

Website SEO Evaluation & Best Practices

Introduction

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is the practice of optimizing websites and website content in hopes of ranking as high as possible in relevant search engine results. Search engines, like Google, have developed complex and highly protected algorithms that determine the relevance of a website in relation to all similar websites available on the Internet. In order to be found in relevant searches, many steps must be taken in order for search engines to find and properly index the information we want them to have. These steps allow search engines to read and understand what we want them to understand, but in no way guarantees that a website will show up at the top of search results for any/all keyword searches.

Proper SEO Practices can only make websites visible and easy for search engines to read/understand. But, the public's actual interaction with the site determines how high it stays in search engine results. If the site does not interest people, meaning they perform a search, visit a site (or the site is seen in search results often and never/rarely chosen), do not really interact with the site or its content, and leave without returning, it will begin to drop as a relevant search result for those particular terms used for the searches. Therefore, a periodic SEO review is an important step in maintaining and augmenting website traffic over time.

General Rules We Go By

- No one technique or rule will make or break your SEO efforts. Instead, addressing as many considerations as time/budget permits in a holistic manner wins the race.
- If an approach/someone promises/claims to "guarantee" top 5 results then be wary. There are no promises in SEO given the volume of variation that exists.
- SEO efforts are never complete. It all depends on how much time/effort/cost you want to invest AND what the value is of the return on your efforts.
- Organic SEO is a must. Paid advertising (such as through Google AdWords) can supplement traffic for sites that are in a highly competitive market, have very diverse geographic audiences and/or have not reached their organic SEO goals (which for some may never happen).

Items We Evaluated

- Website Articles: Culture, News, Media, Blog, Expertise
- Social Media
- Newsletter

Website Article SEO Evaluation

We have reviewed several of the most recent posts on the PAGE website as part of our first Special Report (Ticket #4499). Following are examples of recommendations for search engine optimization related adjustments. Please review these examples and explanations for the changes. We recommend that the pattern of these adjustments be carried on to new posts. More examples can be found in the attached document.

A) WEBSITE ARTICLE TITLE RENAMING

Creating a highly relevant, keyword dense title provides search engines with the most important information used for categorization. This is also what appears as the blue link on search results pages, and keywords that match with a user's search will appear in bold.

Example:

Article URL: <http://pagethink.com/v/blog-detail/Wichita-State-University/4c/>

Current Title: Wichita State University

Recommended Title: Page Brings Architectural Expertise to Wichita State University

The information provided should be geared towards gaining traction for Page, not Wichita State University.

B) META DESCRIPTIONS

In addition to website copy, meta descriptions should contain highly relevant terms related to the article. Adding these keywords into the meta description field, which is shown as the black text on search results pages, will help users decide if the search result is relevant to their query. If keywords that they searched appear in the meta description, they will show up as bold on the search results pages. The meta description should be very direct and concise, about the length of a Tweet. The copy found in meta-descriptions should be highly related to the copy in the website and keyword fields, but should aim to draw users into the website. If the meta description field is left empty, the system will pull in the beginning of the article. But, that may be too long and include information that may not be most relevant to the entire page/article. Having consistency throughout the webpage title, copy, meta descriptions and keyword fields will aid in the website being as pleasing to search engine crawlers as possible.

Example:

Article URL: <http://pagethink.com/v/blog-detail/Wichita-State-University/4c/>

Current Meta Description: An example of how the firm's values influence our work is Wichita State University Housing and Dining Project, a case study in the PSP design process, providing vision and leadership.

Recommended Meta Description: Page's values have influenced our work in bringing architectural design expertise to the WSU Housing and Dining Project, a case study in the Page design process.

C) IMAGE NAMING

Using descriptive image filenames provides search engines with important information used for image categorization. In this way, your images are more likely to come up in image search results.

Example:

Image URL: http://pagethink.com/media/uploads/news-images/lg_wsu_exterior_blog.jpg

Current Image Filename: lg_wsu_exterior_blog.jpg

Recommended Image Filename: page-architecture-design-wsu-housing-dining.jpg

Much like the page title above, we want the information provided to be geared towards gaining traction for Page, not Wichita State University. In addition, the mixed use of broad keywords (architecture design) and narrow keywords (wsu housing dining) help to appeal to both a broad and narrow audience. In addition, search engines prefer hyphens (-) to underscores (_) when separating words in image filenames.

D) IMAGE CAPTIONS

There are text fields in the CMS to provide images with captions. Captions provide additional, relevant information that is readable by search engine crawlers. They should always be used to provide additional information to search engines about what is on a website/image.

Example:

Article URL: <http://pagethink.com/v/blog-detail/GSA-Office-Building-Receives-Wood-Design-Award/71/>

Current Caption: None

Recommended Caption: Page's Award Winning GSA Office Wood Design

This provides additional information about Page's involvement, and what is shown in the image.

E) KEYWORDS

When looking at Page's organic search results in Google Analytics, it is apparent that most users are searching for several variations of the brand name. Of course, Page should be found for the brand name, but 'Page' is not an SEO friendly term related to architectural design. As of Monday, April 28, Page can be found on the first page of a U. S. Google search by simply searching for 'Page', just below the fold (around the 8th or 9th link). So, when writing copy for the website, an attempt should always be made to find ways to combine the brand name with highly relevant search terms.

