



How to Get the SEO-Driven Revenue You're Missing



Contents

- Introduction** 3
 - Outline a Process..... 3
 - Learn from the Experts 3

- Why You Need to Pay Attention to the Changing SEO Landscape**..... 4
 - Algorithms Continually Change..... 4
 - Complacency Can Cost You 4

- A Review of the Basics: Top SEO Principles**..... 5
 - SEO Terms You Should Know 5
 - Types of SEO Activities 8

- Two SEO Tools You Need to Set Up Correctly Before Doing Anything Else** 9
 - Google Analytics 9
 - Google Search Console 10
 - Exploring Additional WMTs 10

- Six Steps to Improving the SEO of Your E-commerce Site** 11
 - 1. Decide Which Pages Deserve the Greatest Impact, and Then Focus! 11
 - 2. Create User-friendly Pages, Each Focused on One Topic 11
 - 3. Increase Positive Signals and Reduce Negative Signals 12
 - 4. Use Third-party Tools to Further Improve 12
 - 5. Consider the Power of User-generated Content..... 13
 - 6. Consider User-generated SEO to Boost Quality Traffic 13

- Major SEO “No-no’s” That Can Damage Your Site’s Reputation** 14
 - Unnatural Links 14
 - Dealing with Penalties Due to Unnatural Links..... 15
 - Duplicate Content 15
 - Doorway Pages 15
 - Thin/Shallow Content 15

- The SEO-driven Revenue Most Retailers Miss Out On** 16
 - How Site Champion User-generated SEO Works 16
 - Strengths of the User-generated Approach 17
 - Strengths of the Learning-based Approach 17
 - What Site Champion Is NOT 17

- Summary and Next Steps** 18

Introduction

As a retail executive or e-commerce professional, your goal is to produce more revenue. You want site traffic that is high in quantity, but also in quality – you need it to convert. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is one practice out of many in your tool belt, but unless SEO is your full-time job, it's nearly impossible to keep up with the constant changes that affect your site's rankings on search engine results pages (SERPs). Plus, it can be difficult to know which SEO-related activities can drive more revenue without the possibility of causing damage to your site's reputation. That's where this white paper can help.

Outline a Process

You can't become an SEO expert in an hour, but you can identify what's possible with SEO and outline a process for improvement. Whether you have an in-house expert, use an outside agency, or need to learn how to perform basic SEO tasks on your own, this paper will help you determine where you want to go with SEO and provide the main steps to get there. Topics covered include:

- Why you need to pay attention to the changing SEO landscape
- A review of the basics: Top SEO principles
- Two SEO tools you need to set up correctly before doing anything else
- Six steps to improving the SEO of your e-commerce site
- Major SEO “no-no’s” that can damage your site’s reputation
- The SEO-driven revenue most retailers miss out on

Learn from the Experts

At SLI Systems, our search and SEO experts continually monitor and improve the on-site search of hundreds of client sites in the e-commerce industry. With more than 17 years in business, we have gained unique insight into SEO best practices and opportunities for online retailers. We share some of our best advice in the following pages.

Why You Need to Pay Attention to the Changing SEO Landscape

At the point when you think your SEO efforts are achieving exactly what you want, don't stop too long to congratulate yourself. In SEO, the one constant is change. Internet search engines continually change algorithms to better discern the quality of content on your site and its relevance to a user's search request.

Algorithms Continually Change

Google leads the way with ongoing algorithm updates. In the past several years, Google updates have made it easier to match an internet search query with content that is not only relevant in topic, but also relevant in location, type of device used to search, and other factors.

The good news about these updates is this: Today, a high-quality site has greater potential to fare well in search engine ranking position without resorting to tricky methods like link buying or keyword stuffing (which now are likely to earn penalties rather than points).



If your e-commerce site meets the following criteria, you have an excellent starting point to succeed with your search engine rankings:

- Your products and content are relevant to the search phrases shoppers actually use
- Your site is mobile-friendly, and your mobile pages are content rich
- Many highly credible and relevant sites (e.g. news media, associations, other strong brands) link to yours
- Your page load times are sufficiently fast
- You score well in engagement signals such as bounce rate, time on site, and pages visited per session
- Your site is technical SEO compliant and follows current best practices (e.g. secure, using structured data)

Complacency Can Cost You

Even if you are at the top of your game at the moment and your site performs well, you can't be complacent about SEO. As search engines change algorithms, even small adjustments can have a significant impact on your rankings for individual search engine results pages. Plus, negative SEO might affect you temporarily – or permanently.

It's critical to stay on top of the best practices in SEO because you can be sure your competitors are doing everything they can to try to rank higher than you. The more you know about SEO and what it can help you to achieve – as well as its limitations – the better you can judge for yourself which SEO advice and tools you can trust and which ones you should steer clear of.

