

BUILDING AN SEO CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

A Practical, Proven Way Every Brand Can Simplify, Structure and Scale SEO



INTRODUCTION

Enterprise SEO is hard.

Scaling enterprise SEO is even harder. Yet, despite the many challenges, global enterprises can - and do - make SEO simpler and scalable.

And when they do, they enjoy incredible success.

We know. We've worked with, have helped, and continue to help many global enterprises achieve this success.

The key to this success is a specific approach to SEO. When applied, it establishes what we call an **SEO Center of Excellence**. Over the years, it has proven itself time and time again.

And, what's great about this approach is that it can be adapted to any enterprises' current state of SEO.

With it, every SEO effort becomes simpler and scales easier. It also changes the way you think about enterprise SEO. This might seem like a challenge for an enterprise, but we expect you'll find:

- Your enterprise has probably applied this thinking in all its other efforts.
- It makes SEO much easier to adopt across the enterprise.



When you do adopt it, you'll find it's easier to overcome the many challenges of enterprise SEO like:

- **Many users and stakeholders**, each with varying levels of knowledge, differing roles and differing goals
- **Many sites**, which introduce multiple, fragmented uses of different technologies, websites with thousands of pages, sections and categories
- **Constant change**, as organic search and technology constantly evolve
- **Many versions of "the truth"** with different reporting systems and different approaches to analysis that make it nearly impossible to establish clear, hard facts

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If these challenges aren't enough, enterprise SEOs find that it's even harder to produce results that are:



Consistent



Measurable



Repeatable

Aren't these types of results what every enterprise and enterprise SEO want?

Of course they are! The challenge is getting there. In this ebook, we will share with you the proven **SEO Center of Excellence** approach that:

- Produces consistent, measurable and repeatable results,
- Overcomes the challenges of enterprise SEO, and
- Lays the foundation for a Global SEO Center of Excellence.

“Enterprise SEO is hard. It's hard because of this problem of scale. Organizations need to appreciate all that goes into making SEO work - every team needs to understand and be involved in SEO throughout the entire enterprise.”

MITUL GANDHI

Co-Founder and
Chief Product Architect



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CHAPTER 1 **The Case for the SEO Center of Excellence**

In the past, a talented SEO or team of SEOs could do it alone. Keyword and link-building tactics could keep pace with the search engine evolution. SEO business units could operate in regional silos and still produce great results.

Search is different today. Machine-learning, AI, and semantic content have shifted the focus from search engines to the user. Search continues to evolve at an ever-increasing speed making enterprise SEO more complex and difficult to manage.

Enterprise SEO has evolved beyond simply adding keywords and acquiring links to a page. Now, **successful SEO** involves:



Technical Audits - requires IT



Data Analysis - needs marketing analysts



Content Marketing - requires creative



Collaboration - needs buy-in from all stakeholders



Reporting - relies on integrated tech



Stakeholder Training - complex in an enterprise environment

... and, of course, the SEO (or SEO team) must manage the whole thing!

This requires managing many different teams of stakeholders to meet content, social and technical needs.

Having many sites across the globe only increases the complexity.

- Fragmented tech stacks make it hard to manage technology efficiently, especially across a global organization.
- Different approaches may make it hard for different teams to work together in an effective and collaborative way.
- Multiple technologies may also present training challenges that can limit collaboration.
- Different approaches to reporting make it hard for organizational leaders to measure SEO success.

With so many different systems and processes, scaling SEO quickly taxes the limited resources of every enterprise. Even the most talented SEOs have only 24 hours in a day.

These are some of the challenges, and they're the reason the techniques of yesterday don't work today.

SEARCH HAS EVOLVED FOR THE BETTER

You know search has evolved. What's important to see is that it's evolved in a way that is better for everyone - users, SEOs and every stakeholder in an organization.

Today, SEO is a team game. Enterprises still need great SEO talent. Although it's out there, it is sparse - but, even great SEO talent isn't enough.

Successful enterprise SEO relies on many different elements that more than one person or team can provide. Tactics aimed at beating search engines - something SEOs or teams of SEOs could do in the past - won't cut it today. RankBrain, semantic search and the rise of voice and mobile search changed SEO forever.

Now, enterprise SEO success demands an all-encompassing approach. The **SEO Center of Excellence** delivers, supports, and guides that approach.

THE SEO CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

We developed the **SEO Center of Excellence** to meet all of today's SEO challenges.

- It **Simplifies** SEO, not only for SEOs, but for everyone in the enterprise.
- It provides a well-defined **Structure** to the SEO effort, guiding everyone and every action with clear standard operating procedures to ensure a consistent effort and provide accountability.
- It makes it possible to **Scale** SEO in a way that meets every challenge and, more importantly, improves the user experience.