Researching and adding relevant, highly searched keywords to the website copy will aid in triggering the Page website in searches. Website content is one of the most important aspects of SEO, and augmenting copy with SEO friendly terms provides search engines with the specific information we want them to have.

Tools: <https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner>

A good tool to use for keyword research is Google's Keyword Planner. This tool is meant for Google AdWords users, but can be used even if you do not have an AdWords account (a standard Google account will be required though).

This tool lets you find the average monthly searches for certain terms and the competition for those terms (as far as how popular are they for paid search – High, Medium, or Low competition). This can give you an idea of how much traffic certain keywords could hope to gather.

Examples:

We have attached a Word document (**PAGE_Blog_Optimization_Recommendations.pdf**) with recommendations of edits to make to your website copy. We recommend reviewing these edits to see how we have injected terms that will help improve ranking on search engines.

F) CALL TO ACTION

We have included a document with copy adjustments for blog posts on the site (**PAGE_Blog_Optimization_Recommendations.pdf**). In future blogs, news, or social media posts, the focus should be on celebrating Page's involvement with a project or event and should provide a Call-To-Action prompting a visitor to view a related blog, connect through social media, or contact Page. This doesn't have to be an opportunity to brag, but all posts should have Page's involvement front-and-center in order to appropriately place credit, and to improve search engine value.

Social Media Evaluation

Social media, when used properly, can be a great referral source for a website/business to help generate traction and visibility, especially when involving the popular subject of sustainable, green practices/design. Social media posts should always engage the viewer to respond, like/comment/share, or visit an article or page. Responding to positive social media traffic creates a conversation that makes a social media page (Facebook) appear more relevant, aids in boosting social media traffic, and helps boost how often posts from your business are shown to your followers and their friends. It should be used to provide easy access to new, digestible information, yet stimulating enough to 'like' and share with others. Having content shared and 'liked' is the point of using social media as a business. Similar to all website copy, the point of social media content should be to celebrate Page. All links should direct social traffic to the website. Even if an article is from another source, a short article should be written about it on the website (with a link) and that should be shared on social media - never direct links that do not go through the website first. The 'Like', share, and comment for a chance to win' approach can work if you have a tangible reward. It can be an undertaking to create and implement a reward program on social media, but even once-a-year contests for sharing, commenting, and liking content can increase traffic and followers over time. Simply tagging the end of posts with, 'Like, comment, and share for chances to win...' can greatly increase visibility. Social media is a great way to show off charity involvement, as well. Offering \$1 for every 'like' Page gets in a particular month/time period (up to a pre-determined amount) or offering to match donations looks good and works, especially if you plan to give to charity anyway.

Example 1 (Post From Facebook):

Post URL: <https://www.facebook.com/PageSoutherlandPage/posts/10152004428065952>

Current Post: Just in time for Earth Day! A university science building housing astronomical and solar observatories that Page worked on has achieved LEED (Leadership in Energy Efficient Design) Gold certification. This means it attained a premier mark of achievement in green building from the US Green Building Council. The IDEA (Inquiry, Discovery, Entrepreneurship, Access) Center at Austin College in Sherman, Texas uses solar shading, natural light, rooftop rainwater, drought-resistant landscaping, sustainably harvested wood, recycled building materials/waste. There's more – click through to see the images and get details.

Recommended Post: Who Likes Earth Day? Page recently won an award for Leadership in Energy Efficient Design for their work with Austin College in Sherman, Texas. Page focused on concepts including solar shading, natural lighting, rooftop rainwater collection, and recycled building materials. How would you make your home or workspace more energy efficient? We welcome your ideas! (Link to article included)

Basis of Recommendation: This post celebrates LEED certification rather than Page's affiliation with the winning design. Posts can be more than a few sentences, but should be as concise as possible. Readers of social media have the option to easily scroll past content, so we must grab their attention as quickly as possible. We should

always ask followers to tell us what they think or how they would improve their surroundings if they could. This engages followers to offer insights to the value of our content.

Example 2 (Post From Facebook):

Post URL: <https://www.facebook.com/PageSoutherlandPage/posts/10152002765275952>

Current Post: We are so excited to have won design awards from ASLA Texas for two master plan projects in China! Lanzhou City Urban Plan received an Honor Award and Taohua (Peach) Island Master Plan received a Merit Award for unbuilt projects in the Commercial category. Congratulations to the design teams!

Recommended Post: Page Wins Again! And, Again! Page is excited to have won two ASLA design award for projects in China's Lanzhou City and Taohua (Peach) Island. Our goal was to design a project dedicated to greening Lanzhou City and Taohua Island. How would you green your city or neighborhood? Tell us what you think! (Link to article included)

Basis of Recommendation: The important info is that Page won two major awards in an international arena using green practices perfected by Page. The award levels and categories are not an exciting aspect of the award/article/event and we should focus on Page's double win instead.

Newsletter Evaluation

We have taken the time to evaluate the newsletter sent out in mid April, as it relates to SEO, and social for the website. Check out the attached document for a few recommendations aimed at better promoting your posts AND tying them to your website content (**PAGE_Newsletter_Optimization_Recommendations.pdf**).

Summary

There are many components to website SEO, and no one fix will bring your website to the top of search engine rankings. However, by sticking to best practices and investing in long-term improvement, search engine ranking can improve slowly over time. The best tool for improving SEO is relevant, interesting copy that accurately reflects the product or service offerings provided by your business.