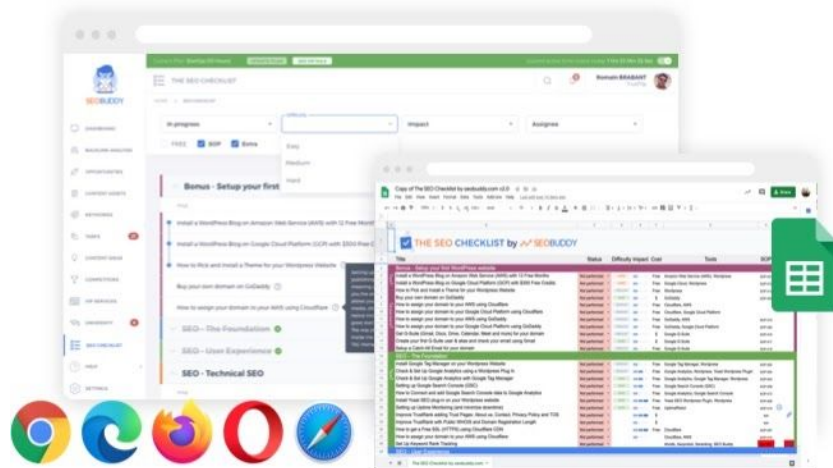


The SEO Checklist by SEO Buddy

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Search Engine Optimization - a big word that poses a black box for many. While we all have the same goal, rank on number 1 in the Google results, people have different understandings on how to reach it, what factors influence the efforts and how to manage SEO activities in the long run.

In order to establish common ground, we put together a list of do's and don'ts, covering the whole range of SEO activities and circumstantial adjustments. No matter if you are an experienced SEO vet or just at the very beginning of your SEO journey - make sure you are aware of many - often overlooked - factors that can seriously affect your ranking.

This e-book aims to provide you with a comprehensive collection of tips, tricks and best practices that help you to optimize and streamline your SEO efforts. The guide covers a wide range of important SEO aspects from A to Z that we recommend you to consider - for an efficient and targeted SEO strategy. We put together 91 SEO tips in eight chapters: The Foundation, User Experience, Performance, Technical SEO, Content, On-Page SEO, Off-Page SEO, and Local SEO.

So what are you waiting for? Let's dive right in!

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The Foundation

Before diving right into SEO, your first priority should be to create a functional environment which poses the foundation of all your subsequent SEO efforts. Your general setup is the base for all further activities and having the right tools in place is critical for your SEO success. So make sure you are prepared in the best possible way! Here are some suggestions:

Set up a Google Analytics Account

Setting up Google Analytics is the first thing we recommend you do after publishing your website. At the core, it allows you to track your website traffic, meaning you know who actually visits your website! The tool does not only show you the amount of people and their activities on your website - among others it also allows you to see your geographic reach, the source (such as organic traffic, social media, direct search, etc.) as well as the amount of time they spend on your page. It hence includes many great insights to see how your website is performing and is a great start to optimize your online presence.

The way you set up Google Analytics in WordPress is by dropping the GA code inside the head of the site. Usually you do this via a WordPress plugin or Google TAG Manager.

Set Up Google Search Console

After you publish your website and set up Google Analytics, it's now time to think about how people can actually find your website. While your website is accessible after publication it is important to know that it is NOT automatically showing up in Google's search yet! In order to tell Google about your website (so that Google can index it) you will need to submit your so-called *sitemap* to the search engine. This is what you will need the Google Search Console for initially. However, it is way more than just that: It serves as a reporting tool, covering several SEO metrics and enabling you to maximize visibility of your website and improve search rankings. It also covers parameters such as website speed or mobile performance.

Integrate a SEO solution into your webpage

Some website providers such as Wordpress or Wix already include a SEO Suite, covering several SEO functionalities. On top you can complement the existing content management system with SEO plugins. These plugins have the goal to give you full control about your page while they allow for a rather easy-to-use interface. The two most popular plugins for Wordpress for example are Yoast SEO and RankMath. We will go into more details about different SEO solutions.

Include “Trust Pages” in your website

This is an easy but often neglected tip. Make sure you have what I like to call “trust pages” on your website. This includes pages such as “About”, “Contact”, “Privacy Policy” and “Terms of Service (TOS)” pages.

Why are these pages so important? When it comes to determining the “ranking worthiness” of a webpage, Google (among many other parameters!) measures a site from a trust perspective. If these are missing the website quickly is declared as “shady” or not “trustworthy” by Google. Hence, every legit business should have these pages - and so should you!

Set up a keyword rank tracking for your website

You can’t manage what you can’t measure! It is impossible to improve something if you don’t know what you are dealing with in the first place.

Hence, continuous monitoring is essential for long-term SEO success. “Quick fixes” here and there are not enough to strengthen (and keep!) a good ranking in Google. You will need to follow a strategy, e.g. by giving each site a specific set of keywords that you keep track of over time.

There are several tools out there that can help to keep track of your keyword rankings:

- SERProbot
- What's my SERP
- SERPwatcher
- Ahrefs
- SeRanking
- AdvancedWebRanking
- And obviously SEO Buddy

User Experience

After setting up your general environment, it's time to go a step further! When it comes to SEO, always keep in mind that Google and other search engines have the goal to provide their users with the best possible answers to their search query. This basically means - if your users like your website, Google likes it too! Hence, it always should be your goal to maximize user experience in every possible way. We show you how!

Configure Permalinks / SEO Friendly URLs

Wait, what exactly are pretty permalinks? Just as the name implies, any URL (Uniform resource locator) should indicate what the respective page is all about, ideally in a descriptive and easy to understand way! But it's always better to show than tell so here's a little experiment:

Without knowing the definition, can you identify which URL is the prettier one?

- A) <https://seobuddy.com/?aspx=456032304>
- B) <https://seobuddy.com/welcome-to-the-club/>

Easy, right?

You might now say, well this is nice to look at but, in the end of the day, isn't it mostly important that my user is directed to the right page rather than what the link looks like? Well, purely looking at it from a functional perspective you are correct. However, from a UX perspective, pretty permalinks show what a page is all about at a glance - even before checking out the page. In the end of the day it is a nice and easy way to increase your UI. On top, SEO-wise, URLs are a very important ranking factor. Hence, optimizing your URLs is also crucial for your SEO efforts.

With WordPress for example, this is very easy to implement. Simply Go to *Settings->Permalinks->Post Name->Save*. Done!

Make sure your website is optimized for mobile usage

Once you have a Google Analytics account you can see how many people access your website from a desktop versus from a mobile device. And in most cases, the mobile access rate is significantly higher than the one from a real computer! On average over 60% of visitors use a mobile device to see your website. Therefore you want to make sure there are no overlaps and everything is readable in a first step. (Don't be fooled, just because your site looks good on a desktop does NOT automatically mean it looks good on a mobile device). On top, nowadays a website that is loading slowly is an absolute no-go and makes people flee from it faster than you can look. Hence, you want to make sure that your website's performance is high - and also mobile friendly.

Some website providers specifically allow you to optimize the interface in a separate design menu. The easiest way to see how your website on a phone is to actually just access it yourself! On top there are tools out there that let you test your website, such as the Google Mobile Friendly Test: <https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>

Tip: You can use the Chrome console (F12) and toggle the device toolbar to understand how the site appears on different mobile devices.

Make sure your website loads fast!

Speed is a SEO ranking factor! Let's say there are two identical pages on two distinct websites. As Google always tries to provide the best possible result for the searcher it will favor the one that loads faster over the one with the lower performance.

But how fast is fast? Here are a few fun facts for you, giving you an idea about how important speed is (Source: Trinity):

- **Only 15% of Websites** Operate at an Acceptable Page Speed
- **37% of Visitors Bounce** When Your Site Takes Five Seconds to Load
- A **One-Second Delay Results in a 7% Drop** in Conversions
- **Three of the Top Four** SEO UX Signals are Page Speed Dependent

Impressive right? You see that speed is a VERY important factor that you should not overlook. So what's the ideal speed you might ask now. To be honest, it depends. However, as a rule of thumb, all your pages should load **under 3 seconds**.

