ON-PAGE SEO

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

WRITTEN BY
bluehousegroup
INTRODUCTION

Tutorial: How to incorporate SEO into your web design

How do you get your website recognized on Google, Bing, and Yahoo?

It’s one thing to have a user-friendly, custom-designed website. It’s another initiative entirely to drive organic search traffic. Building your website is a lot like building a house.

Once the house is finished, you wouldn’t walk inside and expect furniture to magically appear, just like you shouldn’t expect search traffic to magically appear when your website is finished.

Moreover, to keep the electricity, water, and heat running every month it takes time, money, and effort. Just as building new search rankings every month takes time, money, and effort.

Search Engine Optimization is not a one-stop operation; it benefits from consistent activity, strategizing, and monitoring. It’s a long-term marketing strategy that can take months to recognize the initial outcome. That alone scares many organizations away from pursuing this marketing channel. Yet, it’s one of the few techniques that generate compounding results as a repeat and engaged traffic source month after month.

SEO goes hand-in-hand with content development for your site. Declaring you want to rank for a specific search result doesn’t move the needle alone. It’s a commonly distributed fact among SEO professionals that there are around 200 ranking signals. That’s a lot to digest, so here are some of the most important elements to help you get started on this project.

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While not a ranking factor, defining keywords is the most critical step in the SEO process: creating a keyword strategy shapes your entire organic marketing initiative. Keywords are search terms your audience might enter into search engines, e.g., “Website Redesign” or “Custom Website Development.”

It isn’t as easy as picking any random keyword and saying that’s that. Many clients come to us and say “our search engine ranking is terrible, I Googled [insert generic industry term here], and we didn’t show up in the results!” This represents a narrow view of how a keyword strategy operates and doesn’t consider whether that specific term is something that holds true relevance to the average audience.

The reality is, different audiences identify search queries through varying lenses. Although I might search for a web designer, you might search for a web consultant. They hold similar meanings but have different search patterns, volume, and ranking difficulties. Just because you feel a specific search term is relevant doesn’t mean that’s the way everyone else searches. This leads many websites to optimize around a search term that never drives traffic to their pages.
There are three important factors in picking a keyword:

1. Contextual relevance;
2. Monthly search volume;
3. Ranking difficulty index.

The phrases you optimize your web pages around should be relevant to your audience, have enough people searching to impact site traffic, and shouldn’t already be dominated by other powerful domains that are difficult to rank against.

Using tools like SEMRush (paid) or Google Keyword Planner (free) help identify keywords that produce higher monthly search volume and aren’t overly difficult to rank for.
LSI KEYWORDS
Defining Synonyms & Expanding Scope

There’s such a thing as over-optimization. Long gone are the days of keyword stuffing to beat out competitive rankings. While you want to target a primary keyword for each web page, there are benefits to researching and including synonymous terms throughout page content.

These are often referred to as latent semantic (LSI) keywords. They have similar meanings to your primary keyword but expand the scope of the content on your page and, inevitably, the amount of search phrases your site will rank on. Including LSI keywords in body content, h-tags, and other on-page aspects helps search engines identify your work as knowledgeable.

For each page that you’ve identified a primary keyword for, add two to three LSI keywords throughout the content. Typically, as you write long-form content you’ll naturally begin to include secondary keywords, but if you need help identifying potential targets, Google’s “Searches related to…” at the top and bottom of a search result gives you a place to start.

Searches related to LSI keywords

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LSI keywords example</th>
<th>LSI keywords in seo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LSI keywords generator</td>
<td>LSI keywords moz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to find LSI keywords</td>
<td>what does LSI keywords mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSI keywords full form</td>
<td>LSI keywords 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Remember, SEO and content marketing go hand-in-hand. To build search ranking success, you must incorporate targeted keywords into your website. Pursue these steps to complete on-page search engine optimization.

There are seven places you want to use your keywords:

1. Page Title Tags
2. URLs
3. H1 Tags
4. Subheadings
5. Body Content
6. Meta Descriptions
7. Image Alt Attributes
A <title> tag is the most critical on-page SEO element and should appear on every webpage. It appears within the user's browser and is the first text element seen in your search engine results. A title tag’s primary goal should be to assist search engines and users understand what your page is about.

