

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION



XTRAPUNCH.COM

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xtrapunch

About XtraPunch: XtraPunch is a full-service digital agency. Based in Delhi, India, XtraPunch provides [web design, SEO and digital marketing services](#). XtraPunch has been serving its clients since 2010. Over the years, the author has successfully ranked his own and client websites for hundreds of keywords – easy to extremely difficult. Over the years, it has helped numerous businesses with web design & SEO. Our clients rank for some highly competitive keywords. We love open source & WordPress, and contribute regularly to the community.

What is SEO?

SEO stands for **search engine optimization**.

Search engine optimization is the process of making your website better for search engines.

Search engines such as Google & Bing serve as the discovery point for the web. People go to search engines to find relevant content, information and websites.

Search engines then scan through their index of webpages and deliver the search results based on the user query. The results are ranked based on the relevance of a webpage to the user search intent. Search engines want to make their results pages useful for their users. A wide range of quality parameters and signals are used to deliver the best possible results.

With the advancements in computing, search engines now use artificial intelligence and analysis to improve the search results.

Google and other search engines play a critical role on the Internet.

Websites need to make sure that they make a good impression on search engines. In order to rank higher in search results, they need to help search engines by sending the right signals. Search engines use computer programs to analyse the webpages.

SEO involves making your web pages optimized so that search engines find all the signals they need to understand the relevance and context of the webpage. When a web page is optimized for SEO, it ranks higher in search results. Thus, it drives more traffic from search engines.

Types of SEO

Search engines take into account a large number of factors when deciding on the ranking of the webpage in their results page.

SEO work can be put into three general categories.

1. On-page SEO

When ranking web pages in search results, search engines consider the content of the webpage. It also looks at the overall website. The aspect of SEO which involves making changes and improvements to the website is called on-page SEO.

2. Off-page SEO

Search engines also take into account signals from the web. Search rankings are not determined by their own website structure and content. It is also influenced by how the website and webpage is perceived by others on the web.

The most important aspect of off-page SEO is backlinks from other websites, including social media mentions.

3. Technical SEO

With emphasis on a more user-friendly web, it is a recent addition to SEO. Search engines now consider website speed, usability, and security for ranking in search engines. It's more focused on technical settings of the website to improve its performance.

HTML Basics for SEO

HTML stands for Hypertext Markup Language. It is the standard markup language for documents (webpages) designed to be displayed in a web browser (Firefox, Chrome, Opera, Internet Explorer).

HTML, along with assisted technologies such as Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and scripting languages such as JavaScript (JS) and jQuery, is the content of all webpages on the Internet.

For SEO, one needs basic understanding of HTML.

HTML web pages have the following basic structure.

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">
  <head>
    <meta charset="UTF-8">
    <title>Awesome Title for Web Browser & Search</title>
    <meta name="description" content="An awesome description of the webpage
content for search engines."/>
  </head>
  <body>
    <h1>Heading 1 – The Main Title</h1>
    <h2>Heading 2 – Second Important Title</h2>
    <h3>Heading 3 – Third Important Title</h3>
    <h4>Heading 4 – Fourth Important Title</h4>
    <h5>Heading 5 – Fifth Important Title</h5>
    <h6>Heading 6 – Sixth Important Title</h6>
    <p>A web page can have paragraphs. It can have many headings and content such
as blockquotes, lists, etc.</p>
  </body>
</html>
```

HTML web pages have two main sections contained within the `<html></html>` tags.

All HTML documents have a HEAD and a BODY.

The head section of a HTML document contains information for web browsers and computer programs such as Googlebot web crawlers. It may include the CSS stylesheet, Javascript and other files that help browsers in properly displaying the webpage. It also includes information to be consumed by Internet programs and crawlers.

The body section includes the actual content for users.

HTML Tags

HTML markup consists of tags (contained within angle brackets). Each element is wrapped with opening and closing tags. HTML has tags for different elements, such as paragraphs, bullet lists, blockquotes, tables, images, anchor hyperlinks, etc.

All tags can have attributes. Some tags (such as anchor and image tags) have attributes as part of the tag for including functional information.

Some tags don't require a separate closing tag.

Heading Tags

HTML has heading tags for adding titles or heading on a webpage. H1 refers to the most important heading title on the webpage. H2, H3, H4, H5 and H6 are headings and subheadings with reducing importance, with H2 being the second-most important heading.

```
<h1>My H1 Title</h1>
```

Though a web page can have any number of headings (<h1> <h2> <h3> <h4> <h5> <h6>), it is a good SEO practice to have only one title/heading with the <H1> tag.

Why just one H1 title?

H1, by its design, is intended to convey the most important message. By having two or more H1 headings, the importance of the tag gets diluted.

Think of H1 as the king. There can be only one king to maintain order. Two kings is chaos.

Hyperlink Anchor Tag

When a webpage needs to include a clickable hyperlink to another webpage within the content, the <a> (a is for anchor) tag is used with the "href" attribute and additional optional attributes.

The <a> tag can also include global HTML tags. In simple words, the hyperlink tag can contain text, paragraph, image, etc. The element (text, image, etc) within the ahref tag link to the target URL.

```
<a href="https://example.com/">Hyperlink Text</a>
```

```
<a href="https://example.com/"></a>
```

```
<a href="https://example.com/" hreflang="hi">Hyperlink Text</a>
```

```
<a href="https://example.com/" rel="nofollow">Hyperlink Text</a>
```

```
<a href="https://example.com/" target="_blank">Hyperlink Text</a>
```

Attribute	Value	target Description
href	URL	Specifies the URL of the page the link goes to
hreflang	language_code	Specifies the language of the linked document (ISO 639-1 Language Codes)
rel	alternate author bookmark	Specifies the relationship between the current document and the linked document

	external help license next nofollow noreferrer noopener prev search tag	
referrerpolicy	no-referrer no-referrer-when-downgrade origin origin-when-cross-origin unsafe-url	Specifies which referrer to send
target	_blank _parent _self _top	Specifies where to open the linked document
type	media_type	Specifies the media type of the linked document
download	filename	Specifies that the target will be downloaded when a user clicks on the hyperlink
media	media_query	Specifies what media/device the linked document is optimized for

Source: https://www.w3schools.com/tags/tag_a.asp

From an SEO perspective, the **a href** tag is important. We need to work with it often. Search engines use links to discover new webpages. Each link to a URL is considered as a vote for the linked URL. When you need to link to a webpage but not have the link counted as an endorsement, you can add a `rel="nofollow"` attribute.

