Siteimprove

17 Killers Of Your SEO Efforts and How to Fix Them

Guide

All your time and effort spent managing and editing your website is in vain if you aren't on top of your Search Engine Optimization game. Fortunately, you can address the most critical violations by taking some basic steps.

#17

Defining the Issue

What's the Problem?

How Do I Fix It?

Tackle Your SEO Issues Head On

It's easy to get lost in the ever-evolving world of SEO. At Siteimprove, we keep up with the changing technicalities to help you meet the latest SEO requirements with as little effort as possible. Here are 17 common SEO violations that you can address right away. Feel free to consult the glossary of terms in the back of the guide.

#1 Pages Without Page Titles

When a page has no page title, it makes it difficult for search engines to determine what the page is about.

Create a unique page title for every page. A good page title provides an accurate description of the page's content, includes important keywords that relate to the content of the page, is usually around 55 characters, and is written with both users and search engines in mind. The title tag is also used as the headline in organic search results, so it is important to write an appealing headline; Google rewards a high click rate.

#2 Duplicate Page Titles

If two or more pages share the same page title, this may cause the pages to compete against each other and weaken search engine optimization. Each page on your website should have its own focus.

Edit the page title on each page so they have unique page titles. A good page title provides an accurate description of the page's content, includes important keywords that relate to the content of the page, is usually around 55 characters, and is written with both users and search engines in mind.

#3 Pages Without Meta Description

Without a meta description, you do not convey accurate information about your page. The meta description is your opportunity to advertise the content of the page and entice searchers to click it amongst organic search engine results.

Create a unique meta description for each page that accurately describes the content within. A good meta description includes important keywords that relate to the content of the page, is max 106 characters in mobile search results and 160 characters in desktop search results, and provides a compelling description of the page.

#4 Duplicate Meta Descriptions

If two or more pages share the same meta description, this may cause the pages to compete against each other and weaken search engine optimization.

Create a unique meta description for each page that accurately describes the content within. A good meta description includes important keywords that relate to the content of the page, is max 106 characters in mobile search results and 160 characters in desktop search results, and provides a compelling description of the page.

#5 Pages Without an H1 Heading

The first headline of each web page should have an H1 tag in the HTML code. Without an H1 element, search engines will struggle to figure out the focus of your page. The H1 is the main heading on the page.

Create a unique H1 heading for every page that accurately describes the page's content. A good H1 heading includes important keyword(s) that relate to the content of the page and encourages people to stay on the page instead of bouncing back. Google values data from real visitors like high time on site, higher-than-average page duration, and low bounce rate. The H1 heading can be followed by H2-H6 subheadings in the correct hierarchy rather than more H1 headings.

#6 Duplicate H1 Headings

If two or more pages share the same H1 heading, this may cause the pages to compete against each other and weaken search engine optimization.

Create a unique H1 heading for every page that accurately describes the page's content. A good H1 heading includes important keyword(s) that relate to the content of the page and can be followed by H2-H6 subheadings in the correct hierarchy rather than more H1 headings.

#7 Keyword Is Not Included in Page Title

The page title is the single most important place to include your keyword. Without a keyword, your page might not show up in the searches you want it to.

If you want your page to rank on a specific keyword or phrase, you should use it in your page title. Edit each page title so it includes the chosen keyword for that page. Don't forget that the page title should provide an accurate description of the page's content and be written with both users and search engines in mind.

#8 Keyword Is Not Included in Meta Description

The likelihood of a user choosing this page decreases if the keyword they have searched for does not appear in the text.

Rewrite the meta description so that it contains your chosen keyword for each page. A good meta description includes important keywords that relate to the content of the page, is a maximum of 106 characters in mobile search results and 160 characters in desktop search results, and provides a compelling description of the page.

#9 Keyword Is Not Included in H1 Heading

Without the right keyword in your H1, your page might not show up in desired searches. The H1 heading is the main heading on the page.

Rewrite the H1 heading so it accurately describes the content of the page and includes the chosen keyword.

#10 Keyword Is Not Included in Image Alternative Text

Remember to include important keywords in the image file name and alt text. Alt text in an image's HTML code also provides better accessibility of the page.

Make sure that relevant images or graphics have alt text that includes the keyword and describes the image's content or function. You can also provide a description to help search engines and users with screen readers.

#11 Keyword Is Not Included in Subheadings

You can also use keywords in the page subheadings if it is appropriate.

