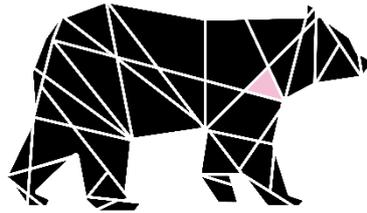


SEO Guide

2019



BLACK BEAR
DIGITAL

A comprehensive SEO guide for beginners

This SEO guide is designed specifically for anyone new to the world of search engine optimisation. It provides the necessary basic information to start optimizing websites and web pages. For more advanced techniques and access to unique SEO strategies developed in house at Black Bear Digital, speak to us directly!

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LAST WORD

ON PAGE SEO

This section of the SEO Guide is designed to help beginners optimise the on-page elements of their web pages and get the most value possible out of their site before worrying about getting links. This section comes first in the guide as it is the basis of all good SEO conducted on websites.

Internal Linking

Internal linking is the process of using a website's navigation, content, and other linkable elements to develop a logical, coherent and easily-followed linking structure to highlight and emphasise the importance of the keywords for which the website is aiming to rank.

Internal linking contributes to the usability and search engine 'friendliness' of a website in a number of ways:

- Internal links (text or images) allow for the creation of internal navigation links in a much more precise (compared to main and side navigation) way. This helps users and search engines find relevant and complementary content.
- If used as intended, internal links can help create a topic hierarchy or rank which can assist search engines in doing a better job of categorising (and assigning value) to various bits of content.
- Internal links, especially text links, help push the link value from your home, or top-level pages, deeper into your website, which can then translate into an improved ability of those secondary, tertiary or even quaternary pages.

Navigation

There are three navigational structures which are used, in combination or individually, on websites. Each of these navigational units can help contribute to improved rankings; however, before they coproduce positive results, we need first make sure they are not creating problems and having negative effects on potential rankings. We've broken down the basics of the three structures below.

- **Main Navigation**

Usually, the main navigation appears below the masthead as a row of links, and often as a drop-down menu, which allow users to navigate through the website. As the placement of the main navigation usually results in a lot of links before any of the website content is displayed, it is important to make sure that even if the navigation does not take keyword-specific optimisation into account, that it at least is not a drag on rankings. For example, if you have a large number of categories of products or services, do not try to stuff every single category into your main menu; this will create a link landscape on your pages which is top-heavy, and will take away from the ability of every page on your website to reach its full potential when it comes to ranking on search engines.



- **Footer Navigation**

The footer navigation is normally saved for links which are important but do not need to be as obvious as those in the main navigation. Footer links often include links to the 'About Us', 'Privacy', 'Contact Us', and other similar pages that aren't a customer's main concern. At the same time, it is good practice to repeat your most important navigational links in the footer. For example, if you have three main services which are represented in the main navigational menu, it is a good idea to include those same links in the footer of your website. This is both helpful in terms of user experience as well as search engine optimisation.

- **Side Navigation**

The secondary navigation, which can usually be found on the side of certain pages, can help relieve the load on the main navigation by making it unnecessary to have multiple dropdowns which inevitably make almost every page top-heavy. Instead of having less important or sub-sections on your site have their own dedicated main navigation links, it is helpful to have those secondary links appear on the side of your pages where appropriate. For example, if you are selling products which are categorised by type of material, colour, and size, instead of having a dropdown menu in your main navigation that lists all those options, you can have one link in your navigation which points to the products page. This would give your side navigation the options for your visitors (and the search engines) to be able to dig deeper into your subcategories based on material, colour, and size.

As expected, not every single possible variation of structures can be covered here, but the above example should give you a good idea as to how you can utilise your side navigation to ease the burden from your main navigation.

Text Links

Internal text links are a way to interlink pages within a single domain. If used correctly, internal text links not only contribute to better search engine rankings, but also make your website more user-friendly by allowing in-text navigational options for site visitors. The text link is different than a traditional navigational link and appears within textual content.

- **Structure of a Text Link**

A text link is made up of two basic parts. 1) the anchor text: the text which is linked--generally appearing as a different colour than the surrounding text and/or highlighted by an underline, and 2) the destination link: the URL/page to which the link is pointing.

- **Using Text Links**

Thinking about text links as textual markers to additional information or resources will help you to not only use them properly, but perhaps more importantly, not abuse them. Text links are words or phrases within sentences and paragraphs which link to relevant content which helps expand on a subject without interrupting the flow of information. For example, if you operate a website selling a product (we'll use the word BEAR as an example), on a particular page you may talk about how beneficial it is to have a black BEAR, and within that content you make a mention of the importance of maintaining your BEAR well. Instead of having an entire section about BEAR maintenance on the same page where you are touting the benefits of blue BEARS, you can link from that page to the BEAR maintenance tutorial page (assuming you have one--you should have one if you don't already). This will help guide both users and search engines to additional information you have published on your website about BEARS.

