SEO HEALTH CHECK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to search engine optimisation (SEO), one of the first things that you have to do before you formulate your strategy is understand the current state of play. If you are able to pinpoint where you currently sit within your market and can set realistic goals both short and long-term then you will have a fighting chance at significantly increasing performance.

An SEO healthcheck will allow you to understand your current positioning and ask relevant questions. Here at Click Consult we see numerous clients with various starting points, budgets, end goals and levels of competitiveness in their industry. It is for this reason that all of the projects that we work on are bespoke – and yours should be too. With that in mind it is important that we give general coverage of SEO and ask a variety of questions as we prepare strategies. This eBook will cover a wide variety of problems and pitfalls; what is important however is that you tailor them to your situation.

This eBook will explore:

- Market and competitor analysis
- Mobile optimisation
- Voice optimisation
- Schema markup
- Speed
- YMYL and EAT
- Link building
- Search intent
- Image search

Let's begin …

1. RUN MARKET AND COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

There are two simple questions that form this part of a health check. "Where are you now?" and "where do you want to be?" Understanding your position is vital and it doesn't matter if you are a new brand just starting out or an established market leader, there is always a need to implement an effective SEO strategy and there is always room for improvement.

If you want to gain an edge on your competitors, you need to know what they're doing online. This is a vital part of your SEO Healthcheck. The two man considerations are:

• Their strengths: How can you incorporate what they're doing well into your own strategy?

• Their weaknesses: Are you repeating the same mistakes they're making?

Analysing your current and potential competitors' SEO activities will allow you to assess your position in the market, and provide a context in which to make strategic decisions for your business online. Evaluating their strengths and weaknesses against your own will reveal where there are opportunities for improving your user experience and rankings. We often use tables (such as the two below) to understand the differences between competitors and use the data to choose what to prioritise when working on a site.
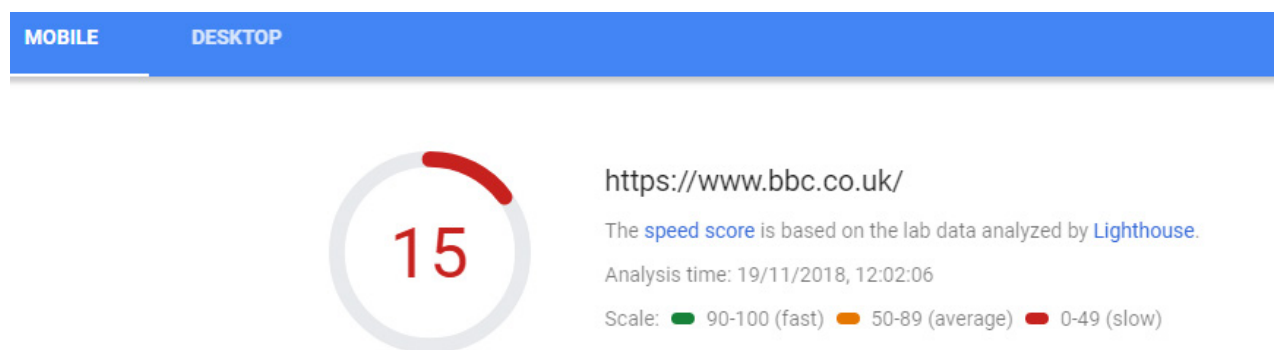
Homepage	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Keyword Selection	Very good	No keywords found	No keywords found	Good	No keywords found
Title Tag	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Satisfactory
H1, H2, H3 Tags	Good	No H1 or H3 tags were found	Excellent	Very good	Excellent
HTML Content	Well structured, sufficient content	Lots of content, although not as well structured	Excellent. Well structured, user friendly	Informative and sufficient homepage content	Lots of homepage content
Alt Tags	Some alt attributes are missing	Majority of alt attributes are missing	Excellent	Some alt attributes are missing	Majority of alt attributes are missing
HTML Validation	1 warning, 6 errors	13 warnings, 18 errors	125 errors, 227 warnings	33 errors	24 errors, 10 warnings