Tools to measure the speed of your website:

- <https://gtmetrix.com>
- <https://www.webpagetest.org>
- <https://tools.pingdom.com>

Keep your URLs short

Apart from being description and self-explanatory (see above), a URL should always be short and concise.

According to Matt Cutts, Administrator at U.S. Digital Service, you summarize the core of your content with three to five words (try not to use more than 60 characters):

“If you can make your title four- or five-words long – and it is pretty natural. If you have got three, four or five words in your URL, that can be perfectly normal. As it gets a little longer, then it starts to look a little worse. Now, our algorithms typically will just weigh those words less and just not give you as much credit.”

Matt Cutts - [interview with Stephan Spencer](#)

Another [great read on this topic was published by Neil Patel](#) - highly recommended!

Optimize your 404 page

Have you ever seen your own 404 Page? No? Well, let's do it! Head over to your site and add a “/404” to your URL. This will trigger the 404 page.

So now think about your users - they are not triggering the page on purpose but end up on it when they can't find what they are looking for. In return this means they will most likely bounce off your site, increasing your overall bounce rate. And a high bounce rate is bad for your SEO!

You might now ask, how you can stop people from ever experiencing a 404 error? Well you can't. But what you can do is make the 404 page an experience for your user!

An example: If you work with WordPress, you can simply install the following plugin <https://wordpress.org/plugins/404page/> - it allows you to basically make ANY page your 404 page. In return this implies you can create a new page - make sure it looks great and set that as your 404 page. Now you have a 404 page that has some value for your user which will reduce your bounce rate.

Why not take a shortcut and simply refer to an already existing page, such as your start page?

I wouldn't recommend it for one reason: A 404 error means that something is missing! Users that can't find what they are looking for they most likely turn into lost leads. However, if you provide them with interesting information where they would least expect it, this is your chance to convert them into prospects.

Create “shareable” content

We all know that a personal referral or recommendation is one of the most powerful lead generators. If someone you trust gives away their name for a product or service it is highly likely that you believe them and give it a shot! The former “word-of-mouth” can nowadays also be found on social media: If your real users share YOUR content on THEIR personal accounts, this is one of the best marketing effects you can have!

But how do you get people to share your content?

Make it interesting, fun and easy to share!

What exactly does that mean? A couple tips to keep in mind:

1. Have a “social media sharing solution” on your website by simply integrating Social Media buttons on your page (Classics include LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter & Instagram). It is very likely that your website providers provide an easy way to do so in the template you are using. You can even improve this experience by adding a custom sharing solution, for example by respectively adding plug-ins. For WordPress, one great plug-in is [Social_Snap](#): It has great features and is on top performance-friendly. However, there are many many other solutions out there: For an overview check out this list by [WpRocket](#) which ranks the plug-ins according to their performance.
2. Make it easy for social networks to grab your data from a technical standpoint. Are your tags set up properly? Tools such as Yoast or Rank Math do this automatically and you can on top manually customize or change the tags on a page-by-page basis.

Make sure your brand is present on multiple social networks

Let's try something: Search your own brand by typing it into Google. Hit the search button - what do you see? Probably you'll find yourself in one of three possible scenarios:

- A compilation of links to your website or social networks
- Only a few links to your website and social networks, mixed with unrelated websites
- No links to your own brand and only links to other people's brands

The idea behind it is very simple: Your goal should be to have ALL results on the first page directed to your brand or content. Why is this important? If you look at it from a user perspective - the more information you can find about someone, the more trustworthy they appear in your eyes. And trust is the primary precondition for someone wanting to work with you!

A rather easy way to do this is by claiming your brand's online properties. These include:

- Your website homepage
- Other pages on your website
- Facebook Page
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn

Or other important niche-specific directory listings.

Record User Sessions & Heatmaps to understand your UX

So-called “Heatmaps” are a great way to understand your user’s behaviour on your website. Heatmaps show you..

- how far users scroll
- where users click
- what users interact with on the page
- how the website looks like from a user perspective

By understanding what content users interact with and how they navigate through your pages can give you important feedback on how to improve your online presence and user experience!

Some great heatmap tools are:

- <https://www.hotjar.com>
- <https://www.plerdy.com>
- <https://www.crazyegg.com>

Performance

This part of the guide focuses more on the technical aspects of SEO with the goal to have a high-performance website that loads quickly and has no delays. Why is this important? It is important as performance is not only a ranking factor, it is also an essential factor when it comes to user experience: If a site takes too long to load people will simply close it and go to the next site. Subsequently you will find a couple tips on how to make sure your page is working well from a technical perspective!

Choose your Web Host wisely

One of the first decisions you will have to make is to choose the web host you want your site to run on. Choosing the right platform is essential for your SEO success as it impacts a series of SEO dimensions, including pagespeed, bounce rate and the overall UX experience.

In the past few years, the clear trend was to go with the big players in the market including Bluehost or GoDaddy. However, these big companies have a rather hard time to provide solutions for all different needs and niches out there.

Hence, it is not surprising that now so called boutique web hosts have conquered the market. Boutique web hosts are focused on providing a web host solution tailored to the needs and requirements of a specific niche, offering you both the server and the platform to set up your website.

Using one of these providers (depending on your industry) is a great choice that you should look into these days: They are novel, offer state-of-the-art technology and usually come with great customer support.

Some recommendations:

- Cloudways: A managed cloud hosting platform
- SiteGround: A classic shared web hosting provider which offers WordPress
- Kinsta - A Managed WordPress hosting solution for enterprise

Try to have your server located close to your service area

Here's a quick hack on how to make the website of your local business faster.

If you for example operate a local business in the San Francisco area, it would make sense to sign up with [Cloudways](#), pick a DigitalOcean or Vultr server, choose San Francisco as server location and there you have it! Now, when somebody visits your website, it will load super fast because there is no lengthy back and forth DNS change required beforehand!

While this approach works great for local businesses, it obviously gets a lot more complicated once your service offer reaches nationwide or even global audiences. In this case: Let me introduce CDNs.

Use a CDN

CDN is a shortcut and stands for **C**ontent **D**elivery **N**etwork. According to Yoast, a CDN is "a network of servers in different geographic locations working together to get content to load faster by serving it from a location near the visitor."

Hence, this is your solution if you provide your service nationwide or even globally.

However, a CDN offers more than just hosting your static files on servers.

Here's a quick overview of what CDN can do for you:

- deliver static content to users in a fast and efficient way
- save you bandwidth
- support you with scale resources in case you go viral!

- add a new level of security

Here are some recommended CDNs

- [BunnyCDN](#)
- [CloudFlare](#)
- [KeyCDN](#)
- [StackPath](#)

Compress your content with Gzip

Gzip is a method of compressing aka shrinking your files which enables faster network transfers. Due to the smaller size your content loads faster when someone accesses your site. Even though gzip compression is a standard practice these days, there are still some hosts which do not offer this feature by default. So make sure to check if it's enabled.

You can easily test for Gzip compression by checking out one of the following two apps:

- <https://www.giftofspeed.com/gzip-test/>
- <https://varvy.com/tools/gzip/>

In case the result is that you don't have Gzip compression enabled, simply reach out to your web host to activate it. If that's not possible it might be time to switch to a new web host.

Check for HTTP/2

What is HTTP? HTTP is the network protocol which is the negotiation base for the exchange of all network information exchange between the user and your site/server. It's basically the channel that enables users to load websites.

There are two different versions of HTTP: The later version, HTTP/2 is basically a revision of HTTP/1 with major performance improvements. Your goal should be to have

your server run on HTTP/2: The update is a fundamental makeover with a difference of 18 years in between the releases. The most advanced feature of HTTP/2 is that it can send several data requests over a single TCP connection at the same time. This allows you to download web files from a server via ASync mode.

Here are two tools that let you test if your website supports HTTP/2:

- <https://http2.pro/>
- <https://tools.keycdn.com/http2-test>

If the result is that your website doesn't support HTTP/2, reach out to your web hosting provider. If your provider can't enable this feature for you, it's time to switch hosts.