```
<a href="https://example.com/" rel="nofollow">Hyperlink Text</a>
```

■ Tip

Learn HTML and web design in detail at <https://www.freecodecamp.org/>

How Google search works?

Latest Explainer Video

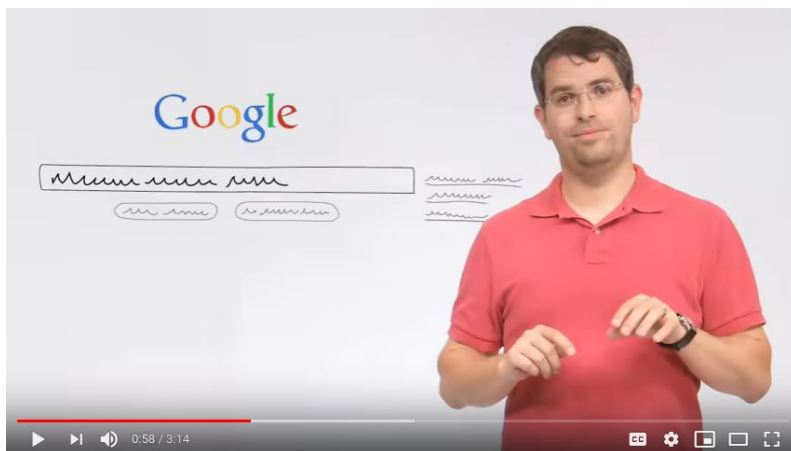
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eKVizvYSUQ>

How Google Search Works



Old Explainer Video (Unlisted)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNHR6IQJGZs>



Learn how Google search works: <https://www.google.com/search/howsearchworks/>

Is your website listed in Google?

Google is the leading search engine on the web. Most people look for websites and information on Google. Search engines are the discovery tools of the web. If you have a website or blog, you want to have it indexed in Google.

When your site is indexed by Google, your site will appear in relevant search results.

Check if your website is in Google's index

- Go to Google.com
- Do a site: search for your website's URL. Eg: search for "site:wikipedia.org"
- If you find some results, your website is indexed by Google

If your site isn't in Google, these are the common reasons.

- You've just launched a new site
- The website isn't linked from other sites on the web
- Google received an error when trying to crawl your website
- Your website policy blocks Google from crawling it

How to get your website in Google?

Google constantly crawls the web and indexes websites.

Google crawlers visit websites in its index, links on those sites to discover other pages. It takes note of new websites, changes to existing websites and dead links.

Google does not index all of the web. Low-quality sites and harmful sites are weeded out or ignored. Based on its assessment, Google determines which websites to crawl, how often and how many pages to fetch.

If you have a good website and it's linked to by other websites, Google will discover your site sooner or later. In fact, the vast majority of websites listed in Google results are added automatically.

When you have just created a website or blog, you can speed up the process of getting listed by Google. Simply, bring your website to the attention of Google.

Try any one of the following to get your website indexed by Google.

- Add your site links in social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.
- Get a link to your website from any website already present in Google.
- Submit your website sitemap via [Google Search Console](#)

If your website or web page isn't indexed in Google, you can use the Google Search Console to request indexing.

- Go to Google Search Console
- Navigate to the URL inspection tool
- Paste the URL you'd like Google to index into the search bar.
- Wait for Google to check the URL
- Click the "Request indexing" button

You can request that an inspected URL be indexed by Google. Indexing can take up to a week or two; you can check the progress using this tool. If the page passes a quick check to test for immediate indexing errors, it will be submitted to the indexing queue. You cannot request indexing if the page is considered to be non-indexable in the live test.

To request indexing of many new or updated pages, your best choice is to submit a sitemap, with the updated pages marked by <lastmod>.

■ Tip

Sharing your website link on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest is one of the easiest ways to get indexed by Google. Post your website URL in Facebook & Twitter.

[Optional] Create a Facebook page and Twitter account for the website, and add your website URL in profile. Your website will get indexed by Google in 1-3 days.

On-Page SEO

Website structure and content is one of the main factors that determines search rankings. Hence, you have to optimize your website and content for search engines. This aspect of SEO is referred to as on-page SEO.

On-page SEO involves almost everything related to your website structure, content and usability.

Webpage Title

The title tag of your web page should be properly optimized. The title of your webpage, which is part of the head section of your webpage HTML, is generally used by search engines as the title in search results.

- It should be short and meaningful.
- It should include your primary keyword (phrase) for which you want to rank.
- It should draw attention and encourage people to click.

<title>Best Restaurants in New York</title>

what is seo



en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Search_engine_optimization ▾

Search engine optimization - Wikipedia

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of growing the quality and quantity of website traffic by increasing the visibility of a website or a web page to ...

Your web page title is the first thing users see in search results. The title of the webpage is also used by browsers to display the page title.

Unless your title is too long or irrelevant, search engines will use it in the search result snippet for your webpage. However, search engines may modify the title or use an entirely different title for your webpage.

Webpage Description

The description of your webpage is added as a meta tag within the head section of the webpage HTML. It should correctly serve as the summary of the content on the webpage.

- It should be short (1-2 sentences) and meaningful.
- It should accurately summarize the information on the webpage.
- It should include the primary keyword (phrase) for which you want to rank.
- It should include secondary or related keyword phrases too.

