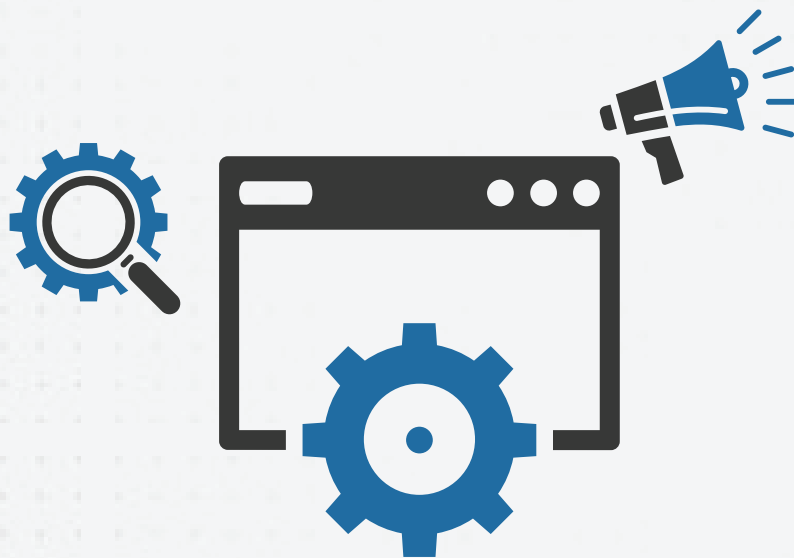


# THE ULTIMATE SEO OPTIMIZATION GUIDE: **PART 1**

---



**&MARKETING**

# Introduction

Everyone uses Google, or another search engine like Bing, to search for help with everyday obstacles and questions, or products and services to purchase. In fact, [68% of online experiences](#) begin with a search engine. This indicates a growing importance on making sure your website has a strong presence on Google, otherwise you will have a difficult time building brand awareness and being found by your ideal customer online.

You know you want to attract more of your ideal target customers to your website so they can learn who you are and how your products or services can help them. You might even know SEO is an important part of that equation. What you likely don't know is how straightforward SEO is once you learn the basics. Master the information in these guides, and you'll be well on your way to implementing an SEO strategy that will get you found on Google more frequently, by more people—which in turn leads to more leads for your business.

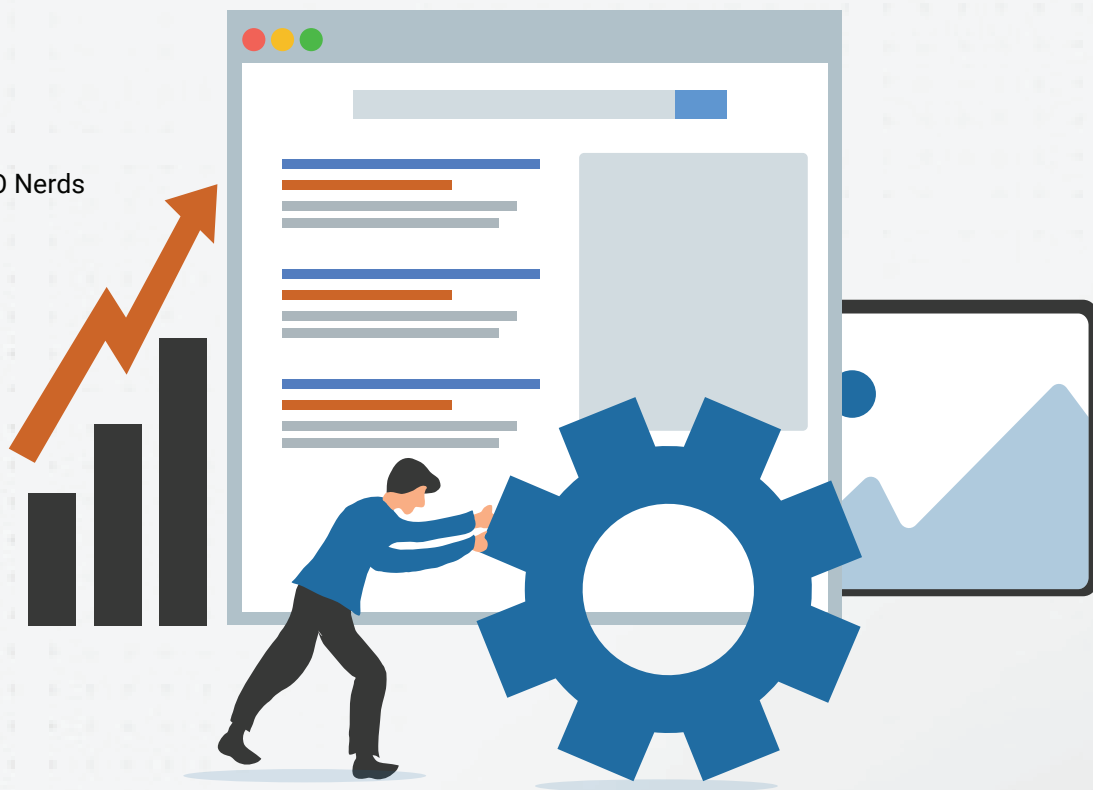
In this 2-part SEO Optimization Guide eBook series, you will learn:

