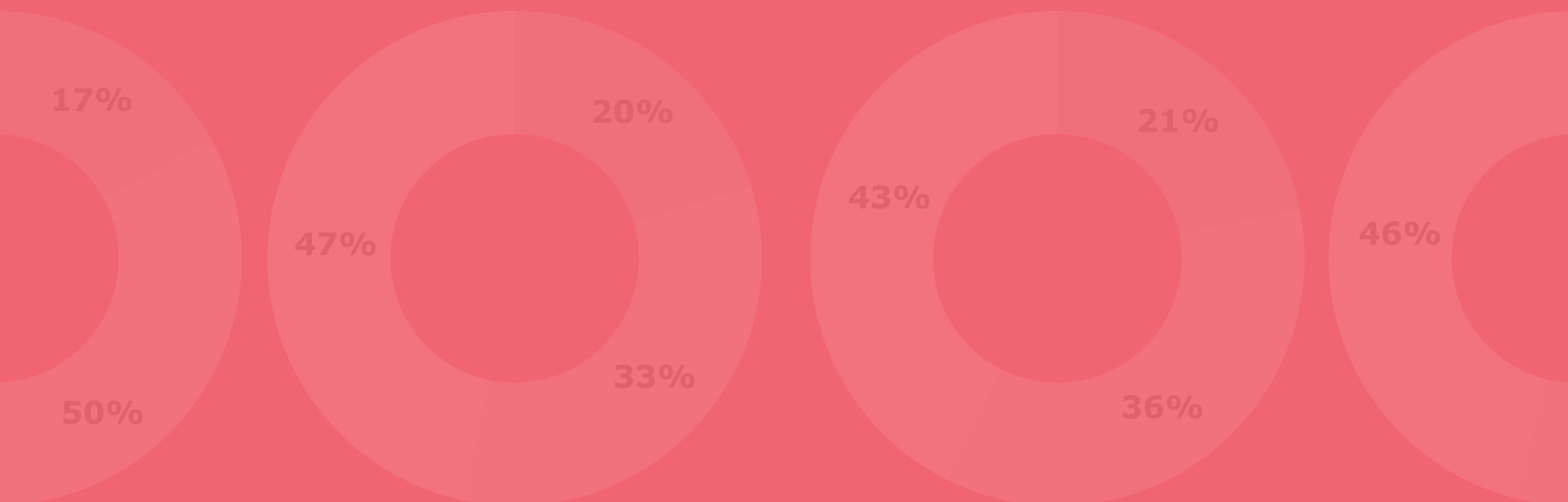




A SIMPLE GUIDE TO ORGANIC SEARCH (SEO)

WHAT IS ORGANIC SEARCH AND
WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE
YOUR SITE'S PERFORMANCE





INTRODUCTION

While the brick-and-mortar store has had to adapt (and quickly) to survive in the digital age, their eCommerce sections have continued to prosper as consumers become increasingly reliant on the web to research products, interact with brands and make purchases.

The important thing, therefore, is to ensure that your brand's website is as visible as possible, to make sure consumers can find you.

This eBook gives you the basic best practices of organic search (SEO) that companies of all sizes can use to increase site visibility, the number of visitors coming to your site and, most importantly, improve conversion rates.

To give you some indication of the importance of search to both on and offline conversion, here are some key take-home figures from a recent back-to-school report from [Think with Google](#):

- In the study, three out of five back-to-school searches happened on mobile, and there were 35% more mobile searches than last year.
- In addition to facilitating research, mobile is increasingly [connecting shoppers to stores](#). For back-to-school shoppers, there's strong evidence that searching actually leads to store visits. Consider this: Last August, searches about "back to school" followed by a visit to a department store within a week grew 20% over the previous year.
- Watch time for back-to-school videos on YouTube [was] up more than 70% YoY

Potential buyers will now, more often than not, search online for information prior to purchasing (whether they make this purchase on or offline). It is, therefore, vital to be found and to be found easily online.

Some more stats

From Deloitte:

60% of consumers used a digital device prior to their last store visit.

23% used a digital device while in-store during their last store visit.

6% of consumers used a digital device after their last shopping trip

Digital technology is influencing 33% of in-store retail sales in the UK, equivalent to almost £100 billion in 2014.

From PWC:

67% say that either reading or writing social media reviews and comments influences their online shopping behaviour

From Google:

Foot traffic in retail stores has declined by 57% in the past five years, but the value of every visit has nearly tripled.



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Summary



ORGANIC SEARCH (SEO) GLOSSARY

A/B split testing – the practice of comparing two versions of a similar webpage to find out which performs better.

Above the fold – the portion of a web page that is visible on screen once the page has loaded, without the need to scroll down.

Affiliate – an affiliate site is one that refers visitors to other websites in exchange for commission based on those referrals.

Algorithm – a complex program used to interpret data and determine an outcome. Google and other search engines use these to determine the ranking of a web page in their search results.

Alt Text – an attribute that is part of the code behind an image in HTML, which describes the image. It isn't shown to the user except when an image is broken and is used for those with accessibility issues. Search engines use this attribute as part of their algorithm so they can understand what the image is.

Analytics – a program that compiles and analyses data about a website's visitors, allowing easy reporting for the user to interpret. Google Analytics is a popular free analytical package used by millions of websites.

Anchor Text – the text part of the link visible to the user. This should also be clickable. Search engines use this to help them determine the relevancy of the site it links to.

Authority – also known as “link juice” or “trust”, is the amount of trust that a site is given by search engines and is calculated by relevant inbound links from another trusted website.

Audience – the people who visit a particular website or are reached by a particular online advert.

Avatar – a graphical image that represents a person online.

Back Link – a link to one website from another.

Black Hat – a search engine optimisation tactic frowned upon by search engines and people within the industry. It is a practice that attempts to trick the search engine algorithms into ranking a site higher, using techniques considered dishonourable. They are often caught quickly and the offending site penalised.

Blog – a content section which displays posts in chronological order, and is often used for business, company or personal news.

Bot – see “Search Engine Robots”.

Bounce Rate – the percentage or number of users that enter and then leave a website without navigating to another page.

Breadcrumbs – a navigation bar (usually horizontal) that allows you to jump to any step you have visited on your way to that page in the format of the site structure.

Canonical Issue – refers to duplicate content caused by a page existing under more than one URL. The same page existing under more than one URL can be overcome with 301 redirects or the canonical Meta tag.

Cloaking – a technique used to hide content from users but show it to search engines. This is a black hat technique and is frowned upon, and can result in penalisation of your site.
CMS – stands for “content management system”. Software



such as Wordpress, Joomla and Magento are used by webmasters to manage websites and content without necessarily having knowledge of HTML or other coding skills.

Comment Spam – posting a comment for the sole purpose of gaining a link to a website. This alone is the main reason sites moderate comments or do not allow links altogether.

Competition Outreach – the practice of reaching out to bloggers within a particular vertical with the offer of running a competition on their blogs. This involves providing a prize for the blogger to offer to their readers.

Content – the text and images on a website which are intended to have value for the visitor.

Content Curation – collecting relevant content from various sources to create fresh, interesting and useful content on a particular website. Value is added by commentary or simply by the usefulness of a single information source. Aggregating related content in a single location can help to highlight a connection, chronology or humorous point.

Content Marketing – the process of producing informative and engaging content of value to an audience on a regular basis to drive engagement and sales or leads.

