

Tecfreakz Technologies

www.tecfreakztech.com



CHECKLIST

MUST DO SEO CHECKLIST



1. Introduction

Search engine optimisation, or SEO as it is more commonly known, is one of the most important requirements for websites. Practically everyone will have used a search engine at some point in time to find information, products or services on websites.

SEO is no longer an optional part of your marketing plan, it is an essential element. This checklist will help you in creating a SEO friendly website.

2. Before You Start

To allow you to successfully measure the success of your SEO activities and how well your website is performing, it is important to put in place some form of analytics tool.

Thankfully, Google provide most of these tools for FREE such as: Google Analytics, Google Tag Manager and Google Search Console. Make sure you have set these up on your website before you commence your SEO activities.

Set up Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a great tool for tracking how many visitors your website is receiving, the time of day, which pages they are viewing, the bounce rate metrics and much more. For tracking SEO performance, it is a must have tool.

Set up Google Tag Manager

Google Tag Manager makes it much easier to implement tracking pixels on your website for tools such as Google Analytics, Facebook and many other platforms. It alleviates the need to manually edit the code on your website.

Set up Google Search Console

Many website owners are not aware of Google Search Console. It provides access to insights as to how Google see your website. Setting this up will give you fantastic data on how your website is performing in Google's eyes.

3. Technical SEO

Create An XML Sitemap & Submit To Google Search Console

This is a table of contents for your website and is normally named “sitemap.xml”. It helps search engines discover each of the pages on your website and to understand the site structure. It is best if your website can automatically create this file as you add or remove pages on your site. If this is not possible, there are a number of free tools which can create a static file which you can upload to your website – just remember to keep it up-to-date.

Create A Robots.txt File & Test It Is Accessible

This file instructs search engines how to access your site. Unless told otherwise, search engines will look at all the pages they can find. If you do not want certain pages to appear on the search engines, you can block them in the robots.txt file. You can even stop certain types of crawlers from accessing your site altogether or control the speed at which they crawl it. Once uploaded to your site, test that it is accessible at www.yoursite.com/robots.txt

Domains

If you own multiple domains and point them to your website, you could accidentally create issues for the search engines. It is best to pick one primary domain for your website. All other domains (and variations such as www & non-www) should be 301 redirected to the primary domain. Failure to do this can create duplicate content issues and end up with your site being penalised.

Test For Incorrectly Referenced Canonicals

Many content management systems or developers include a “canonical” reference in the code of each page. Sometimes these can be incorrectly referenced, for example, the primary domain is set as <https://www.yoursite.com>, but the canonical references <http://yoursite.com>. View the source code to check that the canonical tag (if applicable) is correct.

Check For Bad Redirects

Google (and other search engines) prefer the use of 301 permanent redirects to control redirecting users between old pages and new pages, or from one domain to another domain. Some content management systems (CMS's) or web developers will implement 303 or 302 redirects. Use tools such as <http://www.redirect-checker.org/> to check the redirect status.

Site Architecture

A carefully structured website split into sections with a clear hierarchy will help with SEO. It will help visitors easily navigate your site and help search engines organise your content. Planning and mapping out your website structure forces you to think about logical grouping of content, and how you want visitors to flow between pages. Check that your URLs match the site structure and contain keywords to help SEO.

Test Your Website's Speed

The speed of your website is an important SEO factor and usability factor for visitors. No one likes waiting on a slow website to load, visitors will lose patience and go elsewhere. Google also measure the speed of your website and it will affect your rankings if too slow. Use tools such as <https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/> to test each page on your site and aim to get them as fast as possible.

Test That Your Site Is Mobile Friendly

More and more users are viewing websites on mobile devices. Google have also placed more focus on how well websites appear on mobiles. If your website is not responsive and/or fails key mobile validation checks, then you are harming your SEO efforts. It is important to check all your pages using <https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly> to make sure they pass.

Check That Your Site Is Using SSL

Having a secure website which is protected by a SSL certificate is important. Google will give sites using SSL a ranking boost. Using an SSL is viewed as a trust signal, giving visitors more confidence. Chrome browser now presents a security warning to users before they even reach your site if you don't have a SSL. Check that your site is **only** available on an https connection <https://www.yoursite.com>

Test That You Have A Custom 404 Page

Create a custom 404 error page to help your visitors. Should they try to visit a web page which does not exist, display a 404 page that includes helpful links to key sections, or a site search facility so they can find other pages. Use a free checker such as <http://tools.seobook.com/server-header-checker/> to ensure the page returns a 404 code to help search engines.

Check Your Site Has Valid Error Pages

As well as a 404 error page, it is good practise to have additional pages to handle other errors. These include 400 (bad request), 403 (forbidden pages), 500 (server error) and 503 (service unavailable) error codes. Testing for these pages requires some technical knowledge of websites and hosting servers and may be best offered to an expert to check.

