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WOO

Technical SEO Quick Wins

Quick Technical Fixes
To Improve Your SEO &
Google Rank

Contents

01

Introduction

Quick Technical Fixes To Improve Your SEO & Google Rank

Having a website isn't enough for it to rank in search engines like Google. There are lots of factors that can cause you to rank, or not rank, for search queries. One aspect of your website that could be preventing you from ranking better is your site's technical health.

This guide covers the most common technical SEO issues that could be affecting your website and how you can fix them quickly.

02

Security

How secure your website is matters for your customers, your partners, and search engines. Yes, your online security measures can impact your SEO rankings as well as the trust your customer has in you. That's because search engines don't want to put their searchers at risk by sending them to an unsecured site that could harm them. So you need to make sure that your website is secure for its visitors. The easiest way that you can do that is by using HTTPS instead of HTTP.

1   HTTPS

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https://www.yourdomain.com.

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What Is It?

HTTPS stands for hypertext transfer protocol secure. It is the secure version of HTTP, which is a protocol that is used to send data between your browser and the website you're visiting. It's essentially the way that your browser communicates with a site.

Using HTTPS ensures data security for its users, which is especially important if you are browsing using public Wi-Fi networks. You can check if your website is using HTTPS by looking at the domain of your website.

1. **Does it look like: http://www.yourdomain.com?**
2. **Does it look like: https://www.yourdomain.com?**

Why It's Important

HTTPS is HTTP with encryption, which means that it has extra security. That's because HTTPS uses Transport Layer Security (TLS) or Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) to encrypt data that is transferred between your browser and a website. HTTP does not encrypt this data so HTTPS is far more secure.

When To Use It

Every site should be using HTTPS. Since 2018, HTTPS has been a ranking factor, so less secure sites using HTTP will be limited in terms of rankings. This was solely to improve user experience and safety because an SSL certificate is free.

Whether you use a free SSL certificate or a paid one, you will still experience the same level of encryption and security.

1 HTTPS Cont.

How To Use It

If your site is not already using HTTPS, you can change this by setting up SSL/HTTPS in WooCommerce using a plugin like Really Simple SSL.

Plugins will automatically

1. **Check SSL certificate**
2. **Set WordPress to use HTTPS in URLs**
3. **Set up redirects from HTTP to HTTPs**
4. **Look for URLs in your content still loading from insecure HTTP sources and attempt to fix them**

All you need to do is go into Settings » SSL Page to check.

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Are You Using It Correctly?

Make sure that all of your internal links on your site are to HTTPS URLs. It is common for websites that have switched from HTTP to HTTPS to leave HTTP links in the content of their pages. Although these links will automatically redirect to the HTTPS version, it is bad practice. So make sure you manually update any links on your site to the most secure version.

03

User Experience

How secure your website matters to your users and so does the speed at which your website loads. And because that matters to users, it matters to search engines too. Search engines prefer faster loading pages, so your website needs to be quick to rank well.

This is becoming increasingly important for search engines like Google, as they continue to prioritise faster sites. The Core Web Vital algorithm update that Google rolled out in July 2021 but more emphasis on core vitals, including page speed.

1 Page Speed

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What Is It?

As the name suggests, page speed is the time that a web page takes to load. But be aware that this is different from site speed. Site speed is an average speed for all the pages on your website. Page speed is the speed at which each individual page loads. Every page has different elements on it and so you should work on your speed at a page level.

Your page-load in stages, with the most important being:

First Contextual Paint (FCP):

is the time it takes for a page to load enough elements for a user to see what is on the page.

Largest Contentful Paint (LCP):

is the time that a website takes for most of the elements on the page to be visible and interactive.

First Input Delay (FIP):

is the time that it takes for the page to respond after a user has interacted with an element on the page.

Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS):

is the amount that elements on a web page shift and move while the page is loading.

Why It's Important

As well as being important for users, your page speed is important to search engines too. Google has explicitly told webmasters that page speed is a ranking signal. That means that having a fast page will help you to rank better whereas having a slow page will limit how well you can rank.

Slower pages will also affect how well Google can discover your site and how many pages it can see. The longer your page loads, the less time Google will have to spend actually looking at your content.

When To Do It

Often page speed is second to the design and layout of a website. But no matter how many pages you have or how important the look of your pages is, you need to prioritise your page speed.

