SEJ EBOOK

THE ULTIMATE SEO AUDIT CHECKLIST



WRITTEN BY BRIAN HARNISH

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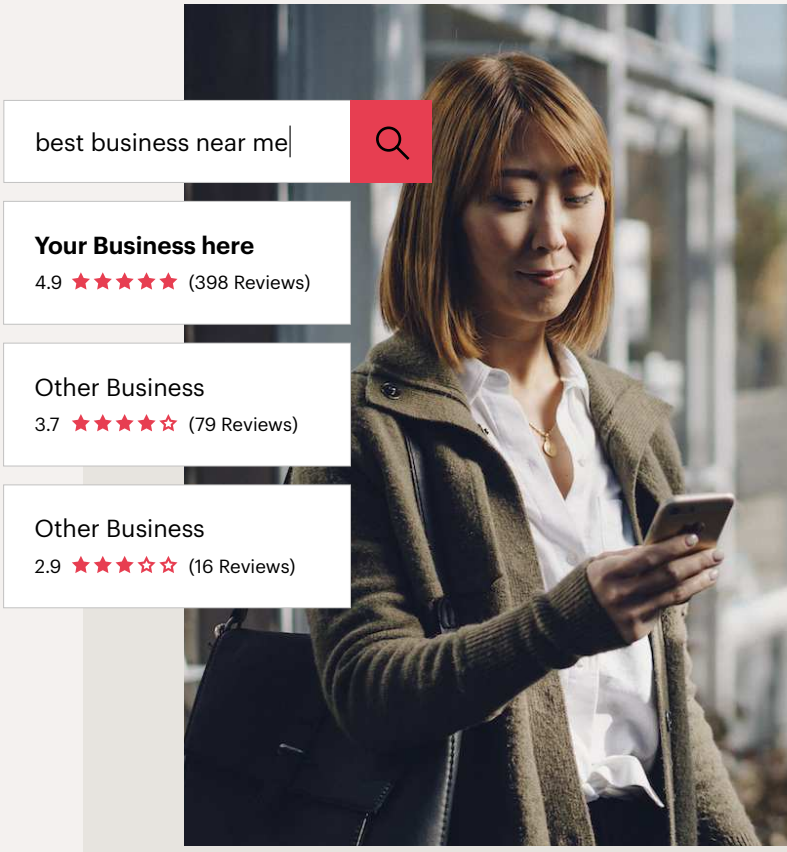
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INTRODUCTION

IF YOU WANT THE ULTIMATE SEO AUDIT CHECKLIST, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE.

DID YOU KNOW THAT GOOGLE HAS APPROXIMATELY 200 RANKING FACTORS?

For SEOs, Google has always maintained that chasing after the algorithm has a minimum effect and does not provide much – if any – return for most ranking factors.

Of course, they don't want everybody gaming the system!

This SEO audit checklist provides checkpoints in your auditing process that will help you better improve certain areas of your site as they relate to these ranking factors.

Please note: This list is not intended to be the official list of ranking factors from Google. It is intended to pool together all potential SEO audit items that you may want to investigate if it's an existing site.

HAS THE SITE FALLEN UNDER PENALTY?

If it has, this checklist will give you the tools and checks you need to get the site working again.

If it has not, this checklist will help you identify where your site's weakest links are (no pun intended).

Other articles and graphics have talked about the 200 factors, but do you have methods and points of investigation to check?

The goal of this checklist is to give you all of the applicable methods of checking and points of investigation to help take the hard work out of identifying each ranking factor.

The bulk of each investigation factor is provided in the form of Screaming Frog audit checks, or using another audit tool or technique, with some paraphrased background information, also mentioned fully with a thorough walk-through of what you should check within each section.

If you are looking for a comprehensive checklist of SEO audit items, it's here.

SEJ EBOOK

1

DOMAIN FACTORS



Written by

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Owner, President of Site ObjectiveDesign, Development, and SEO Consulting

SEJ Search Engine Journal



HOW TO CHOOSE A DOMAIN FOR SEO

When you choose a **domain for SEO**, this will be your moniker on the web.

It is similar to choosing the name of a company, so it must be done with a lot of thought and consideration.

Not only do you want to make sure that your domain name fits your business, but you want to make sure it fits your SEO objectives.

You should also make sure that it's easy to find, and easy to promote through internet marketing.

You don't want to get to a directory where the directory has character limits on domain names (believe me, I've seen this happen).

THERE ARE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVED, ALSO.

- Do you want this domain to target broad, specific, or premium keywords?
- Are you going to be using this domain for a local SEO project?
- Are you going to be using this domain for a business project?
- Or maybe you are using the domain for a blog?

Perhaps you are using the domain to assess whether or not you want to build microsites, and you want to set up the domain in such a way that reflects the microsites that you want to build.

Either way, it's important to create your domain in such a way that people directly associate it with your business. That's where the thought and consideration come in.



MAKE IT EASY TO TYPE

Your domain name should be easy to type and easy to read in print format.

Don't go for the super-long, technical domain like daddysfunwebsitetechnicalshopinaspen.com.

That won't help anybody, and it will simply make everything very confusing for your users.

Which brings us to our next point.

KEEP YOUR DOMAIN NAME SHORT

Your domain name should be short, and easy to transfer to all types of media like print, t-shirts, mugs, stationery, email, etc.

Don't go for an overly long domain name like the above. And don't use slang words.

Using slang instead of real words makes it harder for people to understand your domain and what needs to happen for them to find you.

Don't make anything overly-complex for your users!

AVOID NUMBERS & HYPHENS

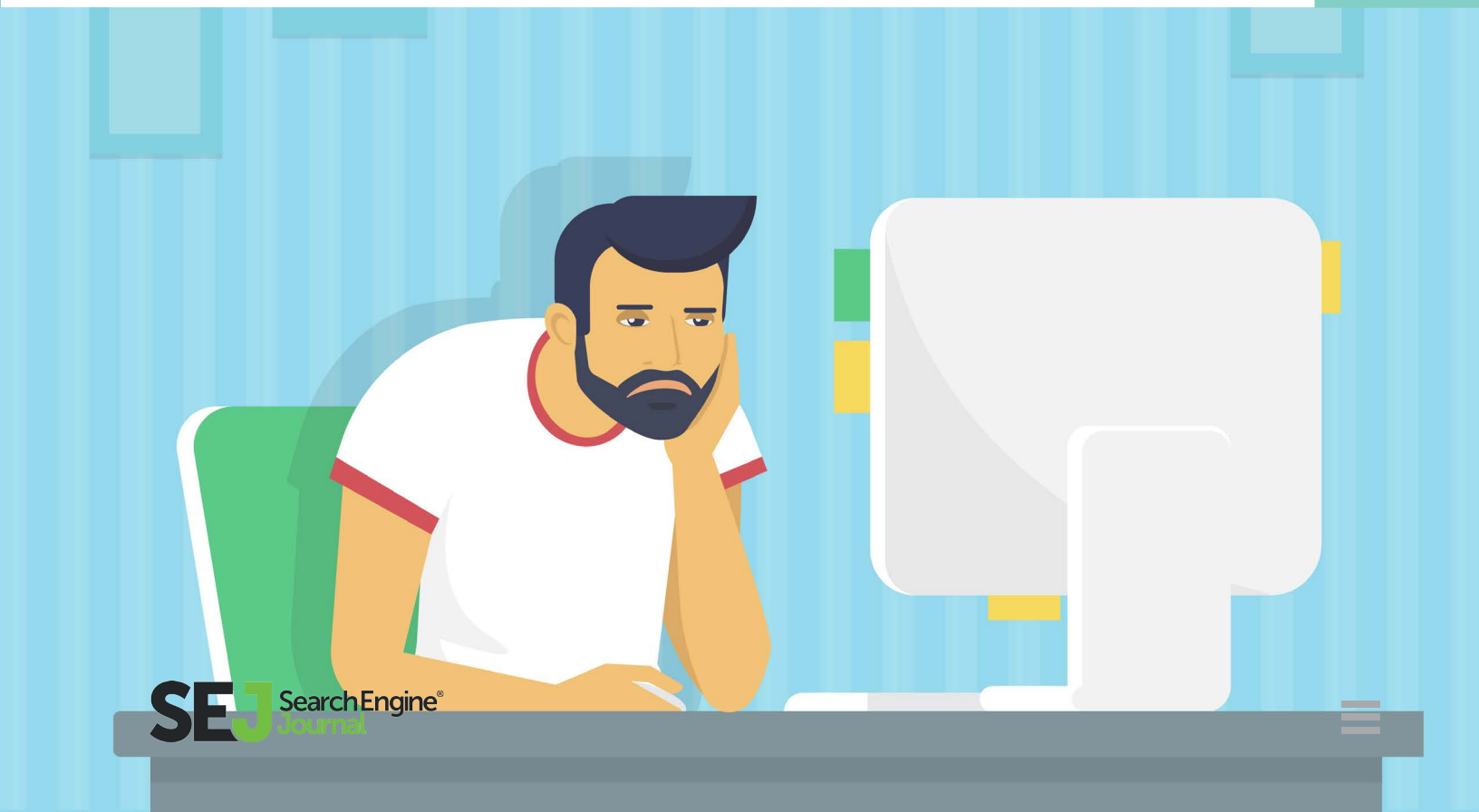
Numbers and hyphens tend to be associated with spammy domains. So much so, that in Moz Pro's domain analysis they cite numbers as a spammy domain metric.

Spammy domains don't want to be associated with their main company site domains, so they do whatever they can to set themselves apart, including adding numbers and hyphens.

Also, hyphens are an age-old SEO technique from days gone by to separate keywords in the domain.

While they used to be valid 5 to 10 years ago, it's no longer appropriate to use hyphens in the domain.

Unless you're creating a lower-quality site that has the possibility of being associated with spam, don't do it.





CREATE YOUR DOMAIN NAME TO BE MEMORABLE

Your domain name must be memorable. The way it sounds, looks and feels when you type it are all hallmarks of memorable domains.

Don't go off the deep end but do create a great-sounding domain name that looks great, feels great to type, and is memorable to people who read it.

THAT is where real online marketing and SEO come in.

DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE WITH MAJESTIC, AHREFS & SEMRUSH

When you buy a domain, you don't know whether or not your domain was already part of **shady link building tactics**, other spammy SEO tactics, or had been used as part of a private blog network.

You just don't know.

That's why it is imperative that you do your due diligence with programs like Majestic, Ahrefs, and SEMrush.

If you plug your domain into SEMrush and you find that it does not have anything significant happening to it (like absolutely no traffic, no links, no PPC, whatever), you are likely in the clear and you can consider purchasing the domain without any major issues.

You should also consider plugging your domain into Majestic and Ahrefs. If it doesn't have any links in either of those programs, you are good to go and you can feel good about your domain name purchase.

Just to really make sure that you don't have any major issues with this domain, plug it into archive.org. This will show you a real-time history of the domain going back ten years or more if you so desire. This will really show you that you have a clean domain.

Also, don't forget to do a site: search for your domain in Google, just to make sure that you don't have any major issues.

Google **has said**, in the past, the following about **doing your due diligence** in this manner, and this still applies in 2019:

> *"Start by doing a site search in Google for the name of the domain you're buying, he said.*
>
> *"If there's no results at all for that domain, even if there's content on the domain, that's a pretty bad sign," he said. "If the domain is parked, well we try to take part domains out of the results anyway so that might not indicate anything. But if you try to do site: and see zero results, that's often a bad sign."*
>
> *You can also do a site: search on the domain name in Bing as well, so you can get a better idea. Obviously if a site is showing up in Bing, but not Google, that's a major red flag. But you can also do a site: search in Bing and plug in typical spam keywords and see what shows up.*
>
> *"Just search for the domain name, or the name of the domain minus the.com, or whatever the extension is on the end. Because you can often find a little bit about the reputation of the domain," Cutts said.*



"So were people spamming without the domain name? Were they talking about it in a bad way like, 'This guy was sending me unsolicited email and leaving spam comments on my blog'? That's a really good way to sort of figure out what's going on for a site, or what it was like in the past," he said."

Doing your due diligence in this manner is something that will prevent you from buying a domain and finding out 6 months in that you have a penalty carried over from the previous owner. That's a major situation that you don't want to find yourself in.

This due diligence should be performed before any major website design or SEO campaign launch.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU HAVE A BAD DOMAIN?



When you buy your domain, and you do your due diligence, you may not know that you have a bad domain.

What are some of the factors that you can figure out that comprise a bad domain?

A bad domain will have many links pointing to it, and you don't want this. If you have a domain with a history, check those links.

They may all be spammy links. Or, they may be good links.

There's no way to tell until you perform a link profile audit as described in this section.

A bad domain will have zero results in Google's index when you do your due diligence with the site: search operator.

This is especially true if there is some history behind the domain and there are links.

If SEMrush shows organic search traffic history before, and none now, there may be a problem.

In addition to the above, if you also find no results in Google's index, then there may be a problem with the domain, and you may not want to purchase it.

Otherwise, if it is a completely blank slate, it is expected that it will not be in Google's index.

You will want to snatch it up immediately, so you can begin an SEO campaign from scratch.

This is why it is so important to do your due diligence in this manner on any domain that you purchase.

This way, you can make sure that you have some idea of what the domain will do when you finally apply your SEO techniques to it.

WHAT TO CHECK

LINKS TO THE DOMAIN IN MAJESTIC

- If you have a suspicious ratio of Trust Flow and Citation Flow (one is significantly greater than the other) it could mean that you have a situation where there are many links coming from just a couple domains. This is also not a good thing.
- Also, check the spammy nature of the link profile to see if you have quality links vs. spammy ones.

LINKS TO THE DOMAIN IN AHREFS

- Check the quality of links in your link profile.
- It is helpful to simply do a full data dump from both Majestic and Ahrefs so you can get a full picture of all backlinks to the domain.
- Then, you can assess all of these links individually.

DOMAIN AGE

John Mueller has stated that domain age does not play a role in search engine rankings. In response to a Twitter question on whether or not domain age plays a role, he answered with a resounding "no".



While they do state it does not, this does show Google uses it in some way, at least for minimal reasons.

If you are curious about the age of any domain, here's a good, cheap method to use to check it. You can also use a bulk WHOIS checker if you are feeling especially adventurous.

HOW TO CHECK

1. Go to **godaddy.com/whois**
2. Type in the domain
3. Look up the age of the domain

It can be helpful to create a spreadsheet of the domains you're analyzing for your specific marketing campaign.

For bulk WHOIS checkers, **Bulk Seo Tools** is an excellent tool for scraping domain WHOIS and web analytics information.



KEYWORD APPEARS IN TOP LEVEL DOMAIN

Notice until recently how Google bolded keywords that appear in a domain name?

This isn't exclusive proof that it's used in ranking, but it makes sense that having the keyword in the domain would be a relevancy signal.

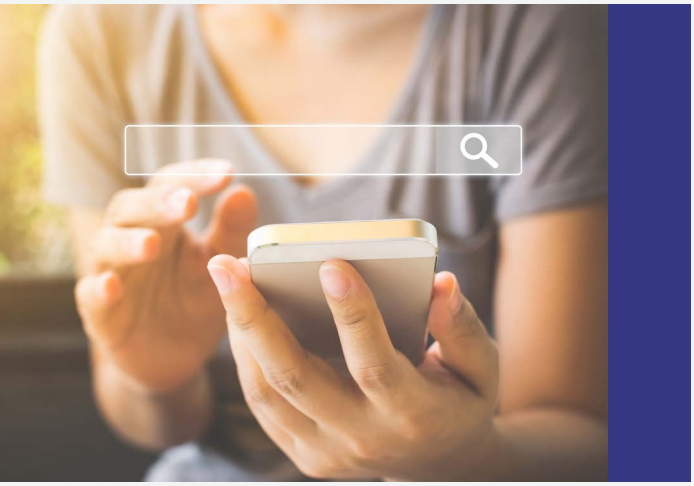
Because this no longer occurs, it probably isn't something you need to worry too much about.

Just keep it in mind when purchasing a new domain name. Use it as a relevancy signal more than anything else.

KEYWORD AS FIRST WORD IN DOMAIN

Moz's 2019 Ultimate Guide to SEO talks about what to look for in terms of keyword use in a domain, and how to use keywords in the domain (link below).

While this appears to no longer be a high-influence ranking factor, it may be worthwhile to check when creating a new site.



WHAT TO CHECK

- Just use your eyes. Eyeball the domain to see if there is a keyword as the first word of the domain or not.
- It probably isn't something that will negatively impact you.

DOMAIN REGISTRATION LENGTH

Google's patent states the following about domain registration lengths:

"Valuable (legitimate) domains are often paid for several years in advance, while doorway illegitimate domains rarely are used for more than a year. Therefore, the data when a domain expires in the future can be used as a factor in predicting the legitimacy of a domain."

WHAT TO CHECK

- While this isn't conclusive proof that domain registration length is used as a ranking factor, it's still a relatively quick and painless check that lets you examine the state of competition in your industry and will allow you to adjust your SEO strategy.
- For checking domain registration length, use Bulk SEO Tools or GoDaddy's WHOIS.

KEYWORD IN SUBDOMAIN NAME

Moz's **Ultimate Guide to SEO** agrees that you should still use keywords in your subdomains in 2019. They write:

"Use broad keywords when sensible

If you can include a keyword that helps make it obvious what your business does while keeping your domain name catchy, unique, and brand-friendly, go for it. But, stay away from domain names that might be considered "keyword-rich" or "keyword-targeted" (such as best-pancake-pans-for-pancakes.com or senior-eldercare-retirement-home-finder.com) We mentioned this earlier, but it's worth mentioning again: While these types of domain names once carried weight as a ranking factor, their tendency to be associated with low-quality content means searchers (and search engines) may now view these keyword-dense domain names with a negative bias.

What's more, in recent years Google has made several changes that have deprioritized sites with keyword-rich domains that aren't otherwise high-quality. Having a keyword in your domain can still be beneficial, but it can also lead to closer scrutiny and a possible negative ranking effect from search engines, so tread carefully. For more on this topic, read The Exact Match Domain Playbook: A Guide and Best Practices for EMDs."

Although, it is a good idea to check for the keyword in the subdomain name to reinforce topical relevance of your domain.





DOMAIN HISTORY

It's likely that a site with a volatile domain history can negatively impact your SEO efforts if you purchase that domain.

When purchasing a new domain, investigate factors such as its link profile, previous owners, and previous activity.

FOR THIS SECTION OF THE AUDIT, WE WILL NEED SEVERAL TOOLS:

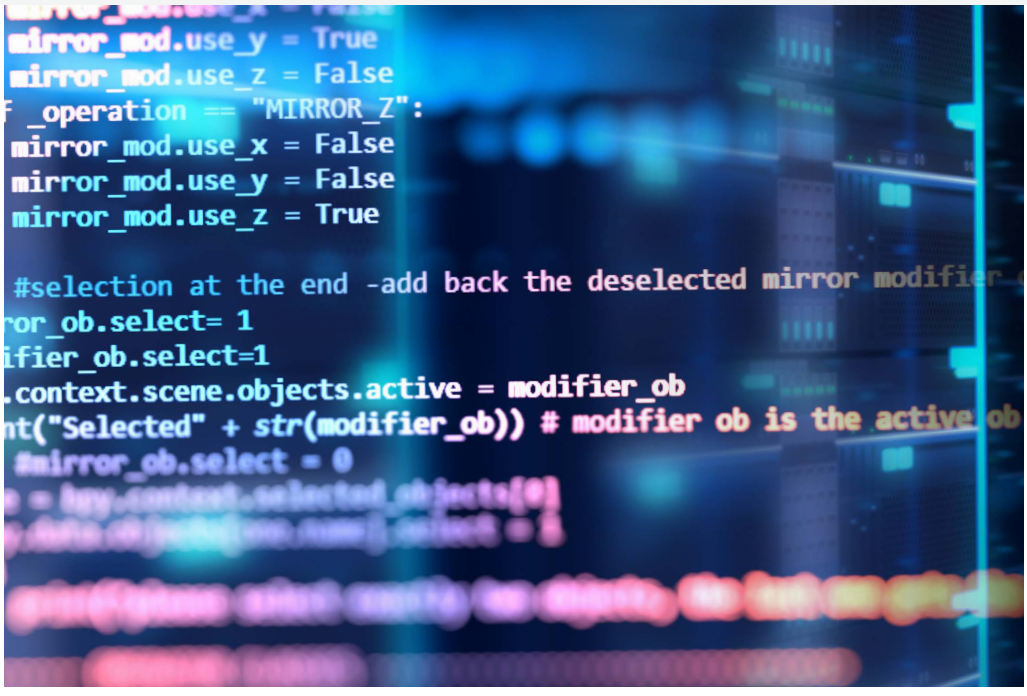
- BulkSEOTools.com
- HosterStats.com
- And several link checking tools (like Ahrefs, Majestic, and SEMrush).

HOW TO CHECK

1. Using BulkSEOTools.com, you can check the current state of the domain WHOIS.

2. Using HosterStats.com, you can check domain ownership history, including things like domain hosting history, DNS history, and much more. These are useful information for determining the domain's track record before you buy it.

3. Using Ahrefs, Majestic, and SEMrush, you can check the domain's link profile and ensure that the domain's linking history isn't spammy. Nothing's worse than buying a domain and figuring out later that you need to perform additional link cleanup as a result.





Also, as if that were not enough, domain authority has entered the picture in recent years. But, it is not at all what you might think.

There are a few important **things you should know** about domain authority, before you go out and buy a domain based on it.

EXACT MATCH DOMAIN



While in the past, having an exact match domain with the exact keyword you want to use was a heavy ranking factor, an **EMD update was launched in September 2012**.

The intent of this update was to stop poor quality sites from obtaining higher rankings just because they had domain names that matched their primary targeted keywords.

Sites that have an exact match domain but are a higher quality site will likely see a benefit from this.

HOW TO CHECK

LOOK AT THE DOMAIN NAME. ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING:

- Is it exact match?
- Do other factors of the site have high enough quality so as to mitigate the exact match nature of the domain?

If so, you probably can leave the domain alone. If not, then it's time to think about a domain name overhaul.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE WHOIS

Google's **John Mueller has stated** that using private registration won't hurt your rankings.

HOW TO CHECK

Use a WHOIS tool like **https://www.godaddy.com/whois**. Check that the WHOIS itself is public or private.



This can be useful in finding spammy links in a bad link profile and determining spammy blog networks, so it could be a good check to use for later.

But in this context, registering your domain with a public vs. private WHOIS is purely personal preference and shouldn't influence your rankings much.

PENALIZED WHOIS OWNER

If you purchase a domain and aren't seeing much benefit from it despite using non-spammy Google practices, it's possible that your site could have been penalized in the past by an unscrupulous owner who decided to dump the domain.

Because you own the domain and have access to its Google Analytics profiles, use the **Panguin tool** as an overlay to check whether you've been penalized by any major algorithm changes.

HOW TO CHECK

1. Using the Panguin tool, investigate the domain you purchased and whether any algorithm updates match your traffic drops in Google Search Console.

2. As a bonus, it's a good idea to also check Google Analytics to see whether the correlations are there. If the three-point check reveals a correlation in traffic drops, it's likely that domain was impacted by an algorithm update, and you have more work to do to get that domain up to speed.

2

PAGE-LEVEL FACTORS



Written by

BRIAN HARNISH

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SEJ Search Engine Journal

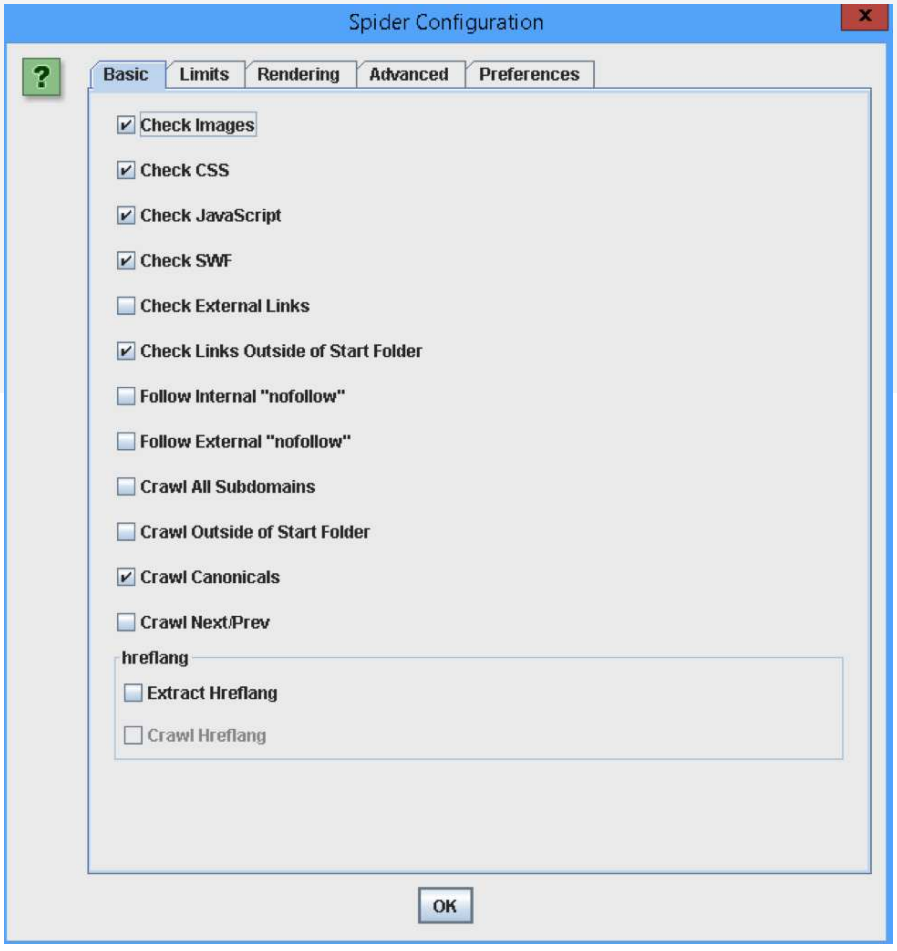
HOW TO CHECK

- Using **Screaming Frog**, perform a crawl of your site. For this crawl example, I used Screaming Frog SEO Spider 7.2. I also used CNN.com as an example site for all these bits and pieces.

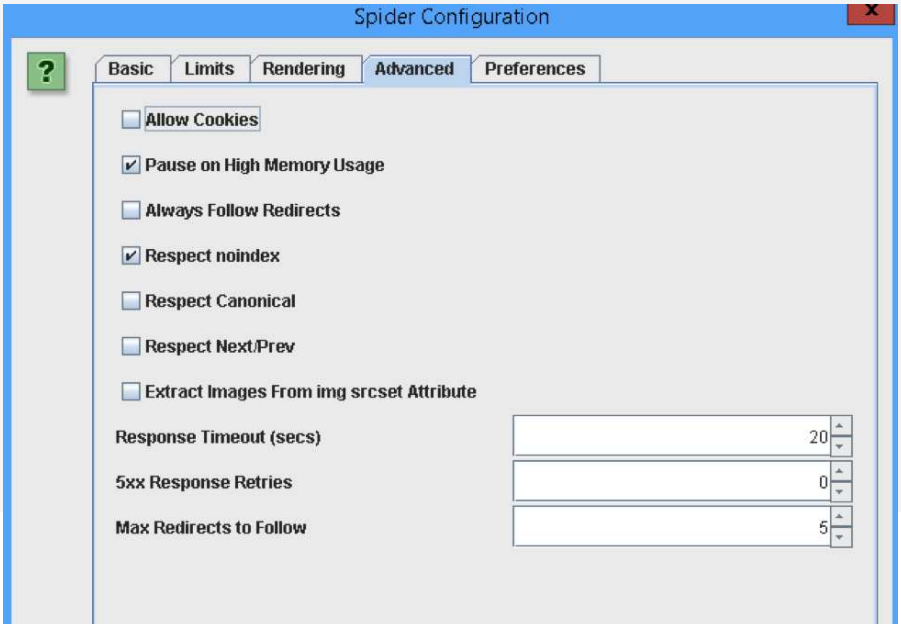
  1. Fire up Screaming Frog.

  2. For most basic audits, you can use the following settings by going to Configuration > Spider:

  Screaming Frog Basic Settings:



Screaming Frog Advanced Settings:



HOW TO CHECK

You'll want to check the following to make sure all of these elements are up to date and they are implemented according to your SEO strategy.

If not, then you've identified fixes you'll need to perform after this audit:

- Keyword in the title tag
- Title tag starts with keyword
- Keyword in description tag
- Keyword appears in the H1 tag
- Keyword is most frequently used phrase in the document

E-A-T: EXPERTISE, AUTHORITATIVENESS, TRUSTWORTHINESS

2

PAGE-LEVEL FACTORS

Every year, Google releases its brand-new quality raters' guidelines for the world to see.

This has nothing to do with the search algorithms but actually has more to do with Google raters (who are human readers) and how they assess the strength and quality of a web page.

This framework that they use is E-A-T, or Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness.



EXPERTISE

This means that you must be an expert-level contributor in your chosen field. Seoinc.com **mentions** the fact that:

> *"You need to be an expert in your field. Expertise means you need to show the skill of the creator for the Main Content or (MC) and mention it in your content. Expertise is less critical for humor or gossip websites, but it's vital for medical, financial, or legal websites. The good news is any site can show expertise if the content is truthful and useful for users."*

AUTHORITATIVENESS

> *"You need to show that you are an authority or the authoritativeness of the creator for the MC. And you can get this from the expertise of your writers or yourself. If your page is a community or forum discussion, the quality of the conversation drives authority. Credentials are necessary, but so are personal experiences like reviews."*

TRUSTWORTHINESS

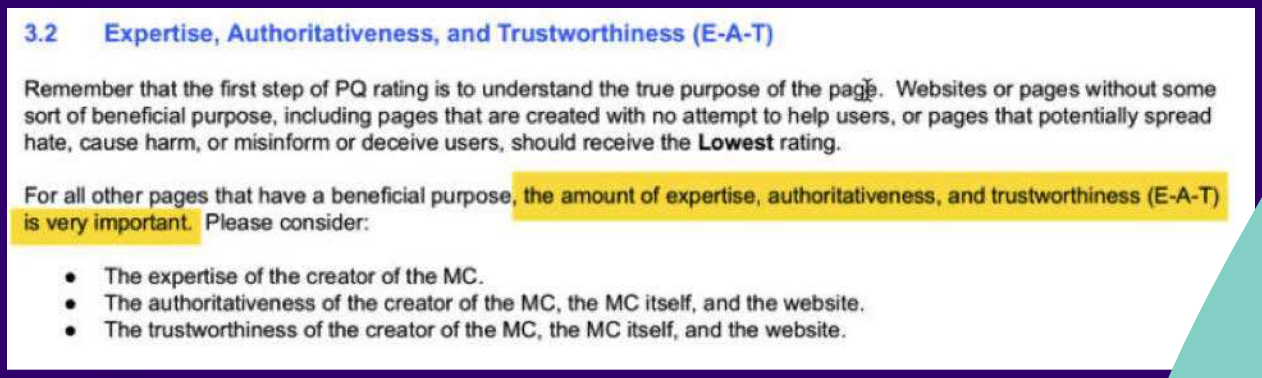
"You need to show users they can trust the creator or company of the Main Content, the MC itself and the website. Trustworthiness is especially important for eCommerce websites that ask users for their credit card information. Everything about your site should make users feel safe while they're visiting. As a starting point, you should immediately implement an SSL certificate on your site as at least 70% of first page results are using SSL (It's one of many of Google's scoring signals)."

It is important to note (SEO professionals such as Marie Haynes **mention** this), however, that not all SEOs agree that E-A-T is truly a ranking factor.

It has been speculated by most SEOs that sites that were heavily hit by the August 2018 Medic Update have also had significant technical SEO issues they had to overcome, and this is one of the more important SEO factors that you cannot ignore if you want to regain your site's performance.

Marie also mentions that:

"Google says that E-A-T is very important



3.2 Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-A-T)

Remember that the first step of PQ rating is to understand the true purpose of the page. Websites or pages without some sort of beneficial purpose, including pages that are created with no attempt to help users, or pages that potentially spread hate, cause harm, or misinform or deceive users, should receive the **Lowest** rating.

For all other pages that have a beneficial purpose, the amount of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness (E-A-T) is very important. Please consider:

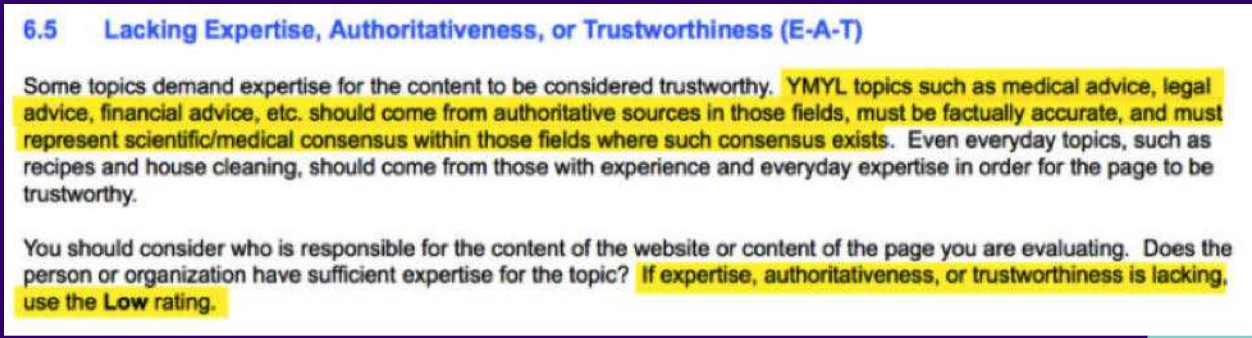
- The expertise of the creator of the MC.
- The authoritativeness of the creator of the MC, the MC itself, and the website.
- The trustworthiness of the creator of the MC, the MC itself, and the website.

E-A-T is extremely important for Your Money or Your Life (YMYL) sites

If your site is a medical, legal, or financial site, then having good E-A-T is crucial. Your site may also be considered YMYL if your site gives advice that helps people make an important decision. You are likely also YMYL if you sell products from your website.

We personally think that most websites on the web are considered YMYL. You might argue that your site that sells ball point pens is not helping people make major life decisions. However, if you're taking credit card transactions on your site, then people need to be able to trust you and as such, you are almost definitely YMYL.

The QRG (https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/guidelines.raterhub.com/en//searchqualityevaluatorguidelines.pdf) tell us that a YMYL site that is lacking E-A-T is to be considered a low-quality site.



6.5 Lacking Expertise, Authoritativeness, or Trustworthiness (E-A-T)

Some topics demand expertise for the content to be considered trustworthy. YMYL topics such as medical advice, legal advice, financial advice, etc. should come from authoritative sources in those fields, must be factually accurate, and must represent scientific/medical consensus within those fields where such consensus exists. Even everyday topics, such as recipes and house cleaning, should come from those with experience and everyday expertise in order for the page to be trustworthy.

