ORGANIC

SEO RANKING FACTORS GUIDE 2018

FOUND.

CONTENTS

BEFORE WE START

In this short guide we discuss the influenceable factors involved in a search engine's assessment of a website, regarding where it chooses to rank it for a given search term.

The practise of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is by some seen as a dark art, the territory of search 'magicians' who using smoke and mirrors can affect change in the search engine result pages (SERPs) without anyone actually understanding their methods. While this is of course untrue, and over recent years SEO has become more transparent and accessible. It doesn't mean that a greater understanding of what is going on when an SEO'r (or SEO agency) 'works their magic' wouldn't benefit all parties involved.

This short guide attempts to fix that as it covers four of the most important factors in SEO and attempts to explain them in an open and accessible way.

As search engines evolve, so do the approaches and best practices involved in optimising a website for search. What doesn't really change is the search engines' ambition to offer the searcher the 'best' possible set of results for the query they have given. Many marketers and website owners would do well to understand that anything done to subvert or circumvent this is doomed to end, at some point, in failure and a penalty from the search engine.

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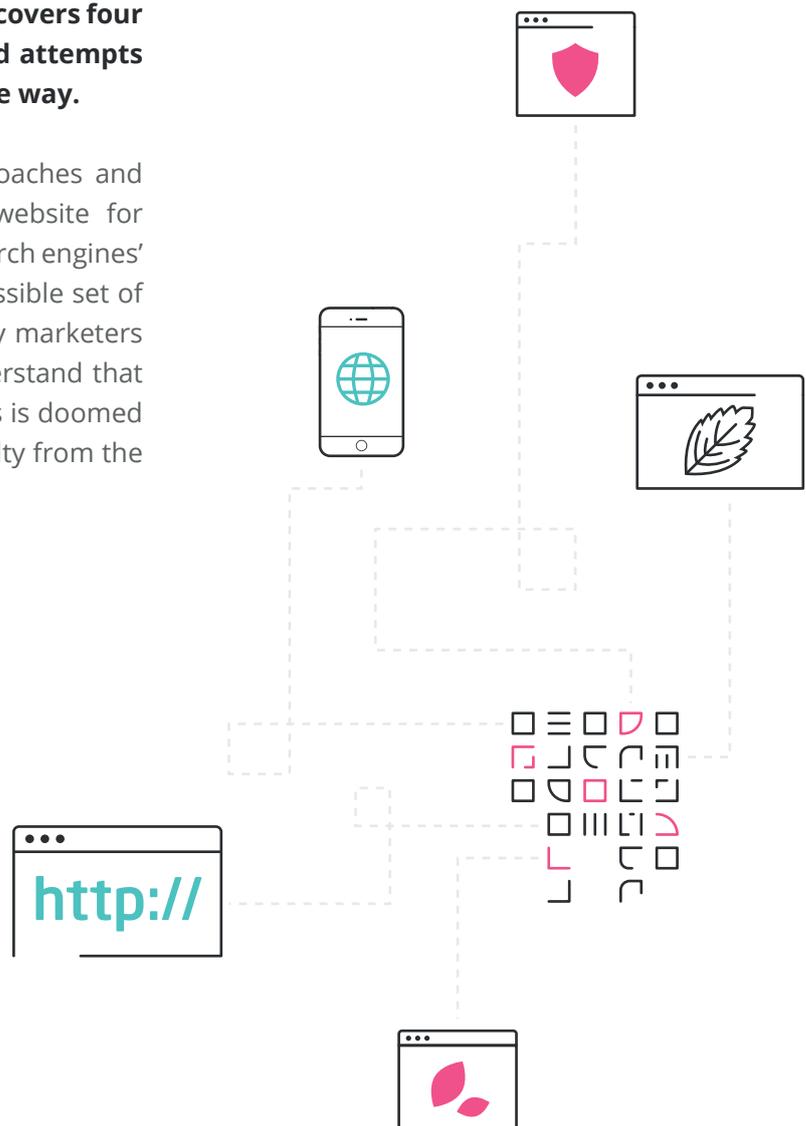
CONTENT

CONTENT AS A RANKING FACTOR

Author : Imogen Davies | SEO Content Executive

Content is the most important of all on-page SEO ranking factors. How you speak to the user determines how search engines will view you.

What is great content? From a search engine's perspective, it fundamentally has to provide the information a user is searching for in a succinct and sufficiently detailed fashion. It might sound like creating content that works for search is the same as for a user, and to some extent this is true. It's certainly a guiding rule.

But, search engines still need a bit of help understanding what content is about; as the name suggests, it's about optimising what's already there and there are certain ways we do this...

'PROOF TERMS' IN THE CONTENT

Strongly linked to the primary keyword on the page, 'proof terms' are those thematic words that you would expect to find in most or all articles on a given topic. So if you're writing about the environment and your keyword is "climate change", then the 'proof terms' one would expect to find in the article might be "global warming" or "climate science".

A study by Searchmetrics in 2015 found over three-quarters of highly ranked websites used 'proof terms' in their content.

The great thing about 'proof terms' is that they tend to appear completely naturally whenever you're producing in-depth content on a topic, so it's often not necessary to think too hard about them.

N.B. it's best to avoid discussing two or more topics on the same web page as this will confuse search engines, a situation known as topic dilution.