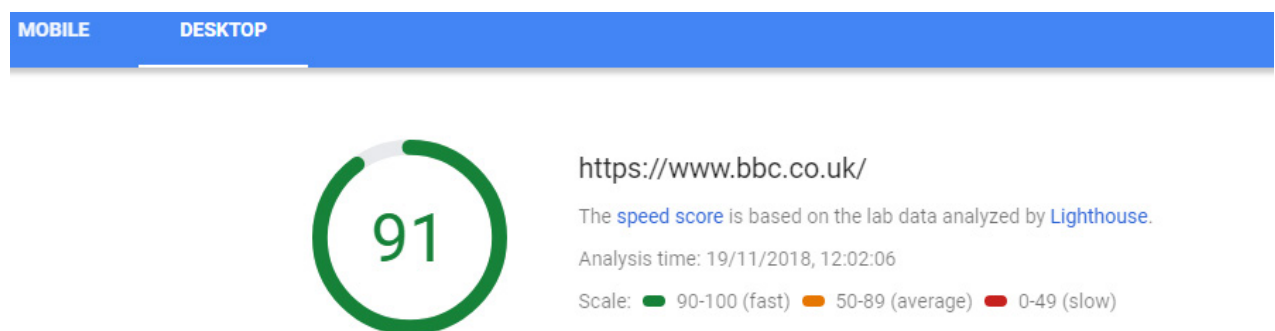| UX	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Site Feel	Modern, high quality and designed with users in mind	Not as user friendly, more basic website	Modern, clean, bold.	Modern, simple, young.	Corporate, more serious, like a news website
URL Issues	URL structure becomes too long at category page levels	No issues	No issues	No issues	No issues
Navigation	No issues	No issues	No issues	Navigation relies on internal site search. Traditional navigation bars are limited.	Standard navigation, user friendly
Blog	Multiple blogs available on the site	News section acts as website blog	Regularly updated site blog	Regularly updated site blog	Several blogs available on the site
Summary	Good site with some minor on page SEO issues. Nothing that will have a significant impact on the overall performance of the website.	Not as many visuals and no video content makes this website less appealing and eye catching. No on page SEO issues need urgently reviewing.	Good on page SEO and lots of well-structured content across the site.	Slightly different site to other competitors in terms of content and navigation. No major on page SEO issues. Modern look and feel to the site.	Good on page SEO, and overall look and feel of the website is good. Targeted at an older audience.

2. OPTIMISATION FOR MOBILE

With smart phone usage continuing on its rapid upward trajectory and more focus on mobile optimisation as a ranking factor, it would be foolish not to add mobile optimisation as a consideration for your SEO health check. Recently we put together a piece on the BBC and the changes that they needed to make in order to bring their mobile site in line with desktop.

If we look at the case study and the performance of the BBC's mobile site we can see that it has a score of 15 which will be a huge concern. Anything between 0-49 is considered slow and throws up a serious list of actions to perform.

MOBILE	**DESKTOP**

15

https://www.bbc.co.uk/

The speed score is based on the lab data analyzed by Lighthouse.

Analysis time: 19/11/2018, 12:02:06

Scale: ● 90-100 (fast) ● 50-89 (average) ● 0-49 (slow)

The desktop site is a different story however with a score of 91 (fast).

MOBILE	**DESKTOP**

91

https://www.bbc.co.uk/

The speed score is based on the lab data analyzed by Lighthouse.

Analysis time: 19/11/2018, 12:02:06

Scale: ● 90-100 (fast) ● 50-89 (average) ● 0-49 (slow)

The key takeaway here, is that the site in general is pretty well optimised but that mobile side has been neglected.

A key consideration might also be that sites such as the BBC use apps as well so there may be more focus here.

Nevertheless, Google takes no prisoners when it comes to rankings so it needs addressing.