The latest update, HTTP/3, is scheduled to be launched later this year so keep an eye out!

Embed a caching solution

Caching is the process in which **the server stores the website data as static in memory**, in order to be served faster. Hence, since it increases the page loading speed, it also increases user experience.

There are different types of caching out there:

- server-side cache
- database cache
- object cache
- page cache
- CDN cache

Each type stores the data on different levels.

Having a caching solution in place should be standard for every website. Luckily, there are many solutions available that enable caching, especially for WordPress.

Many web hosting providers already come up with their own caching solutions built around their existing infrastructure. Examples are SG Optimizer by Siteground or

Breeze by Cloudways. These solutions are free to use especially when you are hosting your websites with the respective providers.

Among the premium plugins available, we recommend the following ones:

- [WpRocket](#)
- [Swift Performance](#)

Some of these plugins do more than just caching and also include website optimization powerhouses, including functions such as image optimization, CSS & JS files optimization, database optimization and more.

Minify JS/CSS files

By minifying Javascript and CSS files you will make your website smaller in size, hence, again, reducing the loading time.

A good way to do this is with one of the caching plugins mentioned above.

In this context it is also worth mentioning the [Autooptimize WordPress plugin](#). Even though the plugin doesn't help with caching per se, it does deal with image and files optimization.

Resize large images before uploading them

The one factor with the most impact on the respective website size are media-rich items such as images or videos.

Often, websites contain very large images - often in “straight-from-the-camera” sizes. Frequently people don't even consider this a problem but think about it: When you have several 7 MB pictures on a website and a user accesses it from a 3G carrier - it becomes clear that the size is critical!

The easiest way to make sure all pictures are of adequate size is to have them resized

automatically, for example by using plug-ins. For Wordpress, there are several plugins that have a solution for the situation:

- [Shortpixel Image Optimizer](#)
- [Resize Image After Upload](#) by Shortpixel
- [Imsanity](#)
- [Swift Performance Pro](#)

Compress and optimize images

This point sounds similar to the previous one but we can't stress the importance of this enough: Images have a huge impact on the size of your site (and performance!). Converting your pictures into the right format is probably around 80% of your website optimization.

Again, plug-ins are your friend! For WordPress, there are many different plugins for image optimization available, some are part of general optimization plugins, others serve as stand-alone solutions. Here are some examples:

- [Shortpixel Image Optimizer](#)
- [Imagify](#), part of the Wp Rocket family
- [SmushIt](#)
- [Flying Images](#)
- [Imsanity](#)

However, while striving for small pictures, always make sure you keep the image quality in mind. Smaller pictures means lower quality. So what is the golden middle? Try to get the best of both worlds by going with the “glossy” approach: not too aggressive (lossy - best performance, at the cost of image quality) and not too soft (lossless - best image quality, low performance).

Lazy Load Images and Iframes (YouTube embeds, etc.)

“Lazy loading images” (and iframes) means “loading images on websites asynchronously — that is, after the above-the-fold content is fully loaded, or even conditionally, only when they appear in the browser's viewport. This means that if users don't scroll all the way down, images placed at the bottom of the page won't even be loaded.” - Sitepoint

This is a great technique to speed up a website tremendously.

And once again - there are plugins for this.

There are various options out there - ranging from stand-alone solutions to plugins that are part for general performance enhancement efforts:

- [Autoptimize](#) (images & iframes)
- [SmushIt](#) (images only)
- [Flying Images](#) (images only)
- [WpRocket](#) (images & iframes)
- [Swift Performance Pro](#) (images & iframes)

Keep your technology up-to-date!

This is a golden rule when it comes to IT: Make sure your technology is compliant with all the latest features, updates and plugins AT ALL TIMES. This is essential for both security and performance reasons: These days there are constantly new updates released to keep up with latest developments and security gaps. If your IT systems are not compatible with these new features you quickly fall behind.

And **a hacked website is the last thing we want** - it means you lose control over your OWN website and your rank that you worked so hard for will take an immediate dip.

If you work with WordPress, make sure to regularly update **WordPress core, plugins and themes**.

Also, when it comes to web hosts, don't forget that the respective server your site runs on must be modern and in accordance with the latest technology standard as well! Hence it should be running the latest versions of PHP, MySQL, Apache or Nginx, etc. Usually this is a given if you use a cloud web hosting platform like e.g. [CloudWays](#) or a more sophisticated one such as [Kinsta](#).

Optimize your database regularly

This point is specifically targeted at WordPress users.

In WordPress, there is a central database that stores all your content and data, such as posts, pages and comments. However, over time, this database also piles up unnecessary "junk information" which slows it down. To ensure your database is operating at its maximum efficiency level, you will need to optimize it from time to time. Here are some plugins for this purpose:

- [Wp Optimize](#)
- [Optimize Database after Cleaning Revisions](#)
- [Breeze](#)
- [Wp Rocket](#)
- [Swift Performance](#)

Technical SEO

The following tips are mainly focused on the technical side of SEO. Unlike before, this chapter deals with the general technical side of SEO, however not necessarily focused on performance issues.

Switch to https

As we heard multiple times now, Search Engines want to make sure their users have the best possible experience during their search. Hence, user experience and security are two of the main drivers when it comes to ranking high. Search engines are obsessed with user experience and security.

You might remember a major hype from 2019 when Chrome started flagging non-https websites and marked them as non-secure. So in case your site doesn't run on https, your users receive a notification that it might not be secure. A nightmare for the site owner!

Basically, the algorithm works as follows: If 2 websites are (close to) identical in terms of other parameters, Google will rank the one running on https higher.

But be careful: A common mistake is for people to transfer the site to https, but forgetting to set up a 301 redirect from the http to the https version. This means they basically end up with two websites: One running on http and one running on https. This is a serious problem as Google now sees two separate websites instead of one!

Make sure to have one single www version

Similar to the previous paragraph, always make it very clear which URL version your website runs on! There are two versions, ones including the “www” and one skipping it.

`https://domain.com` - without “www”(recommended)

<https://www.domain.com> (also functional)

Always make sure to be consistent with it when it comes to link building and social networks. If the “www” is not needed, don’t mention it. For example, if your website loads without the “www”, then it would be weird and unnecessary to use the following format: <https://www.domain.com> across your social networks.

Avoid mixed content

What is mixed content?

Mixed content refers to the mix of secure and non-secure resources found on a webpage. This happens whenever a secure webpage attempts to access resources, such as images, or CSS, that are not seen as secure. Sounds abstract - why is this a problem?

Well, Google announced that future versions of Chrome will block mixed content errors.

This in return means that Chrome will simply not load these aspects of your website properly, resulting in potentially severe damages to the visual side of your page.

An example: Let’s say your site runs on https, but for some reason loads a CSS file on http (seen as non-secure). That’s when you created a mixed content error.

This issue commonly happens when you use an old theme or outdated plugins. Therefore, always make sure that your themes and plugins are up-to-date and come from trusted sources only.

Create a Sitemap for your website and add it to Google Search Console (GSC)

According to Google, “a sitemap is a file where you provide information about the pages, videos, and other files on your site, and the relationships between them. Search engines like Google basically read this file to more intelligently crawl your site.”

A sitemap essentially provides the search engine with a more in-depth idea about the structure of your site. This in return, helps the Search Engine understand which pages they should crawl and do so faster and better.

In case you're using SEO plugins like Yoast or RankMath your sitemap is automatically generated. To give you a better idea, this is how a sitemap looks like:

<https://seobuddy.com/sitemap.xml>

http://seobuddy.com/blog/sitemap_index.xml

Create a robots.txt file

Robots.txt, also known as the so-called “robots exclusion protocol” is a file which contains instructions for crawling spiders. It essentially tells the Search Engine what pages to crawl and what pages NOT to crawl.

Every Googlebot has a maximum “crawling budget” (meaning how many URLs the Googlebot can crawl). Hence, it's crucial to guide the spider to make sure it crawls the most important pages and neglects the ones that are not as important anyways (attachment pages, sometimes tags, etc) and not vice versa!

