



SEO PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS



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INTRODUCTION

Whether you're newly responsible for a site's ongoing SEO or are starting an SEO project from scratch, knowing where to start can often be the hardest part.

SEO performance is something that all businesses want to monitor, but very few know how to do this and with Google constantly updating their algorithm it has become harder than ever to stay ahead of the curve. This, as well as the need to carry out regular website audits can be the difference between success and failure.

We're now going to try to set out some of the best practices and strategies to help get you started and look at performance based metrics that site audits can show you.

The purpose of SEO audits is to assess the current performance of a site in order to drive future improvements. This article will look at the processes involved, the tools you can use (both paid and free) and how regular auditing can help your brand succeed.



CORE UPDATES, WHAT ARE THEY AND WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

When it comes to search and digital marketing, all eyes are on Google – and rightly so. The world’s largest search engine is responsible for much of the traffic that sites receive. With that in mind, it is important for businesses and brands of all sizes to keep any updates front of mind.

In the last couple of weeks, a new broad core update rolled out. This iteration was named the June 2021 Core Update, and subsequently the July 2021 Core Update.

In essence, Google is going to start incorporating metrics that attempt to quantify the quality of a user’s experience when visiting your site into your site’s ranking on the Google SERPs. Like all core updates, this was a global update and was not specific to any region, language or category of web sites. It is a classic “broad core update” that Google releases every several months or so.

The most commonly affected areas included:

- Health
- Automotive
- Pets
- Science
- Travel
- Food & Drink
- Law
- Beauty
- Fitness
- Leisure
- Home & Garden

WHAT ARE GOOGLE CORE UPDATES?

Early in its existence Google adopted the unofficial motto ‘don’t be evil’ to set out its stall in opposition to competitors they felt were exploiting users. Though whether Google has achieved the paragon status it seems they were aiming for early on is debatable, what cannot be denied is that they have demonstrated a consistent commitment to reducing the effects of black-hat SEO tactics and rewarding quality content with improved visibility.

From the Florida update on through Austin, Panda and Penguin, right up to the 2021 updates there has been direct and effective action taken to stop unethical third party action skewing search results.

The changes that Google makes are numerous and, in truth, pretty regular – which is exactly the reason that you should be updating your strategy at regular intervals.



WHICH FACTORS ARE AFFECTED BY GOOGLE'S ALGORITHM UPDATES?

Over the years, and indeed since Google began to run their algorithm as a way of providing the best possible search engine results based on the queries of their users, there have been many changes.

According to Moz: “Each year, Google changes its search algorithm around 500–600 times. While most of these changes are minor, Google occasionally rolls out a ‘major’ algorithmic update (such as Google Panda and Google Penguin) that affects search results in significant ways.”

The important things for business’ is to be vigilant, stay ahead of the game and look at what the previous iterations of the algorithm were and look at how they have had an effect on the search results. One mistake that many companies make is that they forget about what has gone before.

Updates can tell us a lot about how Google is crawling pages, and what they are looking for in order to provide the best (most relevant) pages to a search query. With this in mind, it is important for businesses to not only look at the main ranking factors such as content and backlinks, but some of the more technical aspects too.

In order to get the most from your SEO strategy, then, looking at technical fixes is a must. Of those that fit into this category here are the most important technical points to focus on.



PAGE EXPERIENCE

Page experience is a set of signals which measure how users perceive their interaction with a web page beyond its pure information value. It includes Core Web Vitals, which are a set of metrics that measure real-world user experience for loading performance, interactivity, and visual stability of the page. It also includes existing search signals such as mobile-friendliness, safe browsing, speed and the move to HTTPS.

With the assumption that readers understand the concept of a webpage and that based on the navigation of a website, pages are built out to inform the users of different products and services as well as things like company information, contact details and other information such as blogs.

With that in mind, we'll now look at landing pages and internal linking and the factors that make for good page experience. In truth, all pages of a site are landing pages – they are the pages that the user ends up on, regardless of whether or not they came from an external link or an internal one.

Typically, a landing page is a page consumers arrive at when clicking on links external to your site, from pay-per-click (PPC) ads, search engine results pages (SERPs) or any other external link. The purpose of them, for the most part, is to earn some sort of conversion or engagement. That could be a purchase, or it could be a request for further information or contact.

As the first page a user will see, therefore, the landing page serves many different functions depending on the business needs of your brand, yet – at its most basic – you can consider a landing page to be a kind of gateway. Whether that is to the further exploration of your site, to conversion or to the completion of a designated goal. As such, your landing pages can and often should take various forms – even for the same product or service.

Although a generic landing page can be perfectly serviceable for a number of different levels of consumer interest or intent, it makes sense to ensure that the consumer is being well served by the page they see when first arriving at your site. The page consumers wish to see when at the various levels of the conversion funnel will contain different information.