Test For Security Issues

Users do not want to visit websites which have been hacked. Hacked site may steal their details, infect their computer with viruses, or display unsavoury content or images. Google also do not want people to view sites which have been hacked, so they do not rank them highly. Test your website every 3 months to ensure it is secure. There are various online security websites that can do this, some are free, but for the better ones you will have to pay a fee.

Check For Crawl Errors, Page Errors And Coverage Issues

By using Google Search Console (GSC), Google will highlight any issues they discover with your website. Google provide the tool to help webmasters comply with their guidelines and to make it easier for users to find your site. Check GSC each month for any issues that Google have flagged up and correct these.

Test Your Site For Broken Links and Other Crawl Problems

As your website grows, it can be difficult to monitor for broken links between pages or crawl problems such as accidentally blocking search engines from reading page content. Check for broken internal (and external) links using tools such as <https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/>

4. On-Page SEO

Most people tend to think about on-page factors whenever SEO is discussed. However, the days of optimising just single parts of pages (e.g. meta tags, content, header tags) are a distant memory.

Search engines have started caring about “context” more than just the keywords on a page. You now need to consider how pages relate to each other within sections and navigation of the site.

You also need to consider how searches are evolving. Fewer searches are one or two keywords - they have been transitioning into “questions” for some time.

Today, people are asking more questions on Google and looking for websites to give the answers.

Perform Keyword & Questions Research

Each page on your website should appropriately focus on a keyword/topic. Do not create separate pages competing for the same keyword otherwise Google will decide which page should rank higher. Start by performing keyword research to find out what people are searching for, and importantly, the intent of those keywords. Check out Google Suggestions, People Also Ask and Related Searches for extra assistance.

Include Keywords In URLs

A webpage URL is the first thing which is created when you start a blank page. The URL is an opportunity to present a clean directory structure that includes keywords and context as to what the page is about. Check that your URL contains keywords and uses hyphens (-) instead of spaces between words. Shorter URLs tend to rank higher than long ones. They should also be less than 115 characters long and all lowercase.

Include Keywords In Page Title Tag In A Compelling Way

Page title tags are generally the first thing a user will see in a search results page. Your title tags have to stand out and compel them to click on your website. Including keywords that they searched for, helps with this. Improving the click-through-rate (CTR) for your website does improve SEO rankings. Keep the page titles between 30-65 characters long.

Include Keywords In The Meta Description & A Call To Action

As per the title tag, you need to have a custom and topically relevant and unique meta description for each page. The meta description should include keywords that users are searching for, as Google will bold these when displaying in the search results. Include a strong CTA, to encourage users to click through as this will help SEO. Check the meta description is between 70-155 characters long.

Optimise Heading Tags And Use Nested Headings

Heading tags break up content into readable sections. The H1 heading tag is the most important and should only be used once on a page. It also needs to be the first heading tag. Make sure you intertwine keywords into your heading tags in a suitable manner. Headings ideally will be properly nested H1 -> H2 -> H3 -> H4 and so on. Check that your website is not using heading tags for design purposes, as designers often use them for styling page layouts.

Optimise Your Body Content

The body copy will most likely be the biggest block of indexable content on a page. Place your most important content containing relevant keywords towards the top of the page. Emphasising, or bolding, key phrases make these words stand out for visitors and search engines. Your copy needs to tie into the “context” of the page - this is also referred to as latent semantic indexing (LSI). Overall, write content that flows for users, do not specifically write copy to satisfy search engines. Finally, Google prefer to see high quality unique content which is authoritative and engages visitors. Longer content of 1,500+ words will often out-perform shorter pages of 500 words.

Use Synonyms In Your Content

Search engines are continually becoming more intelligent and are gaining a clearer understanding of human language. Integrating natural language within your copy will improve its readability for users and help search engines understand the intent. This will also help the page rank for a wider range of related keywords.

Check For Duplicate Content

No one wants to read the same content over and over again. Google also don't want to show pages which have content shared across multiple sites. They will often only show the website which they deem to be the originator (and with the most authority) and penalise or de-rank those who plagiarise. Check that you are not using content from other websites, and that other sites haven't copied from you. There are tools such as <https://www.copyscape.com/> which can perform these checks.

Add Descriptive ALT Tags To Images

Whilst ALT tags are primarily there to help describe images used on your pages, search engines crawl these tags and it helps add to the context of the overall page. In addition, your images can be found on Google Image searches for the keywords you add to the ALT tag. Keep the ALT tag descriptive and do not "stuff" with lists of keywords. Tools such as Screaming Frog will find images which are missing ALT tags or tags which are too long.

Optimise Your Asset Filenames

As per ALT tags, how you name the file on your website can help search engines. When you upload PDF files, image files, video files etc. include keywords in the filenames to help SEO. For example, naming an image "seo-checklist.jpg" is better than "image001.jpg".

