



Life as an SEO associate by Charlie

Introduce Yourself

Hello everybody, I'm Charlie and I'm an SEO Associate at Merkle. Grace, who sits next to me, consequently describes me as an "optimiser. Big time.". Personally, I believe my ability to polish off a Viennetta in sub-90 seconds and tell hyperbolic ice-cream stories are more defining characteristics.

What made you interested in digital in the first place and why this role? Was there anything that made you hesitant about applying that you now realise you shouldn't have feared? (e.g. never having done digital before)

It's a good question. Digital industries arouse thoughts of hoodie-wearing computer fanatics. Such a character I am not. In fact, I was hesitant to apply for the role as I have never been an especially "techy" individual. Instead, I had spent the first few months of my final year at university being rejected by 63 grad schemes. This induced a moment of self-reflection.

Luckily, it transpires that Merkle are less interested in hiring graduates with a thousand years of relevant experience, and more interested in an applicant's desire and capacity to learn and gain said experience. They were looking for intellectually curious individuals who could slide into their friendly culture and grow to become SEO account managers.

What do you do on a day to day basis from 9am to 5:30pm?

The role has two main facets; account management and SEO.

Account management necessitates organisation, communication, and a knack for marketing. Juggling multiple jobs and university had forced some semblance of organisation into my schedule by the time of application. Having spent five years of my life as a waiter, my client communications were a well-tested skill. Previous stints of work experience in small companies had taught me the ropes of marketing and branding. I was hooked.

SEO requires numerical reasoning and logical thinking. The internet is a floating web of interrelated websites. Each web page serves a different user need. Our role aims to make our client's websites drive as much relevant traffic as possible, and definitely more than the competition can achieve. We do this by identifying user needs, and making sure that when a user enters their need into a search engine, our client's web page is the result they select. This requires an ability to visualise and understand the machinations of search engines and consumer psychology. Time at university working with data proved uncannily useful at understanding the logical interrelationship of entities and variables.

It was the ever-changing nature of SEO that held the greatest sway on my decision to apply. Success requires thought, focus, communication, buy-in, hard work, patience, and resilience. 5.6 billion Google searches are made every day. Bing finds 100 billion new URLs in that same 24-hour period. It takes time to break through the noise and deliver significant results in a storm of this size.

This means that there is no such thing as a “typical 9-5.30 day” for an SEO. We work either on projects or long-term retainer client accounts. Both relationships concern taking a given website and identifying any issues with its technical foundations (which may make the site slow, hard to navigate, or not function correctly) or with its content (which may be thin, duplicated, or simply failing to target the keywords with which our intended audience are searching). Once the issues are identified, teams will form to discuss the best strategy for resolving the issues and enabling the site to rank meaningfully for the search terms which will drive the highest volume of relevant traffic to the site.

This strategy must then be communicated with relevant stakeholders, and be implemented. Success is monitored on an ongoing basis, with tweaks being made to the strategy where necessary to maximise the chance that the client’s KPIs and expectations are met.

What’s your favourite thing about your role?

In the first few months, most of my time was spent supporting on smaller accounts as I worked on my account management and SEO knowledge. 3 months of training and constant exposure to client work made for a steep learning curve, which was very welcome. Now, exactly 1 year since first starting, things are naturally more progressed. My team works on diverse client accounts, spanning retail, Fortune 500, and 3rd sector websites. These sites operate in countries all over the world, subsequently, millions of people engage with our work every month.

What’s been your proudest moment so far at Merkle?

Some personal highs include liaising with our internal Digital Experience team to guide a B2B client to a successful site redesign, the results of which have resulted in the project being submitted for a DADI award. We are currently implementing an international lead-generating content strategy for a 3rd sector client of ours, which we hope can significantly increase brand awareness and therefore propensity to donate among audiences with relevant affiliations. As a side project, I work with the SEM (Search Engine Marketing) team as we try to forge an understanding of how SEO and PPC can work together and deliver enhanced value to our clients.

This has all been enabled by Merkle’s ability to provide opportunity to all new joiners and ensure the much-needed support to back this up. Merkle’s flat hierarchy, self-development focus, and lack of internal politics make for a very enjoyable culture and creates a petri-dish of creativity. Good ideas are valued, as are the bonds within teams. There are few people who can say with conviction that they genuinely look forwards to working and socialising with their colleagues. I dare to claim that every member of the SEO department considers themselves among those fortunate few.

What's your next step in terms of your career path at Merkle?

As next steps, I intend to continue growing as our SEO team grows. Sharing my learnings as a coach, helping the team rise to our ever-growing client base, and eating all of the free office fruit sit foremost on the agenda.

If this sounds like something you'd like to be a part of, we'd love to hear from you!