Here's an example for a robots.txt file: <https://seobuddy.com/robots.txt>

Now, let's do a little experiment:

Try to open your own robots.txt file by accessing <https://yourwebsite.com/robots.txt>

Now, does this open the file? Yes? Fantastic, this means you have a robots.txt in place for your website. If not, simply create one and drop it into the root of your website, via ftp.

Here's what you can do with the robots.txt file:

- Sculpt the crawling budget by eliminating unnecessary pages from the crawl
- Prevent spiders from accessing "private" pages and showing them in search results. This refers to "membership" or "thank you pages" that are of secondary importance

Consolidate duplicate URLs with Canonical tag

Maybe you have noticed it before when scrolling through the internet: The same URL is mentioned twice, one time with and one time without the trailing slash.

Here's an example:

- <https://site.com/the-seo-checklist/>
- <https://site.com/the-seo-checklist> - without the trailing slash

As mentioned before this basically means that Google sees two different pages - for the same URL. When it comes to ranking your page you will want to avoid this at all costs.

How to fix it?

First, check out that the canonical URL is set to "/" - at this point, if the canonical is already set to "/" then you're fine.

To fix this issue once and for all, simply to a 301 redirect from the URL without a slash to the one with the slash.

Check for and repair broken links on a regular basis

Especially after blogging or running a website for years, it is relatively likely that you have a couple broken links flying around. A broken link is a reference to another page which is no longer existent. If you or one of your users try to access a page like this, it will return a 404 error.

Depending on how many links you have, you might now say “How do i quickly identify them without clicking on every single link on my website?” No worries - there are crawling tools to help you out with this. Two recommended tools are [Sitebulb](#) and [Screaming Frog SEO Spider](#) (free up to 500 urls). Go check them out!

While there is - as always - [a WordPress plugin](#) for the WordPress users, this is not recommended as it will create some performance issues due to its search method. It basically requires many resources to conduct the search which in return might cause the server to go down, especially if you don't have a high-performance webhost.

For more details, [check here for 5 ways](#) on how to best check for broken links, showcased by Kinsta.

Check for and resolve redirect chains

Whenever there are two or more redirects happening at the same time, it is called a redirect chain. Here is an example:

Page A -> Page B -> Page C -> Page D.

Why should we try to break redirect chains?

- it increases crawling efficiency
- it reduces page loading times
- it improves link equity, which means that the Page D gets more “link power” which eventually results in a higher ranking

The easiest way to fix these and breaking the chain is by simply redirecting Page A to Page D via a 301 redirect.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is recommended to use a crawling tool - again we suggest [Sitebulb](#) or [Screaming Frog SEO Spider](#).

Add missing meta titles and descriptions and remove duplicates

As mentioned before, the meta title and description are the information that is shown in search results. For many users, this little piece of text will be the first touchpoint with your website - eventually deciding if someone clicks on your page or not.

Sometimes it happens - either by accident or because of the CMS your website is built on - that this meta data goes missing or you end up with duplicates. Of course this is not ideal and hence should be regularly checked.

Similar to the two previous paragraphs, you can use a crawling tool such as SiteBulb or Screaming Frog to fix this. On top, here's [a good tutorial](#) on how to avoid these issues at all.

Understand and use redirects properly

There are multiple different redirect types that can be used in various scenarios. The most important ones related to SEO are...

- **...the 301 redirect** - a permanent redirect
- **...the 302 redirect** - a temporary redirect
- **...the 410 redirect** - this page doesn't exist anymore

To give you a better idea about when to use which redirect type, you will find some use cases below, together with the matching redirect type:

Scenario 1: You want to consolidate page A with the content of page B

-> **Use a 301 redirect from B to A**

Scenario 2: You want to create a new page with updated information, but you already have a page B treating the same subject

-> **Use a 301 redirect from B to A**

Scenario 3: You want to transfer the link power from page A to B

-> Use a **301 redirect from A to B**

Scenario 4: You want to delete a page and mark it as "gone" from the internet

-> Use a **410 redirect**

Now we have talked about the different redirect types and use cases but how do we actually create these redirects? While you could do it manually, it's easier and faster to do so via the .htaccess file. Or, when you work with WordPress, simply use a plugin.

Here are a couple for you to consider:

- [Redirection](#)
- [Simple 301 Redirects](#)
- [RankMath](#)

Make sure there are no index coverage issues

To check your website for index coverage issues, simply go to your Google Search Console property and analyze the *Coverage tab* under *Index section*.

Now what should you look for?

The tools reports issues such as:

- drop in total indexed pages without corresponding errors (this could mean you might be blocking the access to some pages, e.g. via robots.txt or by noindex-ing them)
- error spikes
- missing pages
- server errors
- 404 errors

All this information helps you to get a good overview and make educated SEO decisions.

Make sure to avoid manual penalties

Have you ever heard about getting a “manual penalty” from Google? It means that an actual human being reviews your website after an automated process has flagged it as suspicious. And at the end of the day, if that Google employee comes to the conclusion that your site is indeed shady, it means your site is banned from the search results and does not show up anymore. This is probably the worst possible scenario for your SEO efforts.

Here's how the cause-and-effect chain looks like:

1. You (maybe even unintentionally) do some shady SEO activities for your website
2. Google algorithms catch you as your website triggers a certain amount of red flags
3. A real person manually checks the site against the red flags and if you are being caught, you get the manual penalty.

The consequence is that your site is removed from the search results. The good news is, that the chances for being blocked from Google are relatively low. But what can you do if it happens? A major indicator is that your organic search traffic suddenly drops out of nowhere. In this case, check the Google Search Console for more information, fix the issues and resubmit your website again.

Keep the path to your important pages short!

In general, Google assumes that content that is buried deep in your site is less important than pages that are easily accessible. Therefore, keep your relevant content within reach - ideally not more than 3 clicks away!

This will help Google's bots to crawl your site more efficiently and increases the chances of having all your important pages properly indexed - a primary condition for all SEO efforts.

Research shows that the optimal crawl depth for a website is three levels or less.

Here are a couple tricks about how to increase the accessibility of your pages:

- optimize internal linking
- place the most important URLs in the top levels of a site's architecture
- use breadcrumbs to allow users and search engines to easily navigate through your pages.

Use "noindex" and "nofollow" tags properly

Google offers different tags for us to categorize and describe our pages. The search engine does this in order to be better educated about which pages we want to be indexed, followed or not accessible.

There are three important tags out there that everyone should know about:

- Noindex: tells the search engine to exclude your page from the search results
- Disallow: tells it not to crawl your pages at all
- Nofollow: tells it not to follow the links on your page

So the big question is, why and when should we use each tag?

Well, the number one goal should be to optimize your crawling budget. Just imagine you have a complex website with over 1000 individual pages and 800 of these 1000 pages are generated by tags. In this case you tag these pages with a noindex tag which results with your site being crawled more efficiently. WordPress and pretty much any decent CMS or your SEO solution (such as Yoast or RankMath) gives you options for such a task.

Disable irrelevant pages from being indexed

Let's think a step further: Google sets a limited crawling budget for each website and probably won't crawl all your 1000 pages in detail. Your goal is to have the most important sites crawled while the not so important ones are of lower priority. What you want to avoid is that Google crawls the wrong, irrelevant pages while leaving the important ones out!

“The ranking strength of a website is the average ranking strength of its pages.”

Keep that in mind and go through every page one by one asking yourself: "Does this page have good chances to rank for the keyword that it's targeting?"

There comes a number of automatically generated pages with every CMS, which - from an SEO point of view - shouldn't be indexed. With WordPress, they usually are:

- tags
- attachments
- custom post types pages
- custom post types categories
- custom post types tags
- author pages

The simplest way of disabling these in WordPress is by using Yoast SEO or Rank Math.

Content

When it comes to SEO, always keep in mind that content is king! Once again, not only should your goal be to provide outstanding content for your target group - if your content is convincing people will share it among their peers without further ado. Therefore always make sure to publish outstanding and valuable content!