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Ensure that each of your website’s pages has a unique and concise title containing your most important keywords. Title tags should be kept to 60 characters or less. Otherwise, they will be cut off in search results. Around 50 characters is ideal when possible, as listings on smaller mobile screens may cut off additional characters. When appropriate, start title tags with your intended keyword.

The closer the keyword is to the beginning, the more weight it will have with search engines. Once your keyword is within the title, use modifiers like “tips,” “guide,” “checklist,” “best,” or “review” to expand your ranking capability to long-tail versions of your target keyword.
When it comes to URL structure, you should keep them concise, informative, and include a primary keyword. URLs that include irrelevant information are not considered SEO friendly, and even further, detract from a viewer's ability to decipher the page topic.

https://www.bluehousegroup.com/services/digital-marketing/

The above example links to the Bluehouse Group digital marketing page. The URL contains a specific subfolder category that shows visitors this is one of our service offerings, and digital marketing describes the topic they’ll find when clicking-through.

Avoid superfluous words and characters. Short and descriptive URLs were identified as holding a ranking advantage in an interview with Google’s Matt Cutts as far back as 2008. It's also important to exclude dynamic parameters whenever possible. These include post IDs, page publish date, and file extensions like “.apx” or “.php”. They aren’t necessary, look ugly, and have been proven to decrease click-through rates on search results.

Digital Marketing, SEO, Branding, and Strategy - Bluehouse Group

Digital Marketing. The web is a noisy place and it can be hard to break through. How do you want to be perceived? What messages will resonate with your target ...

Another aspect to remember is that your URL is the second element searchers will see within their results. This visibility means it’s a principal section that helps them decide to click on your result over the next competitor. All the more reason to keep your URLs short and descriptive.
INCORPORATING KEYWORDS

H1 Tags

The H1 tag is your primary page headline tag. This is an element we find many clients accidentally override as it’s typically controlled in a text editor where headline tags can be changed using a varying hierarchy. While users might make this change because they feel it fits better stylistically within their page template, the <h1> tag that is applied in the HTML code is an important indicator to search engines.

If an H1 tag is empty or missing, search engines will perceive your page’s topic as undefined, and place it lower in results than they would otherwise.

It’s worth checking your page code to make sure it has an H1 tag, and only one. If there is more than one H1 tag then search engines will have difficulty deciding which one is the true topic.

While a page H1 tag should include keywords, it shouldn’t be identical to your title tag. Using the same content in titles and headers means a lost opportunity to incorporate secondary keywords for your page. Use your H1 tag to broaden the potential search terms the page might rank for.
INCORPORATING KEYWORDS

Subheadings

While there should only be one <h1> tag on any given page, it's considered an SEO benefit to be consistent with your sub-heading hierarchy usage. This means as your page content progresses and there are further sub-headings, you can apply smaller headline tags like <h2>, <h3>, <h4>, and so on.

These subheadings follow similar rules as the H1 tag, and show search crawlers this text is important. They offer further opportunities to expand on the contextual relevance of your page body content. When it flows naturally with your content, include secondary keywords or common topical questions in your subheadings.

Netflix Brand Guidelines

Netflix is constantly expanding to new product offerings, geographic regions, and languages. It's critical for them to get their brand consistent as they expand. Their brand style guide is simple and to the point. There shouldn't be any mistaking which assets can be used in any given scenarios.

In our blog post "15 Exemplary Tech Brand Guidelines For Your Design Inspiration", we used subheadings to identify a handful of relevant brands like Netflix. Because of this choice, the article ranks highly for not only keywords like tech brand guidelines but also Netflix, Whatsapp, and Snapchat brand guides.
INCORPORATING KEYWORDS

Body Content

Your primary keyword should be used within the first 150 words on a page. Avoid long intro paragraphs that don’t directly relate to the content at hand. These can often mislead search engines that are trying to determine what a page is about. The below example includes the targeted phrase “website analysis” within the first 30 words of body content.

Website Analysis: Tools to Identify Risks and Opportunities

By Tommy Burns in Web Design

How does website performance affect your business?

It’s too common of a scenario where business owners don’t assess how their website is either contributing to or hindering their operations. What’s even more common is that a simple website analysis could fix potential issues and expand additional digital marketing opportunities. Unfortunately, without a quality website, your business is missing many opportunities to make a positive impression on potential buyers.