```
<meta name="description" content="The critic-approved list of best restaurants in New York in 2020. Don't miss the top restaurants in New York."/>
```

Generally, search engines use the page description along with the title in search results.

Search engines can also generate their own summary of your webpage based on the user search query. It is often the case when your page appears in a search result, but the search phrase is missing in your summary. Search engines pick a text snippet with the relevant keyword from your webpage.

The purpose of the search snippet is to provide a preview of the content. The description or an appropriate text from your web page is used as the preview text snippet in search results.

■ Tip

When using a content management system (CMS, such as **WordPress**) to create websites, the title and description tags for web pages are added by the CMS software. You can still set the content to be used within these tags. The CMS software generates the title and description (meta) tags with your defined content. In WordPress, you need an SEO plugin to manage SEO title and description.

Page Content

Content is the mainstay of on-page SEO.

To rank higher in search, your content should appeal to search engines as an authoritative and comprehensive information source.

What search engines seek in articles?

- Comprehensive articles
- Articles with images and rich media
- Articles that are easy to read
- Meaningful content

Word Count

Search engines prefer content that provides complete information of the topic. Due to this, Google has an affinity for long-form articles that cover the topic exhaustively.

Your article should be a minimum 300 words. For a better chance at ranking, keep your article word count to 500 words or longer.

Look at the webpages ranking at the top three positions in Google for your keyword. What is the word count of articles for these pages? What is the average word count for articles in the top 3 in SERP?

- Write an article longer than the webpage at the Number 1 spot in SERP.
- Keep your word count more than the average word count of the top 3.

In general, articles that are more comprehensive rank higher. Google prefers articles that provide all the relevant answers for a search query. So, cover your topic in depth.

Unique Content

Your content should be unique and informative. Google does not like duplicate content. Duplicate content web pages are ignored by search engines.

When creating content, do not plagiarise or copy from other sources.

Any webpage content will pass as unique if it is original and not copied from any other source.

Duplicate content issues can also arise when you have the same content on two different URLs on your website. Make sure that the same content is not accessible from multiple URLs.

Don't steal content from other sources. Many websites have a licence, such as Creative Commons, that allows copying and content. Avoid such content too. Google will identify it as a duplicate of the original webpage.

Keywords

Search engines analyse your content against the search queries. Any content that has the searched keyword is included in the results and placed based on the quality score.

To rank your website in search, your content must include the keyword you are targeting. You should also include the variants of the same keyword and other related keywords within the content.

Keyword density is the number of times the keyword appears every 100 words. If a keyword appears 10 times in a 1000-word article, its keyword density is 1%.

- Include your primary keyword in the webpage title.
- Include your primary keyword and its variants in the search description.

- Include the primary keyword in the H1 tag on the webpage.
- Include the keyword variants in H2, H3 headings in the content.
- Place your primary keyword as close to the beginning of the content.

Never stuff your article with keywords. Instead, use the keywords in a natural manner. Search engines no longer process the articles mechanically. They become more human-like when analysing articles. Hence, you should be writing for your readers.

Simple Language

Write like you speak – natural language.

Voice search is on the rise. And, Google has started using NLP, or natural language processing, more aggressively for search.

Make sure to learn about NLP, and incorporate the best practices in your writing.

- Use simple language (English).
- Write short and easy sentences.
- Avoid words not commonly spoken.
- Break your content into small paragraphs (1-3 sentences).
- Simplify the idea down to the level of school students.

If you know how to write theatre or movie dialogs, implement it in your writing. Speak out your article loudly to find any problem areas, and simplify all the complexities.

Grammar

Properly formatting your sentences and using correct grammar should also be part of your SEO checklist for content. Poor grammar can hurt your ranking prospects.

“He saw a dead man walking down the road.”

Search engines are getting better at reading like humans. Bad grammar or language can be seen as a negative point. Sometimes, it changes the meaning. That means lost ranking.

If you write incorrectly, Google won't be able to fix the error like the human brain.

The Inverted Pyramid

In journalism, news articles are expected to follow the concept of inverted pyramid.

The most important information comes at the very beginning. The rest of the information also follows the priority order. The least important piece of information goes at the last.

Implement the inverted pyramid in your articles too.

Put the most important information at the very beginning. Rest of the information follows the priority order.

If you want to rank for a keyword, make sure that you put it at the top.

Headings

Each webpage should have JUST one H1 heading title.

The primary idea or the keyword phrase should be included in the H1 heading, which can be your article headline. (In CMS, the page title is generally assigned the H1 tag.)

Put all your keyword variants and secondary keywords within H2 and H3 tags.

Organize your entire content into sections. You can then divide your sections into sub-sections, and even further down. Use the headings semantically, with H2 assigned for sections, H3 used for sub-sections, and so on.

H1 [Title]

↳ H2 [Section #1]

↳ H3 [Sub-section of Section #1]

↳ H4 [Subsection of Subsection]

↳ H4 [Subsection of Subsection]

↳ H3 [Sub-section of Section #1]

↳ H2 [Section #2]

↳ H2 [Section #3]

Hyperlinks

Don't keep your webpage disconnected from the rest of the web.

Add links to relevant content on your own website. Don't add random links, but use the links to create a better website navigation and make your website more useful for visitors.

Instead of trying to retain all the link juice to your webpage, consider linking to useful resources. Search engines use the backlinks from your page to gain confidence about your content relevance.

Don't just link to Wikipedia. Link to the websites and articles that you find useful for the topic. These links should help your audience gain more information on the topics.

Always add links (both internal and external) with proper context and anchor text. Click here as an anchor text does not provide much information.

Multimedia – Images, Videos

