



The Insanely Powerful 2018 SEO Checklist

How to get a perfectly optimized site
with the 2018 SEO checklist

Every time we start a new site, we use this SEO checklist. There are a number of things you should be doing every time you create a new page. This list covers the most important ones.

LEARN HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This SEO checklist, and on-page optimization in general, is best thought about as incrementally beneficial. The big mistake people tend to make is that they find a checklist, they go through everything on it, and the minute they realize they won't be able to do one of them, they think they're screwed. That's not the right way to think about it.

Try to do as many as you can – but the vast majority of people aren't able to get everything.

INSTALL GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Why should you do this?

Google Analytics is the most widely used web analytics tool in the world. Its free version has almost everything you'll need to track and report the performance of your site.

For SEO, you'll be able to track things like how much traffic you're getting from search engines, which pages are getting the most organic traffic, what's the bounce rate, along with many other important metrics.

Resources:

- [Google Analytics](#)
- [Google Analytics Individual Qualification](#)
- [How to Pass the Google Analytics Certification Test](#)

SET UP GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

Previously known as Webmaster Tools, Search Console is a free tool provided by Google to webmasters (those who manage a website) to get data about their site's status and organic performance in Google's search engine.

Resources:

- [Google Search Console](#)
- [How to Use Search Analytics in Google Sheets for Better SEO Insights](#)

FOCUSING ON THE US? MIGHT WANT TO INSTALL BING WEBMASTER TOOLS

Why should you do this?

This is the equivalent to Google's Search Console for Microsoft's search engine. Bing is the default search engine for Internet Explorer and Edge browsers, which is the reason why Bing has about 10% of market share for desktop searches.

Bing is not nearly as relevant as Google, but it's also not negligible in the US market.

Resources:

- [Bing Webmaster Tools](#)

USING WORDPRESS? GET A WORDPRESS GOOGLE ANALYTICS PLUGIN

These plugins are a perfect answer for tracking and interpreting performance data when you aren't comfortable with adding the Google Analytics tracking code to your site yourself.

Resources:

- [Here's a Google Analytics plugin](#)
- [Here's another one](#)

USING WORDPRESS? INSTALL THE FREE VERSION OF YOAST SEO

Why should you do this?

Yoast SEO is a WordPress plugin that makes it incredibly easy for you to create SEO-friendly content. It takes care of things like canonical tags, noindex tags, and sitemaps for you.

The free version is very complete and will allow you to do almost everything you'll to optimize your WordPress site.

Resources:

- [Yoast SEO](#)
- [How to Install and Setup WordPress SEO Plugin by Yoast](#)

CHECK GOOGLE'S SEARCH CONSOLE FOR CRAWL ERRORS, DUPLICATE CONTENT ERRORS, MISSING TITLES AND OTHER TECHNICAL ERRORS

Why should you do this?

Previously known as Webmaster Tools, this is Google's free tool for website owners to get data about the search performance of their sites.

You will be able to use it to find technical issues with your site such as duplicate content. And find data about search rankings, visibility, and CTR.

Resources:

- [Google Search Console](#)

SPOT-CHECK REDIRECT PROBLEMS (SPECIFICALLY, 302 ERRORS THAT SHOULD BE 301S)

Why should you do this?

In SEO, the proper use of redirects is crucial. The standard is a 301 redirect, which is interpreted by search engines as a permanent redirect, hence it passes almost all of the SEO value from the old page to the new one. A 302 is a temporary redirect, on the other hand, is considered a temporary redirect (like for site maintenance or time-specific promotions, for example) so the SEO value of the redirected page is not passed to the new destination.

Resources:

- [Browseo.net](#)

LOOK FOR BROKEN LINKS, ERRORS, AND CRAWL PROBLEMS

Why should you do this?

The larger your site, the more important this is. Broken links, errors, and crawl errors make it harder for search engines to find your content, index it, and drive traffic to it.

Resources:

- [Screaming Frog](#)

PERFORM KEYWORD RESEARCH

Why should you do this?

Understanding the terms that people use when they search, and the intent behind them is crucial to your SEO strategy.

Be sure to consider searcher intent and difficulty, pick 1 keyword per page, and you'll generally want to start with lower-volume keywords first.

Resources:

- [Adwords Keyword Planner](#)
- [KWFinder](#)
- [KeywordTool.io](#)
- [SEMRush](#)

HAVE YOU LOOKED AT COMPETITOR LINK PROFILES?

Why should you do this?

This is the easiest way to get started with link building. Tracking where they are getting their most authoritative backlinks will help you to understand their strategy, how they are anchoring the links on their pages, and provide insights as to where you can gain similar links.

Resources:

- [Ahrefs](#)
- [Link Diagnosis](#)
- [Open Site Explorer](#)
- [Majestic](#)

TRY TO GET YOUR PRIMARY KEYWORD INTO YOUR PAGE URL

Why should you do this?

Keywords in the URL are known to be a ranking signal. However, you should avoid stuffing your URL with keywords: research has shown that shorter URLs tend to rank higher than long ones.

Side note: There are very serious consequences to changing a URL that already has authority – don't do this if your page already has links!

Resources:

- [Best practices for structuring URLs](#)

ADD YOUR KEYWORD TO YOUR TITLE TAG. IS YOUR TITLE TAG COMPELLING?

