

SEO “Cheat Sheet”

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SEO stands for **S**earch **E**ngine **O**ptimization. It is a set of techniques that increase the rank of your website so it appears as high as possible on the search results page of major search engines, especially Google. The goal is to increase your website’s visibility to generate as much web traffic as possible. It is as much a science as it is an art and it should be part of your online strategy.

OVERVIEW

There are many components that go into SEO. Search engines like Google use their own secret algorithms to determine where your site will rank when someone searches for certain keywords. The exact way these algorithms work is not publicly known and always changing. However, there are several important factors to focus on that will help you improve your website’s ranking (in no particular order):

- 1) **Meta Tags:** These are the code tags behind a web page – particularly the page title – that search engines use to help rank and describe that page (explained in detail below).
- 2) **Content:** This includes the headlines, text, images, captions, video, etc and even the URL that make up a web page. Rich and frequently updated content increases your rank as does content offering depth and expertise.
- 3) **Popularity:** Incoming links, the number of pages in your site, monthly traffic, and more determine your “footprint” on the web and therefore its importance which contributes to its search engine rank.
- 4) **Security:** Websites that do not use an HTTPS connection, contain malware or are the origin of spam will automatically get their ranking lowered or may even be delisted. Also, sites that try to “trick” search engines into giving them a higher rank with misleading content or text that is packed with keywords that are not readable by a human will actually have their rankings lowered.
- 5) **Relevance:** An often overlooked factor is if your site contains what the user is looking for based on the keywords they entered during their search. Physical location can also be extremely important if the person is looking for a business nearby, for example “Chinese food near me.” The more closely the content and focus of your site matches what the user is looking for – plus your proximity to them, if relevant – the more likely your site will rank high in that person’s search results.
- 6) **Submission:** Search engines need to know that your site exists and should be asked to “crawl” your site (ie, see what new content is available) on a regular basis. Submitting your website to the search engines frequently (monthly is recommended) is an important part of achieving a good rank. In addition, providing a site map ensures that all links will be followed so all your pages are discovered.

- 7) **Mobile:** These days, sites must be responsive – optimized for both desktop and mobile devices – or they will rank poorly. Web visitors frequently use smart phones and tablets, so sites must display well on these devices as much as they do on larger desktop screens.
- 8) **Magic:** There are numerous other factors involved in achieving high search rankings. You may hear of services that “guarantee” a certain ranking such as Top 10, but there is no way to consistently do this as the algorithms used by search engines are proprietary and ever changing. While it can be a mysterious topic, by doing the basics right, you can achieve and maintain good rankings.

TAKING ACTION

A lot of time – and money – can be spent trying to achieve better search rankings with mixed results. At any point, search algorithms can change and so can your rankings. Our recommendation is not to be tempted by companies promising specific rankings, as they can never guarantee results because those rankings are out of their control.

Despite this caveat, it is still important to build and maintain your site with SEO in mind. Just like you wouldn't build a store without putting up signs, you need to drive traffic and visitors to your website and the most common way to do so is via search engines: they are the path to your virtual doorstep and an important way to attract customers.

META TAGS

Meta tags are lines of code in your web page that help search engines make sense of your content. By taking the time to create targeted meta tags, you can improve your rankings.

Note: Meta tags should not include a quote mark (“) within tags since this is used to start and end the actual tag itself. If a quote mark is absolutely necessary, use the HTML entity code equivalent of " but note this will not appear in search engine listings. For more information, see: <http://theseosystem.com/quotes-in-meta-tags-description/>

Title

The title is the only meta tag that you can see from your web browser without viewing the source code. It is the title that appears at the top of your browser window or tab. Not only does it act as a label for the window and for any bookmarks that may be created, it helps search engines understand the content of that page.

For the title meta tag of your home page, start by listing the most important words and / or phrases related to your website. The total title length should not exceed 70 characters, and the most important words should be within the first 55 characters. Avoid redundancy and emphasize what's most unique about your website and the content,

services, or products you offer. If location is important, add that to your list, but note that most search engines will use other indicators to determine your geographic location.

Keep in mind you are targeting the search phrases and words people will most likely enter to find your site. Make sure you list the phrases in order of priority, with the most important appearing first. Most likely, you should also include the name of your business or website, usually at the beginning or the end of your list. You can separate the keywords and phrases with commas or spaces.