Conversion – also known as a “goal”, it is the achievement of passing a set of rules. A conversion could be someone submitting a contact form, downloading a white paper or completing a purchase for example.

Conversion Rate – the percentage or number of people achieving a conversion compared to the number of visitors to the site.

Crawler – see “Search Engine Robots”.

Creative Blog – Lighthearted, non-promotional blogs which usually include images and often take the form of a list.

DATA-DRIVEN – the practice of accumulating and analysing qualitative and quantitative data for use in the development of strategy.

Directory – a website that categorically lists other websites for easy searching.

Duplicate Content – used to describe similar or an exact copy of content that exists on another website or page. A site may see a drop in rankings if they duplicate content from another website. Search engines do not always know where the original content comes from however.

eCommerce Site – a website devoted to selling products.

External Link – a link on your website directing users to a third-party site.

Feed – commonly refers to an RSS Feed, which is a specialised file that can be interpreted by news reader software. They are often used to compile content from lots of sites into one place for easy reading.

Frames – a page that is set up to display one or more separate pages in a split screen setup.

Generic Optimised Blog – generic industry relevant blogs which are not promotional or ‘salesy’ in tone. Usually no more than 500 words and contain at least one target keyword.

Guest Blog Outreach – the practice of approaching individual bloggers to ask if they would be interested in hosting content that is relevant to their audience. This form of content is created exclusively for use on the targeted blogger’s site.

Hit – describes the action of loading a web page, document, image, etc. One page view can generate many hits.

HTML – stands for “hyper-text mark-up language” and is the code that makes up a website.

Impression – this is when a page is returned to a user in search engine results page (SERPs).

Inbound Link – a link on a third-party website that links to a page on your website



Inbound Marketing – the process of helping potential clients find a company by using various forms of pull marketing such as blogs, white papers, guides, eBooks, podcasts, webinars, events, SEO and social media.

Indexed Pages – pages on a website that have been added to the list of pages a search engine has seen and stored.

Industry News Blog – a blog on a specific piece of industry-relevant news. Word count depends on the subject matter.

Keyword – a word (or phrase) that a user wants to search for (when searching) or wants to associate a page or piece of content onto a web page.

Keyword Density – the percentage or number of times a keyword has been mentioned on a page.

Keyword Research – the practice used by search marketing professionals to identify actual search terms that people enter into search engines

Keyword Stuffing – also known as keyword spam, is the act of using a keyword a huge number of times on a web page in hope that the search engines notice and associate the content on the page with that keyword. Keyword stuffing can get a page or site penalised.

Landing Page – a page that the user will load when they click on a link in the search engine results.

Link Bait – a page that has been designed with the sole purpose of attracting back links. These pages are often highly useful or fun pages. They often go viral through social media sharing.

Link Building – the act of gaining links to a web site or web page.

Link Exchange – a scheme designed so that webmasters link to each other (reciprocal linking). These types of links are often considered of low value by search engines.

Live Blogging – updating a blog or microblog to report on an event as it takes place.

Local Search – the process of driving geographically-relevant traffic to your website through specifically targeted local pages

Long Tail – a more specific search query. These are generally targeted less often than shorter search queries. For example you might search for “hat” which is very broad, but “blue hat with a ribbon” is more specific and is a long tail search query.

Meta Tags – lines of code within the header of a website which tell crawlers information about the page. These include the title, description and the (unused by most crawlers) keywords. It’s important to have this information so the search engines can use it to help them determine what the page is about.

Multivariate Testing – the practice of testing multiple variables of a website or webpage (such as icons, images, colours) with live traffic to analyse which combination of the website will perform best.

Nofollow – a command that prevents search engines from following a link or an entire page, depending on how it has been used.

Noindex – a command that prevents search engines from indexing a page.

Non Reciprocal Link – a link that links to one site but that site does not link back. This is a non-reciprocal link and tends to have more value to search engines than a reciprocal link.

Off-page Optimisation – factors that may improve a web asset’s visibility on search engine results pages and can be controlled off the website. Examples include link building, social networking and blogger outreach.

Online Reputation Management – promoting positive comments and assisting with the movement of negative comments on Google and other search engines that directly relate to a business and website



On-page Optimisation – factors that affect a web asset in organic search engine results pages that can be controlled on the pages of a website by the website owner. Examples include HTML code, content, meta tags and keyword density.

Opt-in List – in email marketing, this refers to a database of subscribers who have chosen to receive bulk emails.

Organic Search (SEO) – the process of achieving, improving and maintaining the visibility of a web asset (e.g. a website, Facebook page or YouTube video) within the organic or algorithmically determined search results of popular search engines.

Organic Search Results – search engine results which are not paid for advertisements. Paid advertisements generally appear in a (sometimes only slightly) different coloured box at the top, bottom or right hand side of the search results.

Outbound Links – a link on your website directing users to a third-party site.

Outreach – the process of building relationships with real people who are considered influential online within the same industry or specialism as a brand.

Page Rank – also known as “link juice,” page rank is determined by the number of backlinks to a site, their relevance and other factors.

Page View – the act of loading a web page will trigger a single page view. Refreshing the page will trigger another page view.

Pestle Analysis – an important stage of discovery, PESTLE is the political, economic, sociocultural, technological, legal and environmental analysis of the client’s market.

Reciprocal Link – an exchange of links where two sites link to each other. These types of links are not generally seen as high value by search engines.

Redirect – a method of sending a user from one page to another. These are often used when a page is moved or deleted.

Robots.txt – a file in the root of a website that tells search engines what they can and cannot crawl and index.

ROI – stands for “return on investment” which shows the increase or decrease in revenue based on an investment.

Search Engine Robots – a piece of software that collects information from websites, including their links, then follows links to other websites and repeats the process. This software is how search engines are able to show you results when you make a search.

SEM – stands for “search engine marketing” and is the combination of search engine optimisation, paid listings/ advertising and other related activities used to increase your exposure to search engines and boost traffic to your site.

SEO – stands for “search engine optimisation” which is the process of optimising web pages and link building to them to increase page ranking and overall traffic in and from search engines.

SERP – stands for “search engine results page”, which is the page you see after you have searched for your query.

Sitemap – a page on a website which links to each top level (and sometimes all) pages on a website. These help to improve site access for search engine crawlers and help users who have got lost in the site structure.

SMM – stands for “social media marketing”, which is the process of promoting a website through social media.

Social Bookmark – a bookmark to a website or page that has been found to be useful and has been posted on social media websites.

Social Media – sharing information, opinions and news on blogs, forums, social sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and rating sites such as Reddit.

Spam – the practice of distributing unsolicited bulk messages indiscriminately online.

Spammer – someone who posts lots of useless information to unrelated places in the hope of reaching their goal or to simply annoy other web users.

Spider – see “Search Engine Robots”.

Time on Page – the amount of time a user spends on a page before moving to another.

Toolbar Page Rank – a value between 0 and 10 that has been assigned by Google to primarily describe page importance/trust. This is calculated based on varying factors including link relevancy. The higher this number, the more trust the page is said to have and is normally updated every few months.

URL – stands for “uniform resource locator”. It is simply the web address used to view a website.

UGC – stands for “user generated content”. Forums, blog comments, reviews and wiki’s are all examples of user generated content where anybody on the web can make a contribution.





