



Experience Authentic Transformation

QUICK GUIDE



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Summary

1. What Is SEO / Search Engine Optimization?

2. How does SEO work?

3. Value of SEO.

4. Google Ranking Factors SEO.

5. SEO Setup Prerequisites.

- Setup Google Tag Manager.
- Setup Google Analytics.
- Set Up Google Search Console.
- Using WordPress? Install Yoast SEO

6. On-site SEO.

- Domain Name.
- Web Hosting.
- Keyword Research.
- Site Architecture.
- Navigation.
- URL Structure.
- Site Speed.
- Mobile Responsiveness.
- Visual Interface.
- Indexable Content.
- Primary Keywords.
- Title Tags.
- Optimize Images.
- Optimize Headings.
- Optimize text on the page.
- Meta Descriptions.
- Link to Other Pages on Your Website.
- Submit Your Sitemap to Google.
- Create an SEO Plan for the Future.

7. Technical SEO Checklist

- Check Google's Search Console for crawl errors, duplicate content errors, missing titles, and more.
- Identify bad redirects (302s that should be 301s).

- Look for broken links, errors, and crawl problems.
- Make sure you do not have duplicate content.
- Check your site's speed and keep it fast!
- Make sure your site is mobile-friendly.
- Create an XML sitemap and submit it to Google Search Console.
- Create a robots.txt file and submit it to Google Search Console.
- Claim your brand name on as many social networking sites as possible.
- Use an SEO Audit Tool to double-check everything.
- Link Building & Establishing Authority.
- Measuring, Prioritizing & Executing SEO.

1. What Is SEO / Search Engine Optimization?

SEO or “Search Engine Optimization” is the process of enhancing your site to increase its visibility for pertinent searches. The better visibility your pages have in search results, the more likely you are to gain interest and attract future and present customers.

2. How does SEO work?

Search engines such as Google and Bing use bots to crawl pages on the web, going from site to site, collecting information about those pages, and putting them in an index. Next, algorithms analyze pages in the index, considering hundreds of ranking factors or signals, to determine the order pages should appear in the search results for a given query.

The search algorithms are designed to surface relevant, authoritative pages and provide users with an efficient search experience. Optimizing your site and content with these factors in mind can help your pages rank higher in the search results.

3. Value of SEO

You have probably heard the term “SEO.” You probably know that it is something your company needs. But do you know all of the value you will see by optimizing your site for search engines? When you invest in SEO, you will see a multitude of benefits.

- Higher search rankings: Your web pages will appear more frequently and in higher positions on SERPs (search engine results pages).
- Increased organic traffic: More visitors will land on your web pages through search engines (so you do not have to pay for traffic).
- Increased brand awareness and authority: Your brand will appear more frequently which increases your visibility and leads to your website being used as a resource by other websites and publishers.
- Increase in the number of leads and sales: As your website appears in front of a larger audience, it becomes a silent salesperson that can collect leads and drive sales from online searchers.

- **Lasting results:** When you improve a site's SEO, the work often creates long-term improvements and compounding returns that can get better over time.

SEO is a vital tool in building and growing your company's online presence, but it is not a one-time project that will give your brand a lasting boost. It is a long-term practice that works best over time. SEO strategies that are implemented today should be given at least six months to show results. Once that value kicks in, strategies continue to work.

GOOGLE RANKING FACTORS SEO

You do not have to be a search engine specialist to rank for important terms in search results. We will walk through proven, and repeatable practices for optimizing websites for search that can help you drive targeted traffic without having to reverse-engineer the core competency of one of the world's most valuable companies.

SEO SETUP PREREQUISITES

1. Setup Google Tag Manager

Google Tag Manager is a great tool to add and manage multiple pixels and tracking codes without needing to edit the code of a site.

2. Setup Google Analytics

With Google Analytics you will be able to track things like how much traffic you are getting from search engines, which pages are getting the most organic traffic, what's the bounce rate, along with many other important metrics.

3. Set Up Google Search Console

Search Console is a free tool provided by Google to webmasters. This is how you communicate directly with Google and get data and feedback on how your site is performing.

4. Using WordPress? Install Yoast SEO

Yoast SEO is a WordPress plugin that makes it incredibly easy for you to create SEO-friendly content. It takes care of things like canonical tags, no index tags, and sitemaps for you.

ON-SITE SEO

1. Domain Name

Domain names are one of the ranking factors search engines look at to figure out what a page is about. If possible, choose a domain name that is relevant, easy to remember, and incorporates the main keyword you want to rank for.

2. Web Hosting

Google has been upfront about site speed being a ranking factor for SEO. Visitors are impatient and expect web pages to load within seconds (or less), so Google tries to only deliver results that will satisfy that requirement. One of the best steps to take from day one is choosing a web hosting provider that can deliver consistent speeds.