"You shall know a word by the company it keeps"

- J. R. Firth, 1957

'RELEVANT TERMS' IN THE CONTENT

In the same Searchmetrics study mentioned above, it was noticed that half of all highly ranked websites utilised 'relevant terms'. These are words not as closely correlated with the keyword as 'proof terms' but are still contextually linked. So if your keyword is "exercise", then "sweat" or "weight loss" might be 'relevant terms', whereas 'cupboard' would not.

By looking at a list of relevant terms for a specific keyword, we should be able to make an accurate guess as to what the keyword itself is. Let's say you're creating a landing page for a hotel. Your primary keyword may be "Mayfair hotel", but you might have a range of relevant terms within the content such as "Mayfair rooms", "inexpensive lodgings in London", "breakfast included". Again, these terms tend to appear naturally as you write about a topic and help convince search engines that your page contains relevant content for the query.

The rise in importance of 'relevant terms' coincides with a decline in the importance of keywords. What Google is looking for is evidence of relevance, and by providing contextual depth you are doing just that.

KEYWORDS IN THE INTERNAL LINKS

An internal link is one that targets the same domain, or in other words, links to another page on the same website. The reason good internal link structuring is important is threefold. Firstly, it helps your site visitors to get around and find what they're looking for – if they're on a law firm's website and reading an article about information on divorce law for instance, then an internal link to another article dealing with the amicable division of assets could well be of interest to them.

Secondly, internal links help search engines to understand the architecture of a website and index it for future reference. Poor internal linking structure, which can have many causes, frustrates the efforts of search engines to crawl a website and in doing so prevents it from ranking.

Thirdly, it distributes page authority and ranking power around your website, telling the search engines that you think certain content is important.

The text used in a link (anchor text) helps a search engine understand what the page being linked to is about, so as it crawls the whole site it compiles a more complete picture of the topics and content. The best optimised internal links will have a descriptive keyword in the anchor text placed after the link referral location, such as:

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<a href="http://www.randomlawfirm.
co.uk/law-guide/division-of-
assets/">Division of assets</a>
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This improves the flow of relevance to that page for that specific keyword topic.

Embedding the internal link within the body text is more than enough, since it will be surrounded by relevant contextual content. The anchor text for links going to the same page should be varied, so long as they remain closely correlated to the keyword you want to rank for. It's important to remember also that the page linked to must be in some way related to the content discussed.

KEYWORDS IN YOUR EXTERNAL LINKS

The quantity and quality of external hyperlinks heading to your site and from your site to others are considered to be one of, if not the, most important ranking factor in SEO. The "link-juice" they impart carries extra weight because they are third-party recommendations – think of it as a popularity contest.

Key metrics in external links include the trustworthiness of the site they originate from, the relevancy between the source and the target page(s), and the relevancy of the anchor text in the link.

So again using the example of the law firm with its page about the division of assets, one site might link to it using the anchor text of "splitting property between partners" while another might use the anchor text "avoiding conflict when dividing assets during a divorce". By accurately reflecting the true nature of the content they're linking to, both tell Google what the target page is about and help to improve its relevance scoring.

However, when earning links for your content, caution is advised. Overuse of what is known as exact match keyword anchor text in links from external domains is one of the most common red flags for link profile manipulation, which Googlebot can detect through its Penguin algorithm. In practice, most external links to a domain either (a) have brand anchor text, or (b) simply use the URL. Keep a close eye on the anchor text of your incoming links to ensure you avoid algorithmic or manual actions.

KEYWORDS IN THE BODY TEXT

Keywords are simply the terms people are searching for most on a topic i.e. more people search for 'divorce lawyers' in the UK than 'divorce attorneys'. Placing these words on your pages will help your chances in ranking for the terms more people are searching for.

But, it's not simply the case of putting the most popular phrases in the text as many times as possible; this once worked but no longer. Great keyword inclusion is making sure the right phrases are present on the right pages in the right places (the title and opening paragraph are some of the most important).

Focus most on the meaning behind your content, instead of just repeating the term that you want to rank for. Keywords can be placed in various segments of the page from the Title tag to image tags and the URL, but placing them in the body text is essential to establish a robust semantic core to the content.

Of course, when writing about a topic, the keywords in the body will often just flow naturally but you should be aiming to include plenty of 'relevant' and 'proof terms' also. Two or three usages of your keyword in the body text of a page is enough to ensure the message of what the page is about gets through to search engines.

THE WORD COUNT OF A PAGE

While there's no set word count for a web page, and the maxim that quality is always better than quantity generally holds true; long-form content does tend to be more valuable than short snippets for some topics.

Remembering that search engines want a user's query to be sufficiently answered in as a succinct fashion as possible. Google especially holds content on health or finance to a higher editorial standard and has preconceived notions of how much information is required to cover off a topic i.e. an article on pancreatic cancer symptoms is expected to be more thorough, deeper and comprehensive than one on how to get a good night's sleep.

The guiding principle is to write in more detail on topics the more they impact on someone's life or decisions. This is what search engines judge (to one degree or another).

Try to produce unique or original content that is useful to the reader and that utilises keywords, but remember that if yours is a topic that deserves talking about at length, then Google will probably agree. It will likely look at the genre of the website, so if you're a journalist operating an online publication then it would expect to see considerable amounts of content but if you are a Chester pet-grooming parlour, it would not.