Title example (from my own website): *Advanced PHP Developer, Custom eCommerce, Custom WordPress – New Media Design*

Description

The description is hidden code that search engines display under your weblinks on their search results page, so it's important to summarize what your site offers.

For the description meta tag, write 1-2 sentences that explain what your site is about and / or what your business offers. It should be clear and concise and help differentiate your site from your competitors. Limit the length to 160 characters.

Description example: *New Media Design develops robust web applications, eCommerce systems, and custom WordPress sites. We are PHP and MySQL experts and we customize our development to your exact needs, within a reasonable timeframe and budget.*

Keywords

Keywords are also hidden code that search engines no longer put much emphasis on, therefore they are optional.

Similar to your Title, this is a list of searchable phrases, separated by commas. The difference is that this list can be a lot longer (between 20 and 100 words) than your title and it's OK to have some redundancy. For example, you would include both "web developer" and "website developer" whereas the title tag would use just one of these phrases to be concise. You may want to create this list first and then edit it down to create the Title list.

Keywords example: *PHP expert, PHP developer, PHP guru, custom web developer, PHP programmer, custom ecommerce developer, ecommerce websites, custom shopping carts, ecommerce developer, WordPress developer, custom WordPress, WordPress with ecommerce, Stripe integration, PayPal integration, PHP, MySQL, HTML, Javascript, JQuery, CSS, AJAX, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Philly, John Contarino, UI, UX*

NOTE: Our NMD System offers an easy to use SEO Manager which allow you to assign the above meta tags universally to your entire site or on a page by page basis. In

addition, our eCommerce module automatically generates meta tags for your product pages based on your product details.

More Information

When creating your meta tags, check out your competitors' websites (as well as other sites in general) and see what they are using, especially those that rank higher than you on search engines like Google. The easiest way to view meta tags for any website is to right-click on a web page and choose the View Source (or View Page Source) option. Then look towards the top of the page for this code:

Title

```
<title>How To Use HTML Meta Tags - Search Engine Watch</title>
```

Description

```
<meta name="description" content="Meta tags aren't a magical solution, but they will help ensure your website appears on search engine results pages. This tutorial explains what HTML meta tags are, which meta tags matter, and how to avoid mistakes when implementing meta tags." />
```

Robots

One meta tag you don't want on your important pages is this:

```
<meta name="robots" content="noindex, nofollow">
```

This tells search engines NOT to crawl your site. Some websites, including those built with WordPress, have the option to "discourage" search engines from crawling a site. This is usually done when a site is in development, but when a site is live, search engines should be allowed to crawl your site.

Note that WordPress gives you the option to "Discourage search engines from indexing this site." This can be checked when your site is in development but should be unchecked when it is live.

To learn more, here's a good basic overview of meta tags:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2067564/How-To-Use-HTML-Meta-Tags>

CONTACT US

If you would like us to guide you through the world of SEO and help your site rank higher, please contact us for a free initial phone consultation. We can help you create optimized meta tags, improve the structure and content of your website, and submit your site to the search engines on a regular basis. Please be sure to mention this document when you contact us and you will receive a 20% discount off of all initial services.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some additional links you may find useful:

The Beginner's Guide to Search Engine Visibility

<https://www.monsterinsights.com/search-engine-visibility-beginners-guide/>

Why Is Metadata Important?

<http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/91427-SEO-Why-Is-Metadata-Important>

7 Advanced SEO Concepts

[https://moz.com/blog/7-advanced-seo-concepts?](https://moz.com/blog/7-advanced-seo-concepts?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_content=7_advanced_seo_concepts&utm_campaign=blog_post)

[utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_content=7_advanced_seo_concepts&utm_campaign=blog_post](https://moz.com/blog/7-advanced-seo-concepts?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_content=7_advanced_seo_concepts&utm_campaign=blog_post)

Ingenious Ways To Increase Web Traffic

<http://www.quora.com/What-are-some-of-the-most-ingenious-ways-to-increase-traffic-to-a-website>

Google's Mobile Friendly Update

<http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/84702-SEO-How-Google's-Mobile-friendly-Update-Affects-Performance>

SEO: Content Optimization Checklist

<http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/97596-SEO-Content-Optimization-Checklist>

26 Free SEO Tools for Merchants

<http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/97619-26-Free-SEO-Tools-for-Merchants>