You should consider who is responsible for the content of the website or content of the page you are evaluating. Does the person or organization have sufficient expertise for the topic? If expertise, authoritativeness, or trustworthiness is lacking, use the **Low** rating.

Again, we believe that many sites are considered YMYL. Pretty much every topic area has people who are known as experts on this subject. Even if your topic is not an obvious YMYL topic, we still would recommend paying attention to Google E-A-T."

Manish Dudharejia also provides **several ways that you can improve your Google E-A-T Rating.**

E-A-T has become even more of a factor in Google's latest algorithms.

But, it's also important to make sure that all of your technical SEO factors are up to par, because if you are lacking in technical SEO, and making your site easily crawlable and indexable, all the E-A-T in the world will not help your site's performance.

HOW TO CHECK

- Checking for E-A-T- on your site is not exactly a scientific process, but more of a creative one.

  These points should help your audit process in finding E-A-T issues on a website:

  1. Does your site have personalized author information, and does it have personalization enabled?

     a. This means: author bio, author page, and contact information for the author.

  2. Does your site have personalized, authoritative content that's trustworthy?

     a. This means: fact-checked, high-quality articles. Articles must have factually correct information about the topics they discuss.

     b. Articles should also be trustworthy in how they discuss the topic. If your writing is of lower quality, and is structured in a haphazard manner, you will not have good E-A-T score on your articles. DO NOT skimp on article quality.

3. Does your site have a unique take on things, and does it tackle the subject matter in a way that gives Google an incentive to put it on the first page of their results?

a. You can do SEO and optimize your content for the technical all day. You can build links all day. But if your content is weak on your subject matter, it may be a factor in how your site's performing.

b. Your meta descriptions and title tags should all be of super high quality, while also targeting keywords and keyword phrases that your article topics discuss. They should not be written as an after-thought.



HEADLINES

SEO headline writing is a different beast altogether. You should integrate keywords for SEO.

But, you also have to tailor your headlines to social, website visitors, and they should serve the SEO side also while integrating those keywords.

It's not a simple "write for five minutes and it's done" scenario.

Here are three points you can check on every page to make sure that your content headlines are written properly:

- Are your headlines written naturally and conversationally? These generally tend to perform very well in social, and integration of your SEO keywords just adds a nice ring to it, increasing the quality of your headlines.
- Write your headlines in such a way that they target user engagement and brand reputation as a result.
- Write your headlines to generate discussion and mystery on social. Using the AIDA sales principle (Attention – Interest – Decision – Action), you can identify whether or not your headlines meat this standard to be of high enough quality to be included in your site.

Rand Fishkin notes in his Whiteboard Friday **(https://moz.com/blog/writing-headlines-seo-social-media)** on the topic that there are some notable conflicts that can happen with this approach:

"1. Keywords for SEO can be really boring on social media sites. When you try and keyword stuff especially or be keyword-heavy, your social performance tends to go terribly.

2. Creating mystery on social, so essentially not saying what the piece is truly about, but just creating an inkling of what it might be about harms the clarity that you need for search in order to rank well and in order to drive those clicks from a search engine. It also hurts your ability generally to do keyword targeting.

3. The need for engagement and brand reputation that you've got for your website visitors is really going to hurt you if you're trying to develop those clickbait-style pieces that do so well on social.

4. In search, ranking for low-relevance keywords is going to drive very unhappy visitors, people who don't care that just because you happen to rank for this doesn't necessarily mean that you should, because you didn't serve the visitor intent with the actual content."

Naturally, some fields are not always going to have every single quality as part of their headlines.

Let's be realistic here. Dry topics, and other types of topics that do not generate very much interest should be determined to have a different approach involved.

You can't be everything to everyone, but there are always creative approaches that can be taken to make content in dry, boring industries exceptional.

You can use the points above to audit your site for headlines that will stand the test of time and so that you can improve them in the future.





SEO WRITING

SEO copywriting is so integral to the process of SEO, that some people forget to write their content in such a way that also includes SEO.

They feel that simply writing content is enough, and that “if you post it, they will come.”

Unfortunately, writing is only half the battle. The other half of the battle includes SEO – the tangible SEO properties of content that should be integrated so that you do not have issues with Google finding your content high enough quality.

Don’t forget about content freshness! Freshness has its place in SEO, but it was mostly designed for time-sensitive searches, and not every single piece of content.

Let's take a look at some of the common SEO writing factors that should be addressed in a website audit:

TEXT STRUCTURE

The structure of your text is as important as your optimization.

As a standard, your text should attack structure on two fronts: informationally, and from a coding perspective.

In the coding perspective, you should be using standard semantic HTML to define headings and content sections, namely (H1 tags, H2 tags, H3 tags for headings, and P tags for paragraphs).

Informationally, your content should follow a logical structure that is consistent with the topic matter.

Don't just throw in three unrelated topics in your content's discussion, unless they are of significant relevance in some way.

KEYWORD INTEGRATION

Integration of keywords is important, but don't keyword stuff.

Don't include six hundred variations of your keywords and expect it to be a high-quality article. That's never going to happen.

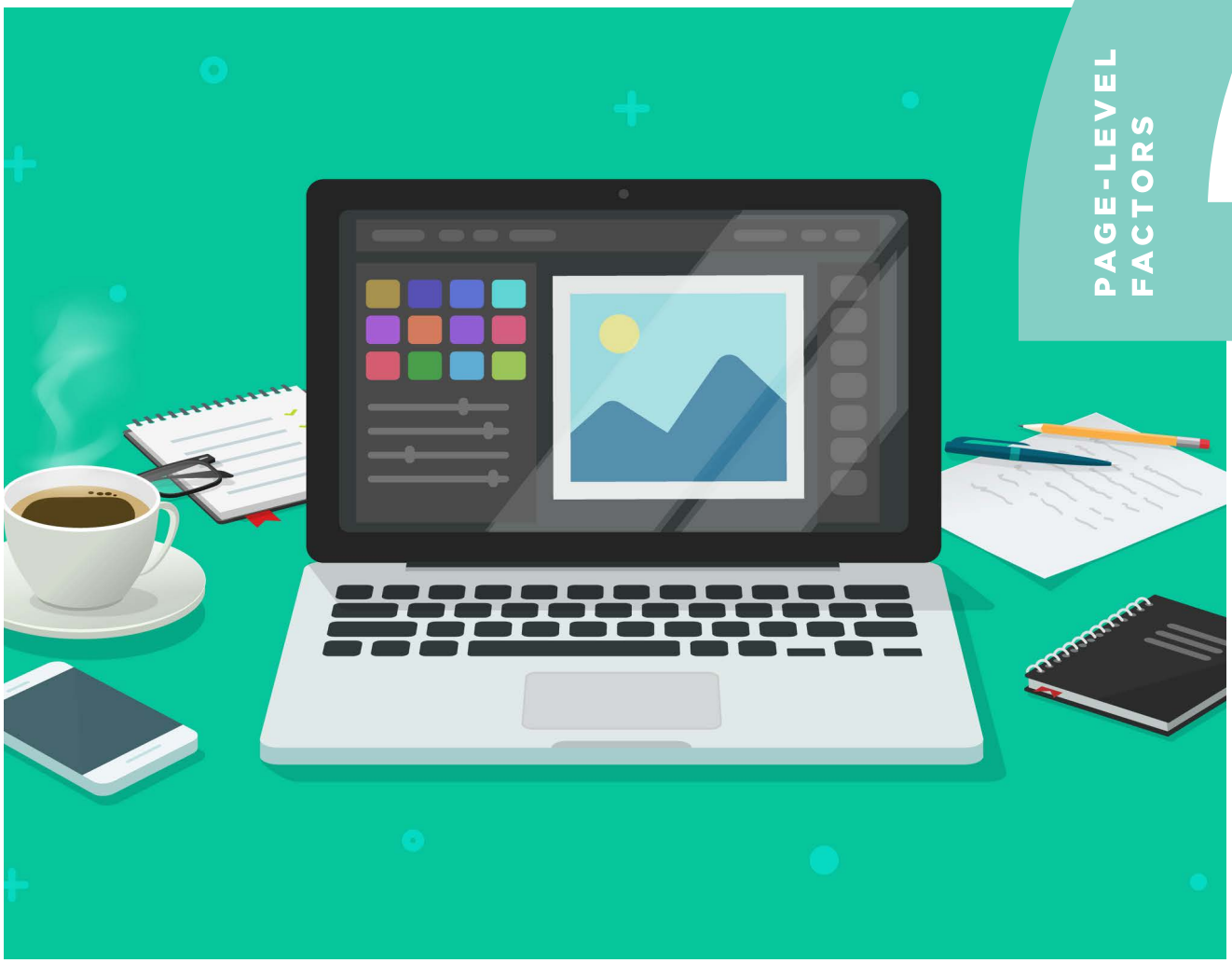
Focus on naturally including your keywords and keyword phrases where they make sense.

IMAGES

Images are another important part of text structure, but they are discussed elsewhere in this audit guide.

If you can use an image strategically in your content to support it, feel free to do so. This point should also be discussed in your website audits.

Don't forget to include points on image optimization, and their impact on site speed.





HIGH-QUALITY WRITING

High-quality writing is an essential part of any SEO page. High-quality writing makes any SEO content easy to understand, clear to the reader, and communicates points succinctly.

Don't expect readers to always have a thorough understanding of your topic like you do. That never helps at all.

Always make sure any writing in your audit is clear to the reader.

Make sure that your writing clearly explains every topic, every bullet point, every headline.

Go into 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or more paragraphs if you have to. This also builds on the prior points discussed in this section – keyword integration, text structure, and images should all contribute to this quality.

LISTS, BULLET POINTS, BOLDED KEYWORDS & TEXT FOR EMPHASIS

Checklists, bullet points, and bolded keywords and text for emphasis should all be a part of any well-optimized piece of content.

Lists provide a clear hierarchy of items that explain any topic in further detail. They are also clear to the reader (depending on how they're structured) easy to understand and provide good information in a succinct way.

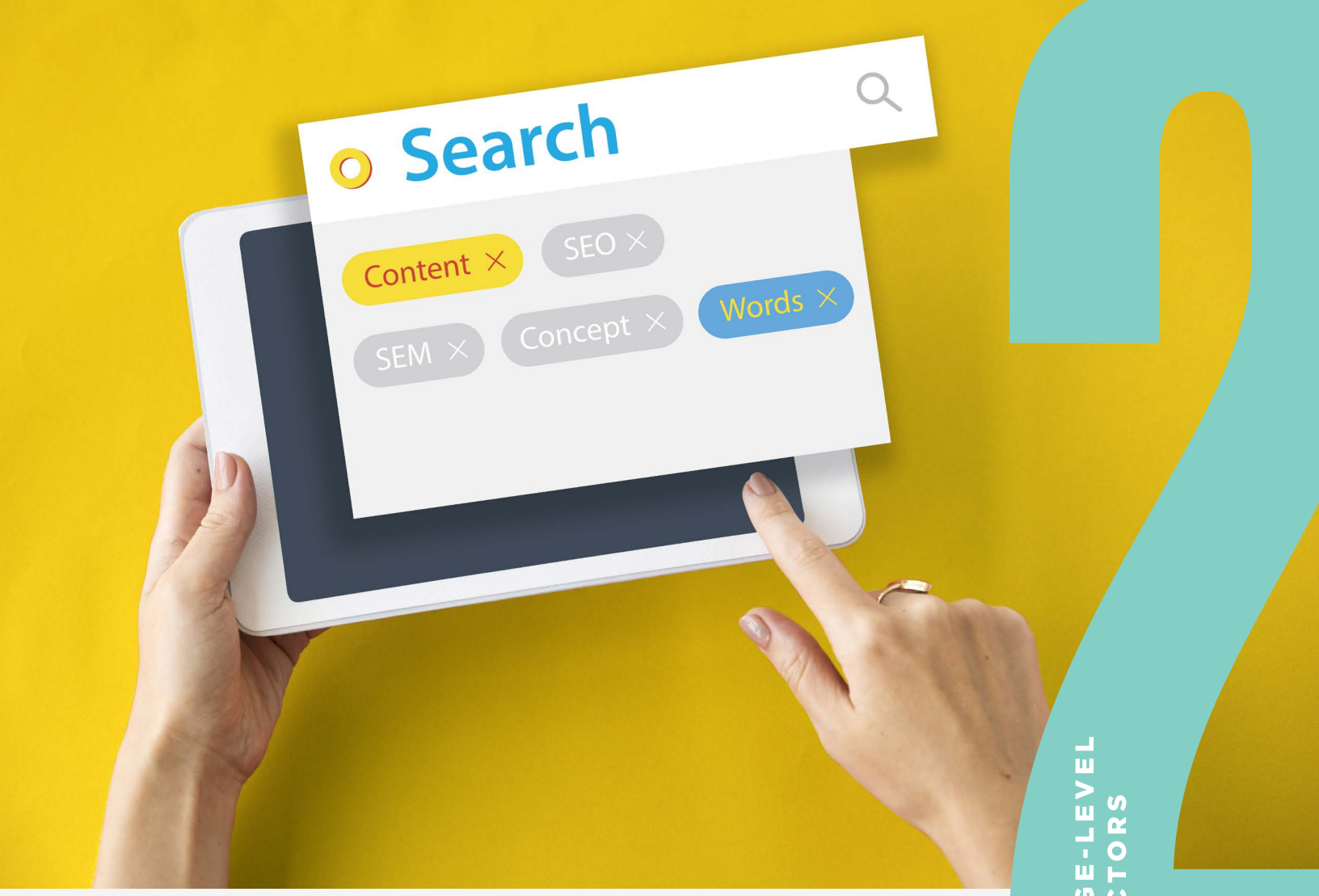
But, don't just include lists to include lists. That doesn't help anyone.

Make sure that any lists in your audit enhances the website's subject matter, rather than detracts from it.

OUTBOUND LINKS AND INTERNAL LINKS

Any piece of content should include outbound links to external resources, along with internal links to other related page content. This provides for greater understanding of the topic when done right and includes authoritative resources to other authors in the industry.

When you link out, you also increase your linking opportunities through other writers who may use Google Alerts to alert them of any new articles that are published on their particular topic.



2

PAGE-LEVEL FACTORS

KEYWORD CANNIBALIZATION

This can be a bigger problem than you may think. If you have more than one page that targets the same keyword, you can experience keyword cannibalization. This is when two pages trying to rank for the same keyword, and Google is forced to choose between pages.

This means you won't get much, if any, SEO value from your optimization efforts if your keywords are all too similar.

You can also introduce other problems with keyword cannibalization. OnCrawl **talks about these:**

- **CONVERSION RATE**
  why wasting your time on different pages with the same goal if one of these is converting better? You should focus your efforts on one of these pages instead of spending energy on lower-converting version targeting the same traffic.

- **CONTENT QUALITY**
  if you are targeting multiple pages with the same keyword, they should also be about the same subject. What you risk is duplicate content, poor quality content, or replicates and you are lowering your chances to receive referrals and links.

- **INTERNAL ANCHOR TEXT**
  if you are targeting different pages with the same subject, you are missing chances to concentrate the value of internal anchor texts on one page.

- **EXTERNAL LINKS**
  external links can boost the SEO value of a page targeting one keyword. But if you have different pages targeting the same keyword, then your external links will be split between those different landing pages. You are thus sharing external link value among different pages instead of focusing it onto one.

HOW TO CHECK

LINKS TO THE DOMAIN IN MAJESTIC

- In Screaming Frog, after we have crawled our site, we can check the title and meta descriptions in our pages to see if there are any instances of more than one page targeting the same keyword.
- After finding these pages, check Google to see if you have any pages showing up for these keywords.
- If you have more than one result for your site that is showing up for these keywords, you likely have keyword cannibalization issues that you must fix.



USER ENGAGEMENT AND USER EXPERIENCE

In today's SEO, **user engagement** is an important factor in the quality of your page, and comprise attributes that are very important to get right.

It has an impact on SEO, as **Anna Lea Crowe writes:**

> *"User experience (UX) has an impact on SEO.*
>
> *If you don't think about UX, your website will end up in the trash next to the TV dinner and mushy peas.*
>
> *In fact, 38 percent of people will stop engaging with a website if the content and layout is unattractive.*
>
> *Main Street Host, a digital marketing agency, saw a 66 percent increase in page views to their attorney profile pages by updating the content and optimizing call-to-action buttons.*
>
> *And, Ezoic saw 186 percent increase in earnings per 1,000 visitors after creating a better UX."*

While it may not be a direct ranking factor, there are indirect but intangible benefits to creating a website with a quality design, and creating higher quality content that results in an even better user experience, leading to better user engagement.

They are intangible because they cannot be linked to any direct ranking factor on Google. So, we can't say "we changed the keyword here, and this resulted in an immediate improvement in click-throughs on the button right next to this keyword". It is not definitive, and this is a conundrum for user engagement that many SEOs face in their reporting. How can you reliably tie different user engagement metrics to your SEO efforts so that you can move forward with the proper strategy that will get results?

It's important to note that different levels of website quality can impact user engagement. Quality refers to many things: the quality of your website design. The quality of your content. All of these can be major indirect factors that can influence people to purchase your product or sign up for your service.



And, different levels of quality can impact user engagement.

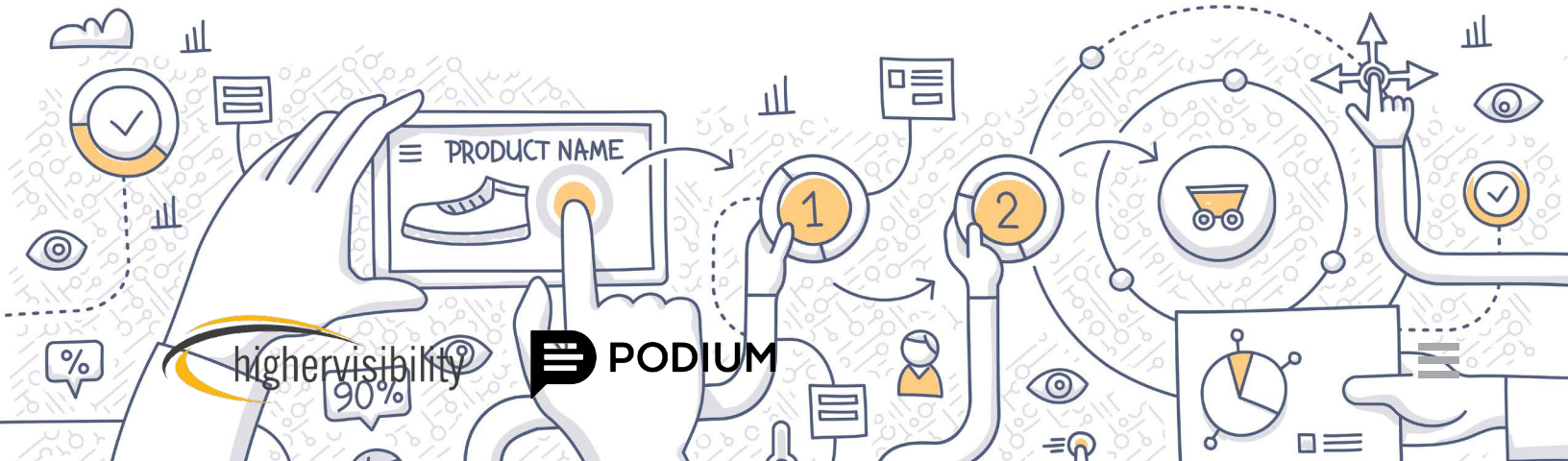
For example: if you have a one-off landing page that is a wall of text content, you may only expect two user engagement metrics: dwell time, and a click on the call to action button at the end.

If you have a more complex site that includes many different types of buttons for calls to action, such as live chat, a call us phone number, sign up for our newsletter, listen to our podcasts, view our videos, and other calls to action, you will need to take inventory of these and audit them to make sure that you have created proper user engagement across your website.

Did you know that you can construct custom URLs to track all of these specific user engagements and much more? It's true.

Not only that, but there are many different user engagement metrics to track in Google Analytics that will help you interpret what's happening on your site more effectively.

Fortunately, there are many ways to audit your user engagement metrics to make sure that what you are doing is having a positive influence on your site.



IDENTIFY ANY CUSTOM URLS CREATED FOR THE PURPOSES OF TRACKING

HOW TO CHECK

- This is an easy check with Screaming Frog.

  You can simply audit all of the main URLs that were crawled by Screaming Frog. Use the search feature in the program to look for any URLs containing “utm”.

- If they are linked on your website, they should show up in a Screaming Frog crawl.

- UTM parameters are unique identifiers. Using UTM parameters, SEOs can create unique URLs for any campaign conversion component that a site owner may want to track.

- You can also search in Google Analytics for UTM pages, because they will be dumped into the main GA traffic for landing page URLs.

- Just click on Acquisition > All Traffic > Source / Medium

- All of your UTM URLs that you have created should show up in here.
- You may want to read **this guide on SEJ, written by Amelia Willson**, for tips on how to use UTM codes for conversion tracking.
- If you are reading this and you don't know how to create UTM URLs, the **Google Campaign URL Builder** may be just what the doctor ordered.

CHECK FOR ABNORMALLY HIGH BOUNCE RATE IN GOOGLE ANALYTICS

If your bounce rate is abnormally high (into the 65% and above range) it can point to something else (slow page speed), low-quality design, low-quality content, or other issues that are causing the low engagement. It could also mean that your topics are not driving the user engagement.

Maddy Osman wrote a fantastic section in her book chapter on SEJ on **how to track user engagement metrics in Google Analytics.** There are many more metrics to check in her guide, so I will link to it there.

CHECK USER REVIEWS

User reviews are another user engagement metric that you can use to check the effectiveness of your SEO strategies.

If your site creates great user engagement, they will likely purchase your products and services.

If the great user engagement extends across your business, they will more than likely leave positive reviews.

HOW TO CHECK

- Just check your review sites like Yelp, BBB, and other review sites. Keep a running tally of the metrics on these sites every month.
- They will help you assess whether or not your site's user engagement is performing as it should.
- Yes, it's an indirect factor. But it can be a telling factor in terms of how your website is performing.
- People also leave website feedback in reviews, and they can be a great indicator as to how well your site's performing (or not).

- It's important to note that it isn't exactly a direct, determining factor. There are always exceptions.

  I was involved in a site where someone was hired as a "reputation hit man" to go after the company and post negative reviews.

  Yes, these people do exist.

  While disgruntled customers and past employees may sometimes be the culprit, there are cases where reputation hit men go after companies and that is all they do all day.

  Be mindful of reviews and make sure that you're not buying into something like this.

  That is why audits on this part of your business is important, because reviews can also give you great insight into how your site is performing by whether or not users are and continue to remain engaged.

USER EXPERIENCE SEO FACTORS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH highervisibility

When conducting an SEO audit, it is essential to consider the User Experience (UX) along with the traditional SEO factors.

These elements must coexist and work together if a website is to be successful enough to appeal to both consumers and search engines.

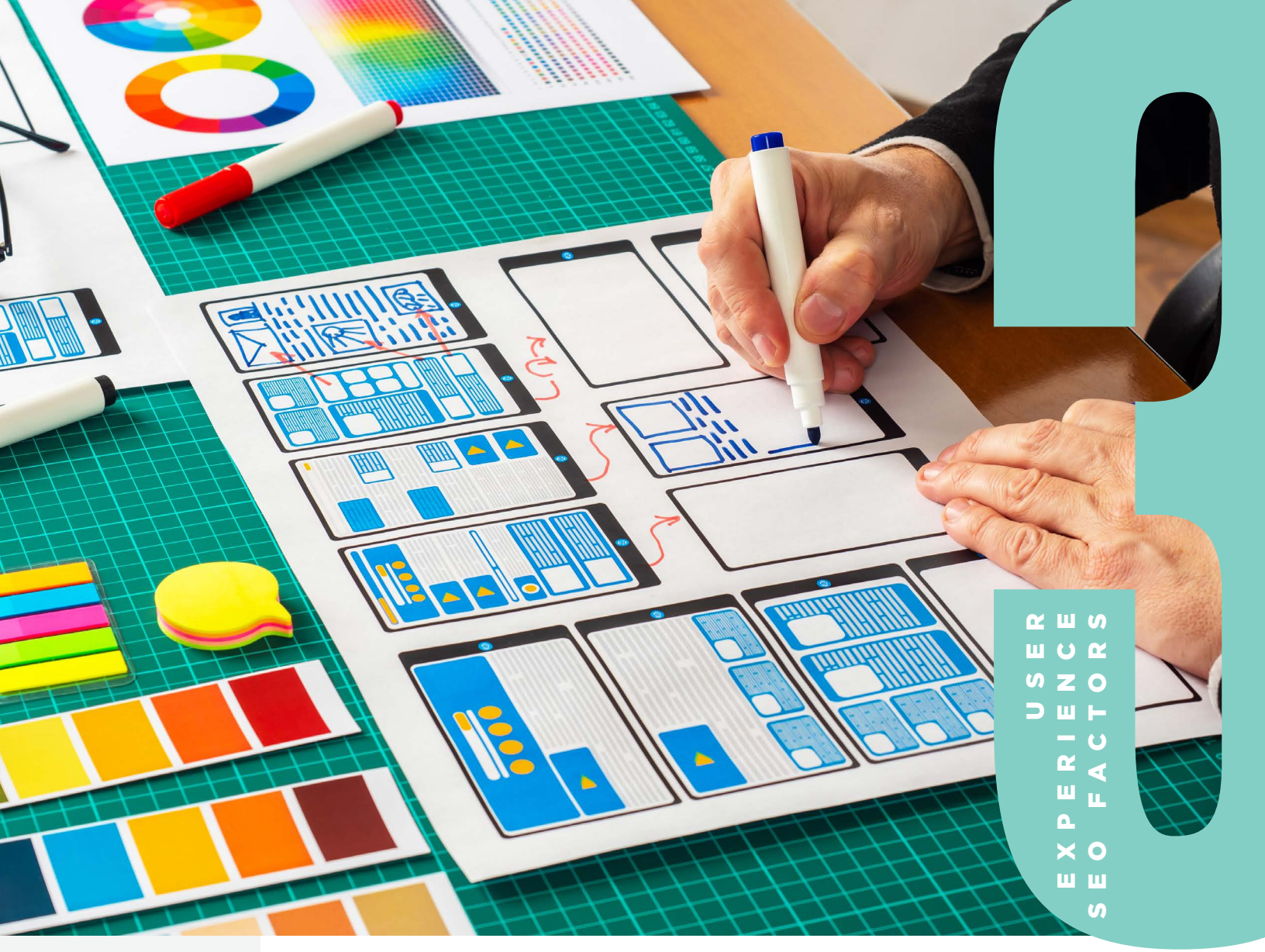
A faulty UX can detract from well-planned SEO, and vice versa, poor SEO execution can deter a carefully crafted UX. So, you need to pay equal attention to both.



Written by

ADAM HEITZMAN

Managing Partner, HigherVisibility



WHAT IS USER EXPERIENCE?

UX design is primarily about marketing. It focuses on enhancing a website's ability to attract and engage visitors.

The overall purpose may be to disseminate information or to convert visitors into customers.

To do this effectively, you must know who your target audience is, what their specific needs are, and then cater to these requirements.

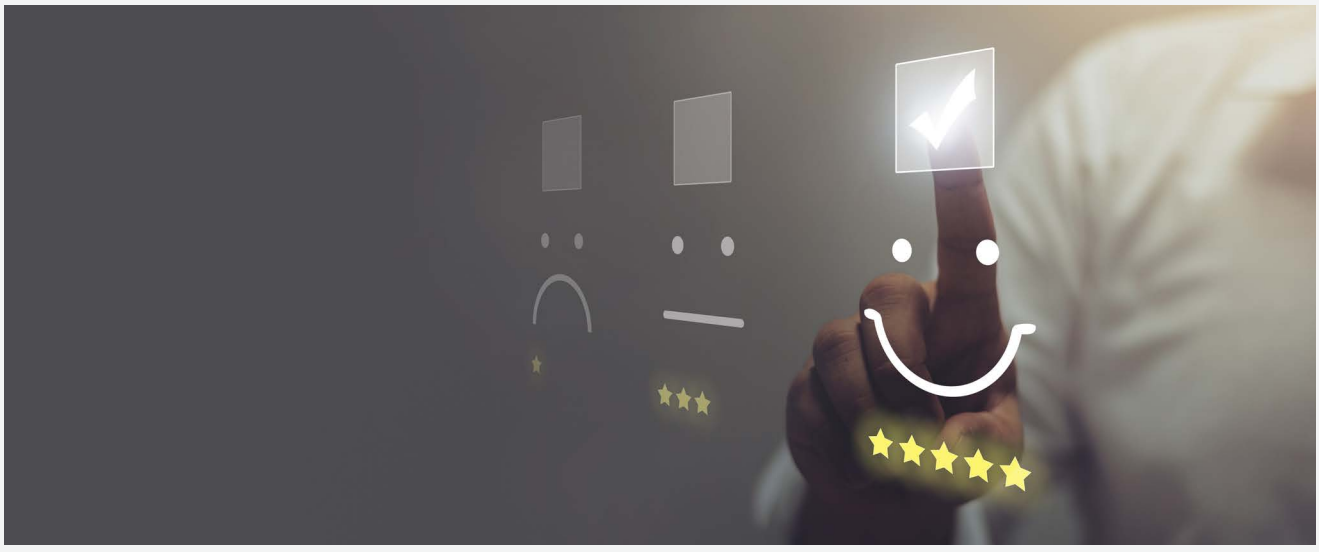
For this, it will help to have user-friendly websites that load fast and that you can view on multiple devices.

They must also be secure, easy to navigate, and have interesting useful content.

Such websites get more organic traffic and rank higher in search engine results, and that can lead to increased brand awareness and business revenues.

To develop these websites, UX designers research customer personas. They create user flow reports to analyze user behaviors.

They then use the gathered data for setting up the desktop and mobile site architecture and for planning the site navigation and content interactivity.



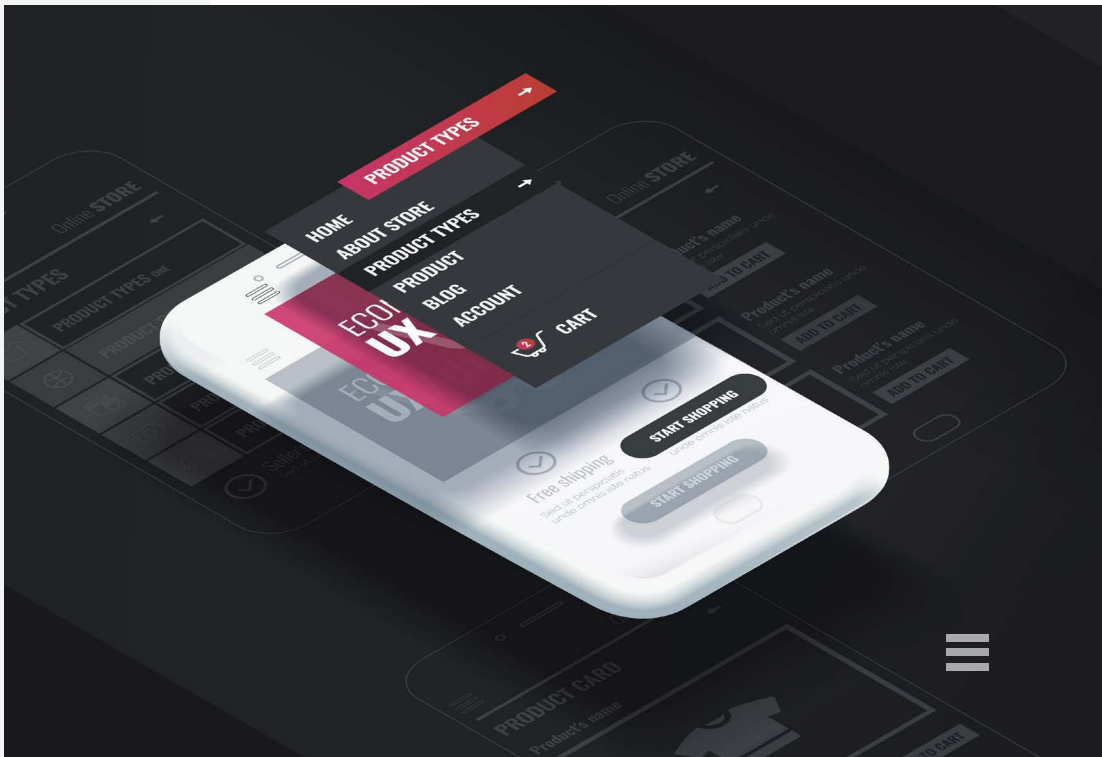
WHY IS USER EXPERIENCE IMPORTANT FOR SEO?

USER EXPERIENCE SEO FACTORS

SEO is about gaining the interest of search engines, while UX is about understanding what people want, to ultimately capture their attention. Both are important.

SEO can help to make your site visible in search engine results and bring you traffic, and the UX will make the visitors linger and return.

That means providing the exact information that the searcher wants.



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USER EXPERIENCE SEO FACTORS

PRIMARY USER EXPERIENCE SEO FACTORS

The following are the primary user experience factors one should pay attention to when performing an SEO audit:

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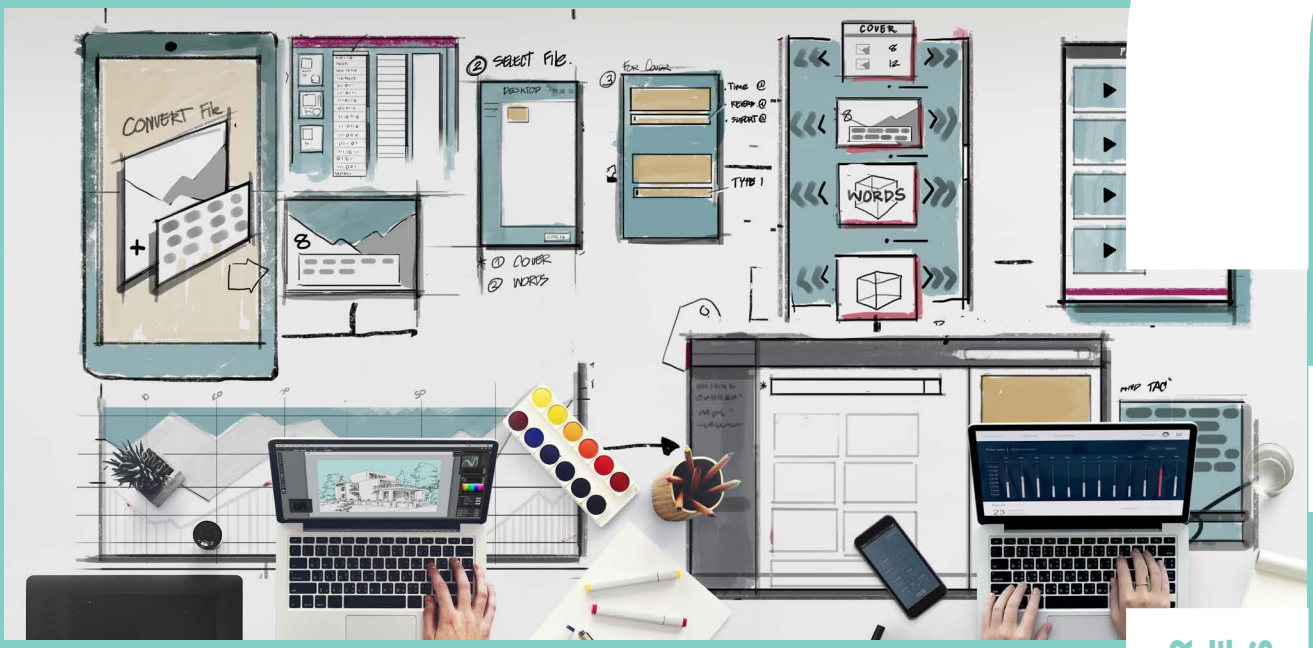
1 WEBSITE DESIGN

The site design usually makes an impression on visitors before they get to the content.