The **SEO Center of Excellence** is not a theory. It's a proven approach that works. It grew out of our experience of:

- Living SEO every day;
- Observing the challenges facing enterprise SEO programs; and,
- Working with enterprises enjoying SEO success.

You see, over the years we noticed all enterprise SEO efforts faced three similar challenges:

- 1 **Experience:** One company can test only so many different approaches via trial and error.
- 2 **Technology:** The vast amount of available data consumes too much time collecting, filtering and analyzing data rather than applying the insights and strategy suggested by it.
- 3 **Search Engines,** or rather their Evolution: There are simply too many elements that go into SEO today for a single person or team to handle.



In principle, the **SEO Center of Excellence** is simple. It features three main elements:

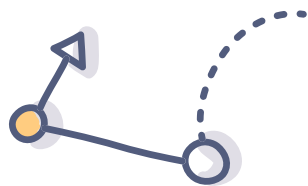
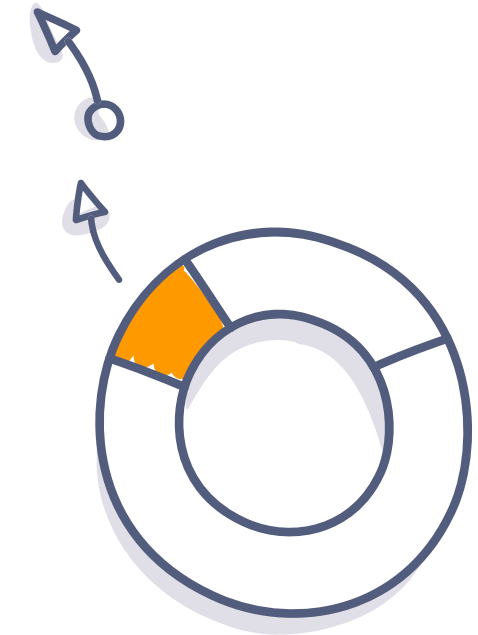
1. **Strategic Approach**, which is defined by how you think about SEO.
2. **A proven framework** that gives SEO structure and makes it testable, repeatable and predictable.
3. **Scalability**, making it effective, efficient and expandable for global enterprises.

The first element is foundational. The second defines priorities and roles. The third element makes it possible for all stakeholders to participate in a meaningful way to contribute to SEO success.

- SEOs love the Center of Excellence as it makes their job simpler.
- Content producers, marketers and IT love it as it clearly explains and defines their role and why it contributes to the enterprises success.
- C-level executives love it for the way it makes SEO a predictable profit-center with easy-to-understand reporting.

The reason it works so well is that it focuses on the user, just like the search engines do. Google, Bing, Yahoo - they all want to deliver the best search experience. So should you.

And, it's why the first of the three elements of the **SEO Center of Excellence** - **Strategic Approach** - says how you think about SEO matters.



CHAPTER 2 Strategic Approach, or How You Think About SEO Matters

For years, keywords and link-building defined SEO. In time, an “SEO” mindset developed. It’s the view that says SEO is a tactic that chases search engines to get the best ranking.

In the past, this involved keyword-stuffing and plentiful backlinks. For a long-time it worked. The thing is, however, that “a long-time” ended long ago.

Algorithms driven by machine learning and AI calculate a lot more than keywords and links on any given page. Search engines, especially Google, have been clear - the focus is the end-user and their activity, not how many keywords or links you have.

Google is focused on your customers and the search experience it can deliver to them. It’s time enterprises embrace this new thinking.

It’s time to stop thinking about SEO as Search Engine Optimization. Google doesn’t. Enterprises enjoying the greatest SEO success don’t.

We recommend thinking about SEO as...

SEARCH EXPERIENCE OPTIMIZATION

When you think about it this way, everything changes.

- SEO makes customer experience the priority.
- Strategy focuses on creating a holistic approach, one that optimizes for the customer search experience through the entire buyer journey.
- The end-user gets a terrific brand experience that requires involvement from the entire organization, from marketing to customer service to IT.



By changing the focus to the end-user, the SEO conversation changes. This won't simply improve SEO results. It gets buy-in.

TALKING TO A CONTENT WRITER



Engine-Focused Conversation

SEO: I'm sending you a list of keywords to include in your content writing.

Content Writer: 😞 I think you might not be understanding the customer or the content.



User-Focused Conversation

SEO: I'm sending you a list of keywords that customers have been searching for. Including them in your content writing should help show that we're topic authorities.