KEYWORDS IN PAGE DESCRIPTIONS

When you write a meta description for a page, you're effectively giving Google a snippet of information that it then uses on its SERPs as a summary of that same page. Optimising this short description, normally between 150 and 160 characters, with the right keywords, while it does not have any effect on your ranking, can greatly boost your click-through rates. It's your best opportunity to concisely inform a reader that your page contains the information they need.

Once you know the keyword you want to target in the description, you then combine that with information about your site and a call to action for the user to click the link. It's a form of organic ad copy and requires accurate representation of what the on-page content is actually about, and being distinct from all of your other page descriptions, where reasonably possible, to work as it should.

READABILITY AND THE FLESCH READABILITY SCALE

Readability in your on-page content is vital, since if the text is too complex with long, technical words it may put some people off and most users won't stay long. The Flesch Readability Test, developed by author Rudolf Flesch, produces scores based on the average sentence length and average number of syllables per word, with the highest scores being the most readable.

If your page produces a score around 60-70 out of 100, this is considered about average, with sentences in the region of 15-20 words in length and words averaging around two syllables. Note that if your score is too high, this can have the reverse effect of convincing readers the page content is beneath them, and causing them to click away. So be smart, just not too smart.

Much of search engine optimised content is in some ways open to interpretation. It's not unknown for meta descriptions to be left blank for the search engines to pull out what they consider relevant text from the page to use as snippets, for instance. The value of high word counts is debatable and many now believe that individual keywords are nowhere near as important as they used to be.

What is unarguable, however, is that it has never been more essential to have useful, original and relevant content on a page, content that is easy to understand and link to, and embedded within a semantically-rich contextual framework.
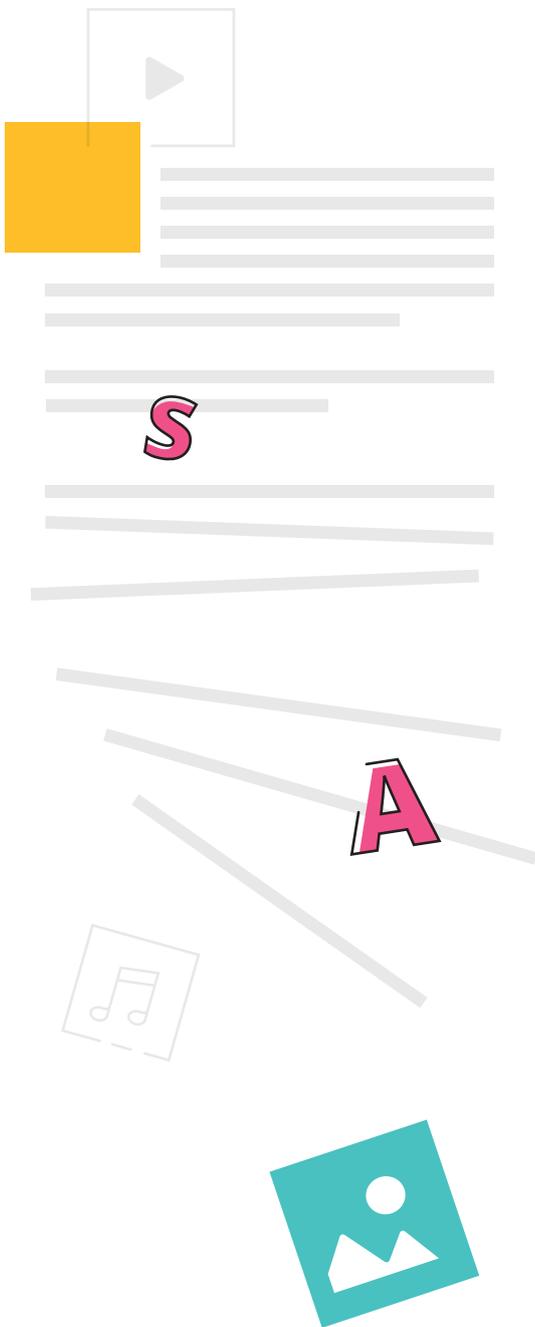
TECHNICAL

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS THAT WILL HELP YOUR SITE RANK

Author : Richard Lewis | SEO Lead

A firm grasp of the technical elements of SEO, and the principles behind them, forms the basis of any successful organic campaign. If these elements are not implemented effectively, then other key factors in SEO such as content and outreach naturally cannot perform to their full potential. Googlebot will be unable to give full credit for the relevance and authority of your web-pages for given keyword searches if your domain is not technically compliant.

> *"...it's essential for webmasters to maintain a clear understanding of those features that are known to affect positioning on SERPS..."*

Given the complexity of search engine algorithms, and that they are continually subject to change, it's essential for webmasters to maintain a clear understanding of those features that are known to affect positioning on SERPS, and also those which while not thought to directly impact rankings can also help with SEO.

Multiple studies of high-ranking sites indicate that the best performers will always have certain technical aspects in common. Below we discuss the crucial elements that should be borne in mind, and current best practices when implementing them...

ARCHITECTURE & CRAWLABILITY

If we think of the internet as a gigantic book, then for a website to feature in the web index, and thereby appear in the rankings, 'spiders' such as Googlebot and Bingbot need to be able to crawl it and determine its relevance for particular queries. If they can't find their way around easily, the site won't rank – it's as simple as that, so ensuring that your website has a crawlable architecture is very important for boosting search rankings.