## Part I

1. What SEO is and Why it's Important
2. Basic SEO Terminology
3. How to Build an SEO Strategy

## Part II

4. Measuring SEO Success
5. SEO Tools to Use
6. Bonus Tips for the True SEO Nerds





# What is SEO and Why Is it Important?

## Defining SEO

SEO, or [Search Engine Optimization](#), stands for the process of optimizing your company's website to improve rankings and awareness through search engine sites (most often Google). Due to a large market of people constantly searching for terms across the internet, SEO is essential for your brand to be uncovered by visitors through keyword searches that may or may not be directly related to your brand's name.

**In short, SEO is a low cost strategy that can produce amazing results for your business.** By optimizing your content for search engines, you can ensure your target audience is always able to find you through an organic search. The higher you rank, the more traffic you're likely to generate to your website. You can save lots of your marketing dollars by not having to pay Google to show your brand on the first page of its search results for the terms that matter to your business.

## How Long Does SEO Take?

The best answer is—anywhere from three months to one year. The range is dependent on your content, the competition for the keyword you are targeting, and the amount of traffic you are able to send to the page.

Generally speaking, &Marketing tells clients it takes three months to gain actionable insights that help inform if the page is targeting the correct keyword, or if additional content needs to be added. It takes six or more months to understand bigger picture trends (such as how the article is performing against the competition) and see how changes made in the first three months will affect overall rankings and traffic, or whether or not it's leading to business results.

You can watch [this video](#) to see exactly what Google says about this topic.



At all points, ensure that your content is working towards business objectives



# How Search Engines Work

## Google's Ranking Factors

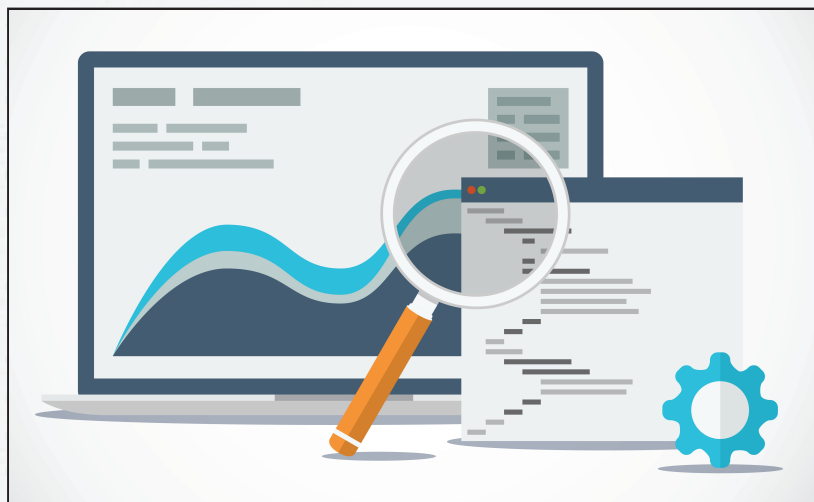
Search engines work by crawling the internet, indexing the content, and ranking the page and site based on an algorithm.

**Crawling** refers to the process a search engine takes to "crawl" code, content, and links on a page. Think of a spider crawling between different webs. Sitemaps are extremely important here. Most web builders automatically generate a sitemap for your website, and it's imperative that you upload this sitemap into Google Search Console in order to maximize SEO results.

