



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

STARTER GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

WHY SEO MATTERS

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is crucial for businesses and individuals who want to establish an online presence. Optimizing your website for search engines increases your chances of appearing at the top of search engine results pages, which can lead to increased traffic, engagement, and conversions. It is also a cost-effective marketing strategy, as it targets users that actively search for products or services similar to what you offer, increasing the likelihood of a conversion.

SEO is a long-term strategy that can have an impact on your website's visibility and success. By consistently optimizing your website, you can continue to rank highly in search engine results pages and attract new visitors to your page. SEO matters because it can help you achieve your online goals, whether increasing brand awareness, generating leads, or driving sales. By investing time and effort into your SEO strategy, you can establish your website as a valuable resource for your target audience and achieve online success.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS GUIDE

This guide is structured to give you a comprehensive understanding of SEO, from the basics to advanced techniques, so that you can improve your website's visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs).

By the end of this guide, you can expect to have an understanding of what SEO is, how search engines work, and the fundamental concepts and strategies involved in optimizing your website. You will also learn practical tips and techniques that you can implement to improve your website's ranking and increase organic traffic.

So whether you are a blogger, small business owner, or marketing professional, this guide will equip you with the knowledge and skills to improve your website's SEO.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

1. Read through the guide to gain an understanding of SEO and its various components.
2. Use the table of contents to jump to specific sections as needed.
3. Take notes and jot down any questions you have while reading.
4. Try to apply what you learn to your website or blog as you go along.
5. Use the resources and tools listed throughout the guide to aid your SEO efforts.
6. Refer to the guide for a refresher or to deepen your understanding of a specific topic.

By following these steps, you get the most out of this guide and start implementing SEO strategies on your website or blog. Remember that SEO is an ongoing process, so keep educating yourself and adapt your strategies as search engines and user behaviour evolve. Good luck!

SEO FUNDAMENTALS

WHAT IS SEO?

When someone searches for relevant keywords or phrases, your website will appear higher in the search engine results pages (SERPs) thanks to SEO (search engine optimization). The goal of SEO is to boost website traffic to raise your company's visibility, credibility, and profits

Complex algorithms are used by search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo to choose which websites to display in response to a user's search query.

The relevancy of the material on your website, the calibre and quantity of links going to it, the user experience, and the technical performance of your website, among many other things, are all taken into account by these algorithms.

By optimizing your website for these factors, you can improve your chances of appearing at the top of search results pages, which can in turn drive more traffic to your site. SEO involves both on-page and off-page optimization strategies, which we'll cover in more detail in the following sections.

How Search Engines Work

Search engines are powerful tools that help people find what they are looking for on the internet. When you type a search term (or "query") into a search engine, it uses a complex algorithm to find the most relevant results from its index of web pages.

The first step in the process is crawling, which is when the search engine's bots (also known as "spiders" or "crawlers") visit web pages and follow links to other pages. This allows the search engine to discover new content and update its index.

Once a page is in the search engine's index, it can be retrieved when someone searches. The search engine's algorithm analyses the query and matches it to pages in its index that are the most relevant and authoritative.

Relevance refers to how closely the content on a web page matches the user's query. The search engine looks at factors such as the presence of keywords in the title and body of the content, as well as other on-page elements like headings and alt tags.

Authority refers to how trustworthy and valuable the web page is perceived to be. The search engine considers factors such as the number and quality of external links pointing to the page, as well as the reputation of the domain.

The search engine then ranks the results based on relevance and authority and presents them to the user in a list, often with a brief description (called a "snippet") and a link to the page. The user can then click on the link to visit the page and find the information they were looking for.

The Role of Keyword in SEO

Keywords are the foundation of SEO. They are the words and phrases people type into search engines when they are looking for something online. For example, if someone wants to find a recipe for chocolate cake, they might search for "chocolate cake recipe" on Google.

In SEO, the goal is to optimize your website for keywords that are relevant to your business or industry. By doing this, the chances that your website will appear at the top of the search engine results pages (SERPs) when someone searches for those keywords increases.