A consumer at the awareness stage, for example, may be seeking information regarding the product – such as pricing, reviews or functionality, while at the purchase level they may simply need some refresher information to confirm they're in the right place and a buy it now or 'add to basket' button. It is, therefore, worthwhile matching your landing pages to your existing buyer's journey.

LANDING PAGE OPTIMISATION

Landing page optimisation is the practice of ‘optimising’ a page to make it as easy as possible for the consumer to complete the action you and they both wish to – whether that is proceeding through various other pages, raising their awareness of your products or services or converting.

This can take a number of different forms, from general SEO to PPC and CRO – these will, in turn, optimise the page for SEO, as destination pages for PPC advertisements and for increasing your rate of conversion. Landing pages are also great for use in conjunction with segmentation – allowing you to further personalise the user experience (UX) of your site.

MOBILE-FRIENDLINESS

If you’re seeing a drop in both rankings and traffic following the update, one way to determine whether or not a mobile issue is the cause is to run your site through Google’s mobile testing tool which is designed give you a definitive yes/no answer to the question of whether or not your site tests as being mobile friendly:

If the tool finds that your website isn’t mobile-friendly, then it’s likely that mobile issues may have caused your drop in traffic. But don’t panic – the good news about issues with mobile friendliness is that your rankings should automatically improve once Google identifies that remedial action has been taken.

Of course, there are many factors at play in the complex world of SEO and there are no guarantees that the mobile algorithm is the root cause even if your site is distinctly mobile-unfriendly.

PAGE 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 to look at the current positioning of a brand, when you run it through the PageSpeed Insights tool.

HTTPS RANKING BOOST

Ever since Google introduced HTTPS to Gmail by default in 2010, it has been hailed for its continuing advancement of encryption and ensuring the privacy and security of its end users. Although companies are not obliged to make the switch, the consequences for not doing so are unknown.

It is, however, highly likely that those sites ranking highly on the search engine, especially the first page, will make the switch to avoid risking their prominent position.

Google has offered information to all website owners about how to make the change. Additionally, the set of quick tips below will help you to start the process...

- Decide on the kind of certificate you need: single, multi-domain, or wildcard certificate
- Use 2048-bit key certificates
- Use relative URLs for resources that reside on the same secure domain
- Use protocol relative URLs for all other domains
- Don't block your HTTPS site from crawling using robots.txt
- Allow indexing of your pages by search engines where possible. Avoid the noindex robots meta tag

PRESENCE OF H1/H2

Over the last 12 months the number of landing pages that are crawled and are ranking on Google which contain H1 and H2 heading has risen sharply. This is no coincidence. The only pages that tend not to see an increase in the number of H1 headers is in position 1; this is largely due to the fact that these positions are dominated by brands and brand terms. Searchmetrics call this phenomenon 'brand factor' but suggests that the general trend of there being more H2 headlines for those websites occupying positions 2-10 (first page).

HTTPS

Google has long been moving towards a more secure web, where the transfer of data is more secure and the risks associated with browsing are reduced. Page encryption using HTTPS is growing quickly. In 2015 only 12% of all pages on Google relied on data transfer via HTTP.

As we stand now over 70% of all pages on Google are operating in this way, a figure that will continue to rise. The status of HTTPS as a ranking factor has been elevated further following the marking of all HTTP sites being marked as unsafe.

Over 50% of all webpages in the top 10 positions are using HTTPS encryption and businesses should take note of this when they are strategy planning.

TLD RANKINGS

Top-level domain (TLD) is the formal term for the suffix that appears at the end of a domain name. Some example of top-level domains include:

- .com
- .net
- .org
- .edu

There is strong evidence to suggest that those sites operating with a TLD rank higher and gain more from their status than those without. According to Moz when it comes to your domain name you need to make it memorable. They say: “Strive for domain names that are short, easy to remember, easy to type, and easy to say.

“This is valuable for word-of-mouth advertising because those visitors will need to visit your domain directly, but it also matters for processing fluency. An implicit cognitive bias, processing fluency is the concept that we remember and have more positive associations with things that we can easily say and easily think about, and that includes pronounceability in our own minds.

“Also stay away from domain names that include numbers or other non-standard characters, use unusual spelling, or are longer than about 15 characters or so.

“If the .com TLD for a domain name you’re looking to purchase isn’t available, lean towards .net. , .co, or a known ccTLD as alternatives.

“Additionally, it is not recommended that SEO-conscious webmasters purchase low-quality TLDs such as .biz, .info, .ws, .name, etc. as a means of increasing traffic. Because they’re less commonly known, these TLDs receive substantially less traffic than the more widely known domains and are more frequently associated with ‘spammy’ behaviour.”