Why should you do this?

Even though including keywords in the title tag is still important, it is not enough to get you to rank high. Search engines now weigh in the clickthrough rate on the results as well when determining rankings, so an attractive and compelling title will help you get more people to click on your page.

Resources:

- [Title tag preview tool](#)

ADD YOUR KEYWORD TO YOUR META DESCRIPTION. IS YOUR META DESCRIPTION COMPELLING?

Why should you do this?

The content of the meta description is not used by search engines as a ranking signal. However, including your keyword in it and writing a compelling meta description can help with your CTR.

Resources:

- [This is a helpful article about meta descriptions](#)

ADD YOUR KEYWORD TO YOUR H1 TAG. MAKE SURE TO ONLY USE ONE H1 TAG, AND MAKE SURE IT SHOWS UP IN THE DOCUMENT BEFORE H2, H3 ETC.

Why should you do this?

Even though the value of the H2, H3,...,H6 tags for SEO is debatable, it is still generally a good idea to include your primary keyword in your H1 tag, make sure there is one H1 in the entire page and that it appears before any other heading tag.

ADD CRAWLABLE TEXT TO YOUR PAGE

Why should you do this?

Make sure to have at least 100 words on each URL (minimum – the more the better). You can still rank with less, and you don't ever want to put unnecessary text on your site, but I recommend not creating a new page unless you have roughly ~100 words worth of content.

USE SYNONYMS IN YOUR COPY

Why should you do this?

As search engines gain a more complex understanding of human language, content creators are able to utilize more natural language and still stay relevant to the keywords they are trying to rank for. Synonyms are great, and using natural language that's influenced by keyword research (rather than just pure keywords) is highly encouraged.

Resources:

- [What synonyms mean for SEO](#)

USE WORDS DISCOVERED THROUGH LATENT SEMANTIC INDEXING IN YOUR COPY

Why should you do this?

Latent semantic indexing, or LSI, is a method used to determine context. Including keywords that are thematically related to your primary keyword can help the search engine understand what the content of your page is about.

Resources:

- [LSIGraph.com](#)

ADD DESCRIPTIVE ALT TAGS AND FILENAMES TO YOUR PAGES

Why should you do this?

Search engines "see" images by reading the ALT tag and looking at file names, among other factors. Try to be descriptive when you name your images.

LINK TO OTHER PAGES ON YOUR SITE WITH SEO-FRIENDLY TEXT

Why should you do this?

In addition to including links to relevant and authoritative sites in your content, Google looks at the language used in the hyperlink itself. By including internal links with text that is relevant to the page that you are linking to, and including your keywords, you are indicating what the content being linked is about.

Avoid using keywords in global navigation, though, as that can look like over-optimization. Stick to in-content links instead.

Resources:

- [Best practices for internal linking](#)

MAKE SURE YOU DON'T HAVE DUPLICATE CONTENT

Why should you do this?

Duplicate content can dilute the value of your content among several URLs.

Use 301 redirects, canonical tags or use Google Webmaster Tools to fix any duplicate content that might be indexing and penalizing your site.

Resources:

- [Google Search Console](#)

CHECK YOUR SITE'S SPEED AND KEEP IT FAST!

Why should you do this?

Search engines value sites that provide a good user experience and the speed of your site is a huge factor. A slow loading site will increase your bounce rate, as visitors lose patience and leave.

Resources:

- [PageSpeed tools](#)
- [Gift of Speed](#)
- [GTMetrix](#)
- [Pingdom](#)

MAKE SURE YOUR SITE IS MOBILE FRIENDLY

Why should you do this?

As an increasing amount of web traffic comes from mobile devices, having a site that is not responsive to different screen sizes and shapes will negatively impact usability, especially for local searches.

Resources:

- [Google's mobile friendly testing tool](#)

CREATE AN XML SITEMAP AND SUBMIT IT TO GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

Why should you do this?

An XML sitemap helps search engines understand the structure of your site and find all the pages on your site that you want indexed.

Resources:

- [XML-Sitemaps.com](#)
- [Google XML Sitemaps WordPress Plugin](#)
- [The Yoast SEO plugin also comes with this functionality by default](#)

CREATE A ROBOTS.TXT FILE AND SUBMIT IT TO GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

Why should you do this?

In conjunction with an XML sitemap, a robots.txt file will establish what activities crawlers are permitted to perform in relation to each page. Including one in the top-level directory allows you to control the way that a search engine crawls and indexes your site. It can be specified for different types of crawlers, allowing you to establish different protocols for different search engines.

Resources:

- [Google's robots.txt tool](#)

CLAIM YOUR BRAND NAME ON AS MANY SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS POSSIBLE

Why should you do this?

For reputation management reasons, not only do you want to make sure no one else gets your account name, but you can often own all the results on the first page of a search for your brand if you're a new website or company.

Resources:

- [Namechk](#)

USE AN SEO AUDIT TOOL TO DOUBLE-CHECK EVERYTHING

Why should you do this?

Performing an SEO audit manually is time consuming and complicated. Fortunately, there are SEO auditing tools that can help with the process. These will speed up the process, identifying errors and offering solutions. This allows you to spend more of your time working on overall strategy, instead of weeding out broken links.

Resources:

- [SEO Audit Tool](#)

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