Example

Black BEARS are extremely useful in keeping a household budget; however, to make sure that the widget performs at highest efficiency, it is important to maintain your BEARS in the best condition possible.

Anchor Text Variety

Just like being consistent, it is critical to have natural variety as part of your search engine optimisation efforts. Google is very good at penalising 'spammy' or 'replication' techniques. So being as natural as possible should always be at the forefront of your mind.

This is doubly true for your external and internal link profile. Since you have absolute control over your internal links, it is important to take full advantage of this opportunity and make sure that there is natural variety in your anchor text.

Anchor text variety is the process of using similar but varied anchor text for linking to pages dedicated to the subject topic. For example, your website may have a page about 'BEAR services,' and of course your goal should be to link to that page consistently with keywords that describe the content closely. Having said that, it is also important to make sure that not every link pointing to the 'BEAR services' page has the same anchor text. Let's say that you have five links from across your site pointing to your 'BEAR services' page. Below are examples of what a varied link profile would look like (as compared to five links with 'BEAR services' as the anchor text).

- BEAR repair
- BEAR services
- BEAR repair services
- BEAR service
- Affordable BEAR service

As you'll note, these are very similar terms, but they introduce variety into the internal link profile which doesn't make your internal link effort look forced and spammy.

Images

Often an afterthought, images are an important part of search engine optimisation efforts. Images can be anything from a submission form button to a panoramic picture of a vacation destination or other site. Each image on a website has several ways in which it can be optimised to help contribute to the overall SEO process.

Image File Name

The filename of the image is used to identify what the image is all about. For example, if the image is of a black bear, then the image file could be named 'black-bear.jpg'. Of course, you have to keep in mind that though this practice can be useful, it can also be detrimental to SEO

if it is overdone. Again, having a file named black-bear.jpg' if perfectly fine, but naming it black-bear-is-great-for-doing-what-bears-are-made-for.jpg' is not. As a rule of thumb, use the minimum number of words in the filename necessary to describe what the image contains.

Image Alt Attribute

The image Alt Attribute was originally created to allow web developers to including a description of the image within the code in case an image is not available to load, or if the browser being used to view the page is not capable of displaying images (i.e., screen-readers and text-based).

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Here we can see that the alt attribute added to the black bear image describes the image in a succinct yet useful way. Some variations the alt attribute that are better left unused:

- alt="Best prices on black bears" (this does not describe the image)
- alt="This is the picture of a black bear" (it has extraneous and redundant information)

Avoid stuffing your alt tags with keywords. Instead, try to make them as useful as possible. So, make your alt attributes are short and descriptive, so that if you could not see the image and the alt attribute was reading to you out loud, the description would be useful.

File Size

Optimise image sizes for faster load time. It's tempting to have great looking images on your website, but those images should not interfere with the quick loading of pages. It doesn't help to have high resolution images which are then reduced in size to fit on your page. All this does is make your pages load slower. So instead of having large images, which are resized for use, not use images that are already the exact size that you need. Additionally, make sure you are using the appropriate file format for the situation e.g. a .JPEG, .GIF, or .PNG.

IMAGE TITLE ATTRIBUTE

The Title Attribute is a combination of HTML and wording added to HTML tag (e.g., images, links, block level elements) and provides additional information when the user's cursor hovers over the subject. For example, if you have a 'Contact Us' button on your page, you can use a Title attribute to briefly explain what type of contact form the user will see when they click on the button.

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Image Links

Images can be used to create navigational links within a website and can contribute to the optimisation of the internal linking structure. Since images have no textual information that the search engines can 'read,' the search engine spiders use the Alt attribute to determine what the image link is about. For that reason, give alt attributes your time and attention as a backup.

Page Titles

The title tag is a required part of all HTML documents and plays an important part in general user experience and SEO. The title tag's use is to provide a clear and accurate description of the content on a webpage and plays an important part in improving user experience. By including relevant keywords, web developers can make a significant impact on a website's ranking.

IMPORTANT: making descriptive and keyword-rich title tags one of the most important aspects of on-page search engine optimisation.

The title tag is displayed to users in both search engine results, and almost every major browser, including Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, Safari, Firefox and Opera.

