

# SEO IS A "SCHOOL OF THOUGHT" PROCESS

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## “Lead Them Where You Want Them To Go”

At its core **Search Engine Optimization, SEO**, is a “**School of Thought**” process. This post has a unique, aquatic theme, so I hope you are ready to jump right in and get wet! “Lead them where you want them to go,” is a phrase I coined in my early, competitive swim coaching days. I found that most people, kids and adults, dislike being told anything. When you have ninety swimmers in the water at the same time, and you’re running three different workouts simultaneously, time management is a factor and communication has to flow freely and at a rapid pace. I found an effective way to manage the athletes was to do a little homework. I found out each athlete’s wants, needs, and desires. I changed my paradigm to meet theirs. I knew where I wanted to go and where I wanted them to go. My goal was always the same: train smart so you could swim fast. Being technically proficient and streamline training was the way to win races: **Technique – Technique – Technique!**

It’s human nature: people resist force and change. I simply let them think our journey was their idea. In competitive swimming results are not expected, they are demanded. Every parent, at the very least, who brings their child to the pool at 5:00 a.m. is banking on a college scholarship, and they all dream of the ever-elusive Olympic Gold Medal (a non-realistic goal for all but the top 1% of the top 1% of swimmers). A coach learns to communicate effectively across many different levels. While having to administer the goal setting, training, and inspiration for the athlete, a coach has an even bigger challenge of keeping parents calm and happy. For some strange reason, parents always seem to have a greater need of coaching than the athletes! I’ve found that competition brings out the best and the worst in people.

Parents, due to some unrealistic goals and expectations, are easily frustrated and can become volatile. And that is because what is involved here is hopes, dreams, and desires! Nothing is more precious to a parent than providing that child with opportunities of which the parent could only dream. When I transitioned my career from coaching to marketing, I held to my principles and practices that made me a successful coach. [As marketing has evolved in the digital age](#), the technology has changed but the goal is the same: Lead people to where you want them to go. Your business goal and my business goal at [Rich Benjamin & Associates](#) is to position your product or  offer in such a way that allows the consumer to feel that it was their idea. Marketing is very much like fishing – every fisherman or fisherwoman wants to catch the largest fish out there, or they want to catch the largest amount of fish. Fishing is not easy; it takes skill, hard work, and a little bit of luck. A good fisherman/online marketer must be in the right spot at the right time; fish are elusive, smart, bold, and fish (like consumers) exist in a hostile environment every day evading and avoiding predation. So how does my fish tale equate to a marketing and sales best practice?

Quite simply, as a good fishing guide, you need to know the water that you’re fishing in. The

consumers' thought processes travel in schools much as fish do - that is "schools of thought" meaning they think in relatively similar patterns. For example, when it comes to **planning a vacation**, the three main thoughts most consumers have are: Where am I going? What am I going to do when I get there? And what am I going to eat?

## Vacation Planning: 3 Step "School of Thought" Process

### (1) Where Am I Going To Vacation?

A destination is chosen purely to fulfill the intrinsic needs of a person. The destination must provide an experience that lifts the visitor emotionally; it must elevate the psyche of the visitor. For a destination to be successful, the visitor must believe that the grass is greener there. *A vacation destination is the physical embodiment of vacationer's hopes, dreams, and desires.* We vacation to either experience something greater, or we go to escape something uncomfortable. To inspire the visitor, it's incumbent upon us to focus our marketing efforts on the experience portion – seek to be better, lead the potential visitor with the promise of experiencing something better in life. If we focus on a promise of greener pastures, our approach is an invitation. Social media is based in control; consumers have found power in being able to shut off conventional, unwanted sales messages and marketing pitches; these are viewed as intrusions in their life. The vast majority of marketing has been designed to push sales, push the consumer to a destination. Like fish, consumers are easily spooked and will not be pushed; they scatter and dart about. **Successful Website and Social Media Campaigns** are based on the principle of creating something so inviting, enlightening, and yet provide a safe environment, that the consumer wants to belong. Consumers can be lead; they refuse to be herded or pushed.

### (2) What Am I Going To Do When I Get There?

The Holy Grail of most vacations is the itinerary. "Why do we need an itinerary to go relax?" says the man to his wife. Her reply is simply, "because we have limited time; therefore, we must fit in as much experience as possible." *Experience fills the emotional cup of wanting.* Have you ever considered the etymology of the word consumer? In the early 1500's a consumer was defined as one who squanders or wastes. By the 1700's a consumer was defined as one who uses up goods or articles; the opposite of a producer. To consume something implies that a person has a need to fill a void. Sadly, the consumer of the 1500's was viewed as a pestilent destroyer. However, since the 1700's, the consumer has been a vital component to our economic structure. For today's consumer the void that must be filled is experience which brings us back to emotional wants, needs, and desires. Each experience promises the betterment or fulfillment of life in some way. The expectation of a new experience is that it will make the consumer feel something: it will make them laugh, make them cry, and remember what love feels like. The experience will provide a moment of

exhilaration, a moment of excitement, a moment of peace or splendor. The emotional response is dependent upon the situation that the visitor is in search of. The visitor's **school of thought** is: I want more from life, I desire change, and I deserve this. Again, we see an example of pure, intrinsic need.

### **(3) What Am I Going To Eat?**

Nothing provides instant gratification like eating! Eating is consuming; each town or destination offers opportunities for exploration through a delicious culinary voyage. We have five senses: touch, taste, smell, hearing, and vision. Dining, if done well, will include an experience that includes all five of our senses. For example, tonight I visited a new, local eatery that could be classified as a pub or a grill. The experience began the moment I walked in the door. I was greeted by friendly faces and the aroma was thick with chicken wings and cheese burgers. The lighting was not bright nor was it so dark that I could not see; it was warm and inviting. As the food was served, the smell of the tangy vapor was greatly appreciated rising on the steam in front of my eyes. Anticipation coupled with exceptional customer service and a great product is the winning recipe for a great experience.

**Social media**, used smartly, can help you convey the sensory anticipation of these experiences for your visitors.

## **Lead the Consumer...and Be a Leader Yourself**



As I work on Internet Marketing for my clients, I am reminded of the words of legendary Olympics swim coach Ray Bussard from the University of Tennessee. "**Son, practice doesn't make perfect, perfect practice does!**" I learned from him that life is a conditioning process. Either we condition ourselves, or our environment conditions us. Eventually, we join a school of thought and like fish we travel in a predictable pattern. Your job as a successful marketer or business manager is to learn those patterns. Know your product and know your market and its consumers' thoughts and trends. Treat consumers with dignity and respect and they will follow you anywhere.