A Review of the Basics: Top SEO Principles

SEO Terms You Should Know

If SEO is what you do for a living, you'll know these terms. But for those working in e-commerce with only partial SEO knowledge, here's a primer on the basics. It's not overly complex, but there are some main principles you need to know.

SEO

Search engine optimization. This definition from [Moz](#), a leading SEO company, describes SEO well: "Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to your website through organic search engine results" ([What Is SEO](#)). SEO comprises a variety of activities with many distinct disciplines. To find out more on the nuances of what SEO is and isn't, check out this [Search Engine Land](#) post.

SERP

Search engine results page. SERPs are the pages that display search results provided by an internet search engine (e.g., Google, Bing) after a visitor enters a search query. Your goal is to achieve a high position for your company's pages on SERPs by using SEO. With a high position, search engine users see your pages, click on your company's result snippets, and ultimately land on your site.

SEM

Search engine marketing. A marketing strategy that targets internet search engines, SEM results in paid ads that appear at the top of SERPs with the goal of higher user clickthroughs (e.g. Google AdWords, Google Product Listing Ads, Bing Ads).

Ranking Factors

Ranking factors are used to determine your SERP position. Search engines use many ranking factors including basic document-to-query relevance, language semantics, number of backlinks, site speed, anchor texts in internal and external links, engagement signals (bounce rate, time on site, pages visited per session), mobile friendliness, and general domain reputation.

Index Size

Index size refers to the number of pages you have listed in internet search engines. There are several variations to index size including (1) the number of pages the search engine knows about; (2) the number of pages it has **crawled**, or explored and brought data back to the internet search engine; and (3) the number of pages shown on SERPs that the search engine sends its users to. The first number is often significantly higher than the third. This discrepancy can result in internet search engines getting confused about which pages to rank and which to ignore. It's in your best interest to keep all index size variations as small as possible but still have pages for all terms you think you can rank well for.

Bot

Also referred to as a "spider" or "crawler," a bot is a type of software used to crawl your site. Bots are used to gain understanding of an entire site and its individual pages. There are desktop-specific and mobile-specific bots. Well-behaved bots identify themselves with a unique user agent string that is logged as part of the page request in your web server's access logs. Malicious bots often use no or invalid user agent strings to avoid detection.

Snippet/Rich Snippet

The listing below the title on a SERP is a result snippet; other details added to the snippet (e.g. review stats, price, availability) make it a Rich Snippet. A Rich Snippet causes your listing to be larger and predominant on the SERP. Rich Snippets are desirable because the larger your SERP listing is, the farther down your competitors' listings appear. Combined, these effects mean it's more likely your link will catch a searcher's attention.

Rich Snippet Markup (RSM)

Rich Snippet Markup is elements of code added to the HTML of webpages showing products or other information. RSM is invisible to a site visitor and targeted specifically at internet search engine bots. It allows bots to better understand the information shown on the webpages. If the information on the page is well understood and the page is considered RSM-relevant, the internet search engine rewards the page with a Rich Snippet or by improving page ranking.

DA, or Domain Authority

“Domain Authority” (DA) is a term coined by Moz. Though widely used for years, after persistent argument from Google that DA doesn’t truly exist the SEO community has largely stopped using this term as a ranking signal. DA helped explain why two equally-relevant pages on different domains ended up with different SERP rankings. DA was used to indicate that one of the two – the higher-ranking domain – was more “authoritative” for the search term. While the term DA may not be used as a ranking signal any more, it’s important to know that brand-building SEO activities still aim to improve the authority of an entire domain for a particular industry. As a result, the term is still used though in a less formal capacity.

PA, or Page Authority

Page Authority is a term also coined by Moz and is still widely used by the SEO community. PA is a metric predicting how well a given webpage is likely to rank in Google’s search results for a specific search phrase. A collection of page-level ranking factors determines PA. The same page will have different PAs relative to different search phrases.

Penguin / Panda / Hummingbird / Pigeon / Fred / Mobile First

These are a series of major algorithm updates from Google focusing on different aspects of ranking webpages.

Penguin focused on identifying and rewarding sites with a high number of legitimate inbound site links, while also identifying and penalizing sites with “unnatural” inbound links. Unnatural in this context means the likelihood of these links existing because they were intentionally placed by a human is very small or nonexistent.

Panda focused on identifying and boosting high-quality pages. It allowed Google to reward pages with highly-relevant content and penalize those using black hat practices (e.g., content spinning or keyword stuffing) to try to gain a higher SERP ranking for irrelevant content.

Hummingbird focused on measuring the semantic relevance of webpage content in relation to search queries. It focused on “intent” versus exact keyword matching. This update was less about literal search phrase-to-content matching and more about ranking content that helped searchers achieve their goals.