The colors, fonts, patterns, and images evoke emotion and convey how relatable, reliable, trustworthy, and authoritative the website is.

If you apply good aesthetic judgment and maintain consistency in the visual content, you can make your website appealing to your target audience.

Search engines will take note of the web traffic flooding your way.



2 WEBSITE ARCHITECTURE

To make navigation easier for your visitors, you must neatly arrange and categorize the website pages and establish a clear page hierarchy.

You don't want your visitors going down an endless rabbit hole with no idea about how to get back to where they were.

Ideally, the links shouldn't be more than four pages deep. That way people can find their way around and remain on your website, instead of leaving in frustration.

The hierarchical content and page arrangement constitutes the site architecture.

While saving your visitors' sanity, it is also incredibly important from an SEO viewpoint. It helps search engine crawlers to find your website and index the web pages.

3 PAGE SPEED

Search engines like Google factor into their results how fast your website loads on desktop as well as mobile devices.

The page speed influences the user experience. People don't have patience with slow-loading pages. Even a two-second delay can put them off.

So, if your website takes ages to load, you are going to lose visitors, which will negatively affect the traffic, and as a result, your search engine ranking will plummet.

To avoid that scenario and get around the site speed issues, start by purchasing a reliable hosting plan.

Use optimized images on your website and get rid of auto-play multimedia formats.

Leverage browser caching so that your web files are stored in the browser cache and repeat visitors can have faster-loading pages.

You can also optimize content delivery with the lazy loading technique. The on-demand loading, per the user's requirement, will save time and memory resources.

Additionally, use the Google PageSpeed Insights tool to check what else you can do to improve your page loading time.



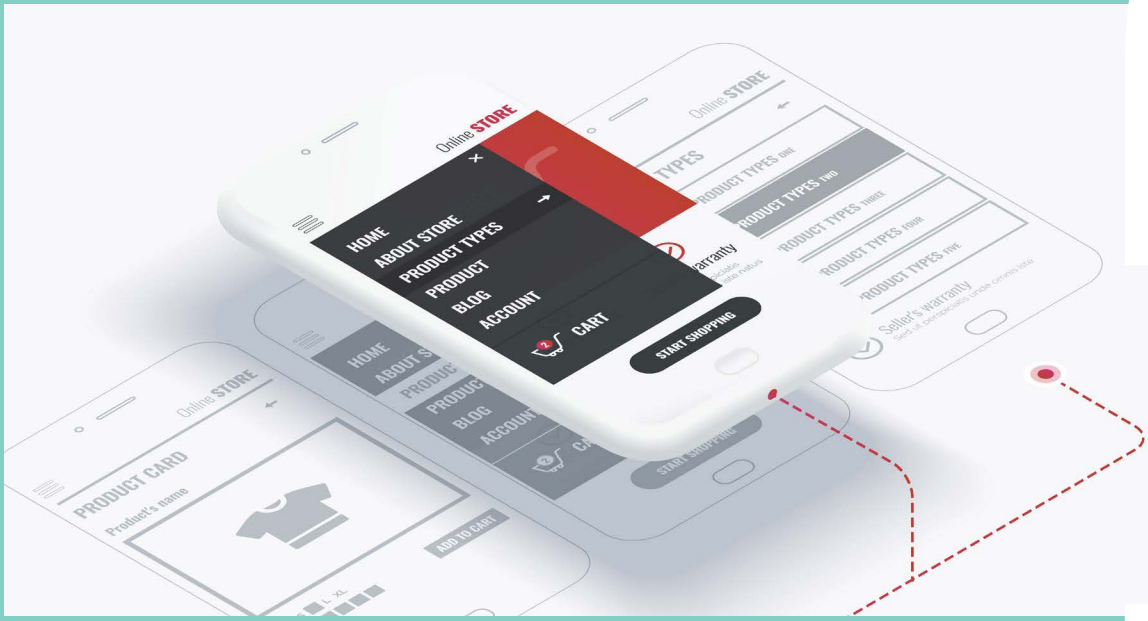
4 USER SIGNALS

Every time a user visits a website, they give off user signals like click-through rate (CTR), bounce rate, time on site, and pogo-sticking.

The leading search engines claim to not care about these user signals, but they do appear to influence search rankings. So, you need to pay attention to what your CTR is and if you have a high bounce rate.

You should also check how much time visitors spend on your site and if people are pogo-sticking off your site.

You can use the data to improve your website design and content, and, thus, enhance the user experience.



USER EXPERIENCE SEO FACTORS

5 MOBILE EXPERIENCE

Earlier, web designers created mobile versions of the website as a marketing extra.

Now, with the number of mobile users increasing worldwide, it is a must to optimize your website for mobile devices. Google and other search engines use mobile-first indexing, and you need to appear there to maintain your internet visibility. However, using UX design for mobiles is trickier than that for desktop.

First, given the smaller size, you need a simple, uncluttered design that doesn't take up too much screen real estate.

Second, the font must be readable and the content scannable and quick loading.

Third, all the navigation buttons and links must be easy to tap.



6 ENGAGING CONTENT

You need long-form, informative content to keep your target audience and other visitors engaged.

Get rid of any content that seems spammy, duplicate, overtly self-promotional, or filled with irrelevant links. That can be off-putting to many visitors, and they won't bother to come around again.

Create content that offers real value. Also, make it easy to scan through by using short paragraphs and suitable headings. People will find it more readable this way.

Plus, it will be easier to parse for the search engines. It is customary to use one H1 tag on one page to inform visitors and search engines about the page's purpose, but you can insert multiple H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6 tags.

They can help establish the logical hierarchy of your website content.



CONDUCTING A USER EXPERIENCE SEO AUDIT

YOU'VE PROBABLY FIGURED OUT BY NOW THAT UX AND SEO ARE PRETTY MUCH INTERDEPENDENT.

- UX creates accessible websites that bring in traffic and that increases their find factor with search engine spiders.
- UX ensures that the website has the valuable, useful content that the SEO indicates it has.
- UX considers how users behave and what actions they take, while SEO builds on this data.

If your website is not performing as well as you would like, this checklist of user experience and SEO concerns may help to correct your site's deficiencies and make a difference.

- Is the website's visual design appealing and accessible to human visitors?
- Are the desktop and mobile layouts clear, simple, and uncluttered?
- Are there too many popups that can ruin the user experience?
- Have you researched your target audience and their content expectations?
- Have you selected and included the right keywords to draw in your target audience?
- Is all the content relevant and non-spammy? Are you delivering what you promise?
- Is the written content property categorized? Is it presented in short paragraphs with suitable headings?
- Are the website's pages well-optimized to make it easier for search engine spiders to find and index them? Have you optimized the page title, meta description, headings, and image alt tags?

- Is the website optimized for the mobile experience?
- Are the images on the website optimized to make them quicker to load?
- Do all the web pages load quickly?
- Is the website menu listed and in the right order?
- Is there a website map to inform visitors of the website contents and assist in navigation?
- Are all the navigation buttons clearly visible and easily accessible?
- Is the website easy to navigate from every web page?
- Do all the internal and external links work correctly?

If you are serious about boosting your organic presence, you need to adopt a user-centric approach to UX and SEO.

It will boost your search engine ranking, increase traffic and return visits, and help establish your business as a trustworthy brand.

4 CONTENT LENGTH

Most SEO audits tend to identify **thin content** to avoid penalties, but what about other items that are technically necessary? Let's take a look.

From thin content to image links on a particular page, images that are missing alt text or images that have too much alt text, Flash implementations, and how content is organized sitewide, it would be helpful to know about everything that can impact rankings, right?



Written by

BRIAN HARNISH

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IDENTIFYING PAGES WITH THIN CONTENT

After Screaming Frog has finished crawling, just click on the internal tab, click on the arrow next to “filter”, and select “HTML”.

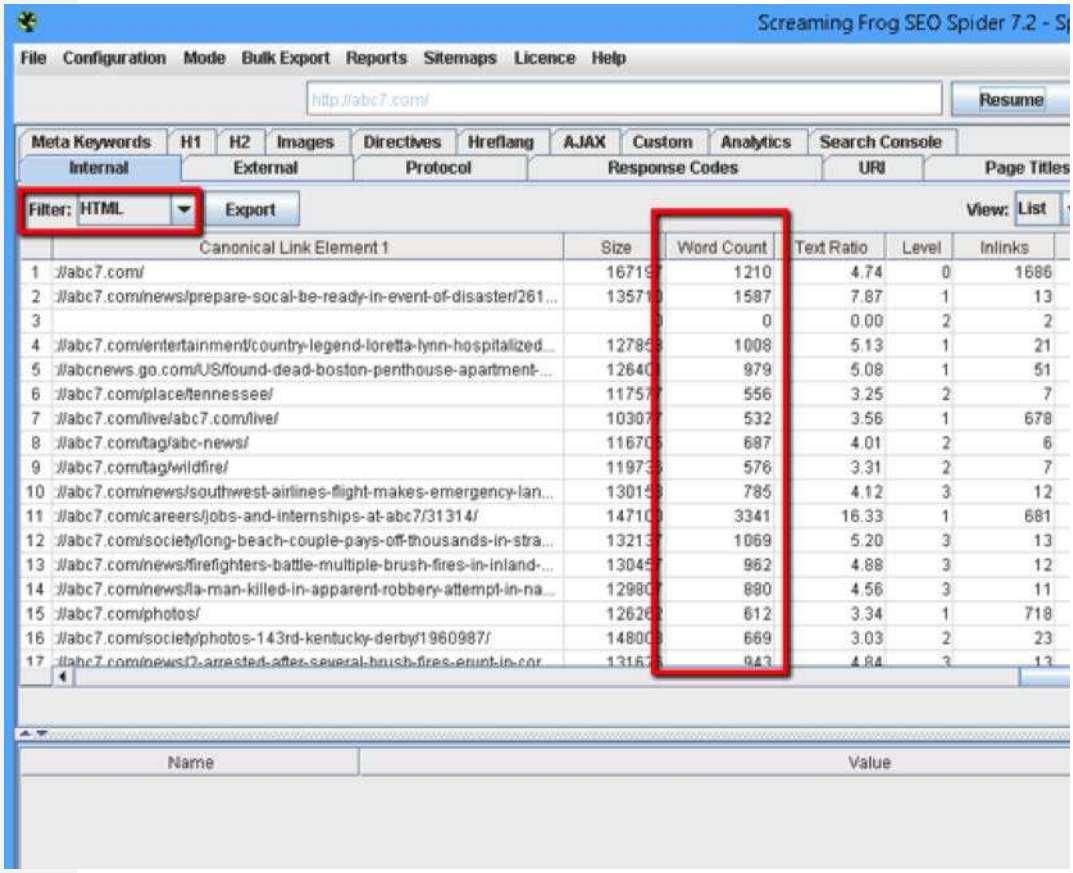
If you scroll to the right, you will see a Word Count column.

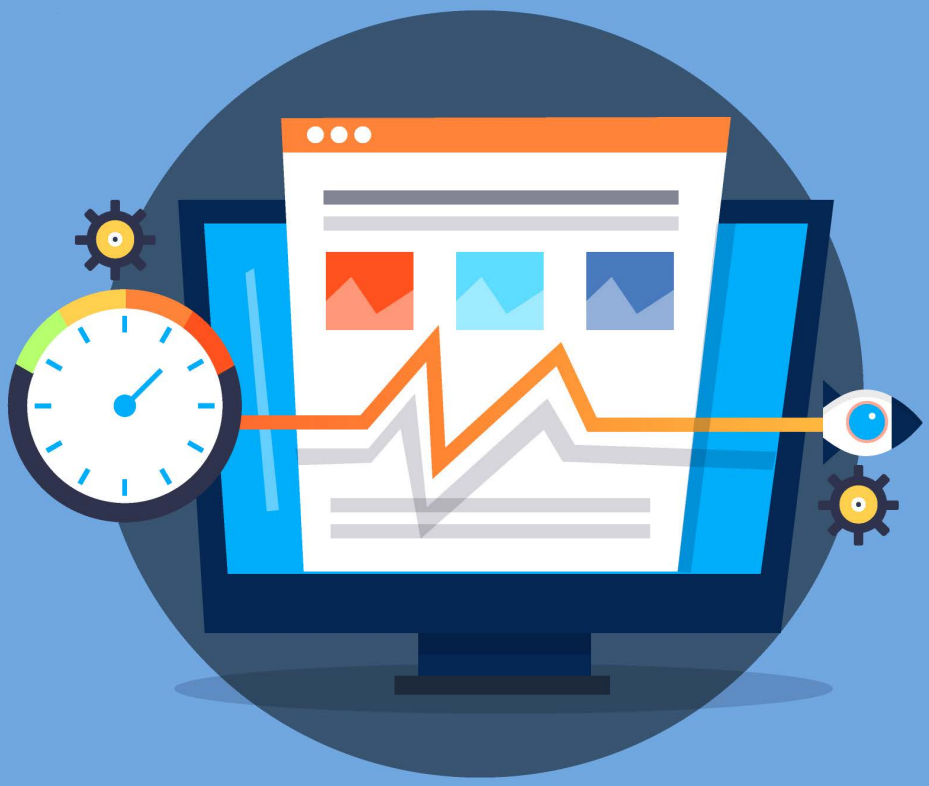
While this isn’t quite as precise as other methods, it will help you identify thin content pages.

In most instances, you should know that only so many words are taken up by navigation, and then you can mentally assess from there if the page has thin content.

If the site has a heavy menu like 150 words, has a heavier footer at 200 words but not much else, and there are 3,500 words of content on the page, you can generally assume that 3,150 of those words belong to the meaty article on that page.

If you aren't sure, dive deeper into the page with the **Word Count extension from Google Chrome**, and count how many words belong just to the meaty article.





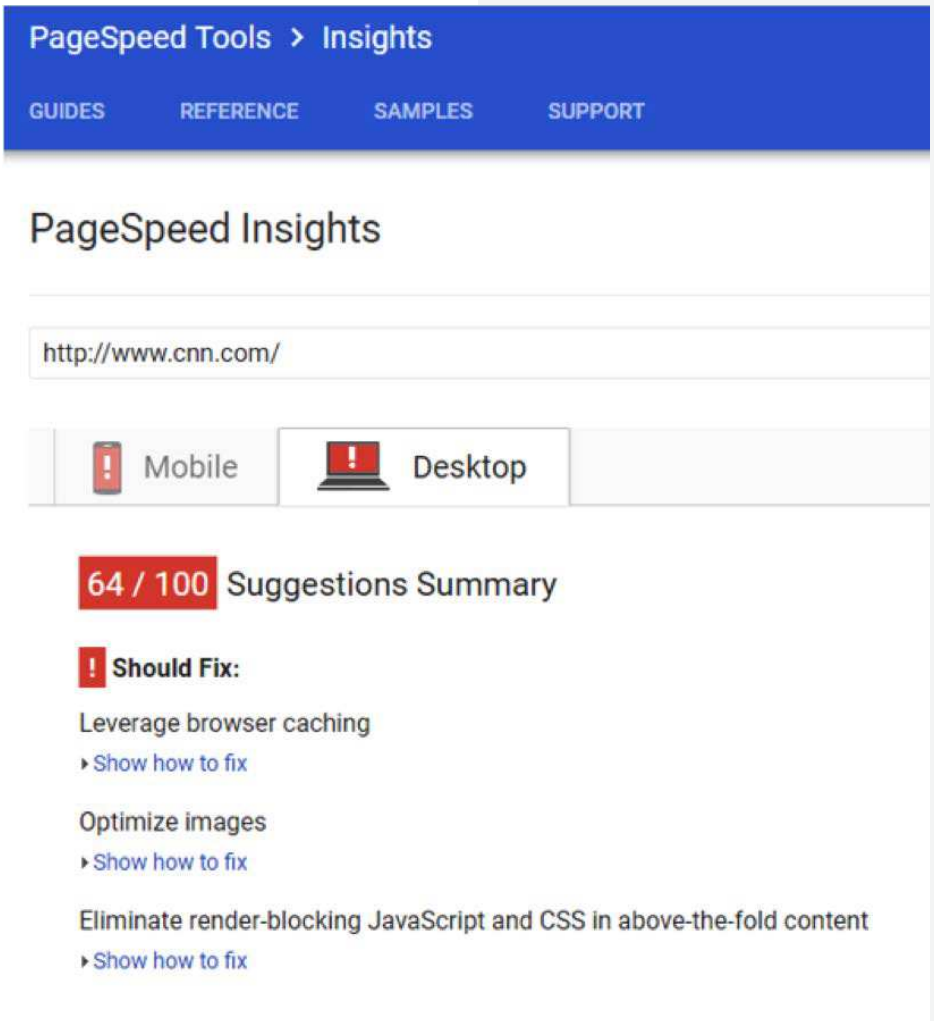
PAGE LOAD SPEED VIA HTML

Page speed, in recent times, has become a critical ranking factor to get right.

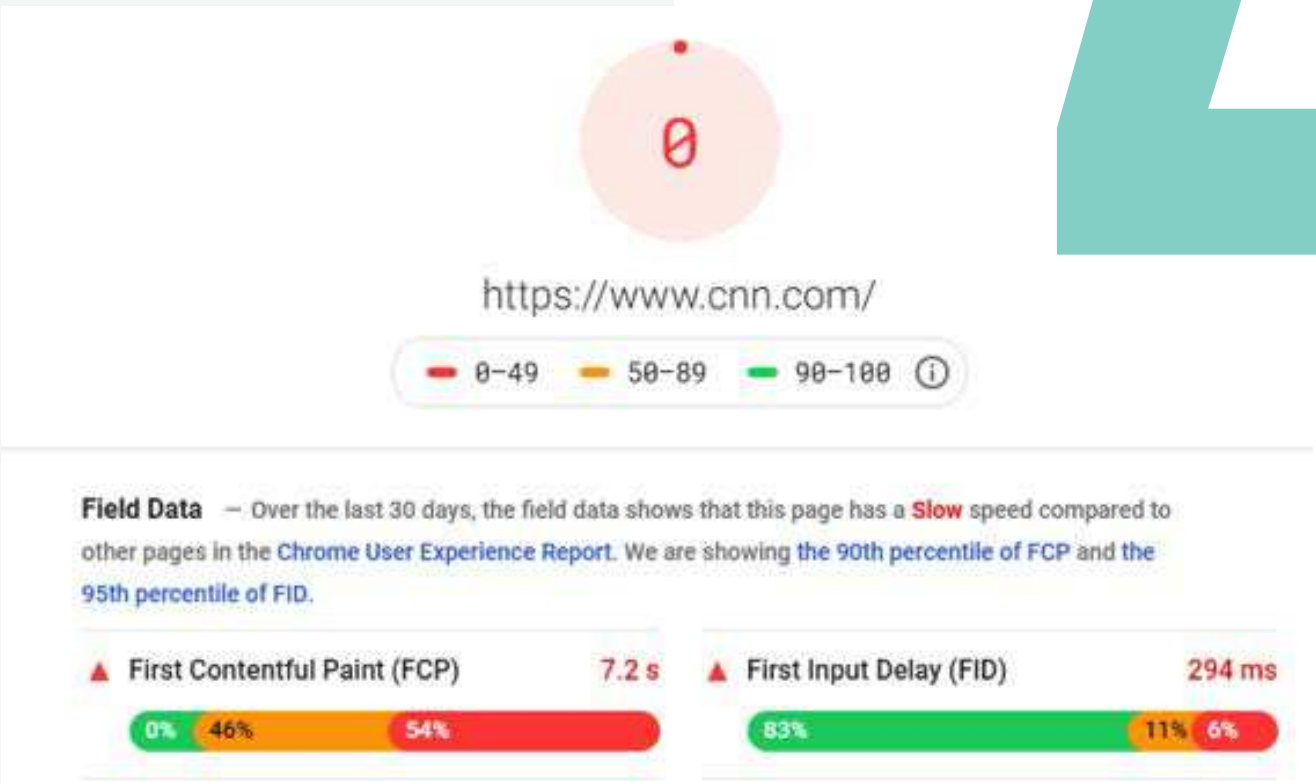
In fact, Google's John Mueller quite recently gave a legit number for Google's Page Speed recommendations: He recommends that you **keep your load time to less than 2-3 seconds.**

Using any one tool to identify bottlenecks and page speed issues can hurt you. That's why I recommend using at least three tools to check this metric. This is because **Google's PageSpeed Insights tool** is not always accurate.

Using more than one tool will help you identify multiple issues that aren't always identified by Google's PageSpeed Insights Tool. Other tools can uncover issues even when Google's tool says your site is 100 percent optimized.



Another tool like **https://www.webpagetest.org/** will help you identify server bottlenecks, including another issue like time to first byte which can cause longer load times if you aren't careful.

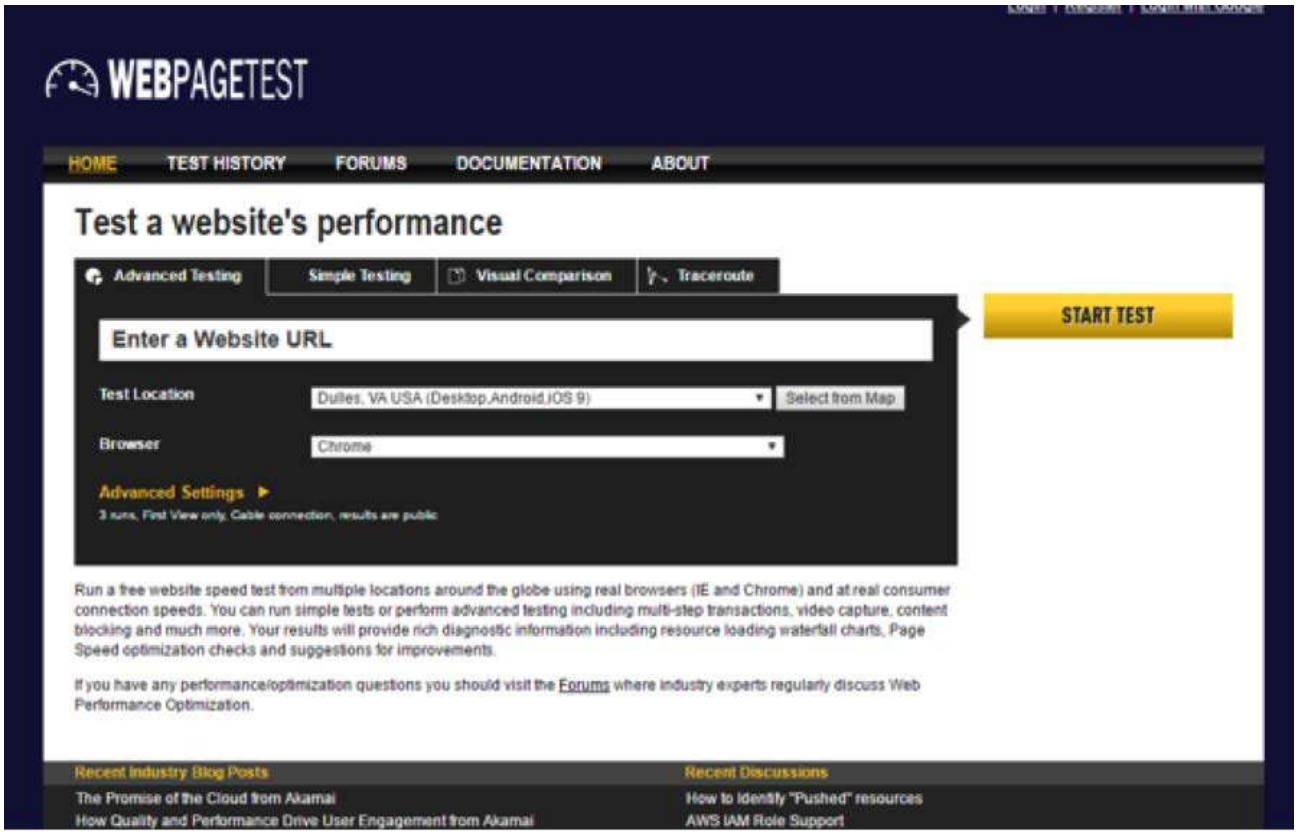


You can also identify page speed issues in Google Analytics. If you wanted to get more granular and prioritize pages based on traffic, you can identify pages that need work in Google Analytics.

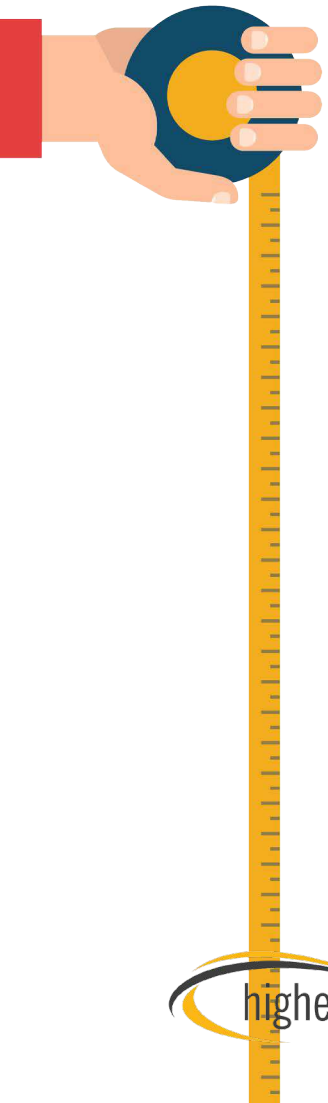
Simply sign in to Google Analytics, navigate to Your View, open up Reports, then click on Behavior > Site Speed.

The page timings report gives you a fully detailed analysis of individual page performance. Making the case for prioritized pages and site-wide overhauls will be easier with all of this data at your fingertips.

In addition, Google's Page Speed Insights also offers **new performance metrics** that are analyzed by the Lighthouse tool.



ASSESSING CONTENT LENGTH THROUGH COMPETITOR ANALYSIS



When it comes to **content length**, we all know that long form content is where it's going to kill it in terms of search results and ranking.

But, did you know that you can assess content length through competitor analysis? It's true.

Let's say that we are doing a competitor analysis for the legal industry. In the industry, we want to find competitors who are ranking for a term like California DUI lawyers.

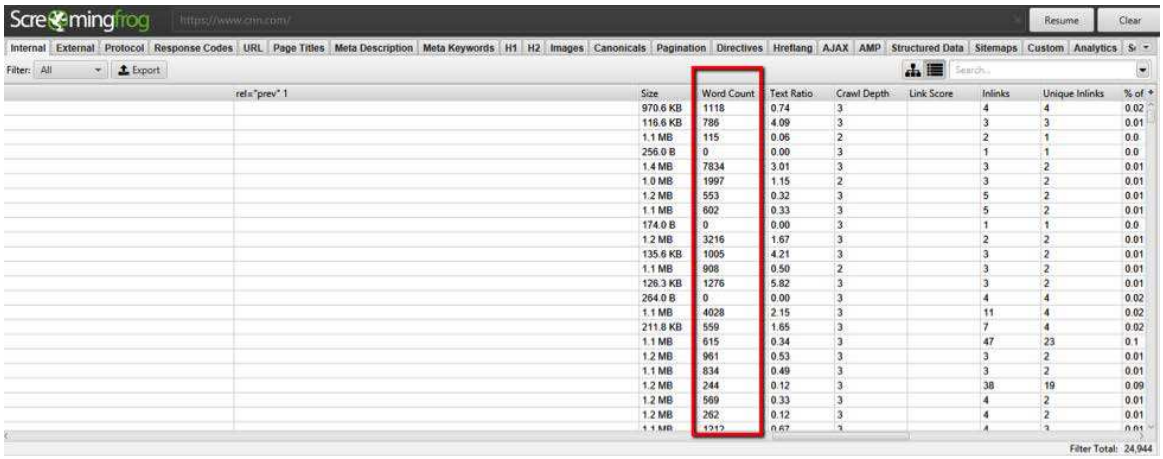
First of all, we want to use ctrl+shift+N in our Google Chrome web browser.

This is important when you are doing competitor analysis – because your browser will bring up a private window that has everything disabled and non-logged-in sessions.

THIS IS BENEFICIAL FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

- You don't have personalized results muddying the waters that you will when you use your logged in account,
- You don't have localized results muddying the waters that you will have when you use your logged-in account or a non-logged-in normal window,
- You won't have tailored results in any way interfering with the data that you want to examine.

Using our example crawl from earlier, you can check word count in Screaming Frog by making sure you are on the internal tab > scrolling to the right to the Word Count column:



Simply plug in your top five competitors that you chose for that keyword, and assess each word count for each competitor that you crawl.

It then becomes a game of beating your competitor in word count, quality content, and quality inbound external links.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTENT LENGTH ON MOBILE

CONTENT LENGTH

People (SEOs, mostly) may think that mobile will harm any chances of getting a potential customer via mobile, and that with longer content, they will simply bounce away like no tomorrow.

This is actually further from the truth. The truth is that people will still review long-form content on mobile. With higher-quality screens in Samsung and iPhones, text readability – for the most part – is not in question.



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In fact, Ellen Harvey of pubexec.com **writes** the following about her research into content length on mobile devices and why long-form content performs just as well (if not better) than short-form content, despite the small device size:

1

"Although short-form articles are more numerous on mobile platforms, long-form articles earn just as many visits.

Pew reports that on average a long-form article earns 1,530 interactions from mobile users compared to 1,576 interactions with short-form content, despite long-form content accounting for only 24% of the total article sample size. "This does not necessarily mean audiences are asking for more long-form content as there is a strong likelihood that most users are not aware of story length when they click a link," reports Pew. "Still, long-form articles do, whether through shares, bookmarks, or other means, find their way to as many initial visitors as short-form."



2

Readers spend more time with long-form content on the weekends, particularly in the morning.

On weekend mornings long-form content attracts 137 seconds of engaged time on average, compared to 123 seconds of engaged time during weekday mornings.

3 *Social referrals drive the most mobile traffic (40% of total traffic) to long-form content, but internal referrals drive the most reader engagement.*

Mobile readers who click an internal link (a link within the same website) to a long-form piece on average spend 148 seconds on the article. Direct referrals drive the second longest engagements with long-form content at 132 engaged seconds. Social platforms drive the shortest average engagement at 111 seconds. Short-form content follows a similar pattern, though direct referrals spend slightly more time with content at 62 seconds than internal referrals at 59 seconds. Like long-form, social refers the least engaged group of readers to short-form content, averaging 52 seconds of engaged time.

4 *Facebook drives the most readers to long-form content, but Twitter drives the most engaged readers.*

"For longer content, users that arrive from Facebook spend an average of 107 seconds, compared with 133 seconds when they come from Twitter, a 24% difference. In shorter content, the same pattern emerges," reports Pew."

In short, don't worry about content length on mobile. There are no real audit items to check here – just sound advice.



STRANGE SEO CONTENT PROBLEMS & HOW TO FIX THEM

There are a number of issues that you can face in Google search, especially when you have significant issues with underperformance. If a site is under-performing, people love to play the blame game with excuses.

Weird Google issues can be a handy excuse to use in such a scenario. However, some of these issues, in reality, is likely because of some combination of poor site, very high competition, and a brand that's failing.

If you have suffered a sudden traffic drop, there are likely other issues at play, and this audit will be the first thing that you want to do to find any major penalty issues.

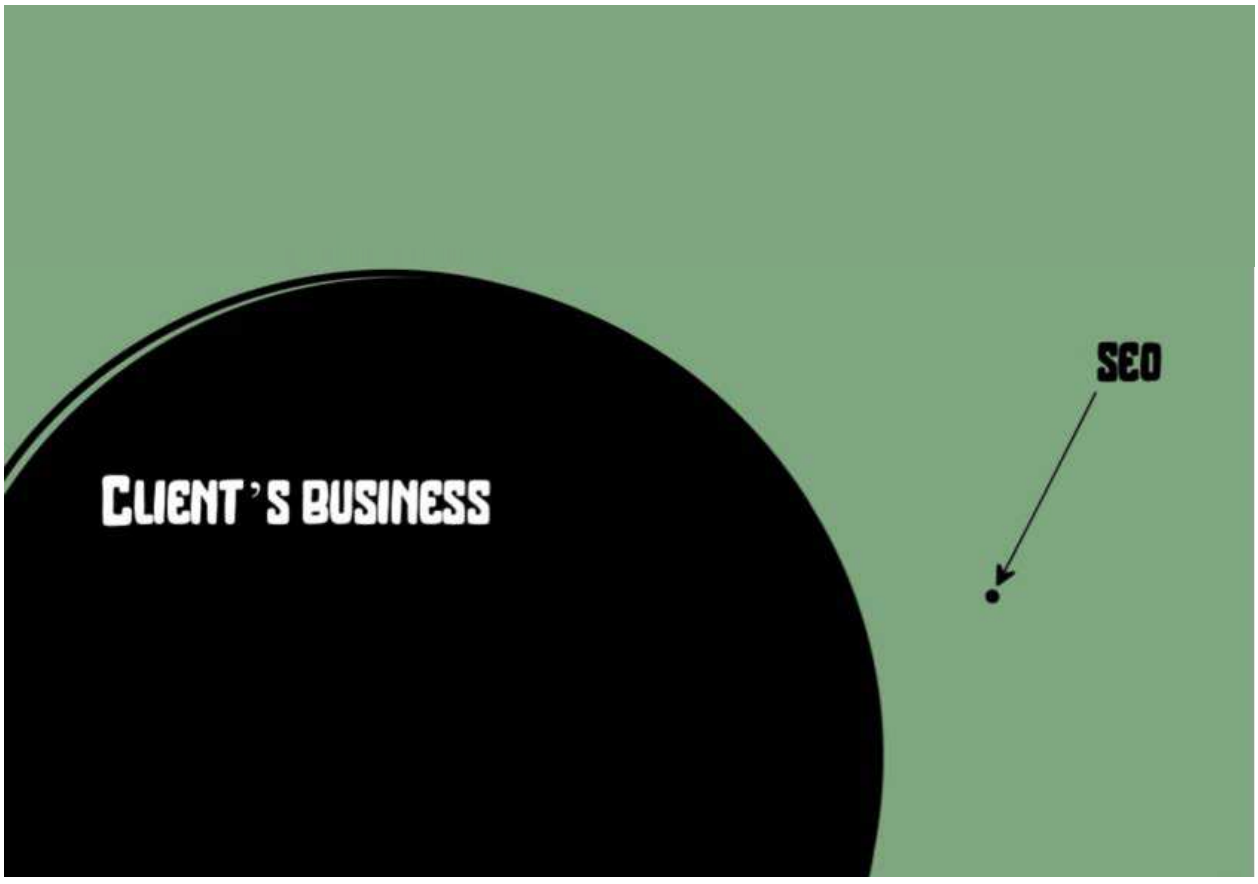
In addition, don't forget to check out the keyword cannibalization checks earlier in this guide also.