Top level stats

When it comes to the top level stats on which the speed is based, we see the following six metrics:

As you can see from the BBC's mobile page test, five of the six areas are classified as slow and one is average here's what they all mean:

First Contentful Paint (FCP)

The FCP marks the point, immediately after navigation, when the browser renders the first bit of content from the DOM (tree structure that represents the HTML of the website). This is an important milestone for users because it indicates that the page is loading. In the case of site speed it goes without saying – the faster the better.

Speed Index

Speed Index is a page load performance metric that shows you how quickly the content of a page is visibly populated. The lower the score, the better.

Time to Interactive

Load is not a single moment— it's an experience that no one metric can fully capture. There are multiple moments during the load experience that can affect whether a user perceives it as 'fast' or 'slow'.

The Time to Interactive (TTI) metric measures how long it takes a page to become interactive. "Interactive" is defined as the point where:

- The page has displayed useful content, which is measured with First Contentful Paint.
- Event handlers are registered for most visible page elements.
- The page responds to user interactions within 50 milliseconds.

Some sites optimise content visibility at the expense of interactivity. This can create a frustrating user experience. The site appears to be ready, but when the user tries to interact with it, nothing happens.

First Meaningful Paint

Page load is a key aspect of how a user perceives the performance of your page. This audit identifies the time at which the user feels that the primary content of the page is visible.

First CPU Idle

The First CPU Idle metric measures when a page is minimally interactive:

- Most, but maybe not all, user interface (UI) elements on the screen are interactive.
- The page responds, on average, to most user input in a reasonable amount of time.

Estimated Input Latency

Input responsiveness is a key factor in how users perceive the performance of your app. Apps have 100ms to respond to user input. Any longer than that, and the user perceives the app as 'laggy'. To make your site responds to user input faster, you need to optimise how your code runs in the browser.

Opportunities and diagnostics

Understanding the metrics is a good starting point, and the next stage of the report is the 'opportunities' tab. This lists all of the tasks that can be done and the benefits of resolving any flagged issues. This is a feature that was always available but the new interface shows the actual time that can be saved.

In the below screenshot, you can see that there are five different opportunities for mobile speed optimisation, specifically relating to the page load time.

	Opportunity	Estimated Savings
1	Eliminate render-blocking resources	0.44 s ˅
2	Enable text compression	0.18 s ˅
3	Minify JavaScript	0.15 s ˄

Minifying JavaScript files can reduce payload sizes and script parse time. Learn more.

URL	Size (KB)	Potential Savings (KB)
...jquery/jquery.js (static.bbci.co.uk)	78 KB	36 KB
/jload?anId=... (pixel.adsafeprotected.com)	17 KB	3 KB
/jload?anId=... (pixel.adsafeprotected.com)	17 KB	3 KB

	Opportunity	Estimated Savings
4	Defer unused CSS	0.15 s ˅
5	Efficiently encode images	0.15 s ˅

I've expanded the third point in the list and you will be able to see that there is a more detailed report about areas for improvement. Whilst in all likelihood these are task for a specialist web developer there are things that can be done in house such as making sure that all images are compressed and optimised. Images are in fact on of the main reasons for poor mobile speed, especially on 3/4G connections.

From a diagnostic point of view, there are a few things that can be done to the mobile site of the BBC website and the potential positive impact is huge.

The timings that are associated with these tasks are startling. If you look at recommendations two and three, you will see that these fixes could save a huge amount of time. In fact they currently have a combined 15.6 seconds of load time so making a saving here could take the mobile site to the same level as the desktop site.

In essence, lots of the work related to speed is done for you. Google provides the possible updates you can make in the form of a checklist and highlights the time that you can save on certain areas. As part of your SEO healthcheck, working through these is a must.

3. PREPARE FOR VOICE OPTIMISATION

To understand the importance of voice search you only need look at the amount of money that tech giants are throwing at it. Frankly, within search and digital marketing, there is a lot of noise about voice search – whether it's the experts claiming that it's the most important thing (correct), or their counterparts declaiming it as an irrelevancy (incorrect).

There is a real battle going on at the moment between several major tech companies for dominance in the digital assistant market (specifically in smart speakers) with everyone from Amazon to Yandex having a speaker on the market. While Alexa rules the roost at the moment, Google has, for the first time, succeeded in outselling Amazon with its Google Home since it went to market.

