ADVANCED TECHNICAL SEO

8 THINGS TO DRIVE SITE PERFORMANCE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

We are living in strange times. The way people across the globe are working thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic has altered consumer habits like never before and a larger number of people are spending a greater amount of time online. In the past we have covered topics such as eCommerce in great depth and making sure that you have a business that is prepared for the second digital revolution and which can adapt to online buying habits is a must. We also know that more advertising takes place online and that the ad spend in nearly every sector is on the rise. This leads us to the idea that there is more competition and for that reason it is crucial that your business stands out.

The best way to stand out online is to rank higher than your competition for relevant products, keywords, services and based on location. This eBook will look at the top 8 things you can implement to drive your SEO. For those new to the concept of SEO we have put together these resources to help and they act as a starter before you action some of the tips and changes listed below.

Let's begin…

WHAT IS TECHNICAL SEO?

WHAT IS THE 'LIGHTHOUSE REPORT'?

Technical SEO refers to the practice of optimising your site for crawling and indexing purposes by the search engines. It can also include any technical process meant to improve overall search visibility.

A post by SEMrush stated that technical SEOshould help you to answer the following questions:

- Can search engine bots crawl/find your page? (includes topics such as status codes, sitemaps, information architecture, robots.txt, facets)

- Can search engine bots index your page? (includes: meta robots)

- Can search engine bots render your page? (includes: JavaScript, the DOM, page speed)

- Can bots understand content on your page? (includes: structured data (Schema.org, HTML), accessibility)

- Are you sending search engines the proper signals for dealing with ranking content? (e.g., canonical tags, dealing with pagination)

- Is this page worthy of ranking? (includes: content relevance, authority, HTTP, UX, mobile-friendly, site latency)"

These questions highlight some of the things that you could and should be doing if you want to see an upturn in performance. In the next section we'll look at eight of these points and explain what they are and why they are important to your website and indeed your future digital performance.

TOP 8 THINGS TO IMPLEMENT TODAY

XML SITEMAPS

In the simplest possible terms, were a website a body, the content (blogs, products etc) would be the flesh and skin, while the sitemap would be the skeleton – the frame upon which all else is built. The easiest way for you to make progress, is necessary for your foot bone to be connected to the ankle bone, ankle bone to leg bone and on and on. The same is true for your brand's site – its skeleton should be set up in the best possible manner for the journey.

If we think about a simple customer journey (I'm going to use ecommerce here because the goals are easier to define):

Arrives on your site.	Clicks through to a product type.	Clicks through to a specific product.	Clicks to add to basket	Clicks to get to checkout and pay.

As we can see, the customer arrives, identifies a product group, narrows it down, adds their product to the basket and converts. Simple. This, however, has to be replicated for every journey on your site. Any consumer, site crawler or anything else with the intention to do so must be able to make a similarly simple journey through each layer of your site. It is for this reason that XML sitemaps are of paramount importance.