Google wants the best answers. Add rich media to your webpage.

When creating content, enhance it with relevant images, illustrations, flowcharts, videos, etc. You can create explainer videos too.

However, don't add arbitrary images and videos. Google has started to recognize images and videos, and check their relevance to the webpage content. Placing an image without context is not going to help.

Make sure to add the correct "alt" text (alternative text) descriptions for images. Your alternative text should be descriptive and factually correct.

- Adding alternative text to photos improves accessibility for visually impaired.
- Missing images get replaced with alt text, keeping the webpage usable.
- Alt tags are used by search engines to get a better image context/descriptions.

Map Embeds

Adding a map to your webpage can help Google in understanding the content better. A map embedded on the page clearly tells search engines that the content is related to the map location.

Embed maps can help local businesses or local content improve search ranking.

Linking to a map location can also help improve local SEO ranking.

Schema & Structured Data

Schema and structured content are ways to provide additional information to search engines. Where possible, you should implement schema and structured data within your webpage. It can be added within the page content or by adding in the webpage HTML head section.

The schemas are a set of 'types', each associated with a set of properties. The types are arranged in a hierarchy.

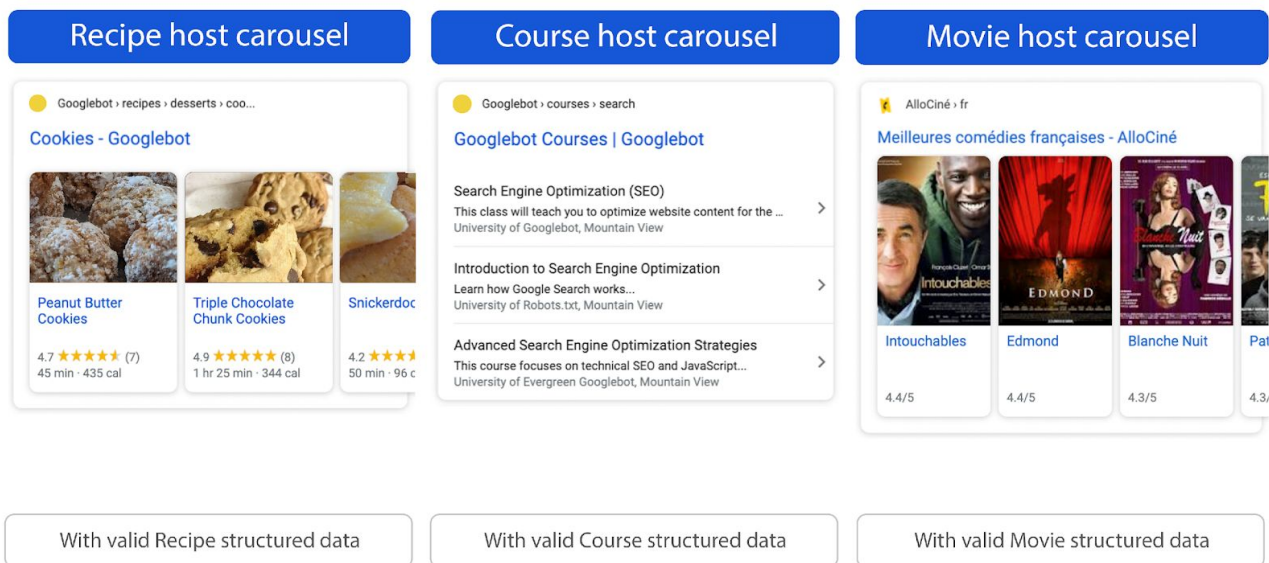
Commonly used schema types:

- Creative works: CreativeWork, Book, Movie, Recipe, TVSeries ...
- Embedded non-text objects: AudioObject, ImageObject, VideoObject
- Event
- Organization
- Person
- Place, LocalBusiness, Restaurant ...
- Product, Offer, AggregateOffer
- Review, AggregateRating

You can learn more about schemas and their structures at <https://schema.org/>

Article structured data should be added to news, blog, and sports article pages. Your page may be eligible for different features. **Mobile-friendly pages with structured data (earlier only limited to AMP web pages)** can appear in the Top stories carousel, host carousel of rich results, Visual stories, and rich results in mobile Search results. **Non-AMP web pages with structured data** can help Google understand your web page better.

A **breadcrumb** structured data indicates the page's position in the site hierarchy, and it helps users explore a site effectively.



A **carousel** is a list-like rich result that people can swipe on mobile devices. It displays multiple cards from the same site. To enable a carousel for your site, you need to add Carousel structured data in combination with one of the following supported content types: Course, Movie, Recipe and Restaurant. It makes use of ItemList or Recipe schema type.

There are many more useful schema types such as [FAQs](#), [How-To](#), and reviews & ratings.

Google maintains a structured data code resource to help you get started. Check <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/guides/search-gallery>

Keyword Research

Get to know the keyword. Trying to rank for a keyword without an in-depth understanding of the task at hand is not a smart business process.

For content marketing and SEO, keyword research is important.

Keyword research should be done at the very beginning, when you are planning a website. It should be conducted when you plan to target a new niche and create content for the same.

Keyword research helps with the following:

- Get the average monthly search numbers
- Understand the competition for search ranking
- Analyse the revenue potential (advertising or leads)
- Discover the best keywords to target

How to conduct keyword research?

Multiple online tools are available for keyword research.

Some prominent paid tools include Ahrefs, Majestic, SEMRush.

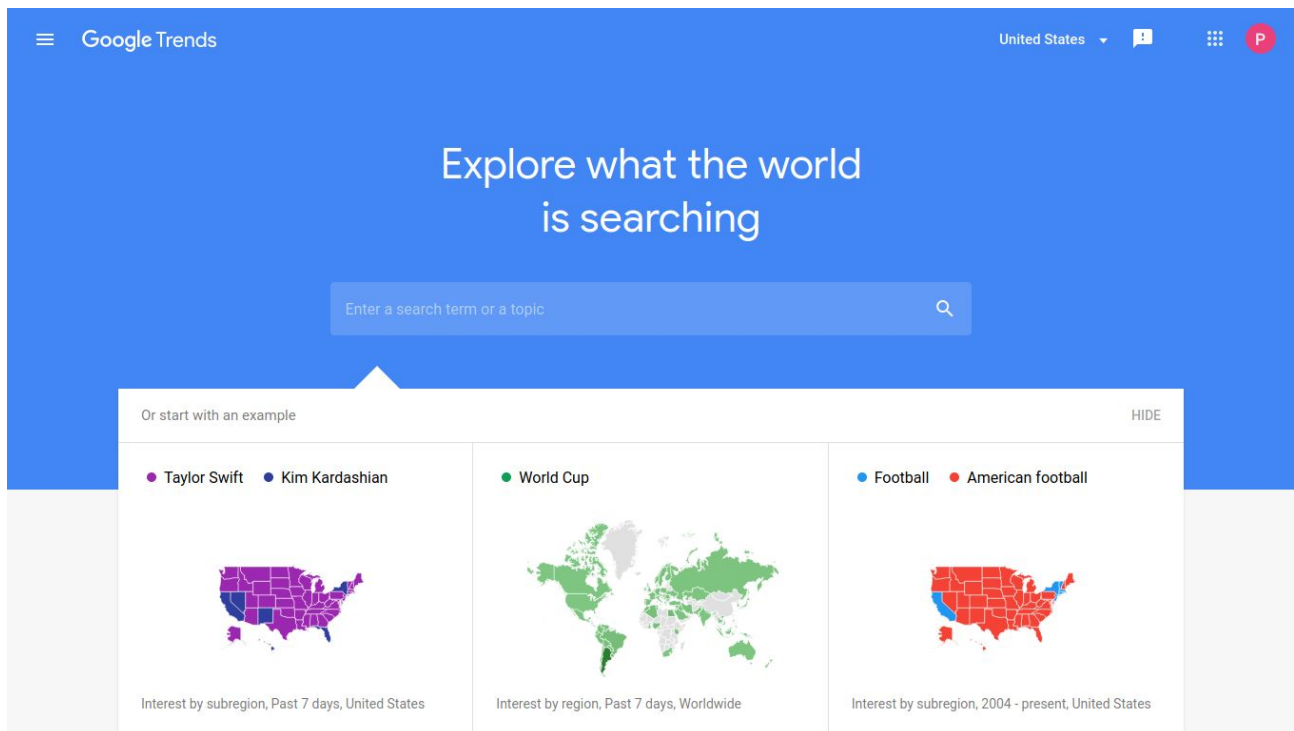
Let's focus on the free tools available for keyword research.

1. Google Search: Google is a good starting point for keyword research. Check the auto-suggestions that appear in Google. Look at the related **search suggestions** on the search results page. Use the information to create your list of keywords.

The number of search results that appear will provide you a **rough estimate about the competition**. Google shows the search results at the top in the search result page (SERP). If there are just 10,000 search result entries, it would be easy to rank

for the keyword. When there are millions of websites appearing in the search result, you know it's not going to be easy to rank.

2. Google Trends: What content to create and keywords to target? Google Trends provides you the information. Use this information to create more relevant content at that time.



3. Google Keyword Planner: When you register with Google Ads, you will have the Keyword Planner available within your Google Ads dashboard. You don't need to pay anything or actually run ads. Simply register, and don't provide your payment information or create any ads.

Keyword Planner will provide you a rough understanding of the keyword search volume and ad competition. You will have a search range (eg: 1000-10,000) shown as the average monthly search. You can also look at the cost per click bids required for top ad ranking.

Google Keyword Planner will also allow you to discover keywords from other websites. You can use it to find more keywords in your niche too.

4. Ahrefs Keyword Generator: Unlike Google Keyword Planner, Ahrefs Keyword Generator will provide you the exact monthly search volume for your keyword (and its suggestions). You can find the search volume on Google, Bing, Youtube & Amazon. Based on the country you target, you get to find the search numbers in that country. The free version is good enough for keyword research.

Website: <https://ahrefs.com/keyword-generator>

5. Keyword Surfer Chrome Browser Extension: Install the Keyword Surfer extension in Google Chrome web browser, and you will have access to average monthly search volume information available right in Google search page itself. It also provides the volume for related search keywords too. You can use this free tool to find search volumes in different countries.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "keyword planner" with approximately 1,880,000 results. The Keyword Surfer extension is active, displaying a table of "Keywords ideas" with columns for Keyword, Similarity, and Volume. The table lists various related terms and their search volumes.

Keyword	Similarity	Volume
analyzer google	5%	823000
ad google word	5%	550000
google as words	5%	550000
words searched	5%	246000
searched words	5%	201000
google keyword planner	85%	40500
google keywords planner	85%	40500
google. keyword planner	85%	40500
google planner keyword	80%	40500
google planner keywords	80%	40500
keywords google planner	80%	40500
google's keyword planner	75%	40500
keyword planner google	75%	40500
google keyword planners	70%	40500
keyword google planner	70%	40500

This Chrome extension will provide you some additional information to help with competition research too, such as the word count of ranking web pages, estimated traffic to the websites, and keyword density.

Website Structure