Content Writer: Hm, you just gave me some great ideas. Thanks for the help!



Engine-Focused Conversation

SEO: I've noticed that we have some 404 errors that are tripping up crawlers.

IT Engineer: Yeah, those don't really matter too much though. I wouldn't worry about it.



User-Focused Conversation

SEO: I've noticed that we have some 404 errors that are keeping customers from reaching that new landing page. Seems like it's becoming a customer service issue.

IT Engineer: Ok, I'll make that a top priority today.

Thinking like this isn't simply a way for SEOs to get buy-in and tech problems fixed. It expresses SEO problems for what they really are - real problems for real customers that have a serious impact on the brand.

Aren't the problems noted above the same ones your content writers and IT professionals are there to solve?

Start thinking like this and SEO becomes relevant to all teams in the organization. Use this thinking to guide your SEO strategy and results will follow.





Think about SEO in terms of experience over engine.

CHAPTER 3 **Structure, The Framework for Successful SEO**

There is a fundamental shift that occurs when an enterprise changes their way of thinking about SEO from tactics for the search engine to an approach that optimizes for the user experience. In doing this, it becomes easier to implement workflows and standard operating procedures (SOPs) that are collaborative.

This gives the enterprise - and its SEO and content teams - a way to:

- Prioritize every task;
- Identify how each stakeholders' contributions support the SEO effort;
- Establish a measurable, repeatable and consistent process;
- Set a single "Truth" which guarantees meaningful data analysis and reporting; and,
- Train new employee stakeholders in a simple and time efficient way.

Now, it's important to note that every enterprise will have its own unique SOPs that will involve various stakeholders from different departments throughout the organization. Depending on your enterprise's level of SEO practice, SOPs may require some trial-and-error to make processes move smoothly.



The uniqueness for these comes from need to fit the enterprise's business practices, organization and online complexity. Generally speaking, SOPs give structure to:

- Processes used to deliver the many different elements of a campaign;
- Standard tasks and their order of completion;
- Teams and their responsibilities; and,
- Collection and analysis of data.

In our experience, a structure needs to be put in place to create these SOPs and workflows to ensure that every person in your organization is doing things in the best way for them to be successful.

Ultimately, our proven framework helps provide a jump start on a universal structure that any enterprise can use to produce consistent, measurable, and predictable results across the brand, website, or world.

We call it the **URA Framework**.

THE URA FRAMEWORK

URA stands for Usability – Relevance – Authority.

It only works in this order, but in this order, it works like clockwork. It is a practical way to guide SEO activities for every page, section and across entire websites.

Let's take a closer look at each part of it.

USABILITY

First comes Usability Optimization. It's the foundational component of search optimization. It focuses on accessibility and indexability, the technical side of SEO.

After all, if end-users can't find or use a page, that page isn't relevant and certainly not authoritative!

Usability is the set of actions that must be taken to make and maintain a site as usable by customers. This includes the following technical SEO elements:

- Crawlability
- Speed
- Indexation
- Page Speed
- Taxonomy

Each one of these elements affects an end-user's ability to find, reach and access a page. If there's a 404 error, they'll never see it. If it's slow, they'll click away.

Key SEO activities for Usability include:

1. **Architecture Optimization**
2. **Indexation Improvements**
3. **Speed Improvements**

RELEVANCE

Relevance Optimization comes next. In this section of the framework, the focus shifts to match content to user intent. The effort involves identifying audience interest and need through analysis of search. These findings are then applied to develop and create content users search for.

Key SEO activities include:

4. **Audience and Market Size Research**
5. **Audience Needs Analysis**
6. **Content Mapping**
7. **Content Optimization**

AUTHORITY

The final part of the framework is Authority. Actions at this stage promote the content, making sure it is available to the audience wherever they are. It also highlights content to demonstrate its usefulness, uniqueness and value to the end-user.

Key SEO activities include:

- 8. **Building external links**
- 9. **Building internal links**
- 10. **Encouraging social shares**



BUILDING SOPs TO MAKE THE URA FRAMEWORK WORK

Although we've highlighted SEO activities for each element of the URA framework, it should be clear that the effort involves stakeholders in many different areas of the organization. This is why it's essential to create well-defined SOPs.

Depending on your enterprise's current level of SEO practice, it may require a little more or a little less effort. Sometimes there's minor trial-and-error involved to make processes move smoothly. Finding a partner who can help can go a long way to shortening the learning curve.

Is it worth it? In our experience, enterprises that follow this URA framework experience incredible SEO success, not to mention grow and expand a brand loyal customer base.