Again, we're going to take a simple visual approach:
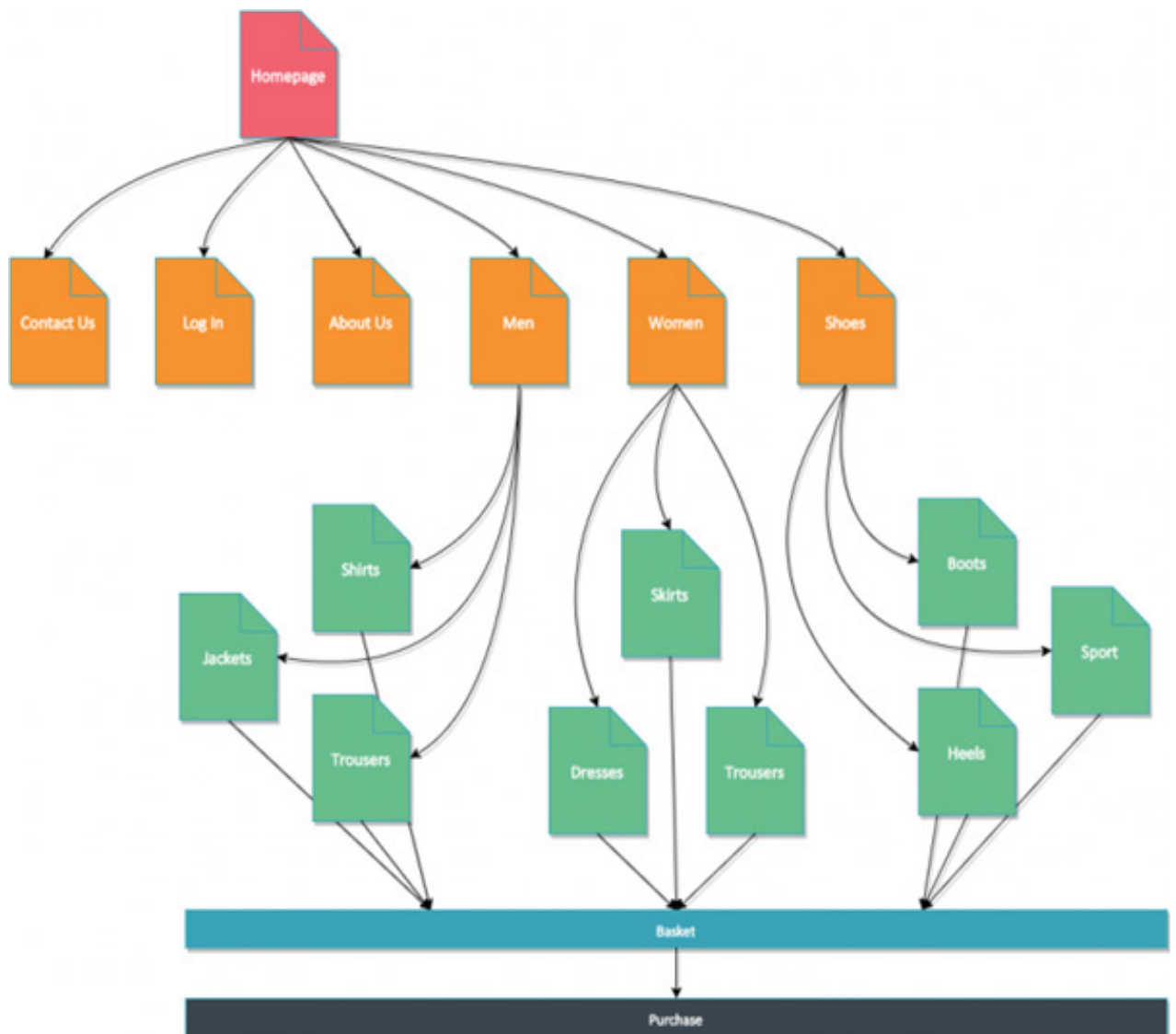
Yet, even if we take this most basic approach – with homepage linking to minimal subcategories, which link to very few in turn – we can begin to see how a journey can be impacted by limited in-site navigation. If a consumer enters the site above and wants to look at shirts following trousers, they would have to return to the 'Men' subcategory and retrace their steps. It's a small inconvenience, but an inconvenience nevertheless, and all inconveniences impact conversion to greater or lesser degrees.