When choosing keywords for your website, it is important to consider the following factors:

1. Relevance: Your keywords should be relevant to the content on your website. If someone searches for a particular keyword and your website doesn't offer what they're looking for, they will quickly leave and may not return.

2. Search volume: You want to choose keywords that people search for. If no one is searching for a particular keyword, it's not worth optimizing your website toward it.

3. Competition: Some keywords are more competitive than others. If a keyword has a lot of competition, it may be harder to rank for it. You may want to focus on less competitive keywords that are still relevant to your business. Following the selection of your keywords, you can begin to prepare your website for them. This entails utilizing the keywords in the body copy, title tags, meta descriptions, and other on-page components of your website.

Yet it's crucial to employ keywords wisely and avoid overusing them. This practice referred to as "keyword stuffing," might undermine your SEO efforts. Instead, concentrate on producing relevant, high-quality material that naturally incorporates your keywords.

On-Page vs. Off-Page Optimization

There are two primary types of optimization in SEO: on-page and off-page. The actions you can do on your website to raise its search engine visibility are referred to as on-page SEO. On the other hand, off-page optimization entails actions that take place away from your website, such as establishing backlinks from other websites.

On-Page Optimization:

Making your website's content and layout more search-engine friendly is known as on-page optimization.

This comprises items like:

- Using relevant keywords in your page titles, meta descriptions, and header tags
- Creating high-quality content that answers searchers' queries
- Ensuring your website is easy to navigate and has a clear site structure
- Adding internal links to help search engines understand the relationship between pages on your site
- Optimizing your images with descriptive file names and alt tags

Off-Page Optimization:

Off-page optimization involves promoting your website and building its authority through external means. This includes things like:

- Building backlinks from other websites
- Sharing your content on social media
- Guest blogging on other websites to get exposure and build your brand
- Participating in online communities related to your niche to establish yourself as an expert in your field

Both on-page and off-page optimization are necessary for a successful SEO strategy. Optimizing your website's content and structure makes it more attractive to search engines and improves its chances of ranking higher in search results. Meanwhile, off-page optimization can help increase your website's authority and visibility in the eyes of search engines, which can also lead to higher rankings.

White Hat Vs. Black Hat SEO

White hat SEO and black hat SEO are two different approaches to optimizing your website for search engines. White hat SEO is the legitimate, ethical way to improve your search rankings, while black hat SEO involves using tactics that are frowned upon by search engines and can get your website penalized or even banned.

White hat SEO techniques focus on creating high-quality, user-friendly content that provides value to your audience.

This includes optimizing your website's structure, using relevant keywords in your content, building high-quality backlinks, and engaging with your audience on social media.

Black hat SEO techniques, on the other hand, are all about trying to game the system and trick search engines into ranking your website higher than it deserves. Black hat SEO techniques include link-buying from dubious websites, keyword stuffing, and cloaking (displaying alternative content to users and search engines).

It's vital to keep in mind that search engines are continually improving their algorithms to pick out spammy and low-quality websites, although black hat SEO may appear like a seductive shortcut to better ranks. This means that using black hat SEO techniques can harm your website's long-term search results and only be effective for a limited time.

Black hat SEO should be avoided at all costs, whereas white hat SEO is a sustainable and safe technique to raise your search ranks. You may achieve long-term SEO success that will benefit both your website and your audience by concentrating on producing excellent content and developing connections with your users.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

WHAT IS KEYWORD RESEARCH?

Keyword research involves finding the right words and phrases that people use when searching for information online. These words and phrases are known as keywords or search terms.

Keyword research is an essential step in SEO because it helps you understand what your audience is looking for and how they are searching for it. By identifying the keywords your audience is using, you can create content that meets their needs and improve your chances of ranking higher in search engine results pages (SERPs).

To conduct keyword research, you can use various tools that help you discover and analyze search terms. These tools will give you insights into the search volume, competition, and relevance of each keyword. Some popular keyword research tools include Google Keyword Planner, Ahrefs, and SEMrush.

Once you have identified the keywords you want to target, you can use them strategically in your website's content, including your titles, headings, and body text. This will help search engines understand your content and show it to the right people at the right time.