3. Keyword Research

Understanding the terms that people use when they search, and the intent behind them is crucial to your SEO strategy. In order to do a lot of the other things on this list effectively, you need to first have a clear idea of the main terms and subject areas you want to focus your SEO efforts on.

A number of SEO tools provide keyword suggestions and data on the amount of traffic and competition you can expect to deal with for each keyword. Most of them will cost you a subscription fee, but you can use Google's Keyword Planner for free to get started.

When choosing your keywords, be sure to be reasonable. SEO is competitive and a brand-new website is not in a good position to compete for popular, broad terms. Get specific and find long-tail keywords to target. Be sure to consider searcher intent and difficulty, pick one keyword per page, and you will generally want to start with lower-volume keywords first.

4. Site Architecture

plan out your site architecture in advance so you have a structure in place as you go.

For most websites, your site architecture should have a pyramid structure. Your homepage is at the top, with the next most important pages right below that. Underneath those, you'll add any subcategories and individual pages that fall within them.

When you plan your site architecture in advance, you make sure your website is organized to give priority to the most important pages in terms of how easy they are for visitors to find, and you make it easier for visitors to navigate between pages on the site to find what they need.

5. Navigation

Your site architecture is a good step in this direction, but it is just one part of making your website intuitive for visitors. When you are building out your website, continually think about what your customers will be thinking and doing on each page they land on. You want it to be easy for them to find what they are looking for every step of the way. That means:

- Making sure your main menu lists the most important pages visitors are likely to visit on the site.
- Creating categories and subcategories based on the way your target audience is most likely to browse.
- Making sure those category and subcategory pages employ the keywords your research shows people use when searching for the type of products or information on them.
- Including links on each webpage to other, related pages that a visitor to the page may be interested in as well.
- Including a clear call-to-action on each page, so it is visitors know how to take the next step.
- Having a search bar somewhere on each page, so that visitors who know exactly what they are looking for have a quicker way to get there than browsing between pages.

The goal in this step is to try to get inside your visitors' heads and imagine what steps they will want to take as they move through your website, and how they would go about making them.

6. URL Structure

When a search engine algorithm is trying to determine what a web page is about, one of the main places it looks is the URL. The URL is the main address for each page of your site on the web. Every URL on your site starts with your main domain name, for instance, our domain name is “Jacob International Group” so our URL looks something like `www.jacobinternationalgroup.com`. For each page (other than your home page), that will be followed by additional characters unique to the page.

For SEO purposes, you should always customize the URL you use for every webpage on your site based on the keywords you want that page to rank for. But beyond writing a custom URL for each page, you also want to create a larger SEO-friendly URL structure for how to name URLs on your website – avoid stuffing your URL with keywords, research has shown that shorter URLs tend to rank higher than long ones.

Refer back to the site architecture you developed here. The categories and subcategories you defined can become a part of the URL structure you develop, which gives you a way to incorporate more relevant keywords into your URLs, keeping them useful and intuitive for visitors.

There are very serious consequences to changing a URL that already has authority – do not do this if your page already has links!

7. Site Speed

Your web design is just one factor in how fast your website will be, along with your web hosting package and the plugins you use. But many decisions you make in the design stage can affect how fast your site will load for visitors.

A fast-loading time creates a better user experience and is one of the ranking factors the search engine algorithms consider. When designing your website, consider ways to improve site speed, such as:

- Minimizing features that slow downloading time, like animation or large, high-resolution images.
- Shrinking any JavaScript and CSS elements you use
- Reducing the number of HTTP requests, you have on each page.
- Only using necessary widgets, to keep external scripts to a minimum.

Sometimes design elements that seem really cool can swamp down your website, inadvertently causing slower load times and a worse experience. Be thoughtful about everything you include on the site and measure how its effect on loading times balances against whatever value it offers.

8. Mobile Responsiveness

More than half of all website visits come from people browsing the web on their mobile phones.

For the sake of both your mobile visitors and the search engines that care about their experience, your web design should aim to work just as well on mobile devices as on desktops. That usually means designing a responsive website that avoids flash and has big enough buttons for people to easily select them on a touchscreen. Using a responsive web design will ensure that everyone in your target audience can have an enjoyable experience while visiting your site.

9. Visual Interface

What people see when they land on a webpage on your site depends on how large their screen and browser window are. A lot of users will only see a small portion of the whole page. When you are designing each page, think carefully about what you want them to see in the first seconds they are on the page.

To ensure your visitors get what they need and, design your pages in a way that takes the most important information high up, so all visitors see it faster.