Pigeon focused on identifying localized content and giving higher rankings to it when searched from a corresponding region.

Fred received its name [in jest](#) from a Google Webmaster Trends Analyst after Google refused to confirm an algorithm update had occurred and was even less willing to classify it as related to either Panda (content quality) or Penguin (link profile). Fred, which is actually a group of algorithms, was targeting low-quality content sites – sites primarily written with the sole purpose of ranking well.

Mobile first refers to a long-awaited update from Google that changes the way pages are ranked. Before implementing their mobile-first strategy, Google ranked websites using the desktop version, and mobile sites “inherited” the ranking determined by the desktop process. Anticipating a shift in how users would search — mobile overtaking desktop — Google announced plans in 2012 to change the way it crawled the web through mobile-first indexing. In other words, mobile pages would be crawled and ranked first, and desktop versions would inherit the ranking signals created from the mobile content. In April 2018, Google began rolling out this “mobile first” update.

Meta Description Tag

An HTML attribute that summarizes a webpage’s content in one paragraph. Frequently used in result snippets on SERPs, a well-written meta description tag is important for gaining high clickthrough rates. It should be unique for each page on your site to improve efficiency. If written well, meta description also decreases the likelihood of “click-backs” as it sets the tone for visitors clicking through to your page from SERPs.

Title Tag

HTML attributes used on SERPs to provide an accurate and succinct description of a page’s content. The page title tag is typically used by internet search engines as the link text (or anchor text) of the result title on the SERP. Some popular formats include:

- Version 1: primary targeted keyword, secondary targeted keyword, your brand name Example: Fashion Jewelry | JewelsRUs
- Version 2: call to action, primary targeted keyword, your brand name Example: Explore Fashion Jewelry at JewelsRUs

200 / 301 / 302 / 404 / 410 / 500 / Soft 404

These are response codes your web server sends, sometimes with the requested webpage and sometimes instead of the requested webpage.

200 – Appropriately returned content. It means the page was returned as requested.

301 – Permanent redirect. When you move content, a 301 passes page authority.

302 – Temporary redirect. Used for temporarily moved content. Historically, a 302 did not pass page authority. However, in 2016 Google representatives announced a 302 can pass authority. As a result, some internet search engines may treat 302s like 301s. Until this becomes definitive, however, it is better to return 302s when temporarily moving content.

400 or 4xx (“xx” indicates a number between “00” and “99”) – Problematic page requests. 400 codes are returned as a result of client-side request problems. The most frequently used 400 code is a 404: “page not found.” In this example, a client requested a page that doesn’t exist; the server would return it, but it’s not there.

404 – Page Not Found. Used when a client requests a page the server doesn’t have or no longer has.

410 – Page Permanently Gone. Used when requested pages have been permanently removed. The code is designed to help internet search engines de-index pages faster.

500 or 5xx – Internal server errors. Used when the server, not a client, is assumed to be the cause of the issue.

Soft 404 – This is not a web server response code but instead a Google Search Console crawl error category. This code is returned when a Google bot crawls a page for which it received a 200-response code (appropriately returned content) but finds a “no results page.” Google categorizes these pages as “soft 404s” instead of 200s to lower the ranking of these less desirable pages. Soft 404s should be avoided as they indicate poor technical SEO compliance.

WMT, or Webmaster Tools

Webmaster Tools (WMT) are provided by internet search engines such as Google (Google Search Console – GSC) and Bing (Bing Webmaster Tools – BWT) and allow webmasters to check the performance of their sites, monitor any crawling and indexation issues, test aspects affecting indexation, and apply configuration according to how internet search engines treat site information. Understanding the information provided by WMTs is crucial to understanding the performance of your site.

White Hat / Black Hat / Gray Hat

Denotes the level of compliance aimed for during SEO activities.

- White hat SEO attempts to adhere to the terms of service as laid out by internet search engines. This may include staying clear of practices that might be frowned upon even if they are not currently considered a violation of the rules.
- Black hat SEO doesn’t concern itself with the rules of internet search engines. The sole purpose of the practice is to increase traffic now, even at the risk of the site getting banned. Black hat SEO includes activities done to damage competitors’ reputations with the intent of improving the rank of self-owned content.
- Gray hat SEO includes the large number of practices that are neither white nor black.

Types of SEO Activities

There are various SEO disciplines or activities, many of which have a number of significant sub-disciplines. Here's a brief summary of SEO disciplines and how they may be used to improve SEO on e-commerce sites. Not all activities need to be executed all the time, but it is a good idea to consider the below list as a checklist when working toward optimizing your website as combining multiple activities increases your chances of success.