**Indexing** refers to the process of the search engine storing your content in their database. This is similar to a library storing a book on the shelf of their respective category. Therefore, it's very important to utilize SEO Titles, Descriptions, and URL structure in order to help Google (the librarian) and users (the visitors of the library) to find the page (or book) and make it easily accessible to those looking for that content (based on the keyword search or respective category visitors of the library are looking for).

**Ranking** is simply the next part of the process where Google (or other search engines) sorts the content by relevance, and other factors. [Google still holds over 90% of the search market](#), so we will focus on Google's ranking algorithm. [Google's ranking algorithm is based on](#) the answering the following questions:

- Meaning of the search query - what is the intent behind the search query (looking for directions or instructions, etc.)?
- Relevance of web pages - does your keyword have the search query mentioned in the content?
- Quality of content - does your page demonstrate expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness?
- Usability of web pages - how accessible / functional is your page on all devices?
- Context and settings - what is the location of search, past search history of user, etc.?



# Basic SEO Terminology

## Google Search Console

[Google Search Console](#) is a free software provided by Google that allows you to monitor search results and how your site is performing from a technical perspective, as well as other troubleshooting tools.

[You can tie back your SEO Results to Google Analytics](#) in order to better understand how visitors are engaging with your site following an organic search click. In case of eCommerce or tracking form submissions through Google Goals, you are able to receive insight into what keywords and pages are driving the most conversions on your site. **In plain English, that means you can see what people are searching for that leads them to the pages they're taking action with on your website.**



## Meta Titles / Descriptions / URL

Meta titles, descriptions, and URL make up the technical SEO for your web page. These are completely under your control and important for ranking well. Further, these three technical inputs all appear during a Google search.

To define:

**Meta Title** Specifies the title of a web page. For example, a blog title we have is: "What is SEO?"

**Meta Description** Specifies the content of the page. For example, for the above blog title we would start the description with something like: "Search Engine Optimization is the process of..."

**URL** Address of the web page (or link in generic terms). For example: "www.and-marketing.com/what-is-seo"



# Structured Data, Schema, and SERP Features

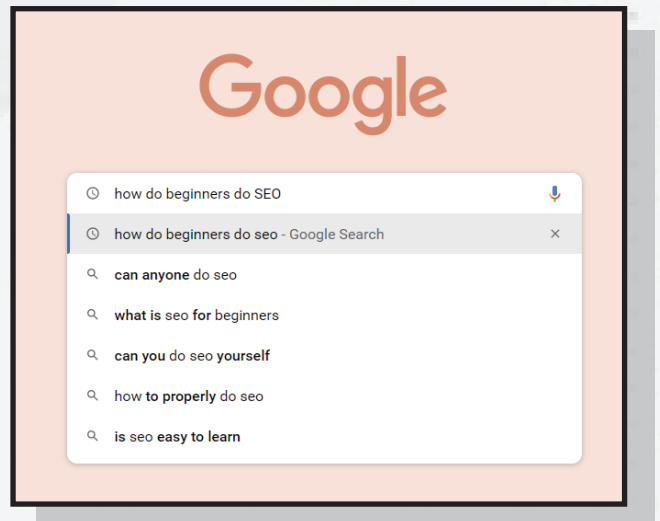
**Structured data** is information provided to help search engines understand the contents of the page. Structured data can also be referred to as “Schema Markup.”

Search engines have started allowing structured data through [Schema.org](https://schema.org), which allows you to label additional information on the backend of your web page for the search engine to better understand what the page is saying.

In adding **Schema**, you are able to boost your chances to get **SERP features**. SERP (or Search Engine Results Pages) features define the different types of content search engines display for a particular search.

For example, a search for “pizza” will result in local pizza places nearby as well as recipes. Similarly, a search for “SEO” will result in several questions, or People Also Ask (PAA) questions, that work to address commonly asked questions about the topic.

The map of local places, recipes, and PAA questions are all SERP features. SERP features follow different ranking rules than regular pages, allowing businesses to bypass the main ranking and land on the first page of the search engine results.



## Ranking / Average Position

**Ranking** refers to the order web pages/sites are listed due to relevance of the web page to the search query. In other words, web pages ranking in the top 3 positions are what Google (or other search engines) determine to be the best, most relevant information for the user who is searching.

When reviewing your own search analytics data, you are able to see **average position**, or where your page is listed within the rankings. A ranking or average position of 1 is the best—that means you are the top search result in Google for that term. Anything over 50 (past the first couple pages of Google) could use some revisiting.