Websites and blogs need to be organized. Entire website should be properly organized and also have a good navigation structure.

Blog categories: When you are creating a blog, your entire blog content should be categorized into a few broad topics. Ideally, you should have **2-6 categories** on your blog. You don't need too many categories, unless you have a frequently updated general blog or news blog. All your blog articles should fit within these categories.

Categories are structured and hierarchical organization of your content. Each category can have sub-categories. You can create additional categories within the broad categories on your blog.

Categories should be seen as a way to allow you readers to dive into the content topic they really like. On a digital marketing blog, one reader might only be interested in reading about SEO. If there is an SEO category, the reader can simply head over to the SEO posts.

Blog tags: For a loose structuring of content, you have tags. Unlike categories, tags are not mandatory for blog posts. You can have blog posts without assigning any tag. These don't have a hierarchical organization either. Each tag exists as an independent self.

Don't abuse tags. Blog tags should not be considered like #hashtags. Think of them as additional categories. Instead of adding random tags to blog posts, stay frugal with tags. Use tags as a tool to improve content organization. Let's say you have a series of 10 articles related to "SEO Conference 2020". You can use it as a tag, and have all those articles available at one place. The posts can still be placed within the SEO category.

Navigation: The website header navigation should include all the main content pages. It should have the main content (cornerstone content) web pages that you want to rank for. If you have a blog, all the categories should be in the header navigation. All sub-categories can be sub-menus of their respective menus.

Content Strategy

Don't just create content randomly. Create a content strategy.

Plan your content in advance. Create a schedule for content publication. A content plan will also help you in planning the inter-linking of articles.

Organize your content for optimum benefit.

Don't take your laptop and start writing a new blog. Start with keyword research, create your content schedule, and follow your content plan.

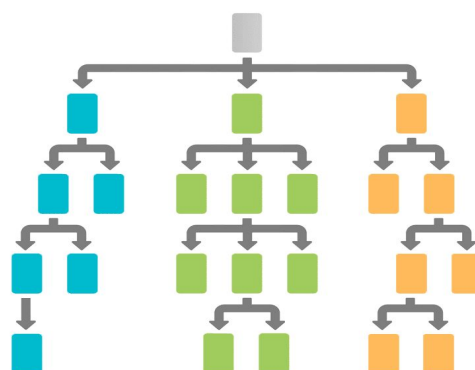
Make sure that your website / blog has quality content. Duplicate content is a huge problem with blogs. You can weed out poor and duplicate content by planning in advance.

Maintain a spreadsheet for your content plan. Keep a list of all published content, scheduled articles and content ideas. Use the list to properly manage your blog content.

The Content Silo

One of the most effective content plans for SEO is the content silo. When you organize your content in different compartments based on topic, you get the silo structure. In a content silo, each has one topic. Here, the content is also organized in a pyramid structure, based on the hierarchy of keywords.

Siloing is a term that is used to refer to the concept of organising connected pieces of information into distinct groupings.



In a content silo, you have one primary keyword as the parent, and multiple secondary keywords as children and grandchildren.

The parent keyword article is the main content in a silo. All child keywords will have their own articles, and each one linking to the parent article, and linked back from the parent article.

Similarly, the grandchildren keywords will have their own articles and link to their respective parents and the main article of the pyramid. For grandchildren keywords, the link will come from their respective parent article, but not from the main article in our pyramid.

In the content silo, the objective is to rank the cornerstone article. Link to your cornerstone article from the silo's other pages, and from other blog posts and pages on the website. Interlinking your website content is a great way to boost your website SEO, improve navigation and bring content in front of readers.

For the purpose of a content silo, you can have the main topic page as the cornerstone content. A **cornerstone content** is an important article which you want to rank in search engines. These are generally long-form articles with a few thousand words, illustrations, images and media.

When using WordPress, you should publish your cornerstone articles as pages instead of blog posts. Add your cornerstone content in the website menu. All your articles in the silo should then link back to this page – the cornerstone article.

The purpose of publishing the content as a page is to keep it easy to manage and update. Most websites have many blog posts, but only a few pages. Also, most WordPress sitemap plugins assign additional importance to pages.

When you publish the content as a page, search engines know that the page is more important than blog posts.

Another advantage is blog posts have a publication date shown in Google search, but it is not added for pages. It helps bring visitors even when the page turns old.

You should update your cornerstone articles regularly to keep the information relevant. Also, search engines prefer fresh content over old ones.

■ Tip

Removing the date from appearing on the web page does the trick. If there's a date on the web page, search engines process it and show it as the publication date. If you don't have the date shown in the front even for posts, Google won't add the date next to your blog post search snippet.

Backlinks

Backlinks, or anchor links or links, are the way people create connections on the Internet. One website links to another, the other to yet another and so on.

Links are used as a referral or vote for computing search engine rankings. When you link to a page, you pass the reputation or link juice of the linking page to the one linked.

Add only relevant links to your content. Make sure that you use the right anchor text when adding a backlink. Given the importance of backlinks, link to other websites wisely.

Normal links don't need any rel attribute value. For certain links on your site, you might want to identify your relationship with the linked page. You can use the rel attribute values in the <a> tag.

rel Value	Description
rel="sponsored"	Mark links that are advertisements or paid placements. These types of links can be marked as nofollow too.
rel="ugc"	Marking user-generated content (UGC) links, such as comments and forum posts.
rel="nofollow"	Any link that you don't want Google to associate your site with, or crawl the linked page from, your site.

You can specify multiple rel values as a space- or comma-separated list.

Eg: I love Example cheese.

- Don't link to bad websites.
- Don't link to websites in unrelated niches.
- Don't accept guest posts with links to websites in unrelated niches.
- Make sure your site doesn't have unwanted backlinks in the sidebar, footer, widgets, etc.

- Keep your website secure as hackers inject malicious links.
- Make sure that any user-generated content such as comments don't allow embedding links or auto-generated links. Add the "nofollow" attribute if you allow comments or website links. WordPress automatically adds the "nofollow" attribute to comments.