Tools for Keyword Research and How to Choose the Right Words

Several tools can help you find the right words to target in your content. Here are some popular ones:

1. **Google Keyword Planner:** This is a free tool that shows you the estimated search volume and competition for specific keywords. You can also find related keywords and get ideas for new ones.

2. **Ubersuggest:** This is another free tool that provides keyword suggestions, search volume, and competition data. It also shows you the top-ranking pages for each keyword.

3. **Ahrefs:** This is a paid tool, but it offers comprehensive data on keyword difficulty, search volume, and click-through rates. You can also see what keywords your competitors are ranking for.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Once you have a list of potential keywords, how do you choose the right ones? Here are some tips:

1. **Relevance:** Make sure the keywords are relevant to your content and what your audience is searching for.

Black hat SEO techniques, on the other hand, are all about trying to game the system and trick search engines into ranking your website higher than it deserves. Black hat SEO techniques include link-buying from dubious websites, keyword stuffing, and cloaking (displaying alternative content to users and search engines).

2. **Search volume:** Choose keywords that have a decent search volume, but are not too high that you can't compete with big players.

3. **Competition:** Look for keywords with low to medium competition so you have a better chance of ranking.

4. **Long-tail keywords:** Consider targeting longer phrases that are more specific and have less competition. They may have a lower search volume, but they can be easier to rank for.

ON-PAGE OPTIMISATION

WHAT IS ON-PAGE OPTIMISATION?

On-page optimization includes elements such as optimizing page titles, meta descriptions, header tags, content, images, and internal linking. These elements play a crucial role in improving the user experience and helping search engines understand the content of your web pages.

Here are some key elements of on-page optimization:

1. **Title Tags:** The title tag is the most important on-page element for SEO. It tells search engines what your page is about and should include your keyword.
2. **Meta Descriptions:** The meta description is a summary of the content of your web page. It should be engaging and include your target keywords.
3. **Header Tags:** Header tags (H1, H2, H3, etc.) are used to structure the content of your page. They help both users and search engines to understand the hierarchy of the content.
4. **Content:** High-quality, original, and informative content is essential for on-page optimization. Your content should be written for your target audience and include your target keywords.

5. Images: Images can make your content more engaging and visually appealing. It is good to optimize your images by adding alt text and descriptive file names.

6. Internal Linking: Internal linking is the process of linking to other pages within your website. It helps search engines understand the structure of your website and can improve user experience.

Title Tags and Meta Descriptions

When you search on Google or any other search engine, the results include a title and a short description for each page. These are called the "title tag" and "meta description," respectively.

They are crucial because they provide a quick summary of what a page is about, helping users decide whether or not to click on it.

Relevant keywords should be included in title tags to represent the content of the page. Since they are used as headlines in search results, they must be catchy.

Compared to title tags, meta descriptions are longer and should give a brief synopsis of the page's content. They should also be written so that users will click through to the page and contain pertinent keywords. A meta description should be 150–160 characters long at the most.

It's critical to note that title tags and meta descriptions are intended for human readers and search engines. They also provide valuable information to users trying to decide whether or not to click on your page. So, make sure that they accurately describe your content and are written in an informative way.

Header Tags and Content Structure

Header tags are HTML elements that define headings and subheadings on a webpage. They help search engines understand the structure and hierarchy of your content. This makes it easier for users to scan and understand your content.

There are six header tags, ranging from H1 (the main heading) to H6 (the smallest subheading). It is important to use these tags in order and to use only one H1 tag per page. It helps search engines understand what the main topic of your page is.

When it comes to content structure, it is necessary to organize your content in a logical and easy-to-follow way. This means using headings and subheadings to break up your content into sections, and using bullet points or numbered lists to make your content easier to scan.

Internal Linking and Site Architecture

With on-page optimization, one factor is your website's internal linking and site architecture. It refers to how your website is structured and how pages are connected through links.

Internal linking is when you link from one page on your website to another page on the same website. These links are in your navigation menu, footer, or within your content.

Why is internal linking important? It helps search engines understand the relationship between your pages and can improve the user experience for visitors to your site. By linking to other relevant pages on your site, you can guide users to more helpful information.

