



SEO Basics

Video: Why Is SEO Important?

In today's digital landscape, getting found online is more important than ever.

With almost as many websites as people on Earth, it's become increasingly difficult to cut through the noise. The climb to get to page one of search engine results is getting tougher. Users are more discerning than ever about the content they read and the websites they choose to interact with.

The majority of online experiences involve search.

68% of online experiences begin with a search engine (Source: BrightEdge)

53% of all website traffic comes from organic search (Source: BrightEdge)

93% of global traffic comes from Google search, Google Images, and Google Maps (Source: Sparktoro)

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To fully understand the importance of search, first look at how the Internet works.

In its simplest form, the Internet is a massive collection of pages connected to each other by links.

Think of the Internet like a city.

How is the Internet like a city?

In a town, there are houses that we can think of as websites. Each room inside the house is like a different webpage on that site, and the hallways and stairs connecting the different rooms are the internal links between the site's pages.

On each street in town, you have different houses, representing lots of different websites. As more and more houses are built and the Internet continues to grow, the town expands to become a city.

Connecting all of these houses are roads, which are like external links. The roads connect different buildings and neighborhoods together. A big popular website is like a shopping mall, with lots of roads and maybe even a highway leading to it. Not only is it easy to find, there are several different ways to get there.

If you know a building's address, you can drive straight to it. This is like typing in the URL of a website. But if you don't know where the building you want to visit is, you'll have to go to the town directory or Yellow Pages to look for it – assuming you don't have the Internet, of course! You use the information you do have about the building – it's a red brick building, it has three stories, it's on the other side of town – to look it up. This is kind of like performing a search using a search engine.

This is a pretty basic analogy, and the Internet in practice is way more complex. But, hopefully, this starts to get you thinking about how websites relate to one another and the role that search engines play.

When the Internet began, getting to a website was cumbersome.

You could only reach a website by manually typing in its address or by clicking a link from another website. As the internet grew and thousands of websites were created, search engines were created to help users navigate the web and find what they needed easily.



There are lots of search engines out there like Yahoo and Bing. But we're only going to focus on Google since it accounts for over 90% of search queries worldwide. (Source: <https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/search-engine-market-share>) With the advent of search engines, naturally, came the start of SEO.

What is SEO?

SEO, which stands for search engine optimization, is the practice of increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to a website through organic search engine results. (Source: Moz)

In the early years of SEO, search engine algorithms were simpler and bad practices like "keyword stuffing" were common. But as search engines became more sophisticated, their algorithms became smarter and more adept at serving users more relevant content to answer their search queries.

This, at the end of the day, is Google's (or any search engine's) goal. They are focused on their users (the searchers) and giving them the best experience by showing them the best results. To do this, they've made their algorithm smarter – with a smarter algorithm and more competition than ever before, SEO helps you stay competitive.

If you want an overview of the major Google algorithm changes over the years, check out the resources for this video.

When you're doing SEO today, you need to balance focusing on the user and making it easy for search engines to crawl your website.

You can have the best content on the web, but nobody will know about it if your website isn't optimized for search engines. Understanding even just the basic "to-dos" and "not-to-do's" of SEO could make (or break) how your website is found.

Google cares about E-A-T. E-A-T stands for expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness. The expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness of a page's contents, of the website itself, and of the creator of the website's content all matter immensely.

If a page has low E-A-T, you can bet that it won't rank for many high-value keywords. E-A-T is a great guiding principle when it comes to both SEO and the creation of excellent, high-quality content that helps answer or solve searchers' questions or problems.

Going beyond that, there are countless tactics and strategies when it comes to SEO, and it can be hard to tell which will work for you.

SEO is ongoing and cumulative.

There is no silver bullet or quick-fix. The same SEO strategy won't provide the same results for different companies.

Ranking signals affect different sites very differently and depend on the website's area of expertise, its content strategy, and even the types of searchers it attracts.

It's also important to remember that SEO isn't a short-term tactic: it's a long-term strategy. It can take weeks or even months to start seeing results. Ranking organically takes time, so it's important to start as soon as you can.

Many marketers and business owners get discouraged when they don't see immediate results and suddenly appear in the top spot on Google after starting with SEO. But sticking with SEO has so many benefits: not only is it more cost-effective than other strategies like paid advertising, but it has a "snowball" effect. As you invest over



time by regularly creating and optimizing content, your site becomes larger and more authoritative, and therefore more likely to rank. This effect only continues to build over time as your growth compounds. It just requires a little bit of knowledge, a solid SEO strategy, and sticking with it.