Submitting a sitemap, the correct use of canonicalization, 301 redirects and building an effective internal link structure can all help boost crawlability. Note that if a site uses Flash or certain other technologies, these can impede spiders from making their way around by making any links or HTML embedded within them unparseable.

THE INTERNAL LINKING STRUCTURE

As discussed above, a website's visitors aren't always human, and an effective internal link structure, as well as making it easy for someone to navigate a website and easily find the information they need, also helps search engine spiders to know what you consider to be of importance and where it is located.

By making it easy for the spiders to crawl your pages and assess the content of each, you help your rankings, spreading domain authority and ranking power across your website. Aim to link deep into the website in natural directions, to valuable content that you want people to discover, rather than to your Home or Contact pages. Utilise follow links and anchor text, embedding them naturally in the body text, and use your internal links sparingly – while it's not necessarily detrimental, adding dozens of links won't have much more effect in terms of ranking than a handful.

Make the internal links as natural as possible – exact match anchor text is preferable to a generic 'Click here' and is a major ranking signal.

THE SITE IS HTTPS

In long-form, Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure, or HTTPS, effectively means that any communications between a person's web browser and a website bearing that prefix in its URL are encrypted and therefore secure.

Google has been at the forefront of pushing for a HTTPS web and while it has itself said that HTTPS is only a low-strength ranking signal at present, it's quite possible that it will grow in importance in the future.

As such, currently HTTPS has only a low correlation with organic performance and since implementation can be both costly and complex, take-up is a long way from complete. But it does result in greater security and user confidence, and webmasters can restrict it to certain pages such as registration and checkout if they want, to make installation easier and reduce the strain on resources. There are also techniques available that can prevent HTTPS from slowing page loading speeds, which is vital especially for major ecommerce websites. For further detail on HTTPS, see our blog post Making the Leap: Should You Kermit to HTTPS?

EXISTENCE OF A META DESCRIPTION

Writing meta descriptions won't directly affect your search rankings but they are very useful for improving click-throughs from the SERPS.

These snippets that describe the content of a page are what appear on the SERPS, like organic advertisements, and so they need to be correctly optimised. Aim for 150-160 characters – too long and your sentence will be cut off, too short and it doesn't look right, denting user confidence. Add a persuasive description, smart deployment of keywords (which Google helpfully bolds to make them stand out), and of course pay attention to relevance to the page content.

It's preferred that every meta description should be unique from all the others you use, so if you have a lot of pages to describe, you might consider just leaving them blank and letting the search engines pull through content from each page to create their own.

THE SITE SPEED

There are many things that are important to Google – web security, not being evil, and also, of course, the user experience, or UX for short. An interesting part of that is page-loading speeds which can be bogged down by a wide variety of factors – such as, potentially, HTTPS or video content that plays automatically. Slower website loading speeds – even fractions of a second, can cause users to click away in frustration, and so they are picked up on by search engines.

Time To First Byte – the duration until the first response is received from the server, has the potential to impact rankings if competing websites are otherwise equal. A fast internet connection helps, but it's far from the end of the matter. You can consider dedicated hosting for your site, and look at optimising your back-end infrastructure and software so that requests get through your network to your servers and data goes back as fast as possible. Content Delivery Networks (CDNs) are a common way of helping with latency and they are especially useful for companies that need a web presence in multiple countries and want to maximise site speed.

Note that the actual page loading speed, according to one Moz study, does not seem to correlate directly with search rankings, but given Google's interest in UX, it would be unwise to assume that won't change at some point.

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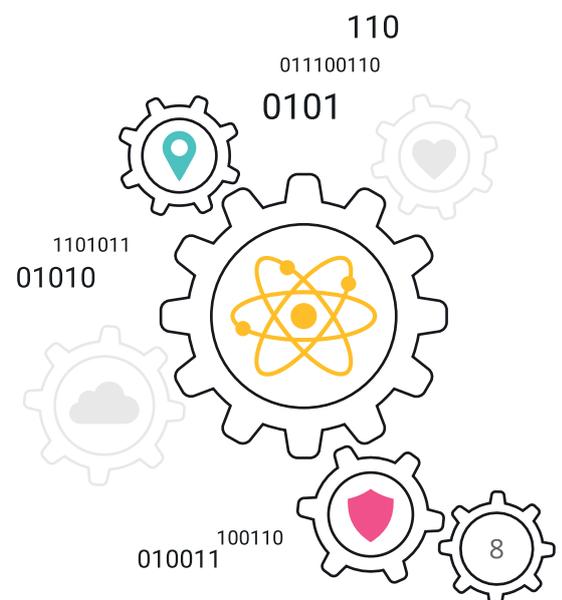
THE KEYWORDS ARE IN THE DOMAIN

Keyword-rich domains, such as buildawebsite. com, can certainly help with rankings but they will understandably also face greater scrutiny from the search engines that are looking to confirm the quality and relevance of their content.

Best practise calls for balancing the benefits of having a keyword in the domain name with ensuring that it remains catchy and easy to type for the user. Exact Match Domains, if you can afford to buy the one you want, can still have considerable value, but never rely on them as a way to increase traffic at the expense of other tactics.

If getting a keyword-rich domain is going to involve using multiple hyphens or using a lesser-known Top Level Domain, then it's probably not worth it.

