

8.4: Core principles

Understanding SEO

Search engines need to help users find what they're looking for. To make sure, they list the best results first, looking for signals of:

Note

Want to see how search works? Check out this resource from Google: www.google.com/insidesearch/howsearchworks/thestory

- Popularity
- Authority
- Relevance
- Trust
- Importance.

SEO, also called organic or natural optimisation, involves optimising websites to achieve high rankings on search engines for certain selected keywords. Generally, techniques used for optimising on one search engine will also help efforts across others.

SEO can be divided into two main strategies:

1. **On-page optimisation**, achieved by making changes to the HTML code, content and structure of a website, making it more accessible to search engines and by extension, easier for users to find.

Note

A good place to keep track of Google search algorithm updates is this handy resource from Moz: moz.com/google-algorithmchange.

2. **Off-page optimisation**, generally focused on building links to the website and covers activities like social media and digital PR.

SEO is an extremely effective way of generating new business to a site. It is a continuous process and a way of thinking about how search engines see your website and how users use search engines to find your website. It's search psychology.

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:

1. A search engine friendly website structure
2. A well-researched list of keywords
3. Content optimised to target those keywords
4. Link popularity
5. User insights.

Search engine friendly website structure

Search engines encounter two kinds of obstacles:

1. Technical challenges that prevent the search engine spider from accessing content.

Note

Read more about this in the [Web development and design](#) chapter.

2. A competitive marketing environment where everyone wants to rank highly.

To ensure that search engines can access your content, you must remove technical barriers. Those who want to achieve the best results must follow best practices.

The key is to make sure that there are direct HTML links to each page you want the search engines to index. The most important pages should be accessible directly from the home page of your website.

The information architecture or, how content is planned and laid out, has important usability and SEO implications. Users want to find what they are looking for quickly and easily, while website owners want search engine spiders to be able to access and index all applicable pages. Google consistently points out that it wants users to have a good user experience. Content relevance, user engagement and user experience are all crucial to SEO (Martin, 2016).

Note

Read more about this in the [User experience design](#) chapter.

There are times when user experience and SEO can be at odds with each other, but usually if you focus on building usable, accessible websites, then you have made them search engine friendly as well.

Another technical challenge to search engines is Flash. For the most part, search engines struggle to crawl and index Flash sites. There are some workarounds, but the best approach from an SEO perspective is to avoid building sites or delivering key content in Flash. Instead, use HTML5, which provides similar interactivity and visuals while remaining easily crawlable.

The chapter on web development and design delves more deeply into building a search engine friendly website.

Voice search

As digital marketers, we must evolve with the times to stay effective. The ‘no interface trend’ refers to the way people want new, natural forms of interaction with technology. Consider Stephen Sandmann’s (2016) observation that, “Speech, gesture, touch and sight: truly intuitive technologies are set to transform your customer interactions forever”.

When people think of SEO, they usually think of only the traditional type of SEO, based on desktop and mobile Google search. SEO has evolved to be mobile-centric, which now includes voice search.

Many consumers use Google search on their mobile phones to find answers to their everyday questions. This means you can encourage your consumers to engage with your brand via voice search-accessed mobile search. The Google app allows a person’s voice to access mobile Google search results on their smartphones. Google voice search is a default app in all of the latest Android smartphones.

Other voice search tools include Apple’s Siri, Microsoft’s Cortana and Amazon’s Alexa.

Voice searches are usually made through mobile devices because of their on-the-go convenience factor which means that the mobile context will generally apply. This means:

- The user behaviour relating to voice search differs from traditional mobile search. This may seem obvious, but you have make a conscious effort to accommodate voice search in your Mobile SEO strategy.
- In most cases, voice searches appear in the form of questions, such as, “What movies are showing at Brooklyn Mall?”
- Voice-derived search queries are also usually longer than the average traditional search query.

These differences should be factored into your content by adding local keywords that are geographically relevant and by writing content that answers common questions that your intended audience may ask.

The future

Google’s revamped Google Now, called Google Now on Tap, is incredibly intuitive. Now on Tap is a Google voice search that has contextual awareness. When you do a search via Now on Tap, it scans your phone’s screen and recent activities to help give it context for your search, thereby better answering your query to fill in the gaps of a vague search query. Google also makes use of a personal index of what you do on your Android phone as a means of learning more about you.

Siri and other voice search platforms are also making major headway in terms of technological advancements and additional predictive features. Voice search is here to stay and will become more widely used going forward.

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