“In an organization, there can be different versions of the truth depending on the team or the system that’s reporting it. It’s important that enterprises align on the same metrics across all teams that have a hand in SEO.”

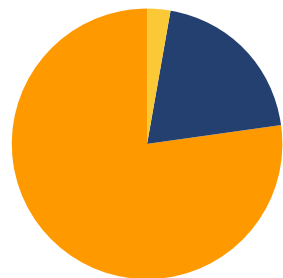
MITUL GANDHI
Co-Founder and Chief
Product Architect

CHAPTER 4 **Scaling SEO for the Entire Enterprise**

In every enterprise, resources are finite. Oftentimes they’re limited. Employee time is one of the most limited.

Given a very real lack of resources, it doesn’t make sense to spend time on mundane and time-intensive tasks like data analysis and reporting. Yet, that’s what our research says most enterprises and enterprise SEOs are doing!

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In one survey, SEOs told us only **20%** of their time is spent on execution.

77% of their time was spent on data acquisition, reporting and analysis!

Does it make sense to commit more resources to crunch data and assist with analysis? Not really, no individual or team can possibly process and analyze all the possible SEO data. There’s simply too much out there!

Scaling at the enterprise level requires technology. In an age of AI and machine-learning, it doesn’t make sense to spend human capital on trying to process vast data sets. We may be able to see unique insights into human behavior, but we’ll never be able to process data as fast as machines.

By leveraging technology to process data, SEO scales easier. And when it does, SEO becomes:

- Much more manageable for SEOs
- An effort all stakeholders can relate and contribute to
- More easily segment-able for alignment with appropriate people and departments
- Productive
- Easier to execute for all stakeholders

Ideally, we recommend technologies that:

- Consolidate all the data in a single platform;
- Leverage machine-learning and AI to see connections and process billions of different data points;
- Is usable by all stakeholders in the organization; and,
- Provides reporting that anyone can be easily taught to understand, from the engaged content writer to the CMO.

Most importantly, of course, the technology must enable the enterprise to consistently deliver usable, relevant and authoritative content and products its customers want... and a user experience that keeps them coming back!



It starts with the mindset.

CHAPTER 5 What You Can Expect from Your SEO Center of Excellence

In our experience, many enterprises begin their **SEO Center of Excellence** journey with a change of mindset. Some have the mindset, but to give structure to their effort and a technology to scale it. Some find all they needed was a technology to shift the work from data collection to execution of strategy.

Fortunately, every enterprise can immediately benefit by adopting the principles of an SEO Center of Excellence.

It starts with the mindset.

Then, implement the URA framework and corresponding SOPs and processes.

Finally, invest in technology that makes you time efficient and empowers you to scale, easily and flexibly. Truly, the better you can scale, the faster you can grow.

Once adopted, you'll address the major challenges facing enterprise SEO:

- Many Users and Stakeholders.
- Many Sites
- Constant Change
- Many Versions of "Truth"
- Engaging stakeholders and getting buy-in

Plus, you'll find everyone in the organization will buy into the effort faster too!

- Team members will understand how the insights from SEO benefits their efforts.
- All teams will know why what they do is important.
- Every team member will see how their goals and responsibilities align with the SEO.
- Resources will produce more.
- Results will be measurable, consistent and predictable.

In short, you can expect a new level of SEO success and company-wide engagement.

Of course, the next question we get is, "Ok, this sounds great. Where do we start?"

Let's answer that question now...

CHAPTER 6 **Implementing an SEO Center of Excellence**

So far, this ebook had defined the **SEO Center of Excellence** and shared the three main features:

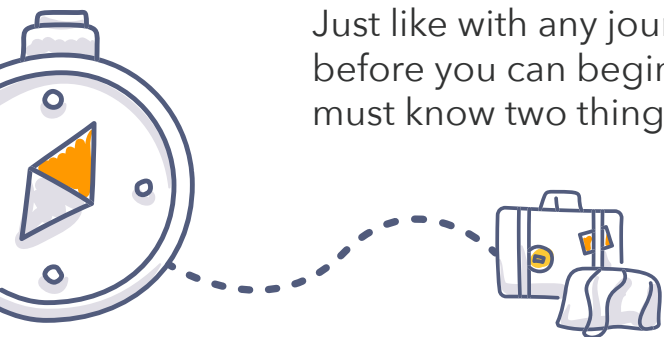
- Thinking about SEO as Search Experience Optimization in the development of strategy.
- Putting a structure in place to simplify the effort and make it accessible throughout the entire enterprise.
- Getting the tools in place to make it scalable.

