ANDREW FAULKNER

Search Engine Optimization

CASE STUDY

Learn how I helped a college admissions consulting firm transform their online presence through Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy. This case study highlights the steps taken to increase organic traffic, improve search rankings, and drive qualified leads.

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SEO Campaign Case Study

Introduction

The client featured in this case study is a college admissions consulting firm based in a large U.S. city that is top five in population. Their primary purpose is to help students gain admission to Ivy League and other top-tier colleges across the country through application consulting, candidacy building, and test preparation. They work with students locally but also serve clients abroad who seek to enroll their children at American universities.

The client engaged our agency in 2020, and in their words were looking into the "possibility of growing their marketing." I took a discovery call with them to better understand their company structure, and goals, and to see if our services were a good fit.

At the time, this client was decently successful in their market and had gained most of their business through referrals from previous clients. The college admissions counseling space is competitive, and to grow faster, they needed guidance to build a more complete marketing and paid media strategy, which was previously nonexistent.

After two meetings with their team, I recommended that they consider an SEO campaign to generate organic traffic and supplement the referral leads that they were receiving. I saw it as an opportunity to better establish them in their local market, and also as a means of increasing their exposure to international students and families across the country struggling with the difficulties of the admissions process for elite schools.

I was an integral part of the sales process and was the liaison for this client for the duration of our engagement. I also developed the SEO strategies found in this case study and implemented them with the help of my designer, and the client, and took lead on all strategy and reporting for the project.

Project Overview

When I started working with the client, they had a WordPress website that was aesthetically sound, but was thin on content, lacked structure, and didn't properly communicate the depth of their services. The website had few to no blog posts, and the

service and home pages were sparse. In the month I started, they had **fewer than 50 monthly visitors** to their website.

After meeting with the client to set goals and KPIs for the campaign, we established that our campaign was intended to increase their organic traffic to **2,000 visitors per month**, and eventually generate leads for them. For context, they were understanding that SEO takes time, and we didn't set an initial benchmark number of leads until I worked through the first phase of improving the website.

Approach

In our initial onboarding process with the client, I conducted a competitive analysis in the admissions consulting industry, developed a list of improvements that we needed to make to the website, and determined what types of content we needed to create to start ranking for long-tail keywords of reasonable difficulty.

In my competitive analysis, I created a report for the client showing them various aspects of each competitor's website that would have an influence on our ability to outrank them for certain keywords. I found that it would be difficult and inefficient to attempt to compete for broad terms like "college admissions consulting" and that we should start our campaign focusing on school-specific keywords and other parts of the application process. For example "What tense do I write my college essay in?," "Rice University average GPA," and other question-based or informational searches that applicants to top tier schools would be searching.

Over the course of our campaign, I helped the client, with assistance from their in-house writer, to create over 350 blog posts, 30 resource pages, 100 university-specific and high-school specific guides, six case studies, an e-book, and other supporting pages to rank for the terms on our target keyword list. I also led the effort to create a new set of uniform service pages that had higher word counts and more effectively communicated the client's capabilities.

I pivoted the approach and introduced new tactics many times, but about a year into the campaign is when we started to target more difficult keywords that had previously been out of reach. At this point, we built upon the foundation we had created with our new collection of blogs and resource pages by creating location-specific landing pages, test prep boot camp landing pages, and other ancillary website content.

I also developed a backlink portfolio for the company and generated features for them in outlets like College Confidential and several industry podcasts, which was a piece of the success that you'll see in the results section. Although I understand the importance of link building, we prioritized content creation for about the first year of our campaign.

To communicate our progress, collaborate on various pieces of the campaign, and generate new ideas, I led weekly check-in meetings with their Founder and CEO, their Director of Business Development, and a few other team members with sporadic involvement in our efforts.

Results

In summary, our campaign achieved the following:

- Increased the client's number of external links from 15 to 1,364
- Increased the client's domain authority from 3 to 21 according to Moz
- Increased the client's monthly visits from under 50 to over 24,000 in two years (88% of total traffic was organic from search engines)
- Increased the client's number of ranking keywords from 8 to over 9,300 in two years (over 19,000 according to SpyFu, another reporting tool we use)
- Ranked the client's website on the first page for "college admissions consulting," "college application coaching," and other high-value keyphrases in their local market

As a result of our campaign's success and the client's increase in leads, they were able to raise their prices and double the average revenue per customer in two years to the month. I have a great working relationship with them and engaged them in a paid media campaign and email marketing campaign after they saw the results of our efforts. At this point, we started running Google Ads and sending monthly newsletters to supplement our SEO progress.

Below is the growth of organic clicks and impressions over the first two years of our relationship. In September 2021 we helped facilitate a domain switch from .net to .com and were able to successfully complete the migration with minimal loss of traffic and rankings. The website recovered seamlessly and impressions/clicks continued to improve shortly thereafter.
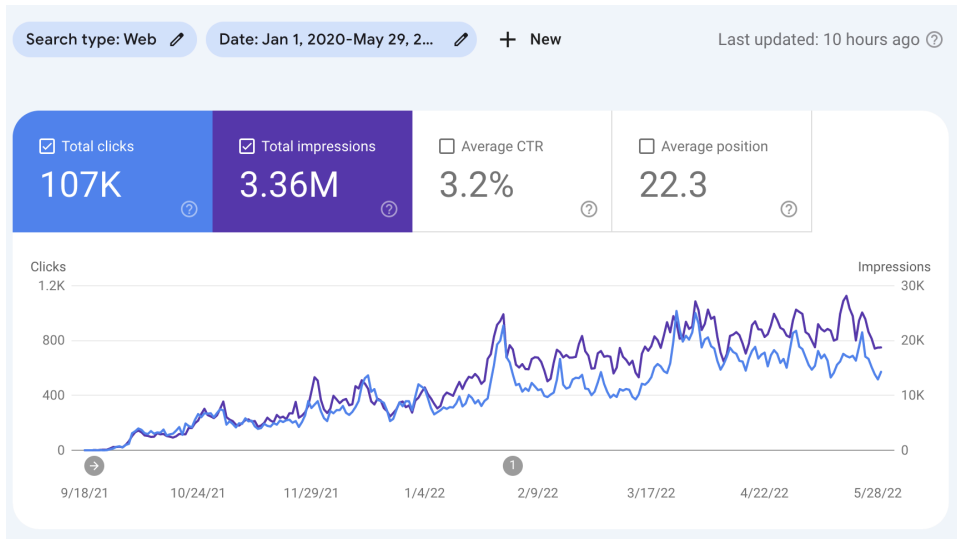
The visual below shows the domain authority and number of ranking keywords, according to Moz, after two years of working with the client.