THE EVOLUTION OF SEO

Whether it is the early 20th century propaganda model distilled into embryonic radio and television advertisements or the psycho-social research that still impacts the marketing of major film releases, the creative nature of advertisement is always underpinned by a real knowledge of the market – otherwise it just doesn't work, creativity for its own sake (in advertising at least) is most often doomed to failure.

Though SEO may well have begun (as one anecdote, in a 1998 book entitled *Net Results* has it) as a result of a website designer for band Jefferson Starship's response to being berated by the band's road-manager (who couldn't find the website through a search engine) – finding that repeatedly including 'Jefferson Starship' in black on a black background took the website to number one for the keywords in a matter of moments, but the manner in which SEO is conducted, and the variety of things it now includes in its remit has necessitated a development in keeping with that of advertising on traditional media.

Digital and traditional marketing are becoming ever more closely entwined as time goes by. As an industry, search marketing has been required to learn, in a much shorter time, the lessons of its elder marketing siblings in television, print and radio. Whether this is Prospect and Decision theory's influence on A/B site trials, or the effect of the Emergent Norm, Deindividuation and Social Identity theories in determining how best to reach large cross sections of specific demographics with a campaign, the industry has gone from being a niche sector, an afterthought in the marketing process, to a vital part of any marketing strategy. In this regard, McDonalds – one of the world's most recognisable brands – recruited (back in September 2015) a number of YouTube 'vloggers' to host a weekly show in

order to engage millennials, while AOL has added to its video platform purchase of adap.TV for \$405m with the purchase of Millennial Media, a programmatic advertising company (which utilises algorithms to automate the purchase of ad-space using consumer data).

All of this is the end of a process which began in the infancy of marketing and which will bear further fruit as search marketing agencies and in-house brand departments continue to merge with traditional marketing in brand building and consumer outreach.

“Man has been called the reasoning animal but he could with greater truthfulness be called the creature of suggestion. He is reasonable, but he is to a greater extent suggestible.”

Walter D. Scott, Psychologist (1869 – 1955)

From the early days of radio in the 1920's, companies began a process of personalisation that has continued to the present and which can only continue to develop. The method they employed? Sponsorship of programming which reflected their brand and, though the earliest examples of advertisement, on posters and billboards (such as Kodak's 'You press the button, we do the rest,' of 1888) had firmly established the profitability of the slogan, it was with the personalised 'call to action' (a phrase any SEO practitioner will be more than familiar with), that advertising really began to find its feet as a cultural influence.

By associating their brands with cultural phenomena which their demographics naturally sought out, they were able to interact on a personal level with their consumers, beginning a dialogue that has been ongoing for a century.

“Historians and archaeologists will one day discover that the ads of our time are the richest and most faithful daily reflections any society ever made of its whole range of activities.”

Marshall McLuhan, Philosopher (1911 – 1980)

Whether it's Camel assuring the early 20th Century that you'd 'walk a mile for a Camel' (though not, perhaps, in one go – depending on consumption), or Volkswagen urging 1950's American consumers to 'think small', or even Budweiser's animated amphibians calling out for Bud-weis-er at the end of the millennium, there has always been an attempt to create a zeitgeist. This has almost always taken the form of improved content and better targeted demographics. It is this that has been leading inexorably to an arena in which, realistically, only online advertisement can compete.

The sphere of search marketing benefits from one of the largest readily available data sources possible. This places it a country mile ahead of other forms of marketing in terms of its ability to target the right people at the right time – and it is this which is leading to the next stage in the evolution of search marketing.

What digital marketing is now capable of doing is competing in a world where people do not have to see anything they do not wish to. Consumers can and shall continue to be able to build a world of media and online interaction bespoke to their needs, interests and opinions, and while there is talk of banning ad-blockers, or erecting pay-walls, what marketers must not forget is that since the beginnings of their trade, there has been a constant battle between marketer and consumer. It has been a marketer's responsibility to make consumers want to listen to their message – and it has never been accomplished through legislation.

Search marketing has gone, in less than 20 years, from a

method of gaming search engine results to a genuine creative force in marketing, one with measurable results, fantastic ROI and, more importantly, the potential to get even better. It has learned the lessons of its elder siblings and has entered the age of personal, bespoke digital experiences, with engines at full power.

Past (black hat) techniques

- Paid links
- Keyword stuffing
- Link farming
- Hidden text
- Cloaking
- Duplicate content
- Blog comment spam

Modern, effective SEO tactics

- Producing quality content
- Using structural semantic markup
- Carefully crafted and accurate meta tags
- Thorough keyword research and implementation
- High quality, earned inbound links
- Social media marketing
- Strong UX focus

Through brand outreach, connecting with your customers and visitors with great content and a solid social media strategy, you can begin to build a strong reputation for your brand and increase the relationship between its 'fans.' For example, a consumer is much more likely to purchase from your ecommerce site if they enjoy reading and sharing your high quality content than a rival site that doesn't do this as well.

The theory that 'SEO is dead' often gets floated around in digital circles. The truth is that it isn't. As the industry has evolved and sites like Google have enhanced their algorithms, so have the practices. In short, SEO has evolved into something else.

The commercial objectives of a business should now be much more aligned with the objectives of Google and the sites that it ranks highly

HOW SEARCH ENGINES MAKE MONEY

(AND WHY IT MATTERS)

There are two kinds of search results:

Organic results

These are “natural” results. Based on a series of complex algorithms, sites like Google will try and ensure that the sites that appear in the SERPs are those best placed to answer your query.

Paid results

PPC ads are placed by advertisers (or thirdparty advertising networks) and displayed according to a formula that includes how much the advertiser is willing to pay, how relevant the ad is to the keyword and the quality of the landing page. When searchers click on these ads, this is how search engines make their money. And, of course, the search engine with the most users will command a higher fee for ads.



Search engines are always working to ensure that the sites appearing organically are the most relevant to the search

query. This is the primary way to make their search engine better than others.

Once a user feels that a particular site isn't giving them the information they require, they'll simply switch search engines. This reduces the search engine's user base, which means fewer searches to serve ads for... and lower rates for the PPC ads.

All of the major search engines roll out updates to ensure that their organic results are of the highest quality. For example, Google typically makes more than 500 algorithm tweaks and changes each year.

The majority of these changes are fairly minor (small feature improvements or minor tweaks to how it ranks a site). For Google, the most important of the larger and more impactful of these are as follows:

Panda (2011)

Panda, though lately incorporated into the main algorithm, acts as a kind of content filter – removing low quality or duplicated content from SERPs. Though there are several varieties of Panda-specific penalties, they often result in complete removal of offending content from SERPs. The first indication of the possible effects of the then unnamed update came in a [Google blog in January of 2011](#) where it was revealed that they were evaluating ‘multiple changes that should help drive spam levels even lower’.

Panda certainly did just that, effecting 12% (potentially billions) of search queries – penalising content farms and scraper sites filled with low quality (scraped) content. Successive updates to Panda have rendered this particular



black hat technique entirely unsustainable – though it is sometimes possible to profit temporarily, the next Panda refresh is likely to see any progress not only undone, but with additional losses in visibility due to penalties.

The unfortunate result of this was that, while it closed some of the more easily accessed loopholes, many companies simply moved on to other, easier to game ranking factors – such as link farming and various other varieties of link-spam. As a result, it came as no surprise to many in the industry that another algorithm followed in 2012.

