

# SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION OVERVIEW & GUIDE



Explore this guide for recommendations that can help you properly implement Search Engine Optimization (or SEO) and have a dramatic impact on where your website appears in a search engine's organic (unpaid) listings.

### GENERAL TIPS



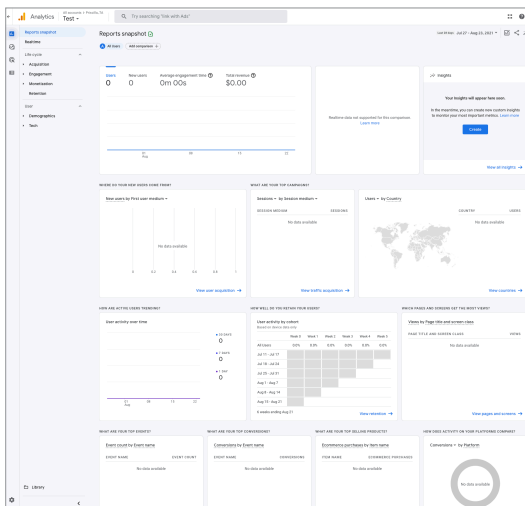
- Each of the following areas should be considered and implemented to maximize your SEO efforts:
  - » **SEO Basics**
  - » **Keyword Research**
  - » **Technical SEO**
  - » **On-Page SEO & Content**
  - » **Off-Page SEO**





Understanding how search engines operate, even on an elementary level, is essential to successfully reaching your target audience. The fundamentals include:

- Set up Google Search Console:** These tools allow you to have a clearer picture of how your audience is finding your site and provide ways to troubleshoot and enhance its appearance within their respective search engines. Both are free and simple to set up and use.
- Set up Google Analytics:** Another free tool that gives you a better understanding of the user experience on your website. This, in turn, can give you the information you need to modify your website to improve rankings on Google's search engine.
- Install and configure an SEO plugin:** There are several plug-ins available that extend your ability to add SEO keywords in meta descriptions (text that is not visible on your website, but that further helps your appearance in web searches) as well as to manage content, browsers and software.
- Generate and submit a site map:** A site map is a file that provides information about all the pages, videos and other files on your website. By generating and submitting one, your site will load faster, provide a better user experience and receive a higher search result ranking.

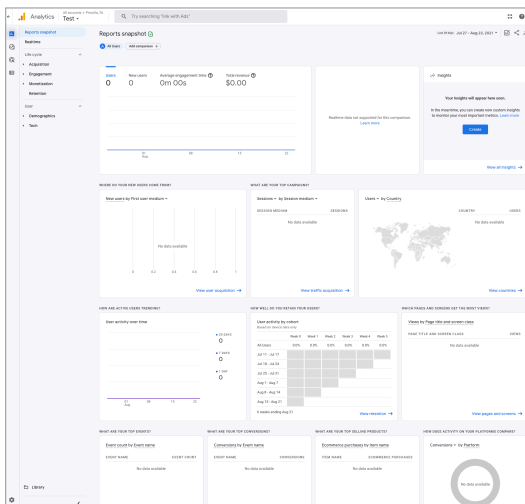




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The screenshot shows the 'About your business' section of the Google Analytics setup process. It includes a progress indicator with three steps: 'Account setup', 'Property setup', and 'About your business'. The 'Business information' section asks for the industry category and business size. Below that, it asks how the user intends to use Google Analytics with their business, with several checkboxes for different goals like measuring customer engagement, optimizing site/app experience, and increasing conversions.

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## KEYWORD RESEARCH

Researching and implementing the right keywords are important parts of search engine optimization. But before you begin, there's one thing to note.

It's crucial to understand the goals of both your business and your website. Understand who you want to reach and the brand message you want to build.

Once you're ready, start your keyword research:

- **Identify your competitors:** The first step to discovering unique, effective keywords involves identifying your competitors. Taking the time to research both direct and indirect competition can help you see where they are and where you need to be.
- **Conduct a keyword gap analysis:** A keyword gap analysis will help you discover terms and phrases your target audience is using, as well as keywords that are sending traffic to your competitors' sites instead of yours. This helps you learn what you're missing in your list of keywords.
- **Identify your main “money” keywords:** Your “money” or primary keywords are the ones that best represent your content while being most relevant to what your audience is searching for. Identifying these terms will require the most research but are most likely to yield the greatest results.