It is possible to resolve this, as most sites do, with an ever-present, branded navigation bar featuring drop-downs to make virtually all pages reachable from anywhere on the site which ensures the user journey is simplified.
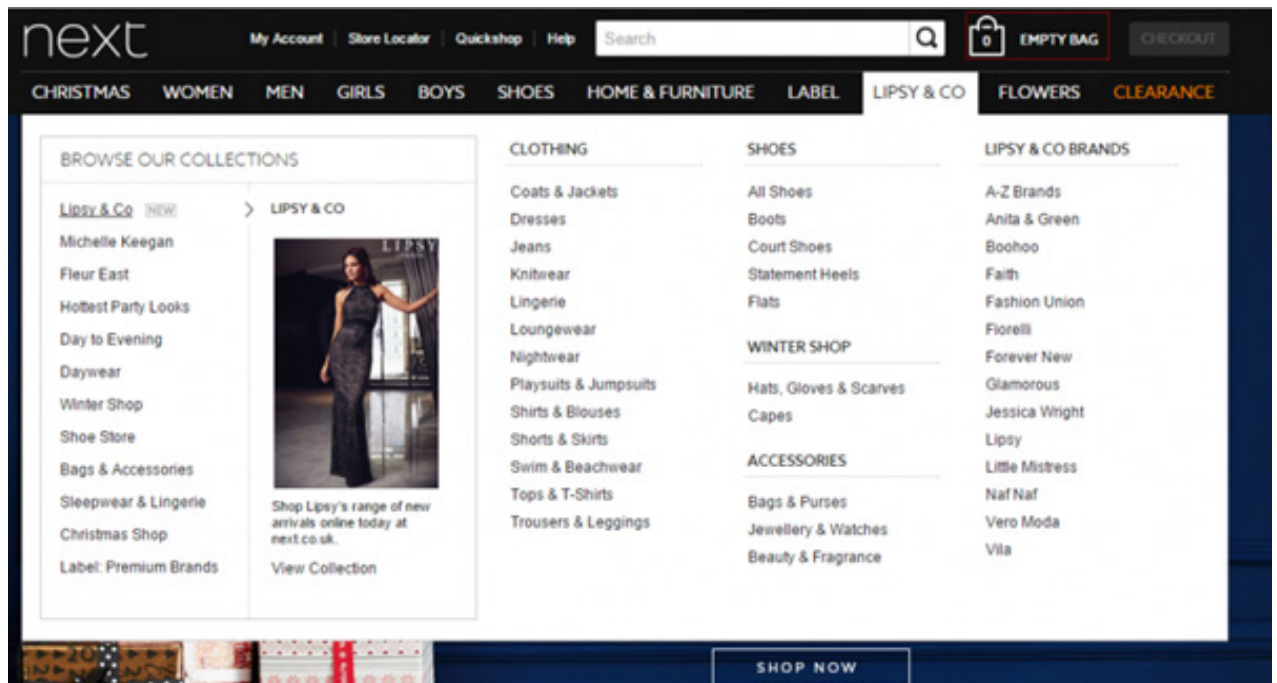
The issue with this is that it can lead to problems for indexing, and it is therefore vital to ensure that the correct use is made of redirect codes and canonical tags. It is also necessary to ensure that robot.txt directed crawlers are not indexing multiple duplicate pages, or attempting to follow link loops or broken links, and therefore diluting the authority of, or even failing to index pages lower down the sitemap. The issue with this is that it can lead to problems for indexing, and it is therefore vital to ensure that the correct use is made of redirect codes and canonical tags. It is also necessary to ensure that robot.txt directed crawlers are not indexing multiple duplicate pages, or attempting to follow link loops or broken links, and therefore diluting the authority of, or even failing to index pages lower down the sitemap.

FIX YOUR 404'S

Link reclamation is the process of identifying existing citations of your brand or website across the web and taking action to gain a backlink from this existing content. This tactic generally provides a more immediate return because the hard work is often done in terms of getting content about your brand on the web.

We can increase the value of this content by introducing or fixing a backlink, and ensuring that the backlink will pass Authority, Trust and Relevance to your website as per the latest Google guidelines.

Once you have found erroneous links there are generally 2 types of link reclamation:

Broken Link Reclamation

This is a process where we use several tools to identify existing links across the web that are now broken and no longer direct a user to your website correctly.