URLS

This is one of the areas that causes the most discussion but the general consensus is that using short, accurate URLs is the best practice. Shorter URLs tend to rank higher on page 1. During his time with Google, Matt Cutts said that there may be some value to adding a keyword into the URL and that they are readable by humans.

The key considerations when it comes to URLs are:

- Remove extra words
- Shorter is better
- One URL for your home page
- Easily readable
- Utilise hyphens and underscores
- Match URLs and titles
- Limit folders
- Restrict redirection
- Avoid keyword stuffing
- Using tracking parameters
- Paginated URLs

With the above in mind it is important that we now consider auditing and how using the knowledge from above can assist you in looking for metrics that can affect performance.

WHAT IS AN SEO AUDIT?

An SEO audit is a series reviews, checks and processes which aim to assess the present performance of a websites capacity to rank for its chosen key terms and benchmark that performance against an ideal in order to provide feedback, suggestions for improvement and serve as the basis for any SEO roadmap which hopes to facilitate a greater ability to rank in future.

Often these reviews will uncover problems with the targeted keywords, issues with site architecture, performance, content and a host of other aspects of a website which, while not necessarily directly related to SEO can have a knock-on impact on ranking – meaning that SEO audits can lead to the generation of a workflow that necessitates action from multiple departments.

This can make the recommendations of SEO audits labour intensive to implement, meaning that interdepartmental buy-in is also an important part of the auditing process.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN AN SEO AUDIT?

SEO audits cover the full range of how a website functions and, while it may be necessary to summarise when reporting findings to various stakeholders, a good SEO audit should be thorough. As such, while we'll try to use as many free tools as possible, there are occasions where a paid subscription is a must-have for completeness. That is not to say you can't improve a site's SEO performance using only free tools, just that for the best possible results, some tools are recommended.

That being said, SEO audits generally include a mixture of the following:

- Keyword analysis
- Mobile performance
- Technical SEO
- Backlink auditing

KEYWORD ANALYSIS

One of the primary tasks of SEO as a practice is to achieve rankings and improve rankings for a specific set of keywords. However, this list should be reviewed during any thorough SEO audit.



KEYWORD TARGET REVIEW

Volumes change, intent changes, the way people search changes – and your keyword targets should change, too. For a first audit or new site, there may be no historical information, but you can use tools such as Google Trends to check for previous peaks in interest.

While search volume is not the be all and end all of keyword targets, if a previously huge volume has dropped to nothing, the question has to be asked as to whether the term is still worth optimising for. Similarly, new keywords emerge within all industries, and new ways of searching for old concepts.

For this reason, even established keyword lists should be regularly audited to ensure that the brand is targeting the best mix of key terms to deliver growth.

You can look to free tools such as Google Search Console for much of this task – you can examine the impressions a keyword delivers versus your position, for example, you can use Google Trends as mentioned, but tools such as Semrush, Ahrefs and Searchmetrics are particularly useful for conducting this kind of review – and many such tools will also offer suggestions based on your site for potential keywords to target.

KEYWORD GAP ANALYSIS

A keyword gap analysis is a method of assessing where a brand sits with reference to direct competitors in terms of search visibility for industry terms. The 'gap', in this instance, is the area of industry terminology and keywords of all intent levels where your brand does not appear but where competitors do, or where you should appear but don't.

Missing content – A keyword gap analysis allows you to look at your website content and identify which pieces of the puzzle are missing or need optimising to compete for their target keywords. If you were an eCommerce site, for example, you might have a number of products which are missing a description or with descriptions which are inadequate for ranking purposes. With this in mind, it is vital that you make a list of content that is incorrect or missing, and add this to a content calendar.

- **Uncovered topics** – Ask yourself, are you missing content that could give you a boost in organic search? This will have been revealed at least in part by a keyword target review – it's great if you have all of your core keywords covered in your content, but there are likely to be dozens of ways that consumers will search for products and services like yours and you can facilitate their discovery by targeting those keywords.
- **Competitor targets** – If you are looking to gain competitive advantage over your direct rivals, then ensuring you're competing for similar terms is a must. The benefit of this is that it's likely they will be completing similar projects to you – and this can uncover potential targets you may not have considered.

All three of these can be completed manually to an extent, but a lot of time and effort can be saved by using tools like Semrush's Keyword Gap tool – which allows you to select competitors and then filter by keywords your site performs weakly for, or which your competitors rank for and you do not.