First of all, when faced with strange content problems. You may run into situations where you have the following recommendations or excuses.

We have a situation where our client's trust is almost nothing. It's important to note that our clients are not SEO companies. They couldn't care less about our recommendations half the time.

In fact, SEO is probably the lowest on the list of priorities in a small or medium business. Much lower in a large business setting.

Ian Lurie's presentation "**Bullshit, Own It: A Temperamental SEO's Guide to Getting Shit Done**" puts this perfectly:



“It’s a penalty.” and recommendations behind that will likely be met with some resistance if you haven’t investigated other avenues first in your audit.

This may be true despite the fact that you’ve shown a Barracuda overlay that shows exactly when the traffic dropped and the exact correlation with when that penalty hit.

“We should rebuild the entire nav menu.” You may say.

Your client says “No.”

You could say “Install this caching plug-in”. And your client still says no. Despite your best intentions with these recommendations.

The problem, Lurie mentions, is that it’s rarely a penalty. He does discuss that lots of little things can cause problems that may look like a penalty.

Big things (on a more now-and-then scenario) can also cause problems. And I agree.

One major issue that can cause this is client trust. Here’s another example Ian poses:

You find a major issue with indexed pages on Google being 2 million, but your site only has 1,000 pages. Client wants to say: Google says that’s not a problem. You know what that means? The client says they trust Google far more than they trust you, you dumbass.

Lurie's solution here talks about finding the source of truth in terms of WHY this is impacting your site in such a negative way.

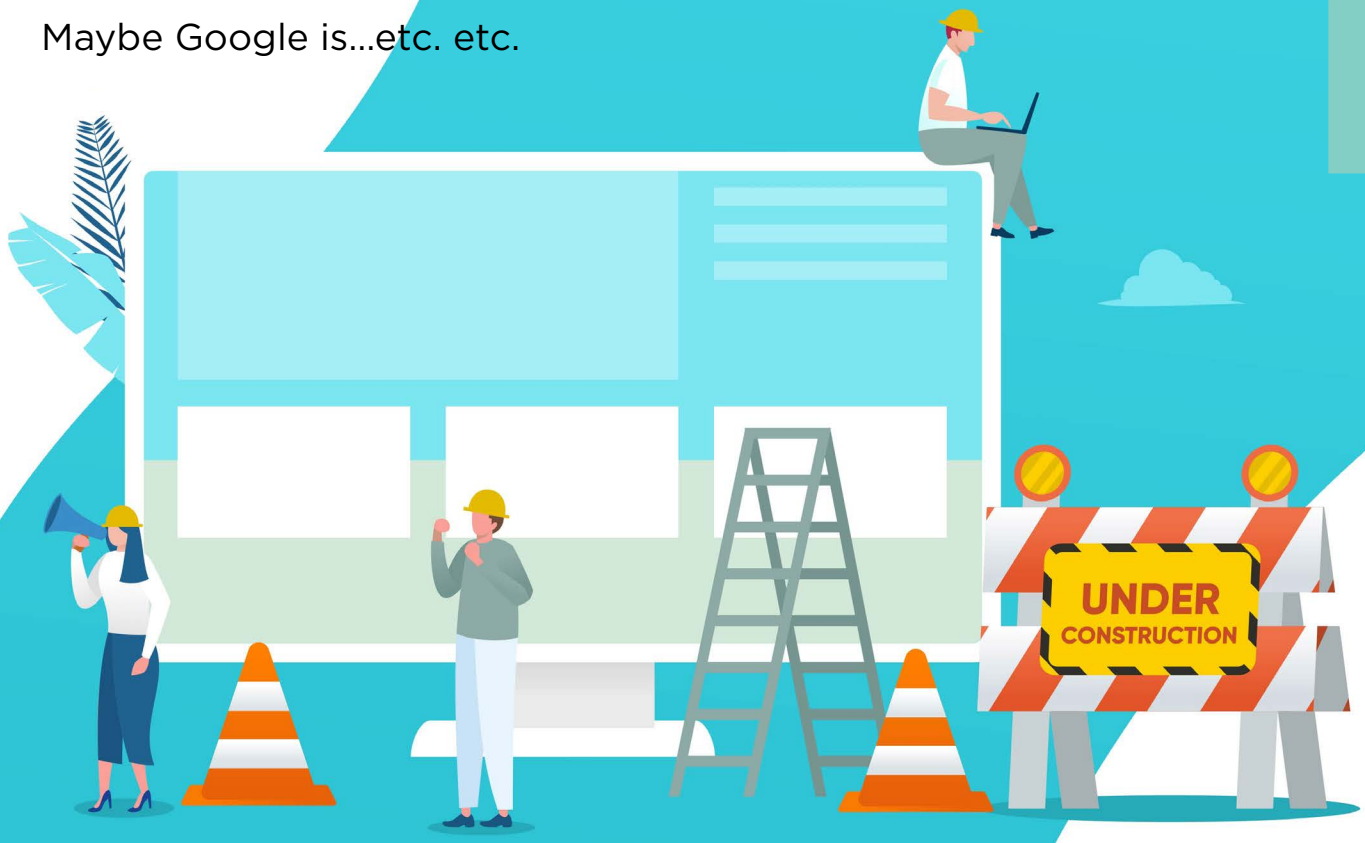
First, check the log files. Log files will be able to tell you exactly what's happening on your site.

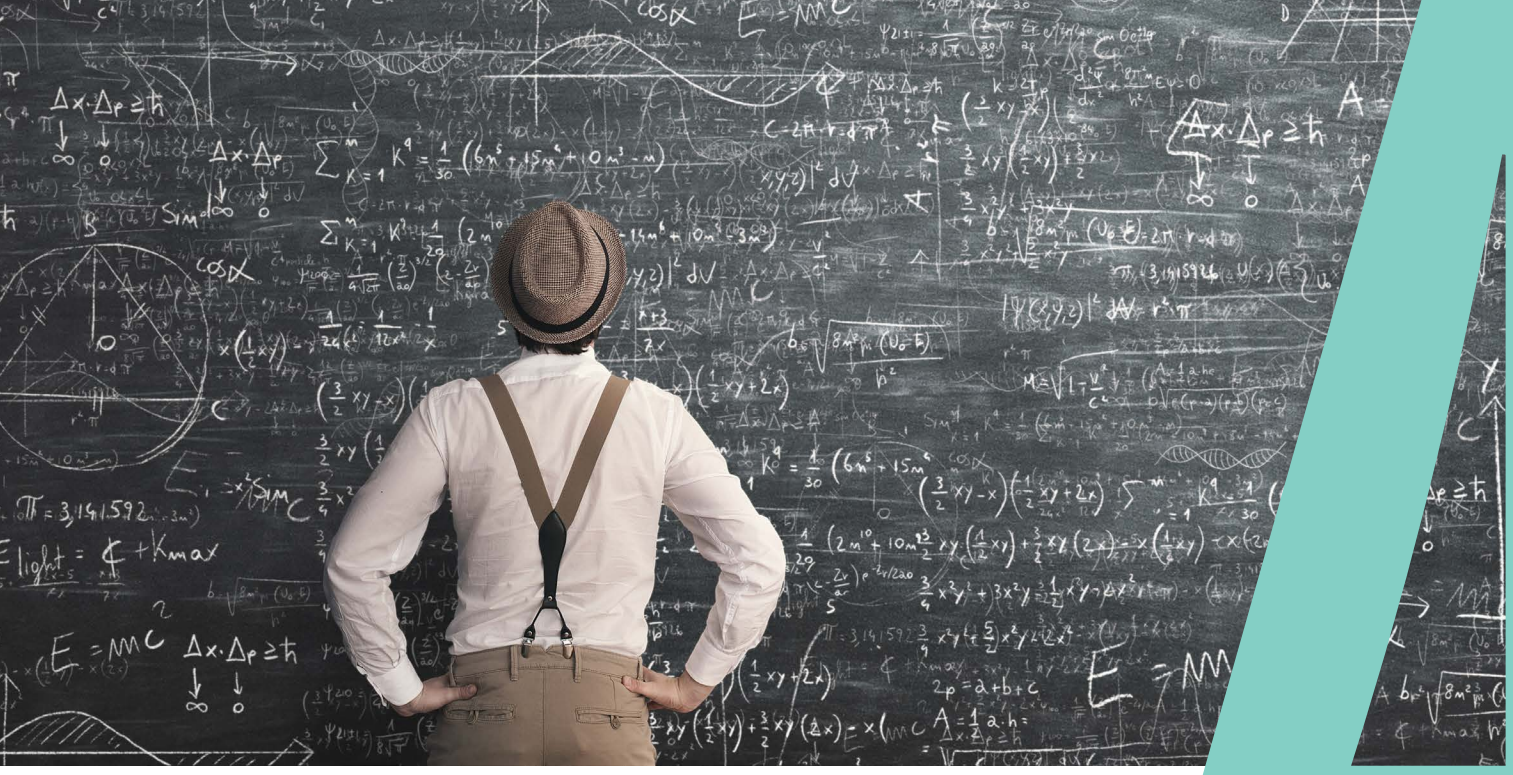
If you review your log files, you will likely see a few things.

Maybe Google is crawling your forms a thousand times a day, equaling more than 80% of your daily crawls from Google.

Maybe Google is crawling auto-generated pages with random parameters that are being indexed to the tune of thousands upon thousands per day. This is common with some search plugins that do not have de-indexing enabled.

Maybe Google is...etc. etc.





The idea being start with your own site's log files and figure out what is happening with those so you can earn trust first.

Armed with this evidence, you can now go straight to the company CEO and say "Here's your evidence. Let's get this fixed."

This is why log files are such an important part of any SEO audit. If you examine your log files, you may end up finding significant issues that you otherwise never would have found in the first place.

The point is – you must own your position and correct any mistakes that may be the result of major issues with your server, rather than issues with Google.

Cheat if you have to – if internal company politics don't let you play the game or they force your hands to be tied. At the end of the day, it's your job that's on the line, and likely not theirs.

These are examples of strange SEO content problems that can come up and how you can fix them. Even if you're a business owner.

5 DUPLICATE CONTENT

Different types of content issues can plague a site – from **URL-based content issues** to physical **duplicate content**, actually replicated from page to page without many changes.

As if that weren't enough, you have other WordPress-specific duplicate content issues to worry about, such as duplicate content on product pages and category pages.

Identifying duplicate content issues is only half the battle. The other half of the battle comes when you need to fix these issues (in some cases this is much easier said than done).



Written by

BRIAN HARNISH

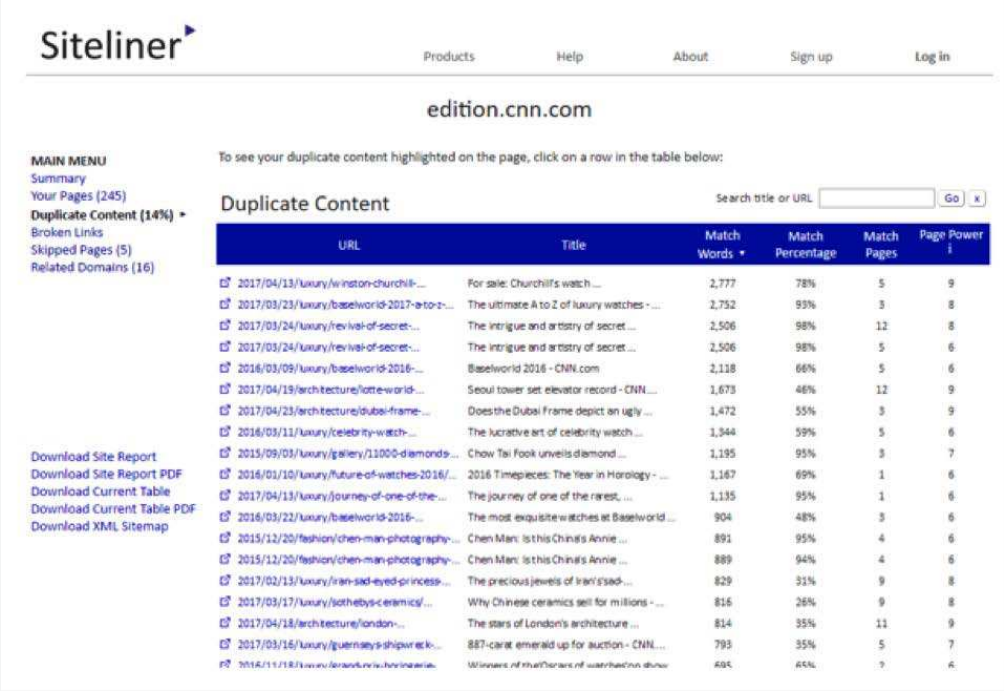
Owner, President of Site ObjectiveDesign, Development, and SEO Consulting

IDENTIFY DUPLICATE CONTENT ISSUES ON YOUR SITE QUICKLY

DUPLICATE CONTENT

HOW TO CHECK

- **Using the tool Siteliner.com** (made by Copyscape) can help identify duplicate content issues on your site quickly.
- It gives an easy-to-see view that shows you which pages have a match percentage, and which pages match other pages.



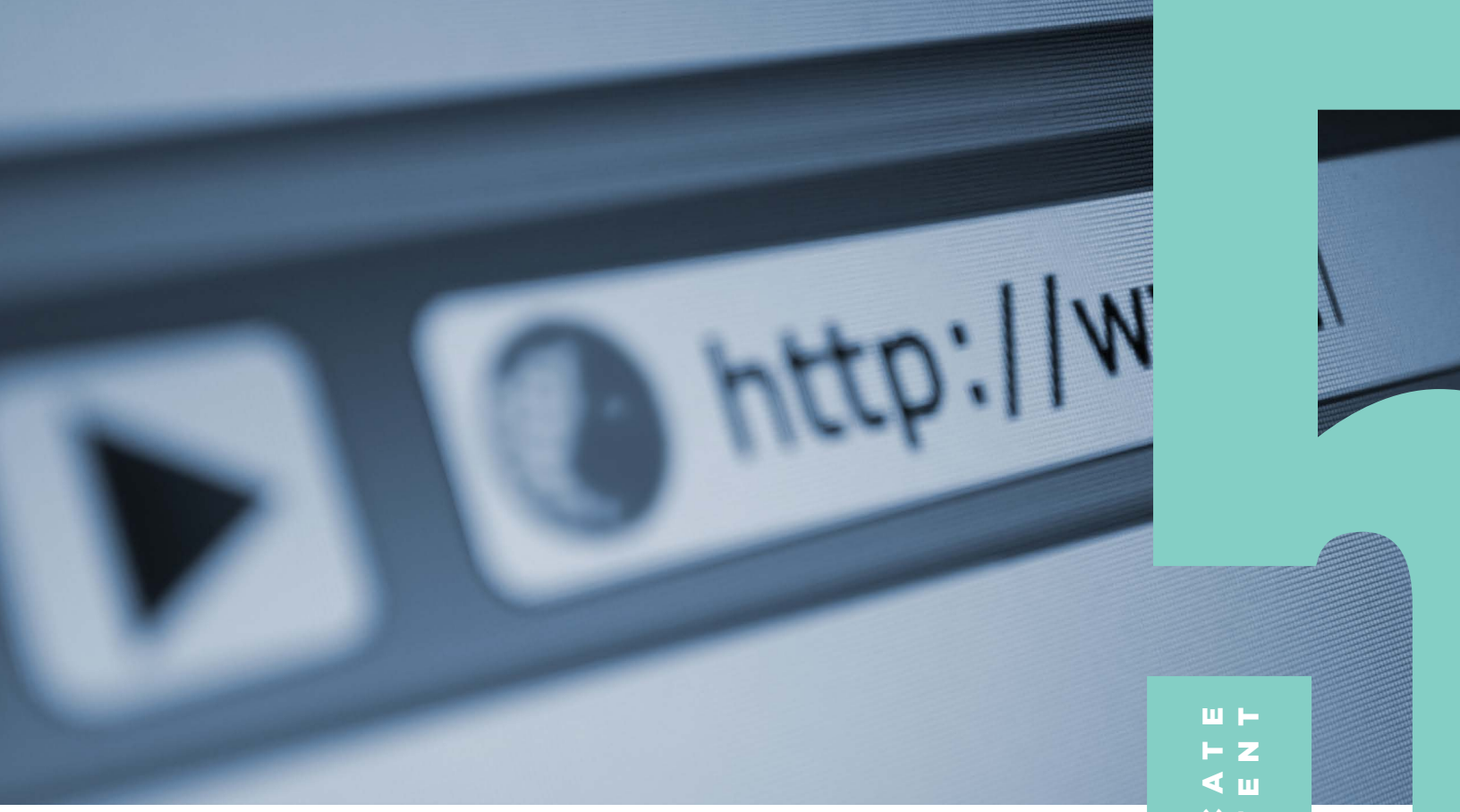
IDENTIFY WHICH PAGES OF YOUR SITE WERE DUPLICATED ACROSS THE WEB

DUPLICATE CONTENT

5

HOW TO CHECK

- Use Copyscape to check and see which pages of your site have been duplicated across the web. Copyscape is considered one of the standard audit tools in SEO circles. This tool can help you identify duplicate content sitewide by using the private index functionality of their premium service.
- To cover all your bases, check Google's index for plagiarized copy of your site's content from around the web. Select a section of text that you want to check, and simply copy/paste it into Google's search bar. This should help you identify instances where it has been stolen.



DUPLICATE CONTENT

CHECK URLS FOR DUPLICATE CONTENT

Identifying duplicate content isn't just limited to text content on the page.

Checking for URLs leading to duplicate content can also reveal issues that cause Google great confusion when they crawl your site.

CHECK AND INVESTIGATE THE FOLLOWING:

- How recent content updates are
- Magnitude of content updates
- Historical trend of page updates

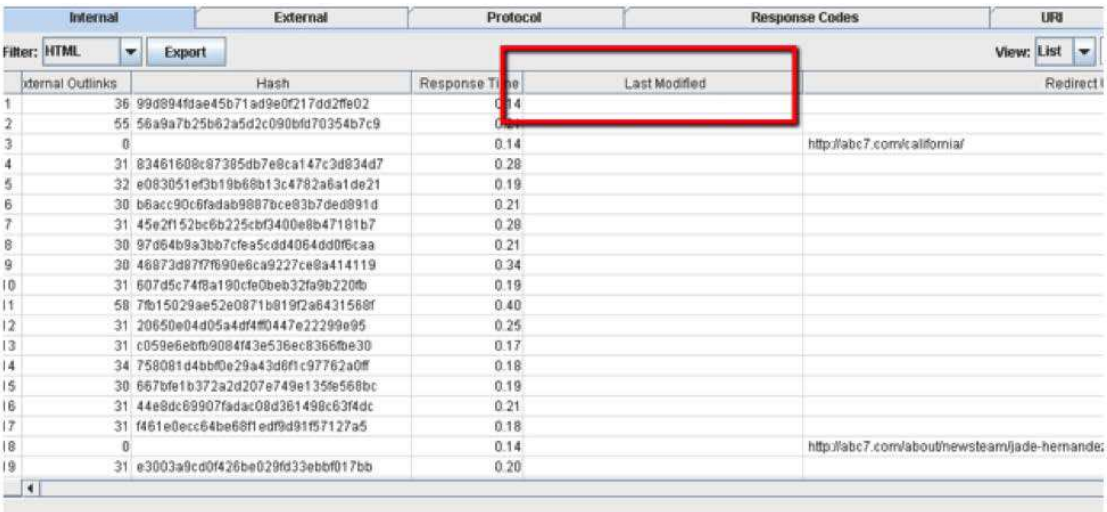
HOW TO CHECK

IN SCREAMING FROG, SCROLL ALL THE WAY TO THE RIGHT, AND YOU'LL FIND A LAST MODIFIED COLUMN. THIS CAN HELP YOU:

- Determine how recent content updates are and the magnitude of content updates on the site.
- Develop historical trends of page updates.

If you're obsessed with your competitors, you could go as far as performing a crawl on them every month and keeping this data on hand to determine what they're doing.

It would be pretty easy to analyze and keep this data updated in an Excel table, and identify historical trends if you want to see what competitors are doing in terms of developing their content. This can be invaluable information.



WHAT TO CHECK

- Syndicated content
- Helpful supplementary content

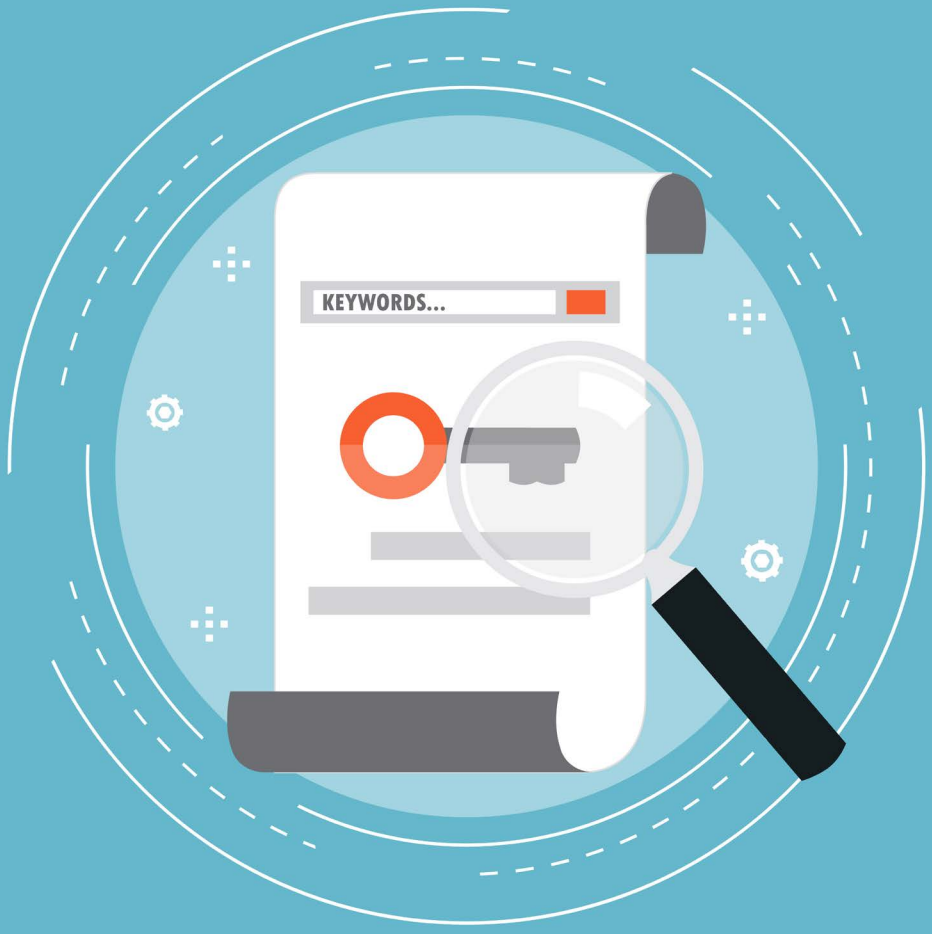


Understanding how content is segmented within a site, or somehow syndicated, is useful for divvying up original content on a site from syndicated content on a site, especially when syndicated content is a heavy site feature.

This trick is especially useful for identifying thin content and creating custom filters for finding helpful supplementary content.

KEYWORD PROMINENCE

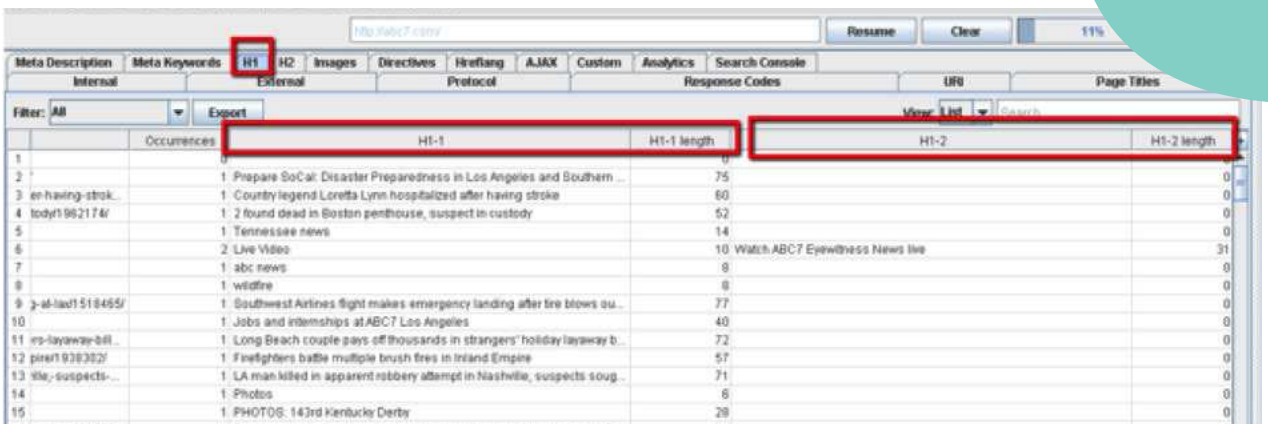
The above trick for creating custom filters can also help you identify keyword prominence – where the keyword appears in the first 100 words of a page's content.



KEYWORD IN H1, H2, H3 TAGS

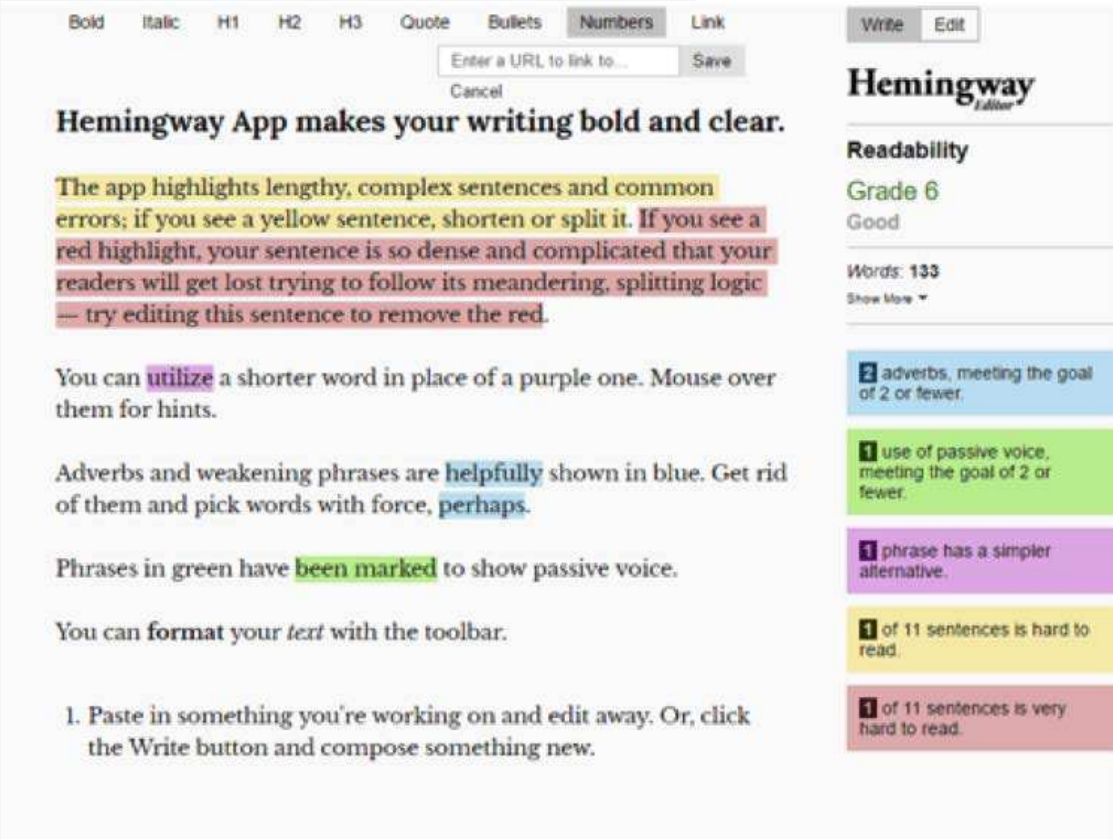
In Screaming Frog, click on the H1 tab then take a look at the H1, H2, and H3 tags.

Alternatively, you can also click on the H2 tab. In addition, you can set up a custom filter to identify H3 tags on the site.



WHAT TO CHECK

- Keyword word order
- Grammar and spelling
- Reading level



Identifying poor grammar and spelling issues on your site during a site audit isn't ideal, and can be painful, but doing so before posting content is a good step towards making sure your site is a solid performer.

If you aren't a professional writer, use the **Hemingway App** to edit and write your content. It can help identify major issues before you publish.

NUMBER OF OUTBOUND LINKS

The number of outbound links on a page can interfere with a page's performance. It has long been held a best practice by SEOs not to exceed 100 links per page. While Google has stated that the requirement of limiting outbound links to **100 links per page** has been removed, there are contradictory claims. John Mueller **has stated** that outbound links are not a ranking factor. Which is it?

It helps to look at case studies conducted by others for answers:

There has been a study by **RebootOnline.com** that contradicts this one:

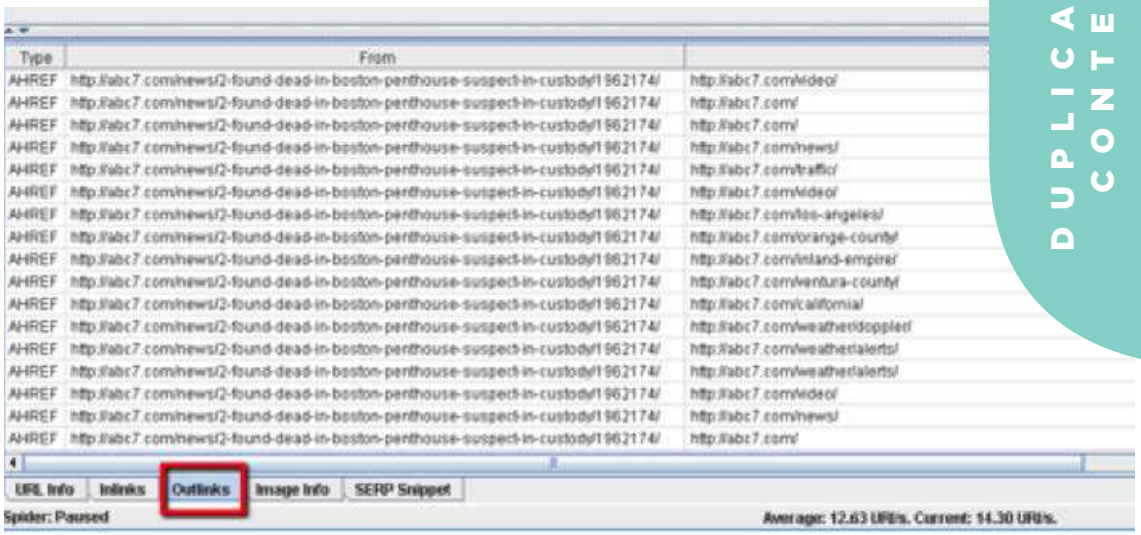
> "The results are clear.
>
> Outgoing relevant links to authoritative sites are considered in the algorithms and do have a positive impact on rankings."

Context is important, because 100 outbound links on a page can be anything from 100 navigation links to 100 links purely put together to be in a link farm. The idea here is to audit the quality of those links as well as the quantity. If you see something strange going on in terms of the quantities of links, it merits further investigation into both their quality and quantity.

If you want to perform a bonus check, you could always check this in Screaming Frog, although generally it isn't required anymore.

HOW TO CHECK

In Screaming Frog, after you identify the page you want to check outbound links on, click on the URL in the main window, then click on the Outlinks tab.



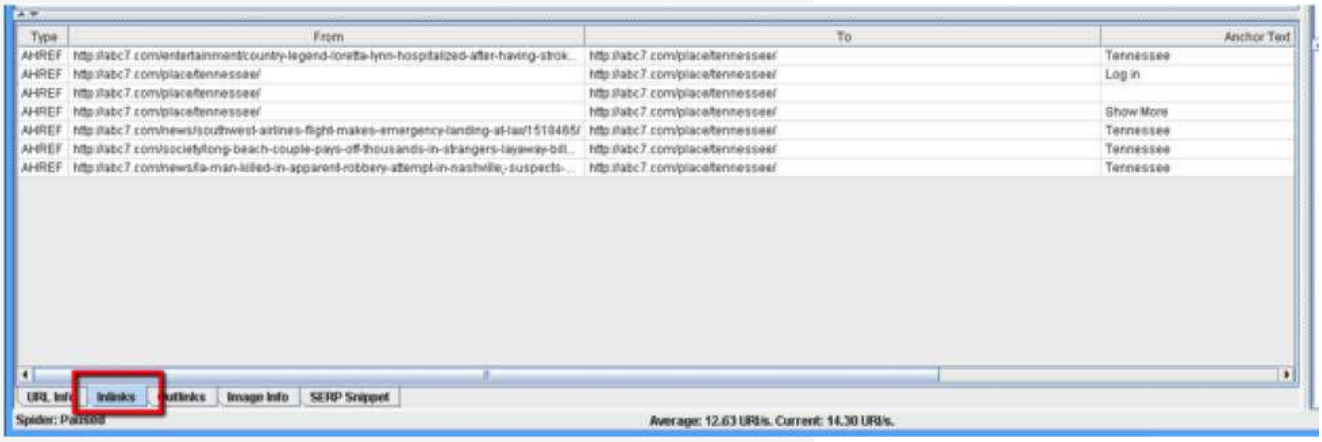


Alternatively, you can click on Bulk Export > All Outlinks if you want a faster way to identify site-wide outbound links

NUMBER OF INTERNAL LINKS POINTING TO A PAGE

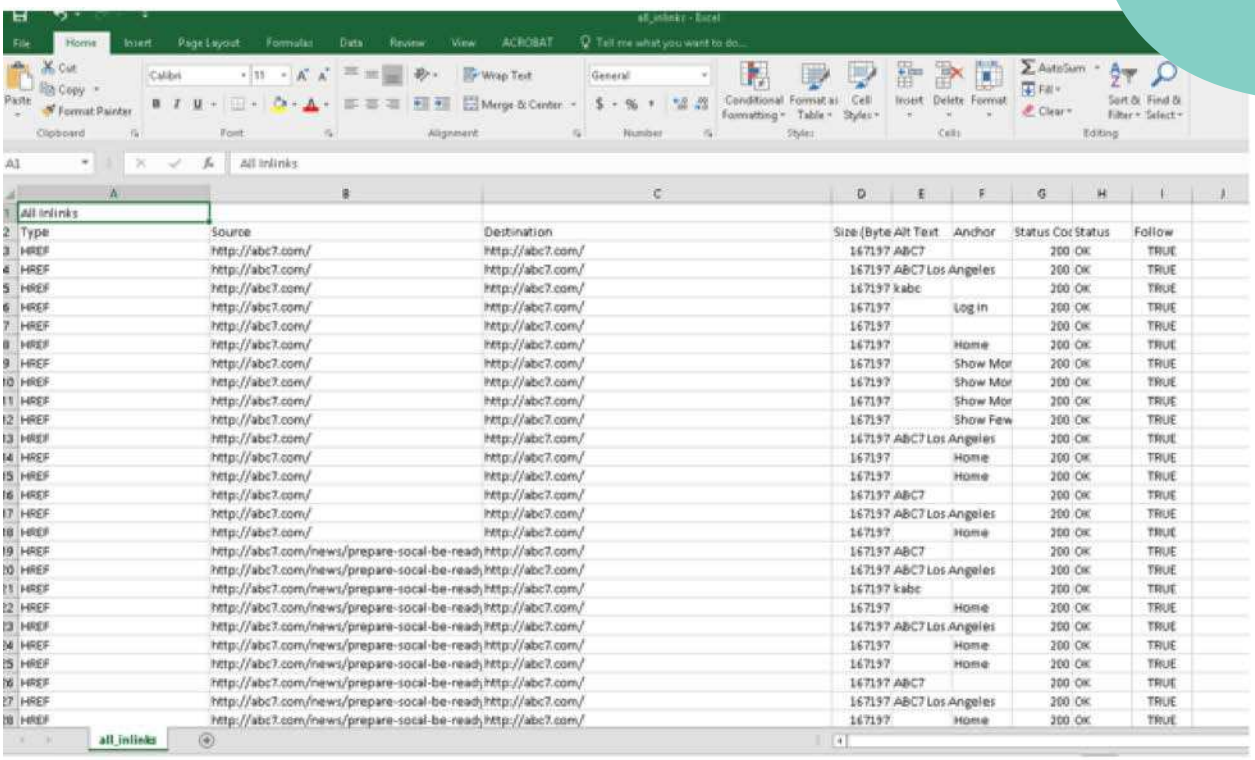
To identify the number of internal links pointing to a page, click on the URL in the main Screaming Frog window then click on the Inlinks tab.