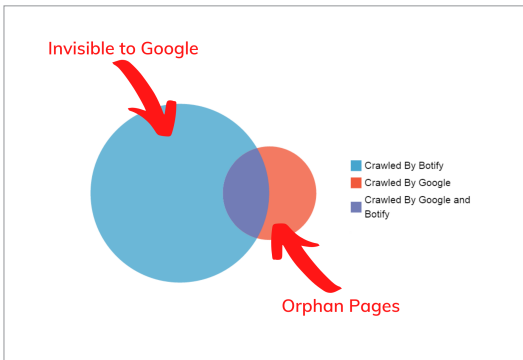
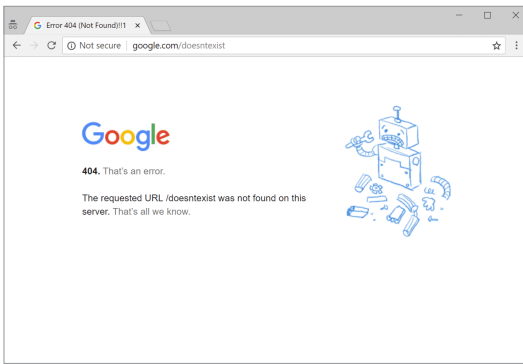
- **Find long-tail keyword variations:** Long-tail keywords consist of a combination of three or more words or phrases. While search volumes are typically lower with these keywords, the traffic to your site is generally more relevant.
- **Find question keywords:** When looking for information online, whether they're using a browser or a digital voice assistant, people often use questions. Question-based keywords are more specific and can result in better search engine rankings.
- **Analyze the intent of pages that rank:** A manual action report appears on your Google Search Console if a human reviewer at Google determines pages on your website are not compliant with their webmaster quality guidelines. These issues should be reviewed and resolved to avoid lower search rankings or omission from search results.
- **Create a keyword map:** A framework for the keywords you've chosen, a keyword map helps you know where to optimize, what content to add to your site and which new pages could attract more traffic.
- **Prioritize by search volume and keyword difficulty:** This process helps you create the ideal content strategy for your site. By determining things like how often a keyword is searched in a given month and how difficult the average site can rank it, you can zero in on what content to add.



Although it's a constantly moving target, making sure your website meets the technical requirements of current search engines is an important task. Here are some recommended tasks:

- **Leverage the “inspect URL” feature in the Google Search Console:** Errors can prevent your site from being indexed. The URL Inspection tool in the Google Search Console can find AMP errors, structured data errors and other issues within the indexed version of each page.
- **Ensure your site is mobile friendly:** With more people using phones and tablets to search websites than ever before, there are a number of things you should do to make sure your site is optimized for mobile SEO. This includes using readable text, avoiding uncommon software, repairing irrelevant cross-links, etc.
- **Check your site's loading speed:** Web pages that take over five seconds to load can negatively affect search engine rankings and lose up to 50% of users. Checking your loading speed using a number of available tools can help you know when to optimize files and settings.
- **Make sure you're using HTTPS:** An encrypted version of HTTP, this protocol protects you and your users from security breaches, improving site speed and increasing confidence in your site — all of which can help your rankings.
- **Find and fix crawl errors:** Crawl errors can be detected using the Google Search Console or Bing Webmaster Tools. Checking for them regularly and fixing any problems can ensure your site can be found by search engines.
- **Check page depth:** Your site's page depth has to do with how many clicks it requires to reach a secondary page from your home page. The more clicks, the “deeper” the page — and the lower your page rank. Using internal linking and breadcrumbs can reduce the depth of your pages.
- **Check for duplicate versions of your site:** An incorrectly set up web server or website can create duplicate content and bring down your search engine rankings. There are a number of tools available that can check for these issues so you can resolve them.