If your website is underperforming, or visitors can’t identify—or even find—your primary services, it might be time for a website analysis.

On the flip side, resist the urge to litter your pages with keywords. Make it flow naturally: well-written paragraphs outweigh any SEO benefit. Work through the copy on all of your pages to make sure your keywords are evenly sprinkled throughout the piece. Don’t keyword-stuff. Maintaining a keyword density of two for every 1,000 words is more than enough as it’s more effective to include contextual LSI keywords.
INCORPORATING KEYWORDS

Meta Descriptions

The page meta description is a summary for searchers and crawlers to read. It’s the smaller text that appears beneath your URL in search results. While a meta description isn’t considered to have a direct impact on search engine rankings, it does have secondhand relevance. It takes up the real estate of half your search listing. It has the power to make or break whether a searcher clicks on your website or on other competing results.

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Meta descriptions should be less than 165 characters, anything over that threshold will be cut off in search results. Your meta description should contain an interesting hook and quick description of what to expect from the page.

Depending on the keywords being used in a user’s search, Google will dynamically change the meta description to include the most relevant content from your page. Your manually inputted meta description will only be used when the search engine can’t decide which content from your page is the best match for the search query. If you don’t include a meta description on your page, Google will replace it with the first paragraph from the body content. This substitute paragraph can be irrelevant to searchers and lead to lower click-through rates.
**INTEGRATING KEYWORDS**

**Image Alt Attributes**

Search engines can't read images unless descriptive keywords are placed in the HTML. This is called an alt attribute, which is used as an alternative display option when the image can't be viewed. If you aren't optimizing for image search results you're missing out on potential traffic. Using keyword-rich alt attributes in contextual descriptions will help your images, and ultimately the page they live on, appear in image search results.

To create a high-quality alt attribute, use verbiage as if you're describing the image to someone who is blind. This is an actual scenario, as many website e-readers for blind users will use alt attributes to define images on the page. Not only are alt attributes important for image search optimization, but they are even more important in making a site accessible to all users.

For further image optimization, include keywords in image file names before uploading them to the CMS. Elements like image title tags aren't used by search crawlers to define an image but can be used to create additional context for e-readers.

```html
<div class="featured_image">
  <img src="/assets/Uploads/_resampled/ScaleWidthWyI0OTUjX0SilverStripe-vs-Joomla.png" class="img-fluid itemprop="image"
  alt="SilverStripe vs Joomla">
</div>
```

When visiting our SilverStripe vs. Joomla! blog you'll notice the image files are uploaded to the CMS with a descriptive file name and then applied an alt attribution.

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[Share options]
INCORPORATING KEYWORDS

Outbound & Internal Links

Not including links in your website content is one of the most missed on-page SEO elements. Search engines take into consideration the types of links that are included on your site. They want to know you’re an expert in the topic being written about and you’re including reputable external sources to help visitors digest your content.

There are two types of links that address these needs. Outbound links should direct to external resources from authority sites. Internal links should reference relevant content and assets from elsewhere on your site.

Pointing to relevant content with hyperlinks reveals to search-engine crawlers you’re a topic authority. It’s a signal that you understand the landscape and you can back up your assertions with additional resources.

Additionally, pages that don't receive any internal links become much harder for search crawlers to find and index. These are considered orphaned pages and have a greater potential to overlooked as an asset to include in search results.
Mobile friendliness has evolved as more website traffic comes from mobile phones and tablets. Frankly, that’s old news and has been on the digital radar for close to a decade, but many websites still don’t meet responsive design standards. Google made an official announcement in April of 2015 stating web pages that are responsive to screen size will be given priority in mobile search results. This search algorithm update was the cause of many website redesigns, but it was only the first step.

Since the initial Google announcement in 2015, search engines have only continued to crack down on non-responsive websites with new mobile-related enhancements like AMP and Mobile First Indexing. There is a huge incentive to maintain a mobile-friendly website, as over 50% of all searches happen from a mobile device. This means if your content doesn’t scale to fit smaller screen sizes you’re missing out on over 50% of that hard-earned search traffic!
The way you structure website content is just as important as creating content. In 2009, Google’s CEO, Eric Schmidt joked in a TechCrunch interview, “[Google’s] long-term goal is to be able to give you one answer, which is exactly the right answer.” Little did he know, RankBrain, an AI-controlled algorithm update with that exact intent would roll out almost a decade later.