- The four main reasons for a lost or broken link are as follows:
- The author removes your link from the linking page;
- The linking page no longer exists (404 error);
- The linking page gets (301) redirected;
- The linking page is no longer indexed in Google

Once, identified we can either contact the webmaster to fix the link on their webpage, or create a redirect so the user (and link authority) is passed to the correct page on your site. It's worth noting here that whilst adding in 301 redirects will restore some SEO value to the affected links, a link reclamation project is the only way to retain the full link value.

Make sure that you get them fixed!
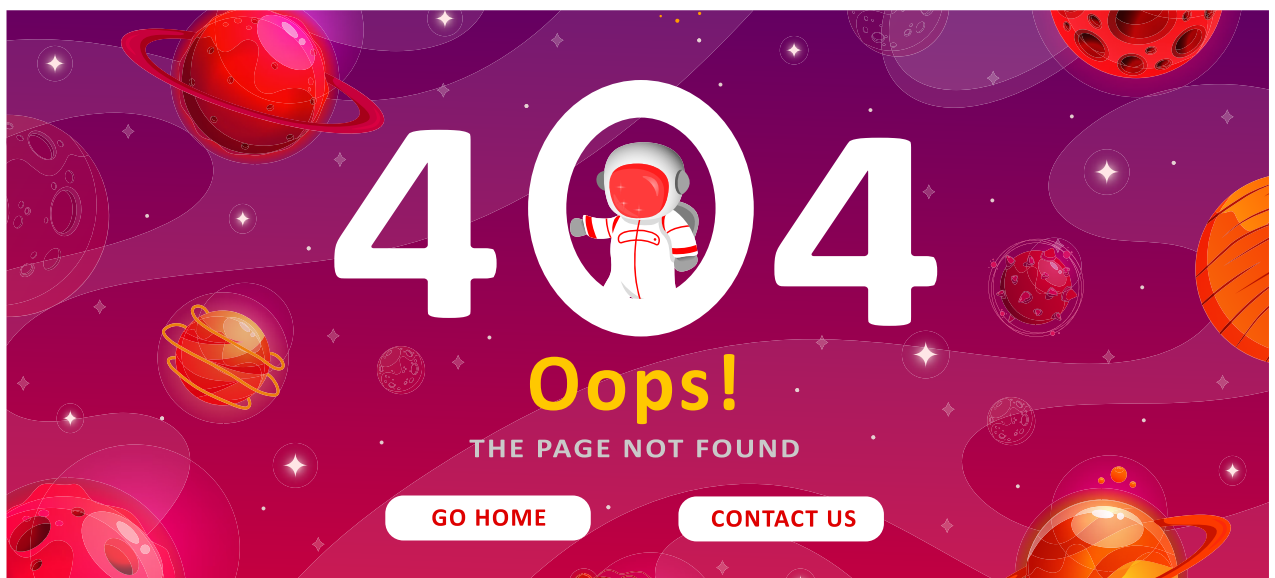
CONSIDER SITE SPEED

One area that can make an impact and that does make an instant difference is page speed, specifically mobile page speed. This metric is one of the single biggest decision makers that users have if they are to stick around, continue reading or come back to your website because it has one of the greatest bearings on user experience (UX).

It's funny really; that the two ends of the search experience, the business (website) and the searcher (user) have such different goals despite their seemingly similar habits. The user wants UX in abundance – they want to be able to find the product or service they are after, in a way that is quick and relevant. In truth the user has little interest in who offers the result to their query, as long as they get the result.

The business behind the website wants to be number one. They want to sell and to do that they want rank as highly as possible for the most relevant terms. They target their buyer based on audience profiling and they know that one of the factors that is going to guarantee they retain their lead and encourage them to return it positive UX – and speed is a part of this. Searchengineland. com backed this up saying: "Speed is big. Not only is it a ranking signal; it's a major UX factor. UX, in turn, impacts rankings. It's a loop."

According to Google, it is expected that any page will load, in full in under three seconds. This is its benchmark for what correlated with a positive UX and it is these pages that are performing best on SERPs. In their latest post on the Adwords blog, Google said: "Consumers' expectations for faster and better digital experiences are on the rise. The mobile web is no exception. But the thrill of the hunt, whether it's researching the best hotel deals for spring break or buying a new pair of sneakers, is often hindered by slow mobile sites.

