moomu media

The Complete Guide To SEO
For PUBLISHER SITES

SEO for Publishing Sites

Publishing sites can have a healthy dose of skepticism when it comes to SEO - they worry that it means taking their finely crafted stories and pumping them full of keywords or links. But this isn't the case, and doing so could do more harm than good.

Search engine optimisation means making your site worthy of recommendation by search engines - and the best thing you can do to that end is produce high quality, relevant content. Since this is usually the focus of a publishing site, it's often the case that publishing sites already have a lot of SEO value.

Where we see publishers fall down is on the technical side - they might not realise that their content is secretly duplicated on their own site, or that their URLs are making it difficult for search engines to crawl.

Here we put together a list of SEO tips for publishing sites, to help them get the basics of SEO under control, so that more readers can find and enjoy their content.

Technical SEO Improvements

To start improving your SEO, you first need to understand the SEO limitations of your CMS. An easy way to do this is to Google "CMSname SEO", and look for online discussions.

The following are things you should check your CMS can do;

1. Ensure your site has a sitemap. This is often automatically created by your CMS.

2. If your site has many videos and images (of importance), you would also benefit from separate video and image sitemaps.

3. Ensure you have a clean, and customisable URL structure. Folders should segment information in a sensible way. For example, a cricket news site might have folders like;
   www.cricketingaustralia.net.au/cricket-news
   www.cricketingaustralia.net.au/local-cricket-events
   www.cricketingaustralia.net.au/cricketer-interviews

   Most content management systems have plugins or options to help you improve your URLs for SEO.

4. Ensure your URLs do not include excessive parameters. They should be easily readable

5. Check your content is not being duplicated across your site. Cut and paste a sentence or two of your content into Google (enclose it in quotation marks). If more than one result comes up, you could have a duplicate content problem. You may need to put 301 redirects in place or you might need to use canonical tags. Eliminating this problem is a more advanced topic, so if you need more help on this, feel free to email us about your particular circumstances.

Technical SEO Improvements

More things you should check your CMS can do....

6. If any of your articles are broken up into multiple pages, use rel="next" and rel="prev" to explain the structure more clearly to Google.

7. If your site uses images, remember to optimise them with relevant alternative text and/or image titles. It can also help to have them all in a dedicated folder, and give them optimised file names.

8. Make sure your site has appropriate stylings for Header tags (H1, H2, etc), as these should be used throughout your stories to section your content.

SEO Advice for Content Writers

Content writers might balk when faced with the prospect of learning about SEO, but they may be surprised to learn that it IS possible to write for both search engines and humans.

The most basic tip for content writers is to write content using the language your readers use. If your readers use technical language, feel free to use it yourself. However, if it is unlikely that they use technical language, you should avoid it where possible. A writer should imagine what their audience would search for or ask, and then try and deliver that.

Although tempting, content writers should avoid too many puns or flowery headlines. While these might work well offline on the covers of newspapers or magazines, online they can be a liability if they obscure the topic of the story.

Optimising Templates

The following items can be optimised at the template level, and you must remember to do them on all the major templates you use on your site. (For example, maybe you have separate templates for "research" and "latest news").

Optimise your Meta Data. Take advantage of formulae.

While we don't want to pump your stories full of keywords - it is important to have keywords in your pages, and one of the best places to put them is in your meta data (meta title and meta description only. Meta keywords are no longer important, so dpwaste your time).

Your meta data should be unique for every page, so don't just make a static meta title for your template. It is usually best to write a formula so that your meta data is unique on each page. For example, if you run a site about cricket, then your news template might have a meta title formula like this:

>   Cricket News - <article title>

In most Content Management Systems you can enter your own meta title for each story, so going forward you would also have the option to optimise each and every article meta title. The title is often what shows up as the link in Google's search results, so ensure that it is meaningful outside of the context of your website.

Tactically cross-link between your stories.