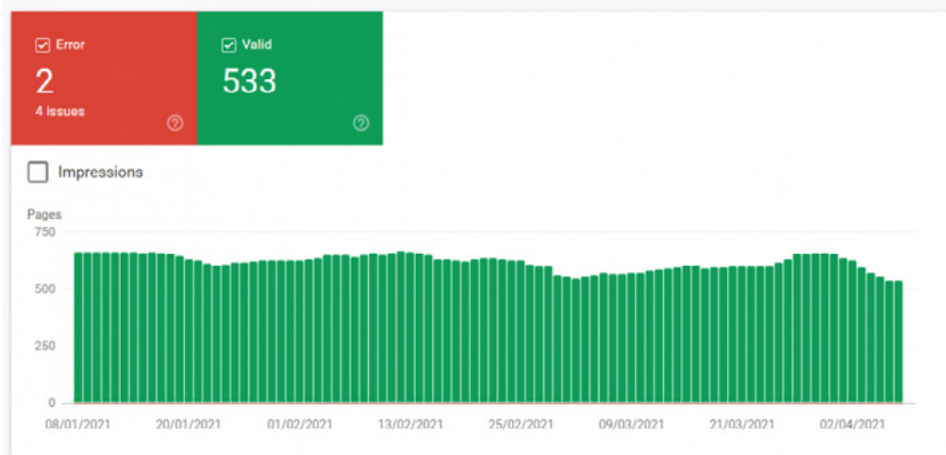
The screenshot displays the Semrush Keyword Gap tool interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'Organic keywords', 'Paid', and 'PLA', along with a dropdown to 'Select keyword type for each domain'. Below this is a search bar with 'Position' and 'Volume' dropdowns, and an 'Advanced filters' dropdown. The main content is divided into two panels. The left panel, titled 'Top Opportunities for You', has a filter for 'Missing' and 'Weak' keywords. It lists several keywords with their search volumes: nespresso (301,000), indian takeaway (60,500), deep fat fryer (49,500), cutlery set (33,100), and dulce de leche (33,100). A 'View details' button is at the bottom. The right panel, titled 'Keyword Overlap', shows a Venn diagram with five overlapping circles representing different domains. A legend to the right lists the domains and their total keyword counts: tesco.com (770.2K), sainsburys.co.uk (698.3K), asda.com (851.7K), morrisons.com (306.9K), and waitrose.com (305.1K). At the bottom, there is a dropdown for 'All keyword details for:' set to 'tesco.com' and a 'You' button.

MOBILE PERFORMANCE

Mobile performance is the performance on which your site is judged. Since Google began to roll out mobile friendliness updates, culminating in mobile first indexing, the way your site performs on mobile has been treated as the primary indication of your site's performance overall. As such, though you want your site to perform well across desktop and mobile devices, you need to devote the majority of your resources to ensuring that your site's mobile performance is the absolute best it can be.

SEARCH CONSOLE MOBILE USABILITY

One of the best tools available for auditing mobile performance is located in Google Search Console. The mobile usability report features two charts on the main dashboard, the first of which is errors versus valid pages:



Obviously, in this case, you're looking to minimise the number of errors your site is encountering – and the errors themselves are elaborated upon in the table below:

Status	Type	Validation ↓	Trend	Pages
Error	Clickable elements too close together	Not Started	—	2
Error	Text too small to read	Not Started	—	1
Error	Content wider than screen	Not Started	—	1
Error	Viewport not set	Not Started	—	1
Valid	Mobile-friendly pages	N/A	—	533

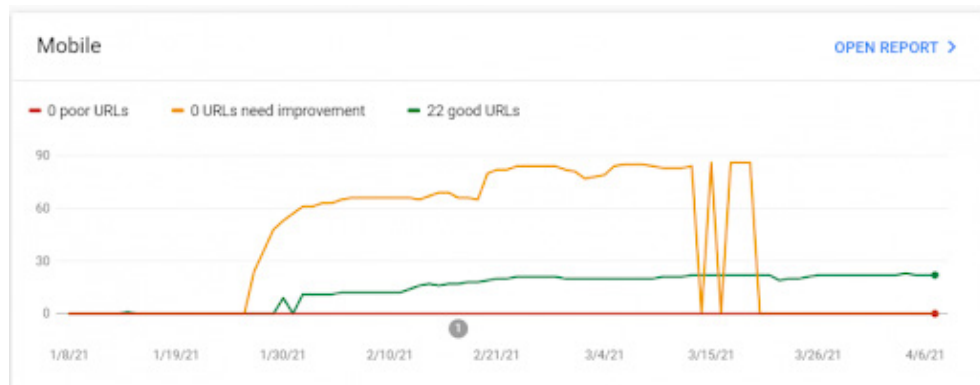
These errors break down as follows:

- **Clickable elements too close together:** – as you might imagine, this refers to icons, menus and the like which are positioned in such proximity that it makes clicking on the right option difficult or impossible.
- **Viewport not set:** – while I'd hope you won't see this error, this refers to the `<meta name="viewport">` element which should be set generally as `<meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0">`.
- **Content wider than screen:** – generally experienced when you have failed to define a width or break points for your site or images, this is where you'll see pages on your site which require sideways scrolling to see the whole page.
- **Text too small to read:** – again, this is fairly self-evident but refers to the size of your text when viewed on smaller screens – again, you can resolve this by selecting specific increases in font sizes along with your break points, attributing font sizes relatively (using em or rem), or by specifying font sizes along with your site's @media queries.