That's because, as well as affecting your user metrics like bounce rate, on-site behaviour, and conversion rate, your page speed will also affect how well you rank and how much organic traffic you drive.
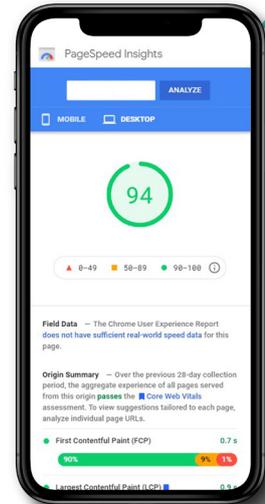
1 Page Speed Cont.

How To Do It

There are lots of quick and easy ways that you can improve your page speed yourself, which include optimising your images, limiting the number of page redirects.

1 Compress Your Images

Reduce the size of the image files that you upload to your website. Try to keep them under 150 bytes where possible. You can use a free tool like Tiny PNG to reduce image size without losing its quality.

2 Choose The Right Image File Type

Upload your images in the most optimum file format. PNGs are better for graphics with less than 16 colors and JPEGs are better for photographs. However, WebP images are typically 25-50% smaller than JPEG.

3 Minimise Redirects

Redirects from one page to another are important for seamless user journeys and to keep broken pages at bay. However, every redirect adds an additional step in loading a page, which means extra time. You should especially avoid redirect chains, where multiple redirects go from one URL after another.

Check pages for redirects using a browser extension like Redirect Path. You can then identify any chains and change them to go straight from the first URL to the last.

1 Page Speed Cont.

4 Minify CSS and/or JavaScript

Minifying your code will reduce the time your page loads by removing unnecessary characters in your code like commas and spaces, as well as removing unused code. You can use third party tools like CSSNano or UglifyJS to do this.

5 Improve Server Response Time

Improving the time your server takes to respond will improve the time it takes to load your page. You should aim for a server response of under 200ms, which you can do by analysing your hosting solution and the amount of traffic your site receives.

There are also straightforward fixes that a developer can do to improve your page speed. Although there are plugins for WooCommerce, some of these development fixes can be a little more complicated so it may be beneficial to pass these tasks onto an expert.

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Are you using it correctly?

To check how well your pages load and what aspects of your page needs improving you can use free tools like Google Lighthouse and GT Metrix. These tools test your speed and give you a score in the key stages of page load so that you know what you need to work on. This will also help you to benchmark the progress of work you do on your speed.

04

Crawling

To rank your website a search engine needs to be able to discover and understand it. They do this by doing what's known as 'crawling' and there are certain things that you can do on your website to make sure that they crawl your website the way you want them to.

1   Robots.txt

This set of instructions to search engines can make or break your SEO efforts. Get this wrong and your site may not appear in Google at all.

2   XML Sitemaps

An XML sitemap acts as a map of your website for search engines when they are crawling.

3   Rel Canonical Tags

These are a type of HTML tag that may sound complicated, but could have a big impact on your SEO efforts with minimal effort.

04

1   Robots.txt

This set of instructions to search engines can make or break your SEO efforts. Get this wrong and your site may not appear in Google at all.

What Is It?

Robots.txt is a plain text page that only search engines will see. It contains a simple set of instructions so search engines know how to discover your site and what pages they should not look at. These instructions can apply to all types of search engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc.) or to just one.

Check whether your website has a robots.txt by:

1. **Adding /robots.txt to the end of your site's URL**
   (But be mindful that not all websites used this path for their robots.txt)
2. **Or using an SEO crawler**

What you should see is a call to search engines, known as a 'user-agent', followed by a 'disallow' instruction and a list of URL paths, e.g. /admin, / search. This will mean that search engines will not effectively ignore the URLs in the list.

Why It's Important

Search engines work by sending bots to discover all of the pages on your website. But because there are so many websites and web pages to discover, the bots only have a limited amount of time on each site. So to make sure they spend their time discovering the pages you want them to, you can give them instructions using robots.txt.

When To Use It

Having a robots.txt will help maximise the bots' time to make sure search engines don't bother looking at irrelevant pages, like your checkout pages. So you should use it to include all the areas of your website that search engines don't need to see.

However, all websites should have a robots.txt even if you want search engines to discover all of your pages. At the very least, your robots.txt should have a link to your sitemap for search engine bots to discover.

1   Robots.txt Cont.

How To Use It

By default, WordPress automatically creates a virtual robots.txt file for your site. But to edit your robots.txt you will need to use a plugin like Yoast SEO. To manage your robots.txt with Yoast, you will first need to turn the option on.

Visit:

1.   **SEO > Dashboard > Features > turn on Advanced Settings Pages**
2.   **SEO > Tools > File Editor > Create Robots.Txt File**

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Are You Using It Correctly?

Your robots.txt should sit directly on your domain:

www.yourdomain.com/robots.txt

So you can check it by adding "/robots.txt" to the end of your domain. Once there, you should carefully consider what pages you want search engines to discover and which you don't.

