Allied Churches of Alamance County

Search Engine Optimization Audit

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Summary

As part of the comprehensive plan for elevating the online presence of Allied Churches of Alamance County (ACAC), changes need to be made to specific parts of the code that the website is built on. Many of the suggestions made in this document will need to be addressed by the webmaster, since they are in the code itself. These suggestions are meant to optimize the way that search engines find and understand the Allied Churches website, and successful implementation of these changes will lead to higher standing in search engine results for the organization. Our team has identified both global and specific areas to focus on in order to optimize the website's search engine results.

Global

On the global level, elements of the navigation are some of the easiest fixes for optimizing the site. In particular, the "WHAT we do", "WHY we do it", "WHO we impact", "current NEEDS", and "what YOU can do" should all be changed to better describe their linked sections. Our suggestion is to change those titles to "Our Mission" (combining the "WHAT" and "WHY" sections), "Our Community" (the "WHO" section), and "Your Support" (combining "Needs" and "You" sections). These changes fall closer in line with user expectations for navigation, and help search engines to better understand the content of those sections.

The grammar standards outlined in the navigation should also extend to all pages of the ACAC site. Any article or page titles with atypical capitalization or punctuation should be changed to follow AP style guidelines to provide users with better guidance through the website. While this may seem like a small change, adherence to AP guidelines will assist search engine crawlers to better catalogue the ACAC website. News articles should cut down on redundancies in the titles, and should follow the formula: Description of article content | ACAC. In practice, that looks like "Jane Smith Hired as New Program Director | ACAC".

As a last global level issue with the website, the favicon (icon that appears beside the page title at the top of a web browser in the tab) should be changed from the Drupal water drop to a black and white version of the ACAC compass icon. The size of that image should be 16 x 16 pixels in order to work with most web browsers.

Specific

The specific instances of issues preventing the search engine optimization of Allied Churches' site will, again, need to be handled by the webmaster. The easiest of these

changes will be to migrate any pages that return a 301 status code to their canonical (original) parent pages (i.e. updating the publish date on www.alliedchurches.org/history so that it is recognized by search engines as the original page). The 404 pages should also either be returned to their canonical parents, or just outright deleted from the site index. Our analysis indicates that most of those pages could be deleted without any affect to a user's experience with the site, since only eight of the 453 pages associated with the Allied Churches website have either a 301 or 404 status code. Determining these codes, and fixing the problems, should be an easy task for your webmaster to complete.

Next, the site index needs to be cleared of any duplicate pages. Our assessment indicates this could substantially streamline the site, which, in turn, helps increase the search engine page ranking for the site as a whole. Specifically, any duplicate pages missing "www." from the beginning of the address should be deleted. Moving forward, any pages added to the Allied Churches site should have a "www." in their title to maintain consistency. Search engines algorithms can read pages both with and without the "www." distinction, so duplicating the page only slows the search engine's ability to index the rest of the Allied Churches site. Additionally, an XML sitemap can be created to help search engines index the site. It is not quite as beneficial for a relatively small site, like ACAC's, but it will also never have a negative impact on SEO.

A similar principle should be applied to any pages containing images or links with computer generated titles (ex. img_04022). Any titles or links should be readable by humans (ex. foodDrive.jpg) to ensure that the image or link is properly indexed with the rest of the site. Images in particular should also have meta descriptions of no more than 150 words attached in the website's html. There should also be a meta description added in the head of the index.html file so that a more accurate description of the organization is displayed with its search engine results. These descriptions have a direct correlation to raising ACAC's search engine ranking, and are displayed in a number of secondary and tertiary avenues that would bring users back to the main Allied Churches website.

Conclusion

These recommendations will improve how ACAC appears on search engines to the user, and to the search engine indexing bots. Invariably, some of the recommendations will simultaneously improve the user experience of the site. For example, having consistent titles and a more relevant favicon will help with navigation across tabs and provide more consistency in regards to the site and brand identity. ACAC is already in a good position in terms of SEO. All off-site contact points are positive, and relate back to ACAC in the right ways. The off-site points fall into two general categories: information (i.e. the yellow pages,

yelp, and alamance government sites) and affiliation(i.e. Churches and organizations who send volunteers). It is important to maintain those relationships, and periodically check that the off-site SEO remains current. By adopting some or all of the recommendations discussed in this report, the site should be in an even better position for both users and indexing bots to find and learn about ACAC.