based model could be taken into use in the near future, however, regarding this thesis and the commissioner's stage of business, it might be better left on the shelf for a while.

5 DISCUSSION

The main goal of this thesis was to seek out how to build and optimize an e-commerce site for search engines to maximize the volume of new customer acquisition. In order to see how the website should be designed and optimized, the theory behind search engine optimisation was studied and explained thoroughly to acquire greater understanding. The subject was also studied and researched through an online questionnaire gaining valuable information from potential clientele. On top of the questionnaire, a full site audit was conducted following the steps presented by Dover (2011).

5.1 Findings

Based on the questionnaire, it actually *does* matter if an e-commerce site offers other information and content or just the products. By offering content and information an e-commerce site can easily differentiate from competitors; sharing knowledge about the business and caring about the customers by making the shopping experience more personalised and informative will give better results in new customer acquisition and search engine rankings.

To get as unbiased answers and opinions as possible, the questionnaire was made without revealing on which type of an e-commerce site the information will be used for. It was considered, that revealing the type of the e-commerce site or the field of business could have had a positive impact on the answers, but this option was ruled out to get an overall understanding of the subject and to better answer the initial research question.

5.1.1 Changing the website according to the questionnaire results

Hiustuotteet.fi website is modern, and stands out by itself, but that does not lead to great results by itself. By fixing and modifying the website's structure according to Dover's (2011) website audit, the ground will be set for other changes and improvements. The changes and improvements that can be made were found through the online questionnaire, and the results give an idea of what to do. According to the results, because so many people choose to shop online for some

sort of products, the changes suggested should be taken into *serious* consideration.

The results showed, that providing good information on what to expect when subscribing to an e-commerce newsletter, visitors are more likely to subscribe. Hius-tuotteet.fi website has the incentive already in place (figure 5-8, outlined portion), but the positioning of the subscription box could be made more visible to the user. Currently, it is located in the very end of each page, which is good, but not many users will find it. According to Agrawal (2019) best practices for the placement of the subscription box is to have it as a pop-up for the first-time visitors with a clear incentive to subscribe (e.g. offering a discount code right away, sending an information package to the e-mail address) or have it visible at every times a visitor is on any page (side-bar, top-bar, bottom-bar) or have it pop up once a user has reached a certain point in the content.

Tietoa meistä

- > Toimitusehdot
- > Ota yhteyttä
- > Tietosuojaseloste

Ota yhteyttä

Suomen Hius- ja Kauneustuotteet Oy 3087851-9 info@hiustuotteet.fi

Tilaa Uutiskirje

Älä missaa parhaita tarjouksiamme! Tilaa uutiskirje syöttämällä sähköpostiosoitteesi alla olevaan kenttään.

Sähköpostiosoite

I'm not a robot

reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

Ryhdy Tilaajaksi

Figure 5-8. Newsletter subscription box (www.hiustuotteet.fi 2020)

A newsletter should be sent monthly to the subscribed members, but not more than four times in one month, according to the results. The information in it can differ each time, but it should consist on some discounts or package deals available only for the subscribed members and some additional information about the field of business, products or other relevant subjects.

Applying the rule of reciprocity introduced by Cialdini (2009) (ultimately meaning that people want to return good acts of others) to a business environment, showing gratitude of purchase with a personalised thank you -note with the delivery could increase customer loyalty and the rate of re-visits to the website from the same customers. This conclusion can be drawn by the results of the questionnaire, and it could be implemented to future deliveries as a way to increase the re-visit potential of one-time customers. Afterall, the personalised note does not have to be more complicated than having a small portion of the note's text written in hand targeted to the specific buyer. This requires little to no extra effort from the business, but could result in great increases of overall purchases. On top of that, it could help customers share the shopping experience on social media, which ultimately would give more visibility for the business.

To be able to keep up with the competition and provide necessary information and content, it is important to understand how users compare different e-commerce sites, and what makes them choose one over the others. As one might have guessed, the price plays an important role when deciding which vendor to choose from, especially if all the competitors are offering the same product. Luckily hiustuotteet.fi have understood the pricing game and know how discounts and product bundles can be used as an advantage against the competition. According to the results of the questionnaire, users tend to focus on the product description as well. As mentioned earlier, Sanders (2015) suggested to pay close attention when writing product descriptions. The description should include the necessary information, but written in a unique form that cannot be found from other websites. By writing a descriptive, informative and engaging product description the e-commerce site will differ from the competition right away, and it will positively affect the search rankings in the near future (Dover 2011).

The usability and design of a website affect which site the users choose to use, so making sure all of the functions work properly and that the website is clear and simple to use is important. The brand image of an e-commerce site will improve as the changes are made according to the questionnaire and site audit results. Boosting brand visibility with campaigns and advertisements help achieving a following, which will ultimately help with new customer acquisition. Boykin & Jones (2013) recommend to take the advantage of social media by interacting with the target group, posting informative content and generating leads with advertisements published on social channels. According to them, this helps create awareness and will improve the traffic to the website.

One key phrase associated with SEO is *content*. Great content helps with every aspect of search engine optimisation. Great content is something, that relates to the field of business or offerings of the e-commerce site and gives new information to the visitors (Boykin & Jones 2013). The idea behind publishing additional content on an e-commerce site is to improve the traffic flow to the website (Ledford 2009). The questionnaire results show, that users appreciate content on an e-commerce site, which means it will not only serve the crawlers, but also serve the potential buying customers. In *hiustuotteet.fi* case, the content could be for example a monthly blog on hair products and tips on when, how and why to use different products.