Here are some tips for effective internal linking:

1. Use descriptive anchor text: When creating internal links, use descriptive anchor text that tells users and search engines what the linked page is about. For example, instead of using "click here", use "learn more about our SEO services".

2. Create a logical site structure: Organize your site into a clear hierarchy that makes sense for your business and audience.

This helps users and search engines find the information they need quickly and easily.

3. Link to relevant pages: When linking to other pages on your site, make sure the linked page is relevant to the content on the linking page. This helps build topical relevance for your website.

Content Optimization

One of the most important aspects of on-page optimization is ensuring that your website's content is optimized for search engines.

This means using relevant keywords and phrases throughout your content so that search engines can understand your website and show it to people searching for those topics.

Here are some tips to help you optimize your content:

1. Use relevant keywords: Make sure that the keywords in your content are relevant to the topic of your website. You can use tools like Google's Keyword Planner to find relevant keywords and phrases.

2. Avoid keyword stuffing:

While it is good to use keywords throughout your content, you do not want to overdo it. Keyword stuffing is when you use too many keywords in your content to manipulate search engine rankings. This can hurt your website's ranking and make your content difficult to read.

3. Write high-quality content:

Search engines want to show users the best possible content. Make sure that your content is well-written, informative, and engaging.

4. Use header tags: Header tags (H1, H2, H3, etc.) structure your content and make it easier for search engines to understand. Make sure to use your target keywords in your header tags.

5. Add alt text to images: Alt text describes images to search engines. Make sure to use descriptive, keyword-rich alt text for all of the images on your website.

OFF-PAGE OPTIMISATION

WHAT IS OFF-PAGE OPTIMISATION?

Off-page optimization refers to the actions taken outside your website that can impact your search engine rankings. This can include link-building, social media, and other online marketing techniques that help build your website's reputation and authority.

An important aspect of off-page optimization is building high-quality backlinks to your site. Backlinks are links from other websites that point to your site, and they are a factor in how search engines like Google determine the relevance and authority of your content.

In addition to link building, social media can also be a part of off-page optimization. By sharing your content on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, you can increase your visibility and attract more traffic to your site. Social media can also help you build relationships with your audience, which can lead to more shares, likes, and backlinks.

Other off-page optimization techniques include things like guest blogging, influencer outreach, and online PR. These strategies can help you build your brand and get your content in front of a wider audience, which can lead to more traffic, leads, and sales.

Link Building Strategies

Link building is acquiring links from other websites to your website. Search engines like Google consider links as a signal of trust and authority, so building high-quality links to your website can help you rank higher in search results. Here are some beginner-friendly link-building strategies:

1. **Guest posting:** Reach out to other websites in your niche and offer to write a guest post for them. In return, you can include a link to your website in the author bio or within the content.
2. **Broken link building:** Find broken links on other websites in your niche and offer to replace them with links to your content that is relevant and useful to your audience.
3. **Social media:** Share your content on social media platforms, and encourage others to share it as well. This can help increase your exposure and attract links from other websites.

4. **Link reclamation:** Monitor the web for mentions of your brand or content, and reach out to websites that have mentioned you but have not linked to your website. Ask them to include a link to your website in the mention.

Social Media and SEO

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can play a role in your website's SEO. While social media signals (such as likes, shares, and followers) do not directly affect your search rankings, social media can indirectly impact your SEO efforts in several ways.

1. Social media can drive traffic to your website. When you share links to your website on social media, you give your followers a chance to click through and visit your site. The more traffic your website receives, the better your SEO rankings may be.

2. Social media can help you build backlinks. When people share your content on social media, they are creating backlinks to your site. Backlinks are a factor in SEO, as search engines see them as a sign of authority and relevance. The more quality backlinks you have, the higher your website may rank.

3. Social media can help you build brand awareness. The more people know about your brand and recognize it, the more likely they may search for it by name. Brand recognition can indirectly affect your rankings, as search engines see branded searches as a sign of authority and relevance.

To make the most of social media for SEO, here are some tips:

- Be active on social media platforms that your target audience uses most.
- Share links to your website on social media regularly, but do not overdo it.