RankBrain has been designed to identify query intent and equate that to the perfect result. Essentially, RankBrain takes the 2 billion searches Google processes a day and uses those to identify user patterns and connect successful results to those patterned queries. It’s the reason you can type “places to eat near me” and the results that appear are local eateries. Those restaurants never optimized around that specific phrase, but Google is smart enough to match your query with the desired results.

To stay relevant and become the “one perfect answer”, sites have to demonstrate expertise. This can be done by creating a content-centric architecture called topic clusters. These clusters are specific to the topics you want your site to be known for. There’s no limit to the number of clusters on your website, but each should surround a pillar page, be relevant, and have comprehensive subtopics.
Pillar pages act as a high-level overview of a topic, while subtopic pages represent longer, more niche based queries.

HubSpot is the prime example of the topic cluster strategy. Their topic cluster is inbound marketing and inbound sales. Some of their pillar pages are centered around inbound marketing tactics like content marketing, social media, and SEO. This Instagram Marketing pillar page provides high-level content about the importance of Instagram and basic usage tips.

Meanwhile, in every section on the pillar page, they provide inbound and outbound hyperlinks to relevant subtopic articles like Instagram advertising guide, how to take the best pictures with your phone, and Instagram metric reports.

This architecture strategy creates an ecosystem of relevant content and positions your website as a topic authority. Both organic traffic and user performance metrics will benefit from information structured around topic clusters.

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There is a direct correlation between building website content and ranking for related keywords: you won’t have one without the other. Google deemed this the high-quality content update or Panda Update in 2011.

This stands to reason, long-form content on average ranks better in search results than short content. Well-known SEO specialist, Brian Dean analyzed 1 million search results and found the average first-page result to have almost 1,900 words.
There are a number of reasons pages with more content rank better.

Typically, when site owners are willing to consistently dedicate the time it takes to create long content, it means they’re invested. This is reflected in the production of high-quality content, which is impactful to search engines and users. Longer content enhances your page’s contextual relevance, showing Google that your site contains a deeper understanding of that topic.

Google wants to provide their users with the most relevant results, so when they see sites that are dedicated to generating that experience they inherently give preference to their material.

Additionally, long-form content boosts other critical user-based ranking signals. It fosters longer time spent on page, it’s more engaging which leads to more social signals, and it increases the number of page views per session.

All of these elements are indicators that users are finding your site helpful, which is ultimately what search engines want from their ranked results.
Another well-known ranking factor, Google has been touting page speed as an important algorithm element since 2010. To put it simply, fast-loading sites are significantly more likely to rank higher for their desired search terms than their slower counterparts.

Speeding up websites is important. It creates happy users, boosts session durations, and reduces bounce rates.

The threshold for page load time is two seconds. After that, users begin to lose interest while waiting. Google finds page load speed to be so important to user experience and ranking consideration that they’ve created PageSpeed Insights. This tool provides background information to help developers identify slow loading assets and improve website performance.

Your Results:

**Performance grade**: B 81
**Page size**: 1.5 MB
**Load time**: 1.30 s
**Requests**: 57

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Dwell time represents the amount of time a visitor consumes your content and then returns to their search results. Google Analytics refers to this as **Session Duration**. Longer dwell times represent happy users who’ve found content that is answering their search queries.

This search indicator can be found referenced by Bing as far back as 2011. Search engines see short dwell times as an indicator of an unsuccessful search result. If users pogo stick back and forth between result landing pages and result listings, then they aren’t satisfied with the content that has been served.

Naturally, search engines don’t want this behavior to continue so there is an incentive to switch out underperforming results for those that have better user engagement.

While there hasn’t been 100% confirmation on the importance of dwell time, we do know search companies are adopting machine-learning - a form of artificial intelligence - algorithms that put emphasis on human behavior.

As tracking user experience becomes easier and easier, we can expect user-based actions to hold greater impact over ranking factors.
Click-through rate isn’t just a digital-advertising metric anymore. Organic search listings need to be optimized just as if they were searching ads because user interaction matters more than ever. More clicks mean more traffic. Google rolled out a major update in 2015 (the previously mentioned RankBrain) to custom-tailor search results through machine-learning technology.