Penguin (2012)

Link schemes or ‘spamdexing’ was the next tactic to be cracked down on – with Penguin seeking to penalise sites breaching Google’s Webmaster Guidelines by manipulating SERPs through inorganic, paid or rented links.

Over successive refreshes and updates, Penguin has come to effect around 7% of English language searches – as well as driving black hat SEO further underground. This latest retreat, though closer to Google’s requirements is still below their limits of acceptability, however, with Matt Cutts, head of Google’s ‘web-spam’ department declaring ‘war’ on paid links (the act of paying bloggers to feature linked content) in January of 2014.

It seems that the last straw was a piece of unsolicited spam offering (in clear breach of Google’s guidelines) to pay Cutts to feature linked articles. The fact that this email went to him is indicative of how poorly this black hat outreach is being conducted. Instead of seeking to earn organic links, companies had begun to offer payment to a non-specific list of bloggers. Cutts’ response was the following:

“The objective is not to make your links appear natural; the objective is that your links are natural.”

Hummingbird (2013)

The first major update to Google’s core algorithm since 2010’s ‘Caffeine’, Hummingbird was an update that sought to improve SERPs responses to the changing ways in which people search. By improving the algorithms lexicon,

Hummingbird made for an improved facility for semantic search, finding keyword synonyms and promoting natural language in content.

Hummingbird is seen as the first of the mobile-friendly, mobile-positive algorithm updates, boosting its ability to detect relevance to long-tail keywords and allowing SERPs to return the best possible results for the more natural and human speech reflective searches that have increased along with mobile use.

This ‘understanding’ of speech patterns and the sentence construction of natural language also had the benefit of heightening the usefulness of Google’s voice activated search – making it ever more possible to ‘okay Google’ almost any subject.

Pigeon (2014)

In a move to provide more personalised results in SERPs, the Pigeon update, using hundreds of rankings signals, looks to give preference to local listings in SERPs. One of the largest indicators of Google’s acceptance of and push toward better utilisation of mobile technology, this update may also have played a part in the Your Timeline upgrade of Google Maps and was no doubt the foundation for the geo-targeting of ads through the maps application.

Along with the introduction of the Knowledge Graph, this update was also a real bell-weather for the direction in which search marketing is headed – representing a response to the ever increasing consumer demand for the personalisation of the web. As mobile internet becomes ever more popular (and some would already say critical) to everyday life, the need for easily accessible, relevant content consumable on the move must be a driving force for brands looking to flourish online.

Mobilegeddon (2015)

When Google took the unusual step of pre-announcing a ‘mobile friendly’ algorithm update, the understated response from the search marketing industry as a whole was to name it ‘Mobilegeddon’. In truth, the update, despite the panic, was a much needed nudge toward a standardisation of best practice across devices, placing consumers at the heart of



a brands online presence by encouraging sites to enhance interaction with their target audiences across platforms.

Though there is still work to be done – with some webmasters needing to catch up – this, combined with other efforts to make SERPs uniform across devices, is representative of an ongoing effort by Google and search marketing professionals to improve UX for mobile and tablet users.

RankBrain (2016)

Confirmed in October 2015 and introduced gradually, RankBrain is now considered equal to links and content in priority for rankings, facilitating the return of better SERPs and increasing the search engines LSI capabilities.

Panda/Phantom (2016)

Alongside Panda's assimilation into the core algorithm, there have been a number of unconfirmed fluctuations indicating a phantom update as well as the continuing reverberations of RankBrain.

Mobile-friendly

More accurately described as a boost to the mobilegeddon update, the mobile-friendly update earns its own place on the list by virtue of its less hyperbolic reception. Probably due to the fact that many brands rushed to put mobile-friendly sites in place before the previous iteration was released, the resultant change to rankings was minimal. However, this update also represented another in a line of changes to SERPs which point toward a mobile-weighted unification of user-experience across devices.

Possum

Despite lack of confirmation from Google, the SEL christened POSSUM update had undeniable impact on SERPs, especially the reduction of local packs from seven to three and a resultant shake-up in pack results. Again, due to its unconfirmed nature, the simultaneous changes in organic search results cannot be definitively attributed to POSSUM, but unless there was a second, simultaneous and equally unconfirmed update, we can safely attribute both sets of

changes to Google playing POSSUM.

Mobile interstitial penalty

Announced in August 2016, Google will begin penalising the mobile rankings of sites with interstitial ads that cause significant reduction of user experience on mobile devices.

Phantom V

The fifth in a series of unconfirmed, but definitively identified (through monitoring of various SEO tools), Phantom V appeared to be a content quality update, rewarding substantial, useful content and punishing the inverse.

While this update remains unconfirmed, a study of its effects as well as the winners and losers resulting from it can be found on Searchmetrics' [blog](#).

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



One of the most important things you need to do to increase the SEO performance of your website is to make sure that it's brimming with great content.

And the first step in writing great content for the web is learning about your audience. You aren't writing web content simply because you enjoy writing and you (hopefully) aren't writing just to make the search engines happy. That means that you should be writing for humans not robots, making the content something that users will genuinely want to read, engage with and share on their social channels. This will, in turn, make for good SEO and help to pull users through the buying process, helping to increase conversions.

In the early years of the web, overly optimised meta tags and pages of content that were stuffed with certain keywords and phrases were able to rank highly in search engines. Although it was often unreadable, site owners didn't really care as long as it was picked up by search engines. They were writing for the search engines and not humans so, although they may have been getting traffic to their site, their conversion rate would have remained fairly static as the content they were producing would not encourage visitors to make a purchase or trigger them into repeat business.

Now, however, Google penalises sites that produce this type of content. This is why there has been an even more important focus in recent times on content. If you produce content that is informative, entertaining, solves problems and provides readers with something worthwhile, this will generate traffic, will be more shareable on social media sites and will better place your brand as a good source of knowledge about your industry. This is what will get you good results in the search engines.

You should have a specific purpose in mind for the content and a specific type of reader to write for. If you're new to writing for the web or are trying to reach a new audience, it's worth going through a formal process to define your buyer personas. This is a character representation of someone who defines your brand's audience, helping you to better understand their needs and write content specifically for them.

To create a persona, start by assessing your best customers. Determine the characteristics they have in common and then create a persona that reflects them. The aspects to define will vary depending on your industry, but for a B2B company, you might wish to determine whether your ideal reader is...