On-page and off-page SEO

On-page SEO is any activity, on individual pages or the entire site, which is completed in an effort to boost ranking in internet search engines (e.g. optimizing h1 tags). Off-site SEO is not aimed at the site directly but will cause ranking improvements indirectly (e.g. link acquisition, brand management, etc.).

Technical SEO

This encompasses any activity performed to ensure the site is technically sound so that bots can crawl it efficiently and effectively. Technical SEO is mostly on-page SEO and excludes content creation.

Local and international SEO

Local SEO focuses on ensuring high rankings for searches with local intent (e.g. "restaurants near me"). International SEO focuses on sites with multiple geographic locations and possibly different languages. The aims are for the site to rank well in each target market – but deliver local content first – and to avoid duplicate content issues.

Content creation and marketing

This discipline focuses on identifying relevant topics, creating highly engaging site content, and ensuring this content is reaching target audiences. Content creators should keep in mind that great content doesn't always yield immediate SEO results. As an example, it can take years of quality blogging to establish a new site's authority. Content must be created and marketed with a specific audience in mind to provide a tangible SEO benefit.

Site analysis/audits

This includes looking at specific metrics to identify why your site or competitors' sites are ranking or not ranking well for particular phrases or topics. Site audits can be comprehensive or target specific areas of the site (e.g., technical SEO compliance, link profiles, duplicate content).

Competitive analysis

This includes the practice of understanding why competitors' websites rank well for particular phrases or topics. This information is valuable for identifying how you can rank higher than your competition. It might also help you understand the level of effort required to outrank your competition on particular phrases or topics.

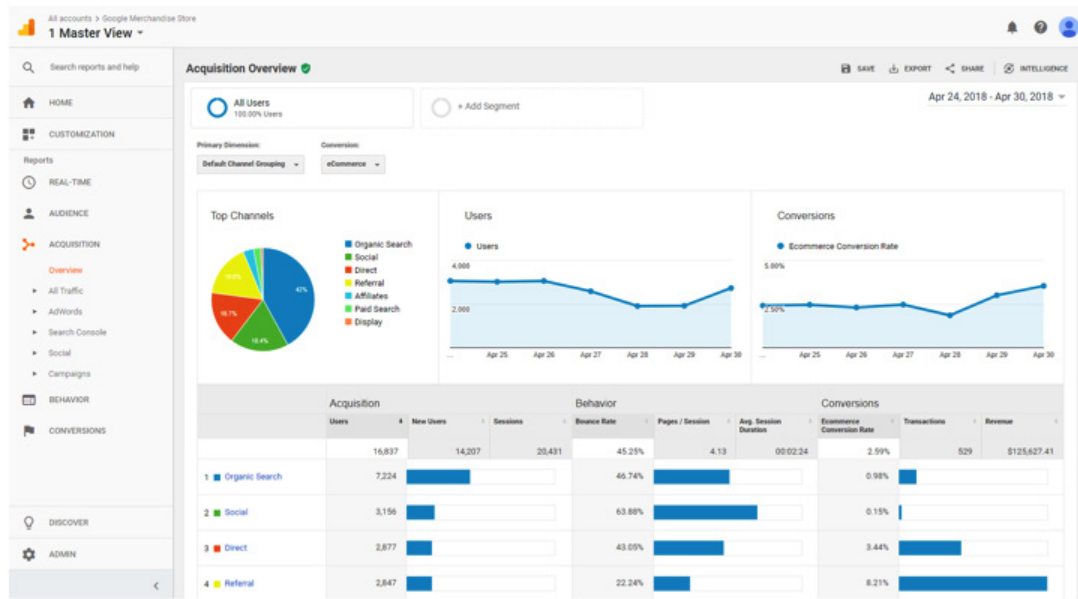
Brand management

This is the practice of ensuring your own brand is perceived well in all target markets or market segments. The higher the brand awareness for your business, the stronger your brand's authority.

Two SEO Tools You Need to Set Up Correctly Before Doing Anything Else

For baseline measurement of your site traffic and SEO performance, you should have Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools accounts. Your webmaster may have already set up one or both of these tools, but you will want to be aware of their capabilities and ensure they are working efficiently.

Google Analytics



Google Analytics, when set up properly, provides valuable insight on your site's performance.