SPEED AND PERFORMANCE

Mobile speed and performance can again be checked using Google Search Console – this time with the Core Web Vitals enhancement. The top report will give you an overview of how your site is doing on mobile devices.



Alternatively, for a little more information, you can use the [‘Lighthouse Report’](#) in Chrome’s ‘Developer Tools’. Using the traffic light method and a score out of 100, this will give you an overview of a few key performance elements:

Diagnostics — More information about the performance of your application. These numbers don’t [directly affect](#) the performance score.

- ▲ Reduce the impact of third-party code — Third-party code blocked the main thread for 490 ms
- ▲ Does not use passive listeners to improve scrolling performance
- ▲ Image elements do not have explicit width and height
- ▲ Minimise main-thread work — 6.6 s
- ▲ Serve static assets with an efficient cache policy — 27 resources found
- Reduce JavaScript execution time — 3.4 s
- Avoid an excessive DOM size — 981 elements

It will also give advice as to potential improvements that can be made to the site in order to improve performance – something which any SEO audit should be including as speed and [Core Web Vitals](#) take on a more powerful role in rankings over the coming years:

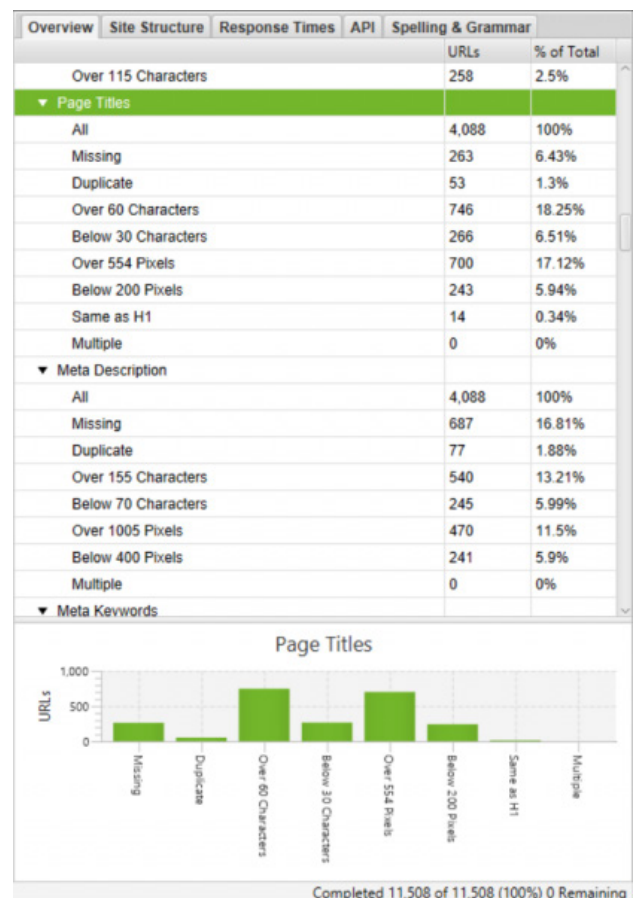
TECHNICAL SEO

Technical SEO is where most SEO audits tend to focus, and should be a main concern due to issues in this area having a huge potential to impact rankings. While we wouldn't say all facets of SEO audits are equal, this section can be over-weighted when conducting audits at the expense of other areas. Equally, any audit that doesn't feature a section on technical SEO is probably going to be giving only half the picture.

PAGE TITLES & META DESCRIPTIONS

A hugely common issue with most sites – especially those that haven't been looked after by a dedicated SEO – is that page titles and meta-descriptions tend to lose focus, get duplicated, or end up being repeated for multiple pages. As such, it's important that an SEO audit is able to offer a list of page titles and meta descriptions which are either missing, need work or are duplicated.

Some CRMs will allow you to sort pages by meta description or page title, but for the easiest way to organise and export this information (including a record of duplication of one or both) is to use a tool such as Deep Crawl or Screaming Frog – both of which have the option to inspect all URLs to see whether such things are present.



REDIRECTS

Like snow, redirects are fine in small amounts but enough of them can cause serious problems with traffic.

Whether they're the result of updating content, or a site migration or move to https, redirects can mount up over time becoming what are referred to as redirect chains. These are oversights – while we may remember to redirect URLs, we often fail to update the internal links to that page and so an internal link becomes a link to content which redirects to the updated version – and that can add up over time causing delays in page loads and internal navigation.