Follow a SEO content strategy

As we just learned: "Content is King!" This is the SEO mantra you should live by. Google relies on content to determine the ranking of websites - and your job is to provide this content! The base of every SEO strategy should hence be a well-planned, long-term content strategy.

When it comes to content, producing some kind of content is not the challenge. Producing the right content is! You will need to publish GREAT pieces of content that provide real value for your readers and ideally complement each other. (Hence the need for a strategy!)

Here are a couple tips:

- Group content around specific subjects and themes
- Create several layers of content around a topic
- Show various perspectives on a certain topic
- Discuss different phases of your buyer personas (awareness, ready to buy, ...)
- Focus on keywords that are easy to rank for AND that have significant traffic
- Leverage and reuse your existing content by improving it and keeping it up-to-date

Do keyword research before producing any content

Every SEO content strategy should be based on an extensive keyword research. Why? Because before you can produce content people are interested in, you will need to know what they are searching for!

You can have very high-qualitative content but if you write for the wrong keywords people will simply not find or read it. This means, you wasted your time and/or money.

You hence need to make sure the keywords you're writing for...

1. ...are relevant for your business
2. ...target customers during a certain buyer-journey phase
3. ...have enough traffic to make your efforts worthwhile

But how exactly do you do that?

First of all, there are several tools which can help you find the right keywords:

- Ubersuggest - <https://neilpatel.com/ubersuggest>
- Ahrefs - <https://ahrefs.com> (paid)
- SurferSEO Chrome extension - <https://surferseo.com/keyword-surfer-extension/>

And here are some Tips and Tricks for building a successful content strategy:

1. Group all your long-tail keywords by main topic/keyword.

While doing your keyword research, you'll most likely find many similar long-tail (niche) keywords covering the same main topic. My recommendation is to group them and then write one long-form piece of content, covering EACH of the keywords. This way you avoid "so-called "content cannibalization" issues, meaning you target the same keyword across several web pages, cannibalizing your own content.

2. Start with with low-competition keywords

There might be keywords that fit your business and have significant search traffic. “Well that’s great - let’s target them!” you might think now. Well, considering that you are not the only one coming to that conclusion, there are probably many other big websites outside targeting that keyword. And it will be VERY hard to compete with established pages (like Hubspot to give an example) especially if you’re just starting out or you know your website is not yet an authority. Hence, I recommend to target keywords that are currently dominated by websites that are not highly established yet and therefore easier to beat.

3. Find which keywords your competition is ranking for and steal them by writing 10x better content

This one is self-explanatory - beat them to the ground! More about creating 10x content in the next section.

Create long-form content

Although word count per-se is not a ranking factor (always keep in mind quality over quantity!), writing long-form content leads to various benefits:

- long-form has more opportunities generates more backlinks than short posts
- therefore they perform in search results
- which means long-form content brings more traffic

We know - this is a very casual cause-and-effect chain - but this is how things work. However, this relation is only proportional till a certain length is reached as the negative effects of too much length set in (nobody wants to read forever long content right?)

Now the question arises, how long should your content be? Statistically speaking, the ideal word count lay between 800-1500 words per publication.

Nevertheless, your focus always should remain the quality of an article rather than the word count. Keep in mind: Your main goal of the content is to solve a certain problem in a unique way and to provide valuable information - no matter if this happens in 500 or 5000 words.

In the end, there is one thumb rule to live by: The easier your content is to consume and understand, the better!

Create 10x content

The term "10x content" was firstly introduced by Moz a few years ago and refers to "content that is 10 times better than the best result that can currently be found in the search results for a given keyword phrase or topic."

The reason why people use Google search is because they want to find the best solution to a problem they're facing. However, sometimes there is simply no great answer to a problem out there and the first Google page only consists of landing pages or short, meaningless articles.

Now, imagine you suddenly find a piece of content such as a blog article that provides REAL value and solves your problem in ways you've never thought about. This is content you are proud you found, and there is a chance you then go ahead and bookmark it, share it on your social networks, or even link to it from your blog. And this is the reason why it should be your goal to produce outstanding content as the effect can be huge!

For you to get a better idea and some inspiration, here are some [10x content examples](#) put together by the Moz team.

Avoid content cannibalization

Content cannibalization = derogatory strategy of targeting the same keyword across several web pages.

As definitions are always a little dry, here's an example:

Look at these two domains:

<https://domain.com/new-york-wedding-venues>
<https://domain.com/new-york-wedding-reception-venues>

Both links (of the same domain) refer to the SAME main keyword (New York Wedding Venue) - not ideal.

How do you identify content cannibalization?

An easy way to find out if your pages are threatened by content cannibalization is the tool *Ahrefs*.

The main idea behind it is that you first export the keywords your site is ranking for, then arrange them alphabetically which lets you identify URLs ranking for the same keyword.

For a more detailed and hands-on explanation, check out this [video](#) Ahrefs published to explain how it works.

How to avoid content cannibalization

- as stated above, group long-tail keywords in topics, then write long-form content covering ALL these keywords, rather than writing unique pages for each one of them
- avoid falling into the "searcher intent" trap by targeting the same main keywords several times, covering different searcher intent nuances on different pages.

Build your website around Content Hubs

Content hubs (other names include pillar pages or topic clusters) should be the core of your website structure.

The Content Hub strategy is an approach to build up a website by clustering subpages with similar content (sometimes referred to as “spoke” pages) and linking them to a superior hub page.

There are many different ways to shape these content hubs. They could for example be existing blog categories or new pages built from scratch.

If you're looking for inspiration, you will find a deeper explanation of the topic [here](#). You can also have a look at [this detailed list](#) of content hubs put together by MIG.

"Deepen" your hubs with supporting content

Hub pages usually cover a certain subject, such as a specific keyword with a significant search volume and a ranking difficulty in the range of medium to hard. However, achieving a high rank with such a page on its own is hard. Hence, you will need to create additional, supporting content, to “feed” the hub page.

If you look at your current website it is very likely that you already have a hub-structure of some kind in place, for example in the form of categories. Now it's time to work with them and create supporting content such as blog posts to push these pages up in the ranking.

Keep your content up to date

Content marketing is a continuous process. While it's important to publish new content on a regular basis it is crucial to not lose sight of your “old” publications. Make sure you keep them up to date (so they are still relevant!) and continuously improve them to further push and/or keep their ranking.

Very often, this aspect is overlooked or seen as unnecessary. But that's the biggest mistake! Studies show that revised "old" content often performs much better than newly published articles. The potential is big - so don't be surprised if your traffic on an old page doubles after you update it.

Here are some ideas you could use when updating old content:

- Make sure the information is still accurate and relevant to date
- Fix broken or expired links and/or add new links to new, relevant references
- Fix grammar mistakes and improve your writing style
- Add new media to the post, such as images or video embeds

Don't forget: Once you update an old post it will also update its publication data to that day - which in return means that the article will show up among the latest results. Et voilà there you have it - a fresh piece of content that is as good as new!

Make sure your categories (content hubs) are unique

Since this sounds like a given it is actually one of the most unnoticed malfunctions. As mentioned before, your categories serve as content. So far so good. However, these content hubs automatically show respective content from your blog posts and articles. Which, in turn, means that the risk of cannibalization is huge as your content appears not once but several times across your website.

In order to avoid this phenomenon (and to get your pages to rank!) you will need to produce **UNIQUE** content for each category.

An easy way (e.g. in Wordpress) is to add a unique description to each category.

E.A.T. to the rescue

E.A.T stands for **Expertise, Authority and Trustworthiness**. E.A.T. are three of the most decisive dimensions Google uses to determine if you are worthy to rank high - or not. Why? Well Google wants to make sure it always presents the best results for a search query. And who would you trust more regarding the quality of a website - an established

and renowned global organization that has been in the industry for years or a newcomer with no reference?

The first step to increase your E.A.T is to make sure that the content on your website reflects your expertise and authority in our industry and that people see you and your website as trustworthy.

