



THAT SEO Checklist



Search engine rankings are impacted by a number of different factors. To achieve the highest rankings, a website needs to address as many of these factors as possible. The following guide is intended to be an outline of the major factors affecting website search engine visibility. Since, organic search rankings are determined by a number of onsite and offsite factors, we'll break our analysis up into two parts.

Onsite Factors: Any factors that are part of the website and affect rankings.

- Design and architecture
 - General website layout should be accomplished using CSS as opposed to tables.
 - All JavaScript should be called from external files.
 - Reduce the amount of code required to correctly render a webpage as much as possible.
 - Frames and iFrames should not contain content needed for SEO.
 - The site architecture should allow the user to access any important page within 3 or 4 clicks, if possible.
- Copy – The copy on each page should contain the relevant keyword phrase and variations of the keyword phrase in a natural language manner (no keyword stuffing).
 - Keywords should appear as close to the top of the page as possible.
 - Bold, italicize and underline important keyword phrases.
- Title tag – The title tag should contain the relevant keyword phrase and be no longer than 70 characters. This tag should not contain any special characters.
- Meta description – The Meta description should contain the relevant keyword phrase and be no longer than 150-180 characters.
- Meta keywords – While not critical, the keyword tag should contain about 5 relevant keyword phrases (separated by commas) that are similar to one another.
- Images – Images should be named and have alt text in alignment with the relevant keyword phrase. For example, a page optimized for the term *red car* could have an image of a red car with the name *red_car.jpg* and an alt tag that reads *Red Car*.
- Headings – Heading tags should be used for page and section headings and should contain the relevant keyword phrase. Search engines put an emphasis on page headings to help define the topic of the page.
- Internal linking – Pages on a website that are often linked to from other pages in that same website typically gain importance in the eyes of the search engines. Link often to important pages. Use keyword rich anchor text in these links.
- URLs – URLs should be search engine friendly meaning they contain keywords descriptive of the pages they belong to. For example, page optimized for the term *red car* could have a URL like *http://www.yoursite.com/red-car.html*.



- Sitemaps – A sitemap containing text links should provide access to all the important sections and pages of the website.
- Robots.txt files – The robots.txt file is used by the search engines to determine which parts of a website to visit and which to avoid.
 - Use *Disallow:* to define sections that shouldn't be crawled. Remember that directories and pages that are disallowed can still be indexed and can still carry PageRank.
 - Specify the location of the website's XML sitemap using *Sitemap:*.
 - See <http://www.robotstxt.org/robotstxt.html>
- XML sitemaps – XML sitemaps make it easy for search engines to find all the content on a website. Every website should have an XML sitemap and the location of the file should be specified in the robots.txt file. (<http://www.sitemaps.org/>)
- Redirects - 301 (permanent) redirects should be used anytime a redirect is needed. Avoid 302, Java, Meta refreshes and html redirects.
- Canonicalization – Each page on a website should exist on exactly one URL. For example, <http://www.mysite.com> and <http://mysite.com> should not both exist. A 301 redirect should be used to redirect one of these pages to other.
- NoFollow – The NoFollow link attribute can be used to instruct the search engines not to follow a given link.
 - The NoFollow link attribute is commonly used to sculpt PageRank to more important pages within the website by preventing link juice from being wasted on 'non-important' pages.
 - Example: The links to *Privacy Policy* and- *Terms and Conditions* pages could contain the NoFollow attribute to avoid passing link juice to these pages which typically aren't important from a search perspective.
- NoIndex – The NoIndex header attribute can be added to any pages that the search engines should not include in the index.
 - Note: These pages can still carry and pass PageRank
- Size – The size of a website can impact its ranking when the content supports the website theme. Websites with substantial amounts of content tend to benefit with higher rankings for competitive keyword phrases and for long-tail keyword phrases.
- Outbound linking – Occasional outbound links to relevant and authoritative websites can help rankings.
- Content – Content should be unique, relevant, quality and updated regularly. A blog is a good way to keep a website updated with fresh content.



Offsite Factors: Any factors affecting search engine rankings that exist off the website.

- Links –Inbound links have a powerful affect on search engine rankings.
 - Acquire links from relevant, reputable and authoritative websites.
 - Acquire many links.
 - The anchor text used in inbound links should use relevant keyword phrases.
 - Acquire inbound links to important pages deep within your website to bring strength to those pages.
- Domain Age – Domain age is an indicator of the trustworthiness of a website. Established websites have more clout with search engines.
- Directory listings – Inclusion in reputable directories such as DMOZ (<http://www.dmoz.org>) and Yahoo (<http://dir.yahoo.com>). Submitting to relevant niche directories can also be beneficial.

Summary:

Your SEO efforts should focus on developing and promoting a web property that adds value to the internet. These general guidelines define the many ways that a website can become more search engine friendly and searchable. It's not recommended to overdo any of the above as this can result in the search engines penalizing a website for spam.



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If you are interested in any of these services, or would like to speak to someone regarding setting up a custom plan for you or your company, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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