## Impressions / Clicks

Clicks and impressions are both metrics within your analytics that help you determine how well your content is performing.

**Clicks** help determine how well your page is performing in terms of getting people to the site, whereas

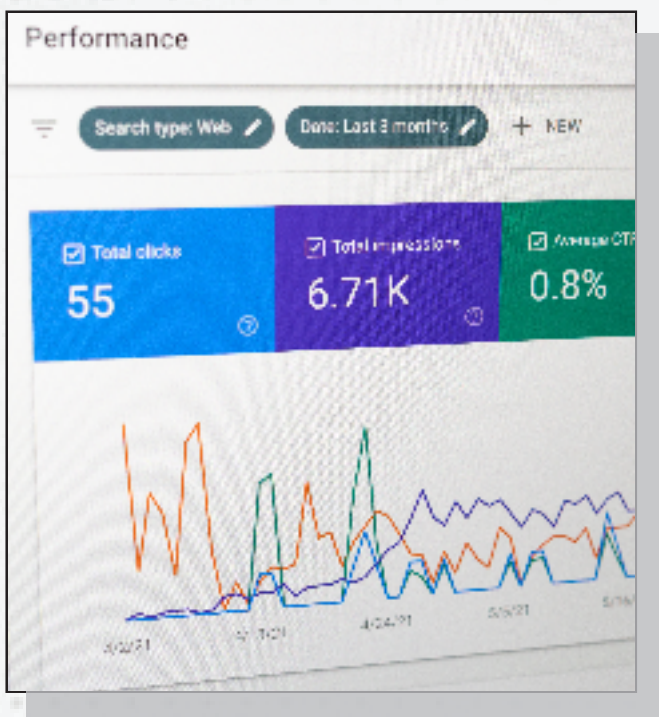
**Impressions** help determine how many times your page is seen for a given keyword.

To define:

**Clicks** - the number of times your web page has been clicked from a search engine

**Impressions** - the number of times your result has appeared for a given search query.

**Bonus: CTR or Click Through Rate** - the number of clicks as a percentage of overall impressions for the page / keyword



## Query / Keyword / Long Tail Keywords

**Query** (or **keyword**) refers to the words typed into the search bar of the search engine. Each word or phrase, including misspelled words, are separate queries — though multiple queries may result in similar results depending on spelling and phrasing.

When discussing keywords, you may hear about long tail keywords, or keyword searches with more than 3 words in the search phrase. Due to the complexity of language, **long tail keywords** are important, due to being easier to target and rank higher for. This is because long tail keywords usually give more context and are more specific to the topic the user is searching for help with.

For example, someone searching “pepperoni pizza” may be looking for a recipe, restaurant, or general information on nutritional value. Pepperoni pizza is a normal keyword, or sometimes called a **short tail keyword**.

A long tail keyword example would be “pepperoni pizza nutritional value,” where a user is most likely searching for the ingredients and nutrition value of a pepperoni pizza. It’s easier to rank for this longer tail keyword as you are not competing (as much) against restaurants trying to sell pizza.





# Branded vs Non-Branded Keywords

Generally speaking, SEO keywords may be broken into two high level categories: branded and non-branded keywords. **Branded keywords** are any keywords that contain some variation of your company name, whereas **non-branded keywords** are any keywords that do not contain your brand name. For example, “Domino’s Pizza” is a branded keyword and “pepperoni pizza” is an unbranded keyword.