You can also click on Bulk Export > All Inlinks to identify site-wide inlinks to all site pages.



QUALITY OF INTERNAL LINKS POINTING TO A PAGE

Using the exported Excel document from the step where we bulk exported the links, it's easier to judge the quality of internal links pointing to each page on the site:



All Inlinks								
Type	Source	Destination	Size (Byte	Alt Text	Anchor	Status Cod	Status	Follow
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	kabc		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Log in	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197			200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Mor	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Mor	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Mor	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Few	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197	kabc		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
HREF	http://abc7.com/news/prepare-socal-be-ready	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE

BROKEN LINKS

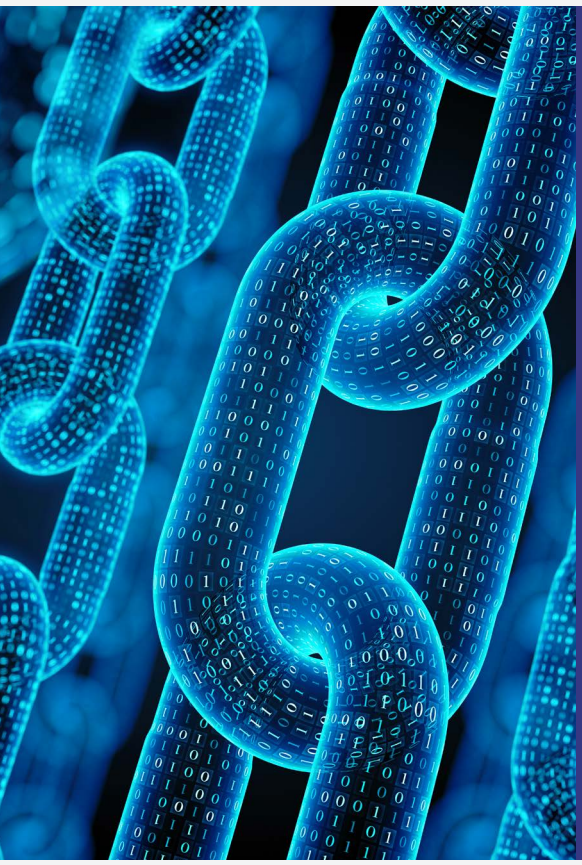
Identifying broken links in an SEO audit can help you find pages that are showing up as broken to Google, and will give you an opportunity to fix them before they become major issues.

HOW TO CHECK

- Once Screaming Frog has finished your site crawl, click on the Internal tab, select HTML from the Filter: dropdown menu, and sort the pages by status code.
- This will organize pages in descending order so you can see all of the error pages before the live 200 OK pages.
- In this check, we want to identify all of the 400 errors, 500 errors, and other page errors.
- For some links, depending on their context, it is safe to ignore 400 errors and let them drop out of the Google index, especially if it has been a while and you don't find them in the Google index.
- But if they are indexed and have been for a while, you'll probably want to redirect them to the proper destination.

AFFILIATE LINKS

If the goal of your audit is to identify and remove affiliate links from an affiliate-heavy website, then the next tip is a good path to follow.

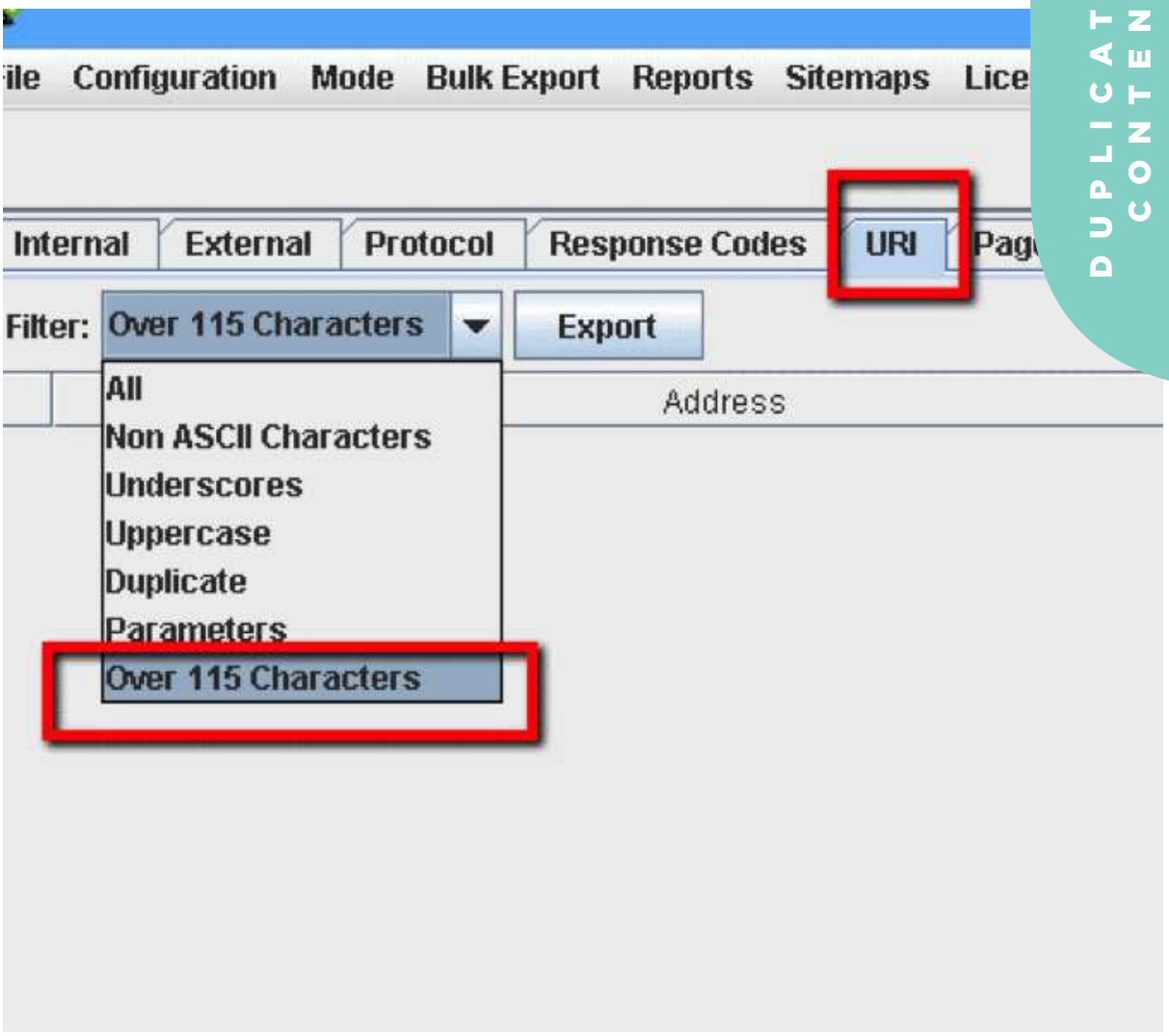


HOW TO CHECK

- Affiliate links tend to have a common referrer or portion of their URL that is identifiable across many different websites. Utilizing a custom filter can help you find these links.
- In addition, using conditional formatting in Excel, you can filter out affiliate links and identify where they are in the bulk exports from Screaming Frog.

URL LENGTH

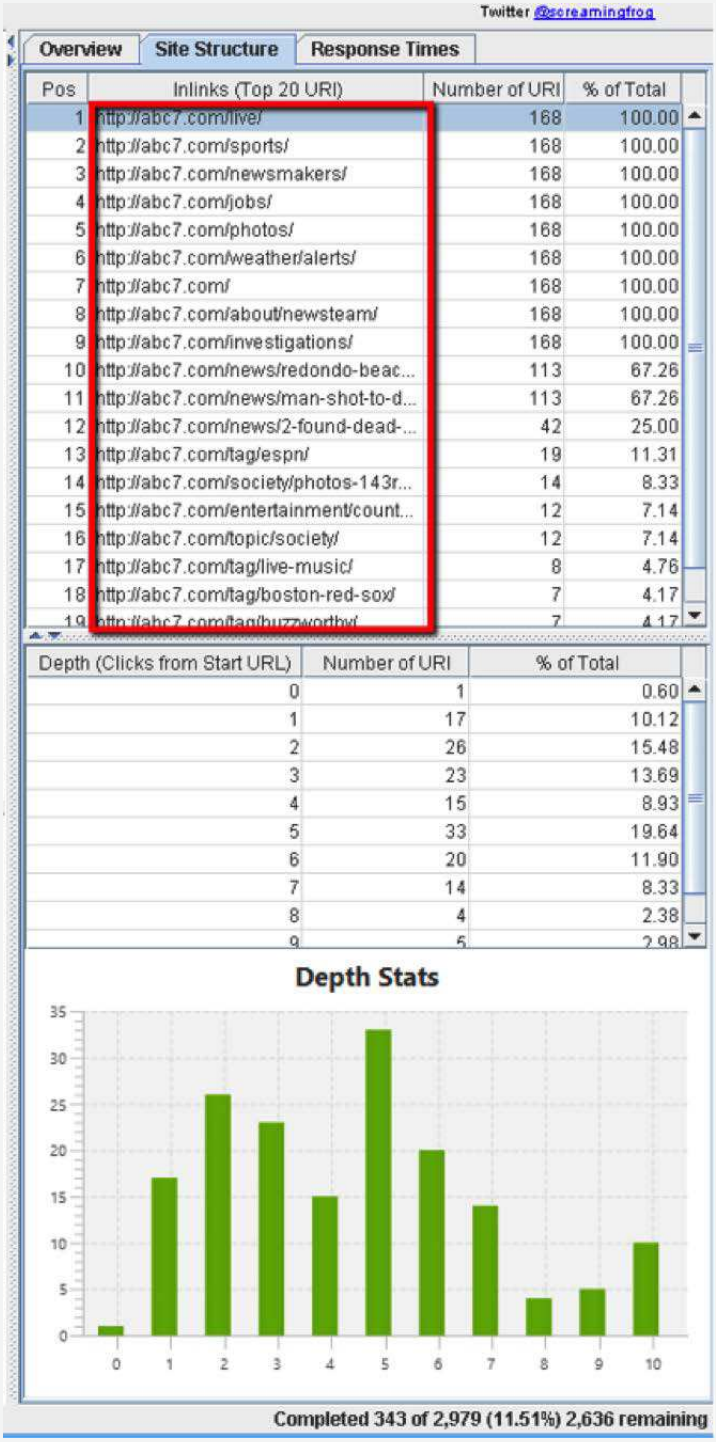
To identify URLs over 115 characters in Screaming Frog, click on the URL tab, click on Filter then click on Over 115 Characters. This will give you all the URLs on-site that are more than 115 characters and can help you identify issues with overly long URLs.





PAGE CATEGORY

For a high-level overview of page categories, it's useful to identify the top pages of the site via Screaming Frog's site structure section, located on the far right of the spider tool.



DUPLICATE CONTENT

5

HOW TO CHECK

Using the site structure tab, you can identify the top URLs on the site, as well as which categories they fall into. In addition, you can identify page response time issues in the response times tab.

6 WEBSITE CONTENT FACTORS

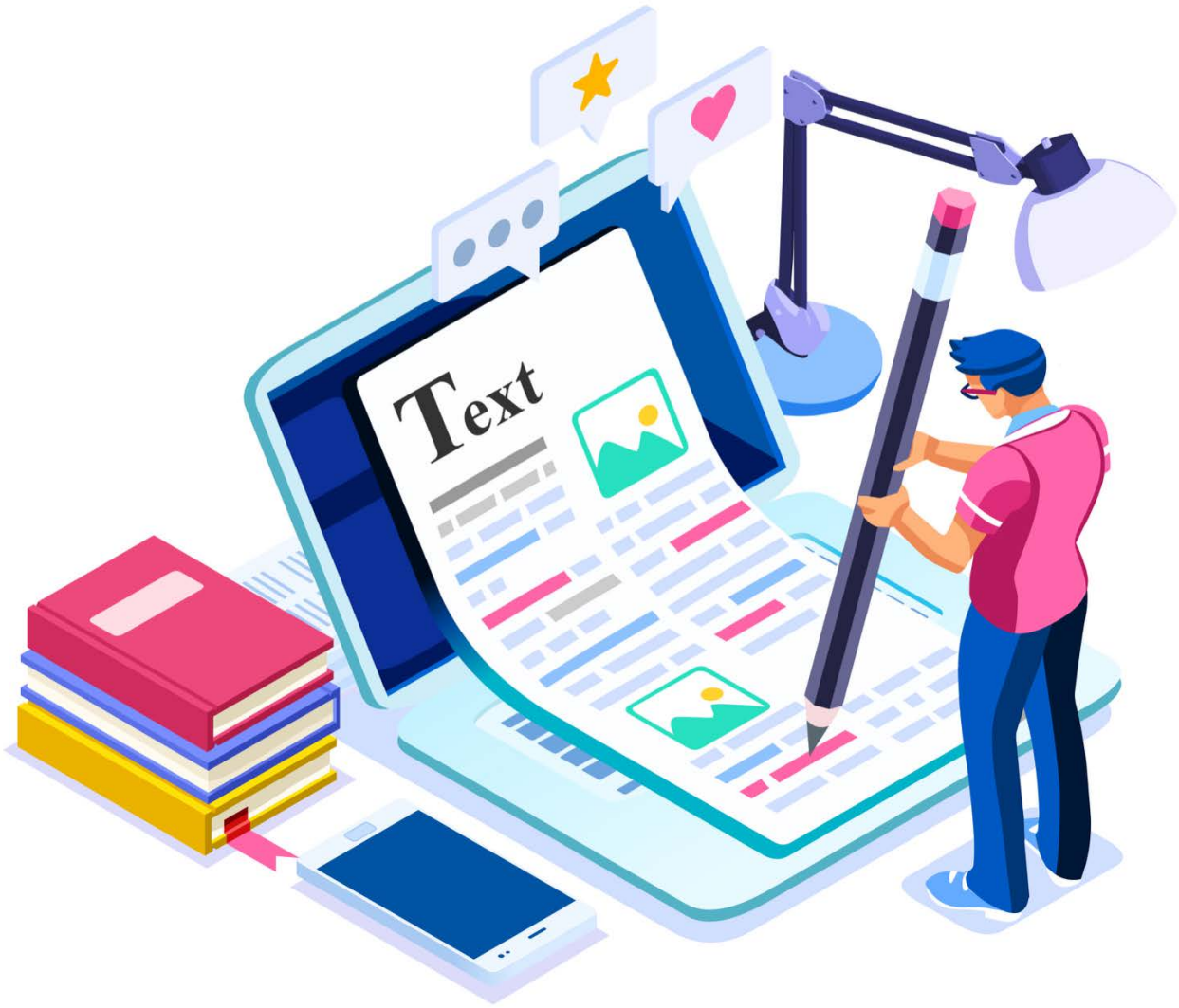


Written by

BRIAN HARNISH

Owner, President of Site ObjectiveDesign, Development, and SEO Consulting

SEJ Search Engine Journal



CONTENT PROVIDES VALUE AND UNIQUE INSIGHTS

Creating content that is valuable and provides unique insights is a challenge.

Not only that, you cannot expect to create a single method for content creation that is adaptable to all industries and audiences.

This is a field where you must adapt and learn how to create new techniques depending on the audience, your industry, and your individual profession.

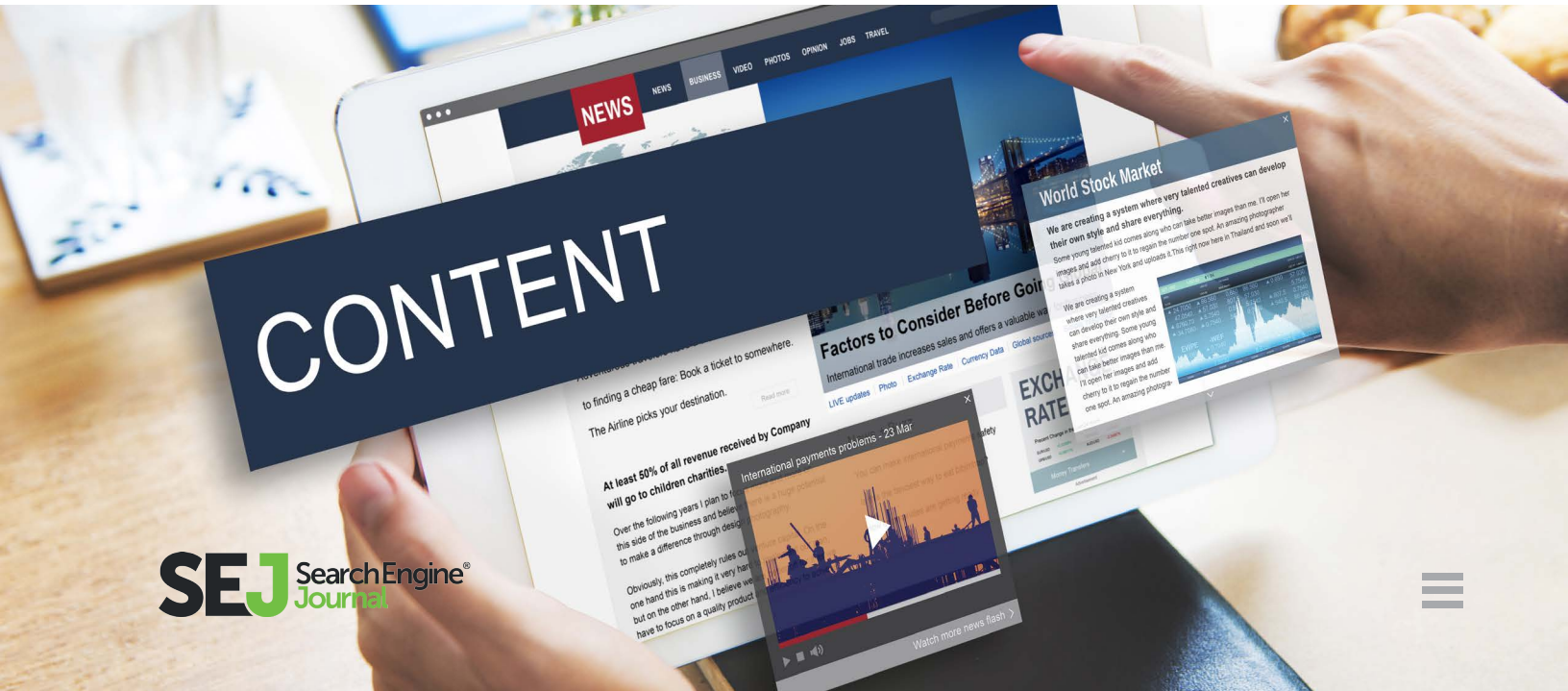
This herein lies a conundrum that many SEOs face: what is the best way to create valuable content for my industry?

How do you identify content that provides value in strange industries where you have little to no experience?

Identifying **content that provides value** and uniqueness can only be done via thorough competitor analysis.

It can also be done by other methods, such as using Python to mine the SERPs, but that is beyond the scope of this book.

For the extreme white hat folks, if you don't want to do anything to upset the Google folks, I suggest performing this check manually.



HOW TO CHECK

- Type your keyword in Google and perform a check of the top 10 organic competitors that you find.
- Assuming Screaming Frog isn't blocked, we can identify this kind of content through quick Screaming Frog checks.
- Pull the competitors from Google, and add them to a list in Excel. Do a Screaming Frog crawl on each site, and export the CSVs.
- To identify the content-heavy pages, scroll to the right in Excel and log all of the word counts for the top 20-50 pages.
- In a new Excel sheet, track all of these results in a single tab per site, identifying the content that provides value and unique insights.
- Pull the competitors from Google and add them to a list in Excel. Do a Screaming Frog crawl on each site and export the CSVs.
- To identify the content-heavy pages, scroll to the right in Excel and log all of the word counts for the top 20-50 pages.
- In a new Excel sheet, track all of these results in a single tab per site, identifying the content that provides value and unique insights.
- This, of course, will need to be judged on a case-by-case basis and a competitor basis.
- For those who prefer to use more efficient means to identify these competitors, you could use Scrape Box's Competition Finder.

I'll leave instructions for this here, because if you don't know what you're doing, you could block your own internet from being able to access Google.

WARNING: I am providing this for informational purposes ONLY. You are responsible for what happens to your internet connection if you don't do any of these correctly.

First off, watch this video to understand all about proxies here (these are the magic that will make your efforts work without blocking your own internet):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHPsZTC-_Bk

You must have your own proxies and load your proxies into Scrapebox before ever actually using the program itself or any of its add-ons.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maxxX_xPSAk

This is how you will be able to use the Scrapebox competition finder:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyT3GtE74wU

The metrics themselves are a good indicator of the level of competition, so you may want to opt for something like SEMRush. If you don't want to pay the $99.99/mo charge for SEMRush, Scrapebox and proxies are an OK, cheaper option.

So what you will need to really get started using these tools include:

- Proxies
- Scrapebox itself
- The Scrapebox competition finder add-on.
- And, if you really want an extra layer of protection, get a VPS - SEO VPSes will allow you to use Scrapebox. This is important - not any service will allow you to use Scrapebox, and it's important to make sure that any VPS you sign up for will allow you to use it..

NOTE

While technically, proxies are supposed to help you avoid detection, if you want to not leave any evidence on your computer of using something like this, then you may want to opt for the VPS layer via Remote Desktop Connection in your setup.



WEBSITE CONTENT FACTORS

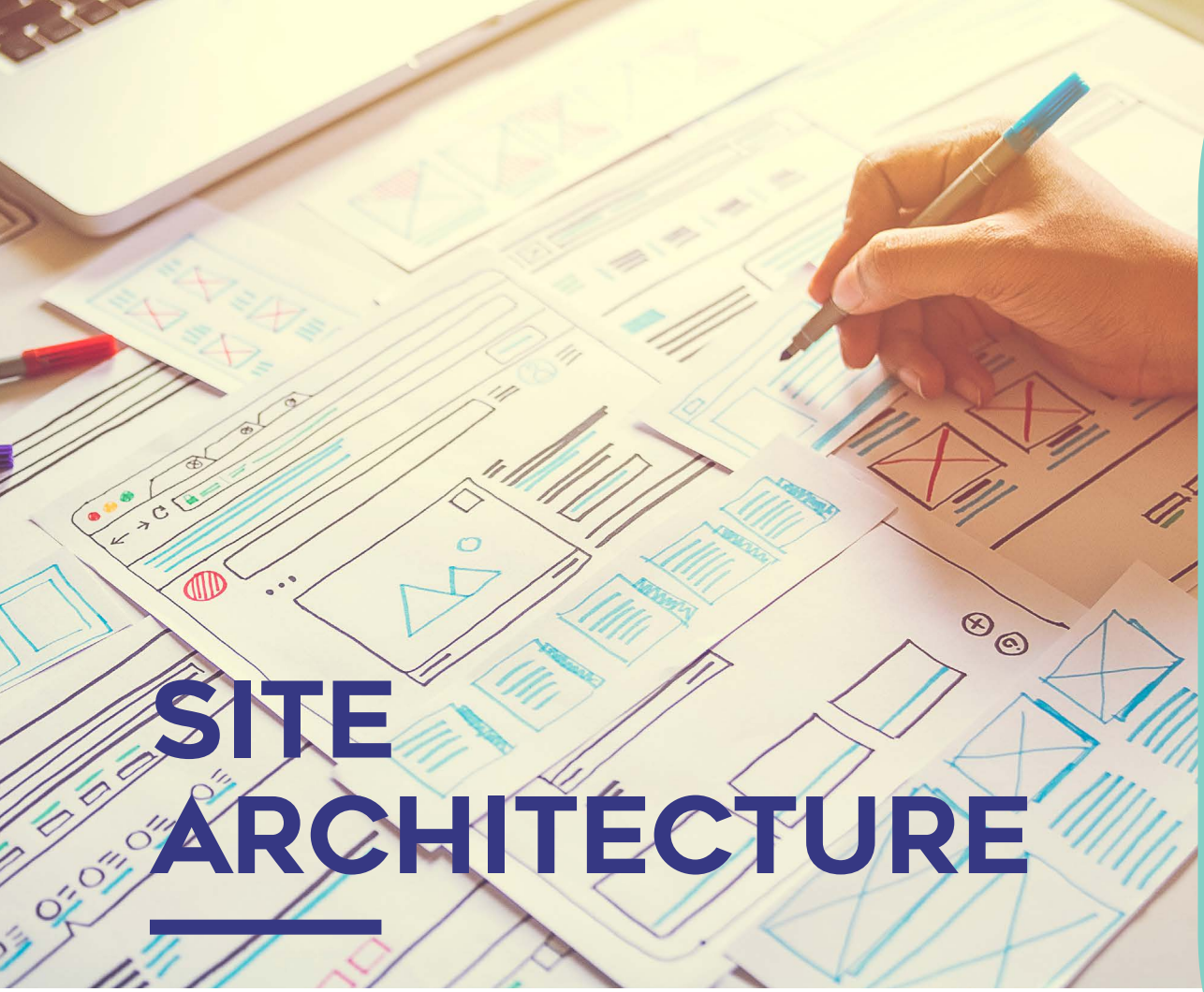
6

CONTACT US PAGE

Identifying a contact page on the site and ensuring that it has appropriate contact information is a good idea.

WHAT TO CHECK

- Eyeball the site and take a look at their contact info. If it is thorough and matches the **WHOIS information**, it's likely good. If not, then you will probably want to make this point of your audit.



SITE ARCHITECTURE

Website architecture, or how your site is organized, can help Google better crawl and organize your content.

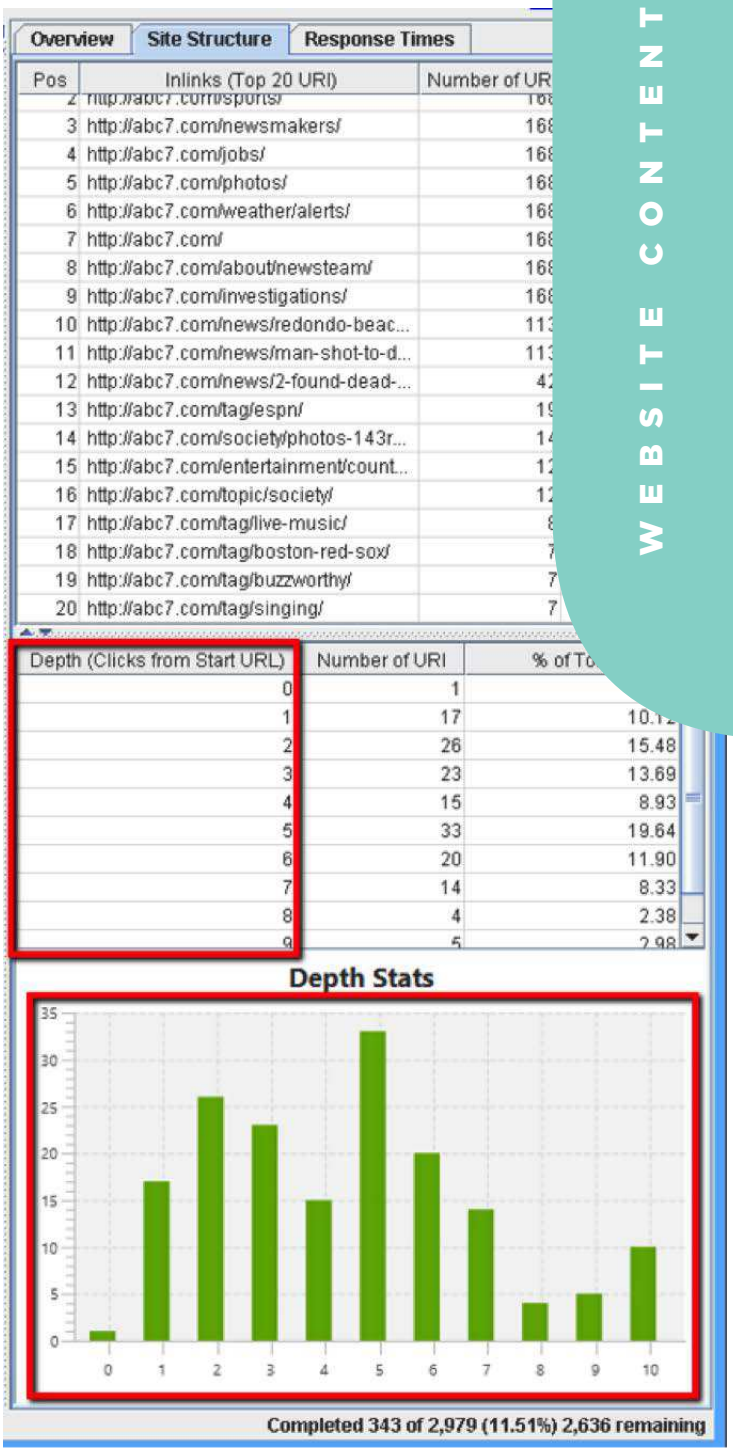
There are different schools of thought on this topic. Some SEOs believe that having a flat site architecture is the best (where you have no more than one click to arrive at internal pages from the home page).

Other SEOs believe that a siloed architecture is best. A silo structure is where content is siloed and organized per content topic.

It has been observed by some SEOs that a silo structure tends to enhance topical focus, which in turn enhances Google's understanding of the website's architecture.

HOW TO CHECK

- In Screaming Frog, check the far right window. Click on the site structure tab. Here, it will be possible to spot issues with the top 20 URLs on-site.
- At first glance, you can identify whether too much content is far too deep for the user or search engine.
- Utilizing this check, you can identify URLs that may need some changes as to where they may be within the site structure.





IDENTIFY PAGES THAT ARE UNDER-OPTIMIZED

When pages are under-optimized, you can end up with pages that are not strong enough to be ranking high in the SERPs at all.

Or, worse, they are only able to reach 3rd-page rankings. These pages are also typically candidates for keyword cannibalization because they are already targeting keywords that are being optimized for on-site.

HOW TO CHECK

YOU WANT TO CHECK ON PAGES THAT HAVE THE FOLLOWING MISSING:

- Pages with missing keyword targeting (content that has no obvious keyword target), basically default content that looks like it was written and put there, without being optimized,
- Pages with missing headers like H1s, H2s, H3s.
- Pages that do not have any meta tags optimized whatsoever,
- Pages that have zero outbound links or internal links,
- Pages that have zero text structure,
- Pages that have zero   tags for emphasis,
- Pages that have zero external inbound links,
- Pages that have images with file sizes of 100 kb or much more,
- Pages that have page file sizes of 100 kb or much more,
- Pages that have no alt text, title text, or image width and height.

When you have pages that only have a couple of the above attributes, you have serious optimization issues.

If you have pages that have all of the above but are still struggling with ranking, then it's time to look at content length/coverage, technical SEO issues, and your link profile.

MAKE SURE THE PAGE IS SHAREABLE

For any website, you want to make sure that its content is shareable by means of social sharing plugins or some other functionality.

This is a simple check that you can do that can make a world of difference in a site's functionality (if it already has traffic happening).

WHAT TO CHECK

- Simply check the pages on the site for any functional sharing buttons, for sharing the article on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Digg, etc.



SITE HAS RAMPANT INTERSTITIALS & OFFENSIVE ADS ABOVE THE FOLD

Barry Schwartz first reported that:

> *"Google has officially confirmed they have begun rolling out the intrusive mobile interstitial penalty yesterday. Google warned us that this was coming almost a six months ago, and it did start rolling out on January 10, 2017, as Google promised.*
>
> *Google's John Mueller and Gary Illyes **confirmed** the penalty began rolling out yesterday.*

This penalty only impacts intrusive interstitials that happen directly after going from a Google mobile search result to a specific page. It does not impact or penalize pages after that, so if you have a intrusive interstitial that comes up later in the click path on your website, this won't impact it: it only looks for the intrusive interstitial after the click from the Google search results page.

Google said this means "pages where content is not easily accessible to a user on the transition from the mobile search results may not rank as highly."

Google explained which types of interstitials are going to be problematic, including:

- showing a popup that covers the main content, either immediately after the user navigates to a page from the search results or while they are looking through the page.
- displaying a standalone interstitial that the user has to dismiss before accessing the main content.
- using a layout where the above-the-fold portion of the page appears similar to a standalone interstitial, but the original content has been inlined underneath the fold."



WHAT TO CHECK

- This will be a visual check of the site. Firstly, you want to check for any ads that meet the above criteria.
- If you have rampant interstitials across your site in this manner, it will be necessary to remove them and otherwise have them re-designed so that they are not offensive or otherwise considered a rampant interstitial.
- Take the pages with the interstitials you have discovered, and create screenshots, identifying each page where the issue materializes.