- In a specific industry
- In a specific department
- In a specific size of company
- At a particular level of responsibility
- In a specific geographic location
- Using a particular tool or program

For a B2C company, the characteristics of your ideal reader could include factors like:

- Gender
- Age
- Owner of a smart phone
- Plays sports
- Travels for work 12+ times annually

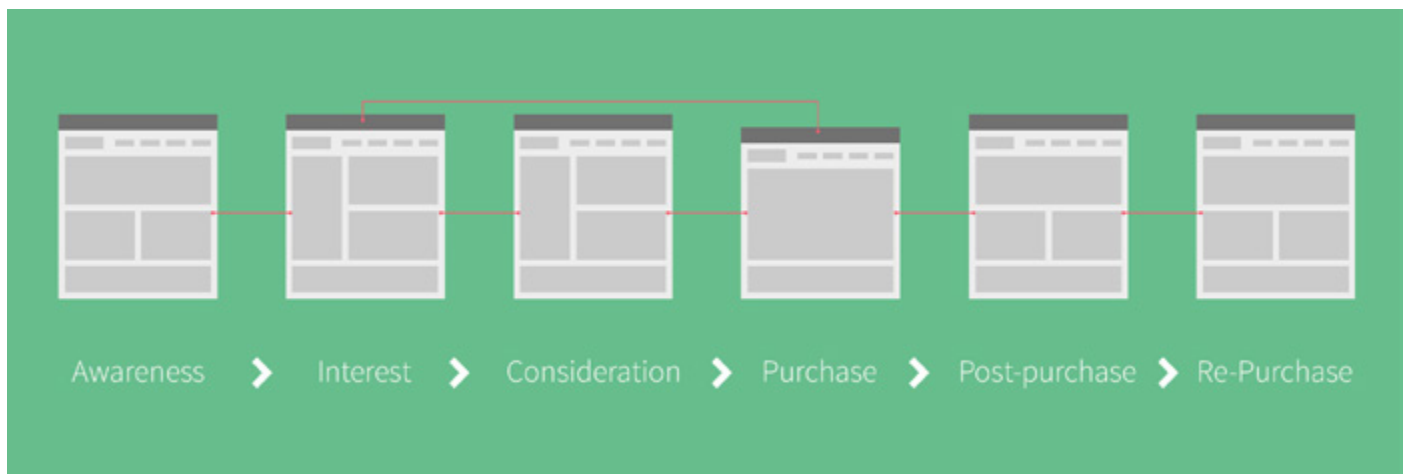
If you already have a strong understanding of your target audience, do just a brief, informal persona review in your head before beginning work on content for your new web page or your next blog post.

Also, it's worth considering the need-based journey of your site's visitors. Think about why they may have searched for something and what they wanted to achieve by doing so; does your content and the calls-to-action (CTAs) on your site's pages help them to achieve their aim? For example, a user searching for "cheap hotels in London" will want to view rooms that are reasonably priced and may be shopping for a late deal. Is the content of your web pages suited for this type of enquiry? Are your CTAs targeted to help this user get what they want?



KNOW WHAT YOUR READERS WANT

UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE MAY SEARCH FOR YOUR CONTENT



Great, so you've identified your audience. Now you need to make sure that the content you produce connects with them. If it addresses the needs of your persona(s), it will be read more and shared more, helping it to rank better in search engines.

People search for a variety of reasons. Common reasons in the B2B sector include searching to...

- Understand a product category
- Learn about a product or solution
- Solve a specific business problem
- Be informed about new approaches
-

Common reasons in the B2C sector include searching to...

-
- Find the best deal
- Find the closest location
- Locate a product or service that's advertised

Here's a basic example of a buyer's journey:

Awareness > Interest > Consideration > Purchase > Post Purchase > Re-Purchase

You can think about this before beginning a piece of content. Is your persona:

- Looking for a general category of information? **(Awareness)**
- Looking for a solution to a specific problem? **(Interest)**
- Looking for an enterprise solution? **(Awareness-Interest)**
- Identifying and comparing specific products or vendors? **(Consideration-Purchase)**
- Looking for help with one of your products they already own? **(Post-Purchase)**
- Looking to replace or upgrade a product, and planning to remain loyal to you? **(Re-Purchase)**



OPTIMISING YOUR CONTENT

KEYWORDS

Keyword research is a vital part of any organic search campaign, whether it is used to mould onpage copy or to develop brand or product positioning – it is imperative that it is not only done, but done thoroughly and well.

As latent semantic indexing (LSI) has improved with the advent of the Hummingbird update in 2013 and the new levels of query relevancy offered by RankBrain, a lot of brands and agencies have begun to place less importance on the role of keywords in content. The worrying possibility this raises, however, is that, though it frees our writers to express themselves with fluency and style without having to rely on keyword anchoring, the reduced importance of keywords in on-page copy can sometimes carry over into keyword targeting. Keywords should not and must not be overlooked, and their importance in attracting a potential consumer underrated.

Take, for example, someone looking to make a purchase for a new hobby. They are interested in the hobby, but lack a degree of knowledge when it comes to hobby specific key terms; in this case, they are going to be searching for more general keywords and are going to rely on brands using search marketing strategies that account for this.

The best keyword research will identify themes – around price size, colour, etc. as well as gaps in the market with low competition from competitors. By grouping such terms into ‘themes’ (groups of keywords), they can be converted into pages of content which will represent a thorough match to a number of targeted searches, increasing relevancy and usefulness for consumers – again heightening UX at the same time as improving chances of conversion.

This is a good time to start thinking about your buyer personas, what are they looking for, what will they want to

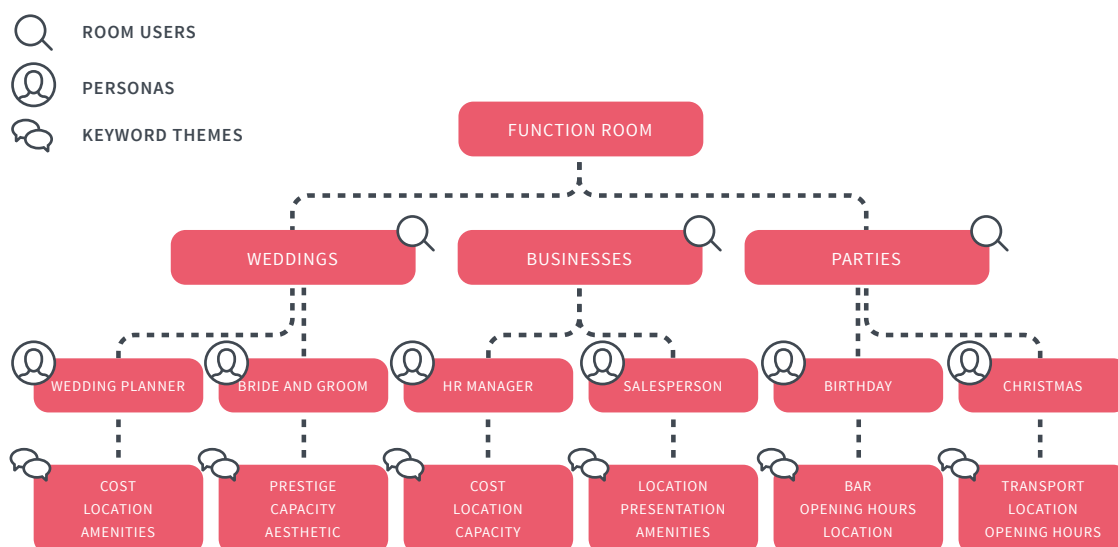
know and at what stage in the buying cycle will they want to know it? Think about how you search on a phone as opposed to on a laptop. Are there differences in your own search methods from one device to another? What are your intentions across devices?

Think about the levels of interest and expertise possessed by your buyer personas – are consumers looking for brand specific items, using specific industry jargon more or less likely to want to buy or to need information than those searching for generic, non-specific terms? How can your keyword targeting nurture the buyer journey by delivering the right content at the right time? If you have run PPC campaigns for your goods or services in the past, there may be a wealth of useful information available to you in your Search Query reports.

Once you have assembled lists of key terms and questions, use online tools (such as Google’s Keyword Planner) to quantify search density and, therefore, which of these keywords, terms and themes should be the focus of your efforts. Ideally you’re looking for the golden ration of low competition and high volume. Also, use Analytics to monitor in-site searches – those terms which consumers are searching for while on your page – as well as popular landing pages and seek to consolidate these terms externally.