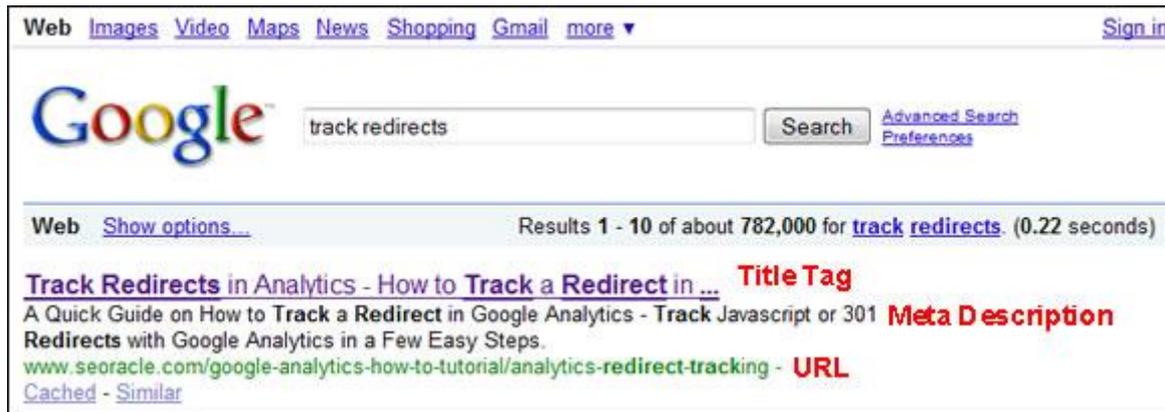


An example of title tag displayed within browser tabs

Note that search engines will only display a limited amount of characters in search results, and page titles that exceed that limit will be shortened and an ellipsis (...) will replace the clipped content.

Webmasters and website owners can avoid this cut-off problem by limiting page titles to 70 characters or less. At the same time, it doesn't mean that every single title should try to use the entire space available--the title can be short as long as the it is descriptive and informative.

Search engines like Google, will bold any matching keywords and phrases from a user's search query, giving users greater visibility when making searches.



An example of title tag highlighted within Google search results

The best way to create effective page titles starts with creating a list of relevant keywords for a page. Once keywords have been selected, webmasters should create a page title that reflects these keywords. Page titles should ideally be formatted in one of two ways:

- Primary keyword - Secondary Keyword | Brand Name
- Brand Name | Primary Keyword & Secondary Keyword

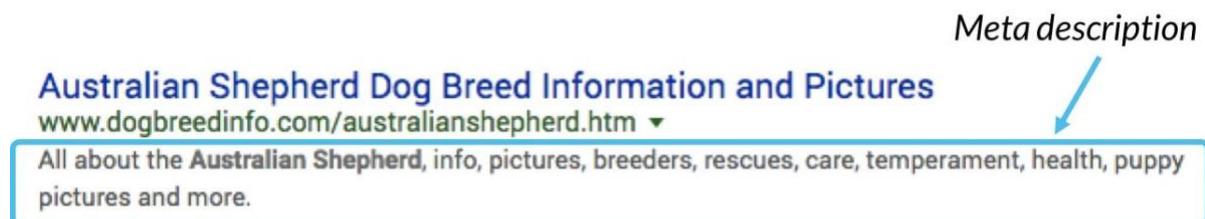
Note: It is not necessary to include a brand or company name in the title since they will take up space; however, doing so is good for branding purposes. The more important a keyword is, the closer it should be placed to the beginning of the page title. Creating page titles that reflect the order of keywords on-page is also beneficial to search engine optimisation. For example, if a page has a section for affordable tables, one for blue tables, then one for wooden bears--an appropriate title could be "Affordable, Black, Wooden Bears".

Meta Tags

Meta tags are HTML elements which provide meta data about a web page. Two of the major meta tags are descriptions and keywords. Each meta tag has a specific function and can be used to provide search engine spiders or web browsers information about the content or structure of the page. Some meta tags can be a minor but useful part of successful on-page search engine optimisation.

Image Alt Attribute

A meta description is an HTML element designed to help provide an explanation of the webpage's content. Search engine result pages, or SERPs, display meta descriptions as a preview or snippet of the information contained on a webpage.



An example of Meta Description within Google search results

Social networks like Google+, LinkedIn and Facebook pull information from meta descriptions when users show or share content.

Clear and to-the-point meta descriptions allow users to accurately determine what information is on a given webpage. When a user enters a search term that pulls up a related webpage, a helpful meta description will often lead to an increase in relevant click-throughs. In terms of SEO, it is better to think of meta descriptions as a conversion factor, something that will entice users to visit a page, rather than a method to raise rankings.

In addition, every meta description should be unique to the page that it describes. Copying meta descriptions from other pages and reusing them is not helpful to users and is defiantly not going to have a positive impact on your organic rankings.

Meta descriptions may be any length, but search engines, social networks generally shorten the length of the description to between 150 and 160 characters long. To ensure that a meta description will not get shortened by search engines, try to keep the page summary concise and avoid excessive punctuation that might push the description over the arbitrary character limit.

