SEO Basics

What is SEO?

SEO stands for "search engine optimization." It's the practice of increasing both the quality and quantity of website traffic, as well as exposure to your brand, through non-paid (also known as "organic") search engine results.

Despite the acronym, SEO is as much about people as it is about search engines themselves. It's about understanding what people are searching for online, the answers they are seeking, the words they're using, and the type of content they wish to consume. Knowing the answers to these questions will allow you to connect to the people who are searching online for the solutions you offer.

If knowing your audience's intent is one side of the SEO coin, delivering it in a way search engine crawlers can find and understand is the other. In this guide, expect to learn how to do both.

Search engine basics

Search engines are answer machines. They scour billions of pieces of content and evaluate thousands of factors to determine which content is most likely to answer your query.

Search engines do all of this by discovering and cataloguing all available content on the Internet (web pages, PDFs, images, videos, etc.) via a process known as "crawling and indexing," and then ordering it by how well it matches the query in a process we refer to as "ranking."

Which search results are "organic"?

As we said earlier, organic search results are the ones that are earned through effective SEO, not paid for (i.e. not advertising). These used to be easy to spot - the ads were clearly labeled as such and the remaining results typically took the form of "10 blue links" listed below them. But with the way search has changed,

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how can we spot organic results today?

Today, search engine results pages — often referred to as "SERPs" — are filled with both more advertising and more dynamic organic results formats (called "SERP features") than we've ever seen

Why SEO is important

While paid advertising, social media, and other online platforms can generate traffic to websites, the majority of online traffic is driven by search engines.

Organic search results cover more digital real estate, appear more credible to savvy searchers, and receive way more clicks than paid advertisements. For example, [of all US searches, only ~2.8%](#) of people click on paid advertisements.

If you provide a solid piece of content that deserves to rank for the right keywords, your traffic can snowball over time, whereas advertising needs continuous funding to send traffic to your site.

Search engines are getting smarter, but they still need our help.

Optimizing your site will help deliver better information to search engines so that your content can be properly indexed and displayed within search results

Webmaster Guidelines

Basic principles:

- Make pages primarily for users, not search engines.
- Don't deceive your users.
- Avoid tricks intended to improve search engine rankings. A good rule of thumb is whether you'd feel comfortable explaining what you've done to a website to a Google employee. Another useful test is to ask, "Does this help my users? Would I do this if search engines didn't exist?"

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Things to avoid:

- Automatically generated content
- Participating in link schemes
- Creating pages with little or no original content (i.e. copied from somewhere else)
- Cloaking — the practice of showing search engine crawlers different content than visitors.
- Hidden text and links
- Doorway pages — pages created to rank well for specific searches to funnel traffic to your website.

Basic principles:

- Provide clear, deep, engaging, and easy-to-find content on your site.
- Keep page titles clear and relevant.
- Links are regarded as a signal of popularity.
- Social influence and social shares are positive signals and can have an impact on how you rank organically in the long run.
- Page speed is important, along with a positive, useful user experience.
- SEARCH ENGINES ARE BLIND (Can not see images)

    - Use a descriptive caption on all image

    - Use alt attributes to describe images, so that search engines can better understand the content.

- Use meta data to suggest search terms

- If you have a page with many links to external sites, turn off scanning for that page. An example to prevent scan would be list of sponsors for a charity.

- Provide a site map so the search engine can locate all pages.

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Things to avoid:

- Thin content, pages showing mostly ads or affiliate links, or that otherwise redirect visitors away to other sites will not rank well.
- Abusive link tactics that aim to inflate the number and nature of inbound links such as buying links, participating in link schemes, can lead to de-indexing.
- Ensure clean, concise, keyword-inclusive URL structures are in place. Dynamic parameters can dirty up your URLs and cause duplicate content issues.
- Make your URLs descriptive, short, keyword rich when possible, and avoid non-letter characters.
- Burying links in Javascript/Flash/Silverlight; keep content out of these as well.
- Duplicate content
- Keyword stuffing
- Cloaking — the practice of showing search engine crawlers different content than visitors.