THE USE OF FLASH

Again looking at the user experience, Flash is an effective device for grabbing the visitor's attention quickly and conveying information in a snappy format, yet it can work against a site's performance. Flash sites often have unconventional navigation that can impede users as well as being slower to load.

If you want to incorporate Flash into your site but also help your rankings at the same time, then you shouldn't use it for site navigation. Create XML Sitemaps for easy crawling and use HTML for the most important sections of your website.
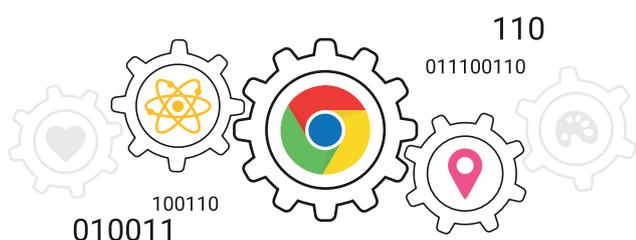
THE DOMAIN IS A .COM

While your site's Top Level Domain, as Google allows, probably won't affect your rankings, it's thought that newer formats such as .travel or .gold, for instance, are inviting search engines and users, to consider them a little spammy.

> *"...overlooking the technical elements of a website, or worse, getting them wrong, can render all of your efforts for naught."*

They can offer some advantages, such as in differentiating your site from the competition or allowing you to buy a memorable web address without spending a fortune on it, but you should always take into account the navigation preferences of web users – they are far more likely to click on a .com or .co.uk.

Trickery such as having a domain name completely unrelated to a site's content will get nowhere – there are now very few shortcuts with search and those that remain are being steadily picked off.

By now if you're a webmaster or work in SEO you'll be long familiar with the term that Content is King and while it's difficult to overstate the importance of high-quality content, overlooking the technical elements of a website, or worse, getting them wrong, can render all of your efforts for naught.

In order to rank, the website needs to be readied for crawling, and the weight that Google and other search engines apply to different technical aspects is forever shifting, so the work is never done. But then, isn't the quest for constant learning and improvement what makes SEO so much fun anyway?

BACKLINKS

HOW IMPORTANT ARE BACKLINKS AS A RANKING FACTOR?

Author : Tom Brand | SEO Lead

The external links directed back to your own website, known as backlinks, are one of the principal aspects of SEO. The volume and quality of these backlinks help search engines to determine the authority of your site which is a major determinant of where it will be placed in the SERPS for keyword queries. Ranking without their presence is next to impossible.

In the past backlinks have been the focus of "blackhat" techniques, such as link-buying or creating artificially constructed link networks called link farms – practices that Google has clamped down on.

> *"A high volume of backlinks may seem optimum, but quality will always take first place over qunatity."*

What you should be aiming for is a healthy link profile, where you have an mix of natural backlink types from websites of varying levels of authority. Your profile should be built up over a period of time to help the natural flow and ideally contain no links from spammy websites in order to stay respectable in the eyes of Google. Fresh links should be developed as part of an ongoing process, as if the number of backlinks tails off, it may signals to search engine spiders that a website is no longer of interest.

This guide outlines the fundamental requirements and techniques of good backlink practice.

NUMBER OF BACKLINKS

A high volume of backlinks may seem optimum, but quality will always take first place over quantity. Search engines use sophisticated analytical methods to establish which links should be taken seriously and which can be ignored due to their forced intentions to help rankings, or worse... penalised for!

The speed at which a website attains its backlinks is also monitored by search engines. If they are observed to be building them aggressively, this can be perceived as suspicious and could see the target website penalised.

REFERRING DOMAINS

The content of the domains referring back to your site should be as relevant as possible to your own content, in order for search engines to give the links natural acceptance.

These domains must also be reputable, and ideally have good levels of authority and trust, because if they are blacklisted at some point then it could taint your own site with reduced visibility.

11

LINKS FROM NEWS SITES

Authoritative and globally popular news sites that are known for the high editorial quality of their content, such as the BBC, score highly for trustworthiness, and will provide increased link equity, because trusted, high authority sites tend to link to other trusted, high authority sites. The difficulty of course lies in getting those backlinks in the first place, but there are several tactics which can help.

If you have something you consider newsworthy, such as the results of a survey, or a product hitting the market, send out a press release. This is just one way of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with journalists, which can also involve making them aware of your site as a potential source if you know they tend to write about topics related to your content. If they contact you with a query, provide a helpful response and you may receive a backlink in return.

NOFOLLOW RATIO

Nofollow links should be utilised when you don't want to vouch for the quality of the content on the websites from which they originate. Paid links should also be marked nofollow. You're essentially telling search engine spiders not to use these links, or to pass value to them, whether positive or negative. A healthy link profile will always include a mix of both follow and nofollow links.

BACKLINK AGE

The age of backlinks is known to be of importance because of a Google patent that described how it can be used to determine the topicality of a piece of content. Crucially, backlink age cannot be faked, so Google can trust it!

Backlinks with short lifespans, those that appear and then disappear again shortly afterwards, are an indication that they are being paid for, something that search engines are strongly against making this tactic fall under blackhat SEO.

ANCHOR TEXT KEYWORDS

Websites earning a lot of backlinks with relevant keywords will score highly for such terms, but anchor text should be naturally varied. Google's Penguin update targeted overly optimised anchor text as a major sign of manipulation which resulted in penalties and loss of visibility for websites that partook so.