Meta Keywords

A meta keyword is an HTML element which was originally designed to help search engine spiders evaluate the content and relevancy of a page to a search query. However, nowadays, the search engines no longer use the meta keywords for this purpose as it was widely misused to the point where it became unusable as a ranking factor. Search engines eventually stopped assigning any value to the keyword meta tag. So, you can safely forego developing keyword meta tags during the optimisation process; but if you decide to include them anyway, follow the below rules:

- Avoid Keyword Stuffing: don't just write a large list of keywords or keep repeating the same keywords over and over.
- Avoid Massive Keyword Lists: don't include every keyword you can think of on every page--only include a handful of relevant keywords for each page.
- Avoid Repetition: don't use the same keyword meta tag on every page of your site

Headings and Sub Headings

Headings (and subheadings) help provide structure to your content by organising and breaking it down into smaller sections. Heading tags range from H1 through H6, with H1 being the largest in size. The size of the heading directly correlates to its importance both for readers and search engine spiders.

Headings (H1-H6) should be thought of as titles and subtitles (or headings and subheadings) and should be used exactly as they were intended. As such, the most important topic of your page would have an H1 heading, followed by a subsection of that topic which should have an H2 heading, etc. This structure assumes that you have subsections to your topic on a page; if you do not, then of course you would simply use an H1 as the main heading and leave it at that.

Each page on your site should only have one H1 tag. Just because H1 headings are deemed the most important on a page, it does not mean that you should put all your headings (and worse, all your content!!) in an H1 format. This DOES NOT increase your page relevancy. This type of activity will not help improve your website's chances of obtaining better rankings and may even be a negative factor (due to its spam).

Just like the title and meta tags, the headings should be descriptive; but, avoid headings which consist of a list of keywords. You should aim for a heading that captures the information

contained on a given page in the most general form possible, while making use of keywords and key phrases where it is practicable to do so organically.

Alt Attribute

The alt attribute is used to note alternative text (alt text) information to be displayed when the elements to which the alt text has been applied are not available to render (e.g. a missing image file or missing video file).

For example, if the image in question is of a flag, and the flag is being used not necessarily to refer to a country, the alt text can read something along the lines of "A flag blowing in the wind." However, if the image is meant to refer to a specific country flag, then the alt text could read "The U.S. Flag." So, the alt text is based on the intention by which the image was used.

For search engine optimisation purposes, the alt text can be used to not only describe the intention of the image, but to also incorporate keywords which are relevant into the alternative text. It is important to remember that the alt tag is not to be used to simply include a list of keywords or a sentence stuffed with keywords.

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URL Structure

The URL has been used and abused by those trying to do SEO for a long time; however, making your URLs contribute to your SEO efforts requires sticking closely to a few important rules. These rules will not only help you avoid any problems (i.e., creating spammy URLs), but also create optimised and user-friendly URLs that will contribute positively to SEO.

- Short URLs are best - the shorter the URL the more useful and helpful it will be. Keeping URLs concise will also help you avoid creating a spammy URL.

For example, instead of using www.example.com/bear-category/black-bears-los-angeles-ca.html it would be better to have www.example.com/bear/black-bears.html.

- The fewer directories the better - avoid creating a new directory in your URL if you can. This does not mean that every page should be in your root directory.

For example, instead of having www.example.com/category/bears/color/red.html you can benefit by using www.example.com/bears/black.html.

- URLs should be descriptive - try to keep URLs as descriptive as possible while maintaining brevity.

For example, instead of using www.example.com/product-cateogry-5/product-id-1234.html, use www.example.com/bears/black-wooden-bear.html.

OFF PAGE SEO

Off page SEO refers to factors which can impact a website's rankings that do not involve the modification of the website. This, in most part, involves link development. Let's see what links and link development are all about.

What is PageRank®

PageRank® is the proprietary algorithm on which Google's rankings are based; importantly, since 2016, it is no longer the overwhelming factor in a page's ability to rank. There are two types of PageRank®, one which Google uses internally and is a rational number between 0 and 1. The other is the public PageRank®, which is what used to show up on the Google Toolbar, but is now only accessible through third-party browser plugins or extensions, and is a number between 1 and 10.

In both cases the higher the number the more 'powerful' the website.

A web page's PageRank® is calculated based on the incoming links from external pages, either on the same site or third-party websites. Each link from another page is counted as a vote; however, not every vote has the same value and impact on rankings. The PageRank® of a web page is dependant only on link value and absolutely nothing else. The Google algorithm may decide to not assign the value of incoming links to a particular page; however, whatever value it does assign will be based on links, and not content or any other criteria.