Divide your content into scannable blocks and give each section a subheading in accordance to the heading hierarchy. Please note that for SEO purposes, only H2-H3 subheadings are crawled by search engines. Include the chosen keyword in the subheadings wherever it makes sense, but don't overdo it—you also want to provide a good user experience.

#12 Keyword Is Not Included in Internal Link Text

Link text (or anchor text) is the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink that connects you to other pages. Using keywords in your link text is effective not only for the SEO value of that page, but this tactic also provides value to the page you are linking to.

Edit any link texts on a page to include the chosen keyword. Ideally, the link text should include keywords that describe the content of the original page but also match the content of the next page. Once again, don't overdo it. Everything in moderation.

#13 Keyword Is Not Included in URL

Without a keyword in the page's URL, it might not be clear to users and search engines what the page is about. Further, if other websites link to the page, it provides even more value if the keyword is in the URL.

Try to keep the URL to five words or fewer, and consider including the keyword. Keywords consisting of two or more words should be separated by hyphens. NOTE: It is not always an advantage to change the URL of an existing page that already has good rankings in search engines. If you want to change the URL of an existing page, make sure to implement a 301 redirect from the old URL to the new one.

#14 Page Is Not Included in XML Sitemap

The XML sitemap informs search engines about a website's pages that are available for crawling in order to help them index the website more intelligently. Not having a page in the XML sitemap sends a message to search engines that you do not think the page is worth mentioning.

Review whether you would like each page to be included in search engines. To fix it, liaise with your developer.

#15 Page Is Excluded by Robots.txt

If you would like pages to be searchable in search engines, make sure the pages don't have a "disallow" in the robots.txt file. If you want search engines to index your pages, don't have "disallow" folders in your robot.txt.

Review whether you would like each page to be included in search engines. To fix it, liaise with your developer.

#16 Page Is Excluded by Noindex/Nofollow

Having pages on your website that are not being crawled and/or indexed because of noindex/nofollow is only an error if you do want the pages to appear in search results pages. Blocking pages by noindex/nofollow is a way to keep pages accessible to users navigating the website but out of search results pages. For a page to be excluded by nofollow, all referring links must be nofollow links and the page you don't want indexed should have this html code in the head section: <meta name="robots" content="noindex" />.

Review whether you would like these pages to be included in the search engines. To fix it, liaise with your developer.

#17 Duplicate Pages Without Correct Canonical Tags

When multiple pages are extremely similar or have duplicate content—and do not have correct canonical tags—search engines won't know which page to index. Traffic to this content gets split up among different URLs, hurting the popularity and SEO ranking of the pages.

Program the same canonical URL into the HTML <head> of both pages using rel="canonical". For instance, <link rel="canonical" href="http://yourdomain.com/yourpage.html" />.

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GLOSSARY

Alternative text: Alternate (alt) text describes an image or graphic and is written in the content management system. It appears in HTML code and is read by search engine crawlers but does not appear publicly on a website. It is a very important tag for accessibility purposes, as screen readers will read this text aloud.

Canonical URL: In the case of similar or duplicate content, rel="canonical" is placed in the HTML code of both pages to help search engines understand which page to index.

Header code: There are traditionally six header tags ranging from <H1> to <H6>, representing six tiers in the structural hierarchy of a page, with H1 being the main header and H6 the lowest level of sub-headers. Header tags are used to separate a web page into logical parts, acting as titles for various page sections. Users often skim through a document by navigating its headings, therefore it is important to use them appropriately to convey document structure. For example, H2 elements should follow H1 elements.

Internal link text: The visible part of links on your own pages that lead to another specific page.

Meta Descriptions: Description used in the HTML <head> of a web page to provide content and site information to search engine spiders.

Rel=nofollow: Attribute is used in link HTML code to prevent a link from passing link authority. Commonly used on sites with user generated content (i.e. blog comments).

Rel=canonical: HTML used in the header part of every page. (See Canonical URL.) The canonical meta data is used as a hint to search engines as to what page is the master. Search engines use this to update their index to reference the master copy as the primary copy, and when they deliver search results, they deliver the page they believe is canonical.

Robots.txt: A text file at the top-level directory of a web server that tells search engines not to crawl certain URLs or folders.

URL: Uniform Resource Locator is the address of a web page. Each page has its own unique web address. This is how your computer locates the web page that you are trying to find.

XML Sitemap: A sitemap lists the pages of a website that are accessible to crawlers or users. XML sitemaps have replaced the older method of "submitting to search engines" by filling out a form on the search engine's submission page. Now web developers submit a sitemap directly to Google Search Console or wait for search engines to find them.