

11 KEY
THINGS YOU
NEED TO
KNOW
ABOUT SEO
FOR 2021



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INTRO...

To get your website rocking the Google rankings...it is way more than just being relevant!

Understanding some key elements to support you in getting your website firing on all cylinders has got to be a good thing, whether you choose to build your website yourself or have a team build it for you.

So here are the 11 key things you need to understand about SEO in as we move into 2021.

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1. User Intent

This sounds a bit big brother, but it is basically what people are searching for, their 'search intent'. The more relevant (there is that word again) you are in your content on your pages, the more likely Google is to represent you in the return to an individual search.

Understanding and fulfilling user intent is what Google get out of bed for!

If someone searches for 'How to boil an egg?' it's pretty clear what their intent is! If you are a nutrition or foodie site, in your content and title tag's or meta descriptions you want to reference clearly 'How to boil an egg?'.

Researching tools are really good for this process, they include sites such as [Answer the Public](#) or [Google Trends](#).

User content has been categorised mainly into 4 key areas and all of these are worth considering when creating content for your site. They are:

Navigational – the user is seeking a specific site or app for example 'Microsoft365 Login' or 'Google'.

Transactional – the user is ready to buy, so seeks specific product or service with intent to buy for example 'Buy GoPro' or 'Buy iPhone X'.

Informational – the user is seeking more general information, such as 'what time is it in Sydney?' or 'Best way to write a blog' it's a search that requires more in-depth information being returned.

Commercial – the users' intent is ready to buy but not decided on brand or particular product yet for example 'Best laptop to buy' or 'Best website builders'

2. Title Tag

Title tags are one of the two most important elements of your website pages in our humble opinion...controversial for some, as yes, the content has to be bloody epic too. The reason we say this is Title Tags appear in search results returned to the user and they are clickable links – you know the blue or purple highlighted headline hyperlinks of your page.

They need to describe what your page is/does and it needs to be titled relevant to what they are searching for. Google believe title tags are often the primary piece of information that triggers a user behaviour to click on it.

Our advice...make sure they are relevant to the 'User Intent' and what people are searching, keep them short and descriptive, include target keywords and avoid using duplicate title tags.



3. Meta Description

This little baby doesn't directly affect search rankings, but it does however influence human behaviour. It is vitally important for click through rates. Here, we explain why.

These little sentences that appear under the search hyperlink 'Title Tag' give us the juice of what the page is about...usually limited to 155-160 characters meaning you have to describe what the page is about, what the user gets, that its relevant and is the solution to their search...it basically has to stimulate the interest and quickly so we click through. Make sense?

A good, simple, clear and informative meta description with a useful title tag has the staying power of [Michael Douglas](#) and [Catherine Zeta-Jones](#)...a pairing that not everyone appreciates but you can't deny it works!

4. Optimise Images

This is a massive pet hate of ours and one we see so often and so wrong! A few key pointers for optimising your images, because for the most of us, this phrase in itself is talking Swahili.

What tends to happen is you will invest a lot of time choosing the images that you like, that make the point, that tell the story...and that is great, however...?

Are you investing as much time choosing the type of image and did you even know the difference? The right image can effect page loading speed and the overall site loading speed and this has a major impact on your Google rankings organically...think about, when someone clicks your site, the magical powers of the web, WiFi and mobile data etc are working their magic to deliver a site to your smartphone...if the images are MASSIVE and take ages to load, the user experience is poor as we want everything instant...therefore Google rank your site lower!

The most commonly used file types for images are:

[JPEG](#) – great for photos and clear images

[PNG](#) – better for images with text or lines in them

[WebP](#) – is the lesser known image type and Google makes it easy to understand with their description of them...

"WebP is a modern image format that provides superior lossless and lossy compression for images on the web"

Well that's cleared that up then! Basically each of these image types compress the data within the image differently, compression can effect clarity, resolution blurriness etc and to give you an idea of size...WebP are approximately 26% smaller than PNG files and approximately 30% smaller than JPEG files. Large image files increase the size of your site and slow down the speed of your site considerably. It's worth considering, isn't it!