Analytics software can help you to learn what anchor text is being used in backlinks directing to your site, and if necessary you can contact the webmasters to change the text so that it's optimised with your preferred keywords or, if they do not respond, use Google's disavow tool.

Effectively optimised backlink anchor text might incorporate your brand name, URL or a brand name combined with keywords, such as "SEO ranking advice from Found".

LINKS TO HOMEPAGE

our homepage is your content hub. Once someone follows a link to an inner page on your site, such as a blog article, assuming they like it, then their natural next step is likely to be your home page.

By strengthening your homepage with backlinks, you're distributing its authority around your entire website, so having a large number of external links heading there makes sense. But that doesn't mean you should neglect developing links to other content you want to be found or for which you wish to rank.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of a strong link profile, but without knowing what sites are linking to you and how, you're flying blind.

With the assistance of analytic software, you can perform a link audit to establish, among other information:

▶ Which sites are backlinking to your own
▶ Their domain and page authority
▶ The age of the link
▶ What anchor text is being used

You can build on that information using the various available techniques, while always keeping in mind that if you build a great website that provides a solid user experience, and has valuable, informative and relevant content, then it will grow in popularity and recognition. From there, good backlinks should naturally follow.
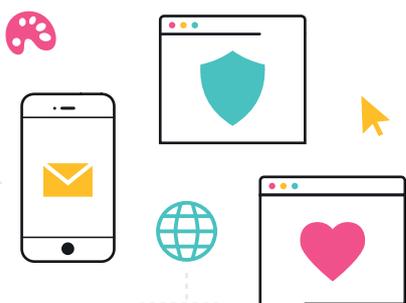
UX

WHY YOU SHOULD TREASURE GOOD USER EXPERIENCE AS A RANKING SIGNAL

Author :Ellie Hubble | Copywriter

If seeing user experience (UX) and ranking together in the title made you wince, you might not be the only reader with that response. You might say "well, UX is not confirmed as a direct ranking factor". And I'd say you're technically right. For now...

Engagement was recently voted as one of the top ten most influential ranking factors. Yet it isn't a confirmed ranking factor, with Google's own analyst John Mueller calling it out as a false ranking signal in August 2015.

But just because it isn't an official signal now doesn't mean it won't be confirmed as one in the future. If one thing is certain in the world of SEO it's that the goal posts are changing at pace all the time.

> ## "We know that understanding user data is important to Google, even if they are vague on its impact..."

We know that understanding user data is important to Google, even if they are vague on its impact to Search Engine Results Pages. They even have a patent to use your phone's camera to understand your feeling towards a particular search result (please smile if you are reading this on mobile), showing the search giant's active interest in user engagement and experience.

It's simple common sense that your website's level and quality of user engagement is important for performance, but can the same be said for SEO?

## WHY USER ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT FOR SEO

Optimising a website for search engines necessitates optimising it for visitors. Without good UX, SEO efforts will be frustrated, with disappointing levels of conversions, social shares and backlinks. Whereas good UX benefits the entire website, as well as other aspects of your marketing.

We know that Google is trying to understand how users interact not just with content, but also with website structure in general. Content and structure must find a balance between what works well for SEO purposes and what benefits UX to avoid conflict between the two.

The best user experiences that meet both of needs are those that:

▶ Engage and attract users
▶ Offer consistent, positive brand-positioning
▶ Boost sales and conversions
▶ Reduce operational and resource costs

Good SEO and good UX judged together in this way shows that everyone can win. So we're working with the same metrics, but why not combine the approach to achieving those goals?
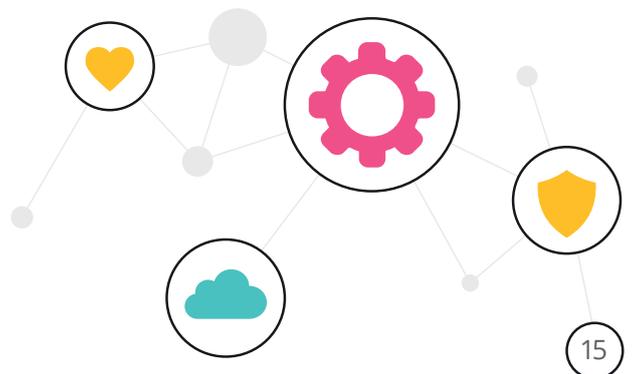
START PLANNING FOR GOOD UX IN THREE STEPS:

1. GET OVER THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE

You're too close to your site, so you think you know how users navigate and engage with your site. But only users can show you how they use your site. There is nothing more valuable than a fresh set of eyes and a great free tool for that is peek – try it out here.

2. GET TO KNOW YOUR USER ENGAGEMENT DATA

By collecting user engagement data and crucially then analysing this, you can see the patterns and trends of how people use your site. Which Calls-to-Action buttons do they click most, or avoid? Is there a service page that is performing especially badly? Does heat mapping show that users aren't scrolling through all your content? Should it therefore be streamlined? What's the bounce rate? Can it be improved? I'll look through some of these data points in more detail below.

3. AVOID COMMON UX MISTAKES

UX is a tricky beast to control and to tame but there are best practices and design conventions that you can follow to get the basics right. Read this great post about user experience mistakes by our Head of Design at Found.