Keyword research tools such as the Google Keyword Planner Tool are a great way to see how searchers in general are again

Simplified keyword theme flow chart



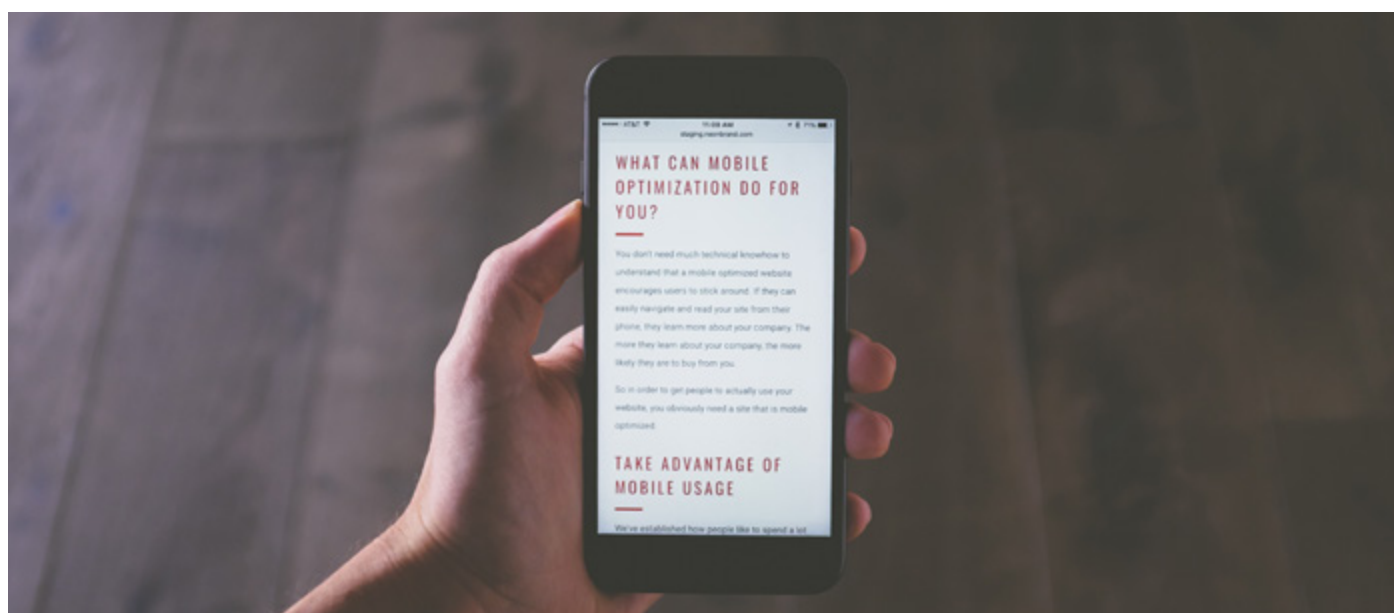
Four simple steps

1. Think like a consumer – pick short and long tail keywords likely to be searched by your buyer personas.

2. Look for gaps – in a crowded marketplace it can be difficult to compete against established companies. So don't compete, find where they aren't present.

3. Rank for priority – it is counterproductive to spread yourself too thin, so choose your targets wisely and look for the golden ratio of high volume, low competition.

4. Consolidate gains – if you begin to rank for certain terms, don't rest on your laurels but continue to target these keywords as you expand your target list.



EIGHT BEST PRACTICES FOR WRITING CONTENT

Tips to serve both search engines and your visitor:

1. Carefully select keywords.

Refer to the previous chapter on keywords. Remember, you should write for your audience and not the search engines, but a little optimisation is needed. When it comes to optimising:

- Include a selected keyword in your copy or headline
- Think about selecting one primary keyword and some supporting ones to go along with it
- Target a low number of SEO keywords per page (ideally no more than five)
- Use the exact term
- Don't mention it too many times!

**Note: Remember: as long as the content reads naturally then the writer shouldn't worry too much about how many times a keyword has been mentioned.*

2. Think about your headlines and titles.

These need to be as 'sticky' as possible because, if it isn't enticing/appealing, the content won't be read. You could shape the heading to suggest that your content is solving a problem, creating a debate or offering guidance, for example. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that the headline will also be used when it is shared on social networks.

3. Make sure content delivers on your headline.

Eight out of 10 people will read headline copy, but only two out of 10 people will read the rest. Because many people initially skim over articles, they won't stick around and digest it properly if they don't think your content is addressing your headline, the thing that got them onto the page in the first place. So make sure your content delivers on your heading.

4. Reel in your audience with a killer intro.

Your headline is your initial sell, but the introduction is what will entice the reader to delve further into your content. You could open your content:

- **By posing a question** - this will engage your reader and they will want to read on and find the answer, particularly if it's a question that they can relate to.
- **With a quote** - this may trigger the audience to read further to see how the quote relates to the headline.
- **With an anecdote** - telling a personal or powerful story will give your content a personality, it will back up what you're saying and it should entertain your reader.
- **By quoting an interesting fact** - this will entice the reader if it is related to the topic and will back up what you're saying.
- **By being contextual** - give a brief reason why you're writing this particular piece of content. Data and stats will also be useful here.
- **By painting a picture in your reader's mind** - 'imagine this' or 'do you remember when?' are ways this can be achieved.
- **With an analogy** - this can immediately grab attention.



5. Break up your text.

Using sub-headings, short paragraphs, call-out boxes and bullet pointed or numbered lists, for example, will make information easier to digest. It will also help those people skimming and scanning your content. Additionally, subheadings do also have a minor SEO benefit, too.

6. Insert images.

Backing up your content with screenshots, infographics, charts etc. can convey a message more powerfully than words alone. However, it is also important to bear in mind that there are strict copyright laws surrounding the use of images, so you must make sure that any image that you use on your site is there with the permission of its owner. Failing that, think about taking your own images or using free image websites such as iStock or Shutterstock.

**Note: it is also wise to tag your images and give them captions to help search engines to work out what they are.*

7. Think about internal links.

Linking your visitors to another piece of related content will ensure that you are keeping them on your site and exposing them to more of your content. There is also a significant SEO

benefit in doing this too, as editorial and mid content internal links provide citation, which is any mention of your brand online with or without a link.

8. Set goals for every single piece of content that you produce.

You might want a piece of content to specifically generate leads or to be shared on social media. Whatever it is, make sure that you have a goal in mind before writing, as your content should be shaped around achieving this aim.

**Note: Never sacrifice the user experience to force your copy to meet an SEO goal.*

HOW TO OPTIMISE A PAGE

It is a fact that organic search has evolved significantly since its early beginnings. Producing content that meets the needs of your audience and customers is now at the core of effective SEO.

However, there are still a few things that are important that you must remember to consider in order to give those search engine robots just that little bit extra help.

Meta title tag

Though it is ultimately limited by pixel length, your meta title tag should be as accurate, concise and precise a description of your content as is possible in 56 characters. It is one of the most important sources of information for Google's algorithm when it comes to deciding relevance (and therefore affects SERPs position) as well as aiding in the ease of browsing for the consumer – it should always contain key terms relating to the page.

