

You can do your own Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO for short) is the process of improving visibility of your web pages and website in Google and Bing search results. After all, who wants a website that nobody visits and is hard to find?

In theory and in practice, optimizing your site is not as complicated as you might think. It boils down to accomplishing two basic goals: 1) editing the content and HTML coding of your web pages and 2) removing barriers to indexing your webpages by the search engines.

In this article, I want to give you a do-it-yourself guide for improving your site's SEO. You don't need to be a programmer or webpage designer to do it. All that's required is some intermediate personal computing skills, administrator access to webpages and lots and lots of patience.

Don't expect SEO improvements to be measurable right away; it takes weeks to observe the results of SEO changes.

Where do you start? First, you need to establish ways to measure your progress. The good news is you can do this for free and without a lot of time and effort.

Sign up for free analytics tools

Open webmaster tools accounts with Google and Bing. Microsoft Bing's recently upgraded tool suite includes analytics tools, but with Google you still need to set up two accounts (Webmaster and Analytics) separately and link them together.

Tool

Bing Webmaster Tools

Google Webmaster Central

Google Analytics

Sign up Link

Bing.com/toolbox/webmaster

google.com/webmaster

google.com/analytics

Through webmaster tools, you get a detailed view of your site, as well as a listing of your link and query traffic. In short, they let you diagnose any structural issues with your site and identify any indexing barriers that might impede search engines' ability to crawl through all of your content. Remember, if it can't be crawled, it can't be found in regular search.

The analytics tools let you measure sales and conversions, but also gives you fresh insights into how visitors use your site, how they arrived to it, and how you can keep them coming back.

A myriad of built-in reports help you find out how often people visit each page of your site, how long they stay, and how often they convert. Standard reports make it easy to measure and understand engagement on your site. Plus, as your proficiency and confidence grows, the ability to quickly build out customized reports is only a few clicks away.

The reporting options are almost endless, so how do you know which reports and metrics to focus

on and which ones to ignore? We find a number of the standard reports built in to Google Analytics are useful, including these...

SITE CONTENT / All Pages report

Key on these three metrics

- **URL Destination:** It shows you if your visitors are visiting the page(s) you most want them to (for example, a completed checkout page).
- **Time on Page:** This tracks the amount of time users spend on each page on the site. On which pages do visitors linger?
- **Pages/Visit:** This will let you know the number of pages visited more than, less than or equal to a predefined number.

TRAFFIC SOURCES / Queries report

This report provides invaluable keyword research. It shows you the search words and phrases (called keywords and key phrases) that users are typing in as their search queries before they land on your website. Armed with this intelligence on your top keywords, you can start adding them to meta tags, body text, headers, as well as use in your PPC bidding, if you use paid search.

TRAFFIC SOURCES

This report divides inbound visitor traffic into three categories:

- **Direct Traffic:** visitors that typed your domain into their browsers and went directly to your website.
- **Referring Sites:** sites that include a link pointing to a page on your website. These sites are often affiliates or other forms of friendly partners.
- **Search Engines:** traffic that reaches your website after performing an online search.

Use free tools to survey competition

Assess your site and those of your competitors for SEO effectiveness by looking at factors such as top keyword prominence in webpage URLs, page titles, header, and more.

An easy and free way to start is to survey yours and your competitors' webpage title tags throughout each domain. Use the 'site:' operator in either Google or Bing (in search window type *site:yourdomainname.org*)

As shown in the example above, you get a listing of title tags and descriptions for all pages of the site examined. Pay particular attention to your title tags. You want each one to be unique and focused on relevant keyword themes. Title tags are important because search engines place more weight on them than all of the other elements on a page. They also heavily influence the searcher's click decision from the search results.

Here are some additional suggestions on creating optimized title tags:

- Don't start your page title with the name of your organization. Instead start them with the words search engine users will most likely use (your top key phrases, as identified in your Analytics TRAFFIC SOURCES / Queries report, and other keyword research.)
- Put your main key phrase at the beginning of your page title (key phrase prominence) and keep your key phrase together (keyword proximity).
- Make the title short (8 words or less).

Another good way to survey your competition and do keyword research is by running domain searches on SEMrush.com. SEMrush is a SEO research service. You can use it to search on six domains a day at no charge (for more searches than that, you need a paid subscription.)

From a SEMrush domain search you get a bird's eye view on how yours and competitors' sites are doing in Google search engine rankings, as well as a imposing peeks at what your competitors are doing, both in organic results and AdWords.

SEMRush taps into its constantly updated database of more than 35 million of the most popular, most searched for keywords to show you the keywords for which every website ranks highly.

Measure, test, confirm, adjust

Treat SEO like a series of experiments. Don't make the mistake of trying to make wholesale changes all at once. Instead, make step-by-step improvements to your URLs, title tags, header tags, internal linking structure, anchor text, page copy, and so on. At each step, measure key performance indicators (KPIs) including these important ones:

1. # unique visitors to a page
2. # of bounces (exits from pages)
3. keywords-per-page
4. average time on page
5. conversion rates (once you have conversion goals established)

You don't need to be a programmer

All websites are built on programming platforms or Content Management Systems (CMS) and most are surprisingly easy for non-technical people to navigate around and operate. Most are based on common MS Windows command conventions, so if you can compose a MS Word document, you can perform the editing required for most SEO tasks.

It's a good idea to get tutorial help from your website supplier before your first time navigating around the CMS dashboard or command center. After a little coaching, you'll be surprised how easily you can edit web page elements and start on your way to better search performance!

If you're interest in learning more about this topic, there are many good training resources such as Internet-Marketing-Ninjas.com, SEOmoz.org and SEOBook.com. The last one offers a some great of tools for free, e.g., SEToolbar from SEOBook. There are many SEO training materials available via paid subscription at InternetMarketingNinjas.com, SEOmoz. org and Training.SEObook.com. If you don't have the budget for a subscription, try the public SEOmoz blog.

So you don't need to wait any longer to start wringing maximum value from your investment in website building, hosting and maintenance by implementing these basic SEO best practices.