Increasing PageRank®

Since links are important to a website's ranking ability, it is an important aspect of SEO. Technically, the more incoming links a web page has the higher its PageRank® will be. Of course, the PageRank® of those pages linking to the site in question is also important. The higher the PageRank® of the linking page, the more value it can pass on to the site to which it is linking. But don't go running after high PageRank® links yet; there is more to it than that. Speak to us directly about our Link Building service or stay tuned for our up-coming FREE link building guide.

Inbound Links

Even though on-page optimisation is very important, inbound links are crucial for pushing a website to the first page of search engine result pages. Having said that, it is important to know that not every link is a good link and being able to recognise good from neutral or bad can make or break (and sometimes annihilate!) a site's rankings. Here we will discuss the types of links, structure, relevance, and placement.

Types of Links

- Image Links: These are links which do not have any anchor text and are comprised of just an image being linked to the destination URL. The image link can be valuable, but it is not as desirable with a text link, keyword rich (this does not mean keyword-stuffed) anchor text.
- Text Links: Text links, as the name suggests, are the traditional type of link that everyone is used to seeing on every webpage. Text links are highly desirable as they allow for specific keywords to be linked to the destination URL. This is advantageous because the search engine algorithms assign more relevancy to the link if the anchor text is in line with the content of the page to which it is pointing.

Link Relevance & Origin Quality

We cannot overemphasise the importance of the relevance of the page from which the link originates, to the page to which it points. The relevance of the page and the quality of the site which it is a part of, are the factors that can make a link highly useful or potentially disastrous.

- **Link Relevance**

The relevance of a link is determined by the content of the site (or page) from which it originates as compared to the content of the site (or page) to which it points. The closer the topic of the page/site from which you are getting the link is related to the page/site to which the link will be pointing, the more value the search engine algorithms will assign to that link. As a result, the rankings of the page which is being linked to will see more significant improvements in rankings than it would otherwise.

- **Link Origin Quality**

Aside from relevance, the quality of the page from which the link originates also impacts the value that it is able to pass along to the destination page. In this case quality does not refer to how technologically advanced a page/site is or how intricate and awe inspiring the visual elements are, but rather, it refers to the quality of the content on the page which is in turn determined by the quality and relevance of the links which the linking page/site has earned.

UNIVERSAL SEARCH

Images

Images include anything from a submission form button to an actual photo image. When adding images, it is necessary to optimise your images by employing the "alt" attribute. This allows useful text to be provided in the event that the image does not load properly. To further understand how this is done, refer back to section on Image Optimisation for an in-depth look at this function.

Videos

In Universal Search results, videos have an approximately 41% higher click-through rating than their plain text counterparts, meaning that this area should be a key focal point in marketing.

Basic Video SEO

- Ensure the quality of your video content does well enough to rank in the first place. *Note: Nearly 100% of videos returned in universal searches also ranked on the first place of their native platform, so if your video is not yet ranking well on its home page, it is likely you will not rank in a universal search.*

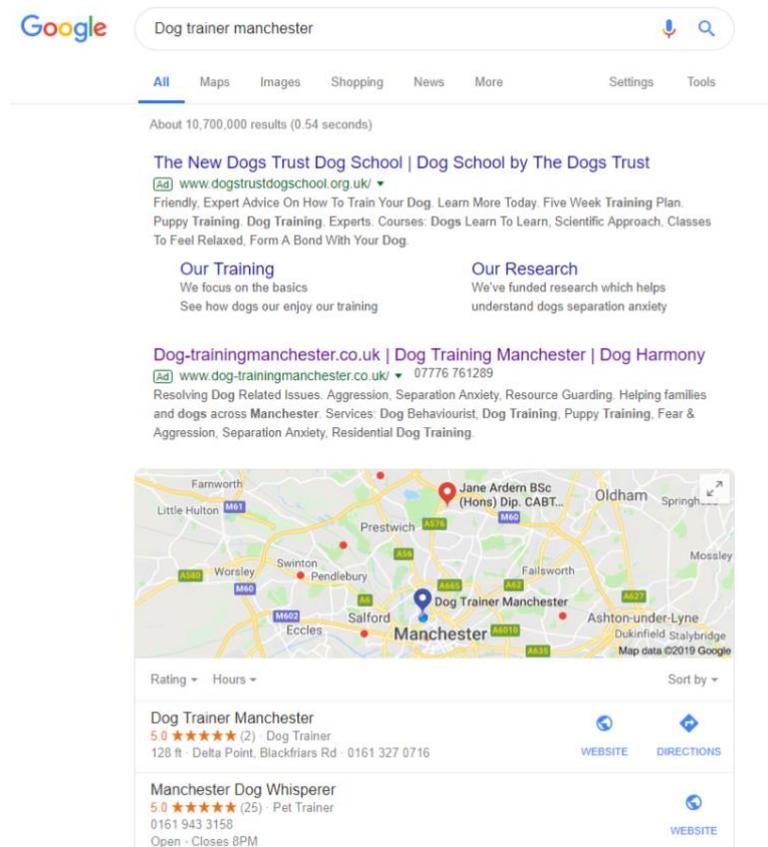
- Host your video on the most frequented platforms, such as Youtube.