Google Analytics (GA) provides valuable insight on your site's performance by offering all the basic knowledge you need to track your site traffic and evaluate factors that affect your SEO. When set up properly, GA provides analytics on:

Search Traffic – amount and quality of traffic coming from search engines, including visitor demographics and how they found your site

Keyword Effectiveness – which keywords are driving traffic and conversions

Content Performance – which site pages and landing pages are driving the most traffic

Sales and Conversions – which search results and pages users click on that result in a sale

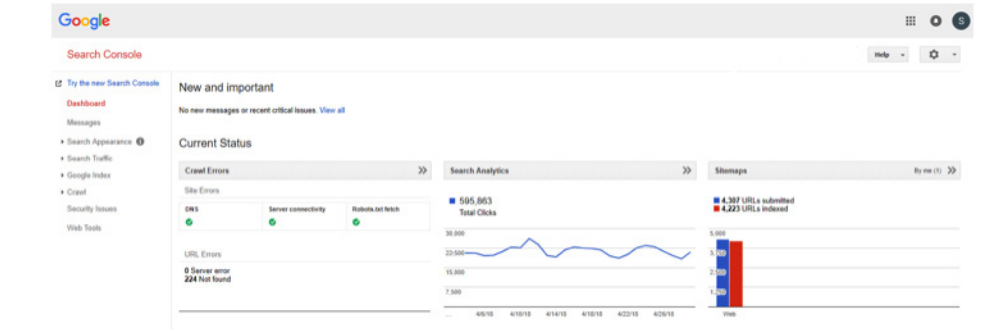
Engagement Metrics – which parts of your site have the best/worst engagement metrics

Rich Segmentation of Traffic – specific segmentation of metrics (e.g. segmenting metrics by device type)

To get the most out of your GA reports, take advantage of Google's comprehensive collection of online help ([GA Help Center](#)) that includes steps for installing a tracking code, identifying goals for what you want to track, linking to AdWords, AdSense, Google Search Console, optimizing keywords, and tracking e-commerce performance against keywords and marketing campaigns.

For Google Analytics to be effective, you need to filter out fake traffic from bots. And it's a good idea to use other analytics tools to double check your GA numbers. Because getting the most out of GA requires careful set up, it pays to research how to avoid common GA mistakes. You might find posts such as [6 Mistakes to Avoid When Setting up and Using Google Analytics](#) (Moz) or [12 Common Mistakes with Google Analytics](#) (Ryte Magazine) helpful.

Google Search Console



GSC goes beyond GA to provide insight on how your site is viewed by search engines in organic search.

Google Search Console (GSC) helps you monitor factors affecting your SEO so you can stay on top of your site's SEO performance. Used properly, GSC will notify you of issues like:

Broken links (404s) – GSC provides an inventory of the top pages no longer returning content. Once notified, you can improve SEO by changing the content linking to your page, recreating the missing page, or redirecting the link to existing content.

Soft 404s – GSC shows you pages receiving this rank-lowering crawl error. If your site receives a soft 404, ensure a proper http response is returned to “no-index” the page. Use a “404” if the page no longer exists. Or change the content to make it clearer to the search engine that it is meant to be indexed.

Additional crawl errors – In case of server errors, crawl errors may be hard to track down since they can be intermittent, caused by high server load, or the result of security/gateway technology. GSC helps you find them.

HTML improvement suggestions – GSC points out inappropriate title tags or meta descriptions by showing the offending pages making it easy to check and fix the issues.

Mobile-friendliness issues – GSC provides a list of “mobile-friendliness” violations along with a list of pages violating best mobile practices. GSC lets you check the status of live pages to confirm if an issue still exists and, after corrected, verify it's been updated to “mobile friendly.”

Structured data issues – GSC gives you a list of your site's structured data issues so you can more readily fix them. For invalid markup errors, counts are shown with a list of offending pages. To improve SEO, fix issues quickly and use [Google's structured data testing tool](#) to confirm the data is now valid.

Fetch as Google – This powerful GSC tool shows you a page the way Google sees it. To use it, select “Fetch and Render” as well as the “Mobile-Smartphone” renderer. You will then be able to view the page as Google search views it. You'll see the impact of blocked resources and can compare the bots' view with the human experience. For top SEO results, ensure the page appeals to both humans and bots!

New console reports – GSC has new reports to help users improve SEO. The “index coverage” report reveals issues with indexing for your complete set of pages, and the “excluded section” report provides pages not indexed and the reasons they are not included in Google's index of searchable and returnable results.

In addition to the above, Google Search Console includes many other useful features. To take advantage of everything GSC has to offer, click through all menu items and explore the features of each tool.

Exploring Additional WMTs

With recent changes to traffic distribution, it's important to consider other tools such as Bing's Webmaster Tools, which shows data for both Bing and Yahoo!. To decide which WMT your company should focus on first, check your Google Analytics statistics. You'll gain insight into which organic search sources drive the most traffic to your specific site. Using this information, you can set up the most relevant WMT account to boost your company's SEO.

While you don't want to ignore other WMTs, it's likely you'll want to set up GSC first to get a handle on any issues and set a strong SEO baseline. SEO expert Bruce Clay has a post that explains the [GSC setup process](#) in detail. Or you can get yourself started with [Google](#).