Meta description

The best explanation of the 'meta description' tag is as a short summary of the page – a clear and concise 155 character description of the on page content (with a minimum of 90 characters recommended). However, as this is the text visible in SERPs, it should also serve to draw consumers to the page – featuring, wherever possible, some form of enticement or call to action. A good 'meta description' can drastically improve your click through rate.

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

Though a brand may publish a novelty blog titled '10 uses for unwanted Christmas knitwear', in order to ensure the bounce rate is kept low and your potential readership is given a full and attractive account of on-page copy (detering

the searchers that may be looking for recycling or upcycling advice), you may wish to describe it as: "A Humorous List Of Unexpected Uses For An Unpopular Christmas Gift".

** Note: if you don't include a meta description, or if Google believes it to be incorrect, then the search engine will create its own description based on what it thinks the user should see.*

Breadcrumbs

Like most of the other suggestions in this eBook, breadcrumbs are a useful tactic to help both your site visitors and the search engines crawling your site. Breadcrumbs take their name from the Hansel and Gretel story and are useful for helping your visitors find their way. They differ in a significant way; they are not a literal representation of the path your visitor took to get to the page they are on. Breadcrumbs are instead a representation of where the current page lives in the site hierarchy.

Breadcrumbs typically live in the upper left corner of a page (below the primary navigation) and are an easy way to both set the context of where the content lives in your site and to help your visitors navigate to higher level content. Since these are standard links, search engines will follow them, so breadcrumbs increase the odds that a search engine will discover your content.

Google believes breadcrumbs are important in helping visitors to understand the structure of the site and how the specific page fits into the site hierarchy. It will include breadcrumb navigation in search results when it can.

Header tags

Headers summarise the pages you create for both consumers and search engines – and should be easily read by both. They are also important stylistically.

<H1></H1>

Though wit and humour are desirable for a page title, it is more important in the digital age for it to convey the information you wish to rank for. While 'Book lack in Ongar' is a great headline, Google's search algorithm is looking for 'Funding cuts for Essex libraries result in severe book shortages' for search queries regarding library funding. Though there is no definitive limit, best practice dictates that you should attempt to keep your titles unique, between 60 and 80 characters, and featuring keywords near the beginning.

<H2></H2>

This is a more appropriate place to flex your creative muscle and generally serves as a sub-title. The <h2> tags are also good for use as stand-alone subheadings when seeking to break up content for ease and speed of understanding. Again, it is still recommended that keywords feature somewhere in the subheading – as each header is important to framing the relevance of page to search queries.

<H3></H3>

This is a tertiary emphasis tag – or your 'sub-sub heading', formatting of which should adhere to its role as a paragraph leader, or stand-out line. As above, ensure this header is relevant to the text it precedes or is linked to – using keywords from the text to add relevance to the passage to promote ease of reader and search engine understanding.

Alt text

Alternative text is used with images (and other non-text content) to describe what the image shows. The words used within an image's alt attribute should be its text equivalent and convey the same information or serve the same purpose that the image would. This helps the visually impaired understand what an image is about using screen reading software, and it also helps those people that use browsers unable to download images. It's also another chance to tell search engines what the image and your page is about.

When writing the alt text for an image, ask yourself: if you were to replace the image with the text, would most users receive the same basic information?

Every image on a page should have alt text.

What makes good alt text?

1. Shorter than 65 characters (including spaces)
 - a. The alt text should be a short 'stand-in' in the event that the image itself is not available.
2. The alt text should accurately represent the image will be able to figure it out, either.

HOW TO OPTIMISE A WEBSITE

Sitemaps

These are a great way of making all of your content on your site accessible to your visitors.

There are two major types of sitemaps:

An HTML sitemap is a standard web page that is public facing and intended to help real people.

An XML sitemap is a file written in computer code (Extensible Markup Language) that's written only for search engines and is not public-facing. It isn't linked where people can find it and most people couldn't understand the code even if they found the file.

HTML sitemaps

HTML sitemaps are intended to make things easier for your site's visitors. How one user navigates a website may differ from another, so these provide them with multiple ways to interact with your content.

A sitemap lets people find specific pages without having to go through menus or other navigation. Since HTML sitemaps are treated like any other web page on your site, they're also a good way for search engines to discover more of your pages. In general:

- If your site has fewer than 200 pages, you can include everything in one site map.
- If your site has 200 or more pages, consider a main site map that has the top level pages and links to category specific site maps.

It's good to include a link to the site map in the footer of every page. It just makes things a little easier once they've finished reading one piece of content and then want to go somewhere else on your site.

Also, search engines will pick up on sitemaps. Google likes to see these as you will be providing as much information as possible for your end user.

XML sitemaps

Unlike HTML sitemaps, an XML sitemap is a file created specifically for search engines. It doesn't guarantee any indexing of your pages, but it is an easy way for search engines to learn about your pages and give you the best chance to get them indexed.

Because these are intended for search engines instead of human visitors, there is a specific format for the file that you must follow. The sitemap must:

- Begin with an opening tag and end with a closing tag
- Specify the namespace (protocol standard) within the tag
- Include an entry for each URL, as a parent XML tag
- Include a child entry for each parent tag
- All other tags are optional

All URLs in a sitemap must be from a single domain, such as "www.example.com" or "store.example.com". You can see more examples and all the options at:

<http://www.sitemaps.org/protocol.html>

Note: Once you have your XML sitemap ready, upload it to Google Webmaster Tools by going to **Optimisation > Sitemaps and choosing Add/Test Sitemap.*

Image search

Once you have a standard XML sitemap, you can expand it to include your images. This will help search engines such as Google discover the images you have on your site, so those images can be included in image search. Like the standard XML sitemap, there is a specific format to follow for image search and the details can be found at:

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/178636?hl=en>

The 404

The 404 is the most public status code, being the ‘page not found’ code. It is, therefore, often a nice touch for brands to personalise their 404 pages – either with links to pertinent content or to the homepage.

This gives the page a familiar branded feel, and can soften the blow of a broken link or page – as with the below offerings from language app ‘Duolingo’ and the BBC:



BBC NEWS BBC SPORT

404 - Page Not Found

This might be because you typed the web address incorrectly. Please check the address and spelling ensuring that it does **not** contain capital letters or spaces.

It is possible that the page you were looking for may have been moved, updated or deleted.

Please click the back button to try another link.

Or

Visit the BBC News Home Page.
Visit the BBC Sport Home Page.
Explore our full list of sites and services.

In the above example from the BBC the use of navigation options on the 404 also offers visitors to the site an easy path to other areas of the site, improving the chances that the visit will not simply bounce.

The ‘soft’ 404

This, though showing a site visitor a 404 error page actually presents site crawlers with a 200 status code, allowing the crawlers to view it as a live page where one may not necessarily exist. In other words, though the visitor may see your 404 page, a search engines such as Google will perceive the page as a live page.

Canonicalisation

Canonicalisation is the name for the process of redirecting search engines from multiple brand URLs to a single, accepted (or canonical) URL. These multiple pages are common on, but can potentially cause problems with ranking – as the authority conferred upon content may be divided between multiple addresses, weakening the authority of each version and, therefore, decreasing the overall 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 your site, you should always use the canonical tag (with few exceptions such as for brands whose pages are repeated in multiple languages), ensuring all pages achieve the maximum page authority possible. All duplicate versions of a page should contain the same URL within the canonical tag – which should always be complete and identical, including the **HTTP(S)://**, or it may be ignored.

