Technical on-page optimisation *Cheat Sheet*

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Introduction

Technical on-page optimisation is the process through which a web developer ensures a site's performance is maximised for reading by search engines (and, by extension, a brand's consumers). The benefits of good technical on-page optimisation are numerous but, boiled down, they equate to improved search rankings and a better user experience. The following pages will give some of the most fundamental code snippets and explanations regarding their use, as well as some tips regarding other optimisation areas which are vital to the correct set-up of your site.

Get the HTML out of here

Important HTML elements for optimising your pages

Meta title tag

Your meta title tag should be accurate, concise and descriptive as it is predominately responsible for value in attribution of relevancy (and therefore search engine results page ranking) as well as aiding ease of browsing. The text should, in general, be no longer than 56 characters long (though this is finally determined by pixel length) and should contain key terms related to the page.

<title></title> The text between your title tags is often displayed on search engine results pages (SERPs). These tags are therefore useful in both SEO and for social sharing.

Meta description tag

Your meta description tag is a unique, clear and concise description of what is featured on the page. It is most often the description that appears below a page link on SERPs and a good meta description can increase your click-through rate. Search engines recommend these are restricted to 155 characters, but should be a minimum of 90 to make them useful. Wherever possible, try to include a call to action as this can help your click-through rate.

<meta name="description" content="This is a concise web-page description">

Though your article title may be '10 uses for unwanted Christmas jumpers', to avoid irritating people who are looking for constructive advice on recycling repulsive knitwear (and adversely affecting your bounce rate), you may wish to describe it as: A humorous list of unexpected uses for an unpopular Christmas gift. It also offers consumers a glimpse into your shop window, something shiny to draw them inside.

Content

We examine content more thoroughly in our blog, – where we discuss our SURE strategy for content (Substantial, Unique, Relevant and Engaging), but as far as this cheat sheet is concerned, the key factors to remember regarding content are: to make it readable (both to bots and people), that the text to code ratio is sensible and that it is not hidden.

Header tags

Headers are the things which summarise the pages you create for consumers and search engines, as well as being important stylistically.

<h1></h1> This tag is your main page heading – it's from this that Google will take its first impression of your page's relevance to a search query. While you may be (as we often are) tempted to attempt wit or humour in your page title, it is important for page relevance that this contain the information you wish to rank for. While 'Book lack in Ongar' is one of my favourite headlines, the search engine is looking for the more prosaic 'Funding cuts for Essex libraries result in severe book shortages.' Though there is no definitive limit, best practice dictates that you should attempt to keep your titles unique, between 60 and 80 characters, and with keywords near the beginning.

<h2></h2> This is where you get to flex your creative muscle, and with a formatting reshuffle can appear to visitors as either a title or sub-title. They are also good for use as stand-alone subheadings for breaking up content for ease and speed of understanding.

<h3></h3> This is your sub-sub and its formatting should denote its place as a paragraph leader, or stand-out line.

Image tag

Your image tag, perhaps unsurprisingly, is responsible for providing images, which can be used in conjunction with various modifiers to position it according to your needs.

`<img src="yourimagelocation/yourimage.jpg" alt="youralttag" width="100" height="100">`

Don't forget your alt attribute! Remember your alt attribute is not only the text which reports to screen reading software, but also how Google determines the image's relevancy to the page's content.

Hyperlinks

The introduction of 'super' or 'mega-menus' (which can legitimately contain up to 300 links) clouds the issue of links a little, however we would recommend applying common sense when considering your text to content ration while bearing in mind that too many links can dilute a page's authority.

Text link

`<a href="http://www.site_you're_linking_to.com/page_you're_linking_to.html">Your Anchor Text</a>`

Used for your on page links (your hypertext underlines), the anchor text should give easily inferred signals about what awaits them on the destination page.

Image link

`<a href="http://www.site_you're_linking_to.com/page_you're_linking_to.html"><img src=img/keyword.jpg" alt="Keyword" width="100" height="100"></a>`

If you'd prefer an alluring image, rather than a word, serve as your link focus then this is the code for you. Essentially it does the same as a text link… only with an image. With image links, the important thing to remember is that the alt attribute serves as the anchor text.

