

Google world

Most restaurant searches will be made through Google, so make sure your website is highly visible to the mother of all search engines

Type the word restaurant into Google and a mere 306 million results come up. What this should tell you is that while Google is a great source of information it also holds rather a lot of it - and that if you want to stand out from the millions of other businesses doing the same thing as you, you've really got your work cut out.

All is not lost, however. Consumers are rarely going to search solely for a restaurant by that single word, but will define their search - either by choosing a location, a price bracket or a cuisine. According to Livebookings, 66% of Brits frequently use generic search terms such as 'Italian in Soho' to locate somewhere to eat. Seventy-one per cent also stated Google was their preferred method of searching for restaurants, yet only 42% of restaurants use Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to improve their online rankings.

It is here that you can try and push your restaurant further up the Google search rankings, and there are a number of tools, both free and paid for, at your disposal.

Search Engine Optimisation

SEO is integral to helping people find you easily online - and this means designing a website that is search-engine-friendly.

SEO is very important when it comes ▶

How well are you doing?

A well-visited restaurant should aim for the following monthly stats:

Bounce rate **22.5%**

Pages per visit **5**

Average time on site **4 minutes**

Percentage of new visits **67%**



▶ to attracting people to your site. Your domain name aside, three key things are picked up by the search engine and used to rank you: page titles (meta-tags), headings and body content. If you use meta-tags they should be different on every page and aligned with the page title tag, heading and keywords used on the page.

"A restaurant should utilise its meta-tags on every page of content and ensure its web address is reflected through every possible avenue in their business," advises Flatcap Marketing's John Pallagi.

Much more important, however, are links that can make a website user-friendly and highly visible to Google. These can be inbound links from other relevant sites - for example, food blogs, review sites or industry websites - as well as internal links within the site itself. Internal links to key pages such as your reservations, menus and the home page help users, as well as Google, to find what they need quickly and emphasise the relative importance of those pages compared to others on the site.

For effective SEO it is also worth following a few other simple rules. First, it is essential all the important information is available as text rather than images, which search spiders can't read. Second, add an XML sitemap to Google Webmaster Tools to make sure your pages can be found easily. Also, make sure your physical address is available in all the page footers to make Google pick you up more readily in local searches. So, if you're a Chinese restaurant in Mayfair you will be high up the Google search results when someone searches 'Chinese restaurant in Mayfair'.

Pay Per Click

If you think that getting your restaurant high up the Google search page is a bit of a lottery then there is the option of investing money to remove the chance element. Pay Per Click (PPC) services, such as Google AdWords, enable restaurants to do this by

Checklist

- ◆ Do you use Google AdWords to get more visitors?
- ◆ Do you use Google Analytics to measure performance?
- ◆ Have you created meta-tags?
- ◆ Does your website link to external sites and those sites link to you?
- ◆ Have you added your site map to Google Webmaster Tools?

placing relevant ads on the right-hand-side of its search results pages. Restaurants create the adverts and bid on keywords, which are words or phrases related to their business, so when people search on Google using one of your keywords your advert may appear next to the results.

"The advantage of PPC is that it is an instant form of marketing if you've got the budget," says Mark Jansen, senior online marketing manager at Livebookings.

With PPC you can control how your results appear on a search engine. Search results down the middle of the page are driven organically by SEO listings and Google decides which links to put underneath the search depending on their relevance to the site. So under a restaurant search Google may add links for menus, general enquires and locations. However, using PPC a restaurant can choose which links drop down, such as one that will take the visitor to a new menu or voucher. "This makes it easier to direct customers to something specific and takes them there with fewer clicks. It creates more chance of getting them to book," says Jansen.

How much a restaurant pays for keywords depends on their relevance to it. Jansen says Google rates a keyword's quality score and the more relevant the word is to a business, the less they pay for

it. If Chez Gérard wanted its name as a Google keyword, it would probably only be a few pence, because Google recognises it is the name of the business.