Other things worth considering even though a little more techie are:

Lazy loading of images – a technique that defers the loading of non-critical images, videos etc at page load time, instead those images and videos are loaded when the user gets to them...very effective process of improving site performance. Google explain it in more detail here [Google Resource – Lazy-load images and video](#)

Compress Images – you can use tools to compress the image sizes before uploading them to your site, some site builders have these built in. If you are a [WordPress](#) user you can use something like [ShortPixel](#) to do this as you build it.

A generic site for compressing PNG & JPEG files is something like [TinyPNG](#)

And if you are a Mac User...(who isn't these days!) you can use this free download tool [ImageOptim](#) which is epic for compressing JPEG's, so much so that even Google recommends it. But for PNG's stick with TinyPNG.

And finally for optimising images, always consider the [Alt Text](#) of your images. Most people save an image or have images sent to them from their photographer and the images are not typically saved as 'Adam-training-a-marketing-team-on-seo.jpeg' it would normally come through as 'DSC0042.jpeg' or if you have downloaded it from an online drive or website, sometimes it is as simple as 'Download.jpeg' and the next one gets saved as 'Download(1).jpeg' – as you can see...not very descriptive at all.

Now, if you are vision impaired as a description of that image, it is pointless. If the image is relevant to the content on the site, then title the image by saving the image with a relevant title in the first place or for ease change the alt text of the image on the website so the image may still read as 'DSC0042.jpeg' as that was the image title when you uploaded, give it an alternative description in the alt text so that Google can understand what that image is about and then can rank the photo! Look again at the example above... would it be useful to have 'Adam-training-a-marketing-team-on-seo.jpg' or another example 'training-a-team-on-seo' as that is relevant to a service that we offer and gives Google and the viewer an idea what that image is about if it cannot for whatever reason be seen.

5. Optimise Loading Speed

Slow loading sites are one of the biggest reasons why users get frustrated and the single biggest reason that they click away! Your website rankings will also drop.

A quick and easy way we have already covered if by compressing images – biggest impact on site loading speed.

Once live, checking your site with free or paid tools so that you can run a regular MOT of your site is part of its ownership. You can do this with tools such as [GTMetrix](#) or with [semrush](#) and these will



highlight areas you can focus on to improve the overall performance, such as reducing server response times and deleting unnecessary plugins.

6. Internal Links

Are often used but not thought through. We regularly see links to the contact us page and very little else. Two big reasons for using internal links and using well are:

- 1) It helps Google properly map out your site, and learn with user experience what your website is all about, the hierarchy, understanding more about the content on pages and therefore can significantly assist in Google rankings
- 2) It's a really great SEO practice to have internal links from high performing pages pointing to pages that are not doing so well

Always check regularly the validity of any links you have your site. Destinations may change, move or be removed in your site evolution and therefore pages and their titles change, so the destination link or URL may become invalid.

Regular Site MOT's and software you can run on your website can identify broken page links and 404 errors etc.

7. User Experience

Whitespace is a must here...good white space on the left and right and between sections or paragraphs helps the user comprehension by 20%, so for being easy to understand and to simply gain the users attention, whitespace is a massive assist with this.

There are many elements to user experience, some of which we have covered above, in terms of loading speed, optimising images etc and here are a couple more to consider.

Popups are the devil's child – please refrain from using them. Because the user experience is so badly affected by pop ups, Google took a decision and from 2017 have been actively penalising websites that use intrusive pop ups. If you have to use them, rely on the 'before you go' exit pop up when someone hovers near the 'X' of the close browser and make sure that what pops up engages me and stops me, then more importantly redirects me to something useful (an internal link perhaps – high performing page).

May sound a bit technical but it can be explained simply, sub headings used well help Google understand the intent in your website. We see people using H1, H2, H3. Please don't just choose them based on the font size options available. Consider the hierarchy of your site and the consider the sub headings to use on each page in their respected format.

Visual is everything with web...so if you have use words and we all need to, not just to explain and expand on what we do, but also for keyword and relevant search versus return use. That said, if you



have a process, can you create a visual of your process with steps written together with pictures to illustrate what happens. Videos, images and visual aspects are great for user experience. For example, videos embedded into your page keep the viewer on that page for longer, visuals that are easy to understand and eye catching will win over bodies of text all day long for user experience. Words help the search return remember...it is an 'And' world, so use pictures and words to engage with your audience.