- Engage with your followers on social media by responding to comments and messages.
- Create shareable content that people will want to share on social media.
- Encourage others to share your content on social media by adding social sharing buttons to your website.

Remember, social media is just one piece of the puzzle in SEO. While it can be a helpful tool, it should not be your only focus. Ensure to also focus on other off-page optimization techniques like link building and guest posting.

TECHNICAL SEO

WHAT IS TECHNICAL SEO?

Technical SEO is optimizing your website's technical elements to improve its visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs). This includes everything from website speed and performance to website architecture and code.

While technical SEO may sound complicated, it is essential in any successful SEO strategy. Without good technical SEO, your website may not be properly crawled and indexed by search engines, which could hurt your overall rankings.

Some examples of technical SEO elements include:

- **Site speed and performance:** How quickly your website loads can affect your search rankings. Slow loading times can result in a poor user experience and lower search rankings.
- **Mobile optimization:** With more and more people using mobile devices to access the internet, having a mobile-friendly website is crucial for SEO success.

- **Site architecture and navigation:** A well-organized site structure and navigation can make it easier for users and search engines to understand your website.
- **Structured data and schema mark-up:** Adding structured data to your website can help search engines better understand and display your content in search results.
- **Minimize image sizes:** Large images can slow down your website. Use image compression tools to reduce file size of images without compromising the quality.
- **Use caching:** Caching allows browsers to store website files locally, so they don't have to be reloaded each time a user visits the site. This can significantly speed up load times. Consider using a caching plugin or service.

Best Practices for Optimizing Website Speed And Performance

Website speed and performance are important factors for SEO. If your website takes too long to load, users are likely to leave, and this may lead to search engines ranking it lower. Here are some best practices to optimize website speed and performance:

3. Optimize your code: Bloated or poorly optimized code can also slow down your website.

Ensure your code is clean, minified, and free of unnecessary scripts or plugins.

4. Use a Content Delivery Network (CDN): A CDN can distribute your website's files across multiple servers, reducing the distance that data needs to travel to reach users.

This can improve load times, especially for users in different geographic locations.

5. Choose a fast hosting provider: Your hosting provider can also impact your website speed. Choose a provider that offers fast loading times and reliable uptime.

How to Use Schema Mark-up to Improve Search Engine Visibility

Schema mark-up is a type of structured data that helps search engines understand the content of your website better.

By adding schema mark-up to your website, you can improve your search engine visibility and increase your chances of appearing in rich snippets, knowledge panels, and other types of enhanced search results.

To use schema mark-up on your website, you'll need to follow these steps:

1. Choose the right schema type for your content. Schema mark-up comes in many types, such as Article, Recipe, Event, and Product. Choose the type that best matches the content on your website.

2. Add the schema mark-up to your website's HTML code. You can add schema mark-up to your website using JSON-LD, microdata, or RDFa. JSON-LD is the recommended format for beginners, as it's the easiest to implement.

3. Test your schema mark-up using Google's Structured Data Testing Tool. This tool will help you check that your schema mark-up is properly formatted and that there are no errors.

4. Monitor your search engine visibility using Google Search Console. After you've added schema mark-up to your website, it may take some time for search engines to pick it up. Use Google Search Console to monitor your search engine visibility and track improvements.

MEASURING SEO SUCCESS

HOW TO ANALYSE DATA AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

Once you have implemented your SEO strategies, it's important to measure your success. Here are some tips for analysing your data and making improvements to your SEO:

1. Use Google Analytics: Google Analytics is a free tool that can help you track your website's traffic and user behaviour. By looking at metrics like the number of visitors, bounce rate, and time spent on the site, you can get an idea of how people interact with your website.
2. Set goals: Before you start analysing your data, it is important to set goals for your SEO. For example, you might want to increase your website traffic or improve your search engine rankings. By setting specific goals, you can measure your progress and make adjustments as needed.
3. Analyse your data regularly: It is important to analyse your data so you can spot trends and make changes quickly. You might want to set up a weekly or monthly report to keep track of your progress.

4. Identify areas for improvement: You can determine where you could improve after you have analysed your data. To encourage users to stay longer on your website, for instance, you may enhance the user experience if your bounce rate is high.