The main issues for voice search are the following:

- It is a technology in its infancy that relies heavily on other technologies in their infancy
- Nobody buys using voice search
- I don't, or don't know anyone else, who uses it
- It lacks sufficient comprehension

There are two ways which are likely to make the most impact short to mid-term for your search marketing strategies:

1. Natural language

While this is, most likely, the second in order of added value of the two must have changes to optimisation, it is also the simplest and least time consuming of the two to implement. The key to this is, really, to attempt to forget a lot of the lessons learned about content optimisation the previous decade has taught us.

While, at the time, the keyword focusing of content made sense from a utilitarian perspective – insofar as it catered to the peculiarities of search engines – even the best writers were forced to work hard to produce content that was both useful, well-written and sufficiently focused on the specific keyword or term (while some other writers ended up producing stilted and repetitive nonsense).

The advancement of voice search and the tremendous improvements in the vocabulary of search engines can (and should) be incredibly liberating to content producers across all industries. Listening is what you should be doing – the way people phrase questions for voice search is all around you (unless you happen to work from home), so keep an ear out for how the people around you are asking each other (or their phones and digital assistants) and look to replicate the formulation of these questions as jumping off points for your content.

2. Markup

Markup is the key to succeeding not only in voice search, but also in local, Google's Knowledge Graph and in mobile search as a whole. The main drawback, however, is that if it has not been implemented early on, it can be difficult and time consuming to do at later stages. However, with markup serving as essential sign-posts for search engines, it is more than worth the time it may take.

Bear these in mind as you plan your future strategies.

4. ADD SCHEMA MARKUP

It's a drum we beat regularly, but while Click has been emphasising the importance of structured data for search – both in the present and to its future, it is great to see our predictions borne out by developments in the industry.

We've made the case before that schema markup is going to be the foundation of voice first search, but it is – as can be seen from recent developments, especially Bill Slawski's dissection of various Google patents and the idea that Google is seeking to become an 'answers engine'.

By using schema markup to make an easily digestible scattered database of the web, constructing ever increasing and comprehensive ontologies, Google is not only ensuring that it will be able to answer most queries, but also that many website visits will be avoidable (furthering the work already done by in 'SERPs answers' and 'rich results').
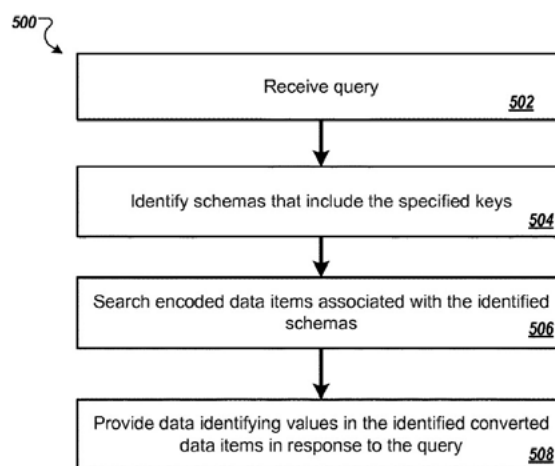

FIG. 5

How this shapes the future of search will take a while to find out, but with voice search set to account for 50% of all searches made by 2020, there has to be a push from Google and other search engines to increase the speed at which we are organising the information in this scattered database.

It's no surprise, therefore, to see Google and Bing double down on the use of existing schema and in the creation of extensions. Whether or not spoken queries lead to the necessity to use a screen as part of the follow up, or a visit to a site, Google as an answer engine is going to fundamentally alter the main function of many brand's website.

With all this in mind, there will be a need to up skill staff or hire more JavaScript knowledge at many in-house and agency teams to ensure that the correct and latest markup is being used – as well as to participate in the construction of industry specific extensions in the hope of being at the forefront of the coming changes, rather than having to react to every new extension.

5. THINK ABOUT SPEED

According to Google:

"People want to be able to find answers to their questions as fast as possible — studies show that people really care about the speed of a page. Although speed has been used in ranking for some time, that signal was focused on desktop searches.

