



presents:

Simple SEO Audit Doubles Application Completion

a digital marketing case study

A laptop computer is shown from a slightly elevated angle, displaying the website of North American Trade Schools. The website has a dark header with a navigation bar containing links for HOME, ABOUT, PROGRAMS, RESOURCES, ADMISSIONS, CAREER SERVICES, FINANCIAL AID, APPLY, and CONTACT. The main content area features a large orange "APPLY NOW!" button with a pencil icon. To the right of the button is a video thumbnail showing two men working on machinery, with the text "Diesel Technology" overlaid. Below the video is a section titled "Are You A Veteran?" with a "Click Here" button. The left side of the page lists various program offerings: Building Construction Technology, Commercial Truck Driving, Electrical Technology, Diesel Technician, Heating, Refrigeration, Ventilation & Air Conditioning Technology (HRVAC), Combination Welding, Industrial Maintenance, Motorcycle & Power Equipment Technology. At the bottom, there are sections for "HAVE A QUESTION?" (with a "Click to Chat Live" button) and "GET STARTED TODAY!" (featuring a photo of a smiling man). The footer contains contact information: "Call: 800-638-5490" with social media icons for Facebook, Google+, and YouTube, along with an address: "6901 Security Blvd. Ste 16 Baltimore, MD 21244" and a "Contact Us Today" button. The overall design is professional and focused on career training.

The Company



Type

Trade School

Website

<http://www.natradeschools.edu/>

Case Study Content

Marketing

SEO

Keyword Targeting

Introduction

North American Trade Schools (NATS) provides career training services in Northern Maryland. In 2013, their website featured a variety of upper-funnel and lower-funnel content, but several key pages were underperforming in terms of attracting new visitors. The NATS executive team wanted to improve the relevancy of these pages for competitive search queries used during the busy final half of the 2013 year.

The Problems NATS Faced

Eroding ROI From Traditional Media

NATS has always spent the vast majority of marketing and advertising dollars on more traditional media—namely, television—but they found costs rising quickly and returns drying up. They'd experienced triple-digit organic gains in visits and leads after we implemented our first Backbone in 2009, but they needed another spark to support an expanded sales team and make up for less efficient media investments. They came to us for help.

Missed SEO Opportunities

NATS website featured a variety of topics for visitors in all stages of the decision-making process. There were several key pages that weren't attracting as many prospective students as the client had hoped—their two most popular course pages and a page with general job placement information.

Keyword targeting was too broad in general, terms were overly competitive and lacked specific buying intent. There were also opportunities to add or update other important SEO points—internal links, metadata, and contextually-related keywords.

Previous SEO efforts helped the pages rank for some search queries, but there was still immediate opportunity for improvement.

Algorithmic Woes

Another issue faced by the NATS team was the depth of the content provided on the website. The content covered many topics, but each page did not contain enough original information to be considered for a top result in Google searches.

Google's Panda update released the previous year periodically re-evaluated websites with “thin” content. Originally targeting overt spam pages used in linking schemes, each refresh of the Panda update increased the scope of websites being evaluated. Depth and authority of content became even more important for NATS website.

What We Did

Periodic SEO Audits

The WebMechanix team identified SEO opportunities on certain high-potential pages during a routine quarterly site audit.

Trade school
increases traffic

67%

to key course pages
with high-impact
SEO activities.

We advised refining the keyword targeting to include less competitive, long-tail phrases that had both substantial search volume, as well as clear commercial intent.

After locating the right keywords, we updated the page's metadata and built certain links both internally & externally to and from the key pages. We also included contextually important keywords and synonyms to help improve the page's overall relevancy for the topic.

Comprehensive Article Upgrades

During our SEO audit, we also made note of the lack of content depth on certain pages. While these pages had performed well historically, they had been sluggish over the recent past. Word counts ranged from 100 words to 250 words and failed to elaborate on specifics of certain programs or clearly articulate the reason someone may choose NATS over a competitor.

To remedy the lack of original content, we re-wrote the pages, expanded the scope of the information generally, added frequently asked questions, testimonials and a clear call-to-action alongside NATS' key differentiators. Of course, certain keywords were used very consciously. Each page was brought up to 400+ words and positioned to eventually have child pages for more specific information.

How Things Turned Out

The changes made following our SEO audit yielded very positive results for the key pages. Heading into the final quarter of 2012, organic visitors increased 66.99%! That number remained strong year over year, as well. Traffic was up another 30.33% the following year!

Our refined keyword selection and article depth also substantially benefitted our goal conversion rate. Visitors landing on those key pages were now more than twice as likely to fill out an application after our edits—application completion rate had jumped by 106.50%!

We successfully attracted more visitors to these pages through search and they were applying at a much higher rate than ever before.

The bedrock of our process is the belief that optimization should make an impact in the short-term and the long-term. Our changes were not focused on attracting more people—we wanted to attract more of the right people. We also wanted to provide these visitors with helpful, valuable information. It smoothed the user experience by fulfilling and exceeding user expectations for information they should expect and made applying even easier.



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