SCHEMA.ORG MARKUP EXISTS ON-SITE

Nowadays, it is considered a best practice to at least have some sort of Schema.org markup on your site.

Most sites should have basic Schema.org optimization applied, and you will be able to see Schema.org when you search the code.

WHAT IS SCHEMA.ORG?

In SEO, Schema.org refers to Microdata markup on the Schema.org website: **(https://schema.org/)**.

Schema.org refers to the actual vocabulary being used on Schema.org. There are different vocabulary terms that you can use to markup to describe the data that's actually on the page.

Schema.org can be complex, causing many deep issues that revolve around things like syntax, and most recently Google's implementation of **spammy Schema.org penalties.**

As if that is not enough, you also have to be aware of and deal with JSON-LD, a JavaScript-based implementation of Schema.org markup.

Also, some of the categories are subtle, with different meanings depending on how you are using Schema. Some others can be deprecated.

Schema.org is used to markup data on a page that has a certain type of context – usually names, addresses, and contextually relevant information.

It delivers meaning behind your data, and not just what it says. It is this type of contextually relevant information that should be marked up with Schema.org markup.

It is used to increase the probability that you will appear at the top of search results that include Schema-based results. Different content types use Schema.org structured data, things like:

Restaurants, events, articles, local businesses, all types of reviews, product ratings, and many other different types of contextually relevant information.

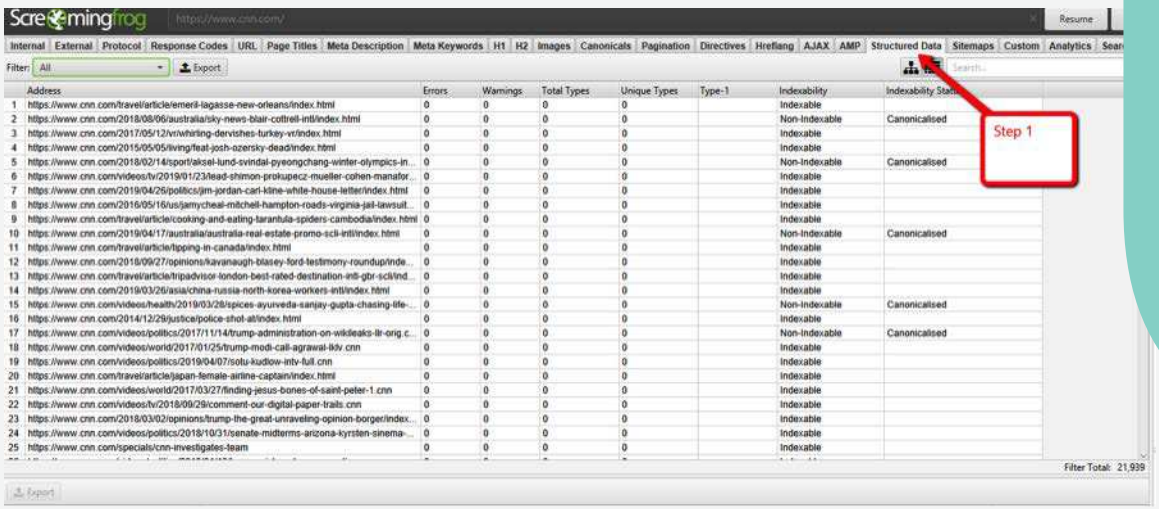
There are vast opportunities and a huge amount of structured data that you can utilize on the Schema.org website.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT AUDITING SOME OF THE MOST COMMON SEO AUDIT SCENARIOS AFFECTING SCHEMA.ORG TODAY:

CHECK FOR THE EXISTENCE OF BASIC SCHEMA.ORG MARKUP

This is a relatively simple check. Simply use Screaming Frog to check for any instances of schema.org.

Step 1: Just click on structured data.

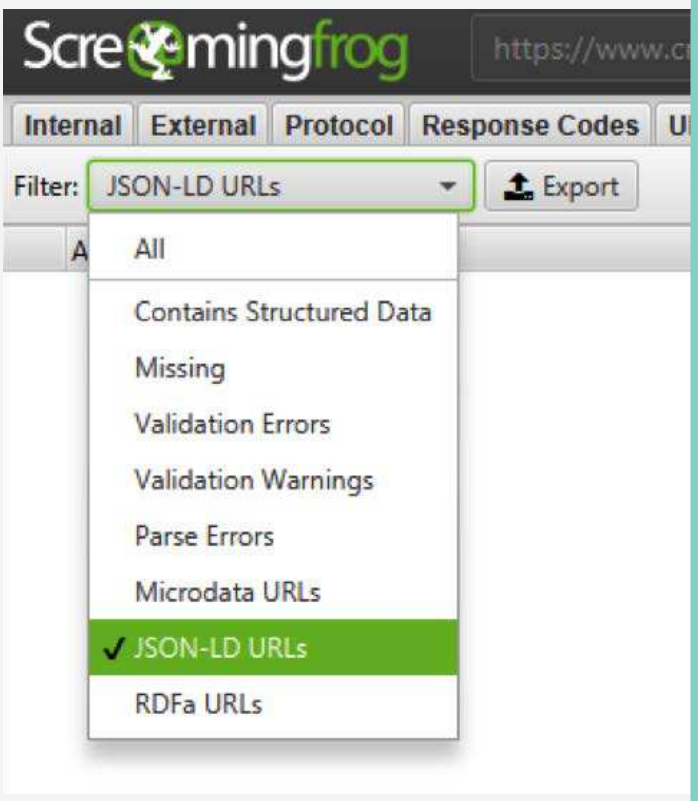


Step 2: Click on filter > all > contains structured data.

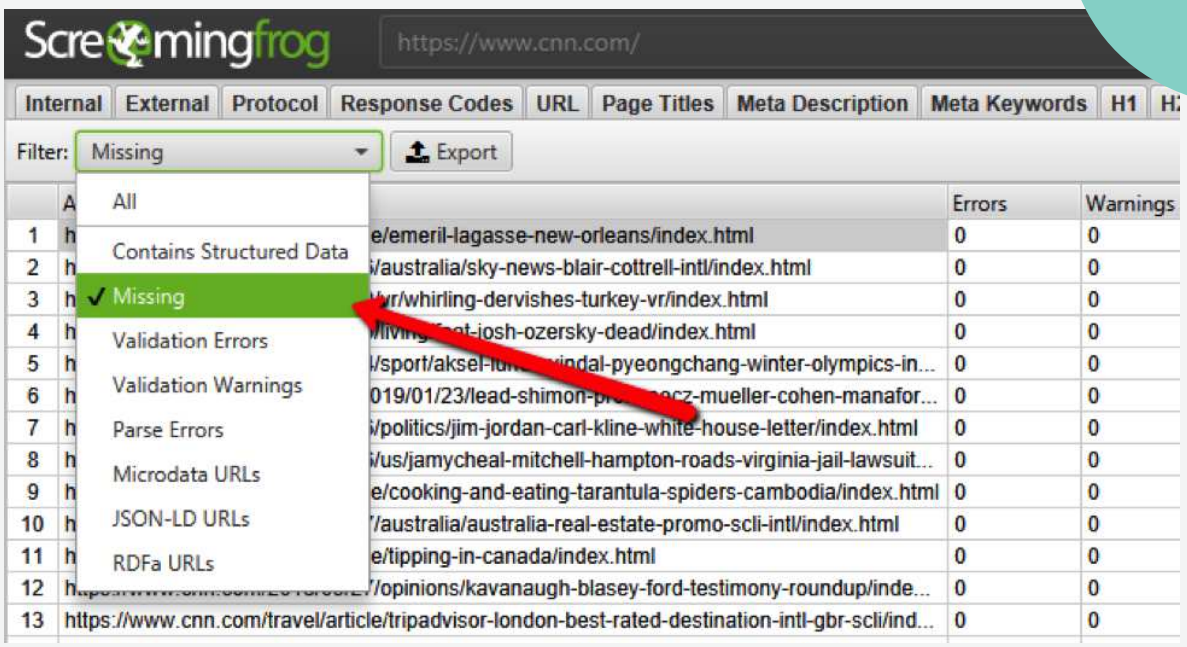


Check for the Existence of JSON-LD

This is also a relatively simple check. Just click on filter > all > JSON-LD URLs.



You can also check for missing structured data:



Then, you can dump all of the data into an Excel spreadsheet for delivery to the client, and additional reporting / auditing as needed.

CHECK THAT SCHEMA.ORG MARKUP IS NOT BEING USED BY GOOGLE TAG MANAGER

For some reason, SEOs developed a process whereby using Google Tag Manager is an acceptable way to include Schema.org markup.

I am of the opinion that the more methods you use to include data that is not on the original page, the more of a chance you increase the opportunity that something will screw up the implementation of this data – be it through indexing, Google Tag Manager going down, whatever.

I highly prefer keeping things where they should be, and in one implementation. It makes things so much easier to troubleshoot and you know that your issues are not being caused by Google Tag Manager going down.

Google themselves, however, has flip-flopped on the topic, muddying the waters significantly.

They have said that **Google Tag Manager SHOULD NOT be used.**

They have also said that **Google Tag Manager CAN be used.**

OH, GOOGLE! WHY, OH WHY MUST YOU COMPLICATE MATTERS SO?

Because of this duplicity, I recommend testing and assessing what happens when you use either method of including Schema.org structured data.

Checking to ensure that your structured data shows up and is being indexed is important, but also to be safe, I recommend including Schema.org markup ON the page itself only.

This leads to less chance of an issue with your Schema.org implementation, and less of a chance of issues with external software causing major technical problems and bottlenecks.



ANY IMPORTANT PAGES THAT HAVE LOW CTR (CLICK-THROUGH RATES)

First of all, what the heck is a click-through rate, and why do I need to care about it?

This is a calculated metric that will explain how many people clicked on your search result out of the total number of people who actually saw it.

In organic SEO, this translates to the quantities of people who actually saw your search result, and the quantities of people who physically clicked through to your page.

Larry Kim over at WordStream has some outstanding examples of **ways that you can improve your CTRs.**

HOW TO CHECK

- First, in the new Google Search Console, click on Performance > Pages > Average CTR.
- This will bring up a new column to the right which shows you pages that have low CTR.
- You can then easily export this data to an Excel Sheet.



FACT-CHECKING CLAIMS MADE IN YOUR CONTENT

With the rise of the fake news paradigm and how easily false narratives can spread, it has become necessary to follow your ABCs… always be checking the facts behind claims made in your articles.

If you haven't integrated fact-checking in your processes, now's the time to make sure that you do.

Not only has Google created fact-checks within the search results, they have also created some fact-checking tools for SEOs and content publishers.

The best thing about these tools is that it can make it easier for you to filter through some of the claims made in your articles, and make sure that they are, for the most part, correct.

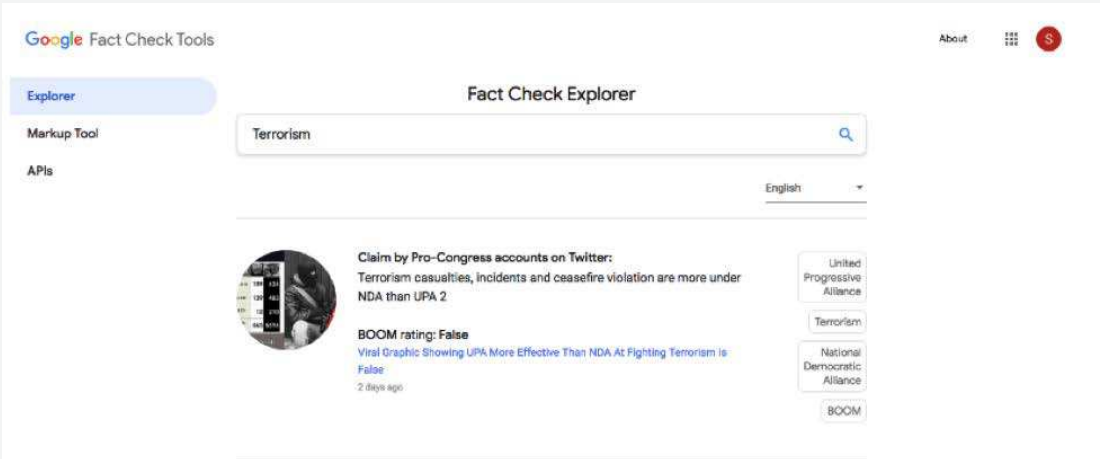
It is not out of the realm of possibility that they include fact-checking in their latest algorithm updates, most notably in the E-A-T portion that we discussed earlier in this audit section – Expertise, Authority, and Trust.

Part of expertise is checking facts and information related to any claims made in your articles and making sure that they are true.

You don't want to create articles and find out that there is a high ratio of misstated or outright wrong "facts" within them. Enter the Fact Check tool from Google.

HOW TO CHECK

Google's Fact Check Explorer: **https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer**



CHECK ON VISUAL ATTRACTIVENESS



WEBSITE CONTENT FACTORS

6

Despite what some may want you to believe, visual attractiveness in website design is important. It's not just about pixels moving on the screen, trying to grab a visitor's attention.

Context and creativity are important because it is these values that will separate your site from the rest of the pack.

In the case of a website audit, even though there are no major issues that may be impacted by a penalty (that we are aware of) it is an important part of SEO – which translates to the user experience.

If your user experience is in any way impacted negatively by bad design, this, in turn, is reflected poorly on you, and your website.

The president of WebFX, William Craig, explains this quite well in his post **Human Behavior Theories That Can be Applied to Web Design.**

He discusses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and how it leads to empowerment of your visitors with this information:

"For a design to work, it must meet the needs of visitors–although what's important to visitors is up for debate and could drastically change from project to project. Some needs cannot be met before other needs have been addressed.

The most famous theory about what humans require in order to reach their "pinnacle" — the point where they decide to participate — was posited by the humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow in the form of a ***"hierarchy of needs."***

Maslow defined levels of importance that reflect how and what humans prioritize, as well as what they require in order to appreciate their surroundings and achieve personal growth (or "self-actualization").

Based on his concept, I've created one related to web development: The hierarchy of website user needs. They're listed below in order of importance.

1 **ACCESSIBILITY**
The website can be found and used by all people.

2 **STABILITY**
The website is consistent and trustworthy.

3 **USABILITY**
The website is user-friendly.

4 **RELIABILITY**
The website is consistently available, without downtime.

5 **FUNCTIONALITY**
The website offers content, tools and services users value.

6 **FLEXIBILITY**
The website adapts to needs and wants of users.

Web design — and specifically the visual aesthetics of a web design — is not a case of "fatal attraction," nor is it the be-all and end-all of a website's success (as shown by ***big websites that have mediocre visual aesthetics)****. But beauty is attractive to humans. Psychologists surmise that humans have a* ***cognitive bias to attractive people and things.***





Content is, of course, the most important part of the website; it's the personality that lasts after the design has worn off.

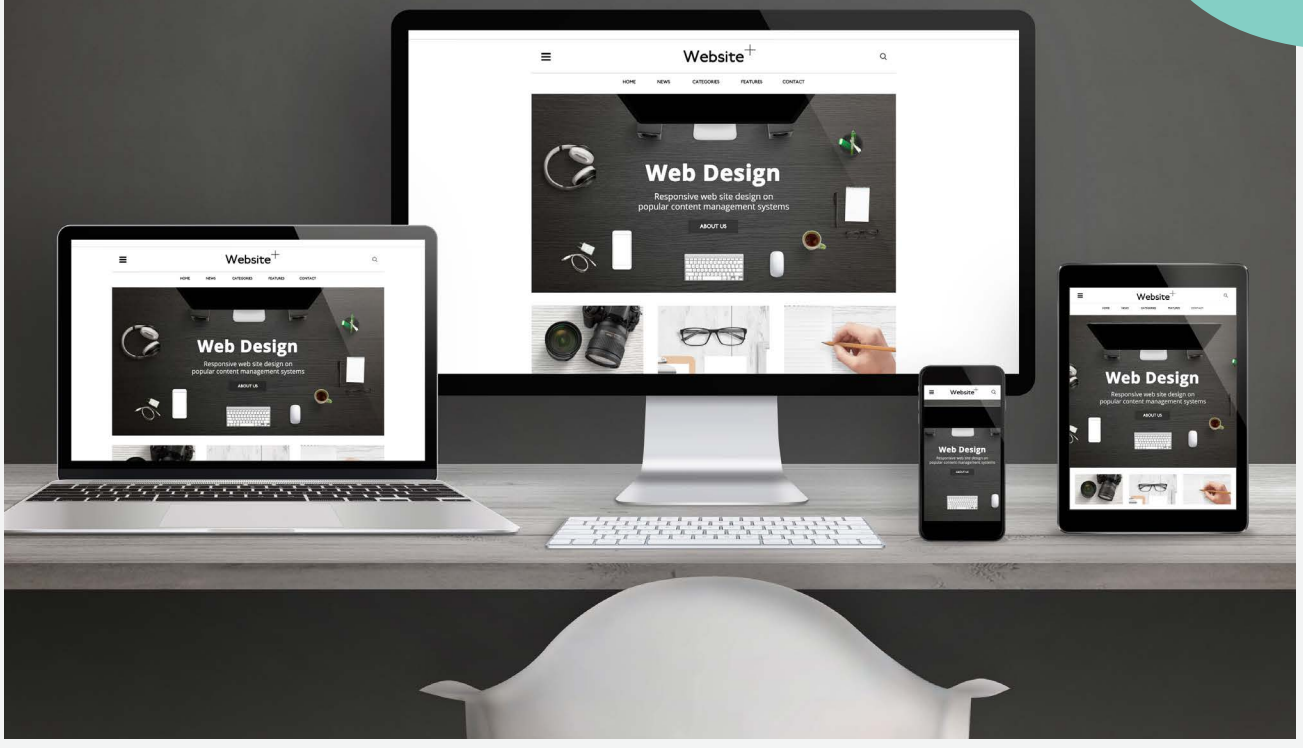
The attractiveness bias theory *simply states that a good-looking design will draw more attention than a poor design. Once viewers get over their first impression (which is always important), they'll be content and comfortable, and that will increase the likelihood that they'll visit again."*

This is why it is so important to have an attractive site that caters to your users' needs, and further translating to better user experience.

WHAT TO CHECK

Perform the following visual checks on your client's pages. See if they have the following attributes and create an Excel spreadsheet or Word document showing what is going on if needed.

- Accessibility
- Reliability
- Stability
- Functionality
- Usability
- Flexibility



WEBSITE UPDATES

Monitoring ongoing website changes are critical. If you make sweeping changes that have disastrous consequences later, you want a paper trail you can go back to.

Either emails or ongoing spreadsheet tracking: if you make a change to the website like new content or sweeping technical changes, track it. This way, you can figure out what, exactly, is happening later.

Plus, it's always a good idea to monitor website updates on an ongoing basis to make sure that site mismanagement doesn't cause issues later.

In this section, we will audit and identify major issues that can occur when it comes to ongoing website updates.



Written by

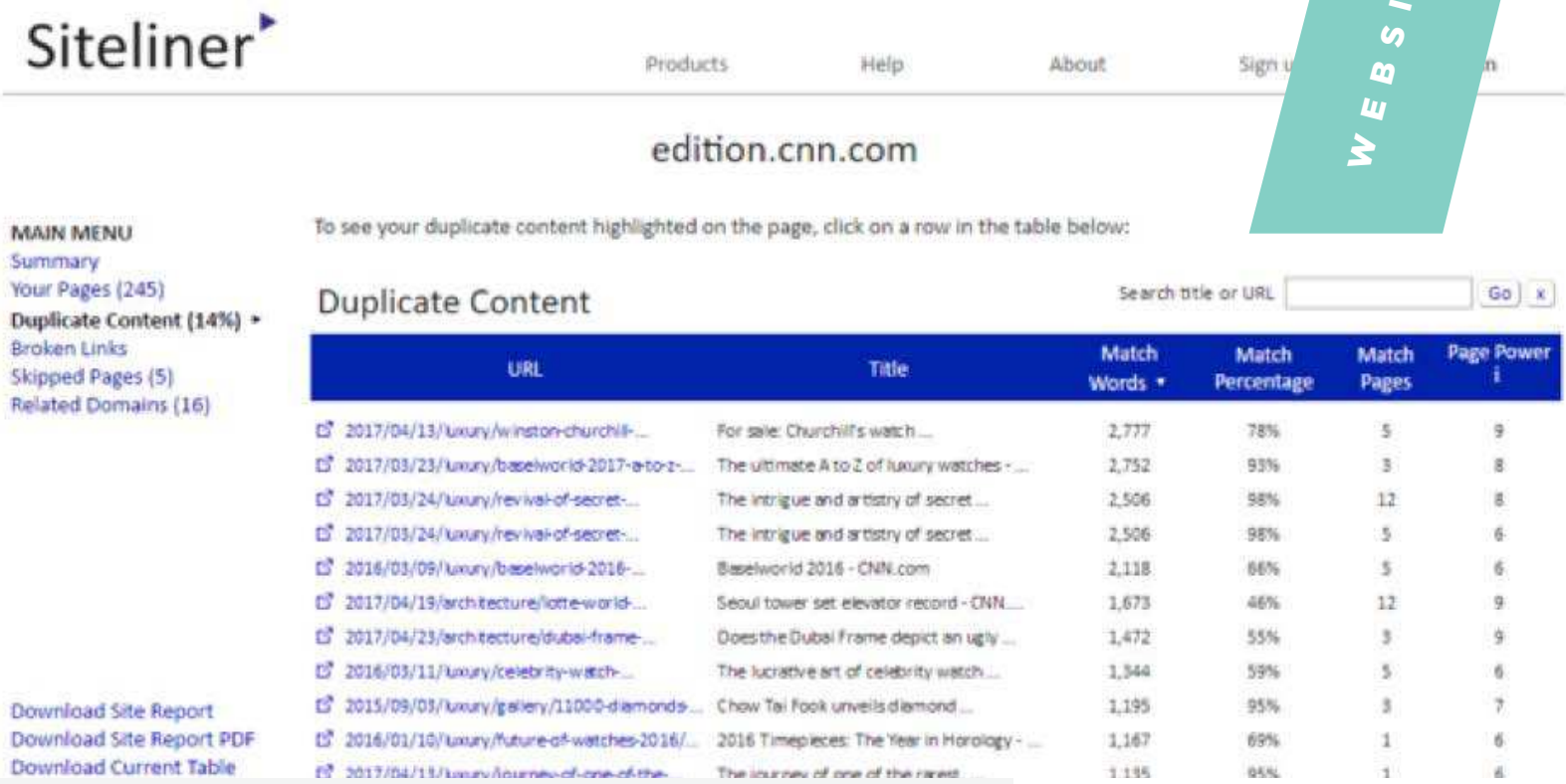
BRIAN HARNISH

Owner, President of Site ObjectiveDesign, Development, and SEO Consulting

SITE UPTIME

In an SEO audit, identifying site uptime issues can help determine problems with the server.

If you own the site, it's a good idea to have a tool like **Uptime Robot** that will email you every time it identifies the site as being down.

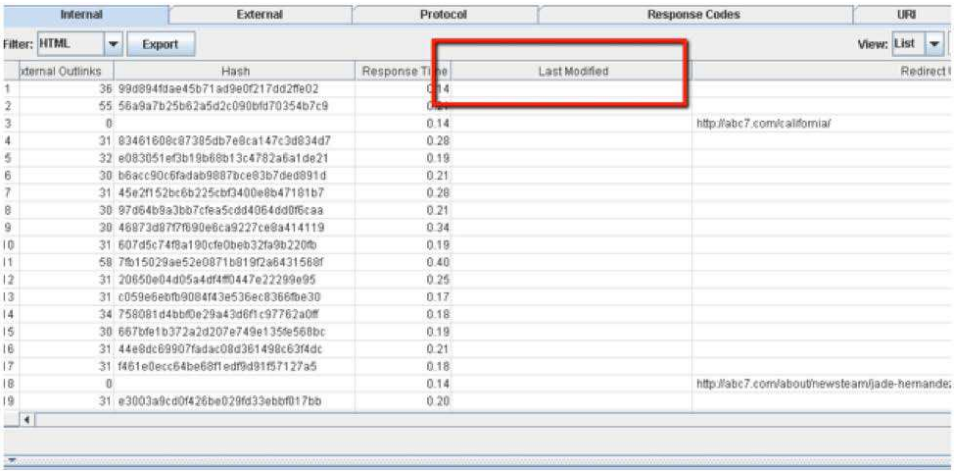


SERVER LOCATION

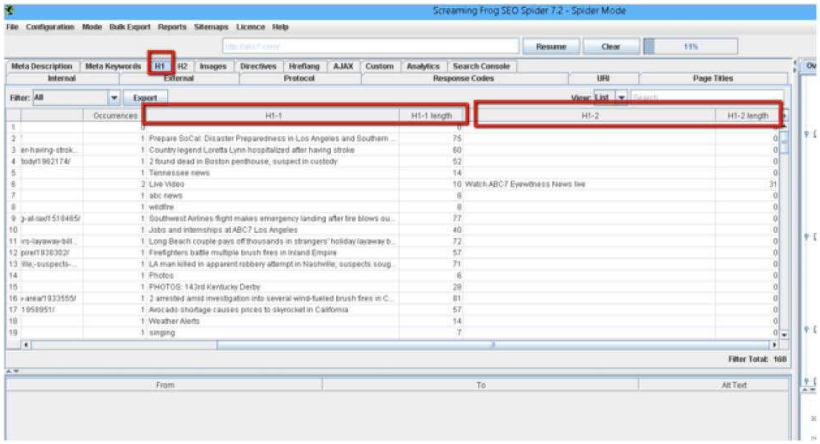
Identifying the server location can be an ideal check to determine location relevance and geolocation.

HOW TO CHECK

Using a tool such as site24x7.com or iplocation.net can help you identify the physical location of the server for a specific domain.



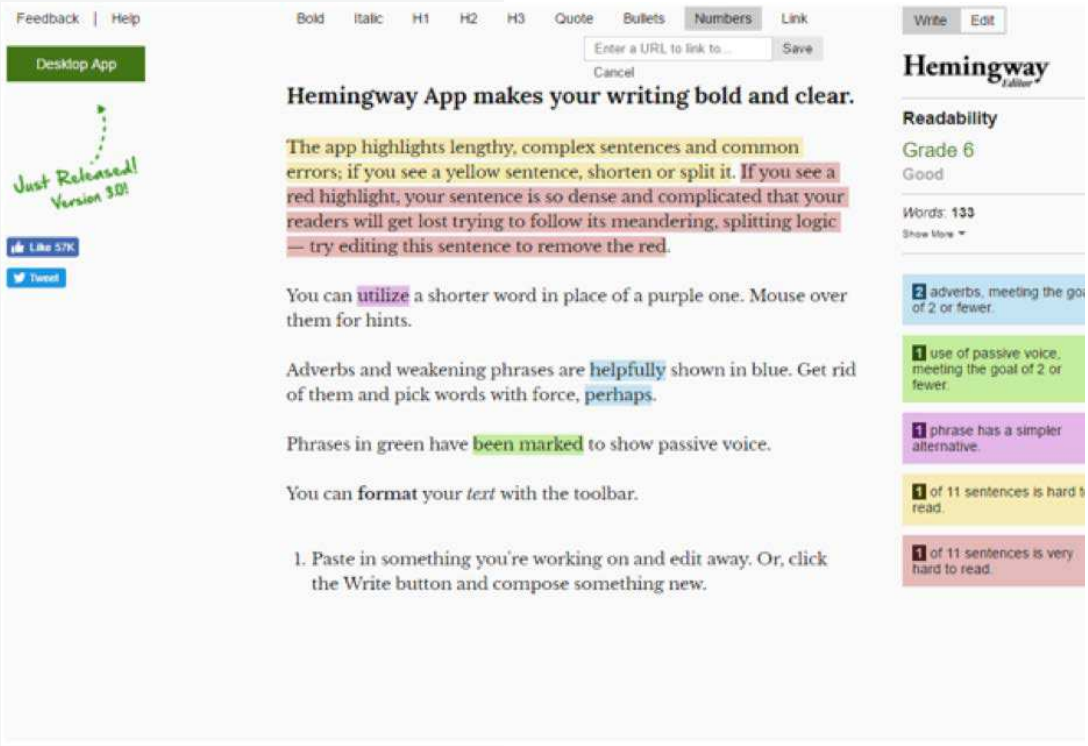
Site24x7



iplocation.net

WEBSITE UPDATES

TERMS OF SERVICE & PRIVACY PAGES



WEBSITE UPDATES

Quite simply, you can use Screaming Frog's search function (on the right side) to identify terms of service and privacy pages showing up in your Screaming Frog crawl.

If they don't show up on the crawl, check on-site and make sure they are actually there and not hosted elsewhere (this can happen sometimes).

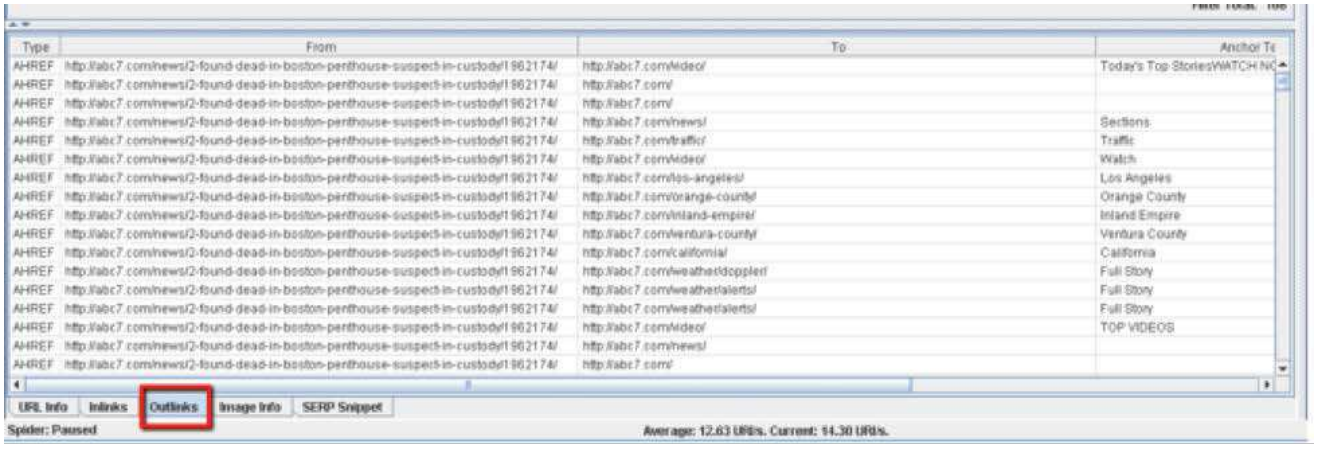
DUPLICATE META INFORMATION ON-SITE

In Screaming Frog, it's quite easy to find duplicate meta information on-site.

WEBSITE UPDATES

WHAT TO CHECK

- After the crawl, click the Meta Description tab. You can also check for duplicate titles by clicking on the Page titles tab.
- In addition, this information is easily visible and can be filtered in the Excel export.



WEBSITE UPDATES

BREADCRUMB NAVIGATION

Identifying **breadcrumb** navigation can be simple or complex, depending on the site.

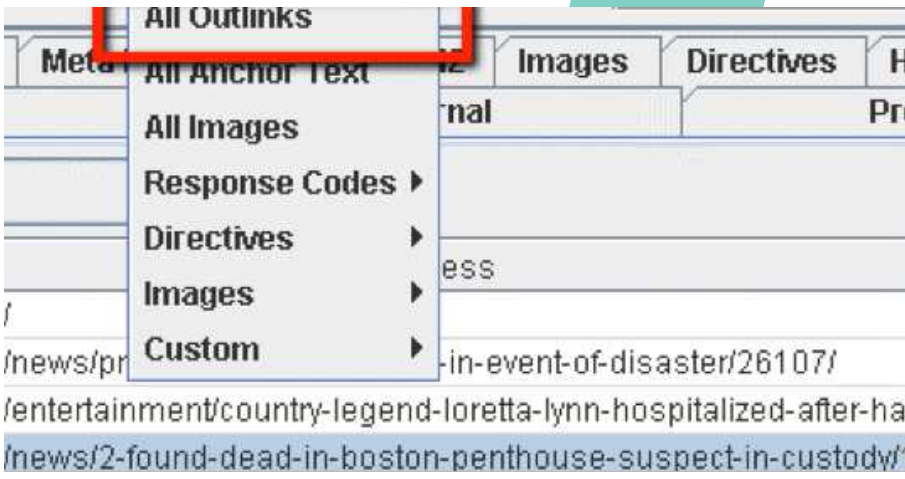
If a developer is doing their job correctly, breadcrumb navigation will be easily identifiable, usually with a comment indicating the navigation is a breadcrumb menu.

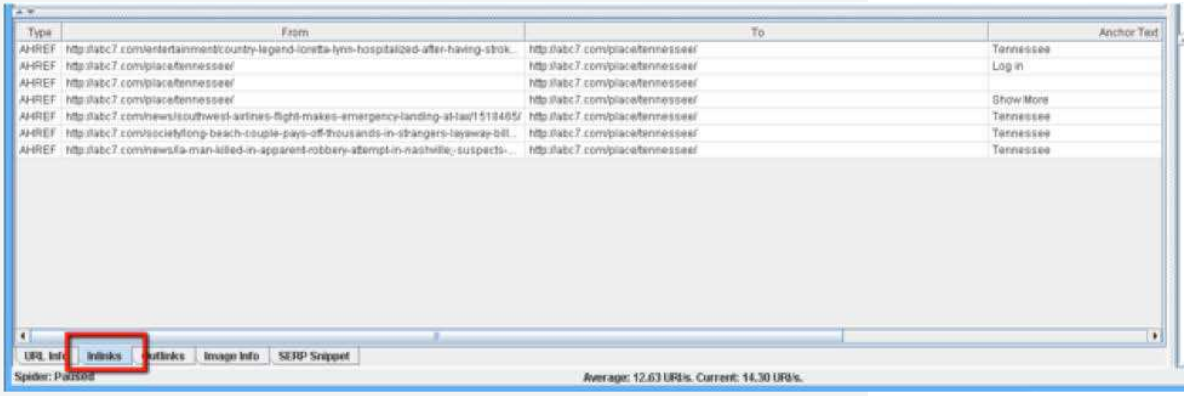
In these cases, it is easy to create a custom extraction that will help you crawl and extract all the breadcrumb navigation on the site.

HOW TO CHECK

- Click on configuration > custom > extraction to bring up the extraction menu.

  Customize the settings and set up your extraction where appropriate, and it will help you identify all the breadcrumb navigation on the site.





MOBILE-OPTIMIZED

As of May 2019 - Google has **moved to mobile-first indexing by default** for brand-new websites. So, it is important now more than ever to make sure your site is optimized for mobile.

