Maximize your SEO

The SEO and SEM primer

**What’s SEO?**

Search engine optimization is an activity. It’s how you improve the ranking of your website on search engines.

**Secure and accessible**

Google has to be able to visit the URL and look at the page content to start to understand what that page is about. To help the bots out, you’ll need:

* A robots.txt file that tells Google where it can and can’t look for your site information
* A sitemap, which lists all your pages.

HTTPS isn’t a factor in deciding whether or not to index a page, but Google’s own John Mueller has tweeted that it’s a “light-weight ranking factor” and that “having HTTPS is great for users.”

**Page speed**

One of the main SEO ranking factors for years.

* Fast-loading web pages will improve users’ experience of the web.
* If your site doesn’t load fast on mobile devices, then it could be penalized.

Use Google’s mobile testing tool to see how your site stacks up.

**Mobile friendliness**

Major SEO ranking factor. More people use mobile devices than desktops to access the web,

If your site isn’t mobile-optimized you risk being out in the cold, in SEO terms at least.

Things to look at include:

* Whether you have a responsive site that automatically resizes to fit the device
* Whether you’re using large fonts for easy readability on a small screen
* Accessibility and navigability, including making it easy to tap menus

**Domain Age**

Nearly 60% of the sites that have a top ten Google search ranking are three years old or more?

Very few sites less than a year old achieve that ranking.

Older is better; established site = established business

**Links**

The web is built on links, so links are a crucial SEO ranking signal.

* Inbound links
  + Links to your site from other relevant sites (high-quality domains)
* Outbound links
  + Links to other, high-quality relevant sites
* Internal links
  + Linking within your own content
  + Helps visitors navigate your site; helps people find the pages they need

**Social signals**

When people share your content on social networks, that’s another sign that it’s valuable.

* Official word from Google is that social shares are not a direct ranking factor
* Links from Twitter or Facebook aren’t counted the same as links from other authoritative sites
* But, the more your content is shares, the more people see it and link to it.

So the connection is at least an indirect benefit.

**Real business information**

The presence or absence of business information is one of the most crucial local SEO ranking factors.

So it’s important to look after areas like:

* NAP – name, address, phone number
* Business listings on Google My Business and Facebook
* Reviews on both those sites and on relevant directories like Yelp and others
* The right local search terms

**User experience**

Google uses [artificial intelligence](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-26/google-turning-its-lucrative-web-search-over-to-ai-machines) to rank web pages

- [RankBrain](https://searchengineland.com/faq-all-about-the-new-google-rankbrain-algorithm-234440) (launched 2015)

It’s looking for signals that affect your search engine ranking. These are:

* Clickthrough rate – the percentage of people who click to visit your site after an entry comes up in search results
* Bounce rate, especially pogosticking – the number of people who bounce away again, which basically means your site didn’t give them what they wanted
* Dwell time – how long they stay on your site after they’ve arrived.

**Optimized Content**

*Keywords*

Words and phrases searchers use when they’re looking for information

Choose carefully; group similar keywords (terms and phrases)

* 2-3 words per phrase
* begin with your value proposition

Also use words and phrases that describe the topics your site is about

* Measure and pivot

Keywords are baked into good content; they’re not artificially spread throughout pages

Content has to be fresh and original

* Don’t duplicate

*Content length*

Google wants content to be quality;

* Give it the length it deserves
* Don’t pad it all out for the sake of adding length

Longer content attracts more links and shares

*Video*

According to Cisco, video content will represent a whopping 80% of online traffic by 2021.

Our own roundup of video marketing stats shows that:

* People are watching video across all age groups
* Some 79% of people would rather watch a video than read a blog post

Gets shared and linked to; which further boosts your ranking

Has to be part of your content strategy.

**Technical SEO**

*Page titles*

What displays when Google returns search results

Add to page titles

*Meta description*

Brief summary that appears below your search result

Usually maxes it out at 160 characters; make it short and sweet, load it with keywords

*Header tags*

Tags show hierarchy of information on your site

H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6

*Alt tags*

Put your keywords in image alt tags, which Google also searches

**It’s all about ranking**

Ranking is everything. You want to be on the first page of a Google search. Why?

* Websites on the first page of Google receive almost 95% of clicks
* Results that appear higher up the page receive an increased click through rate (CTR), and more traffic.

**Google analytics**

You need it

Google Analytics is a free analysis service that measures website activity and performance.

Loaded with intelligence

* **It is easy to set up and doesn't require you to host your website with Google**
* **It can show you at a glance how your search engine activity or other strategies are working so you can make immediate adjustments**
* **You can put in a little or a lot; there are plenty of newbie and expert options**

Either way, point is to drive more traffic to your website, bring more people into your office, get more phone calls. It’s marketing.

**Measure and refine (this is search engine marketing)**

The web changes constantly; people’s behavior changes constantly

* Your campaign cannot stay static

Treat the data you take from Google Analytics as critical marketing information

* Don’t ignore it; check it weekly; adapt strategies monthly

Adapt your keywords to what’s working – and what’s not

Don’t set it and forget it

**What is SEO?**

SEO is a process that takes a lot of time and effort. It may take months or even years to rank for specific terms or not rank at all!

Think of Google as the partner in your office that makes the cold calls for you!