Though a backlink passes your website's reputation to the linked webpage, you can also benefit from it. Linking to an authority site and relevant content helps you establish your connection with the subject.

Ideally, you should add relevant links to authoritative content that provides additional information on the topic of your article.

Internal Links

Add links to relevant web pages and content on your website. When you are writing a blog post or content, you should link to other posts or pages that provide complimentary information.

Internal links (interlinking articles and blogs) is a great way to help improve website navigation and search engine optimization.

Internal links also help gain traction to articles and reduce bounce rate (visitors leaving the website).

Always use the right anchor text when linking. The link anchor text should provide information about the target webpage. It is important from the SEO perspective.

Pay attention to the anchor text used for internal links. It will help users, improve website navigation and improve your SEO.

- Write short & descriptive anchor text in a few words or a phrase.

- Don't use generic anchor text like "page", "article", or "click here".
- Don't use off-topic or irrelevant anchor text.
- Avoid using the page's URL as the anchor text.
- Don't use a lengthy sentence or paragraph as a backlink.
- Think about anchor text for internal links too.
- Don't link to web pages that have no relevance to the webpage.

Nofollow Bad Links

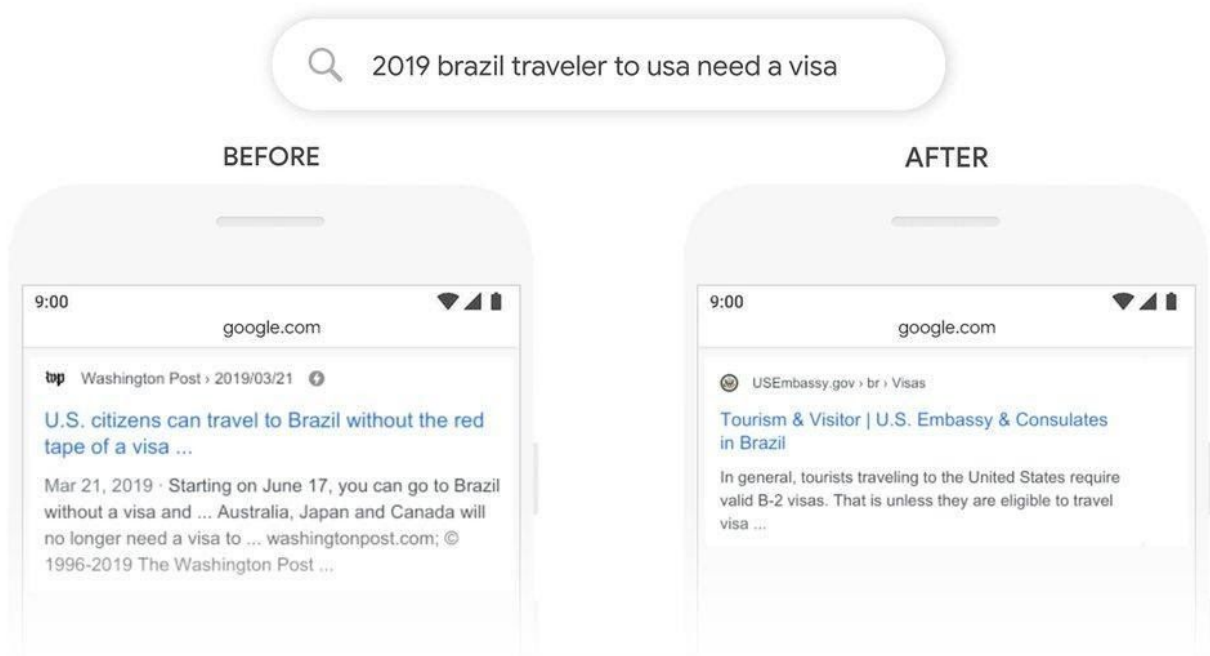
If you need to add a hyperlink (anchor link) to a website that you don't want to pass any link juice, set the value of the "rel" attribute of a link to "nofollow". This tells Google the link on your site shouldn't be followed or pass your page's reputation to the linked pages.

When you want all links from your webpage to be nofollowed, you can add the tag `<meta name="robots" content="nofollow">` inside the `<head>` tag for the page.

BERT

Google now implements BERT – Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers – for reading the content and constantly improving its knowledge. BERT evaluates the meaning from a context (first direction) and demonstrates learning ability (second direction).

BERT is an open-source neural network-based technique for natural language processing (NLP) pre-training. This technology enables anyone to train their own state-of-the-art question answering system.



Particularly for longer, more conversational queries, or searches where prepositions like “for” and “to” matter a lot to the meaning, search will be able to understand the context of the words in your query. Source: [Blog.google](#)

In other words, Google figures out the meaning of a word or phrase using the surrounding content. Randomly adding keywords to any piece of content will not pass the exam.

Natural Language Processing

Google is now implementing natural language processing (NLP) for search.

Natural language is — the way we speak naturally.

Voice search is gaining tractions. This means people are not typing keywords for search. Instead, they are speaking directly. People are phrasing search queries like they say it aloud.

Google gets a lot of new queries. The search giant says that around 15% of the search is absolutely query. Google is now able to understand the language like humans, and is no longer limited to keywords.

Not that keywords have become irrelevant, but search engines like Google are no longer dependent on them to determine the nature of content.

According to the information on Natural language API by Google, NLP involves the following processes.

- **Sentiment analysis** inspects the given text and identifies the prevailing emotional opinion within the text, especially to determine a writer's attitude as positive, negative, or neutral.
- **Entity analysis** inspects the given text for known entities and returns information about those entities.
- **Entity sentiment analysis** inspects the given text for known entities, returns information about those entities, and identifies the prevailing emotional opinion of the entity within the text.
- **Syntactic analysis** extracts linguistic information, breaking up the given text into a series of sentences and tokens (generally, word boundaries), providing further analysis on those tokens.
- **Content classification** analyzes and returns a content category for the content.

NLP changes search queries are analyzed. Google is capable of assessing the sentiment and context of selected queries from the website's content.

Entity: Entity generally refers to named "things" such as famous individuals, landmarks, common objects, etc. For BERT & NLP, an entity is a word or phrase that represents an object which can be identified, classified, and categorized. Entities broadly fall into two categories: proper nouns (specific people, places, etc.) or common nouns (also called "nominals" in natural language processing). NLP evaluates these entities from your content.

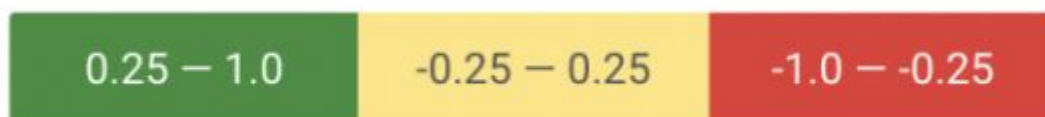
Some examples of objects are:

- persons
- organizations
- brands
- events

Salience: Salience indicates the importance or relevance of this entity to the entire document text. The entity is given a salience score that ranges from 0.0 to 1.0.

Scores closer to 0.0 are less important, while scores closer to 1.0 are highly important. Google is putting words in context and ranking entities in order of importance to the context of the page.

Sentiment: Google also takes the sentiment into consideration. It deciphers the undertone or feeling represented in the content. It can be positive, negative and neutral, and it's measured on a scale.



Positive sentiments are given a score between 0.25 and 1, whereas negative sentiments score between -0.25 and -1.0. The neutral sentiment lies in between.

Using BERT & NLP (natural language processing), it deciphers sentimental intent of the content. Is it positive, negative or neutral?

Google looks at sentiment both on page and subsection levels.

Let's say you have a product review. "The product is awesome. I found it useful and effective."

The above piece of content will get a positive sentiment.

How does sentiment affect your ranking?

If your content is an outlier on the sentiment scale, Google can ignore it as irrelevant to the search query. When all the top results have a positive vibe and your page has a negative undertone, Google may consider your page as irrelevant to the user search.

Breaking Down the NLP Process

NLP involves breaking down the content and then analysing it. Here's the processes involved in NLP.

Tokenization is the process of breaking a sentence into its distinct terms.

Parts-of-Speech Tagging classifies words by parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, punctuation, etc.).

Lemmatization determines if a word has different forms, like:

- am, are, is = be
- car, cars, car's, cars' = car

Word Dependency creates relationships between the words based on rules of grammar. This process also maps out "hops" between words.

Parse Label classifies the dependency or the type of relationship between two words connected via a dependency.

Named Entity Extraction attempts to identify words with a “known” meaning – people, places, and things (nouns).

Salience determines the relevance of text with some entity or something.