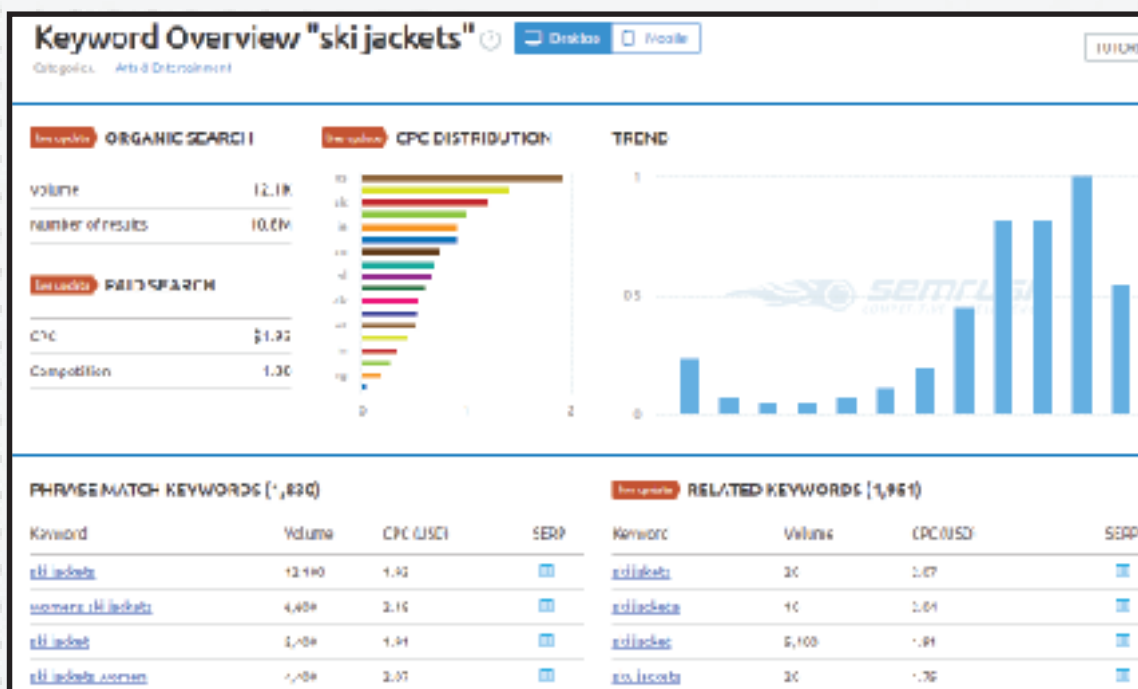
The majority of SEO strategy involves targeting non-branded keywords, as this is where you are able to expand your awareness and reach people who aren’t already familiar with your brand. When writing content that discusses your products and services, you want to make sure you are targeting the non-branded key term related to that topic.

While SEO strategy is focused on non-branded keywords, there are a few times where branded keywords are used. Most specifically, on the Home page, About page, Contact page, etc. on a website. This is important because when someone searches your brand name, you want to be sure your homepage is the top ranking page for your own business.

## Search Volume

**Search Volume** refers to the number of times a given query is searched (most often listed as per month). Search volume helps you understand the size of the search market and gives an understanding of how many impressions and clicks you might see for your web page.

For example, “pepperoni pizza” is searched 27.1k times per month (as of May 2022). With this, you can understand that your website will most likely never receive more than 30k impressions for the keyword. This compares to “pizza,” which is searched more than 2.2 million times per month.



# How to Build an SEO Strategy

## Understand User Intent

Due to language being complex, search queries can mean different things. For example, users searching for “Apple” may be searching for the juggernaut tech brand or the fruit. Google and other search engines utilize search intent in order to identify what a user is searching for and what results to show.

Intent can be [broken down into 4 categories](#) (there is some overlap):

Navigational intent	Informational intent
trying to find something (i.e. Apple’s website)	trying to learn more about something (i.e. What’s a good computer?)
Transactional intent	Commercial intent
trying to complete a specific action (i.e. buy Apple iPhone)	trying to learn more before making a purchase decision (i.e. iPhone vs Galaxy)

## Target Keywords

Keywords are important for SEO marketing, as they help give clues to what kind of content (blog, video, etc) and content (search intent) people are searching for. When you look at keywords and their search volume combined, you can put together an [SEO and content marketing strategy](#) that boosts your website to the top of search results.

**In most cases, you will want to target keywords that generate a relatively high number monthly searches and have low competition.** In other words, lots of people are searching Google for those terms and phrases, but not a lot of other businesses are targeting them, too. These terms also need to harmonize with:

1. Your products or services
2. The specific problem those products and services solve for your customers
3. What your audience is searching for in order to help them solve that problem



# Build and Create Content

Once you have planned your content, [activate your writing superpowers](#). Ensure your target keyword appears in the title, first header, and first paragraph of your content, while making sure all of the content is compelling and helpful enough that your target audience will stay engaged with your words. This may be the trickiest part of a good content marketing plan, as you are writing for both robots (Google) and humans.