Video: How Do Search Engines Rank Your Content?

How do search engines rank your content? The key to getting your content to rank well in search is having a clear understanding of how Google finds, analyzes, and ranks your content.

Getting your content to rank highly in search results depends predominantly on two things: One, improving discovery and relevance by creating lots of high-quality content on the topics you want to be known for; and two, building authority by getting lots of high-quality backlinks to your website.

Discovery, relevance, and authority - those are the three stages that cover how search engines work in a nutshell. And each of these three stages correlates with an action the search engine takes: crawling, indexing, and ranking.

First is the DISCOVERY stage. Search engine bots discover your web page by "crawling" it - which really just means it discovers your web page and takes note of all of the content within it.

Next is the RELEVANCE stage. Once a search engine bot discovers your content, it decides how relevant it is to certain search queries by indexing it, based on signals like keywords within the content.

Next is the AUTHORITY stage. This means building enough credibility through backlinks and other factors, that search engines consider your site authoritative enough to rank high in the search results. Authority directly impacts ranking strength.

I find the best way to explain how search engines rank content is using the library metaphor. After all, isn't Google just a giant library?

Let's pretend for a moment that you work in a library. You have a ton of books in a pile in front of you, and you need to figure out where in the library these books need to be stored.

This is a GREAT way to think about how Google finds, analyzes, and ranks content.

Your first step is to FIND all these books. This is CRAWLING. If a book isn't in the stack to begin with or you can't see it, you won't be able to put it on a shelf. That's the discovery stage. In the sense of a website: Do you have a piece of content, and can the search engines access it?

Your second step is to CATEGORIZE the books. This is INDEXING. The books in your library cover all sorts of topics: fiction, nonfiction, science, history, and technology. How do you sort them? This is where you assess the relevance of a book to a topic - by looking at the title, flipping through some pages, and seeing who the author is and whether they're known for writing about certain topics. Search engine bots index content on a website in a similar way. They crawl the content and say, 'What are the contents of this web page? What do they mean? Then, they bucket them into some sort of topic and start to create some semantic associations.

Your third step is figuring out which books to feature. What should go on your best-sellers shelf? Which books should you make easier to find than others? This is RANKING. The way you determine which books are most easily discoverable for visitors to your library is mostly based on whether the book comes from credible sources.

So, how do you determine authority? This is a subjective exercise. In the case of books, you look for credible authors like Dan Brown and H.G. Wells. Those are authoritative sources - we know that because they're talked about a lot, referred to a lot, and they're cited in other works. Getting cited is like having backlinks to your website - things that are mentioned in the press and are linked to from other sites regularly. That's what builds authority.



These three stages and actions are dependent on one another. If your content isn't relevant, then it has little chance of ranking, no matter how authoritative it is. If your website isn't authoritative, then it has little chance of ranking, no matter how relevant it is. And if your website can't be discovered in the first place, it has no chance of ranking at all.

We hope this helped you understand how search engines discover, index, and rank your content.

Video: How to Create an SEO Strategy

In psychology, there is a concept called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

What is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?

According to SimplyPsychology, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as levels within a pyramid.

From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love and belonging (friendship), self-esteem, and self-actualization. Needs lower on the pyramid must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs at higher levels.

SEO has its own hierarchy of needs. Source: Moz

What is the Hierarchy of Needs for SEO?

This pyramid was developed by Moz, an industry-leading SEO software platform and thought leader. It's a great way to think about SEO, and in particular, your SEO strategy.

Just like with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for human beings, you need to fulfill the bottom tiers of the pyramid before you can move up to the higher tiers. When it comes to SEO, your site needs to be able to be crawled and indexed by search engines before you can start creating compelling content. And you need to have compelling content before you can start optimizing it for keywords – you get the idea.

There are so many different SEO strategies and tactics out there, it's hard to tell where you should start. This model is one way to figure out how to prioritize what you should be focusing on.

Your SEO strategy will depend on several factors.

- How established is your business online?
- What resources do you have to dedicate to SEO?
- What industry are you in?

A healthy SEO approach balances building relevance and building authority.

That means creating high-quality, relevant content while also building high-quality backlinks. Balancing how much time you focus on one versus the other depends on how much authority your website has right now.