The below, for example, is a report that can be exported from Screaming Frog which details any redirects which include more than one step from page of origin to page of destination.





A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
n Type	Number of Redirects	Loop	Source	Temp Redirect In Chain	Address	Final Adity	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index	Final Index
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				Social meta / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				social meta / /body / /Footer	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				paid prom / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				social ads / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				paid social / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				social ads / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				social ads / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		
P Redirect	2	FALSE	https://www	FALSE	https://www/https://www	Indexable	text/html	200	OK				SEO / /body / /Content	text/html	301	Moved Per H		

While the ideal is that all redirects will go straight to the destination page, things start to become a problem from 3 or more redirects are in between pages. This tends to be more of an issue for older sites, but it should be a part of an SEO audit for any sites which have had work done on site structure.

404 PAGES

Your 404 page is not one you hope your user will spend a lot of time on, but as with redirects, they can accrue over time. There is nothing wrong with 404d pages per se, but they can become an issue at higher volumes.









If a product has been discontinued, for example, and there is no close equivalent to redirect to, then returning a 404 status is fine, similarly for articles which are no longer relevant for your audience and which cannot be updated. However, a 404 audit – which can be performed using Google Search Console or a web crawler – should be carried out during any SEO audit to ensure that the volume of pages returning 404 is never too high and that no useful, or potentially useful pages are returning the status.

Excluded	Crawled - currently not indexed	N/A	
Excluded	Page with redirect	N/A	
Excluded	Not found (404)	N/A	
Excluded	Duplicate, submitted URL not selected as canonical	N/A	

CANONICALISATION

There's a great discussion of why canonicalisation should be audited (and how to do it) on the Screaming Frog site, but to summarise: most of your content should have a self-referential canonical URL – these indicate that the approved page and the page you would like to be indexed and treated as the original location of the content located there. Canonicals, therefore, should be audited for chains (as with redirects), for unindexable canonical URLs and missing URLs.

Again, this can be explored using either Google Search Console or a crawler:

Excluded	Alternative page with proper canonical tag	N/A	
Excluded	Crawled - currently not indexed	N/A	
Excluded	Page with redirect	N/A	
Excluded	Not found (404)	N/A	
Excluded	Duplicate, submitted URL not selected as canonical	N/A	
Excluded	Blocked by robots.txt	N/A	
Excluded	Duplicate, Google chose different canonical than user	N/A	
Excluded	Duplicate without user-selected canonical	N/A	

SITE STRUCTURE & NAVIGATION

Site structure and navigation are vital not only to how users move through your site, but also how bots will do the same. Fortunately, what works well from a user perspective will also help the bot do its job. The aim of a site structure and navigation audit is to ascertain how easy it is for both user and bot to traverse the site – which means that you'll need to make sure no pages require too many clicks to get to, that the structure isn't too complicated, breadcrumbs are in place, that the various means of traversing the site are intuitive for users of all needs and there are no orphan pages (pages with no internal links which are unreachable from your site).

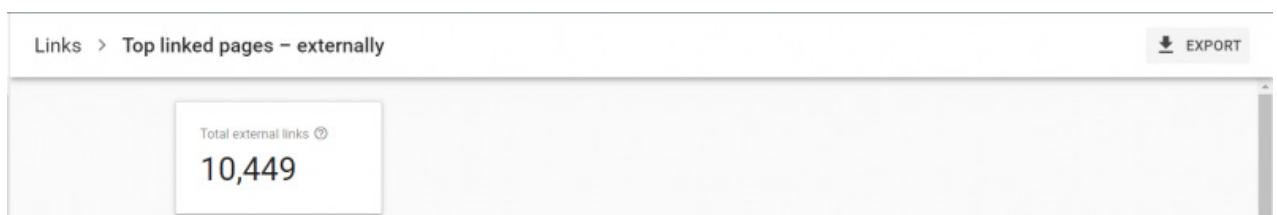
BACKLINK AUDITING

Best performed using multiple tools (but to a lesser extent achievable using Google Search Console), a backlink audit can reveal a host of important information that can improve the performance of your site.

While there is a never-ending argument about how important links should be to rankings, they remain and are likely to remain one of the most important ranking factors. However, because the way Google has historically determined the usefulness of links and their ability to understand their context has changed, combined with the unfortunate fact that some bad links will naturally accrue over time, a backlink audit should be a part of your regular SEO audit.