Sentiment assigns a negative to a positive score of the expressed sentiment (view or attitude) about entities in an article.

Subject Categorization will classify text into subject categories.

Text Classification & Function determines the intended function of the content.

Content-Type Extraction determines the content type of given text without Schema.org structured data. It allows Google to determine if text is an event, recipe, product, or another content type without the use of markup.

Structure Implied Meaning analyses the formatting. How the content or text is represented can change its meaning. Headings, line breaks, lists, and nearness all convey a secondary understanding of the text. For example, HTML list or a series of headings with numbers in front of them are identified as process or ranking. The structure also includes visual aspects such as font size/weight and proximity.

NLP for SEO

Here's how to leverage NLP for search rankings.

Backlink Relevance

Links have taken a whole new dimension now. Even earlier, the content matters for link. Now, the contextual relevance of the link has gained prominence.

NLP has made link structure and placement more important. What is the anchor text? Is it contextually relevant to the page? Where is it placed on the page?

All your backlinks should now have relevance and context. Placing random backlinks in sidebars and inserting backlinks to unrelated content will no longer be a winner. All links on a webpage must have the right context to pass on the full benefit.

Relevant Images

NLP can analyse images or videos without alt text. Hence, you should be actually using images that are relevant to your content. Random images and videos will not be helpful.

Write for the Reader

Content should be created for readers and not for search engines. It has been a rule for white hat SEO for many years now. Now, it's even more important. Creating engaging content with natural language is more important with the rise of NLP and voice search devices.

Write like You Speak

If you write in a natural language – the way we speak – you rank higher in voice search queries. People talk like normal human conversations when using voice search.

Optimize for Voice Search

Voice search is the latest trend with increased penetration of voice assistants and home automation. Google voice search has been there for many years, and now more people choose to speak their search queries.

Optimize your site for voice search. Create your article with natural language. For example, when you speak into a speaker, you talk as though you're talking to a human.

No Black-Hat SEO

Black-hat SEO refers to methods such as keyword stuffing and artificially building backlinks.

With NLP, techniques like cloaking or keyword stuffing will get spotted and penalized more easily. NLP can identify issues with sentence structure and randomly stuffed links and keywords.

Off-Page SEO

Search engines consider external indicators when ranking pages in search results.

Backlinks from other websites across the web serve as a measure of popularity and importance of a webpage.

Off-page SEO involves getting backlinks from other websites and blogs.

If two websites have similar content (on-page SEO), the webpage with more backlinks will have a better chance of ranking higher.

Except for some exceptions of social media and major directories, Google guidelines for SEO say that webmasters should not solicit links. If there are paid or solicited links, they should be identified as sponsored links and have the nofollow / sponsored attribute.

Here's what Google recommends for building backlinks:

The best way to get other sites to create high-quality, relevant links to yours is to create unique, relevant content that can naturally gain popularity in the Internet community.

What does Google forbid you? Practically all types of SEO link building.

Any links intended to manipulate a site's ranking in Google search results may be considered part of a link scheme and a violation of Google's Webmaster Guidelines. This includes any behavior that manipulates links to your site or outgoing links from your site.

If you want to follow Google guidelines, you better stop off-page SEO. Any SEO link that you acquire for your website will potentially violate the guidelines.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 websites allow users to create their own websites, blogs and content.

Some common examples of Web 2.0 sites are free blogging platforms, wiki, video sharing, photo sharing, microblogging, and social networking.

You can use Web 2.0 sites for creating backlinks. You can use Google My Business, Maps (Google Maps), web applications (Google Docs, Drive), video sites (YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs (Blogger, WordPress, Livejournal, Tumblr), social networking & content hosting services. There are many more websites such as Medium & Quora, that allow you to build backlinks through content.

Social Media

Social media platforms are a great way to start your link building. Actively managed social media profiles such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Pinterest help you get indexed faster in Google. It also helps you create your online presence.

Blog Comments

Though it's no longer as trendy as it used to be, leaving comments on other blogs in your niche is a great way to build some backlinks (mostly nofollow links). It also provides you an opportunity to introduce yourself with other bloggers in your niche.

Guest Blogging

A fairly popular method of building links to your site is getting your articles published on other blogs and websites in your niche. In the guest blogging method for link building, you reach out to other websites and blog in your niche. You pitch them a topic or offer to write a guest article on their blog. You promote your website link in the author biography or within the article content itself.

Niche Forums

Join forums in your niche. You can use these forums to engage with others in your space. Add a link to your website in your forum signature. When you have the right question or opportunity, you can direct people to your blog for answers and information.

Infographics & Media

Creating high-quality infographics and videos can be a great way to build backlinks. Take a topic in your niche and create a stunning infographic or video. You then promote it on your blog and social media. Send the media to other blogs or websites, allowing them to publish it with proper attribution (backlink).

Media Outreach

Attracting media (news blogs and mainstream media) can help you get backlinks from some of the most authoritative websites on the Internet. You can start by sharing information regarding your website / business with bloggers and journalists. Send out a story idea pitch to journalists. Media persons have to constantly churn a lot of news and content. If your story idea is even remotely worth a consideration, you will surely hear back.

Local & Business Directories

Yellow pages directories have been replaced with online web directories. Get your business website listed in trade directories and city directories. You can build some quality backlinks by having your business listed in websites such as Yelp, BBB and niche directories.

Trade Associations