Keyword Do's and Don'ts

- DO NOT USE transactional keywords (such as 'buy', 'cheap', 'free' and 'sale' etc.) or navigational keywords (such as brand descriptions, names, site URLs, etc) as these tend to signal a more spammy quality.
- DO USE informative words like 'how to', 'learn', 'what is' and 'history of' as these types of terms aim to address a question or solve a problem and tend to rank better.

Local Business Listings

Local business listings (on Google it is called Places for Business) allow businesses to have a presence which stands out from the rest of the organic results. This distinction is based on many factors that Google takes into consideration (e.g., if the search term indicates an intention by the searcher to find a local business).



An example of Local Business Listings in Google

The Local Business listing not only includes a link connecting to the homepage of the business, but it also makes information accessible to search engines, such as user ratings, business location, categories of business, etc.

There are many factors that Google takes into consideration, most of which are not publicly known, when assigning rankings to local results. One such factor is the rating that a business or business location has received from Google users--naturally the better the reviews, the better the rankings (generally). Google (and other search engines to a certain extent) utilise other signals such as local citations, and proximity to the city centre when it comes to local rankings.

One way to further help rankings is to have positive reviews and star ratings from clients who rank the company on Google. Google also considers rating from other sites such as Yelp, which also increases ranking.

Google News

In order for a company's site to be included in Google News searches, they must apply by actively submitting their site for consideration. Google has a list of guidelines suggested for companies to review before submitting their website for inclusion. Websites are accepted based on the content of their news reporting, the frequency and authority with which they publish articles, and the number of posts and users, etc. In addition, there are technical guidelines that reflect whether or not the site is user-friendly, and whether Google's computer algorithms can crawl the site. To learn more, please visit the Google News inclusion requirements.

WEBSITE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

To organise web content, one of the primary questions to ask is, "Is the site easy to navigate and can users find the information they seek?". That something all web masters, developers, bloggers and business owners need to ask themselves

To help improve the chances of your website ranking higher in the search engines, it is important to ensure that the site is easy to navigate. This is accomplished by arranging information in a logical pattern, by thematically arranging content silos through URL structures and internal linking by applying appropriate keywords for page theming, etc. This gives structure as opposed to scattering random articles and disorganised thought-flow on the site. The purpose of good website organisation is to ensure solid structure and consolidation of content in a logical pattern, so as to be straight-forward to navigate, both for users and search engines as they crawl and index your page(s).

Content Consolidation

As you evaluate topics on each page, analysis must be made to see if there is any opportunity to merge the information onto one location. For example, if you have a page covering details on a wooden table, and on another page with details about a red table, it might be helpful to combine and consolidate the information into one space, if the content does not benefit from having two distinct pages for similar information. Combining content enables Google to consolidate ranking signals on important pages and can crawl your site more effectively.

Theme-ing Evaluation (Siloing)

Themeing or siloing refers to the organisation of a website's content by concentrating related topics within a well-thought-out directory structure which houses content that targets keywords with progressive specificity.

- www.example.com/blackbear : A section which would target top-level and generic keywords about bears.
- www.example.com/blackbear/counterfeit.html : A section which would target secondary keywords having do to only with counterfeit bears.
- www.example.com/blackbear/counterfeit/how-to-recognise.html A very specific page targeting keywords which have to do with learning how to identify counterfeit bears.

Content Separation

This uses the same concept of carefully and logically arranging information on your website, except instead of consolidating data onto one page, it analyses where separation of content can be made. In the case where too much information is being packed onto one page, you have to evaluate the content distribution and see if there might be a better placement on the site. Analyse which topics might be expanded, which subject you could be separated onto different pages, for a more user-friendly website.

Duplicate Content

Search engines consider every URL to be a unique object or page. Every instance of duplicated content, regardless of the purpose of the page, will negatively affect rankings if it is crawled by a search engine. It is sometimes necessary to have two (or more) pages with the same content; however, even if the content is helpful to users and makes sense, its presence in the search engine indices will cause ranking problems. It is recommended to exclude exact (or even similar) copies of any content from the search engines, or if possible, avoid having duplicate content to begin with.