Six Steps to Improving the SEO of Your E-commerce Site

If you still question whether SEO is critical to your business or whether your SEO needs improvement, think about how often you click to see the second or third page of search results on Google, Bing, or Yahoo! If you're not in position 1, 2, or 3 on the first page of results, then you need help. Here's what you can do:

1. Decide Which Pages Deserve the Greatest Impact, and Then Focus!

Start by looking in Webmaster Tools to determine which pages meet these two criteria: 1) they already have a high number of impressions and 2) they already rank relatively high on SERPs. By focusing your initial SEO efforts on the stronger pages with the most potential, you can more easily drive up revenue with fewer tweaks. Plus, when you focus first on a smaller section of your site, it makes it easier to monitor the progress. You can compare the ranking of those pages before and after your changes to see what's most effective.

Since improving SEO takes time and careful attention, you want to make sure the improvements you've made to one set of site pages are successful before moving on. Traffic and revenue gains from the first round of changes will then justify further changes to other areas of the site.

You can effectively apply this technique on the product descriptions used for product detail pages and product listing pages. Often multiple e-commerce sites use the same manufacturer-provided item descriptions, causing the product descriptions on these sites to be treated as duplicate content. When you create unique descriptions for your best performing products, those product pages can stick out from the crowd and achieve higher rankings. You can continue to use manufacturer-provided descriptions for remaining products. Start small and then scale once you are confident this approach has proven its value.

Remember, you don't have to be perfect with SEO – there's no score, just a ranking. You only need to be better than your competition, and you win!

2. Create User-friendly Pages, Each Focused on One Topic

A well-ranked webpage must have quality content that is focused on one particular topic, with a headline and a URL that reflects the topic and content of the page. If your page content is clearly understood by most readers and concise – containing just enough detail to be understandable but not repetitive – then it is probably of reasonable quality. Both the page title and URL should use keywords that accurately reflect the topic of the page.

Also, it's important to make the URL user-friendly. Here are some basic principles:

- Minimize length to fewer than 100 characters in case users want to copy and paste or even remember it.
- Use real words, not numbers or special characters.
- Remove articles like “the,” “and,” and “an.”
- Use hyphens to separate words.
- Be consistent in whether you use lowercase, uppercase, or camel case words in your URLs. Whichever you choose, follow the same style for all.
- Steer clear of URL query strings – optional URL suffixes separated from the main URL by a question mark. E-commerce platforms sometimes use URL query strings for pagination, sorts, and refinements. But more often than not, URL query strings are a recipe for trouble. If your platform requires the use of URL query strings for important pages, be sure to distinguish between important and non-important pages. And make certain you don't allow internet search engine bots to index these pages.

Another important principle in creating user-friendly URLs is to avoid issues with canonicalization, which can arise when multiple URLs direct to the same webpage. Home pages, for example, can be called up by using any of the following structures:

- <http://sitename.com>
- <http://www.sitename.com>
- <https://www.sitename.com>
- <http://www.sitename.com/index.php> or <http://www.sitename.com/index.htm> or <http://www.sitename.com/index.html>

However, you want to choose one preferred URL for each page and have the others use a [canonical tag](#). Otherwise, your page authority for these pages is likely to diminish, which negatively impacts your SEO. Generally speaking, canonicalization issues are considered bad website design, and once they are spotted by internet search engine bots, it will negatively impact the rankings of the entire site. It is common for duplicate content issues to be canonicalization issues in disguise (see section on “Major SEO No-no’s” for more on duplicate content).

3. Increase Positive Signals and Reduce Negative Signals

Once your analytics, Webmaster Tools, and site pages (and their URLs) are properly set up, it’s time to monitor, tweak, and repeat on a regular basis. Your Webmaster Tools will become your best friend, as they offer insight into how you can increase the positive signals and reduce the negative signals that will affect your site’s SEO.

Positive signals to watch and improve include:

Mobile friendliness – The degree to which your site is deemed “mobile friendly” affects your SEO. With the advent of Google’s “mobile first” initiative, mobile friendliness is now significant ranking factor in determining a page’s position on the SERP and cannot be ignored. Mobile first means that even Google searches conducted on desktop devices display results *based on the visible content of the mobile versions a web page*. It’s clear the mobile friendliness of your pages is a key factor in the success of your SEO strategy. As part of their WMT offering, Google provides a [quick test](#) that reviews your URL and reports whether or not Google considers the page mobile friendly.

Keyword rankings – When your site contains relevant, quality content related to search phrases frequently used by visitors of internet search engines, then these are positive signals for your SEO. Use WMT to see which keywords and pages rank highest; use this information to determine which content on your site is most influential. Avoid the temptation to pack more of those high-ranking keywords into every page of your site – this could backfire and send out negative signals. Instead, use the keyword data to guide your content development and focus.