<link href=http://www.your_site.com/ ref="canonical" />

You can use the above as a stand-alone tag placed between

the `<head></head>` tags. This should always refer to your preferred version of the destination URL. This serves the double purpose of allowing you to control which of the URL's a search engine sees and ensures that your traffic is not split between duplicate content, improving the reliability of your reporting.

**Note: It is absolutely vital that no mistakes are made with the URL used within the canonical tag. The smallest of mistakes can prevent the page ranking entirely.*

301 and canonicalisation

Another useful tool is the 301, or 'permanent redirect' – if one considers the canonical tag as a 'suggestion' to site crawlers to accept your stated preference, the 301 redirect is a non-negotiable command to the same end.

URL best practice

Your URL has always been vital to your brand's online presence and, though domain name keywords are no longer as helpful as they once were, an exact match domain can influence click-through-rate. However, the important thing is that the URL is memorable, easy to spell and, preferably, 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

URL's should be kept simple and descriptive. If your site sells generic television remote-controls, then...

<http://www.channelchanger.com>

...is always going to serve you better than...

<http://www.televisions.com>

...for example.

The 'televisions' URL would, because of the vaguely misleading nature of the URL, result in a much higher bounce rate from irrelevant traffic.

Yet this extends to subfolders too – if a subfolder contains blouses, for example, call it "blouses". Also, wherever possible, attempt to keep relevant content within the same subdomain – this will help with domain authority.

What makes a good URL?

A good URL will always be as simple as possible. Though tempting to subfolder each product for the purposes of accuracy, the ideal target is to have your product as close to your domain name as possible and for it to be it clearly described. Not only does this make it easier for the consumer to remember, but if someone chooses to type out a link (for whatever vaguely implausible reason), it makes it less likely they will misspell the URL and cost you the link and referral traffic.

<http://www.northwestdairies.com/half-pint>

<http://www.northwestdairies.com/p2&?=1234MZ32/pasteurised/semi-skimmed/organic/half-pint>

In addition to impact on user experience, the use of variables (the section featuring the question mark) makes the URL more difficult to parse by search engines and consequently for returning in SERPs, implying that the content is changeable and, therefore, bringing uncertainty into the algorithms calculation of page relevance to queries.

HOW TO OPTIMISE A VIDEO

The best search engine optimisation strategy is always to create quality, engaging content which meets some kind of need in the user. However, with Google and YouTube being the two most popular search engines on the planet, there are some additional things that marketers can do to increase the chances of their videos being found organically:

Write effective titles

While a good title is critical for all content types, it's especially important for video. Be sure to use target keyword phrases in all of your video titles, usually as close to the front of the title as possible.

For the best results, take advantage of “longtail” phrases that are very specific to your content. You can generate ideas by using keyword research tools, Google AdWords and even experimenting with the “auto-fill” feature in the Google and YouTube search fields.

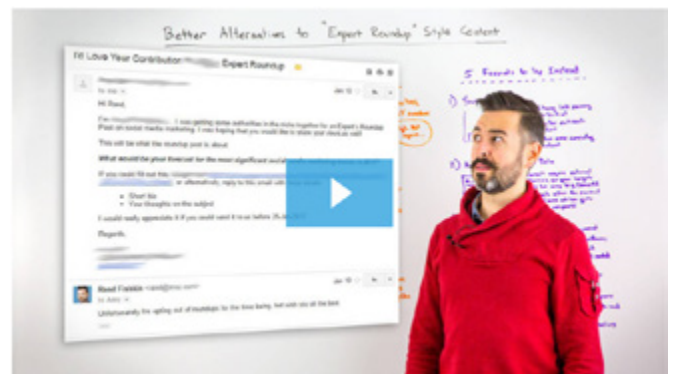
Use additional text

Since search engines have trouble crawling video content itself, the on-page text around the player is especially important for SEO. Make sure you write engaging, descriptive and keyword-rich summaries for all of your YouTube and embedded videos.

Many SEO experts also recommend including audio transcriptions on your video pages in order to give search engines even more information that can improve your rankings, with the additional benefit of improved accessibility to that content.

Create and submit a video sitemap

Since video is indexed differently than text-based content in Google, you can increase the online visibility of your videos by putting together a video sitemap in addition to a standard sitemap. This will essentially help Google identify which content items on your site are videos, whilst providing the search engine with more information about your content so that it can be indexed properly.



However, keep in mind that developing a video sitemap requires some fields that are a bit more technical in nature than those of a standard sitemap, so content creators should work with their webmaster or web development teams.

The video sitemap also allows you to indicate the location of your video thumbnails. These images will show up in both video and standard search results to help your listings stand out from the pack.

Once your video sitemap is completed, you will need to submit it to Google, Bing and Yahoo.



Use video meta tags

In addition to the video sitemap, content editors and developers can also take advantage of proper meta data and attributes to expose more information about their videos to search engines.

This structured data uses standard guidelines dictated by schema.org or the Open Graph protocol, and can include details on authors, video types, descriptions, thumbnail locations and more.

There are some basic tags that you want to keep in mind when creating your sitemap.

<video:title> - Most important; what is the title of this video

<video:description> - Can be up to 2,048 characters and should be keyword optimised

<video:video> - Tells Google etc. that this is your sitemap

<video:thumbnail_loc> - URL of video image thumbnail, formatted in JPG or PNG

<video:player_loc> - Embedding your video from YouTube?
Be sure to give the original location here



SOCIAL MEDIA & ORGANIC SEARCH

Along with optimising your content and your pages, you should have a social media strategy for any organic search campaign.

By increasing your brand's presence on social networks, through interacting with customers, industry experts and sharing and commenting on their content, a significant level of trust is built up.

In turn, you'll increase the chances of having your content shared when you come to promote it. This can impact on your SEO performance, as Google loves to see brands interacting with their audiences through alternative mediums, rather than just the website, and social media is a fantastic way of doing this.

Social media can also include keywords that drive traffic to your website, whether in the post's text or in the form of appropriate hashtags.

While there have been denials and dissembling as to whether social signals are a ranking factor, there is a definite [correlation between strong social network presence and better rankings](#). It cannot be denied, however, that interactions across social media (and with Twitter featuring in SERPs) do influence traditional ranking factors – increasing the probability of the content earning links and traffic.

- If your article gets shared by many influential people, you get improved exposure for a limited amount of time.
- Social signals may not be enough to improve the ranking of content, but increased exposure may encourage people to link to your article, which does help to improve ranking.

Make sure you include social channel buttons that link to your various social networks on every page of your site to facilitate sharing, and add social share buttons to every blog post, press release, and in all of your outbound communications.

This makes your content easier to share and so more likely to be shared, which encourages higher rankings.

It is also important to work out which social networks your audience is most prolific on. Once you've done that:

- Share content that has value.
- Remember not to be too 'salesy'
- Listen well, and engage. Re-post/retweet the content of others and thank people when they do the same with yours. Generosity looks very good socially.



SUMMARY

Thank you for reading our eBook on organic search (SEO).

We wanted to ensure that we produced something that not only covered many of the fundamental principles, but also explained them in an easy-to-understand manner. We hope that this eBook has been helpful and we wish you the best of luck with your organic search efforts.

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Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic and paid search.

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