Google Analytics

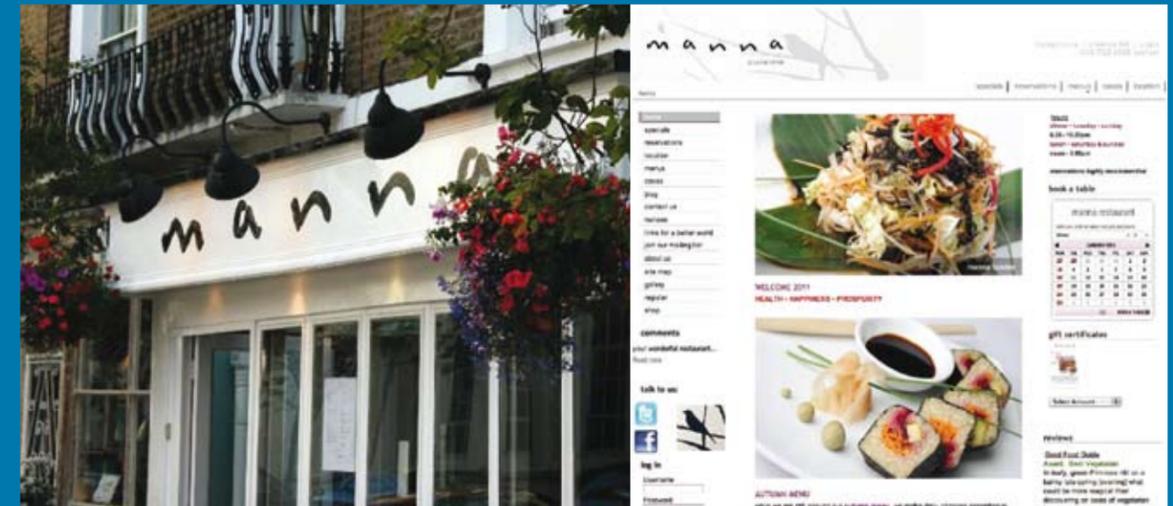
Google Analytics is a free web analytics solution that can give restaurants a rich insight into their website traffic and marketing effectiveness, and helps turn page views into profits. Every time a person does something on your website you can see it, such as where they came from, what page they landed on, how long they stayed on the page, what they clicked next and if they came back.

These statistics provide a fantastic opportunity to learn more about your customers and see which of your online activities (newsletters, social media, AdWords etc) lead to paying customers.

Using the Livebookings interface on your website you have the ability to record a 'goal' in Google Analytics every time a booking is made. For example, Google Analytics can tell you the total number of visitors to your website, the average number of pages per visit, the conversion rate of how many visitors made a booking and your 'bounce rate' - the percentage of initial visitors to your site who bounce away to a different site rather than staying.

All this shows a restaurant whether it needs to change its website design to get people to linger longer or, alternatively, make it more user-friendly to speed up its effectiveness. It also tells them exactly how many potential customers its site is reaching, so that marketing campaigns can be tailored accordingly.

"Google Analytics, correctly set up, can give you a staggering wealth of information," says Magnus Hultberg, strategic advisor at Livebookings. "Where people come from, what time of day they arrive at your website, etc. Information that you can use to your advantage." ■



Case Study Manna, London

Vegetarian restaurant Manna in London's Primrose Hill is a long-standing, successful neighbourhood restaurant. However, its owner Roger Swallow wanted to put in place a more efficient customer communication process than the one it previously used so that his restaurant would have a wider reach and could gain access to new customers.

Previously the restaurant kept its existing customers updated using an email management system, but it found this to be too time-consuming and had a negative impact on the staff's daily duties - they didn't have the time to send out emails and take bookings.

What Manna needed was a record-keeping and database management system that was user-friendly and fuss-free to operate, enabling it to build a more comprehensive customer database, but also ensuring the restaurant still had the time to focus on the most important part of its business - the food.

Manna eventually turned to Livebookings to help it increase covers in addition to online traffic to its website.

Using Livebookings' expertise the restaurant implemented Google Analytics and the Livebookings Barometer to help measure the success of its online initiatives. A comprehensive data management system was installed to help manage Manna's online bookings and electronic mail-outs. It enabled the restaurant to capture customer data from bookings made on Manna's own website as well as Livebookings' range of Network Partner websites. This meant that Manna could market itself more effectively to customers after the initial booking had been made.

"Having a professional system and reliable data is an enormous attribute in helping to impress on staff the seriousness with which we undertake our mission," says Swallow.

In the first seven months of using its new Livebookings systems, Manna's average weekly online/email reservations increased 100% from the previous nine-month period. The ratio of Livebookings to email reservations in those seven months had gone from 0% to approximately 90% and Manna now manages booking enquiries and a

growing customer base significantly more efficiently.

The benefits are manifold, according to Swallow. "The results have been time savings, time savings, time savings... in that order," he says. "Our phone reservations have gone down significantly and our email reservations have dwindled to almost nothing. On a good week, Livebookings rules. We also feel that the Livebookings' interface is well integrated into the design of our website, and that is very important.

"The ability to explore the immediate options available in an ever-changing media world and have thorough marketplace analysis in place for fast feedback is a long-term goal of ours," he adds. "Meeting the Livebookings team gave us the feeling that we were no longer alone in the daunting task of merging a restaurant and IT."

In addition, Manna also signed up to attend the Livebookings Academies, which has enabled it to stay up to date with the evolving booking technologies available. Livebookings runs a number of academies throughout the year, covering numerous marketing topics.

Top tips

- ◆ Create accurate page titles to explain the content of a page with a maximum of 62 characters
- ◆ Use unique meta-tags for each page to allow search engines to distinguish it from other pages
- ◆ Frequently use words/phrases in the headings and copy that your visitors use to find you and to describe your restaurant or food
- ◆ Use description meta-tags to give search engines a summary of the content of the page. Remember this is often displayed in the search engine results
- ◆ Use SEO-friendly URLs that say what the page is about to make users more likely to click on and remember
- ◆ Link to other pages on your site and to relevant external sites. Avoid link text 'click here' or 'more info'
- ◆ Encourage external sites to link to your site