Joining trade associations and organizations can get you backlinks to your business website. Almost all trade associations maintain their member directories online. If your trade association also has a member directory, get your business with the website listed there.

Testimonials

Testimonials are a great way to build trust of your customers. All businesses want credible testimonials of their customers. You can use this to get quality backlinks to your website.

What products and services do you use? Reach out to the companies whose products you use. Send them an awesome testimonial video or text. When your testimonial is published on their website, you have a backlink.

Case Studies

Like testimonials, case studies help build trust with customers. If you have a success story for any product or service as a customer, you can reach out to the manufacturer or service provider. Let them know how you benefited from their product. End your email with a note that you would be happy to have them use this as a case study for their business.

You are likely to gain a backlink and some exposure when your case study finds itself on business websites of products and services you use.

Q&A Websites

Quora is one of the most popular question-answer platforms. Join **Quora** and engage with others in your domain. You can ask questions and add your website URL as a reference. You can answer the existing questions and add your website pages as reference links. Quora allows you to add backlinks like you do in your own blog, with any desired anchor text.

Google My Business

Google My Business (GMB) is one of the most important tools for local business websites. If you have a local business or store, you must add it on GMB. It's 100% free, and can bring a lot of exposure to your business.

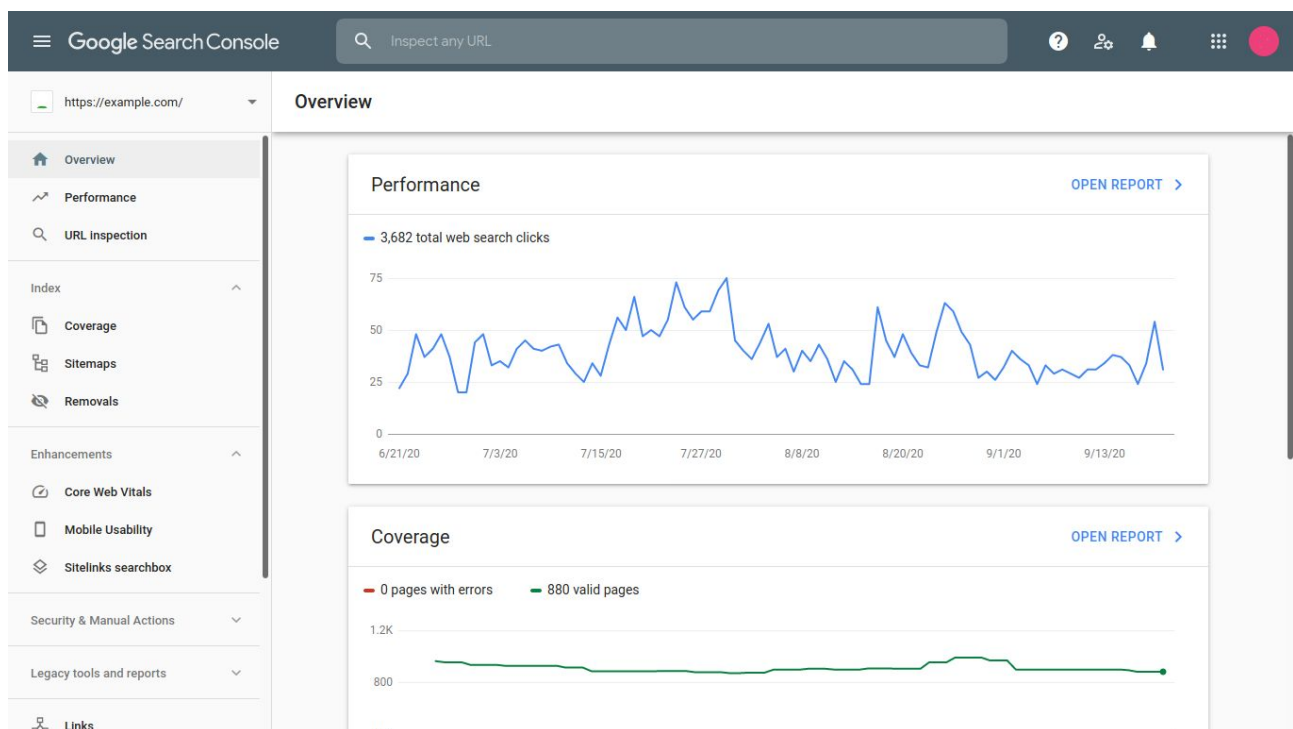
GMB listings are the first thing after the paid ads for local search queries. For search queries such as “New York SEO”, you will have a map pack with three entries above the standard search results. When you rank in the top 3, your business starts getting leads and queries.

Having your business in GMB also helps you rank higher for local search queries. GMB is an important pillar of local SEO.

Google Search Console

Serious about growing your website with SEO? You need all the help you can get from Google.

Google Search Console is a free tool for webmasters. It basically provides you data regarding your website's performance, including its Core Web Vitals performance, mobile usability, search rankings, 404 errors, etc.



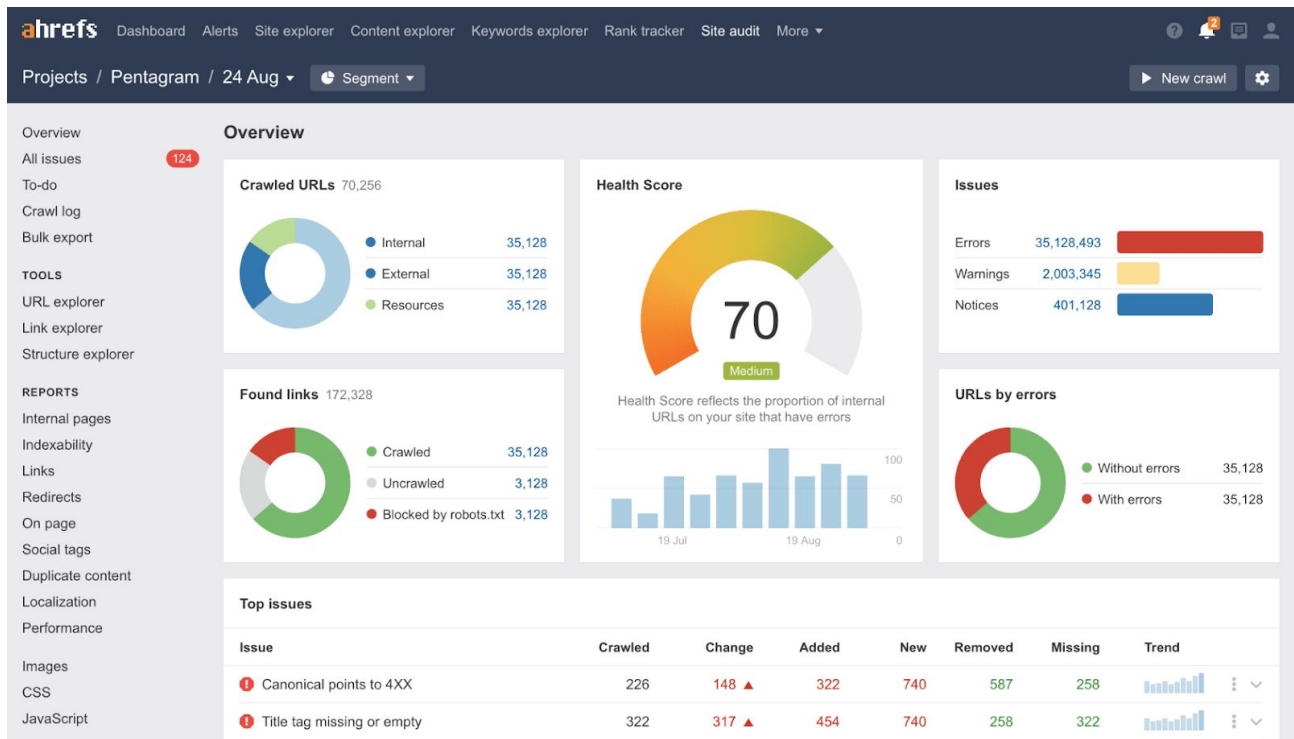
Simply sign in to Search Console (previously Webmasters Tools) with your Google account. You will have to verify website ownership, which can be done automatically if you have Google Analytics code from the same Google account on your website.

Make good use of your search performance and queries data. If your website is appearing within top 100 for any good keyword, explore the opportunity to improve your website for the same. You might add new content for the keyword or work on the page already in search results.

URL: <https://search.google.com/search-console>

Ahrefs Webmaster Tools

Ahrefs Webmaster Tools is a free version of Ahrefs. You can register a free account, add and verify as many websites as you want. Once your website ownership is verified, you can monitor SEO health and backlinks for it.



URL: <https://ahrefs.com/webmaster-tools>

Ahrefs Webmaster Tools is a bare bones Ahrefs SEO monitoring platform, being limited to only verified websites. You cannot access data of competitors or other websites.

As a free tool it's a great way to scan your website for common SEO issues that might be hurting its performance in search engines. It will also prompt ways to fix those issues.

Check how your website is collecting backlinks. Ahrefs crawls the web and maintains a fairly large database of links. You can access your website's backlink data. Though Ahrefs backlink crawler shouldn't be seen as discovering all backlinks, it does provide an exhaustive representation.

Identify the keywords your website ranks in search. You can plan your website SEO and content strategy better with metrics like Search Volume, Keyword Difficulty, and Traffic Value.

You'll need to verify ownership of your website to use the tools. Ownership verification can be done by: Google Search Console (recommended), uploading an HTML file, adding a TXT record to DNS configuration, or adding an HTML meta tag to your homepage.

Ahrefs uses the same unique identification for all websites added in an Ahrefs account. So, when you add your websites to one Ahrefs account, you are letting the world know they are all owned by one person and, hence, connected.

■ Tip

Use the file upload method for verification. It will be your little secret and might just let you keep using Ahrefs without anyone discovering. As the file name is basically a unique hash, bots can't discover it without being pointed.

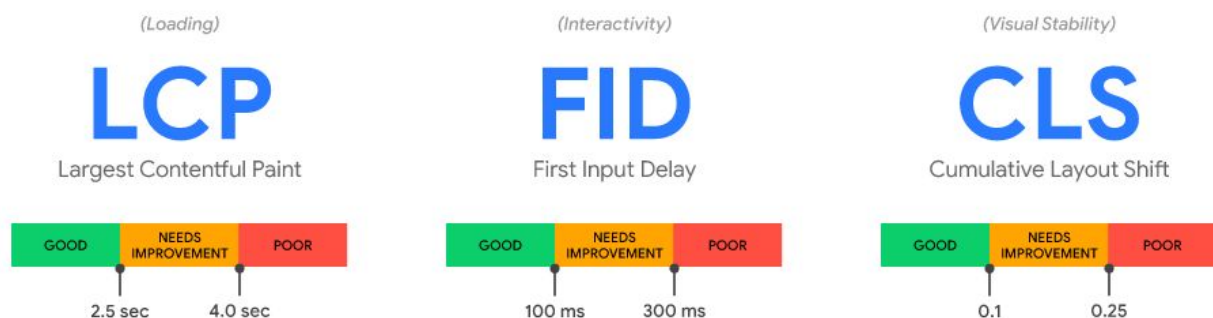
Technical SEO

Website speed and the technicalities of achieving the best user experience fall within the domain of technical SEO. It involves optimizing the website code to improve speed and performance.

Google has announced in May 2020 that the quality of a user's experience on a web page will be factored into its ranking criteria. It will use these for the Top Stories feature in Search on mobile.

Core Web Vitals

Google has started a new initiative Web Vitals. The [Core Web Vitals](#) are the subset of Web Vitals that apply to all web pages. Each of the Core Web Vitals represents a distinct facet of the user experience. The Core Web Vitals metrics will evolve over time.



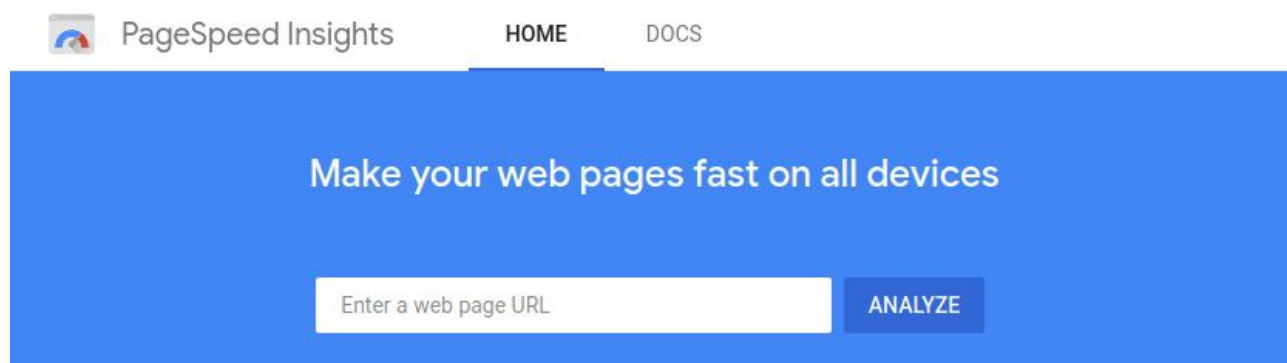
Source: <https://web.dev/vitals/>

Here are some of the main points to consider for SEO.

- Websites should be secured – accessed via the HTTPS protocol.
- Fast to load – currently, a page load time under 3 seconds is considered good.
- Websites should be responsive, or user-friendly across all devices.
- Websites should not be accessible via different URLs. The websites available on <http://example.com>, <http://www.example.com>, <https://example.com>, and <https://www.example.com> are considered as four separate websites. Hence, your website should be available on only one of them.

Page Speed Insights

Google has a tool that measures your webpage performance. As Google has incorporated Core Web Vitals as a search ranking factor, you need to optimize your website in these parameters. Use this tool to check how Google perceives your webpages. It also give you advice on how to improve your web page.



URL: <https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/?hl=en-US>

Mobile Friendly

Check if your website is mobile-friendly. Google is going to start preferring mobile websites for search results. If your website isn't ready for optimum mobile experience, your ranking is going to suffer. You can test your website's mobile readiness using the free tool.

URL: <https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>

GTMetrix

Another popular tool for measuring web page performance is GTMetrix, which is also using the same underlying code (Google Lighthouse) to measure your website performance.

URL: <https://gtmetrix.com>



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