8. Keywords in URL

The link, hyperlink, URL are all names for the same thing – the destination link that someone goes to. Now the title of these we've already discussed. One thing to consider however is the URL structure. This is a massively overlooked element of SEO believe it not. Most people assume that by naming the page it will automatically give you a page URL that matches, some software and web builders do, however, always worth checking as a URL that is made up of number and digits isn't going to return Jack in Google or any other search environment!

Google advise to construct your content and structure of the URLs logically so that they are searchable and intelligible to most humans.

Studies show that shorter URLs work better than longer ones and outperform them in SERPs. And always include the most relevant and targeted keywords without loading the URL too much.

9. Authoritative backlinks

Many changes have happened to all the platforms over the years and will continue to. Some elements will always remain the same and are always in some way linked to engagement. Backlinks are no different. In terms of ranking influence, backlinks are right up there and kind of always will be. The key is to ensure they are, what's considered to be authoritative backlinks.

Simply put backlinks to reputable sites that produce good content and are recognised for it.

Firstly, make sure your site has a good number of backlinks in the first place, that will massively help with Google and rankings as it massively increases your chance of ranking higher in search results. These can come from affiliate style links with business partners or links to testimonials of recognised companies (if you have worked with them obviously) or referral links in blogs like this one...as you will see, there are a number of links (text is blue or purple for hyperlink identification to show you that is clickable elsewhere. If you hover over the blue links above the webpage it is taking you to appears by your cursor).

Now to authoritative links, they are links to sites such as [Social Media Examiner](#) or [Hubspot](#) but could also be sites like [BBC News](#) or the [FT](#) as you could never imagine them putting out poor advertising or spammy stuff right, the source is good and strong and reliable, therefore the chances are highly increased that your back link to them will be classified as an authoritative one.



That is the basic premise, now choosing authoritative links that are relevant to your product, service or content that you have shared now brings the power of backlinks to your site. There is a real science in this, and software that albeit can be an investment, when ready can be excellent return on your investment. If you want a cheap and or free hack, take a look at businesses in your industry that you admire, that have budget and see what they are doing to backlink to sites – basically your competitors can be showing you what works!

10. Long Form Content

In short, this blog!

Being serious, not just this blog. Pages with long form content have converted well for years, in terms of time on page, time on site, ability to provide lots of keywords in human type format so very useful for relevant search returns (showing you in the returns of what others type into search engines).

Humans have always loved stories, so if you can write engaging content or you invest with a copywriter that fully understands human behaviour as well as the chosen subject matter, then you are onto a winner.

Capture our attention + nurture that interest = conversion rate increase!

Long form posts perform better than short on Google without question. Long form, we are talking posts, pages, with 3000 words or more on average get three times more traffic, three and half more backlinks than short form posts and 4 times the amount of shares! Allow that in for a moment.... (this blog at this point is 2581 words!).

Its US, YOU & ME that sit here worrying that longer posts won't get read, people will get bored or they will click away...Google tells us a very different story. There is a vast amount of research and evidence to correlate search performance and content length! See, we told you size does matter!

This is also where we need to consider [Long tail and short tail keywords](#) in our content production as rich content, valuable content that is a lovely blend of keywords to your service and logical to the user who is searching.

Google will always want you to lean on the side of user over SEO and therefore will favour you when your content delivers what the user is looking for.

11. Keep Up to Date

Obviously, this has to be in there, but that doesn't mean you need to sit up and watch pacific time for that webinar from search HQ, it does mean that your site is your responsibility as the business owner. If it is out of date, underperforming, broken in places, YOU need to work closely with your digital team (internal or external) to ensure that you can continue to remain high in the rankings...what worked in 2010 doesn't work now, what works in 2020 may not be working in 3-4 years' time.



Treat yourself...book onto some workshops that we run, get in touch and ask us more or simply reach out and have a confidential conversation if you are not happy with the results that you are getting currently. Having a website is easy...getting it rocking and keeping it rocking, that is a whole different story! #bemoreskineerino

Final, final thought – [Hashtags!](#) When you start to share your stuff socially, keep up to date with the latest [banned hashtags](#)...yes this is a thing and yes the platforms can and will shut your account if they feel you are using their platform for the wrong reasons, and yes hashtags have fallen fowl of this...some of the banned ones will really surprise you.

Until the next time!