- **Identify and fix broken links:** Invalid links or links to web pages that have been deleted or removed can adversely impact the user experience and bring down your rankings. Google Analytics and other tools can help you check for broken links on a regular basis, allowing you to update or remove them.
- **Use an SEO-friendly URL structure:** There are a number of things you can do to create SEO-friendly URLs, but the primary ones are to ensure they are short and keyword-rich.
- **Find and fix orphaned pages:** Web pages that are not linked to or from anywhere else on your site, orphan pages slow down the indexing process. Finding and removing these pages or creating links to them on your site can resolve the issue.
- **Check canonical tags:** A canonical tag is a portion of your site's HTML code that identifies the master copy of a web page, preventing problems caused by duplicate content appearing elsewhere. Canonical tools can determine if a page has a canonical tag or not.
- **Add structured data:** Structured data marks up a website to allow search engines to more easily understand what it's about. There are a number of tools that will help you know where to place structured data for the best results.



There are many things you can do to improve your search engine rankings on individual web pages. These include:

- **Fix duplicate, missing and truncated title tags:** The title tag defines the title of an HTML document, displaying it for search engine results. When title tags are duplicated, missing or truncated, users are less likely to click on them. They can be fixed via your website's CMS or by altering the code.
- **Include current meta descriptions:** A meta description is a brief (150 – 160 character) summary that describes the content of each website page. This information is scanned for inclusion in search results, so it is vital for visibility. Ensure your main page has a meta description, and make it a standard practice for each new page to have a meta description.
- **Find and fix multiple H1 tags:** H1 or header tags are not visible on your web pages, but they play an important role in describing your content in a browser. Multiple H1 tags can cause your site to be identified as spam, so it's important to limit yourself to one per page.
- **Improve title, meta tags and page content:** All of these elements impact how your website performs in search rankings, so it's important to optimize them. That means making them unique, ensuring they're not too short or too long and that keywords used are accurate.
- **Optimize images for SEO:** Large images on your website can significantly increase load times. In addition, search engines are getting better at "reading" images. Optimizing both of these factors can improve your search engine rankings.
- **Organize topic clusters:** In-depth, quality web pages rank higher in search engine results. Creating a topic cluster allows you to cover a broader topic with multiple hyperlinked pages. Creating groups of related pages like this can help you boost traffic and search rankings.
- **Find and fix keyword cannibalization:** Keyword cannibalization happens when you target the same keyword across multiple pages on your site. It's important to find and use keywords that perform well in our industry, but it's smart to use variations of these keywords that are relevant to the content on each page.

- **Update outdated content:** Outdated content on your website can hamper your SEO efforts and hurt your brand. Regularly going through your content to ensure that it's relevant and current will provide the best user experience possible.
- **Improve content readability:** Better content readability ensures that the greatest number of users have a better experience with your site. Some keys are to use simple words (preferably less than three syllables), shorter sentences and paragraphs, fewer adjectives and adverbs, and a reader-friendly font.



Off-page SEO concerns anything you can do outside of your website that can improve search engine rankings. Here's where we recommend focusing your efforts:

- **Set up and optimize Google Business Profile:** Google My Business is an easy way to improve SEO in your local area. Your listing can be optimized by providing complete data, including keywords, keeping information (such as business hours and your address) accurate, adding photos, responding to customer reviews and so on.
  - » For more details on this, check out our **Google Business Profile Guide** to walk you through the process, step by step!
- **Analyze your competitors' link profiles:** A competitive link audit can help you determine what others might be doing to outrank you organically. It requires multiple steps and the use of one of several competitive analysis tools, but it can help you find smart ways to raise your rankings.
- **Conduct a link intersect analysis:** A link intersect analysis will help you identify relevant sites that are linked to your competitors but not to your website. Armed with this information, you can be more targeted in your link-building outreach efforts.
- **Earn backlinks:** Publishing content on other sites that links back to your page drives visibility. Offer guest blogging with industry-known websites as a way to begin.
- **Turn unlinked mentions into links:** If your brand is mentioned on other sites on the internet, you have a unique opportunity to improve your search rankings. In simple terms, the steps involve using a tool to scan for unlinked mentions of your brand, finding contact information for the site owner and asking them to link your brand mention to your site.