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Now let's cover what you need to do to implement it because while how you think about SEO is where you begin with an **SEO Center of Excellence**, it's not where you start your implementation. Here's how to get yourself on the road to implementing your own **SEO Center of Excellence**.

1 **Determine Where You Are with SEO Right Now**

Just like with any journey, before you can begin you must know two things:



YOUR DESTINATION (i.e. an *SEO Center of Excellence*)

WHERE YOU ARE RIGHT NOW



This second part is essential. Think of it this way, if your destination is New York City and you head east out of Chicago, you're going to arrive in a timely manner. However, if your destination is New York City and you just head east but say, out of London, you're going to have a long trip ahead of you!

Now, for travel, departure and destination points might seem like common sense. They are, but...the reality is, this principle applies to every situation - even setting up an SEO program. Travel is just an easy way to demonstrate how important it is to know exactly where you are starting from.

This is the first step and it requires an honest assessment. As an organization, ask yourself the following questions to get started:

- What is important to us? Rankings, traffic, conversions, engagement? Rankings, for example, is the goal for organizations just getting started with SEO.
- What are our biggest challenges? Are we struggling to scale or do we simply need to get the program started?
- Do we have tools in the form of technology in place, or are we relying on a third-party?
- Do we own our SEO strategy?

Once you have an idea of where you are, you can get started by ensuring your answer to that last question is 'Yes!'

2 Own Your SEO Strategy

There are three types of SEO strategy:

1. **No strategy.** You have a website but are not engaged in any SEO related activities.
2. **A third-party strategy.** You've hired a consultant or agency to do your SEO. Whatever they're trying to achieve is your strategy.
3. **Your strategy.** You see that SEO can help promote wider company goals and have instructed whoever is responsible to achieve results aligned with those goals.

If you want to enjoy SEO success, your enterprise must own its SEO strategy. This doesn't mean you don't work with consultants, agencies or professional services firms.

It simply means you have dedicated the resources to set strategy, have an organizational commitment to SEO, and have someone in place to manage the effort and/or relationships.

3 Put the Talent in Place and Centralize

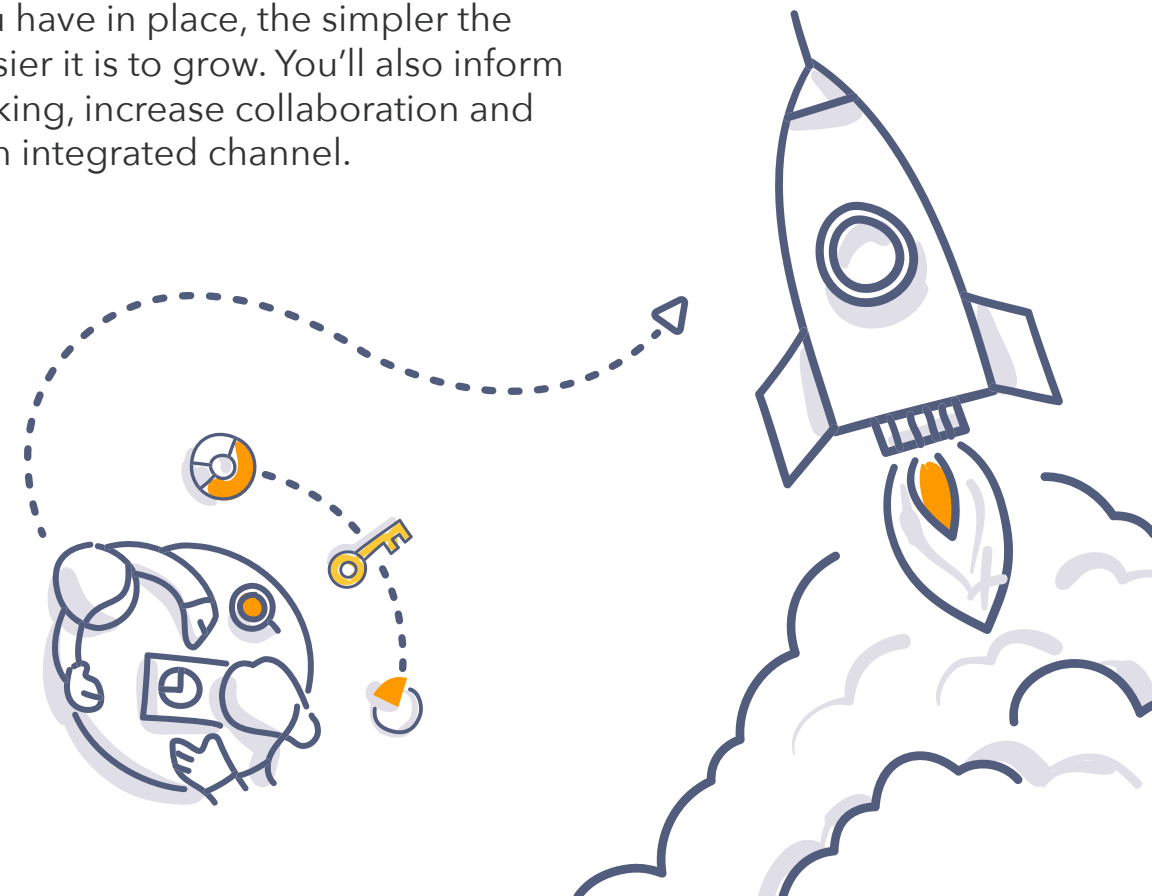
Task someone with the responsibility of building SEO in the organization. Depending on where you are at it could be a full-time SEO, or SEO team, or it could be a marketer tasked with managing strategy. Regardless, the effort of building the thinking, framework and consolidating technology must be centralized.