You've followed these three steps, now you're ready to go deeper down the rabbit hole.

LEARN THE DATA AND METRICS OF UX:

CLICK-THROUGH RATE

It's thought that organic click-through rate (CTR) – the number of visitors to a site who follow an organic search result hyperlink to get there – does still have some effect on search rankings, but Google remains frustratingly vague on the subject.

Of course CTR has the potential to be manipulated, leaving SERPs vulnerable to abuse, but, particularly when combined with other metrics such as bounce rate and time onsite, it can also be very informative on how a site is performing in terms of user satisfaction.

A high CTR means users are engaging positively with your content, wanting to go further into the content and information you provide. And a high CTR is naturally beneficial to webmasters, providing they can then keep the visitors onsite. One example of how organic CTR can be increased is through the inclusion of keyword-rich snippets with effective Calls-to-Action for the SERPS.

If your snippet, domain, title or some other aspect on the SERPs can potentially boost the CTR beyond what would normally be expected, then Google may look at that and think your site should be ranking higher. So it's worth checking yours out and ensuring they're as effective as they can be.
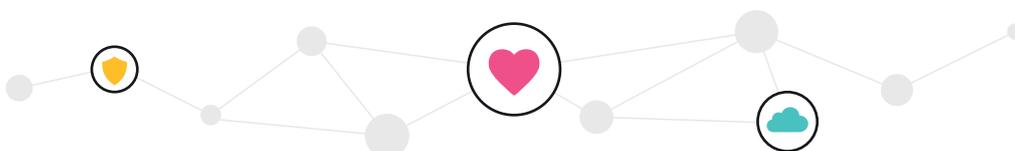
TIME ON SITE

Search engines can easily track dwell time or how quickly someone comes back to them after clicking through to your site. In some cases, people will be looking for the answer to a simple query, so this is not an issue, but if for instance the page they click onto contains a lengthy blog post and they're clicking away within a matter of seconds, then the search engine is naturally going to assume the page is not meeting expectations for that particular search query. This also impacts the value of your CTR.

If there is something that visitors find interesting, useful and/or informative, however, then they will stay longer. If the time onsite is high then Google will make the connection that your content is high quality. So ensure your site is easy to navigate, with logical and relevant internal links and content that is quality and you will increase the time spent onsite, a great success metric for both users and search engines.

INTERNAL LINKS

An effective internal link structure will help your visitors to find their way around your website, and it also distributes link equity to where it is most needed, helping to meaningfully improve your rankings. Additionally, if someone is interested in content on a certain topic, linking to related content on the same domain that will also likely be of use will improve the UX.
Some top tips to get this right:

▸ Introduce plenty of content containing natural, un-optimised anchor text

▸ Link deeply and naturally

▸ Use follow links for link equity distribution

▸ Use breadcrumb navigation so that visitors know where they are

PRESENCE OF UNORDERED LISTS

Unordered lists, for instance the one above arranged with bullet points, are a common feature of high-ranking pages. They make for a good way to condense a lot of information into an easily readable, user-friendly format. And people appreciate being able to find what they want to know quickly. Consider using these on your site if you're not already as they are great for UX and for ranking.

Note that when you're optimising a website for mobile that it's best to keep your unordered lists fairly short, thereby avoiding the need for repetitive scrolling.

VIDEO INTEGRATION

It has been estimated that video in all its forms, such as streaming movies, could account for up to 80-90% of all web traffic by 2019. Take-up, even by small websites, is growing rapidly. Video indicates the presence of rich content to search engines and will therefore play an important role in their algorithms.

It's important, therefore, to label your onsite video with keywords just as you would with images, to let the search engines know what the content is about, and consider including a transcript on the page to help with this clarity even further.

Remember that when you embed a video on a page, such as with YouTube, it weighs the page down. A single video can download substantial amounts of data and make multiple HTTP requests even before the user hits the play button. So optimise the video, such as by loading the video player to begin on-demand, to help reduce page-loading times.
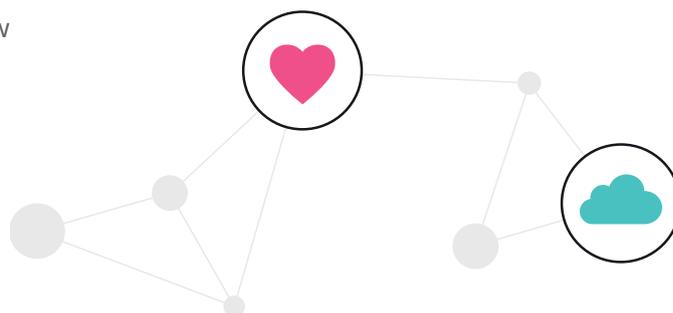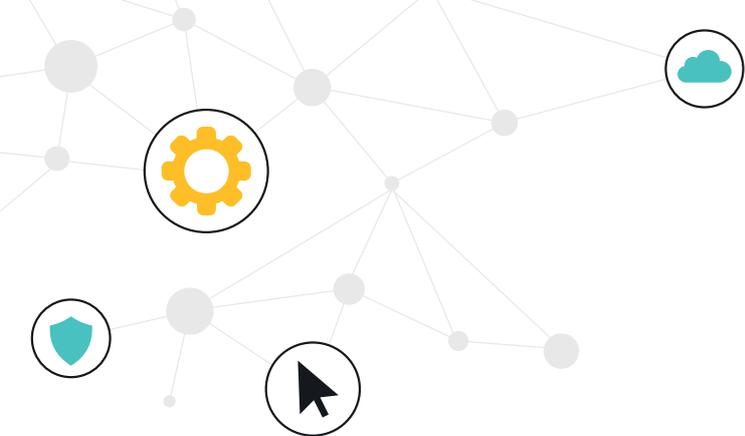
RESPONSIVE DESIGN