Links from other sites to yours – The links you naturally earn from sites with high domain authority (like when you’re mentioned in an e-commerce industry article) equate to positive signals that increase your rankings. However, resist the urge to outright ask publications or associations to add a link to your site – Google has mysterious ways to discern whether a link is simply requested or actually earned. Instead, create standout blogs and provide valuable industry news through social media and PR efforts. When you deliver information that others want to share, you truly earn links that boost your overall SEO efforts.

4. Use Third-party Tools to Further Improve

There are hundreds of third-party tools available to further improve your SEO. When you want to take your SEO further than Steps 1-3, take a look at a few of these resources to see what might work well for you. Also, don’t forget to look at what third-party tools your direct competitors are using – if they’re more successful than your site in SEO, it’s a good idea to know what they’re doing to get there.

Here are a few third-party SEO tools that are popular:

Moz, SEM Rush, Search Metrics

Several inexpensive, powerful tools that track your ranking of keywords over periods of time include [Moz](#), [SEM Rush](#) and [Search Metrics](#). These tools can also show you when a competitor started a campaign that targets your keywords.

SpyFu

For between \$33 and \$299 per month (prices as of mid-2018), [SpyFu](#) shows you your competitors' most profitable keywords and ads. This information offers insight into their success so you can build a strategy to beat them at it!

Screaming Frog

This low-cost tool crawls your site and provides an onsite SEO audit so you know where to improve SEO elements like URL, page title, meta description, or duplicate page issues. [Screaming Frog](#) can also reveal issues with your site navigation and discoverability of content. The free version may be sufficient for spot checks. Make sure your site can sustain the load the tool might generate.

Google Instant Search

For an incredibly simple, free tool for keyword discovery, start typing a keyword into a Google search box to see which suggested, common search phrases pop up first. As an example, when you type "pants for," you're shown different suggestions than when you type "jeans for."

Keywordtool.io

Another easy-to-use tool for keyword discovery, [keywordtool.io](#) is a free resource where you can plug in keywords, choose a language and source, and receive additional keyword suggestions.

5. Consider the Power of User-generated Content

User-generated content in the form of ratings and reviews can deliver powerful SEO benefits to your site. Many e-commerce platforms, including Magento, have built-in ratings and reviews. Other platforms offer extensions in their marketplaces to support user-generated content. For more information, check out [User-Generated Content: Why It's Critical to Your eCommerce Marketing Strategy](#) in which Springbot, an e-commerce marketing company, explains why user-generated content is as important as it is.

If you haven't incorporated ratings and reviews into your e-commerce site, here are some top reasons to consider doing so:

Higher rankings for product detail pages: The language used by reviewers is different than the language used in product descriptions. When you include this unique language in product detail pages, product pages can rank higher.

Rankings for unique terms used in reviews: The language used by reviewers can help products rank for terms they may not have ranked for without the review information.

Social proof: Favorable reviews and ratings act as social proof. Studies show that products are purchased more often when there is proof that other consumers liked those products as well.


Rich snippets: Reviews lead to an increase in Rich Snippets, which means your reviews are rewarded with more screen real estate on Google's SERP.

Keep in mind ratings and reviews only help your page rankings if they are part of the pages themselves. They must be visible as part of initial page loads, without use of iframes tabbed/accordion-type controls.

We recommend showing ratings and review information only after several reviews have been collected. A low review count might negatively impact the perception of desirability for the products on your site.

6. Consider User-generated SEO to Boost Quality Traffic

User-generated SEO is a process of automatically producing user-generated product listing pages, similar to marketing campaign landing pages or category pages. These pages are created for search phrases with known high levels of interaction as determined by the activities of site visitors. These auto-generated pages are crawled and indexed, allowing them to rank well for search phrases you may want to target specifically.

 User-generated SEO allows you to capture a high-ranking position for the "long tail" of searches without endless manual setup of landing pages.

The result is more traffic and higher revenue. Taking advantage of user-generated SEO is discussed further in the last section of this paper, "The SEO Revenue Most Retailers Miss Out On."

Major SEO “No-no’s” That Can Damage Your Site’s Reputation

In addition to engaging in steps to improve your SEO, you should know which SEO practices to steer clear of. Some practices carry such significant penalties that they can damage a site’s standing in the SERP for weeks, months or even years. Here are some of the big SEO “no-no’s” you should always avoid.