For example, let's take two websites:

A - A general, magazine style blog which covers different family-related topics such as health, food, DIY gardening, kids, and so on.

B - A blog from a nurse who has worked with children for years and speaks about child nursing only.

Now let's say both websites publish an almost identical article (assuming that the websites are also identical in terms of link and on-page profile), then the article published on the nurse blog will most likely outrank the one published in the magazine. Why? Because the content of the nurse blog is stronger correlated to E.A.T. than the other one. Makes sense?

Another example: Let's say you're a photographer and suddenly decide to write a blog post about knitting socks on your photography website. Now suddenly this article ranks with pro-knitters that have solely focused on publications about knitting for years. They will easily outrank you!

So, keep in mind to write content around your fields of expertise, where people consider you a reliable authority.

On-Page SEO

As the name of this chapter already implies, the on-page SEO section is all about the things you need to check on the actual website when optimizing a page. check it out!

Target people, not search engines

Back in the early days of search engines, it was common practice to overload your article with your target keywords as the amount of matching words was a crucial ranking factor.

Today, things are not that simple anymore and Google uses a variety of factors and complex algorithms to determine how high your site should rank. While it's hard to optimize your site according to all parameters (the exact interplay is a big black box) it should be your major goal to provide real value for your users: The better the user-experience, the better it is for your site ranking.

Create content that matches searcher intent for your target keyword

We have already learned that Google uses a variety of measures to determine the “rank worthiness” of your site. As the search engine always tries to spit out the best possible result for a search query, it will track if people are satisfied with your page as a result. How does Google do that? It tracks how much time people spend on your site after clicking on it. This in turn means if someone realizes that your content is not at all an answer to their question they will “bounce” immediately, signaling to Google that your website is not what they are looking for. This is very bad for our ranking for the respective keywords.

There are 3 types of search intent:

- informational (example: "how to knit socks")
- transactional (example: "hand-made socks amazon")

- commercial (example: "mailchimp review")
- navigational (example: "starbucks near me")

Here is a piece of advice: Before creating content for a certain keyword, check and understand the top search results to see what Google shows for this keyword and try to match your content to it!

Include your target keyword in the URL, the title and the heading

Studies show that articles that mention their keyword in all three components tend to rank higher than articles that don't.

Here's an example: Let's say we target "mailchimp review" as the main keyword with our article.

The optimal "trio" should look similar to this:

- Title: "Mailchimp Review. Still the Best Email Service Provider in 2020?"
- URL: "https://domain.com/mailchimp-review/"
- Heading (inside the article): "Prerequisites of our Mailchimp review"

Add your focus keyword in the first paragraph

Research has shown that pages that mention their focus keyword in the first paragraph rank higher than pages that don't.

Therefore, always try to keep your focus keyword (or variations of it) in the first paragraph of your article.

Use ONE H1 (Headline 1) on EACH page

Sounds logical right? However, many website owners end up with two H1s on the same page.

Why can this be a problem? It's simple: Heading 1 is a strong indicator for search engines about what the page is all about. Tip: Try to match your H1 with the Meta Title for the respective page.

Choose an alluring, yet SEO-oriented meta title

What is a meta title? It basically defines the title of each page and is pulled by search engines to display your website in the SERP results.

An SEO-optimized title has various advantages when it comes to Google's ranking as it will trigger several ranking factors such as user intent, click-through rate (CTR) and keyword match. Hence, make sure to set it right!

When optimizing a meta title for SEO, always keep in mind:

- it's important to match your content to the searcher's intent of the target keyword
- try to come up with an alluring title to increase click-through rate
- keep it short - usually there is a maximum character limit (This varies by search type, but as a tip, include the target keyword in the first half of the title)

Develop a captivating meta description

While the meta description is not a ranking factor per se, it significantly influences other crucial ranking factors, for example the click-through rate. If it's well written, a meta description can make a big difference!

Similar to meta titles, there are some "rules" to live by when drafting a meta description:

- it's important to match your content to the searcher's intent of the target keyword
- try to come up with an alluring text to increase click-through rate (you can also include a clickbait)
- keep it short - usually there is a maximum character limit (this varies by search type, but as a tip, include the target keyword in the first half of the title)

- include the target keyword in description

Use headings for a clear page structure

Google is a fan of well-structured websites and a clear content hierarchy. The easiest way to achieve this is to use headings.

Generally, you should use Heading 1 (H1) for the main page title. Subsequently, use H2 and H3 (and so on) for subtitles with the goal to further structure the content on the following levels.

Make sure your content is properly formatted and looks appealing

We have already mentioned the importance of headings on your site above. Not only Google loves a well-structured page - your users love it well. It makes it so much easier to read and understand your content if it's formatted and styled according to your content hierarchy.

Apart from varying font size, you can leverage formatting parameters such as bold, italic or cursive styles, include lists or blockquotes, and so on to enhance the user experience - and in return, a better Google ranking!

Place strategic links to your own pages

Having internal links in place (see Content Hubs checkpoint) helps to turn your page into a healthy website and helps increase organic traffic.

You can link to other relevant pages as well as to your own pages.

Place strategic links to other relevant, authoritative websites

Research shows that websites that link to external sites tend to rank higher than websites that don't. Hence, try to place links to other websites where it makes sense, for example if these sites go in depth on a certain topic. This increases overall user

experience as well as it makes it easy for people to navigate to other topics.

Another option is to set anchor parameters:

- “rel nofollow” (if the link is an affiliate you should always set that anchor)
- “target _blank” for opening the link in a new window

Not sure what this means exactly? Go more in-depth [here](#).

Never link to a website with the same anchor the current site is targeting

While this sounds like a no-brainer, it happens all the time!

Here’s an example: Let’s say we target the focus keyword "Los Angeles Wedding Planner" with our homepage. On this homepage I now accidentally link to my “About me” page with the SAME anchor text. Why is this bad? Because at the end of the day I want my main Homepage to rank for the target keyword - if I link to the “About me” page in this manner, I signal Google that I would like the “About me” page to rank higher - which should never be the goal.

Tip: Turn it around and link from the “About me” page to the Homepage - with the anchor text “Los Angeles Wedding Planner”!

It can be tricky to identify this issue - especially when it comes to blog posts and external links - as the anchor texts sometimes don’t coincide with the focus keyword, but with variations of it. What happens is that you end up giving another website a boost, rather than your own.

Have proper names for your images in place

Even though we are in the year 2020, Google still has no proper way to identify the “content” of a picture. So what Google does instead is relying on the image names and tags. In order to make sure Google understands your pictures and can classify them

accordingly, make sure to give them meaningful names.

A great example are stock pictures which often have perfectionized the image naming. See it for yourself: Go to depositphotos.com and hover over any picture to see the description behind it. This is how it could look like:

"stock-photo-delicious-fresh-meat-cheeseburgers-wooden.jpg"

Add alternative text to your images

This goes hand in hand with the previous paragraph: Add descriptive alternative (alt) text to your images to provide more context. These additional tags are an important source for search engines to “understand an image” - it basically enables them to index it properly.

But be careful: Make sure to use unique and descriptive alt tags in order to avoid “over-optimization”. Hence, don’t use tags that are similar to your focus keywords but not directly relevant as this adds up to the keyword density.

Control for social markup

Whenever someone shares your website on a Social Media account, these platforms automatically pull the content of your page and displays information such as URL, title, description and image.

These tags are called og (short for open graph) tags and are determined by your SEO plugin.

Make sure you double check what kind of information is shown when someone shares your content on social networks and if needed, tweak it so it matches your content.