4 Build Your Foundation

Get the strategy and basics in place. Talk about Search Experience and how search relates to your customer, using data to support the conversation. This includes establishing baseline goals, the KPIs you'll use to measure your progress toward them and the reporting you'll use to collect and aggregate data. If SEO is a relatively new effort for your enterprise, target quick wins to build support.

5 Accelerate Your Initiatives

Start implementing the framework. The more structure you have in place, the simpler the work and easier it is to grow. You'll also inform decision-making, increase collaboration and make SEO an integrated channel.





6 Advance Your Brand

Begin to optimize for experience where you can. SEO rarely moves in a linear growth pattern. You may find you have a well-established content team but need work with data analysis. Refine your processes and SOPs and seek out resources as needed. These may include:



A technology partner to collect data or simplify data collection, analysis and reporting



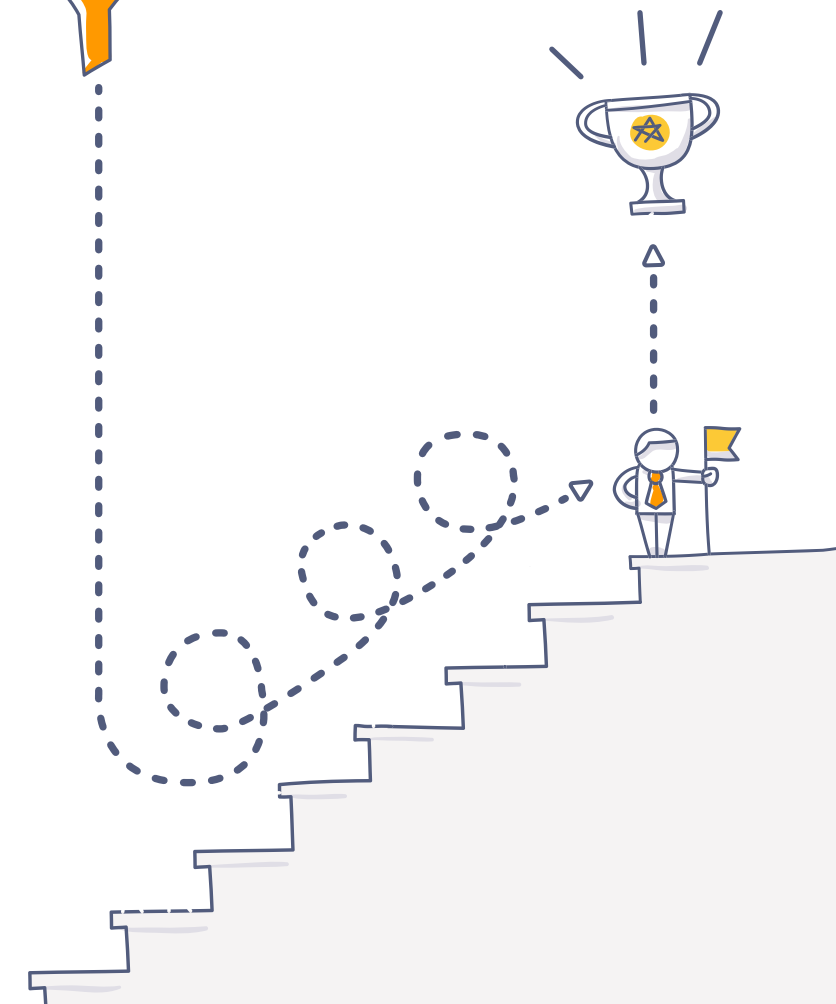
A support partner may be essential, like an agency, to do the menial tasks like data collection, leaving you to focus on strategy. Or support could be a customer service team for your technology.