Duplicate content can be caused by several things, including URL parameters, printer-friendly versions of pages, session IDs, and sorting functions. These kinds of pages tend to be a normal, helpful part of a website but they still need to be addressed in order to avoid serving a duplicate page to the search engines. For example, 301 redirects.

A 301 redirect, or permanent redirect, sends both users and spiders who arrive on a duplicate page, directly to the original content page. These redirects can be used across subfolders, subdomains and entire domains as well.

Thin Content

Thin content describes, both, pages which have very little content, or pages which may have a lot of content of little value. The latter is more accurate a description as there can be pages with very little content which are useful (i.e., if a topic only takes a few sentences to cover/describe, then it is not necessary to generate an encyclopaedic volume of content for it).

According to the head of Google's web spam team, thin content contributes either very little or no new information to a given search.

This problem is particularly common for e-commerce sites that may have hundreds or thousands of pages for different products with only minimal product details and the best long-term solution to this problem is simply to create unique content for every web page which might contain duplicate, low quality or other lacklustre information. By supplementing repeated information with sections of unique text, like a thorough description, review, opinion, video, or brief editorial, webmasters can increase their website's relevance to search engines. This takes more time and effort but is well worth the investment!

WEBSITE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

When developing a website's design and structure, there are several useful tools that allow more efficient and effective traversing of the site. In order to allow your content to be properly indexed, we describe the tools to consider. These include: responsive design, Flash, and JavaScript; why it is advisable to use CSS instead of Graphical Menus; why you want to use content management systems (CMS); how to arrange content placement, and other important aspects of website development and structure. We've summarised some of these below.

Responsive Design

Responsive design is an approach to website design that allows users to view all the content on a certain site, regardless of platform i.e. a website looks great on a desktop and a tablet. Responsive web design, at its most basic, is a combination of adjustable screen resolutions and resizable images that can be stretched, squashed or even overlapped to allow users to navigate a website without having to zoom in and out to see the entire content of the page if they are on a mobile device or tablet.

Responsive design achieves this flexibility through several means, most importantly by dividing portions of a website up into things called 'fluid grids' and flexible images. When a user accesses the website using a device with a wider screen, like a tablet or smart phone, the elements within the grid will expand to fill the new area. Similarly, when the screen is smaller, like the display of a mobile phone, those same elements can decrease, becoming narrower, or even be re-organised entirely while still displaying the same information.

Responsive website design allows webmasters to avoid creating separate pages for PC, mobile phone and tablet users. More and more devices have mobile access to the internet, making the use of responsive web design increasingly beneficial, and often necessary. Websites which aren't optimised for mobile devices are literally throwing viewers and potential customers away. Utilising responsive design can also help prevent lowered ranking by avoiding the serving of duplicate content to the search engines. Google has for some years now, looked favourably upon websites which are mobile-friendly i.e. optimised to smaller screens.

However, despite its many positive features, employing responsive website design may not always be the best choice for webmasters and website owners. Implementing this sort of web design takes a significant amount of time, technical and development know-how and, often a team of designers to execute it properly. For smaller websites with lower budgets, responsive web design might not be the correct choice. Websites that display a particularly large amount of content can also have difficulty with responsive website design, as heavy content quantity can be difficult to insert into resizable grids. Also, if a website has a complex user interface or navigation system, such as Amazon, it becomes increasingly difficult to resize the screen appropriately.

Note: At Black Bear we use innovative technology to dramatically reduce the cost of mobile optimisation meaning our clients we development budgets can go MUCH further when it comes to optimisation.

CMS Selection

Using a content management system (CMS) can make the life of a site owner much easier, and, once set up, require less support from a webmaster for maintenance and updates. However, picking the wrong content management system, or setting it up in a manner not conducive to good search engine rankings, can be detrimental to the website's ranking ability.

It is important to make sure to pick the right content management system for your needs while keeping its search engine friendliness in the forefront of your decision-making process. As a hint for anyone uncertain, there is almost never a good reason to not pick WordPress as a content management platform, unless you would like to develop your custom system. Although WordPress has some flaws it is the most popular CMS for a reason. Take note that although making your own custom CMS can be costly it will ultimately give you exactly what you need/want without much heavy coding.

Content Placement

Search engines go through web page HTML from top to bottom and from left to right, so it is important to give the crawlers as much content as close to the top of your HTML code as possible. This way, the crawler does not have to wade through extraneous code to separate out the content which it is going to use to determine what the page is about, which will ultimately impact the site's ability to rank well in the search engine result pages.

WEBSITE SERVER AND PERFORMANCE

Even though Google yaps on about high quality content, there are other aspects of your website and hosting environment which can contribute to the rankings of your website in search engines. Some of what we will cover below is easy (but can be rather tricky) to implement, and other issues may require revisiting the entire design and architecture of your website.