IMPLEMENT AMP

AMP is Google's accessible framework for creating fast-loading mobile web pages that will boost both the UX and availability of your content for those not browsing on desktop. According to Search Engine Land: "The open-source initiative is designed to enable publishers to easily improve speed (and consequently, the user experience) for their mobile readership without sacrificing any ad revenue that they may rely upon.

"Although experienced developers can often achieve similar results through intensive performance optimisations, publishers often neglect this due to resource constraints. AMP allows these optimisations to be easily achieved without altering the primary mobile web experience."

The five key benefits of AMP

1) Improves site speed

According to a study from Google, 53% of website visits are abandoned if a mobile site takes longer than three seconds to load.

According to research by analytics company, addthis, AMP has a set of standards which all contribute to decreased page load time. A few of these guidelines include asynchronous JavaScript, resources sized statically (such as images and ads), only inline CSS, etc. Page load times have been shown to have a great influence on traffic and user engagement and are always a very important measurement for site owners to be monitoring.

2) Makes existing content more accessible

Today's consumers find the pressures of time a real constraint. Gone are the days of 'nine-to-five' and now businesses need to trade 24/7. With this in mind it is vital that businesses make their content as accessible as possible. AMP allows businesses to display all of their core content so that those who are commuting, taking a shorter lunch or catching up before bed can get the information they need.

3) Decreases bounce rate

As I mentioned earlier UX is vital for those operating a search marketing strategy. If you deliver poor UX, then you run the risk of losing out to your competitors. This is especially true in competitive markets. Visitors that arrive at your site will become dejected if the page the visit is image heavy and takes an age to load. We know that businesses have a very short timeframe (three seconds) to retain a visitor by showing them at least the first part of the content.

To eliminate these problems, it is important to adopt the AMP mobile web development framework that can make your rich content based mobile web pages to load faster. A happier user is more likely to stick around and convert, load speed is key to this.

4) Improves site performance

Google announced back in July 2018 that it would prioritise mobile site load time in its core ranking algorithm, if they are literally telling you this information then it would be foolish not to act on it!

Some of the key improvements to a site's performance thanks to AMP are:

- More backlinks – If the quality of AMP written content is high this leads to improved page visibility and the potential to develop a large number of backlinks.

- Redefine traffic – Users prefer the sites that are mobile responsive and innovative, using AMP therefore can capture the attention of new users and bring new and returning visitors to your site.

- Shareability – AMP is all about feeding the content to relevant users quickly and efficiently. If you have pages that load quickly and that display useful information, then why not add share buttons. This will lead to more traffic and give you a better chance at increasing revenue.

- Better click through rates – A website with AMP label tends to get more attention from users searching for relevant information as people prefer fast loading pages. This means more click through rates with great user experience.

5) AMP adds monetary value

One of the prime reasons for the slow performance of most of the sites is the presence of ad technology. These ads are in place to ensure the widest possible is reached and that these people convert, therefore generating the highest possible revenue. The only problem here is that the more ads you run the slower the site is likely to load.

To gain a better UX, customers were beginning to combat these ads and the speed issues that they cause by installing ad blockers, a move that crucified revenue. AMP combats this and the web developers behind that launch of AMP said: "A goal of the Accelerated Mobile Pages Project is to ensure effective ad monetisation on the mobile web while embracing a user-centric approach.

"With that context, the objective is to provide support for a comprehensive range of ad formats, ad networks and technologies in Accelerated Mobile Pages."

AMP therefore makes the loading of ads quickly on a mobile site and increases the chance of greater revenue.

ACTION CANONICALISATION

When you have the sameor very similar content accessible on multiple URLs, canonicalisation allows you to identify the page that you want both visitors and search engines to see.