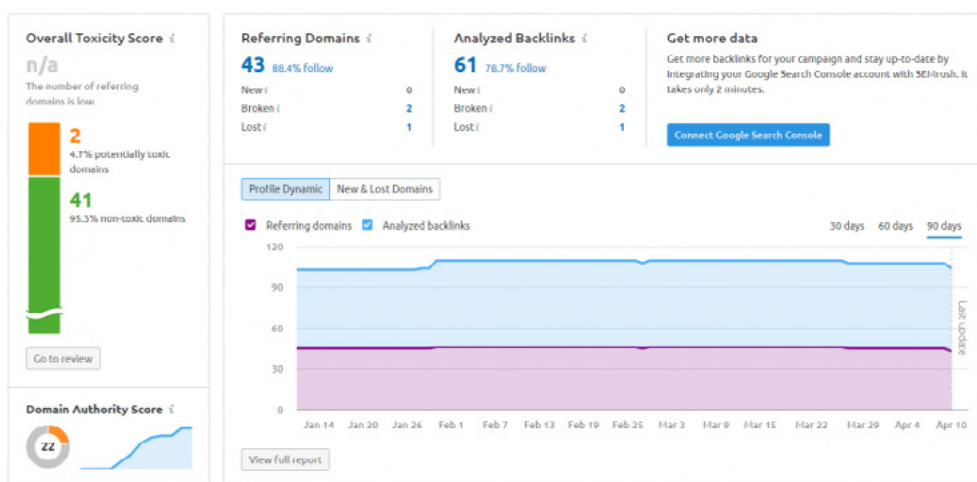
TOXICITY

This is tough to achieve at scale using free tools, but it can be done at least at a base level by exporting all external links and trawling through them for any sites which are obviously unwanted (for most, this would include certain gambling, adult and other sites which have historically been viewed dimly by Google).



Obviously, the more links you have, the more time this will take, but without a tool to perform an initial, automated review, this is a labour-intensive process.

As an example, Semrush has a backlink audit tool which gives a fantastic starting place for any investigation. There is also the option to automatically submit a disavow file if you connect the tool to your Google Search Console account.



Obviously, you want your toxicity score to be as low as possible, but don't be too alarmed by a score in the amber range – not only can you improve it, but natural link accrual will often leave a long running site with an amber score. The important thing is that an audit reveal the potential toxicity and enable the audited site to avoid further issues.

LOST DOMAINS

In addition to toxic links – reports such as the above generated by Semrush, and others by tools such as Ahrefs and Searchmetrics, will provide a list of domains which no longer link to your pages. While some will be lost to sites taken offline and natural webpage churn (as with the reasons given in the 404 section), this list can prove useful as it can provide some instances where the domain may not be aware that the link has broken or where you can offer a potential replacement page for them to link to. It may not provide huge lists, but these can help to maintain a healthy link profile and also help to initiate relationships with interested publishers.

SUBMITTING A DISAVOW LIST

While not a part of the auditing process, we thought we'd include a link here to an eBook that could potentially help to take action if the need arises from a backlink audit. Our ['Link Auditing, Removal and Recovery'](#) eBook features sections on submitting a disavow file as well as other detailed link review techniques.

HOW TO PREPARE AN SEO AUDIT REPORT

While completing an SEO audit can be labour-intensive when done thoroughly, all of that work is essentially pointless if it can't be conveyed to stakeholders in a clear and concise way. For that reason, your report should be treated with as much care as the audit itself. You don't want it to be too long to deter reading, or too short that you can't explain the findings clearly.

OBJECTIVES

As with all reports, you need to consider your objectives before you begin compiling the report. If your aim is to increase budget for technical optimisation, then a content report will only pad the document – similarly a report seeking investment in the link profile will only require the link audit (and possibly content if you feel it will help the case).

Consider the following:

- Who is going to read the report?
- What do I want them to take away from the report?
- What were my hypothesis and does the data confirm them?

TAILORING REPORTS

Once you have the data and have outlined the objectives, you can tailor the report and its content to the audience you'll be presenting it to. Stakeholders from across the business will have different levels of knowledge of what the findings mean and how important they are – and you should tailor the content to ensure that it works on the level of their understanding. Meet them where they are.

LANGUAGE

Is the language clear and free of jargon that your audience may not understand? This is the main question you'll need to ask yourself. As with tailoring, you need to write at the level of your audience. Experts in a field can quickly lapse into jargon or skill specific language – they are forms of shorthand, but only work between individuals with the same vocabulary. As such, you should ensure that you take a look at the finished report to ensure that you've written for the intended audience.

BEST TOOLS TO HELP WITH SEO AUDITS

This is by no means an exhaustive list – and there will be alternatives in virtually every case, but these are some of our favourite tools to help with the completion of SEO audits. While, for the most part, they will require a subscription, there are often free trials of parred back versions which can be useful for brands looking to assess their usefulness before committing to a monthly or annual subscription. For that reason, we've included a link to the paid tools for you to check them out for yourself.