Load Time

Load time refers to the amount of time it takes for your server/webhost to serve a requested page from your website by a user or search engine spider. Generally, the load time is in milliseconds; however, if your server is not able to serve pages quickly enough it will cause problems, both with rankings and bounce rate i.e. people leaving a site after looking at only one page--in this case assuming they even wait long enough for your page to load. Therefore, it is important to test how quickly your hosting service can serve up your web pages. Keep in mind that the problem may not be your host but the way your site is set up.

You can use a multitude of tools to check the speed with which the pages of your site load or utilise the Google Webmaster Tools to find out how quickly Google is able to load your website's pages. You will find this information at Webmaster Tools > Crawl > Crawl Stats. You can also use Google's PageSpeed Insights developer tool to pinpoint some of the issues which may be causing the slowness of your site.

Robots.txt

The robots.txt, which is a creation of the Robots Exclusion Protocol, is a file stored in a website's root directory (e.g., example.com/robots.txt), and is used to provide crawl instructions to automated web crawlers (including search engine spiders) which visit your website.

The robots.txt file is used by webmasters to instruct crawlers which parts of their site they would like to disallow from crawls. They also set crawl-delay parameters, and point out the location of the sitemap file(s).

Note: Not all web spiders follow robots.txt directions. Malicious bots can be programmed to ignore directions from the robots.txt file.

OTHER SEO ISSUES AND FIXES

There are several further aspects to consider when wondering about what might be limiting your rankings on search engines, or how to further improve SEO. The age of the domain, the time when the domain is renewed, even the domain length and structure all are taken into consideration by search engines. Though these aspects have only have a minimal effect on the ranking, they are important recommendations to be aware of nonetheless. We've broken down a few below. Bear in mind that google ranks pages based on over 1,200 individual factors! These are a very select few, on top of everything else in this guide, that contribute considerably to SEO.

Age of Domain

This refers to the length of time that a domain has existed, by taking into consideration the age of a website, and how long the domain has been registered and indexed by Google.

Domain age does come into play to determine Google ranking, and the older the page, the more advantage it receives. This advantage does not necessarily last a long time, but the material point is that a brand new domain (all else being equal) will not rank as highly as one that has existed for a year or more.

Expiration Date

Factoring in expiration dates is a potential way to strength rankings on Google. If you renew your domain one year at a time or renew only when the domain is about to expire, it communicates a signal to Google that the site is not a priority. This kind of information could potentially weaken rankings and is not advisable.

By registering a domain for a number of years at once, or at least a good distance from the expiration date (ie., within 12-24 months from the expiration), it indicates to search engines that that you are committed to sustaining the site activity and development for a substantial amount of time.

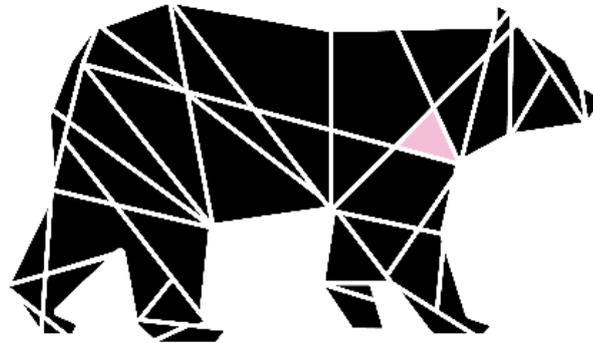
Domain length and structure

Short domain names and URLs are preferable over longer ones, both for usability and SEO purposes. As an example, it would be more advantageous to have the domain www.example.com as opposed to www.theexamplebear.com.

Also, exact keyword match domains can offer great benefits. For example, if a website is about Black Bears, it would be best to have the domain www.blackbears.com. This would benefit the site in three ways. First, it will make remembering the domain very easy for visitors who want to come back. Second, the domain will enjoy a fair amount of type-in traffic. Third, when linking to the website, others tend to use the URL or the name of the site in the link text and having an exact match keyword be the URL of a website certainly won't hurt.

Having an exact keyword match domain used to be a significant factor in rankings; however, nowadays it only offers indirect ranking benefits; still worth considering.

It is also important to remember, when focusing on the structure of your website, that value within a site is based on content and incoming links. URLs do play a role, but the strength of links, and content on your site will be what drives potential for possibly ranking higher on search engines.



BLACK BEAR

DIGITAL

'Well that's our guide for 2019 over! Never forget, we're a friendly bunch and just an email or phone call away. If you want help ranking your website above your competition and looking to generate new business, speak to the experts at Black Bear Digital'

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