5.1.2 Future possibilities

Future possibilities to improve new customer acquisition even further could be *inventing* a totally new way of purchasing items online. The additional question was asked to test the respondents, how they would react to an approach that is totally new to the market. As seen from the results, the response was not overwhelmingly good or bad. One could say neutral. The possibility of having selected products delivered to the buyer after a time limit of their choice could be the next step to make a single purchasing action into a more continuous service-like offering. The subscription-based model might not be the right thing to implement right away, but it was introduced as a possibility for the future, as well as an incentive for the commissioner to innovate new possibilities to help differentiate even further from the competition.

Also, a future possibility regarding the content made to boost SEO could be to introduce content marketing as an additional marketing strategy. According to Jutkowitz (2017), the idea behind content marketing is to publish relevant content consistently and appeal to the audience through the content created not through the products or services sold. By doing so, a business can improve the visibility tremendously and the audience reading the content will eventually start purchasing or using the products and services offered by the business. (Jutkowitz 2017.) Content marketing itself is a subject worth studying, but for the sake of this thesis it will not be delved into any deeper.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to discover possibilities for hiustuotteet.fi to improve visibility and new customer acquisition through SEO. As visibility and new customer acquisition can be achieved through a variety of ways, this thesis focused on how they can be achieved with properly executed SEO; it gave relevant background information on the subject and discussed improvement possibilities.

The objective of this thesis was to give useful and up-to-date information on how an e-commerce site can be optimised for search engines to help acquire new customers and to help differentiate and stand out from the competition. The subject was researched through various articles and theories to give a good basic understanding, and a full site audit was conducted to show some concrete examples on the subject.

Overall, the objective of the study was reached and improvement ideas were given regarding the website and its content. As SEO best practices keep changing along with search engine algorithms, it is suggested to start by focusing on the suggestions introduced in this thesis and after implementation to continue keeping an eye on the SEO results at all times, and when necessary seek out solutions to keep the new customer acquisition rate positive.

The implementation process should be handled properly, in order to maximize the results of SEO. As mentioned earlier, SEO can be boosted by other marketing strategies, and if chosen to be done, the new strategies should be researched to fully benefit from them. All in all, SEO is a base, which can be improved and expanded with multiple different approaches. By following the suggestions made in this thesis a strong SEO base will be built, which by itself will help with new customer acquisition and differentiation.

Because the author of this thesis is not working for hiustuotteet.fi, objective suggestions could be made. The suggestions and observations were made based on the presented theory, site audit and questionnaire, and in the author's opinion

the solutions introduced were relevant to the subject, and will provide additional value for the commissioner.

As the author, I want to thank *you* for reading this thesis, and the commissioner for allowing this subject and thesis to be made. Special thanks to the contact person at hiustuotteet.fi for sparring and discussing the subject.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Online Questionnaire

29/03/2020

Aleksi's Online Questionnaire

Aleksi's Online Questionnaire

Questionnaire for my thesis: Improving New Customer Acquisition with SEO

***Pakollinen**

1. How often do you purchase products from e-commerce sites (online stores)? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Always

2. What would make you subscribe to an e-commerce newsletter? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- I would never subscribe to a newsletter
- I would want to receive up-to-date information relating to the products
- I would want to receive discounts
- I would subscribe if I would receive up-to-date information and discounts

3. *If you chose not to subscribe, skip this question* If you chose to subscribe to a newsletter, how many times per month would you feel comfortable receiving an e-mail from the website?

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- 0-1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 8-9
- more than 10

29/03/2020

Aleksi's Online Questionnaire

4. How does the promised delivery time affect your buying decision? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- If the delivery exceeds 3 days, I will choose another e-commerce site
- As long as the delivery is in between 3-5 working days, it is ok
- The delivery can be up to 7 working days, as long as I get my product
- The delivery time does not affect my buying decision at all

5. Would receiving a personalised "Thank you"-note inside the delivery box increase the likelihood to purchase from the same website again? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- Yes
- No

6. Would receiving a discount code after a purchase increase the likelihood of purchasing from the same website again? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- No
- Yes. No matter what the discount is
- Yes, but only if the discount is more than 10%
- Yes, but only if the discount is more than 20%

7. When comparing different e-commerce sites, what matters to you? (Multiple choice) *

Valitse kaikki sopivat vaihtoehdot.

- Price
- Delivery time
- Usability
- The design/outlook of the site
- Informative product descriptions
- Brand (of the website itself)

29/03/2020

Aleksi's Online Questionnaire

8. Does the product description matter? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- No
- Yes. The product description should include the necessary information
- Yes. The product description should give a bit more information on top of the necessary information
- Yes. The product description should include customer testimonials, ways of use, tips and other information if applicable on top of the necessary information

9. Would you choose to use a certain e-commerce site if it offered some sort of additional content on the website? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- Yes
- No

10. What type of content would you be interested in reading on an e-commerce site? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- Content relating to the products
- Content relating to the field of business
- Regularly updated blog with posts about the products, field of business and other relevant topics
- I do not care about content on e-commerce sites.

11. If you purchase a product online which will eventually run out (e.g. hair products), would you choose a subscription based option, where you would receive automatically the chosen product(s) after they run out (the time in between deliveries would be up to you)? *

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

- Yes
- No

Google ei ole luonut tai hyväksynyt tätä sisältöä.

Google Forms