Nofollow link

`<a href="http://www.site_you're_linking_to.com/page_you're_linking_to.html" rel="nofollow">Your Anchor Text</a>`

Predominately used when linking to content which is not entirely relevant to your site – indicating that you do not want value passed away from the site by this link. It is also used when linking to sites which you may not trust or have control over – such as fora, comments sections etcetera. Here is a cute dog 'nofollow' picture link to a site with pictures of cute dogs:

`<a href=http://cdn.resimkoy.net/ rel="nofollow"><img src="http://cdn.resimkoy.net/2015/08/27/cute-dogs-wallpapers-for-desktop-cute-puppy-backgrounds-resimkoy.jpg" alt="CuteDog" width="100" height="100">`

These are not the pages you're looking for

HTTP status codes

Your HTTP status codes are useful for numerous reasons. Whether you're working on canonicalisation (see page 7) and redirecting from similar to better performing content, or are carrying out site maintenance, it is important to choose the right one. The pages for some error codes can also be customised which is a nice way to cushion the blow for consumers unable to reach the page they want.

CODE	PURPOSE	WHAT YOUR CONSUMER HEARS	EXPLANATION
200	OK/Success	You have arrived unscathed… either with your shield or on it. There is much rejoicing, a feast – or possibly a landing page.	Requires little explanation – this is a code read by the browser only; your page should be displayed to the consumer.
301	Permanent Redirect	What page? You mean this page, right? Yes you do. This page. Definitely.	In cases where there is duplicate or similar content which are feeding of the same traffic, a 301 will redirect all traffic to the stronger content, new content or a new website/URL.
302	Temporary Redirect	We're not in right now – why don't you try next door? I'm sure they'll be glad to help.	There are few reasons for a 302 but essentially it asks Google to retain indexes for both pages, it does not pass on authority however, so the authority of the first page may be lost.
404	Not Found	Did you make a typo? I mean, if we ever sell byckwts, we'll let you know. Until then, here's a 404 page.	The 404 code means that though the site server was accessed, the page could not be retrieved. Most often in the case of incorrect/broken links.
410	Gone (Permanently Removed)	Yeah, about that… there was this thing, we had a talk and, you know – it just wasn't working out. We had to let it go.	Used when content has been deliberately removed and will not be available again in the future. It indicates to engines to purge this page from indices.
500	Server Error	Broken! Oh no! It's broken! For the love of… what's happening? Where is… the back button? Oh, okay.	For use when there is no more appropriate code available – when the server encounters an unexpected condition that defies a more specific code.
503	Temporarily Unavailable	Yeah, we're undergoing some maintenance… the 'out to lunch' sign? You can go ahead and ignore that. Come back soon!	In cases where the server becomes overloaded, or requires maintenance, the 503 code will indicate the temporary nature of the outage.

I think I'll call you… Ermintrude

URL best practice

Your URL has always been vital to your brand and, though domain name keywords are no longer as helpful as they were in determining SERPs rankings, an exact match domain can influence click-through rate. However, the important thing is to be memorable, easy to spell and short. This is the same, wherever possible, for all URL elements.

http://store.your_site.com/Item_Folder/Item_Page

- **Protocol**
- **Subdomain**
- **Root Domain**
- **Top Level Domain**
- **Subfolder**
- **Page**