WHAT TO CHECK

Use **Google's Mobile-Friendly Testing tool** to find out whether your site is mobile friendly.

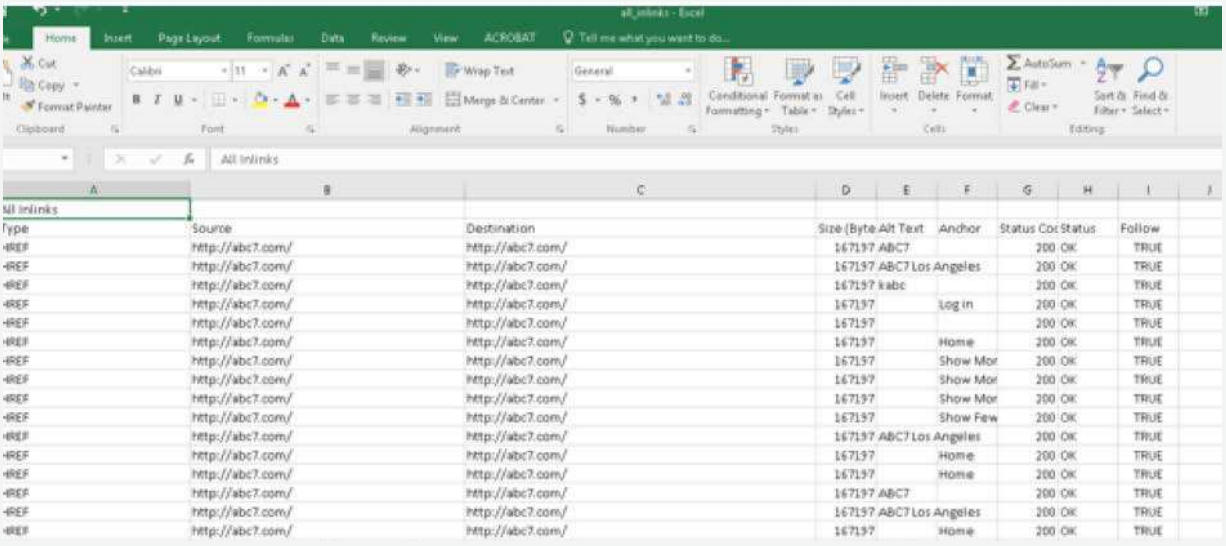
SITE USABILITY

Usability is important to get right among your users. The easier a site is to use, the better.

There are user testing services available that will help you figure out what reactions are really happening when users use your site.

HOW TO CHECK

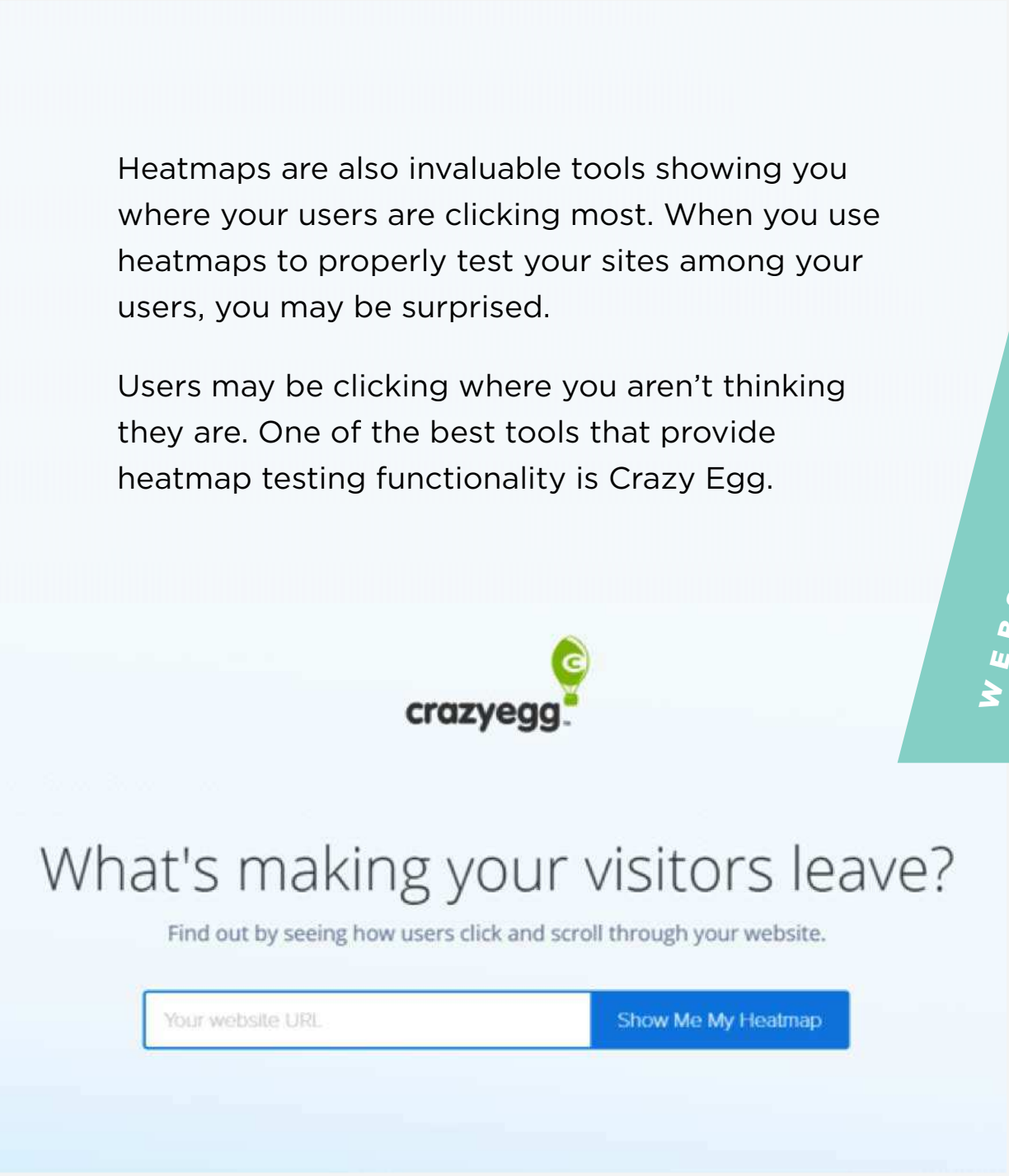
First, check and see how users are really using your site through a service like **UserTesting.com**. This will give you invaluable information you can use to identify where your site's weaknesses lie.



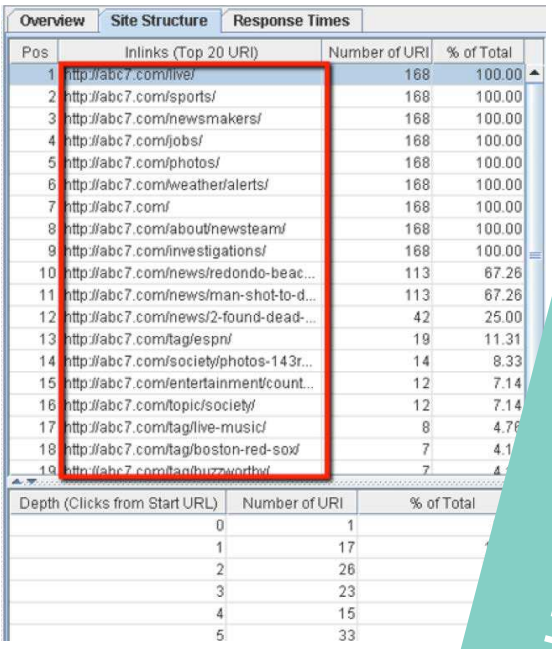
Type	Source	Destination	Size (Byte	Alt Text	Anchor	Status Co	Status	Follow
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7		200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	kabc		200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Log in	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197			200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Mor	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Mor	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Mor	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Show Few	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7		200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197	ABC7 Los Angeles		200	OK	TRUE
REF	http://abc7.com/	http://abc7.com/	167197		Home	200	OK	TRUE

Heatmaps are also invaluable tools showing you where your users are clicking most. When you use heatmaps to properly test your sites among your users, you may be surprised.

Users may be clicking where you aren't thinking they are. One of the best tools that provide heatmap testing functionality is Crazy Egg.



USE OF GOOGLE ANALYTICS & GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE



WEBSITE UPDATES

When using Google Analytics, there is a specific analytics ID (UI-#####...) that shows up when it's installed. In addition, Google Search Console has its own signature coding.

HOW TO CHECK

- Using Screaming Frog, it's possible to create a custom extraction for these lines of code, and you can identify all pages that have proper Google Analytics installs on your site.
- Click on configuration > custom > extraction, and use the proper CSSPath, XPath, or Regex to figure out which pages have Google Analytics installed.
- For Google Search Console, it can be as simple as logging into the GSC account of the owner of the domain and identifying whether the site still has access.



WEBSITE UPDATES

BACKLINK FACTORS

Now, more than ever, it has become a necessity to create a **natural link profile** that is healthy and free of bad links. Unfortunately, bad links are unavoidable in today's internet economy. The key is to make sure that they don't become a major part of your link profile.

Things become even more problematic when a competitor decides they want to hit you with a negative SEO brute-force bad link attack in an effort to cause Penguin to algorithmically devalue your site.

Penguin has become a critical part of Google's algorithm, so it's important to have an ongoing link examination and pruning schedule.

This helps to identify any potential links that will harm you before they cause trouble and before significant issues arise because of their linking to your site.

THE FACTORS THAT YOU CAN CHECK USING A LINK PROFILE AUDIT INCLUDE:

- # of linking root domains
- # of links from separate C-class IPs
- # of linking pages
- Alt text (for Image Links)
- Links from .EDU or .GOV domains
- Authority of linking domain
- Links from competitors
- Links from bad neighborhoods
- Diversity of link types
- Backlink anchor text
- No follow links
- Excessive 301 redirects to page
- Link location in content
- Link location on page
- Linking domain relevancy



HOW TO CHECK

- Using Majestic SEO, it's possible to get some at-a-glance identification of the issues surrounding your link profile pretty much instantaneously.
- For example, let's examine ABC7.com's link profile.

External Backlinks	Referring Domains	Referring IPs	Referring Subnets
1,522,723	21,320	14,980	9,701

In the last 5 years

We can see a healthy link profile at more than 1 million backlinks coming from more than 20,000 referring domains. Referring IPs cap out at more than 14,000 and referring subnets are at around 9,700.

The charts below for the backlink history give you a good idea of link velocity and acquisition factors over the past 90 days.

Backlink History



Chart shows the **External Backlinks** reviewed over the last 90 days.

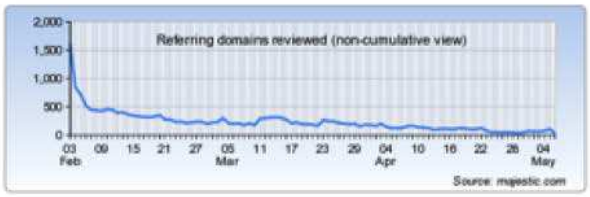
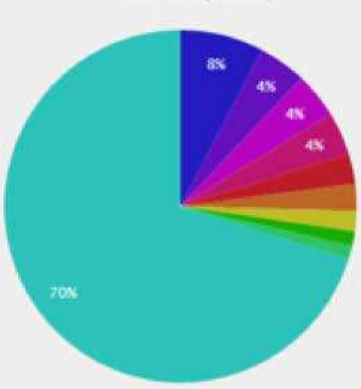


Chart shows the **Referring Domains** reviewed over the last 90 days.

Here is where we can begin to see more in-depth data points about ABC7's link profile. Utilizing in-depth reports on Majestic, it's possible to get every possible backlink. Let's get started and identify what we can do to perform a link profile audit.

Anchor Text

See more results on the Anchor Text tab, where you can drill down into each keyword and find the Referring Domains and External Backlinks that use that Keyword.



#	Anchor Text	Referring Domains	External Backlinks Total	Deleted	NoFollow
1	abc7	1,847	10,317	2,420	2,158
2	abc 7	1,064	6,135	294	588
3	kabc	1,014	7,447	465	370
4	abc7.com	953	41,561	1,385	29,756
5	kabc-tv	664	9,716	332	1,187
6	abc	589	1,657	82	170
7	abc news	461	14,885	1,350	116
8	read more	308	10,713	2,516	858
9	here	307	1,822	31	48

The above chart may have cropped text due to size restrictions, for full details visit the Anchor Text tab. We explain how this is created in the FAQs.

8

LINK PROFILE AUDIT

Performing a link profile audit is a critical part of any SEO endeavor. Regular link profile audits can help you identify negative SEO link attack attempts, assess penalties, and remove bad links before they have an impact on your site's ranking.

Preventive measures are always better than reactive measures.

As if that were not enough, recent updates from Google shows that they are slapping penalties even on sites that **have not built links for the past five years** (at least).



Written by

BRIAN HARNISH

Owner, President of Site ObjectiveDesign, Development, and SEO Consulting

8

LINK PROFILE AUDIT

Ongoing link profile audits are critical towards helping your site continue to have a healthy link profile, and making sure bad links don't get bad enough to cause you issues later.

Some in the industry refer to it as link remediation.

Consider it a mitigation of risk, or rather, link risk management.

By the way, what is negative SEO?

Negative SEO is an attempt by a competitor to build bad links back to your website in order to artificially inflate its link profile.

The end intended result is that Google will think you're building those links, and demote your site algorithmically as a result.

I have seen several successful negative SEO link attacks and I have no doubt that they exist.

Everything on these websites was going swimmingly well until they were attacked by a noticeable increase in spammy inbound links.

This is why periodic link profile audits are critical towards maintaining a healthy link profile and making sure that your bad backlinks don't get bad enough to bite you.

Let's take a look at the applications we will need to proceed with a link profile audit.



THE APPLICATIONS

For link profile audits, I like using a number of different applications as data sources, because the more data sources you have, the more accurate your link risk management tasks will be.

If you have access, I highly recommend using at least five sources. These five sources include (but you can always use more):

- **Google Search Console**
- **SEMRush**
- **Majestic**
- **Ahrefs**
- **Raven Tools**
- **Moz Link Explorer**

LINK DETOX

Link Detox by Christoph Cemper is a program that can do all the heavy lifting when it comes to compiling, storing, organizing and processing your link profile data.

These programs will provide a great treasure trove of data that we can then use for furthering our link profile audit efforts.

Let's begin by collecting our link data.



STARTING WITH THE DATA SOURCES

Begin by identifying the top three sources of links you have access to. Typically, Google Search Console, SEMrush, and Majestic SEO are good sources to start with.

Next, compile them into a single report and run them through Link Detox. Don't forget to download and import your disavow file.

This will help keep your already-disavowed links ignored and Link Detox won't count them when it performs its audit.



In addition, Link Detox will automatically dedupe all of the duplicate entries, so you shouldn't have to identify any duplication issues.

Go through Link Detox and begin training the tool's AI to learn about your link profile by upvoting and downvoting links.

It's also a good idea to visit the sites and figure out what Link Detox considers spam and not spam. By using this upvoting/downvoting process, you can train the tool to include or exclude links when it reprocesses your report.

It's also a good idea to classify your link anchor text if you're prompted to do so. Doing this will greatly increase the accuracy of your Link Detox audit reports.

The more you train the tool's AI, the better it will get at identifying the bad links in your link profile, as well as the good ones.

There are several things to watch out for when investigating issues with your link profile.

These are all my opinion and may not necessarily apply to your site, but it has been my experience that these items are crucial to watch out for and can impact your link profile positively or negatively, depending on how they are implemented.

As per usual, anything used super excessively could be interpreted as spam.

WHAT TO CHECK

- **POSITIVE LINK VELOCITY**
  This refers to how much your link profile is expanding and how fast it is expanding.

- A link profile that is expanding too fast could trigger a red flag to Google, as this could be seen as a link manipulation tactic.

- **NEGATIVE LINK VELOCITY**
  Too many links being removed at once.

- **CONTEXTUAL LINKS**
  Links that are strategically placed within content that has context on the actual page.

  Bonus points if that content is natural, not spammy-sounding, and has some significant meat to it.

  Contextual links are good, but yet again, these could be manipulated, too – and you should keep an eye out for excessive contextual linking.

- **'SPONSORED LINKS' OR OTHER WORDS AROUND LINK**
  Links that are obviously paid, or otherwise sponsored.

- **LINKS FROM 'HUB' PAGES**
  Links that are from top resources on the topic.







LINK PROFILE AUDIT

LINKS FROM AUTHORITY SITES

These are links from typically large authority sites in any one niche.

Having many links from great authority sites is a good thing, and is something that shouldn't count against you.

NATURAL LINK PROFILE

A natural link profile has most link techniques kept to a minimum and a more natural distribution of link anchor text that doesn't lean in any way toward significantly large amounts of any one type of anchor text.

In other words, it looks like many people from many different niches (or within the same niche) linked to the site, rather than one person linking over and over.

RECIPROCAL LINKS

Basically "link to me and I will link to you" for the sake of cross-linking, which is a type of linking scheme that is prohibited by Google in their **Google Webmaster Guidelines**.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT LINKS

These are basically links appearing in the comment portion of blogs.

EXCESSIVE BLOG COMMENTS

Blog comments are easily manipulated, and thus excessive blog commenting could be interpreted as coming from a black hat program like Scrape Box, which is known for its blog commenting capabilities.

LINKS FROM 301 REDIRECTS

301 redirects by themselves are OK and **links from 301 redirects should not hurt your site**, per Matt Cutts.

But having excessive redirects can:

- Weigh down your site.
- Cause bandwidth issues (may not be an issue if you can afford significant amounts of traffic hitting your 301 redirects).
- Cause additional issues with crawling if they aren't managed properly.
- They can become so excessive that management of them could be a challenge.

INTERNAL LINK ANCHOR TEXT

Any excessive use of any one type of internal link anchor text is considered spam, and something that should be avoided.

For example, linking to "Georgia widgets" over and over shouldn't be done. Instead, your link profile should feature varied anchor text.

Try to diversify it so it appears natural rather than manipulative.

BACKLINK AGE

Some SEOs are of the opinion that **backlink age** is a ranking factor based on a Google patent.

NUMBER OF OUTBOUND LINKS ON THE PAGE

Some SEOs believe that a page with many outbound links performs significantly less than a page with a healthy amount of outbound links. However, this is no longer true.

Matt Cutts has stated that they **dropped the 100 links per page guideline**, but they may take action if the links are too spammy.

SITE-WIDE LINKS

Matt Cutts talks about this in his video, **"How Does Google Consider Site-Wide Backlinks"**.

He confirmed that they compress the links together into one link but that they may take into consideration different actions from a manual webspam analyst perspective if they are too spammy.



EXCESSIVE FOCUS OF LINK ANCHOR TEXT ON ANY ONE KEYWORD

It's generally accepted to have a link profile where no more than 20 percent of your links come from one type of site, one type of spam, or focused on one single keyword.

The more variety, the better.

TOO MUCH LINK VELOCITY, TOO LITTLE LINK VELOCITY

If too many links are being acquired in too short of a time, this can negatively affect your site's performance in the SERPs.

This is especially true if it becomes a weighty part of your link profile (approaching 50 percent or much more).

Too little link velocity isn't necessarily something to be concerned about.

Link velocity becomes a concern if it's from one source coming too much, too fast and destroying your link profile too rapidly for any other techniques to actually help.

- **TOO MANY LINKS COMING FROM ONE DOMAIN TOO FAST (PART OF LINK VELOCITY, BUT AN INVESTIGATIVE FACTOR)**

  This could send a signal to Google that this domain is actually helping manipulate linking factors on the target site.

  The idea here is that too much of anything is a bad thing, and most linking techniques should follow linking in moderation – if it's done too much and too fast, it could be considered spam.

- **EXCESSIVE FORUM PROFILE LINKS**

  These types of links could point to a program like XRUMER or Scrape Box being used on the black hat side to manipulate links.

  Forum profiles can easily be manipulated and created with these programs.

- **LINKS FROM REAL SITES VS. SPLOGS**

  A splog, or spam blog, is pretty quickly identifiable these days.

  If blogs are created as part of a major network, they may have the same template, they may have similar content, and all the content may look like gibberish.

  If the splog network is sufficiently advanced, they may even take care in creating high-quality content.

  But most factors between these splog networks will be similar, and they will be easily identifiable.

GUEST POSTS

Guest posts get a bad rap these days because again, they are easily manipulated and can go the way of article marketing if they aren't properly executed.

But if they are executed correctly, they can be a good benefit, especially if they add unique content with significantly high value.

Guest posts can become bad when it's the only thing you're doing to build your link profile.

UNNATURAL INFLUX OF LINKS

Already covered and mentioned elsewhere in this document in the link velocity section.





GOOGLE PENALTY

Using **Barracuda's Panguin tool** can help you identify not only if you have a penalty, but which penalty you have.

It includes a program that overlays your Google Analytics data with dates and information about specific penalties – not just Penguin but Panda and many other algorithmic and manual actions that have been levied by Google. It can help you diagnose your problem much easier.

If you have identified exactly when you incurred a penalty, it's a good idea to go into Google Search Console and Google Analytics to find supporting data before taking action.

If you don't have supporting data that occurred at exactly the time of the penalty, it's likely that some other major change has affected your site.

LINK PROFILE WITH HIGH PERCENTAGE OF LOW-QUALITY LINKS

Many links from low-quality sites – such as those frequently used by spammers – are known as the following:

- Gambling
- Porn
- Viagra
- Excessive blog comment links
- Sites with excessive duplicate stolen content
- Blog Networks
- Article Marketing sites

The following are all specifically called out in **Google's Webmaster Guidelines** as spam:

- Links with optimized anchor text in articles
- Press releases distributed on other sites done solely for the link
- Any low-quality directories or low-quality social bookmarking site links
- Any PPC advertising links that pass page rank to the buyer of the ad

LINKING DOMAIN RELEVANCY

Relevant links from sites in the same/similar niche are all known as being more powerful than links from sites that are unrelated.

During your link profile checks, check that the domain itself is relevant and doesn't cause any major spam issues.

If it's spam and there's no way to contact the webmaster to ideally have them remove the link, consider adding it to your disavow file.

‘POISON’ ANCHOR TEXT

Having significant amounts of this kind of anchor text (basically anything from well-known spam niches like gambling or viagra) could negatively impact your site and could be considered spam.

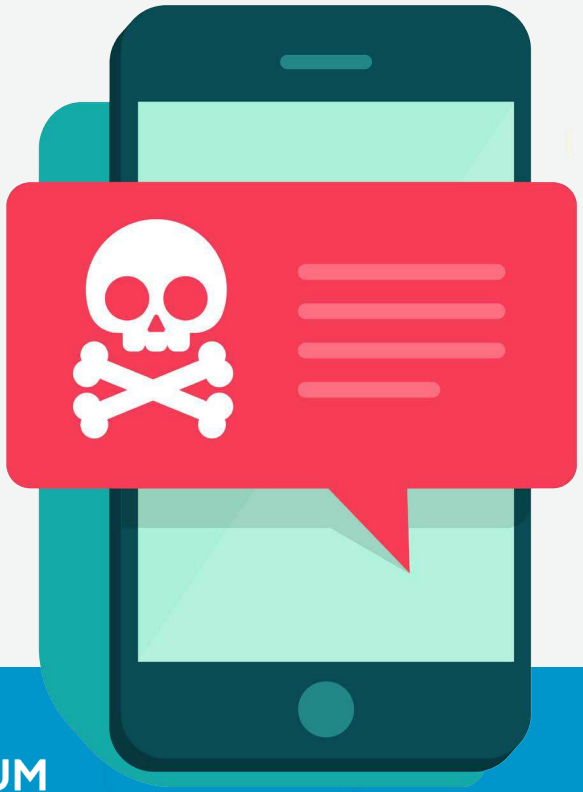
This is a popular negative SEO technique, where a competitor will point a bunch of links with spammy anchor text to another competitor, effectively decreasing their rankings.

Although Google continues to maintain that participating in **negative SEO** will rarely do any harm.

Identify any major instances of significant amounts of poison anchor text happening.

If you catch it and disavow the links, it is likely they will not cause any significant issues for your site.

If you don’t and you find that you have been the victim, it is a good idea to contact a member of the Google Webspam team (e.g., John Mueller or Gary Illyes) and have them investigate.





LINK PROFILE AUDIT

TIME TO COMPILE THE DISAVOW FILE

After you've gone through your entire link profile and identified all the bad links that you want to disavow, it's time to compile your disavow file and upload it using **Google's Disavow Tool** for your site.

WHAT TO CHECK

- Check that your disavow file is free of errors. Excessive www and some formatting issues may occur before you upload your file.
- To be safe, copy/paste your disavow file into notepad, save as txt file, and upload.

SCHEMA.ORG MICROFORMATS

Schema.org has become somewhat of a cult phenomenon.

It isn't quite as popular among SEOs as other techniques since it is difficult to prove its effectiveness, but some SEOs believe that pages supporting these microformats may rank above pages without it.

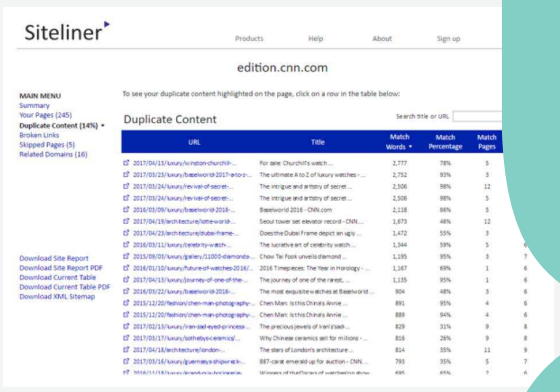
But there is no doubt that it adds support for Google's featured snippets, which may help rankings when it comes to featured snippet results and the Google Carousel for different niches.

Identifying Schema.org microformats in your audit will help you figure out how to optimize next, and where to go from here.

You can establish a baseline of Schema.org optimization and identify what needs to be further optimized and other opportunities for growth.

You can use Screaming Frog to identify Schema.org microformat code that exists on-site.

WHAT TO CHECK



- To identify pages that have Schema.org coding, you'll want to use Custom Filters. Simply bring up Screaming Frog and click on Configuration > Custom > Search.
- Enter the following code in the Custom Filter Configuration to identify whether that page has Schema markup: itemtype=http://schema.org.
- Depending on how it's coded (don't forget to check for this first!) you may want to enter itemtype="http://schema.org".
- This will identify any main parent code items that have Schema.org coding, but won't identify items specifically.
- If you wanted to identify a specific type of Schema markup, you would use that exact Schema. For example, you would have to use itemprop="name" to find any coding that contained that particular Schema value.
- It all depends on your niche and the Schema that you want to identify. Be sure to visit **Schema.org** for a comprehensive listing of all available Schema formats.

9

ON-SITE TECHNICAL SEO FACTORS



Written by

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highervisibility

PODIUM

Technical SEO is incredibly important. You need a strong technical foundation in order to be successful.

It is a necessity and not optional.

There are also some who believe that it's **more important than ever to be technical.** I am in full agreement with both of these articles.

Whether it's knowledge of programming, server architecture, website architecture, JavaScript, CSS, or whatever it is, having this knowledge will put you a step above the rest.

Technical SEO will help you optimize your own site, and identify issues on websites that non-technical SEOs can't catch.

In fact, in some cases, it can be critical to perform technical SEO before ever touching link building.

Let's examine some of the more common technical SEO issues and get some checks and balances going so we can fix them.



SITEMAPS

For link profile audits, I like using a number of different applications as data sources, because the more data sources you have, the more accurate your link risk management tasks will be.

The presence of a sitemap file on your site will help search engines:

- Better understand its structure.
- Where pages are located.
- More importantly, give it access to your site (assuming it's set up correctly).

XML sitemaps can be simple, with one line of the site per line. They don't have to be pretty.

HTML sitemaps can benefit from being "prettier" with a bit more organization to boot.

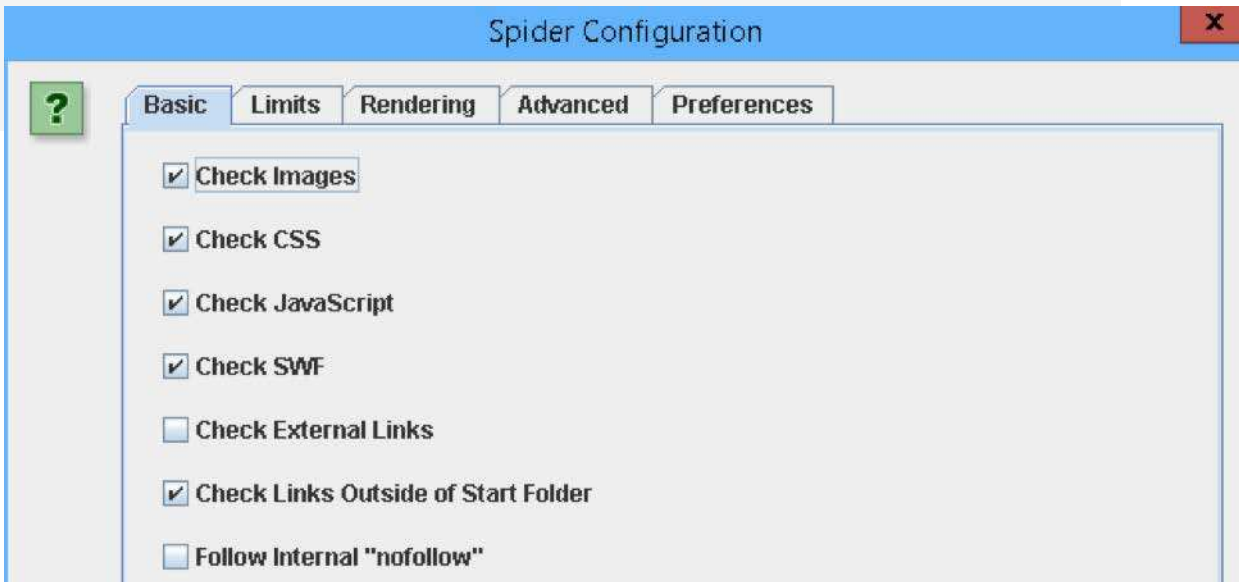
HOW TO CHECK

This is a pretty simple check. Since the sitemap is installed in the root directory, you can check for the presence of the sitemap file by searching for it in Screaming Frog, or you can check it in the browser by adding sitemap.xml or sitemap.html.

Also, be sure to check the **sitemaps section in Google Search Console**. It will tell you if a sitemap has previously been submitted, how many URLs were successfully indexed, whether there are any problems, and other issues.

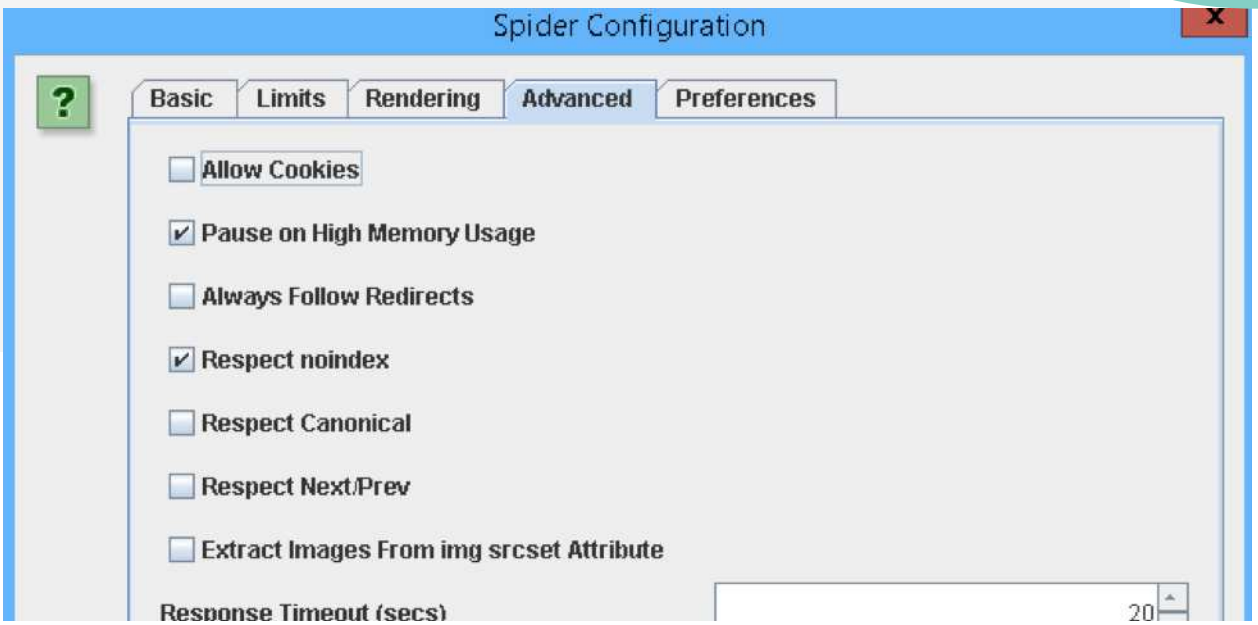
If you don't have one, you'll have to create one.

Using Screaming Frog, it's quite simple to create an XML Sitemap. Just click on Sitemaps > Create XML Sitemap.



Go to the Last modified tab and uncheck it. Go to the Priority tab and uncheck it. Go to the Change Frequency tab and uncheck it. These tags don't provide much benefit for Google, and thus the XML sitemap can be submitted as-is.

Any additional options (e.g., images, noindex pages, canonicalized URLs, Paginated URLs, or PDFs) can all be checked if they apply to your site.

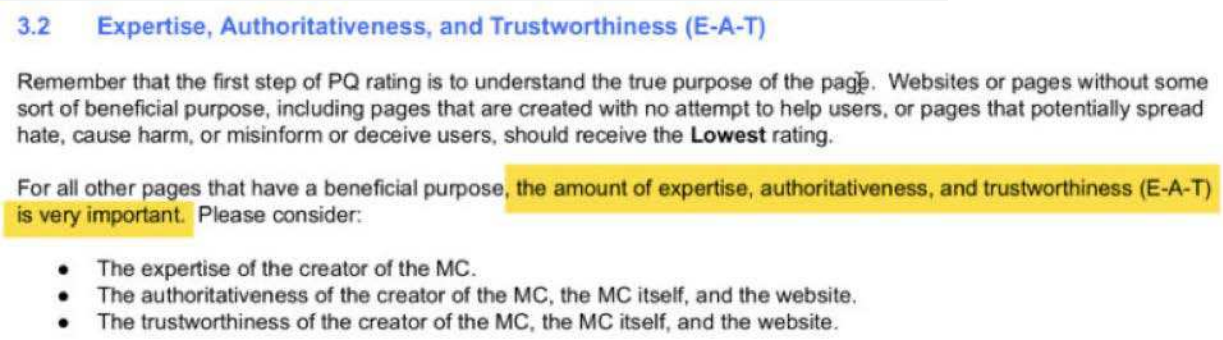


It's also a good idea to check your sitemap for errors before submitting it. Use an XML validator tool like **CodeBeautify.org** and **XMLValidation.com**.