"The 'Speed Update,' as we're calling it, will only affect pages that deliver the slowest experience to users and will only affect a small percentage of queries. It applies the same standard to all pages, regardless of the technology used to build the page. The intent of the search query is still a very strong signal, so a slow page may still rank highly if it has great, relevant content.

"We encourage developers to think broadly about how performance affects a user's experience of their page and to consider a variety of user experience metrics."

The starting point for any analysis is to look at the current positioning of a brand, when you run it through the PageSpeed Insights tool. The results from the analysis are formed by lab data analysed by Google Lighthouse.

6. THINK ABOUT 'YMYL' AND 'EAT'

Google has released its latest version of its Quality Rater Guidelines, which are detailed instructions given to the thousands of human raters that it employs to manually evaluate the quality of the search results returned by Google, and penalise those that violate Google's Quality Guidelines.

The major highlights are a greater emphasis on the quality of 'Your Money or Your Life' (YMYL) sites, ie, those that demand a high degree of trust as they could impact a user's life, and therefore are held to highest standard by Google. If these pages could negatively affect a user's health, happiness or financial stability, they will rank less well. All shopping sites fall under this category. If a rater wouldn't buy from, or submit personal info to, your site, it's unlikely to rank well.

Areas falling into the YMYL category include:

- Shopping/financial
- Medical info
- Legal info
- Child adoption, car safety, etc

Expertise, authoritativeness, trustworthiness (EAT) is another big talking point heading into 2019 as it reflects a user's perception of a site's overall value. Ask yourself how you can increase the EAT of your site? Users should be able to instantly tell the content is from a reputable source, making it more likely to be trusted and shared.

7. BUILD LINKS

Links are still a vital signal to Google about the relevance and importance of a website. A good backlink comes from an authoritative website (one with a high Domain Authority, or DA), using anchor text that appears natural in the context of the content on a page, such as in the following example from Moz.

JC Penney, a very large US retailer was heavily penalized back in February 2011 for buying large amounts of links targeting a range of specific keywords. It was several months before they started to see a recovery and they were forced to spend time trying to take lots of the links down.

Another example closely followed a few weeks later when Overstock were penalized for the practice of giving universities discounts on products in exchange for links. Again, it was several months before they started to see a recovery.

A famous example in the UK was the penalty applied to florist Interflora in February 2013 which was severe but only lasted eleven days. Google didn't directly comment on this but it was widely believed to be link related.

The way to earn genuine, high-quality backlinks is by sticking to the following rules – which are basic good practice for online marketing in general:

- Creating your own unique, engaging, high quality content
- Build a genuine community which interacts with your website, your social channels and one another
- Develop and maintain authentic relationships with relevant influencers

A strategic exercise that ticks all of these boxes is 'campaign outreach', which involves forging relationships with influential bloggers, capturing data, creating and distributing high quality, shareable content, and amplifying its reach through social and 'earned media'.

There are benefits for both parties: the blogger receives high quality content which is bespoke to their own and to their audience's needs, and or the client, the exchange of content helps to boost their brand awareness, and strengthens their website's organic search (SEO) profile by creating strong, natural backlinks.

Building legitimate inbound links, or backlinks, is an important strategy for marketing your website for two reasons:

- They can drive referral traffic to your site
- They can help you rank higher in the search engine results pages

A strong backlink profile requires ongoing maintenance. Since Google released its Penguin algorithm update back in April 2012, websites with backlinks deemed 'unethical' or 'spammy' (for example, low quality sites that try to gain an unfair advantage through excessive or paid link building) risk penalisation in Google's SERPs in an attempt to stop the quality of results returned from being compromised.

To drive the message of natural links home, Google provides a tool within its Search Console (previously known as Webmaster Tools) – navigate to Search Traffic > Links to Your Site. This can help you to clean up your links and there are various third party tools which can provide even more insight.

