



Scaling the Technology Iceberg

*Key Indicators to Elevate
Your Virtual Presence*

by Gabriel Ngo

“In a crowded marketplace, fitting in is a failure. In a busy marketplace, not standing out is the same as being invisible.”

—Seth Godin, American writer and a former dot-com business executive



In my last *Memento Mori* article, I wrote about the growing and essential importance of having your website truly be your virtual business as well as how online reviews are now more crucial than ever. However, that is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Relating your virtual business website to your physical location—and the general physical concepts regarding “curb appeal” and “location, location, location” being such vital components in real life—there are foundations you should understand to help ensure that you avoid “not standing out” and “being invisible” in a busy marketplace as the Seth Godin quote so eloquently captures.

There are approximately 5.18 billion internet users in 2023 (versus a world population of about 8.1 billion)—that is 64% of ALL people on this earth utilizing the internet in some form or fashion. Just to dispel any confusion, the “world wide web” is not quite the same as the internet, even though many people use both terms interchangeably. While the world wide web is the world’s dominant information systems platform, it exists on the internet along with many other information systems platforms.

For example, if you open Google on your computer, tablet, or phone, you will see the URL (which stands for “uniform resource locator”) bar with <https://www.google.com> appearing as its website address. What this means is that Google utilizes the world wide web as its information systems platform (as evidenced by the “www” in the URL address).

The “http” stands for “hypertext transfer protocol,” and it simply means that accessibility is in accordance with specific rules or protocols. The “s” at the end of “http” in the Google example denotes that Google’s website is “secure” by using encryption called “transport layer security” or “TSL” (formerly called “secure sockets layer” or “SSL”) for secure communication over the network (currently used by 80%+ of websites).

The easiest, most fundamental illustration of how this encryption works is as follows: Information that is being sent by one user from point A is shredded like a document in a paper shredder in-transit. However, when the information arrives at point B, that document becomes “whole” again.

Organic Search

Now with all those fundamentals out of the way, how does your website “stand out” virtually like a piece of premium property in a very busy and crowded marketplace that is the internet?

The answer lies in how your website performs when it is searched for—most notably when users are generally or “organically” searching for you or your services (e.g., “funeral home near me” or “crematory in Long Beach”)—and you want your website to appear near the very top of search engine results pages (SERPs).

I cannot take credit for this corny joke: Where is the best place to hide a dead body? On page 2 of a Google search since no one bothers to look there.” The reality is that less than 1% (around .63%) of Google users statistically ever click on a search result appearing on page 2 or beyond. Appearing first in a Google search generally garners something like 10 times the traffic and click-through rates compared to appearing 10th.

Understanding how these digital KPIs impact your virtual online business and doing something about it ensures that your curb appeal for your virtual business is maximized...

Search Position

Being first or appearing on the first page of a SERP in organic searches online is extremely important to claiming your space in the virtual world for your website. I am focusing on organic searches because unlike paid searches, it costs you nothing up front. Organic SEO centers around a few key concepts that require work and coordination:

- Key Word Research
- Content Optimization and Creation
- Technical Auditing
- Marketing Strategy(ies)

Start with having a technical audit performed for your website and its online digital presence. Think of this as a health checkup. Initially, your technical audit results will yield areas of improvement, directing you to the identified weaknesses, for example, Key Words, Content Optimization, and/or Website Design Optimization, that you can now set forth to improve.

Afterwards, you should periodically (perhaps semiannually) have a technical audit performed (again like a health check) to ensure that any weaknesses that have been identified are rectified and now improved—yielding you and your website optimum organic SEO positioning.

Key Performance Indicators

Some main areas of focus arising from technical audits will yield digital key performance indicators (KPIs) related to the three main areas of importance for organic SEO—relevancy, discoverability, and authority. Understanding these will only serve to help you build a solid foundation for your website and overall digital presence. These often include the following:

- **Key Citation Tracker Score**—This score is based on quantity and quality of your key citations. Consistency and accuracy in

your number of key citations will provide a higher overall score. In the United States, there are 38 important citation sites, and a technical audit in this area will search all 38 to uncover inaccuracies and incomplete business information. Within key citations, there are four areas of focus (with the latter three being often abbreviated as “NAP” or “Name Address Phone” breakdowns):

- Whether your business is **Listed versus Not Listed** (yields a “percentage found”)
- Accuracies/inaccuracies in **Name** (e.g., “Frey-Henley Funeral Home” vs. “Frey-Henley Funeral Service”)
- Accuracies/inaccuracies in **Address** (e.g., “North 16th Street” vs. “N. 16th St.”)
- Accuracies/inaccuracies in **Phone Number**
- **Links and Authority**—This technical audit area reports on some key SEO indicators that play a big part in how high your business ranks in search engine results. This addresses discoverability and authority for your website links and domain.
- **Key Word Tracker**—This audit area reports the positions or rankings that your website appears in for important key words. For example, if you perform a large percentage of cremations but your website does not highlight, speak about, or educate the user—*i.e.*, your website does not have the word “cremation” embedded enough throughout—an audit in this area will identify this weakness and recommend that you ameliorate this issue as a focus on relevancy and authority.
- **Local Listings**—It is critical that address(es) and contact information be correct and consistent across the internet for local businesses. This provides reliable information to search engines (like Google) about your online business and ensures that users can find you and contact you, addressing discoverability and authority.
- **Reputation**—As evidenced by Foresight’s 2023 Funeral

Cemetery Consumer Behavioral Study (FCCBS), online reviews are important (and will increasingly become more important) to the consumer. This audit area inspects the most important online review sites and reports back on your total reviews, average rating, and score for your website.

- **Google Business Profile**—An audit in this area analyzes your Google Business Profile (GBP) for optimization and reports on several important criteria and benchmarks your website against the top 10 ranked businesses in your area.
- **On-Site SEO**—This audit area focuses on your website itself and whether your website is optimized in design and creation—think of it as being the virtual equivalent of having your electrical and plumbing inspected for your physical business. Issues such as coding, missing pages, or broken internal links that you (or the user) might not be able to see, but search engines can, will hinder your website from optimal discoverability.

Find a Partner

The speed at which technology moves and changes can be daunting. The good news is we have friends in the profession who can help. While media companies focus slightly differently in their approach to helping you market your business, they are all proficient with technology and can help you uncover many of the internet/technology issues discussed above.

While our profession has been somewhat insulated from being adopters of technology, that technology and change are coming for us all. To come back to the physical, brick and mortar business versus the virtual website business analogy, creating and having your website is merely establishing your presence/space virtually online—your virtual building, if you will.

Understanding how these digital KPIs impact your virtual online business and doing something about it ensures that your curb appeal for your virtual business is maximized—that there are no directional/GPS issues allowing others to find your virtual business; that your reputation with the online community is in good standing; that your virtual business has a fresh coat of

paint on it always (or at least has been presurized clean); that all the guts, plumbing, electrical wiring of your virtual business is working properly.

As the opening quote portends—especially with roughly 3.5 billion Google searches occurring daily, deciding not to participate in understanding how the brave new world functions digitally and virtually will ensure that you and your business are not “standing out,” “fitting in for failure,” and will become “invisible”—digitally and eventually in real life. ☒

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