Maximize dwell time

Per definition, Dwell Time is “the amount of time that a Google searcher spends on a page from the search results before returning back to the SERPs.” Dwell time deserves attention as it is considered a main ranking factor

Here are a couple ideas on how to improve it:

- try to match search intent
- produce outstanding content
- avoid “fluff” and get to the point in the first paragraph of your article
- add visuals and media (e.g. embed a video or an audio such as a podcast)

Beat the “Featured Snippet”

While this might be the first time you hear about so-called “Featured Snippets” you have most likely seen them a million times already. Featured Snippets are a way for Google to provide you with instant and concise answers to certain search queries without you having to click on an article. You will typically find the at the very top of the result pages. Although this is a very useful feature if you are looking at it from a user’s perspective, it also means that people will land on your website less often since they might already find their answers in the Featured Snippets. Therefore, your goal should always be do beat them - here are a couple tips on how to do that:

- Featured snippet URLs often feature `` and `<table>` so try and adjust your content accordingly
- Ensure that one article answers multiple similar questions
- Include images in your posts and name them appropriately
- Ensure that your article ranks on the 1st page of Google SERPs

[Here](#) is an article by Ahrefs that goes more in-depth on this topic.

Be careful: Don't over-optimize!

You might now ask “How is this even possible?” or “Why is this a bad thing?” Search engine over-optimization, however, is a thing: It basically describes the phenomenon that too many SEO adjustments can cause your ranking to drop.

How does this happen? Here's how over-optimization occurs:

- Through content: Stuffing your article, or in other words, overusing your keywords and variations of it might sound logical - however, Google is not as simple as it used to be and won't simply react to the number of keyword mentionings. Actually, the opposite happens: Your article will be significantly less fun to read which negatively impacts the user experience. And as we learned before, user experience is essential for your ranking!
- When you try to “stuff” keywords in the footer or sidebar to increase the number of mentionings without any serious value-add
- When your website does not look natural! If your page has a high dofollow/nofollow ratio when it comes to external backlinks that's not ideal. While it's right that “dofollow” links are beneficial try to include both types of links to appear natural

Off-Page SEO

As the name already says, Off-page SEO is the opposite of On-Site SEO. This section addresses all SEO activities and practices around your website.

Make sure you have a thought-through link building strategy in place

Whenever it comes to SEO we know that one of the most crucial factors determining “rank worthiness” is the number of backlinks pointing to a site. It is hence crucial to have a link building strategy in place instead of just hoping for the best.

The ultimate goal of each link building strategy is to create and publish content that people will share organically with further ado. However, this sounds easier than it is - creating outstanding content that earns links on its own is very hard to do.

But no worries, we put together a series of suggestions on how to proactively build links ethically:

- start with creating the foundational links (more on that in the next paragraph)
- try to create outstanding content that earns backlinks on its own
- proactively reach out to industry related sites to place links on meaningful pages (trade links, get featured, etc.)
- proactively reach out to people you've been collaborating in the past to get featured
- repurpose the content of your site and update/improve older publications

Keep in mind that link building is a long-term and continuous process that requires strategic effort over time. If you try to build links within a week then forgetting about it you won't be successful. You have to be consistent to see results. Also, when building links, don't forget that it's crucial to keep your link profile natural.

Invest time in building foundational links

The first thing that should be on your agenda when you build up a new website should be to build foundational links. What are foundational links?

Just think of it like a house - you will always need to build a solid base before working on the actual building. Equivalent to that foundational links can be seen as the supporting framework for your organic growth. These links include:

- Social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Vimeo, YouTube, etc.
- High-authority directories: Yelp, BBB, YellowPages, Expertise, etc.
- Niche-specific directories: TheKnot, WeddingWire, FearlessPhotographers, etc.

Make sure that you have a business name, address and contact details in place before working on these links - many of these refer to your business without much content to it so you will have to be consistent with the fundamental information before setting up profiles and spreading the word.

Place links between different Social Network Platforms

Normally, social networks have a section for you to add links to other social platforms. Always make sure to use these sections and to interlink your different profiles as this will help search engine spiders to reach your website more often and quicker.

On top, the authority of your social pages will go up as well which means they will rank higher. Hence, when someone searches for your brand name, the first result page will be a mix of your website and your social accounts. This is great as it increases the trust of your brand.

Publish guest posts on related blogs in your niche

Guest posting has always been (and still is!) one of the most effective ways to increase any website's authority, trust and in return, its ranking.

As mentioned before and to maximize the effect, guest posts should be part of a long-term strategy.

Here are a few tips to consider when planning a guest post:

- do your homework - make sure you research and choose blogs which are strongly related to your own niche and are read by your target group
- before proposing a topic, connect with the site owner to understand which topics they are genuinely interested in featuring. The reason for this is that many people simply use a template to apply - and site owners are tired of these "blind" applications. Our tip: Connect with them on social media first, exchange some messages and build a loose relationship. After building this foundation you can ask for a guest post - and trust us, the chances of them saying yes will be a lot higher
- pick a winning topic to write about - once again ,do your research first and pick a topic that strategically fits the blog you are targeting
- create high-quality content, format it correctly and make it look appealing for example by adding images and links to both your site and other useful resources
- let people know who you are by including your bio. This also is another opportunity to place a link to your website as well as to your social media accounts.

Approach people from former work relationships

The success of this approach highly depends on your niche. If you have worked with people in the past, you already have a great base for placing a backlink.

Here is an example:

- Let's say you're a wedding photographer. At each wedding there are usually many other people and vendors involved: Florists, bakers, hairdressers, make up artists, DJs, wedding planners and so on.
- Now find your former co-vendors and check out their websites
- Now reach out and send them a couple of the shots with their work on it (for example the wedding cake or the bride's make up) and ask them to add these pictures to their portfolio - but not without linking back to your website. Or you ask to do a guest post on their wedding blog. You see - there are many ideas out there!

Detect brand mentions and turn them into backlinks

What is a brand mention? It's simple: A brand mention means that your brand is mentioned somewhere in plain text - however, without a backlink to your website. They pose a perfect backlink opportunity so your goal should be to find and to convert them!

There are several tools which can help you here:

- Ahrefs - they also have [a great step-by-step guide](#) on the topic
- [Brand24](#)
- [BrandMentions](#)

The success of this tactic, however, depends on how established your brand is. If you are just getting started with your business, your brand is probably not well-known yet and your online footprint is most likely rather small. In return means that you won't find many brand mentions - yet. In return if you have been out there for quite a while, these brand mentions are low hanging "backlink fruits" that can be converted with little efforts.

Use Social Signals to boost your page rankings

According to the tech company [Bigcommerce](#), "social signals refer to a webpage's collective shares, likes and overall social media visibility as perceived by search engines. These activities contribute to a page's organic search ranking and are seen as another form of citation, similar to backlinks."

This means that these so-called Social Signals, aka shares or likes are perceived by search engines which means they have a positive impact on your ranking.

What does that mean for you? Basically, it means to push your social interactions by posting and promoting your new pages on social media.

Plan and pre-schedule social media postings

Posting regularly and promoting your content on social media requires a steady posting rhythm and can be costly in terms of time.

However, there is no need to set the alarm at a certain time every day - there are various tools and programs out there that allow you to plan and schedule all your postings in advance:

- [Missingletr](#) - this tool transforms your blog posts into social media campaigns for an entire year
- [Buffer](#) - this tool lets you create, schedule and publish your content for social media in advance
- [Coschedule](#) - this is a full toolbox covering various parts of automated marketing
- [NelioContent](#) - this is WordPress plugin which serves as an editorial calendar as well as a social automation tool

Local SEO

So far we have only focused on general SEO practices. However, if you are running a local business you should always leverage local SEO to get in touch with your clients.

As always, you want to make it as easy as possible for potential customers to find you. Hence, this section deals with the special requirements and optimization techniques in local SEO.

Claim a “My Business” Listing on Google

Google offers a special feature called “Google My Business” (GMB) and it’s highly recommended to claim your listing there. Why?

Because Google uses these listings for local search queries. Result pages for local search queries such as “Pharmacies near me” follow a completely different ranking national, global or general ones as they usually come with a different user intent. Let’s say someone googles “Pharmacies near me” in New York, it would not at all make sense to show them results from San Francisco. On top Google currently only shows the top results “near me” on the first page, often referred to as the 3-Map Pack or Local Pack.

So how do you get into these top 3 results? Well, you can’t simply target a search query like that with keywords so you will have to try and claim a spot in the local search results by listing your business!