8. UNDERSTAND SEARCH INTENT

Search engines exist to provide users with results that are relevant to the search query. Smart SEO campaigns are built on an [understanding of how your audience searches](#) around your industry, products and services.

A key point here is understanding the intent behind a given keyword search. A user wants to find specific information, and search engines have advanced algorithms and large amounts of traffic they analyse to determine which results are the best match for a keyword.

According to Marcus Miller from Search Engine Land:

"In many ways, search engine marketing via SEO or paid methods is strategically simple. If you are a plumber in a small town, and someone searches for "plumber" plus the name of the town, then there is a pretty good chance you provide what they need. Getting in front of people at the exact time they have a requirement is good marketing.

"Unfortunately, commercial terms are highly competitive across paid and organic search. For most businesses, there are other opportunities for branding and targeting customers higher in the marketing funnel. We just have to develop a greater understanding of the intent behind search keywords."

The first step here is to understand the three categories of search queries:

Informational search queries - In terms of volume, this is the top of the funnel. There is a huge range of potential queries across the entire spectrum of topics out there.

From a business perspective, we are looking to identify queries that relate to the product or service you provide. You will then look to develop content that answers these questions or provides information on certain topics. This will position you in front of your potential audience. For example:

- What is SEO?
- SEO tips for [keywords]
- Marketing ideas for small businesses in the [industry type]

Commercial or transactional search queries - commercial or transactional queries relate to the desired action that you would like a prospect to take.

These can range from the obvious — like searching for 'electrician' — to the more research-oriented, like 'best restaurant in Liverpool'.

Ambiguous keywords and personalised results - Not all keywords are crystal-clear in their categorisation or intent. Take 'SEO' for example. If a user searches for 'SEO,' what exactly are they looking for?

- A definition?
- Some tutorials?
- An agency?

Where intent is not always clear, Google will typically show a page of results that covers a wide variety of potential answers

9. OPTIMISE FOR IMAGE SEARCH

Our brains process visual content such as infographics, video and slideshows more effectively than text alone. In fact it's estimated that it's up to 60,000 times faster. Visuals express and spread ideas quickly, which means that this kind of content is popular and highly shareable on social media. Quite simply, instead of searching using a word or phrase, you search with an image and this will be huge moving forward.

There was a time when text dominated online and on email, not least because images took so long to download. But imagery is powerful and at the centre of our culture. It's estimated that 93% of all human communication is visual and 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual.

Which is why your brand should be focusing not only on producing and optimising visuals as part of your marketing strategy, but capitalising on the fact that, when you create and distribute good quality images, other websites may wish to share them. The idea: using Google's reverse image search to get more backlinks.

FINAL THOUGHTS

When it comes to SEO we constantly tell clients and others in the industry that there are over 200 'ranking signals'. This number has been touted by Google and as such it has to be taken as verbatim. If you are able to run a health check on your brand's online presence, prepare a strategy and factor in some of the things that we have mentioned above you will be in the best possible position going forward.

Understanding the various nuances between the aforementioned elements is imperative and this is where time management comes into it. If you are able to assess how much resource to dedicate to each facet of search marketing, then success will surely come.

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ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, outreach, social media, conversion rate optimisation (CRO) and international/multilingual search marketing. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year and Digital Agency of the Year 2018, adding to our long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, a Bing Select Partner and feature in The Drum Recommends.

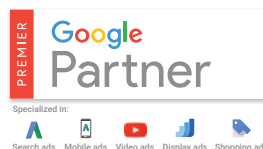## YOUR BESPOKE ORGANIC SEARCH (SEO) ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

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The Drum Recommended   Bing Select Partner   Google Partner — Specialized in: Search ads, Mobile ads, Video ads, Display ads, Shopping ads   VWO Certified Partner

OUR AWARDS

Northern Digital Awards Winner 2018 — Search Agency of the Year 2018

Performance Marketing Awards — Most Effective Agency 2018

Digital Entrepreneur Awards — Digital Agency of the Year 2018

OUR TECHNOLOGIES

monitor TRAX   rank TRAX   feed TRAX   link TRAX   pro TRAX   page TRAX