This AI uses its automated sequence to sift through possible search results and display them in a way that best matches the viewer’s query and intent. As searchers show positive indicators, e.g., clicking on a result, RankBrain begins to give preference to that page when serving future queries.

While you want to include keywords in your title, URL, and meta description, don’t forget this is the only real estate you have when convincing viewers that your page is the best option.

A great place to start is by reviewing Google Ads for related search terms. Ads created by well-known publishers have been tested, iterated, and improved over big budget spends, all with the goal of driving clicks. These are great indicators of words, phrases, and content types that are working for the desired audience. Try including modifiers in your organic titles and descriptions along with the desired keywords.
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
What Goes Around Comes Around

This is one of those on-page SEO factors that is a little fuzzy, but there have been many attempts to prove social signals (likes, followers, etc.) as an indirect ranking factor. It doesn’t appear search engines use social interaction counts as a factor, but there have been many studies that prove content with higher amounts of social shares holds a positive correlation to increased ranking results.

Ultimately, the amount of social signals isn’t what matters, it’s the engagement rate that does. This means the number of unique users that saw your post divided by the number of people who engaged with that post.

Machine learning is the system behind this ranking factor. It rewards high engagement with higher visibility and higher visibility translates to organic rankings and inevitably more social shares.

To determine success, search algorithms look at whether users engaged with the served results. As a greater number of people engage, it creates a signal that the algorithm has displayed the right content. If users don’t engage, new content is taken into consideration in an attempt to generate greater interest.
Security is important to search engines. They don’t want to lead their traffic to a malicious website. An unsecured website could make huge issues for both the business owner and their users. That’s why in 2017 Google started enforcing HTTPS as a ranking factor.

Not only is it used as a ranking factor, but websites accessed from a Chrome browser will even stop visitors before loading the site to notify them of the risks associated with unsecured connections. To remedy this issue, site owners can install an SSL certificate with their hosting provider and make sure all linked assets on the website include URLs that begin with HTTPS not HTTP.

An even lesser known security issue is **mixed content errors**. This means even if your site has an SSL certificate installed links to hosted assets (CSS files, images, URLs) are still within site content as HTTP links. These errors create potential security breaches by weakening the HTTPS connection. They won’t stop people from loading your page but they will notify them a page is not fully secure when they access it.
We’ve written about the importance of XML sitemaps for SEO on our blog previously, and it’s an easy SEO opportunity. As search engines look for content to index and appear on relevant search terms, they send out crawl bots. These bots systematically review millions of websites on a daily basis with the intent of finding updated or removed content.

By creating a sitemap for your website, you are giving these bots direction on how you want your pages crawled. It’s the literal roadmap that tells them where essential pages are located and allow search engines to quickly identify what you consider to be your most valuable information. Conversely, if there is no roadmap in place search engines will take their best guess at which content you want to predominantly highlight to visitors.

On top of highlighting page importance, sitemaps indicate a clear website architecture that makes certain crawl bots recognize all of your pages, or exclude irrelevant pages. Occasionally, search engines will miss pages on your site if there is a poor link architecture in place. This can lead to lower search positioning on critical keywords to your brand.

These missed pages begin to create gaps in your website’s overall quality. Google has evolved to include user action and search contextualization as indicators in keyword positioning.
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We've been helping clients come up with digital solutions for over 20-years. Reach out to us with any questions, we are always willing to help.

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Bluehouse is constantly learning industry best practices so we can share with you.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**WEB DESIGN TIPS**

We’ve built and launched hundreds of web applications. While the technology stacks and UI design trends have evolved over time, we’ve discovered a few principles of the web application development process that remain unchanged.

[Click here to read more »](#)

**WEBSITE ASSESSMENT**

How well is your website working? That’s a hard question to answer. Take our quick self-assessment that includes 10 fundamental questions that will help you determine success.

[Click here for your assessment »](#)

**REPUTATION MANAGEMENT**

Research shows that 94% of B2B buyers do research online for purchase decisions (Source: Accenture). This means that it’s critical for your business to be found in search results in order to even be in the consideration pool. But what will users see when your results appear?

[Click here to read more »](#)