Google Search Console

Google Search Console is a free service provided by Google and designed to help brands monitor and maintain and improve their site's presence and performance in search results. The tool, which was launched in May 2015, replaced Google Webmaster Tools and is regularly updated to improve usefulness and add functionality. The tool offers error reports, keyword reports, mobile site reports and more – making it an ideal tool for any brand and perfect to newcomers.

Google Analytics

As with Google Search Console, Google Analytics is a free tool provided by Google. The tool allows you to investigate your site and user interaction with the site. For SEO audit purposes, the site will provide information on the length of sessions, the number of users, referral information and more which will allow you to monitor where your traffic is coming from and how they are using your site.



Semrush is a software as a service (SaaS), which operates on a subscription model and provides online visibility and marketing analytics data. Originally an SEO tool and browser extension before adopting the SaaS model, the software offers a host of tools beneficial to SEO audits, including: estimated website traffic, Google Ads keyword CPC amounts, site auditing, topic research, and more.



As with Semrush, Ahrefs is an SaaS for SEO and marketing which provides multiple tools to help analyse your site's backlink profile (and those of competitors), as well as to find the most shared content for any topic (based on social media shares), get relevant keyword ideas and traffic estimations, track ranking positions and more – they also have an active blog which covers a lot of useful topics.



Screaming Frog is a regularly updated and improved site crawler which allows you to study how a bot such as those operated by Google experience your site and offers reports on a host of technical issues that are integral to SEO. Not only does it provide crawl data, however, recent updates have seen the site add spelling and grammar, schema markup, page speed and much more to the tool which is, frankly, invaluable for good SEO.

FAQ

ARE SEO AUDITS NECESSARY?

For a newly launched site, it should be hoped that an SEO was involved in the build process and able to implement as much best practice as possible. However, this is seldom the case and, as such, it is recommended that all sites should have some kind of SEO audit completed regularly to give the site the best chance of ranking for key terms and keyword targets.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I RUN AN SEO AUDIT?

The key is regularity rather than volume. An SEO audit works best as part of an ongoing process of measurement and improvement. As such, some sites may run an SEO audit once a month, others may do so once a year (any less than once a year is likely to see errors creeping in just naturally through human and system errors), but the important thing is that the audit is completed regularly to observe changes, monitor improvements and catch errors before they become an issue.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY RANKING DROPS FOLLOWING THE LATEST UPDATE OR IF THE AUDIT REVEALS GAPS?

Yes, sites can see fluctuations, for better or worse, in the search results. Google has emphasised that there aren't specific actions to take to recover and, in fact, a negative rankings impact doesn't necessarily indicate that anything is wrong with your pages.

Danny Sullivan explained how businesses should react to Core Updates:

“There’s no “fix” for pages that may perform less well other than to remain focused on building great content. Over time, it may be that your content may rise relative to other pages.”

Reassess the quality of your content

Don't fixate on updates. The best advice is to focus on ensuring you're offering the best content you can: that's what Google's algorithms seek to reward – and what Google is attempting to 'teach' them to recognise.

Google also offers its own checklist of questions to ask yourself when assessing your content. Here are our top tips:

Focus on Page Quality

For this, Google focuses on Expertise, Authority and Trust

Links remain important

Think about how and what your internal and external links – and on and off-site content – are communicating about your brand.

Expertise is vital

Demonstrate that your contributors are credible sources: if they've got relevant experience and qualifications, make sure they're mentioned on your site in author profiles; encourage your writers to contribute to leading blogs within your industry and niche to help establish them as an expert.

Structured data is a must

While we should be writing primarily for humans, we also need our content to be readable by Google's machine learning algorithms through the use of structured data and the appropriate schema markup.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We appreciate that this is a lot of information to take in and process, and know that it can be difficult to assess the exact impact that the Google algorithm has on a given website, and the need for an SEO audit. For that reason we have decided to offer a bespoke SEO service to our clients where we are fluid enough to offer a variety of tools, services and data analysis options to ensure that your site reaches optimum performance.

If there is anything that you feel we haven't covered, anything that you feel your site could benefit from or just want to discuss the options available, then why not get in touch and let us assist you today.

GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY

ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning search & digital 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, social media and analytics. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named both SEO Agency of the Year and Organic Search (SEO) Team of the Year 2020; ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, and a Microsoft Advertising Select Agency Partner.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

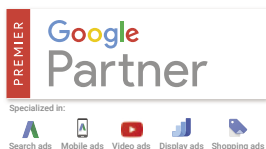
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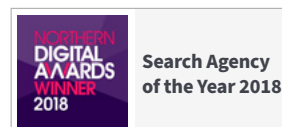
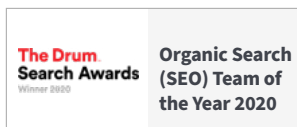
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OUR ACCREDITATIONS



OUR AWARDS



OUR TECHNOLOGIES

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