How do you claim your GMB Listing on Google?

If you're an established business, you probably already claimed your listing. If not, simply follow the Google wizard to apply - or check out this [tutorial](#).

The process is very simple:

1. Claim your listing
2. Set-up your profile
3. Get verified (either via phone, SMS or e-mail)

Claim a Yelp Listing

While Google is undoubtedly the most dominant player in the local space there are a bunch of other directories out there that can boost your local success. Your goal should be to be listed on as many trusted sites as possible. One of the most prevalent directories is Yelp, and once again, it's really simple to claim your listing:

1. Sign up for an account
2. Set up your listing
3. Get the listing verified

(Yelp will call the phone number you provided so make sure you are reachable)

Claim a "Bing Places for Business" Listing

Right after Google, the Microsoft-owned search engine "Bing" is one of the biggest players in the market. Bing is not only the default search engine in Microsoft's Software - millions of people use it for their search queries on a daily basis. Hence, a Bing listing should be on your to-do list!

The process is pretty much the same as with Google: After you set up your listing, Google verifies you and you're all set!

Once set up, optimize your Listings

Setting up your listings is the first step - but you're not done just yet! Claiming them alone is not sufficient to show up in the map pack (remember, Google only shows the top three local results). You will have to optimize to stand a chance!

There are 3 factors Google takes into consideration when determining the local ranking:

1. **Relevance** - according to Google, relevance measures how well a local listing matches the searcher intent. Tip: Make sure to include detailed information about your business to help Google understand and categorize it better.
2. **Distance** - this one is rather self-explanatory and refers to how far each potential search result is from the searcher's location.
3. **Prominence** - Prominence refers to how well-known a business is. In order to determine the prominence of a business, the search engine also factors in:
 - a. Information it finds on the web such as links, articles, and directories.
 - b. Google's review count and score: More reviews and positive ratings will likely improve a business's local ranking
 - c. Your overall position in web results

So, how do you optimize your listings? No worries, we got you covered: The next section consists of several tips specifically referring to the Google My Business profile. While the exact ranking factors might vary between search engines these tips will help you no matter the channel. Keep in mind that these tips mainly form a base of optimizing your listings: This guide will cover more advanced tips in the subsequent sections.

How do you optimize your "Google My Business" location?

- Make sure you have a complete and accurate business information profile in place. This profile should include your business name, address, phone number, website, category, description, photos, working hours, FAQs and so on. Cover each aspect you can possibly think of!

- Make sure you are listed in the right category. If you aren't sure what category your business is in, simply look up your main service and see what category the top results are in.
- Make sure to complement your profile with high-quality, highly descriptive pictures. Research has shown that a business with more images tends to rank higher in the map pack. So make sure to upload at least:
 - 3 interior pics
 - 3 exterior pics
 - Pictures of your work, products or services
 - Pictures of your staff, ideally showing a typical work day setting
- Google lets you add a 750-character description to your listing - make sure you use the full potential and include keywords related to your business.
- Put together a FAQ section. The more content you have on your listing, the better it is for your ranking. This is also a great way of answering common questions of potential customers!
- Make sure you claim the short URL for your listing. This is a way nicer link to post on social networks - for you and for everyone else.

Alright - now you have a good overview about the basics of any listing optimization. If you optimize your listings according to these tips, you most likely already beat around 80% of businesses GMBs.

Get your business listed on relevant general directories

As described above, general directories are a great way to put some foundational links in place. However, our tip is to be selective and only publish on directories that are relevant rather than wasting time trying to be listed on every single directory out there.

Make sure you understand what's important here: When it comes to general directories you should not just try to be listed for the purpose of backlinking - see it as an opportunity to generate traffic and trust. Whenever you vet a directory ask yourself the following two questions:

- Is the website trustworthy and reputable?

- Is the website likely to be read by your target audience?

If the answer to both questions is yes it makes sense for you to list your business there. If not, it's better to skip it as it likely causes more harm than good in the long run.

Target niche-specific directories

When it comes to directories it is always better to target niche-specific ones instead of general ones. Also, there's more to it than just a backlink:

- They are more relevant to your business
- They are your tailored to your target customers and hence attract the right crowd
- Your competitors are probably listed on the sites already - don't fall behind
- You can promote yourself on these sites
- They serve as niche search engines

Get people to write reviews

Apart from the listings, Google also factors in how many reviews a page has and how positive these reviews are. On top these reviews will also boost trust among potential future customers and hence will increase website traffic and sales.

So if your listing lacks reviews, proactively reach out to previous customers and ask them to write one!

This is [a great article](#) with a more detailed guide on how to do this.

Reply to reviews

Google also encourages business owners to actively reply to reviews they got on local listings. If Google says do it, do it - and kill two birds with one stone by pleasing the algorithm AND developing a trusting relationship with your customer.

Also, at the end of the day, more content related to your posting means more potential to increase the spectrum of keywords related to your business. This in return further boosts the relevance of your listing.

Publish Google Posts

Google posts are a great - however, often overlooked feature of GMB. It is another lever which allows you to actively approach your target group.

Make sure to add site-wide NAP details

NAP stands for **N**ame - **A**ddress - **P**hone Number. Google sees it as your “signature”, clearly identifying your local business. It is recommended to include your NAP details on every page of your site, usually in the header or in the footer.

Make sure you implement consistent NAP details across your website

As mentioned in the section before, NAP is basically your signature. Hence it needs to fulfill two criteria: Being unique and consistent.

Hence you should ensure that the Name, Address and Phone number are properly formatted and consistent across your website. While this sounds logical, mistakes happen quickly: Make sure to not use abbreviations on some pages and the full name somewhere else.

Make sure you have consistent NAP details on all listings & social networks

While it is not a big challenge to keep your NAP consistent across your website, it can be a lot harder to do so in all social networks and directories.

Sometimes, people forget to add the full address, state varying phone numbers or use a

short version of your business name. This is one of the biggest and most common mistakes when it comes to local listings optimization.

However, looking at it from the other side - if you have a consistent NAP all across the web in place, this will quickly put you into the top 10% of local listings. Easy!

Have a content strategy in place that targets local topics

We have learned before that two of the top SEO ranking factors are relevance and authority. To make sure you have both of them in place it is highly recommended to have a content strategy for both your products and services as well as for your location in place.

Sounds abstract? Here is an example:

Let's say you're a wedding photographer in San Francisco. While the content strategy about your service would cover topics such as the right time of the day and poses, your content strategy referring to your location could include the best local picture spots or venues.

Consistently publishing content in a certain niche will increase your authority in this certain area, thus leading to a higher ranking in the search results. So what are you waiting for?

Claim brand mentions from local sites

As we have learned before, brand mentions pose a relatively easy way to score a backlink. This also applies for your local business! Especially if you have running your local business it is likely that your brand has been mentioned here and there. Find these mentionings and convert them into backlinks!

In case you have no or only a few mentionings you could also do some research about your competitors and figure out where they are featured. You could then approach the respective local publications and try to get a link to your own site a well.

Not only will this add to your authority - it will also increase people's trust in your brand

which is especially important on a local level.

Add a local business markup to your homepage

First of all, what is a schema markup?

A “schema markup”, also known as structured data or structured markup data is basically the language of search engines. The purpose behind schema is to provide support for a prevailing group of tags that can be used by search engines to better understand and ultimately represent the underlying data.

Before translating your page content into a schema markup, you first need to answer the following question “What is this site all about?”

What’s in it for you?

According to Google, schema markup can...

- ...help Google to better understand the content and purpose of your website
- ... increase the ranking of your site in search results
- ... help you gain more site traffic as the content is better formatted in search results (snippets, sitelinks, etc.)

Conclusion

This is it! We hope that this guide expanded your SEO knowledge and that you found our tips helpful! We are aware many of these chapters have only scratched the surface while the underlying topic could fill many pages itself. However, this would go beyond the scope of our guide - see it as a starting point to dig deeper wherever you feel the need to!

If you have feedback or questions please don't hesitate to contact us:

<https://seobuddy.com/contact>