For example:

- www.soapstars.com

- soapstars.com/

- www.soapstars.com/index.html

- soapstars.com/home.asp

These multiple pages are common on most sites, but can cause problems with organic visibility as the Page Authority of the content may be divided by search engines.

Without canonicalisation, a search engine can't decide which version of the URL they should add in their index. If you have two or more pages resulting in the same content, its bots will assume one is a duplicate copy of the other.

To make sure the search engines are indexing the correct page, you need to select which variation of the URL you want to set as a canonical URL or canonicalised URL.

Canonicalisation ensures your site visitors always access the most relevant content, while keeping duplicated content out of the search engine index and consolidating a site's authority and PageRank into one URL.

MAKE CONTENT USER FOCUSED

Although the term UFC is widely associated with the business of combat sports, in this instance it is known as the abbreviation for user focused content. This UFC delivers the same knockout performance only this time on the internet and not in the octagon. UFC is a term given to posts and pieces of content that are tailored with the user or searcher in mind. They are well optimised and are keyword rich meaning that they are written to display certain sites for the exact terms that the user is searching for. These posts have become vital in the wake of Google's EAT update, which looks at the authenticity and relevance of a website. Trust is a huge factor in how sites are displayed in the SERPs as the search engines want to fulfil the needs of the user in the best possible way.

If content is poorly written or irrelevant then the bounce rate for your site is likely to rise. Customers will leave and then you will miss out to competitors.

Over the last few months this is something that we have been working on and it is plain to see that the performance of clients improved greatly when content is bespoke and authority. The well researched nature of these types of post and the why both keyword research and Schema markup are used means that this tactic is one of the true early adopters of the need to harness technical SEO when it comes to your content.

ADD HREFLANG AND CCTLD FOR INTERNATIONAL SITES

When it comes to SEO, your strategy needs to ensure that search engines show users the correct content and in the right language of your website, according to the version they're using.

And it's not just about simply translating your English strategies and content in other languages; you need to capture the nuances of other languages to really engage with your audience. To that end colloquialisms, humour and cultural sensitivities all need to be taken into account.

Importantly, not all (or even many) countries have a single dominant language. In Canada, for example, a targeted user might speak English, French, or any number of other languages, whilst in Switzerland, a consumer might prefer to read your content in French, German or English. So, for those looking to increase their visibility in different international markets, it often comes down to a choice: country versus language targeting.

When it comes to choosing your audience the clues are often in the data that you already have. You should immediately identify which countries have enough organic search volume of relevant and reasonably competitive keywords that would aid your overall visibility and SEO efforts.

By selecting these as areas to target and prioritising them in your international SEO process you give yourself the best opportunity to rank highly.

If on the other hand, you have determined that there's not enough organic search volume to target a specific country, you can start by targeting the language instead.

Location would be a more critical factor to take into consideration for an eCommerce site, like Amazon (that is country targeting with versions for Spain, the UK, etc), than for service software like Skype (with Spanish or German language versions).

FINAL THOUGHTS

To summarise this eBook it is important that we reflect on the questions from the opening section. Those questions touched on a large number of ideas and concepts and whilst we have only commented on ten of them in this eBook, there is always more to be done.

If you take on the points above then you are well on your way to a high performing site.

GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY

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 Organic Search (SEO) Team of the Year 2020, 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.
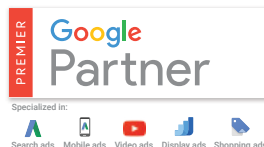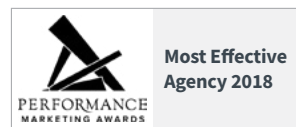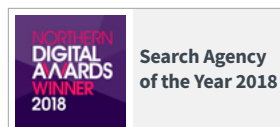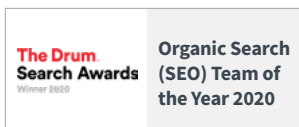
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PERFORMANCE MARKETING AWARDS	Most Effective Agency 2018

OUR TECHNOLOGIES

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