When writing URL's, try to keep them simple and use descriptive keywords – if your site sells monkeys for channel changing purposes, then http://www.monkeychannelchanger.com is always going to serve you better than http://www. enormousdairycows.com, for example. Yet this extends to subfolders too – if a subfolder contains blouses, call it "blouses". Also, wherever possible, attempt to keep content on the same subdomain – this will help with domain authority.
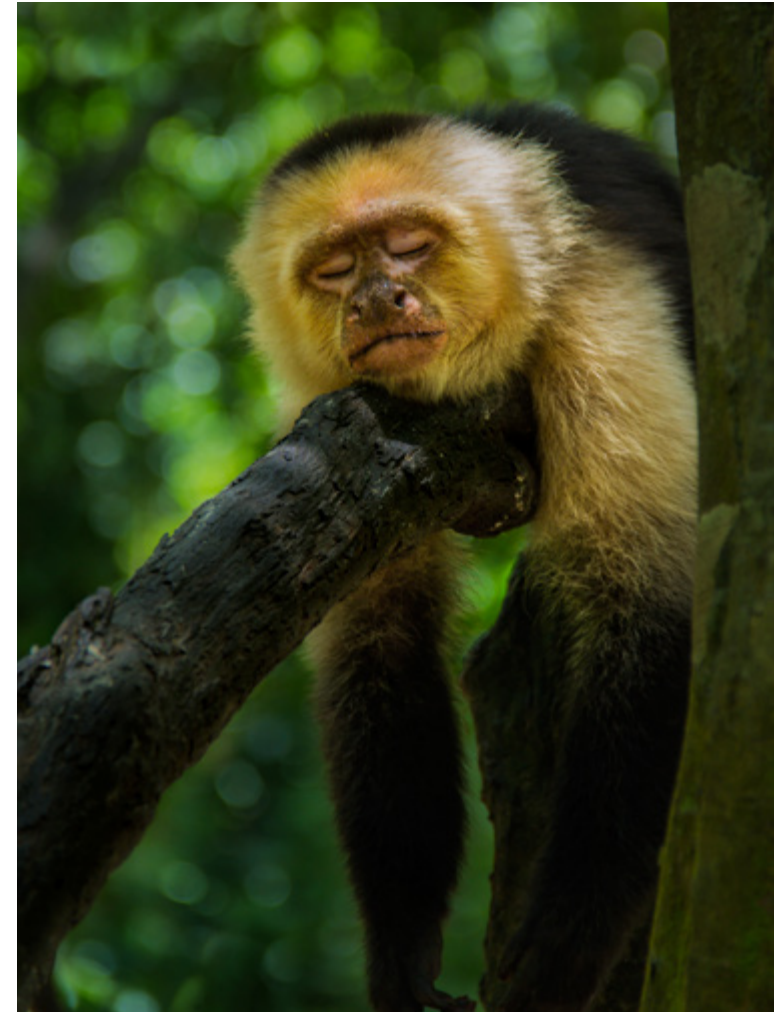
Good URL/bad URL

A good URL, as discussed, will be as simple as possible. Though it may be tempting to subfolder each product for reasons of accuracy, the ideal is to have your product as close to your domain name as possible and to have it clearly described – not only is this easy to remember, but if someone chooses to type out a link (for whatever vaguely impossible reason), it is less likely they will misspell the URL and therefore deprive you of the link and link traffic.

☑ http://www.enormousdairycows.com/half-pint

☒ http://www.enormousdairycows.com/p2&?=1234MZ32/pasteurised/semi-skimmed/organic/half-pint

Tantum volo hoc effercio

(We only want this stuff) or "canonicalisation"

Canonicalisation is the process through which you redirect search engines from multiple URL's to a single, accepted (or canonical) URL. These multiple pages are common on most sites, but cause problems with the positioning in SERPs as the authority conferred upon the content may be divided, weakening the visibility of the page.

Common URL duplications

http://www.your_site.com   http://your_site.com

http://www.your_site.co.uk   http://www.your_site.com/index.html

Best practice

When optimising, it is always a good idea to use the canonical tag, ensuring all pages achieve the maximum authority possible. All multiple versions of a page should contain the same URL within the canonical tag which should always be complete, including the HTTP://, or it may be ignored.

To set this canonicalisation in stone (okay, e-stone), you can use:

<link href=http://www.your_site.com/ ref="canonical" /> which is a stand-alone tag that should be placed between the <head></head> tags, and should refer to your preferred domain. This serves the double purpose of allowing you to control which of the URL's a search engine sees, while ensuring your traffic is not split between duplicate content.

IMPORTANT!

When creating canonical tags on a website, ensure you make no errors in reproducing the canonical URL. A simple spelling mistake or slip of the typing finger can prevent the page from indexing entirely.

Get in touch with us today!
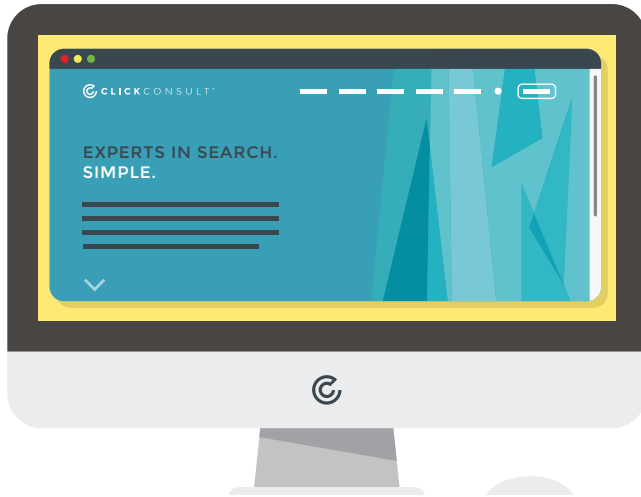
Need any further assistance with your technical on-page optimisation?
Contact us today, we can perform an in-depth opportunity audit on your website

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