Include Keyword Optimised Anchor Text Links

Within the content on your pages, it is beneficial to include hyperlinks to other pages on your website (internal links) as well as, links to external authoritative websites which are relevant to the content. Make sure you include internal links with keywords in the anchor text that is relevant to the page you are linking to. Do not include 100's of hyperlinks on each page.

Include A Breadcrumb Trail On Pages

A breadcrumb on each page will help visitors to quickly understand where they are in your website. It also helps search engines understand the structure of the site. Google often include breadcrumb links on their search result pages, so breadcrumbs provide another opportunity to aid SEO. Check that your breadcrumbs have the correct schema.org markup.

Check If Your Website Uses Structured Data

Structured data helps build context. Using the appropriate mark-up for your site content can help search engines identify the subject matter of a page. Check to see if your website uses structured data for navigation elements, breadcrumbs, blog posts, authors etc. A list of valid schemas can be found here <https://schema.org/>.

Check That Your Pages Are Not Deemed Thin

Web pages which have a scare amount of content go against Google guidelines. Google want to show pages which are rich with content and satisfy a visitor's thirst for knowledge or answers. If your pages only contain a few paragraphs, or worse, no content, then Google will unlikely pay any attention to these pages and will not rank highly in the search results. If you have lots of "thin" pages, Google may penalise your site.

Check Your Page Layout For Top Heavy Adverts

Web pages which contain lots of adverts (sponsored, paid, advertorial ads etc) and make it difficult to read the actual content are disliked by Google. Check that your textural content, and associated images, is prominent and easy to read. Do not overpower your page with adverts, otherwise your site could be penalised by Google.

Check For Hidden Text

Hiding text on web pages is rarely done intentionally. Google comes down hard on sites that employ this tactic. However, sometime text becomes hidden by accident, such as appearing behind an image, being placed off-screen or ending up the same colour as a background by miscoded cascading style sheets (CSS). An example may be white text being placed on a white background, rendering it invisible to the human eye.

Include Fresh Content And Evergreen Content

Search engines and visitors love new content. As a user, if you visited a website several times and the content never changed, you would be unlikely to visit that site again. This is also the same for search engines. Likewise, content which is time-stamped and is from several years ago is less popular than content which never dates i.e. evergreen content. Try to write new fresh content frequently and if possible, not related to a time event so that it becomes evergreen.

5. Off-Page SEO

Links, aka backlinks, are a major ranking signal for search engines. They are seen as a voting system. Gaining better quality (not necessarily quantity) links from other sites back to your website gives your website a ranking boost.

The content on your website will determine if you gain links naturally from other websites. If you think about it, if your content is poorly written and is sub-standard, why would another website owner want to divert their visitors to your website via a link. Their reputation would be damaged.

That is why you have to produce and include amazing content on your site that no-one can get on another site.

In addition, there are other techniques which you can use to generate backlinks to your website. However, you should never pay a website owner to create a link back to your website. If Google discover this, you can expect an instant penalty.

Unfortunately, there are backlinks to your website which may be out-with your control. There is nothing stopping any website owner from creating a link to your site. In certain circumstances, this can have a negative effect on your rankings.

Checking backlinks in detail can be time consuming, however given its importance as a ranking factor, it is something you should do on a regular basis.

Check The Quantity Of Links To Your Site

Whilst the quantity of links is less important than the quality of links, the number of links will still have an effect on your SEO performance. For example, if your site only has ten backlinks, it is likely to rank lower than a site with 1,000 backlinks of similar quality. Check the number of links and linking domains in Google Search Console. If you have a low number, try to increase this. If you have an unusually high number, you should investigate why.

Analyse The Quality Of The Backlinks

This is important. Having poor low quality links pointing to your website can have a detrimental effect on rankings. Google state in their webmaster guidelines the type of sites that you don't want links from – and these should be avoided. Use tools such as <https://www.linkresearchtools.com/> and <https://ahrefs.com/> to evaluate the quality of backlinks. If you discover lots of poor links, you should consider using the Google disavow tool to clean up.

Check The Ratio Of Do Follow Versus No Follow Links

Backlinks are either classified as “do follow” or “no follow”. Do follow, or simply “follow” links, pass SEO value between those websites. Whereas, no follow links, signal to Google to ignore any SEO benefits. Too high a ratio of follow versus no follow can be a red flag and deemed unnatural, which can result in a penalty. Check the quantity and ratio of the links.

Check The Destination URL Of The Backlinks

As per follow and no follow links, the destination URL of any backlinks needs to be investigated. Other website owners are likely to link to your homepage or a particular blog post with valuable information. To help SEO, there needs to be a proportion of links to your top level pages as well as deeper pages within your site. Check to make sure there is a variation of your destination URLs.

Check The Variation Of Anchor Text

The text used in the anchor text of backlinks should also appear natural. They need to include a mixture of “brand” terms, website address and also “money” terms. Money terms are defined as the specific keywords that you wish to rank highly for.