Google is on record as saying that it prefers responsive design for websites, as opposed to adaptive design or separate sites for different devices. While the search giant has also been clear that the type of design is not a ranking factor, and that all things are equal, webmasters should note that there can be indirect effects of not using a responsive design that correlate with impaired search rankings.

Bad redirects, confused canonicalisation, higher bounce rates due to poorly configured content and slower page-loading times can all have a detrimental effect on the user experience and will be affected by the type of design adopted. Whatever strategy you employ, make sure you consider UX alongside SEO in your decision-making process.

BOUNCE RATE

Directly related to time spent onsite, a low bounce rate (at least for certain types of content such as video) will often signify a satisfactory user experience. It follows then that this can in turn help with external link building, leading to better search rankings.

How to put this into effect? People like well-designed websites that have clear navigational structures, high quality, relevant and useful content that resolves problems and/or offers benefits. They strongly dislike negative features such as incessant or annoying pop-ups that block them from the information they want and slow down page-loading and scrolling.

By improving all of the onsite elements that make an online experience seamless, enjoyable and clear, you will lower the bounce rate and do better in search rankings, a win-win for UX and SEO.

NUMBER OF IMAGES

A picture can speak a thousand words, and as a consequence search engines consider them a factor when it comes to user engagement. A website that is too text-heavy without enough images to break it up, or that has too many images which aren't related to the content on the page, can result in lower user satisfaction and higher bounce rates.

When adding images to a site, ensure they are tagged correctly with appropriate file names and ensure that they are optimised so as to avoid slow-loading pages. File sizes can be adjusted in Photoshop or similar programs to assist with this.

ADSENSE / ADWORDS

Adsense - displaying related advertisements next to the content on your website in return for a commission from the advertiser every time one of your site visitors clicks through - does not in itself boost rankings. What you can be sure of though, is overloading your site with ads will distract people from the content and detract from the UX.

Adwords - where a company bids to be placed on the SERPs for a particular query - similarly has no known direct effect on rankings (one can hardly expect Google to rank a website higher solely because it is earning money from it). Note that the majority of users still trust organic placement over paid ads, so even though you can expect more click-throughs, neither Adsense or Adwords are a substitute for SEO. They can, however, be a very useful addition to your marketing arsenal.

FONT SIZE

A large number of websites still get the basics wrong, one of which is font size. Too small a font, anything less than a 10, is going to prove difficult for many users to read, while a font that is too large can also affect user experience by making it necessary to scroll down continually.

So ensure that text is clearly readable on all pages whatever the device being used, apply H1 tags for main headings so they stand out, and clearly highlight clickable links in the body text.

BEFORE WE GO

OPTIMISING OUR PAGES FOR USER EXPERIENCE IS DOING THE SEO OF THE FUTURE FOR YOUR SITE NOW.

And there we have it, four of the most perplexing methodologies in SEO deconstructed and demystified. Now that we've torn down the veil obscuring the "dark arts" of SEO, you can spend less time wondering what these strategies mean and more time harnessing them to great effect on your site.

With content, there has to be a careful balance between how you speak to the reader as well as search engines in your on-page output, be it through adding "proof terms" and "relevant terms" or using keywords effectively for different contexts. Championing clarity and originality above all else is ultimately crucial.

Your on-page content efforts will be fruitless, however, if they don't go hand in hand with solid and well-considered technical implementation. A secure and functioning site structure that can be readied for crawling but also adapted over time enables your content to perform at the highest level.

You have the great content, and it's technically flawless, but without backlinks it's like you've thrown a party but neglected to send out the invites. To ensure performance and a high placement in the SERPs, you need volume and high quality backlinks. Attaining and maintaining a healthy link profile where you have a mix of natural dofollow and nofollow backlinks from reputable sites will reinforce your authority and ranking.

GET IN TOUCH

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And the content, the technical and the backlinks all need to come together under the umbrella of good user experience. Google wants to know how people interact with the site structure as a whole, not just the content that's on it. How are people using your site? What are they enjoying and spending their time on? Which pages have a high bounce rate or Calls-to-Action with poor Click-through Rates? If you can optimise your site to follow UX principles and adapt to onsite behaviour, browsers will get a better onsite experience and your site can perform better. It really is a win-win for you and your site visitors.

93% of online experiences begin with a search engine whilst 75% of people never scroll past the first page of search engine results (source: Junto). It has therefore never been more critical than it is right now for sites to prioritise SEO as part of their business strategy. It won't look after itself, it needs thought, structure, maintenance and creativity.

SEO doesn't have to be a mysterious art or inaccessible science. With the right algorithmic expertise, explosive content and big media backlinks; it's a scientific art form with huge potential for your business. We've made it our mission to master and remaster this art form. Get in touch to see what we can do to take your business to another level...