Training expertise. If you're new to SEO or have stakeholders in various departments throughout the organization that need training, a training partner can help with knowledge and delivery of the needed training.



Professional Services. Perhaps you need advanced integrations, customized workflows or other services outside the core competencies of your team. A strong professional services team can help overcome challenges, keeps costs manageable and keep you focused on what's most important - the customer.



“Every organization’s goal should be to make SEO consistent, measurable, and repeatable. Companies love other marketing channels because they know how to repeat success to move the needle. SEO also requires consistent, repeatable workflows in order to scale results.”

MITUL GANDHI
Co-Founder and
Chief Product Architect

CHAPTER 7 The Global SEO Center of Excellence: At the Intersection of Customer and Company

SEO has changed. Once it may have been about “tricking” search engines to get high page rankings, but those days are over. Today, SEO is all about the customer experience.

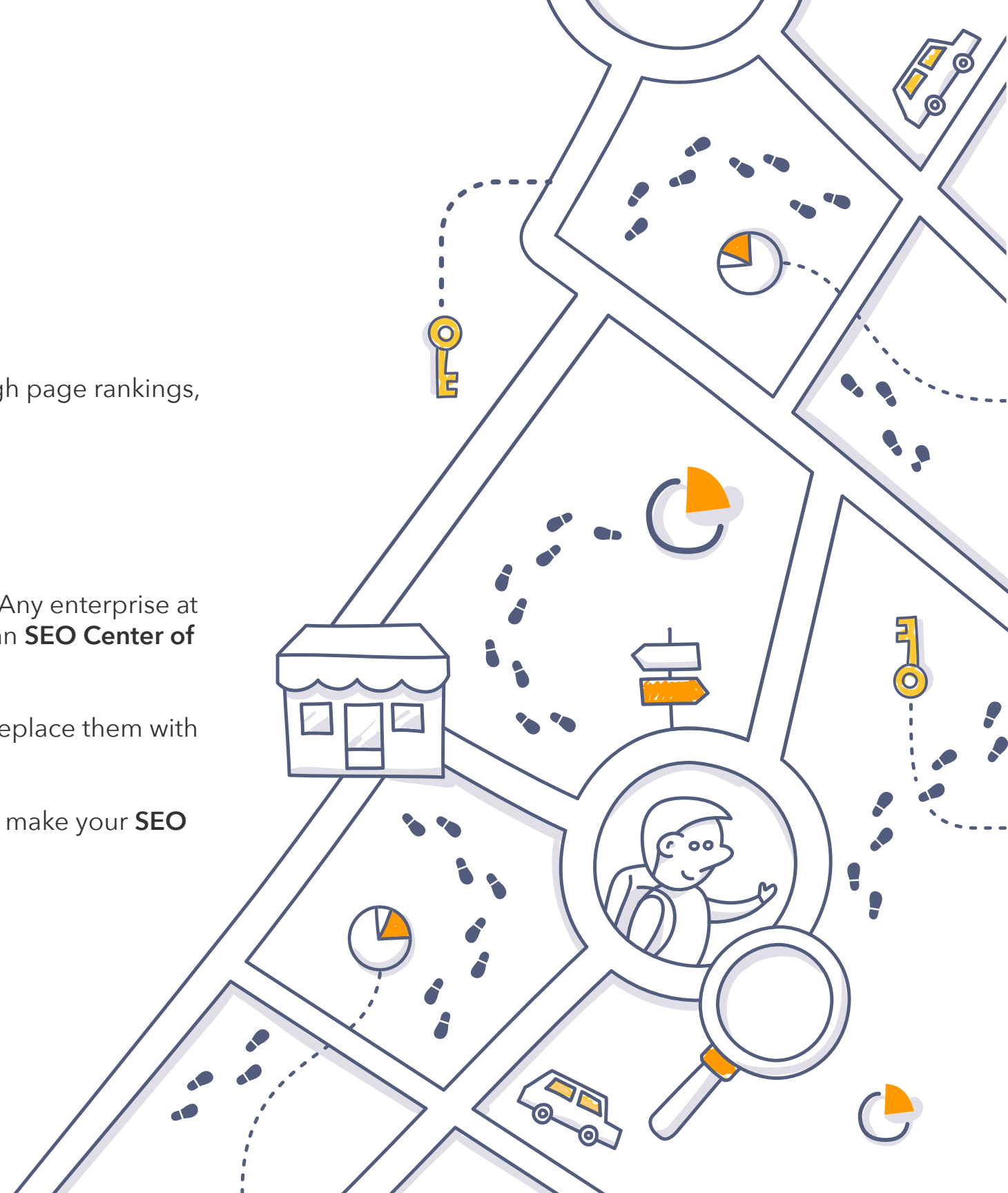
Delivering a quality customer-brand experience involves the whole company.