For example, at the end of each story, link to similar or relevant articles. This is useful for both usability and SEO.

Custom Landing Pages

Publishing sites can benefit by creating custom static landing pages outside their normal templated content. Custom landing pages can be created around any content that would be perennially popular, and are most useful when geared towards things that people are searching for.

To know what this is, you would have to undertake keyword and trends research, or you can even look into your own analytics to see what search terms/topics/questions drive the most traffic.

Custom landing pages might be;

- Lists of resources
- Frequently asked questions
- "Best of" or "Top" lists
- Overview pages about a specific topic

These pages should be optimised with normal SEO principles to help them rank in search engines.

- Include keyword-relevant meta data
- Make sure the terms you think people would search are included in the content, heading or subheadings of the page.
- Optimise any images
- Undertake link-building into these specific pages
- Encourage user generated content on these pages (for example, allow comments if possible).
- Re-promote these pages at relevant intervals via your social media

Sharing Content

A huge aspect of SEO is how your site relates to others on the web - do other sites link back to you? Are they relevant or authoritative in your niche?

There are two broad ways you can get other sites to link to you;

Grow Links Through Great Content

The first way to grow your links is by regularly producing high quality content that is of interest to your target audience. The hope is that this content is so high quality, people will want to link to and reference it.

Having said that, they have to find it first, so in addition to writing great content you have to a) promote it on your own social media channels and b) make it easy for your readers to share. (relevant buttons, encouraging them, etc). This 'natural' mode of link building can be helped along by the more assertive second approach.

Grow Links Proactively

The second way of growing your backlink profile is to actively search and ask for link placements, for example;

- Looking into where other resources in your niche have backlinks, and trying to get them to link to you
- Curating content or undertaking interviews, so owners of that content or those interviewed, have a reason to link to you
- Guest posting on other sites or blogs
- Providing resources for other sites or blogs to use (e.g. infographics, data, ebooks, etc)

Linkbuilding is difficult and requires creative thinking - at its core it is about building relationships with other (relevant) sites, so you need to know what value you can offer.

Other SEO Tips for Publishers

1. Deciding which content will be free to access for the public, and which should be behind a subscriber wall, is a question which is at the core of a publisher sites business model. However, it should be kept in mind that the more content you have free and accessible, the better it will be for your SEO. For most publishers this means a balancing act, and could mean publishing optimised introductions and excerpts for hidden content.

2. Create an account at Google WebMasterTools - so that you have access to Google's advice about your site.

3. Undertake regular SEO training for your editorial team, it is easy to forget SEO principles when you are concentrating on crafting a story or looking for inspiration.

4. Consider introducing new data types like videos and images. Videos in particular can show up in the normal search results and stand out significantly from other entries.

5. Undertake regular keyword research on your area of expertise. Language and relevance can change, so the keywords you optimise for in January might not be as relevant by the time July comes around. Regularly double check that the keywords you optimise for are still relevant, and/or that there are no big new keywords or topics you are missing out on.

6. You have probably seen in the search results that some listings include an author photo. This is eyecatching and can help with your click through rate. To set this up, your author needs to have a Google Plus account and follow these steps https://plus.google.com/authorship

7. Keep your eye on your analytics so that you know your best performing stories. Think about ways to write updated versions of those stories, do a follow up, or even create an eBook on the topic.

While all these changes will certainly help the overall SEO of your site, don't forget to keep working on those things you're already doing which are beneficial for both search engines and your readers: Providing fresh, regularly posted, high quality content.

moomu media

MooMu Media offers digital marketing consulting services including Search Engine Optimisation, Pay-Per-Click Marketing, Social Media and Web Analytics.

Our current clients include online retail, professional services, recruitment, media and finance, and we work on sites across Australia, the UK, North America, Europe and Asia.

If you need more information about any advice provided in this document, please visit our website, www.moomumedia.com, or contact us at:

+61 2 8003 5520

enquiries@moomumedia.com