10. Indexable Content

One of the challenges of SEO web design is that a lot of the visual components of design do not translate well to how search engine algorithms read a website. That does not mean you should not use visuals in your web design, but you should think about how to make sure they can be indexed by search engines.

For any design elements that are visual rather than textual, you need to tell Google what they are. That means:

- You should skip using flash animation entirely, since it is not indexable and not supported on all devices.
- If you use JavaScript, you should use a recommended framework like Brombone or Prerender to optimize it for SEO.
- If you include videos on your website, fill in all available metadata with your target keyword, including the title and description. And include a transcript on the site.
- For all images on your website fill in the metadata with your keyword (more on that in the next step).

Web design necessarily includes visuals. You cannot get around it. And you would not want to, they add to the experience your visitors have on the site. But for the parts of the site, the search engines cannot see, you want to do your best to tell them what they are missing and take those extra opportunities to include relevant keywords.

11. Primary Keywords

Your initial keyword research can help you gain an overall picture of the language to use when building your website, but it is also good practice to choose a target keyword (or a couple) for each individual web page on your site. To avoid competing against yourself, choose unique ones for each page.

- Use your keyword 3 times and make sure you have at least 100 words per page (but 500+ is ideal)

Use your keyword 3 times, and make sure to have at least 100 words on each URL (minimum – the more the better). You can still rank with less, and you do not ever want to put unnecessary text on your site, but I recommend not creating a new page unless you have roughly ~100 words worth of content.

- Use synonyms in your copy.

As search engines gain a more complex understanding of human language, content creators are able to utilize more natural language and still stay relevant to the keywords they are trying to rank for. Synonyms are great and using natural language that is influenced by keyword research (rather than just pure keywords) is highly encouraged.

- Use Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) in your copy.

Latent semantic indexing, or LSI, is a method used to determine context. Including keywords that are thematically related to your primary keyword can help the search engine understand what the content of your page is about.

12. Title Tags

The title tag is part of the website Google looks at to learn what the page is about, which makes it another good spot to use your target keyword. Search engines weigh in the clickthrough rate on the results as well when determining rankings, so an attractive and compelling title will help you get more people to click on your page. Try to keep your title tag short – Google will only display 50-60 characters on the search engine results page and even less of the title tag will show up in the tab at the top of your browser. And do not keyword stuff here. Using your primary keyword once should do the trick.

13. Optimize Images

Every image you use on a web page provides a few additional opportunities for optimizing your page for your main keywords. When naming images for SEO it's important to include the keyword you're targeting (e.g., primarykeyword.jpg) and update the alt text on the page with your keyword. Search engines "see" images by reading the ALT tag and looking at file names, among other factors. Try to be descriptive when you name your images.

If you have a WordPress site, then you can easily update the alt text in the media editor when you load the image.

14. Optimize Headings

When writing for the web, headings are a good tool to better organize your copy so that it is easy to read and scannable for your visits. As an added bonus, your headings are another signal to Google on what your page is about.

Even though the values of the H2, H3, H6 tags for SEO is debatable, it is still generally a good idea to include your primary keyword in your H1 tag, make sure there is one H1 on the entire page, and that it appears before any other heading's tags.

Strategically include your target keywords in the headings on your web page – but only where it makes intuitive sense to do so. You do not want to force words in if they sound strange to the reader, but if you can use the keywords in a way that makes sense, do so.

15. Optimize text on the page

The most important one to remember about website copywriting, and we cannot repeat this point enough, is to avoid keyword stuffing. Search engines notice keyword stuffing and your website can be penalized for it. But as long as you only use your target keywords along with applicable synonyms in contexts where they make sense then it is a good practice to incorporate them into the text on the page. In most cases, as long as you have chosen target keywords that are relevant to what the page is about (which is important!), then this part should come naturally, if not, then use your keyword 3 times, and make sure to have at least 100 words on each URL (minimum – the better). You can still rank with less, and you do not ever want to put unnecessary text on your site, but we do not recommend creating a new page unless you have roughly ~100 words worth of content.

16. Meta Descriptions

Meta descriptions play an important role in your click-through rates from search results. When a person sees your web page in the search results, they will see your meta description below the page title.

Any words in your description that match the terms they searched will be in bold, helping draw their attention to your result. Since they are trying to decide which of the results to choose, you can use this text to make a case for why your page is worth the click.

Always write a relevant meta description for every page on your website. Try to incorporate your keywords for the page naturally in the description to hopefully end up with some bolded text on the search results page - including your keyword in it and writing a compelling meta description can help with your CTR and use the space to provide a brief description about what is valuable on the page.

17. Link to Other Pages on Your Website

Internal linking gives you a way to signal to Google what your page is about through the anchor text you use. If you are not familiar with the term, the anchor text refers to the words that are hyperlinked. Google sees the words used each time there is a link to a web page and takes that as information about what is on the page.