Ranking Keywords	Top Positions	Page Authority	Domain Authority
9.3k	141 keywords in #1-3 629 keywords in #4-10	27	21

The visual below shows the monthly website traffic our client received after a little over two years into the campaign.
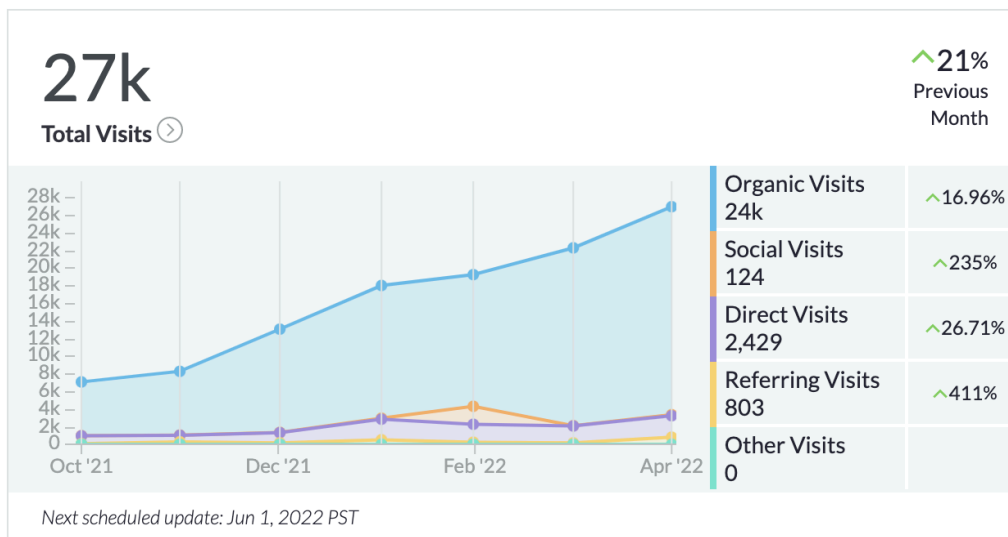
Here are some examples of the many resources I advised and helped the client to create based on our competitive analysis, keyword research, and content strategy. The client helped write the copy found on these pages, while I developed the concept and created the designs.

- https://www.ivyscholars.com/college-application-ebook/
- https://www.ivyscholars.com/houston-college-admissions-consultant/
- https://www.ivyscholars.com/admission-tools/
- https://www.ivyscholars.com/college-admissions-faq/
- https://www.ivyscholars.com/knowledge-base/
- https://www.ivyscholars.com/university-guides/

Below are examples of some keywords that we were able to rank the client's website on the first page. This is nowhere near an exhaustive or complete list but shows that the strategy I created allowed us to rank for keywords and phrases associated with different points in the customer journey or buying cycle.

Keyword	Rank www.ivy...	Monthly Volume	Difficulty	Organic CTR
college admissions coaching United States - en-US Tracked Analyzed 05/31/2022	#3 ivyschol...	64	28	83%
admission coaching United States - en-US Analyzed 05/31/2022	#1 ivyschol...	30	20	83%
college application coaching United States - en-US Analyzed 05/31/2022	#3 ivyschol...	10	29	53%
pro bono college counseling United States - en-US Analyzed 05/31/2022	#1 ivyschol...	1	10	88%
ut acceptance rate United States - en-US Analyzed 05/31/2022	#2 ivyschol...	2,853	40	36%
ut austin acceptance United States - en-US Analyzed 05/31/2022	#1 ivyschol...	143	45	64%
intellectual vitality essay United States - en-US Analyzed 05/31/2022	#1 ivyschol...	153	20	96%

Final Thoughts

I'm extremely proud of the results this campaign achieved, considering the industry is highly competitive and filled with many former admissions officers, counselors, and others with a deep understanding of the landscape and what parents are looking for in a consultant. The college admissions process was something I enjoyed when I was applying to universities in high school, and I'm proud to think that I helped well-deserving students find and connect with our client who is capable of helping them gain acceptance to their dream schools.

Our client's Founder and CEO was happy to provide our agency with a testimonial after about a year and a half of working together and seeing the results of my efforts:

"Most CG has been professional, results-oriented, and sharp. I hired them when our firm's business relied heavily on several large clients whose contracts were ending. After working with them for two years, our local SEO has improved drastically. With their help appealing to our community, we're more profitable even after losing our largest clients. Their hard work has been instrumental in our development."

In summary, this was one of my favorite campaigns and one of the most rewarding projects I led during my time at Most because it started at a time when I was still developing my SEO skills and it gave me additional experience with a client outside of our typical industry of focus.