An **SEO Center of Excellence** puts the tools, talent and training in place to deliver.

Admittedly, a full implementation doesn’t happen overnight. But, it doesn’t have to. Any enterprise at any level of SEO can start today to implement elements that contribute to building an **SEO Center of Excellence**.

Growth happens fastest when you eliminate the menial, time-consuming tasks and replace them with execution that moves the enterprise forward.

Then, in time, your commitment to SEO aligned with professional SEO expertise will make your **SEO Center of Excellence** a global contributor to the enterprise’s business goals.



CLEAR BENEFITS YOU'LL SEE WITH AN SEO CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

1 MAXIMIZING CUSTOMER IMPACT

With a dynamic SEO program tuned into your diverse customer audiences, you'll -

- Be where your customers are, when they are there.
- Deliver relevant content, current and potential new customers are looking for.
- Become an authority to your customers and in your industry.

2 BUILD A CUSTOMER BRAND COMMUNITY

Your **SEO Center of Excellence** will take you beyond customer demand. Customer engagement will be the focus, and as you actively engage with customers, your brand will become an integral part of your customers' life.

This engagement builds a brand community and uncovers new opportunities for engagement, and to provide the products and services to meet the community's needs. SEO can even unite your other digital marketing efforts when you consider the inter-relationship of social media, paid search, and other multi-media.

Another unseen but common element of the brand community is the closeness SEO brings between employees and customers. Through your **SEO Center of Excellence**, employees will engage more with customers, learning about their concerns, needs and wants. Through online engagement the brand may become part of the customers' everyday life, but the customer becomes a part of the employees' everyday life.

3 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employees get more engaged when they understand how their contributions help the team. The **SEO Center of Excellence** makes it clear to employees:

- How 'what they do' contributes to SEO outcomes and business goals
- Why they are being asked to do it
- What will happen (happier customers, more sales, bigger bonuses) when they do their job well

With more contributions, SEO results - and their corresponding business results - will accelerate.

CHAPTER 8 **Getting Started with Your SEO Center of Excellence**

Enterprise SEO may be hard. Scaling it may be even harder. But, that certainly doesn't mean it can't be done.

Great SEO talent may be sparse, but there's a world of experience out there. We know; we work closely with our clients and constantly build innovations into our platform that give SEOs an edge.

We are also grateful to our clients. Their contributions have inspired and fueled advances in technology that makes SEO easier. It's also led to the development of the **SEO Center of Excellence** that:

- Empowers enterprises to own their SEO strategy.
- Builds structure in the form of the URA Framework.
- Makes scaling SEO simpler to make customer engagement more than a reality, but something that can be measured, analyzed and improved.

With an **SEO Center of Excellence** in place, the entire organization focuses on the customer in a unique and much more personal way.

The enterprise stays informed of trends, industry changes and current customer interests.

Collaboration develops between departments to meet the specific needs of customers, unifying employees and the company in meaningful ways.

Brand and customer become a community.

In our experience, enterprises who implement an **SEO Center of Excellence** enjoy incredible success for their effort. For SEOs and enterprises, this simply translates to:

- Predictable results
- Happier team members
- Better resilience to changes in search (*algorithms!*)

To start your **SEO Center of Excellence**, you'll need to implement the methodology outlined in this ebook. The fastest way to grow your center and speed success comes from an expert partner and a platform that simplifies data collection, analysis and reporting.

- The more platforms and tech you use, the greater the cost, and the greater the time needed to learn, use and collect data from the different systems. Fewer systems (*or a single one*) cost less in terms of tools and support and waste less time by reducing the learning curve.
- A good partner will offer opportunities to offload time-consuming tasks, and even get them done faster and insight into the data.

And the more time you have, the more time you can spend on the customer and making the biggest brand impact possible!

START BUILDING YOUR SEO CENTER OF EXCELLENCE TODAY

If you'd like to learn more about how we've helped enterprises implement their own SEO Center of Excellence, contact us today.

B2B Ecommerce Company Achieves 30% YoY Increase in Organic Search Traffic

Read this case study to see how the Search Experience Framework was implemented to achieve organic search traffic growth.

[Read the Case Study >](#)

Get an SEO Assessment


Request an SEO Assessment and let our team provide insights on how to implement an SEO Center of Excellence at your company.

[Schedule a Free Consult >](#)



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