SEO Checklist & SEO Audit (2018)

Prerequisites Before You Start

Tracking, plugins & mandatory tools

Setup Google Tag Manager

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

Resources:

- Google Tag Manager
- How to Install Google Tag Manager on a WordPress Site

Setup Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a must-have. For SEO, you'll be able to track things like how much traffic you're getting from search engines, which pages are getting the most organic traffic, what's the bounce rate, along with many other important metrics.

Resources:

- Google Analytics
- How to Add the Google Analytics to Your WordPress Site

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.

Resources:

- Google Search Console
- Use Search Analytics in Google Sheets for Better SEO Insights

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, noindex tags, and sitemaps for you.

Resources:

- Yoast SEO
- How to Install and Setup WordPress SEO Plugin by Yoast

On-Page SEO Checklist

Heads up: check out our advanced on-page SEO tutorial to get a step-by-step walkthrough.

Perform keyword research

Understanding the terms that people use when they search, and the intent behind them is crucial to your SEO strategy.

Be sure to consider searcher intent and difficulty, pick 1 keyword per page, and you'll generally want to start with lower-volume keywords first.

Resources:

- Adwords Keyword Planner
- KWFinder (Affiliate link)
- KeywordTool.io
- SEMRush (Affiliate Link)

Try to get your keyword into your page URL

Keywords in the URL are known to be a ranking signal. However, you should avoid stuffing your URL with keywords: research has shown that shorter URLs tend to rank higher than long ones.

Side note: There are very serious consequences to changing a URL that already has authority – don't do this if your page already has links!

Resources:

Best practices for structuring URLs

Add your keyword to your title tag and make it compelling

Even though including keywords in the title tag is still important, it is not enough to get you to rank high. Search engines now 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.

Resources:

- Title tag preview tool
- How To Optimize Your Website's HTML Title Tag For More Traffic

Add your keyword to your meta description and make it compelling

The content of the meta description is not used by search engines as a ranking signal. However, including your keyword in it and writing a compelling meta description can help with your CTR.

Resources:

- Meta Description Tag: Optimizing Your CTR for More Clicks & More Traffic
- This is a helpful article about meta descriptions

Add your keyword to your H1 tag, and make sure to only use one

Even though the value 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 in the entire page and that it appears before any other heading tag.

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 don't 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's influenced by keyword research (rather than just pure keywords) is highly encouraged.

Resources:

What synonyms mean for SEO

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.

Resources:

- LSIGraph.com
- Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) & Google RankBrain: The Complete Guide

Add descriptive ALT tags and filenames to your pages

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. We also talk about images in email campaigns in the same way, in our email marketing training course.

Resources:

Image Alt Text: How to Do Image SEO for More Traffic

Link to other pages with SEO-friendly anchor text

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.

Resources:

- Best practices for internal linking
- Anchor Text & SEO: How to Optimize Link Anchor Text for More Traffic

Off-Page SEO Checklist

Use Ahrefs to analyze your link profile

Enter your domain into Ahrefs.com – what's your domain score? How many unique root domains do you have pointing to your site? How many do your competitors have? Are the backlinks from contextually relevant sites? Are the backlinks NOT going through redirect chains? Is anchor text distribution natural?

Resources:

Ahrefs

Evaluate your competitor's link profiles

This is the easiest way to get started with link building. Tracking where they are getting their most authoritative backlinks will help you to understand their strategy, how they are anchoring the links on their pages, and provide insights as to where you can gain similar links.

Resources:

- Ahrefs
- Link Diagnosis
- Open Site Explorer
- Majestic

Technical SEO Checklist

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

This is Google's free tool for website owners to get data on the search performance of their websites. You'll 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.

Resources:

Google Search Console

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's used for site maintenance or time-specific promotions. The SEO value of the redirected page is not passed to the new destination. Replace (almost all) 302 redirects with 301 redirects.

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Resources:

- Browseo.net
- How to Create and Verify a 301 Redirect on WordPress

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.

Resources:

- Screaming Frog
- The Most Common HTTP Response Codes

Make sure you don't 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.

Resources:

- Rel Canonical Tag: How to Optimize Link Rel="Canonical" For SEO
- How to Create and Verify a 301 Redirect on WordPress
- Google Search Console

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.

Resources:

- PageSpeed tools
- Gift of Speed
- GTMetrix
- Pingdom

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.

Resources:

Google's mobile-friendly testing tool

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.

Resources:

- XML-Sitemaps.com
- Google XML Sitemaps WordPress Plugin
- The Yoast SEO plugin also comes with this functionality by default

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.

Resources:

Google's robots.txt tool

Everything Else

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're a new website or company.

Resources:

Namechk

Use an SEO Audit Tool to double-check everything

Performing an SEO audit manually is time-consuming and complicated. Fortunately, there are SEO auditing tools that can help 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 overall strategy, instead of weeding out broken links.

Resources:

SEO Audit Tool