

What is SEO?

In this lesson, we will look at improving our SEO rankings. But what is SEO? Search engine optimization refers to techniques that help you make your website rank higher in search engine results. The aim is, of course, to get more visitors to your site organically.

Search engines send bots to a site to crawl through it and find out what the content is about and where it links. They also check out what the images are about, test if the site loads quickly, and also investigate if the layout of a site is accessible and good for mobile devices. Once they are done crawling, bots figure out keywords from your site and then record them in the search engine database. So now, when anybody starts to search, search engines match a user's search query with the keywords in the database to recommend closely matched sites. Let's look at some tips that we can implement.

De-select the search engine visibility box

Firstly, make your way to Settings. Click on Reading and ensure that you have de-selected the search engine visibility box. If this box is ticked, it will discourage search engines from indexing the site, and we don't want that. This option is only used when a site is still being created.

Fresh content

The second thing to note is that search engines love sites with fresh content, so keep your site up to date with new content as much as possible. If your home page and other pages rarely change, it is advised to have a blog page or news page and ensure that you frequently post about your products, brand, clients, and various other topics.

Quality content

The third tip is to make sure you have quality content on your website. Google has published an E-A-T guideline, which basically says that search engines look at expertise, authority, and trustworthiness. So, let's first talk about expertise. Write about the content you are knowledgeable and passionate about. What about authority? If you have shown expertise, it will be viewed by search engines as authoritative if others link to your site, if people talk about it on social media, and if you link to reputable sites in your content. Lastly, the 'T' stands for trustworthiness. Make sure the information that you share is trustworthy and factual.

Here is an important question you can ask yourself. Is your content shareable? Things to consider: Is it funny? Is it maybe too long? Does it have good taste? Does it use plain language? Does it have a summary or too long, didn't read at the top? It basically comes down to ensuring your content is worth reading and sharing.

Keywords

Next, let's talk about keywords. Keywords and keyword phrases in your content make it easier for people to find your site via search engines. A well-optimized site speaks the same language as its audience, so to speak. We, therefore, need to know what folks are searching for and include those words or phrases on our pages and in our posts. Keyword research will help you know what keywords people search for when looking for similar sites. You can use free tools such as WordStream or Google Keyword Planner to find those keywords that you can use in your content.

The way you would go about finding keywords is to type the domain name of sites that are similar to yours. This will hint at what words people use to search for content on that site. Once you have identified these keywords, use them in your site's content. Search engines will prioritize what your content is titled when they decide on keywords. But you can also use them in excerpts, headings, and content. The way it is laid out here is generally the priority in which you want to use keywords. Remember to use keywords naturally and avoid keyword stuffing or overusing keywords, as this will damage your SEO.

Linking

Let's talk some more about linking. Search engines will travel through your links to understand your site structure and to look for more content. Link to other posts already on your site, as search engines consider pages linked multiple times more important. Also, remember to set external links to reputable sites with good E-A-T expertise, authority, and trustworthiness, as this will make your site more credible as well.

Metadata

The next topic that we want to discuss is metadata. Metadata are tags in your page content that are visible to search engines. It is hidden behind the scenes, but it gives search engines critical information about your site. You might not have known this, but meta descriptions are the information shown below each individual search result. WordPress automatically creates metadata, so it's not easy to edit directly. But most SEO plugins allow you to edit and modify the metadata to be more geared to your content. Usually, no more than two sentences. One of the things you can do is write an excerpt for a post, as WordPress uses these excerpts to create meta descriptions. It is advised to use your keywords and handwrite these excerpts; otherwise, it just takes the top paragraph from your content.

Site Speed

Next, site speed is essential. Search engines definitely look at site speed when ranking sites, so this is an important part of SEO. Here are a few considerations that will help you to improve your site speed. Does your host rank high concerning site speed? Does your host have caching enabled? Although, you can also use a caching plugin. Is your WordPress theme quick to load? Some very snazzy WordPress themes that use a lot of plugins can drastically change your site speed, so be careful. Have you optimized images and videos? Have you installed well-built

plugins? Do your theme and plugins work well together? You can investigate your site's speed using tools such as GTmetrix or PageSpeed Insights.

Image optimization

Image optimization is another piece of the SEO puzzle. Let's first look at a few steps that you can take before uploading images to your site. Choose a good file format, such as PNG, JPEG, or WebP. In this example, I'm using the open-source website Squoosh to change the file format for free. It also has some other settings worth exploring.

Secondly, scale the image dimensions. Images that are too large will be resized when they appear on people's browsers and will affect the loading speed of your site. So make sure you shrink the dimensions of very large images, as most monitors worldwide are no bigger than 1920 by 1080 pixels in size. Luckily, WordPress does make three different size variations when you upload an image, but that large image still takes up space on your server.

Number three, reduce the image file size. You want to reduce the file size of images without reducing the quality. You can use programs such as TinyPNG or also Squoosh. And lastly, rename the image file so that it explains what the image is about.

When an image has been uploaded to WordPress, it is advised to add alternative text or ALT text and a description of the image. Search engines place a high value on ALT text. They use this information to understand the context of an image, what the image is about, and the purpose of the image. Images should also have alt text for accessibility purposes. You also want to ensure that at least one of your images has your keyword or key phrase as part of the ALT tag.

Sitemap

The second last tip is about creating a sitemap. It is something search engines use. It is like a map or roadmap that helps search engines figure out where all content is on your website. Sitemaps don't boost search ranking, but they help search engines navigate the content on your site. Most SEO plugins will automatically generate a sitemap for your site, so it's not something you have to code if you're unable to.

Local SEO

Finally, let's talk about local SEO to optimize your site to show higher in local search results, especially if your customer base is primarily located in the same city or metropolitan area. There are a few things that you can do. Do some local SEO keyword research. Add your contact information in your footer or contact page, post localized content, and get local backlinks – meaning – get local sites to refer or link to your site.

Conclusion

All the best as you endeavor to improve your own SEO rankings, and remember to install and activate an SEO plugin that works best for you.