Make sure that any pages you don't want search engines to rank or have no value in ranking are marked with a disallow instruction. This could be sub-folders like /tags, /readme, /admin /search, or /checkout.

2 XML Sitemaps

An XML sitemap acts as a map of your website for search engines when they are crawling.

What Is It?

Your XML sitemap is a file on your website that lists all the pages that make up your website. It includes every URL, sometimes split into sub-folders, and other information like when the content on the URL was last updated.

Why Is It Important?

Giving search engines a map to your website will help them to crawl your website, i.e. discover all of the pages on your site. If search engines don't discover your pages, they can't possibly rank. So an XML sitemap can help your overall organic visibility.

When To Use It

Every website should have an XML sitemap, but only some websites will need multiple sitemaps. For example, a large website with 1000s of URLs should consider splitting its sitemaps into multiple versions that mirror your site structure.

You may have several sitemaps, one for your product pages, one for category pages, and another for blog pages. However you choose to split your sitemap, it should mirror your site structure so that it is a clear map to follow.

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2   XML Sitemaps Cont.

How To Use It

Once you have created your XML sitemap, you will need to tell Google. You can do this in two ways:

Google Search Console

Manually add your XML sitemap link in the sitemaps section of Google Search Console.

Robots.txt

Include the URL of your sitemap at the bottom of robots.txt file if possible.

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Are You Using It Correctly?

Your robots.txt should sit directly on your domain, i.e. www.yourdomain.com/sitemap.xml, so you can check it by adding "/sitemap.xml" to the end of your domain. But this isn't always the case. You may need to check your sitemap using your CMS.

3   Rel Canonical

These are a type of HTML tag that may sound complicated, but could have a big impact on your SEO efforts with minimal effort.

What Is It?

A 'Rel Canonical', also known as a canonical tag is a small line of HTML code that tells search engines that two pages are related. It sits in the <head> section of HTML where most search engines instructions are. So you can check whether a page has a canonical tag by inspecting its HTML.

Try this yourself using Google Chrome.

1.   **Right click on the web page**
2.   **Choose Inspect**
3.   **Open the <HEAD> tag**
4.   **Ctrl + F to find**
5.   **Type in rel=can**

Why It's Important

Because a canonical tag is used across pages with similar content, it helps to prevent problems with duplication. That is important as duplicate content is bad news when it comes to SEO.

Google and other search engines will penalise duplicate content much like plagiarism. So using a canonical tag can help to avoid this by telling search engines why your content has been duplicated or similar.

When To Use It

A page that has similar content to another page on your website should have a canonical tag. For eCommerce sites, this is common when you have multiple products with different attributes (colour, size, etc.) that each have their own URL. Often, these products share the same product description, which could lead to duplication. In this case, a canonical tag should be added to all products that share content that points to the main version of that URL.

Be mindful: changing a handful of words, like the product name or colour, is not enough to make the content different. Content should be 30% or more unique.

3   Rel Canonical Cont.

How To Use It

A canonical tag should point to the primary page or the version of the content that you want to rank. Once you know which page this is you can set up your tags.

In WooCommerce, you can manage your canonical tags using a plugin like Yoast SEO. Both the free and premium versions of this plugin automatically add canonical URLs to your WooCommerce site. However, Yoast also allows you to manually add or change your canonical tags.

Using Yoast SEO for WooCommerce you can change a canonical tag by:

1. **Navigate to the page or post you want to edit**
2. **Scroll down to the Yoast SEO meta box**
3. **Click 'Advanced'**
4. **Find the 'Canonical URL' field**
5. **Enter the URL of the other page in the 'Canonical URL' field**
6. **Click publish or save**

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Are You Using It Correctly?

Although canonical tags can prevent SEO issues with your site, they can also cause issues when used incorrectly. The most common issues are:

Blank rel=canonical tags
In this case, check that there are no spaces or similar in the 'Canonical URL' field.

Canonical link not working
Check to see if the page in your tag has a noindex tag.

Multiple canonical tags
Remove all but the tag that points to the primary URL.

Canonical tags on every page
Tags should be used where duplicate content is unavoidable. They should not be used in place of unique and original content across your site.

Paginated pages
Canonical tags are not the correct HTML tag to use on paginated pages, e.g. pages in a list.

04

Technical Fixes And Your SEO

Working on these quick technical fixes will help to prevent the loss of customers and rankings while sustaining your organic visibility and traffic.

For more support and quick fixes, visit

sellerdeck.co.uk/insights/

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To find out how we can help you or
your ecommerce site, contact us:

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