Take a moment to think about your business. Is your organization well-known, talked about, and linked to a lot online? If so, then you probably have pretty good search authority already. That means, when it comes to SEO, you won't have to spend as much time building authority and can focus on defending your position. To do that, focus on serving up more and more relevant content to be discovered by Google. Creating more content will also, in turn, help you acquire more backlinks. Or, is your organization creating a lot of content but not getting many links? Then don't make the mistake of only focusing on content creation. If your website doesn't have authority built up yet, then all the content you create isn't going to get ranked as quickly as you'd like. Building authority is a combination of creating high-quality content and building links to it.



An SEO strategy has website goals and established KPIs. The next important piece of creating your SEO strategy is determining goals for your website and establishing KPIs. By setting goals and putting numbers to those goals, you'll be able to figure out whether your SEO efforts are actually paying off. Many businesses will simply say, "We want to rank #1 for this keyword," but that isn't quite enough.

What are your goals for your website?

- Do you want to increase organic traffic?
- Do you want to increase the number of leads from your website?
- Do you want to design a mobile-optimized website?
- Do you want to ensure your website is accessible for those with disabilities?

What are SMART goals?

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

What are some SMART goals for SEO?

Make sure that you're not setting vague or unrealistic goals for your SEO strategy. Goals should be clear and tied to business objectives. They should be achievable and realistic based on your website's authority and the resources you're dedicating to SEO. They should also be time-bound – this is especially important because SEO is a long game. It can take a while to start seeing results, so you have to be thoughtful and realistic about what you can achieve within a given timeframe.

The "measurable" piece of your SMART goals ties into KPIs.

What are KPIs?

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the critical indicators of progress toward an intended result. (Source: KPI.org)

Choosing KPIs to measure is an important part of your SEO efforts.

Important indicators to consider include:

- Organic traffic
- Keyword ranking
- Conversion rate
- Bounce rate
- Page load time
- Backlinks built

Establish official KPIs for your website's SEO strategy.

Once you know your goals for your website when it comes to SEO, you can establish your KPIs which will help you track toward success. Of course, the specific KPIs and numbers you determine will be based on your website, your goals, and your business.

Here's an example: "We want to increase organic traffic by 40% over the next 12 months." This is a specific goal to achieve over a set timeframe with a specific metric to determine success.

To learn more about establishing good KPIs, check out the resources for this video.

Determine your SEO toolset to reach your goals.

Once you've set your SMART goals and established your KPIs, it's time to decide how to get there. In SEO, you have a wide range of tools and strategies at your disposal. Depending on your goals and the resources you can dedicate to SEO, you should pick between 3 and 5 things to work on for a set period of time. For example, if your



goal is to increase organic traffic to your website, your strategies to get there may include creating a series of blog posts for a set of target keywords, increasing your site speed by optimizing your images, or getting featured as a guest blogger on an authoritative website in your industry.

It's okay to not do something if it's not important for your users.

Focus on the user – don't focus on "doing SEO" and checking boxes off for the sake of it.

Focus your SEO strategy on what matters most to your users. Countless resources claim to tell you everything you "need" to do in order to optimize your website and create content that ranks highly in search engines. But, at the end of the day, simply performing tasks for the sake of checking a box on a checklist won't solve the core problem of helping your users. Just like websites are specific to the individual business, SEO is specific to a business' audience. This comes down to knowing your audience well and understanding what they're searching for and wanting from your business.

Video: How to Measure Your Website's SEO Authority

Publishing great content on your website is important, but your site needs to have strong authority to give your content a good shot at ranking in the search results. That begs the question: How do you accurately MEASURE authority in the first place?

There are a number of different factors that add up to the search authority of your website, but the most important are around BACKLINKS. Measuring authority boils down to assessing the VOLUME and QUALITY of the backlinks you have to your website.

To truly measure your website's authority, you'll need to analyze your "backlink profile." What is your "backlink profile"? Your backlink profile is a list of all the sites currently linking back to your site, which also takes into account HOW they're linking to your site, and which pages they're linking to.

Your backlink profile shows the number of inbound links to your website, the number of unique domains that link to your website, and the QUALITY of those links - which depends on things like how authoritative the web pages that link to your site are.

Analyzing your backlink profile isn't something you can do manually, but there are tools to help that don't cost much and are well worth the price. There are also free versions of these tools that will give you a pretty good high-level view of your backlink profile.

One tool that you can use is Moz, which can help you uncover backlinks to your site, find link-building opportunities, and discover links that might be damaging your authority. There are a number of other paid tools that do similar things, like SEMrush, Majestic, and Ahrefs.

Thinking through and actually measuring your website's authority and credibility will help you get a good idea of the state of your current SEO, and what you need to do to have a better chance of ranking.