SEO Implementation Guide

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These materials are most effective when used in association with the book Digital Marketing Strategy

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

SEO Implementation Guide

This guide is designed to give you a step by step guide to implementing your SEO strategy.

Other guides are available for other digital marketing channels. To best understand how this fits into your broader strategy see the book Digital Marketing Strategy by Simon Kingsnorth.

How it works

The guide is designed to be as easy to use as possible. Each guide is broken down into simple, key steps to take to ensure your strategy is as effectively and smoothly implemented as possible. So less of this chat and let's get to the detail.

1 Understand your audience personas

SEO is all about predicting how your audience will search for your business. The foundation of doing this successfully is really knowing who your audience is and how they behave. The key to this is considering the audience types you have and creating distinct personas for each one. Personas should not only reflect demographic traits but also capture search intent, i.e. what users are likely trying to achieve. A woman in her mid-thirties living in a big city is likely time poor and would probably add terms like now or fast to her search. She may also search for advice on childcare and education and do most of her shopping online.

Her dad, a retired guy living in Iowa, probably shops mostly at local brick and mortar stores, is happy to spend money on his hobbies and does most of his networking at the local sports bar. Even though both are interested in buying children's toys, at your store, they'll find you in an entirely different way. Your keyword strategy needs to be able to grab both of them. This tactic ensures your SEO is grounded in real user behavior, not assumptions. It's also useful to align tactical personas with broader strategic customer segments to maintain consistency across marketing channels.

2 Segment your products

Strong segmentation not only helps structure your keyword research but also aligns directly with how search engines interpret your site's relevance. Most businesses sell a multitude of products or services, some of which might well be quite diverse. A good starting point is to split your products/services into logical segments. If your site hierarchy is logical, this step is probably already done.

Next, consider each segment in detail. Which are the most valuable to you? Consider applying audience segmentation methods to understand which types of consumers each product or service might appeal to.

3 Mine your data

This seems like an obvious step, but in 2011, Google made it much more difficult to work out which keywords your customers used. A good proxy for customer intent looking at most visited pages. Armed with this information, you can begin to brainstorm a short list of likely keywords. It need not be exhaustive at this stage.

While Google Analytics no longer provides keyword data due to the 'not provided' change, landing page data can still serve as a useful proxy for understanding searcher intent. If certain pages are consistently popular as entry points to your site, consider what search terms may be leading people there.

4 Mine secondary data sources

Once you have your initial keyword list, you can use several tools to expand the list. There are a multitude, with new ones being developed all the time. Google Keyword Planner is the most comprehensive and is fairly straight forward to use. Simply put in your keywords and see what suggestions come up. Third-party tools like SEMRush and Ahrefs can also help, especially by showing competitor rankings and search trends.

5 Sense check your research

The Keyword Planner sometimes does its job too well and returns more results than could conceivably be useful. A sense check will help you determine in which direction you should go. Ask yourself what commercial use a keyword has. A bank that ranks high for pound/euro exchange rate probably won't see many new accounts opened because of it. Then, take stock of your position. On the internet, David almost never beats Goliath. Smaller businesses do better with the Moneyball (long-tail, super-niche) approach. The last step is the most fun – talk to others in your industry and see what they think. More information only makes your data more robust. A thorough sense check should weigh not just search volume but also user intent, commercial relevance, and competitive feasibility. Involve others across your business to validate assumptions and enrich your data. Remember that you are not your consumers- a data set of one is not enough.

6 Define your tagging

Most marketing people outsource the technical parts of SEO to specialist agencies. Even if that's what you plan to do, it's still useful to know the basics.

Title tags are the blue link you see at the top of a Google search result, the purpose of which is to briefly describe the page content. They should be less than 75 characters and have keywords and your brand closer to the beginning. Pay attention to heading tags (H1, H2, etc.) too, as they help search engines understand the structure and content of your page.

The metadescription is the text that comes underneath the title in the search result. It should be readable by humans, contain some keywords and be no longer than 160 characters. While meta descriptions no longer directly impact rankings, they can help to improve click-through rates.

7 Plan your site structure

Your web design team will likely take care of your site structure, but knowing what factors they consider can help the planning stage go more smoothly. Hierarchy means the flow of pages from category to subcategory to page.

Fridges should be in the Home Appliance category, which in turn should be inside House and Garden. Your URLs need to be pretty, meaning they should contain actual words, not a string of random characters. Site maps come in pairs – one for the search bots and one for human visitors. Make sure you steer clear of duplicate content, meaning don't cannibalize your own content or plagiarize others.

A logical hierarchy or information architecture is crucial for users, but also for search engines. Pages should flow from broad to specific in a way that matches user behavior and keyword segmentation. Create two site maps: a user-friendly one and an XML sitemap for search engines, submitted through Google Search Console. You should also implement alt text for all images, avoid duplicate content, and if duplication is unavoidable, use 'rel='canonical' tags or 301 redirects to manage it effectively.

8 Optimise your content

The best way to optimise for search is to create engaging content that is relevant to your audience. All the SEO tricks are in service of something worth interacting with in the first place. Since Google does like fresh content, even on relatively static sites, a content plan is essential. You don't have to crank out new blog posts every day, but regularly updating helps with search and engagement.

Think carefully about content hosted on FB or Instagram first, as not having your site as the primary source of this content can harm your SEO. Youtube gets a pass because it is owned by Google.

Create your content with natural language and long-form queries in mind to align with voice search and AI-powered searches, where users often use full questions instead of just keywords, e.g. people are more likely to search for ‘What is the cheapest flight from London to Paris next week’ than ‘cheap flights London Paris’.

9 Build links ethically

Link building is the third corner of the SEO triangle and the section that must be treated with the most caution. The way to get links is to create engaging content. It’s slower than buying or swapping but ultimately gives better results. Engaging a PR to help boost your content is fine as long as it doesn’t result in a sudden boost of low-quality links. Google doesn't so much penalise low-quality links now, but rather it discounts them completely.

To avoid being discounted by Google, don’t buy links, remove duplicate content, avoid unnatural anchor text - most links should be natural, often just your brand name or site URL - and make sure you don’t have a disproportionate number of pages with little content. Instead, focus on earning links through digital PR, content marketing, and original research. Audit your backlink profile using SEO tools, and if needed, remove them if you can or use Google’s disavow tool carefully and with expert advice.

10 Structure your business for SEO

SEO is often viewed as some sort of dark art practiced in a damp basement in Russia. The truth is, an effective SEO strategy is implemented from C-suite down. Structuring your business for successful SEO means removing the barriers to collaboration between departments. Bringing social, content and SEO together into one team with shared KPIs makes an immense difference in results.