Using more than one validator will help ensure your sitemap doesn't have errors and that it is 100 percent correct the first time it is submitted.

In addition, uploading the URL list to Screaming Frog using list mode is a good way to check that your sitemap also has all 200 OK errors.

Strip out all the formatting and ensure it's only a list of URLs. Then click on Mode > List > upload > Crawl and make sure all pages in the sitemap have 200 OK errors.



3.2 Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-A-T)

Remember that the first step of PQ rating is to understand the true purpose of the page. Websites or pages without some sort of beneficial purpose, including pages that are created with no attempt to help users, or pages that potentially spread hate, cause harm, or misinform or deceive users, should receive the **Lowest** rating.

For all other pages that have a beneficial purpose, the amount of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness (E-A-T) is very important. Please consider:

- The expertise of the creator of the MC.
- The authoritativeness of the creator of the MC, the MC itself, and the website.
- The trustworthiness of the creator of the MC, the MC itself, and the website.

ROBOTS.TXT



Identifying whether robots.txt exists on-site is a good way to check the health of your site. The robots.txt file can make or break a website's performance in search results.

For example, if you set robots.txt to "disallow: /", you're telling Google never to index the site because "/" is root!

It's important to set this as one of the first checks in SEO because so many site owners get this wrong.

It is always supposed to be set at "disallow: " without the forward slash. This will allow all user agents to crawl the site.

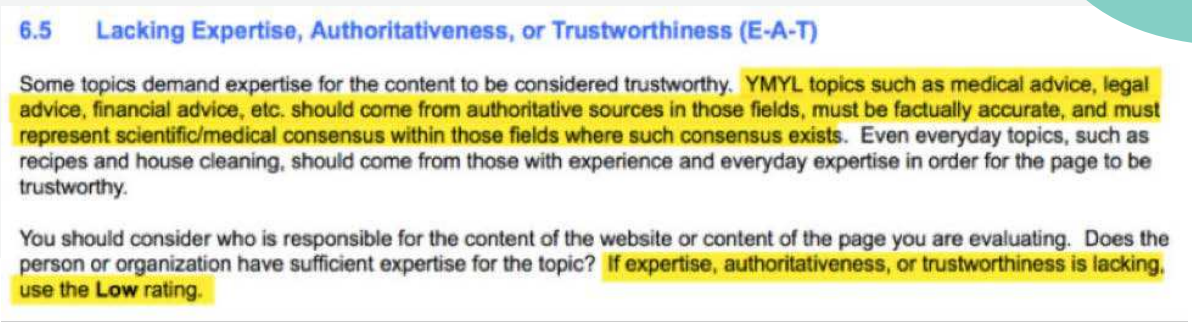
HOW TO CHECK

Check Google Search Console for the presence of a robots.txt file. You can go to Crawl > robots.txt Tester to do this.

It will help you see what is currently live on-site, and if any edits will improve that file.

It's also a good idea to maintain records of the robots.txt file. Monthly screenshots will help you identify whether changes were made and when, and help you pinpoint errors in indexation if any were to arise.

Checking the link "See live robots.txt" will let you investigate the currently live state of the site's robots.txt file.



6.5 Lacking Expertise, Authoritativeness, or Trustworthiness (E-A-T)

Some topics demand expertise for the content to be considered trustworthy. YMYL topics such as medical advice, legal advice, financial advice, etc. should come from authoritative sources in those fields, must be factually accurate, and must represent scientific/medical consensus within those fields where such consensus exists. Even everyday topics, such as recipes and house cleaning, should come from those with experience and everyday expertise in order for the page to be trustworthy.

You should consider who is responsible for the content of the website or content of the page you are evaluating. Does the person or organization have sufficient expertise for the topic? If expertise, authoritativeness, or trustworthiness is lacking, use the **Low** rating.



CRAWL ERRORS

The Crawl Errors section of GSC will help you identify whether crawl errors currently exist on-site.

Finding crawl errors and fixing them are an important part of any website audit because the more crawl errors a site has, the more issues Google has finding pages and indexing them.

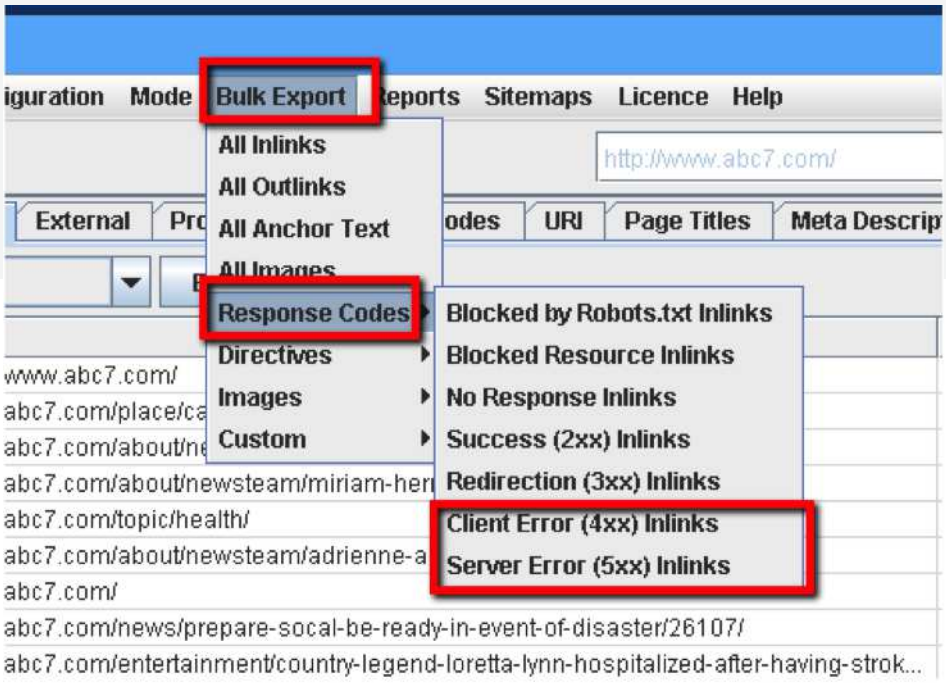
Ongoing technical SEO maintenance of these items is crucial for having a healthy site.

HOW TO CHECK

In Google Search Console, identify any 400 and 500 server and not found errors found on-site. All of these types of errors should be called out and fixed.

In addition, you can use Screaming Frog to find and identify 400 and 500 server error codes.

Simply click on Bulk Export > Response Codes > Client Error (4xx) Inlinks and Server Error (5xx) Inlinks.





MULTIPLE URLS: CAPITAL VS. LOWERCASE URLS

This issue can cause Google to see two or more versions of the page as the source of single content on your site.

Multiple versions can exist, from capital URLs to lower case URLs, to URLs with dashes and URLs with underscores.

Sites with severe URL issues can even have the following:

- https://www.sitename.com/this-is-the-url
- https://www.sitename.com/This-Is-The-URL
- https://www.sitename.com/this_is_the_url
- https://www.sitename.com/thisISstheURL
- https://www.sitename.com/this-is-the-url/
- http://www.sitename.com/this-is-the-url
- http://sitename.com/this-is-the-url

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

In this case, seven different URL versions exist for one piece of content.

This is awful from Google's perspective, and we don't want to have such a mess on our hands.

The easiest way to fix this is to point the rel=canonical of all of these pages to the one version that should be considered the source of the single piece of content.

However, the existence of these URLs is still confusing. The ideal fix is to consolidate all seven URLs down to one single RL, and set the rel=canonical tag to that same single URL.

Another situation that can happen is that URLs can have trailing slashes that don't properly resolve to their exact URLs. Example:

- http://www.sitename.com/this-is-the-url
- http://www.sitename.com/this-is-the-url/

In this case, the ideal situation is to redirect the URL back to the original, preferred URL and make sure the rel=canonical is set to that preferred URL.

If you aren't in full control over the site updates, keep a regular eye on these.





DOES THE SITE HAVE AN SSL CERTIFICATE (ESPECIALLY IN ECOMMERCE)?

Ideally, an ecommerce site implementation will have an SSL certificate. But with Google's recent moves toward **preferring sites that have SSL certificates** for security reasons, it's a good idea to determine whether a site has a secure certificate installed.

HOW TO CHECK

If a site has https:// in their domain, they have a secure certificate, although the check at this level may reveal issues.

If a red X appears next to the https:// in a domain, it is likely that the secure certificate has issues.

Screaming Frog can't identify security issues such as this, so it's a good idea to check for certain issues like https://www, https://blog, or https://.

If two of these have X'es across them, as opposed to the main domain (if the main domain has https://), it is likely that during the purchase process of the SSL certificate, errors were made.

In order to make sure that all variations of https:// resolve properly, it's necessary to get a wildcard secure certificate.

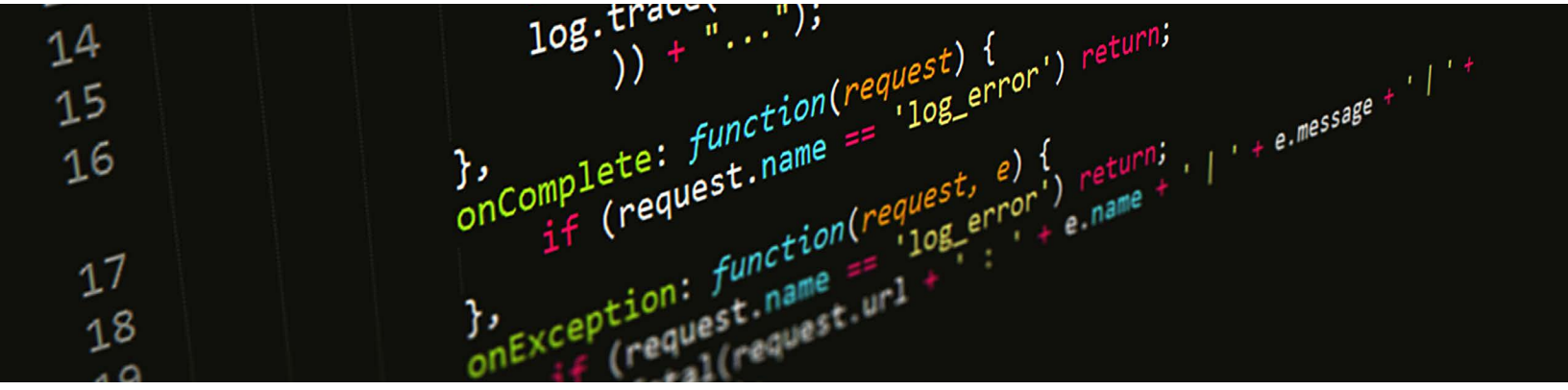
This wildcard secure certificate will ensure that all possible variations of https:// resolve properly.

MINIFYING CSS & JAVASCRIPT FILES

Identifying bloated CSS code, along with bloated JavaScript, will help decrease your site's load time.

Many WordPress themes are guilty of bloated CSS and JavaScript, which if time were taken to minify them properly, these sites could experience load times of 2-3 seconds or less.

Ideally, most website implementations should feature one CSS file and one JavaScript file. When properly coded, the lack of these files minimizes the calls to the server, potential bottlenecks, and other issues.

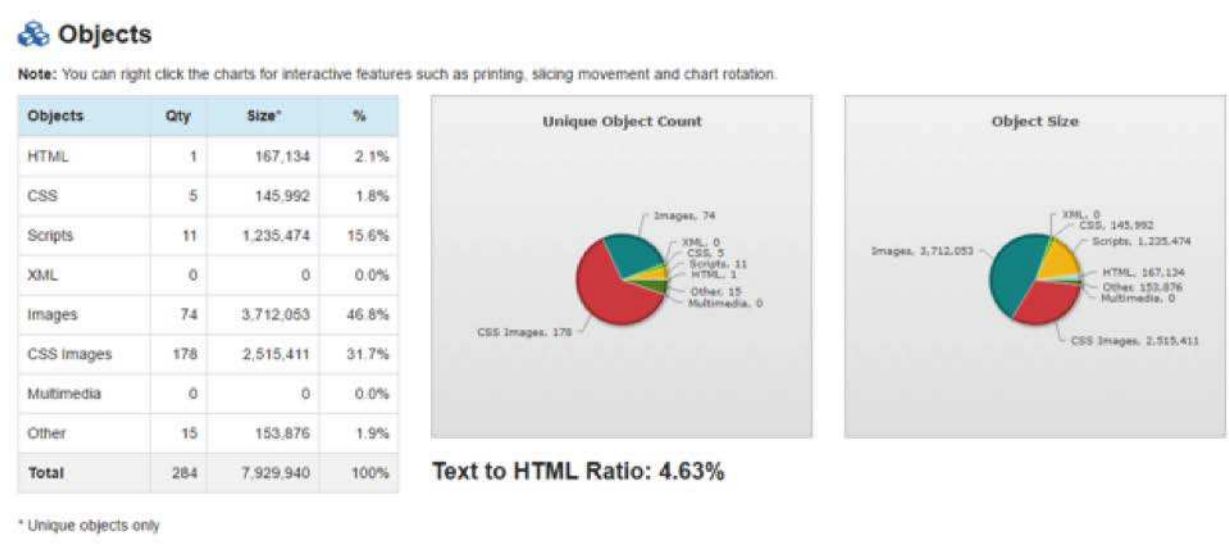


HOW TO CHECK

Using **URIValet.com**, it's possible to identify server bottlenecks and issues with larger CSS and JavaScript files.

Go to URIValet.com, input your site, and examine the results.

Continuing our audit of ABC7.com's website, we can identify the following:



Objects

Note: You can right click the charts for interactive features such as printing, slicing movement and chart rotation.

Objects	Qty	Size*	%
HTML	1	167,134	2.1%
CSS	5	145,992	1.8%
Scripts	11	1,235,474	15.6%
XML	0	0	0.0%
Images	74	3,712,053	46.8%
CSS Images	178	2,515,411	31.7%
Multimedia	0	0	0.0%
Other	15	153,876	1.9%
Total	284	7,929,940	100%

Text to HTML Ratio: 4.63%

* Unique objects only

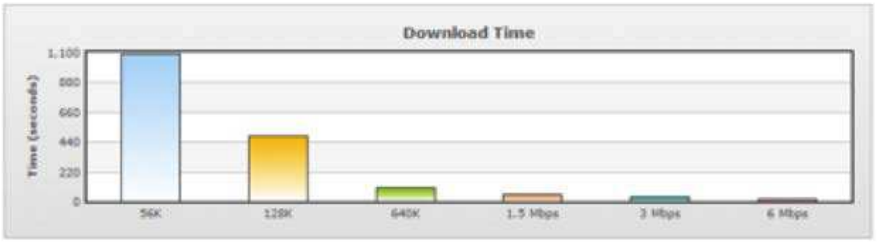
There are at least 5 CSS files and 11 script files that may need minification.

Further study into how they interact with each other will likely be required to identify any issues that may be happening.



Time to Download

Speed	Seconds
56K	1,086.05
128K ISDN	478.34
640K DSL/Cable	102.48
1.5 Mbps	46.01
3 Mbps	26.33
6 Mbps	16.01



Time to download is through the roof: 46 seconds on 1.5 Mbps connection, 26.33 seconds on a 3 Mbps connection, and a whopping 16 seconds on a 6 Mbps connection. Further investigation into the multiple CSS and JavaScript files will likely be required, including more investigation into images not being optimized on-site.

Since this site is pretty video-heavy, it's also a good idea to figure out how the video implementations are impacting the site from a server perspective as well as from a search engine perspective.

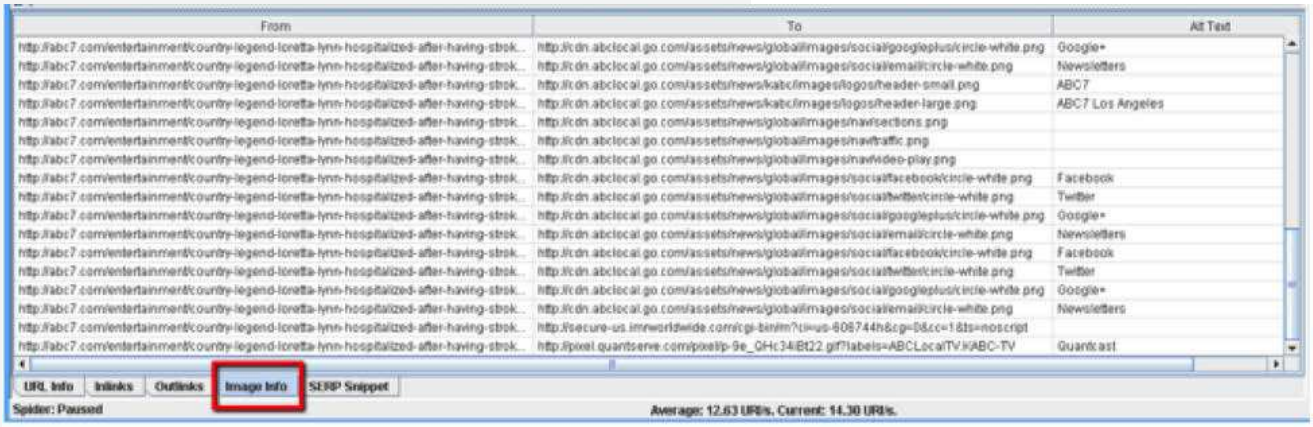
IMAGE OPTIMIZATION

Identifying images that are heavy on file size and causing increases in page load time is a critical optimization factor to get right.

This isn't a be-all, end-all optimization factor, but it can deliver quite a decrease in site speed if managed correctly.

Using our Screaming Frog spider, we can identify the image links on a particular page.

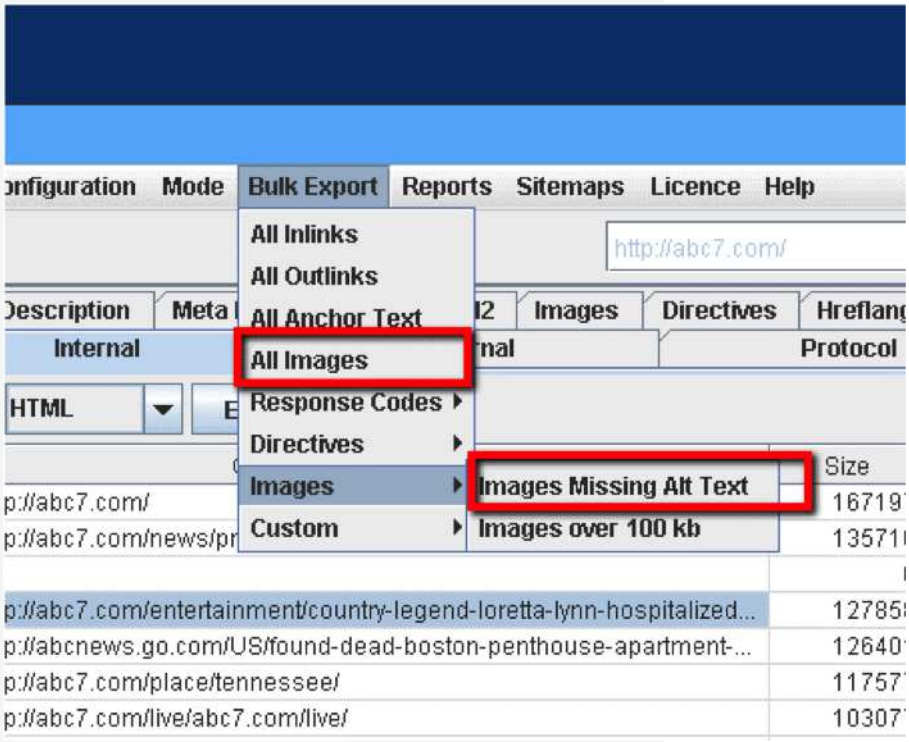
When you're done crawling your site, click on the URL in the page list, and then click on the Image Info tab in the window below it:



You can also right-click on any image in the window to either copy or go to the destination URL.

In addition, you can click on Bulk Export > All Images or you can go to Images > Images missing alt text.

This will export a full CSV file that you can use to identify images that are missing alt text or images that have lengthy alt text.



HTML ERRORS / W3C VALIDATION

Correcting HTML errors and W3C validation by themselves doesn't increase ranking, and having a fully W3C valid site doesn't help your ranking, per **Google's John Mueller**.

That said, correcting these types of errors can help lead to better rendering in various browsers. If the errors are bad enough, these corrections can help lead to better page speed.

But it is on a case-by-case basis. Just doing these by themselves won't automatically lead to better rankings for every site.

In fact, mostly it is a contributing factor, meaning that it can help enhance the main factor – site speed.

For example, one area that may help includes adding width + height to images. Per **W3.org**, if height and width are set, the "space required for the image is reserved when the page is loaded".

This means that the browser doesn't have to waste time guessing about the image size, and can just load the image right then and there.

HOW TO CHECK

Using the **W3C validator** at W3.org can help you identify HTML errors and fix them accordingly.

Be sure to always use the appropriate DOCTYPE that matches the language of the page being analyzed by the W3C validator.

If you don't, you will receive errors all over the place. You cannot change DOCTYPES from XHTML 1.0 to HTML 5, for example.





MOBILE OPTIMIZATION & TESTING

Mobile is here to stay, and there are many reasons for mobile optimization. This includes the fact that Google said that mobile-first indexing was being used for more than half the web pages in Google search results at the end of 2018.

As of July 1, 2019, Google has announced that mobile-first indexing is the default for any brand-new web domains.

This should be included in your audits because of how widespread mobile will be now.

These issues should be checked.

HOW TO CHECK

Make sure that all content you develop can be viewed on mobile

1. Install the user agent switcher for Google Chrome.

2. Check your content on mobile devices using the user agent switcher by selecting iPhone, Samsung, etc.

3. This will show you how your content is viewed on these devices.

4. Shrink and expand the size of your browser window to check this.

5. If the site has a responsive design, check on your actual mobile phone.

6. Report any findings you have in the audit deliverables to your client.

WHAT TO CHECK

- Any videos that you have on your pages should load and be compatible with any and all potential smartphones that your user will use.
- Scroll ability of your content – this ability will allow your content to scroll on any smart device. Don't force your users to click through the next button to next button – this is extremely cumbersome and destroys the user experience.
- Your design should always be responsive. Don't ever use a mobile.domainname.com website ever again. Unless this is a political thing at your employer, there is no excuse for any website in 2019 to have a mobile. or m. subdomain. Any website should be 100% responsive and should use the proper stylesheets.
- Don't use AMP. Through a number of recent case studies we have performed, removing AMP has actually increased traffic, rather than causing issues with traffic. Check for implementations of AMP coding, and make sure that the coding doesn't exist. If it does, recommend that the client remove it.



FORCING A SINGLE DOMAIN

Despite many recommendations online, I still run into plenty of websites that have this major issue.

And this is the issue of multiple URLs loading, creating massive problems with duplicate content.

Here's the situation. When you enter your address in your web browser, you can test variations of URLs:

- http://www.yoursite.com/
- https://www.yoursite.com/
- http://yoursite.com/
- https://yoursite.com/
- https://yoursite.com/page-name1.html
- https://www.yoursite.com/page-name1.html
- https://yoursite.com/pAgE-nAmE1.html
- https://yoursite.com/pAgE-nAmE1.htm



What will happen is that all of these pages load when you input the web address, creating a situation where you have many pages loading for one URL, creating further opportunities for Google to crawl and index them.

This issue multiplies exponentially when your internal linking process gets out of control, and you don't use the right linking across your site.

If you don't control how you link to pages, and they load like this, you are giving Google a chance to index page-name1.html, page-name1.htm, pAgE-nAmE1.html, and pAgE-nAmE1.htm.

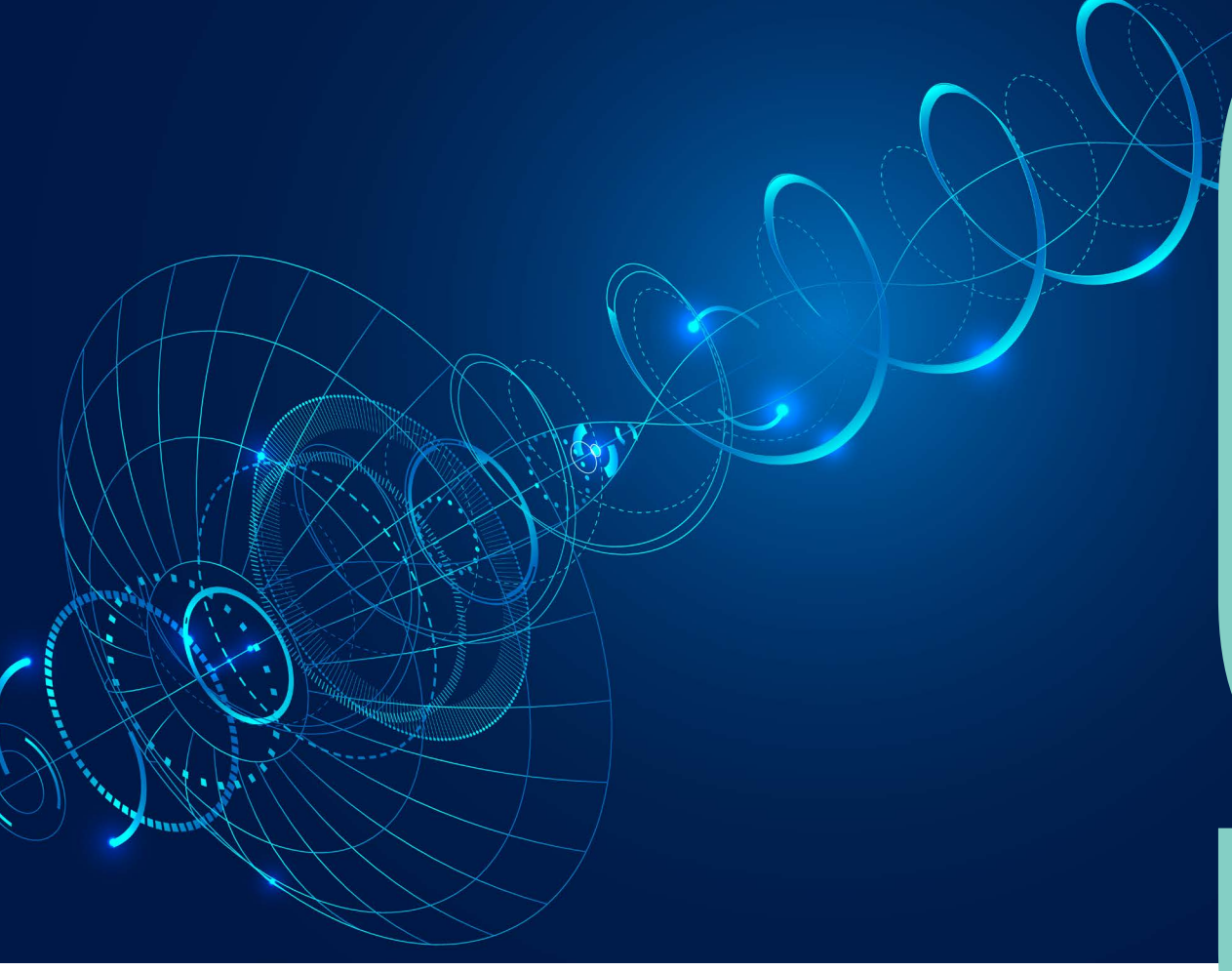
All of these URLs will still have the same content on them. This confuses Google's bot exponentially, so don't make this mistake.

HOW TO CHECK

1. You can check your URL list crawled in Screaming Frog and see if Screaming Frog has picked up any of these same URLs.

2. You can also load different variations of these web addresses for your client's site in your browser and see if content loads.

3. If it doesn't redirect to the proper URL, and your content loads on the new URL variation, you should report this to the client and recommend the fix for it (redirect all of these variations of URLs to the main one).



WHY CERTAIN 'SIGNALS' WERE NOT INCLUDED

Some SEOs believe that social signals can impact rankings positively and negatively. Other SEOs do not.

Correlation studies, while they have been done, continue to ignore the major factor: correlation does not equal causation.

Just because there is an improvement in correlation between social results and rankings doesn't always mean that social improves ranking.

It's not as important as some may think to have active social media. But, it IS important to have social sharing buttons on-site, so that you can share that content and increase the possibility that that content will get links for SEO.

So there IS that dimension to think of when this kind of thing is included in this audit guide.

There could be a number of additional links being added at the same time, or there could be one insanely valuable authority link that was added, or any other number of improvements.

Gary Illyes of Google continues to officially maintain that **they do not use social media for ranking.**

The goal of this SEO audit checklist is to put together on-site and off-site checks to help identify any issues, along with actionable advice on fixing these issues.

Of course, there are a number of ranking factors that can't easily be determined by simple on-site or off-site checks and require time, long-term tracking methods, as well as in some cases, custom software to run.

These are beyond the scope of this guide.

Hopefully, you found this checklist useful. Have fun and happy website auditing!



GOOGLE MY BUSINESS AUDIT

10

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PODIUM

Local SEO is the practice of optimizing your website to be crawled and indexed by search engine bots called crawlers to be found by nearby customers in search engine result pages (also known as SERP).



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Local SEO is unique in that it takes into account the searcher's proximity to their desired result. For example, searching for the best dentist near me will produce a list of highly-rated dentist's offices within a few miles of your approximate location.

Google prioritizes local businesses in the results for local searches like these in a SERP feature called Map Pack.

Getting to the top of Google may seem impossible for local business owners, but if your business has a physical location, you already have an advantage over purely online competitors.

To optimize your Google My Business listing for local SEO, first, you need to understand the three main ranking factors that Google uses for local search. Once you know how rankings are determined, we'll walk through local search results.



HOW DOES GOOGLE DETERMINE LOCAL SEARCH RANKINGS?

The details of how Google quantifies local search rankings are kept reasonably quiet, but according to Google, there are three significant factors businesses should focus on when optimizing for local search.

1 RELEVANCE

The goal of Google's local search algorithm is to connect searchers with answers. So when you try to find the best tire shop near me, you get curated recommendations.

Making sure your Google My Business listing is accurate and up-to-date guarantees you show up for relevant searches in place of less qualified competitors.

2 DISTANCE

The proximity of a searcher to your business is another major factor Google takes into account when determining local search rankings.

Because of this, it is crucial to include your address and other relevant contact information in your Google My Business listing and other directories across the internet.

3 PROMINENCE

Finally, Google takes into account the prominence of your business. According to Google, this means "how well is this business known." Prominence also factors in things like directory listings and online reviews.

Google says, "both a business' overall star rating and the number of reviews are used to determine local search rankings."



GOOGLE MY BUSINESS AUDIT IN 5 STEPS

SEO is too hard and completely unpredictable. At least that seems to be the prevailing theory for a lot of business owners. But it doesn't have to be hard or complicated, especially for a local business.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to understand meta tags, link juice, or latent semantic index keywords to succeed with Local SEO.

Believe it or not, you don't need an SEO strategy to improve your local SEO and start getting found in more search results. You need to make a few updates to your Google My Business listing.

Below is a local SEO checklist to help you follow each piece step-by-step.

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS LISTING CHECKLIST

- Add complete information to your Google My Business listing
- Verify your locations
- Keep your hours accurate and up-to-date
- Manage and responding to reviews
- Add high-quality photos

1. IS YOUR GMB LISTING COMPLETE?

According to Google, "businesses with complete and accurate information are easier to match with the right searches."

So, if your GMB listing is incomplete, or worse, non-existent, then it's harder for search engines to match your business with local customers on Google.

Creating a Google My Business listing is just the first step. Once your listing is created, you'll need to add as much information as possible.

Don't worry about adding specific keywords; make your profile as complete as possible.



Potential customers want to know who you are, where you are, and when they can visit you. So before you get started, make sure you have all of your basic business information like who, where, and when.

WHO YOU ARE

- Name
- Website
- Business Description – Category
- Attributes
- Opening Date
- Photos

WHERE YOU ARE

- Address
- Service Area

WHEN CUSTOMERS CAN VISIT YOU

- Hours of Operation
- Holiday Hours

CONSISTENCY COUNTS

Your business name, address, and phone number (commonly referred to as NAP) must be consistent across the web so customers, and crawlers, can identify your business.

Inconsistent NAP information is one of the leading causes of a poor local search ranking. So if your address ends with "lane," make sure it's either always abbreviated or always be spelled out.

Mike's HVAC
123 Southview Lane Troy, OH
45373

Mike's HVAC
123 Southview Ln. Troy, OH
45373

2. ARE YOUR LOCATIONS VERIFIED?

Before your Google My Business listing appears in Search and Maps it must be verified. Verifying your listing is a simple process and Google offers a few different ways to do it.

ON YOUR COMPUTER:

- Go to https://www.google.com/business
- Sign in to your Google Account, or create one, then, click Next
- Enter your business' or chain's address and create or claim your listing STEP 4 - Fill out basic information about your business
- Submit for verification.

ON YOUR SMARTPHONE:

- On your phone or tablet, open the My Business app.
- Sign in to the Google Account associated with your business STEP 3 - Enter your business address and create or claim your listing STEP 4 - Fill out basic information about your business
- Submit for verification

*You can also use Google Maps to add or claim your business on both desktop and mobile.

3. ARE YOUR HOURS ACCURATE & UP-TO-DATE?

It's also important to include accurate, up-to-date hours of operation in your listing.

Be sure to include special holiday hours, to avoid frustrating customers who make their way to your business only to find out it's closed.

4. ARE YOU COLLECTING & RESPONDING TO REVIEWS

Businesses that want to improve their local SEO ranking should collect and manage online reviews.

Moz estimates that your Google My Business listing and Google Reviews account for 40% of local pack ranking factors.

Online reviews will not only bolster your local SEO but will help build trust with customers and potential customers.

When your customers are happy, they help influence others. If you make it easy for customers to leave a review, you'll get more reviews which will directly impact your local SEO.

Sometimes it can be difficult for businesses to collect online reviews organically, so they need to take a more proactive approach.

5. HAVE YOU UPLOADED HIGH-QUALITY PHOTOS?

Once the verification process is complete, you can begin optimizing your listing. You should start by uploading high-quality photos.

Pictures help tell a visual story about your business and let customers know what it's like to do business with you. Photos are also crucial for attracting attention to your listing–helping you garner more clicks.

According to Google, listings with photos receive 42% more requests for driving directions and 35% more clicks to their website.

There are several different types of photos you can upload, but at the very minimum you should include:

- Profile photo
- Logo
- Cover photo

Before uploading any photo, double-check the dimensions and resolution. Regularly sharing high-quality images will show off your business' personality and help you engage with your audience.

CLAIM TO FAME

As promised, this guide to local SEO was super simple. While it might seem basic to fill out your Google My Business listing, 44% of local businesses have yet to do it.

An incomplete listing means showing up in less local search results, which means fewer customers and fewer reviews.

While some industries are more competitive than others, any business can benefit from updating their GMB listing.

For many websites, local SEO is just a small piece of a much larger puzzle. But if your business relies on getting found by local customers claiming your listing is the best place to start.