Generally speaking, different website pages target different keywords. As mentioned above (in the Branded vs Non-Branded keywords section), there are some basic SEO standard recommendations for specific pages. Most often:

## Summary: Three Key Action Steps

- 1 The Home page targets branded keywords (or your brand name)**
- 2 The Services / Product pages target non-branded keywords and focus on what you offer**
  - If you sell financial services, target keywords like “financial services or “financial management”
  - If you sell tea, target keywords like “green tea” or “black tea”
- 3 The blog targets non-branded, and in most cases, longer tail keywords**
  - If you sell financial services, target keywords like “what is financial services?” or “why financial services?”
  - If you sell tea, target keywords like “what are the benefits of green tea?” or “how much caffeine is in black tea?”

SEO and content marketing plans, although they require time, strategy, and organization, have the potential to [drive high quality organic leads](#) for your business. Hold yourself accountable by creating a content calendar that sets your keyword targets and establishes due dates for your content creation.



# Black Hat & What to Avoid

Black Hat SEO refers to techniques used to manipulate the search algorithm to improve a site's ranking. By utilizing back hat tactics, you will be negatively impacting your website's performance to rank well. In some cases, you may be removed entirely from being indexed.

[Google's Webmaster Guidelines](#) lay out the different tactics to avoid in order to improve overall search rankings. In layman's terms, this means avoiding:

1. **Keyword Stuffing** - repeating your target keyword excessively
2. **Automatically Generated/Duplicate Content** - this is plagiarism!
3. **Hidden Text** - changing the text font to match the background so you can't see it
4. **Doorway/Gateway Pages** - targeting search queries with content intended to act as a funnel to another page (i.e. targeting geographic keywords where you don't have a physical presence)
5. **Cloaking** - presenting different content to humans and search engines  
i.e. serving a page of HTML text to search engines, while showing a page of images to users)
6. **Paid/Manipulative Links** - links should be earned, especially in the case of reviews  
(i.e. avoid backlinks in blog comments or forums)
7. **Misused Structured Data and Rich Snippets** - abusing or misusing Schema Markup  
(i.e. writing up fake 5 star reviews)
8. **Misleading Redirects** - sending visitors to a different URL than the one they thought (i.e. desktop users receiving a normal page, where mobile users are redirected to a completely different domain / similar to cloaking)
9. **Negative SEO** - creating unnatural links to a competitor's domain in hopes of penalizing them



## Interlinking: Inbound, Outbound, & Internal

Links, which lead visitors to another website or another web page, are incredibly beneficial to SEO rankings. Google utilizes different links (see below) in order to enhance rankings. For example, internal links help Google find related content, thereby improving the ranking of the related content pages.

Additionally, inbound links help Google identify how reputable sites are, or in other words, help improve your site's rankings if you have links from other domains with strong rankings. Your content is looked at with more authority if other sites are referring to you for reference or information.

We classify links as inbound links, outbound links, and internal links.

**Inbound links** are links from other website domains. Inbound links provide a major impact on SEO because they enhance credibility. It's important that inbound links are natural and not paid (see black hat tactics).

**Internal links** help distribute and improve rankings between other pages on your site. Furthermore, internal links are great for helping users navigate your website.

**Outbound links** do not have a major impact on SEO, though can help Google identify that you are a trusted source linking to other trusted sources. In any case, make sure outbound links are natural and link to high quality sites. Also, make sure you don't ever use your page's target keyword when linking to another page— it creates competition.



# Conclusion

SEO might seem like it's a complicated process with lots of acronyms and jargon. But once you understand what it is, why it's important, and how to approach it with a strategy that works, you can demystify this important marketing tactic and learn how to apply it to your business.

[In part two](#) of this eBook series, we'll walk you through how to measure success of SEO once you get started, tools to use that make SEO even easier and more effective, as well as a few bonus tips.

If you're trying to get your arms around SEO or are curious how leveraging this marketing strategy can help you generate more leads, grow your business, and meet your goals, [reach out to our resident SEO expert today](#).

---

## About the Author



### Dexter Burgess

Marketing Manager Dexter Burgess takes the lead on implementing new tactics and promoting change through data-driven strategies. Dex works hard at client relations through consistent communication and positive feedback, never settling until the customer is understood and happy.



### About &Marketing

&Marketing provides the robust outsourced marketing department growing companies need without the high overhead costs of big agencies or full-time employees. Our variable model empowers businesses to reach their growth goals through access to the guidance and expertise of senior level strategists and a flexible execution team.