5. Make changes and test again: When you have determined which areas need work, you may make the necessary modifications and test them again to see if they have a good effect on your SEO. It is crucial to implement adjustments one at a time so you can determine which ones are having the biggest effects.

Key Metrics to Track

One of the most important aspects of measuring your SEO success is keeping track of relevant metrics. By monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs), you can gain valuable insights into how well your SEO strategies are working and identify areas for improvement. Here are some beginner-friendly metrics to track:

1. **Organic Traffic:** This refers to the number of visitors that visit your website from search engine results pages (SERPs). It is a good indicator of how visible your site is in search engines and how well your optimization efforts are paying off.

2. **Keyword Rankings:** Tracking your rankings for specific keywords can help you determine whether your content is being and how it is performing in search results.

3. **Bounce Rate:** This metric shows the percentage of visitors who leave your website after viewing only one page. A high bounce rate can indicate that your site is not meeting the needs of your audience.

4. **Conversion Rate:** This measures the percentage of visitors who take a desired action on your website, such as making a purchase or filling out a contact form. It is a good indicator of how well your website is engaging and converting visitors.

5. **Backlinks:** Backlinks are links from other websites to your site. Tracking the number and quality of backlinks you have can help you identify areas for improvement in your off-page optimization strategies.

Remember, these are just a few of the metrics you can track to measure your SEO success. The important thing is to focus on metrics that are relevant to your specific goals and objectives. By regularly monitoring and analysing your KPIs, you can make informed decisions about your SEO strategies and improve your website's visibility and performance in search results.

CONCLUSION

RECAP OF KEY TAKEAWAYS

Now that you understand the basics of SEO, here are some key takeaways to keep in mind as you start optimizing your website:

- Focus on high-quality content that provides value to your audience and incorporates your target keywords naturally.
- Use on-page optimization techniques, such as title tags, header tags, and internal linking, to make your website easy to navigate for users.
- Build high-quality backlinks from reputable websites to boost your website's authority and improve your search engine rankings.
- Pay attention to technical SEO aspects, such as site speed, mobile optimization, and structured data, to improve your website's performance and user experience.
- Monitor your website's performance using tools like Google Analytics and Search Console, and adjust your SEO strategy accordingly to improve your results.

By following these key takeaways, you will be on your way to improving your website's visibility and driving more organic traffic to your site.

The Future of SEO

SEO is constantly evolving, and it is important to stay up-to-date with the latest trends and changes in the industry. Here are a few trends to keep an eye on in the future:

1. **Voice search:** More and more people are using voice search to find information online, so it is important to optimize your content for voice search queries.
2. **Artificial intelligence:** Search engines use artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the accuracy and relevance of their search results. This means that it is important to create high-quality, relevant content that provides value to your audience.
3. **User experience:** Search engines are placing more emphasis on user experience, which includes factors like site speed, mobile-friendliness, and accessibility. Ensure your site is fast, easy to use, and works well on all devices.
4. **Personalization:** Search engines are getting better at personalizing search results based on a user's search history and preferences. This means that it is important to understand your audience and create content that speaks to their specific needs and interests.

Additional Resources and Further Reading

Congratulations on completing this SEO starter guide! If you want to dive deeper into the world of SEO, here are some additional resources and further reading to check out:

1. Moz Beginner's Guide to SEO: This comprehensive guide covers the basics of SEO and is a great starting point for beginners.
2. Google Search Central: This website offers a wealth of information on how to optimize your website for Google searches. It includes guides, best practices, and troubleshooting tips.
3. SEMrush Academy: SEMrush is a popular SEO tool, and their academy offers free courses on SEO fundamentals and advanced topics.
4. Ahrefs Blog: Ahrefs is another popular SEO tool, and the blog is a great resource for learning about the latest SEO trends and tactics.
5. The Beginner's Guide to Social Media: This guide by Hootsuite covers the basics of social media marketing, which can also have an impact on your SEO efforts.

Remember, SEO is a constantly evolving field, so it is important to stay up-to-date on the latest trends and best practices. Keep learning and experimenting, and you will be on your way to improving your website's search engine visibility.