Internal links also give you a way to show the search engines how your different pages are connected and drive traffic from one page on the website to another. You ideally want your visitors to stick around to avoid a high bounce rate on your website, providing helpful internal links is a good way to make that happen.

In addition to including links to relevant and authoritative sites in your content, Google looks at the language used in the hyperlink itself. By including internal links with text that is relevant to the page that you are linking to, and including your keywords, you are indicating what the content being linked is about.

Avoid using keywords in global navigation, though, as that can look like over-optimization. Stick to in-content links instead.

18. Submit Your Sitemap to Google

Before your web pages can show up on the search engine results page, Google has to crawl your website. Usually, Google's crawlers will make their way to your website over time even if you don't do anything, but you can speed things up by submitting your sitemap through Google Search Console. You can directly communicate to Google that your website exists and tell them all the specific pages on it.

19. Create an SEO Plan for the Future

SEO is a long-term and ongoing process. To show up in the search engines when people are looking for the information or products you provide, you must put some real work into providing consistent value on your website and building authority around the web.

TECHNICAL SEO CHECKLIST

1. Check Google's Search Console for crawl errors, duplicate content errors, missing titles and more

Google's free tool for website owners to get data on the search performance of their websites. You will be able to use it to find technical issues with your site such as duplicate content, find data on search rankings, visibility, CTR and more.

2. Identify bad redirects (302s that should be 301s)

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect and passes almost all SEO value from the old page to the new one. This is a good redirect. A 302 is a temporary redirect. It is used for site maintenance or time-specific promotions. The SEO value of the redirected page is not passed to the new destination. Replace 302 redirects with 301 redirects.

3. Look for broken links, errors, and crawl problems

The larger your site, the more important this is. Broken links, errors, and crawl errors make it harder for search engines to find your content, index it and drive traffic to it.

4. Make sure you do not have duplicate content

Duplicate content can dilute the value of your content among several URLs. Use 301 redirects, canonical tags or use Google Webmaster Tools to fix any duplicate content that might be indexing and penalizing your site.

5. Check your site's speed and keep it fast!

Search engines value sites that provide a good user experience and the speed of your site is a huge factor. A slow loading site will increase your bounce rate, as visitors lose patience and leave.

6. Make sure your site is mobile friendly

As an increasing amount of web traffic comes from mobile devices, having a site that is not responsive to different screen sizes and shapes will negatively impact usability, especially for local searches.

7. Create an XML sitemap and submit it to Google Search Console

An XML sitemap helps search engines understand the structure of your site and find all the pages on your site that you want to be indexed.

8. Create a robots.txt file and submit it to Google Search Console

In conjunction with an XML sitemap, a robots.txt file will establish what activities crawlers are permitted to perform in relation to each page. Including one in the top-level directory allows you to control the way that a search engine crawls and indexes your site. It can be specified for different types of crawlers, allowing you to establish different protocols for different search engines.

9. Claim your brand name on as many social networking sites as possible

For reputation management reasons, not only do you want to make sure no one else gets your account name, but you can often own all the results on the first page of a search for your brand if you are a new website or company.

10. Use an SEO Audit Tool to double-check everything

Performing an SEO audit manually is time-consuming and complicated. But there are SEO auditing tools that can help you with the process. These will speed up the process, identifying errors and offering solutions. This allows you to spend more of your time working on the overall strategy, instead of clearing out broken links.

11. Link Building & Establishing Authority

Creating amazing content is not enough to be successful in online marketing; you need ranks!! There are so many websites around the internet that may outrank you but there is a way around this. To outrank the best of the best, you need to establish authority. To establish authority, you need to start earning links (both Internal and Inbound) from an authoritative website. The next step will be to build your brand followed by nurturing your audience to boost your content.

12. Measuring, Prioritizing & Executing SEO

Measuring your SEO is critical to your website's success. Practice several measuring tactics to help you meet your goals. First, focus on engagement metrics where you need to track your audience – how long are they on your website? What are they browsing? Bounce sessions, Scroll depths tracking, etc. Then you need to measure your website's organic performance and traffic. Google Analytics is the best tool to measure the traffic of your site among other measurements such as total views, users, etc. There are hundreds of measuring tools available, you need to choose what is best for you, that covers all the metrics of measurement.

Execution is when you map and schedule your SEO tasks. Google Sheets, Google Calendar, or Daily Planner can be used for this. Measure your SEO first, understand and set your goals, then focus on making your website crawl-able by adding triggered keywords. It is advised to optimize your page every now and then, and finally evaluate your strategy and make changes if needed.

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