Unnatural Links

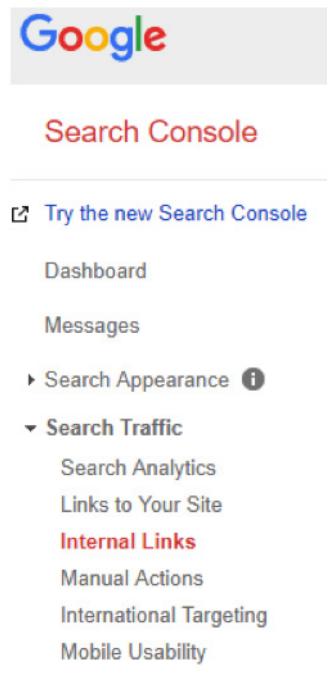
Years ago, a common SEO practice was to solicit inbound links with keyword-rich anchor text from numerous sites, blogs, directories, forums, etc. The goal was to take advantage of the way “Page rank” (named after Google co-founder Larry Page) is calculated and used for ranking. It determines a page’s value by the number of inbound links. However, many black-hat SEO agencies manipulated this ranking factor by buying links or spamming blogs, forums and directories in an effort to artificially inflate positioning.

In April 2012, Google launched its Penguin algorithm update to reduce and penalize the creation of such unnatural links. Since then, updates to the Penguin algorithm also targeted individual link networks.

Some websites still suffer from unnatural links for various reasons. It could be that someone with limited and outdated SEO knowledge is acquiring spammy links. Or that a link-building package purchased years ago has created unnatural links that are still active. It’s also possible that someone has hacked into your site to add links to another site they want to promote or that a competitor is engaging in negative SEO. For more information, Search Engine Journal describes negative SEO and offers tips on how to protect your site from it in [7 Tips to Protect Your Site From Negative SEO](#).

Whatever the reason you find yourself with unnatural links, you can monitor your links in your Search Console, choosing “Links to Your Site” from the left navigation window shown below.

Use Webmaster Tools to monitor the number and quality of links to your site. Looking at your GSC report on a monthly basis is a best practice.



Use Webmaster Tools to monitor the number and quality of links to your site.

When reviewing the report, be careful not to disavow links from legitimate sources like publications that posted one of your press releases or fans linking to you from their blogs – you want to have as many of these quality links as possible.

Dealing with Penalties Due to Unnatural Links

If your e-commerce site experiences a sharp and unexpected drop in organic traffic and/or you received a “manual action” message in WMT, your site could be in serious trouble because of unnatural links. **This is the time to seek help.** There are SEO professionals that specialize in recovery from search engine penalties related to unnatural links. They can take care of the procedure of submitting a reconsideration request and disavowing some of the links to your site.

Expertise is crucial here, because the internet search engine might reject your request if you cannot prove you tried your best to get all unnatural links removed. The reconsideration request can take months from beginning to end, and then it can take months before the penalty is lifted from your site. Clearly, you want the reconsideration request to be successful the first time you submit it, which is why professional help is valuable.

Duplicate Content

The web is at least 25% duplicate content, said Matt Cutts in 2013, at the time head of Google’s webspam team. In the context of e-commerce, that number is significantly higher. So how can duplicate content have a negative impact on SEO? There are several issues with it, according to the Moz article “[Duplicate Content](#)” – all related to a search engine’s efforts to determine which version of the content to index and rank. Duplicate content, then, can lead to decreased traffic and less relevant search results.

To avoid the negative impact of having the wrong kind of duplicate content on your site, be sure that each distinct piece of information (typically an individual webpage) is always indexed under the same URL, and that any other URL that serves the same page has a canonical tag. If content moves, you should set up a 301 redirect from the old URL to the current page. By grouping the duplicate pages together in this way, their combined ranking signals work together for better overall search engine ranking.

Doorway Pages

Doorway pages are typically poor-quality pages where each page is optimized for specific keywords or phrases. In many cases they are written to rank well for these particular phrases and thereby attract traffic, but then visitors are funneled to a single destination. Doorway pages are most often considered a form of spamming the index of a search engine, or engaging in black hat SEO – something you want to avoid. And you can avoid doorway pages by creating unique, quality content and indexing it properly.

Thin/Shallow Content

When Google launched its Panda algorithm change in 2011, search engines began to penalize sites with content that was thin or shallow, e.g. poorly written, lacking supporting references or centered on a topic that didn’t relate to the site’s audience or area of expertise. At the same time, the SEO advantage tipped toward websites with high-quality, original content that is relevant for the target audiences and offers a positive user experience.

Today, even a small amount of thin or shallow content on a site can affect the rankings of a site. To avoid this penalty, site owners are encouraged to ask themselves the [23 questions](#) Google posted in its Webmaster Central Blog at the time Panda was released – questions like: “Would you trust the information presented in this article?” and “Does the article present both sides of a story?” An experienced writer or content manager with current SEO experience should be able to produce content for your site that avoids the penalty for thin or shallow content.

The SEO-driven Revenue Most Retailers Miss Out On

As you've seen in this paper, the attention you give to improving your site's SEO will lead to improvements in traffic and clickthroughs. Monitoring your Webmaster Tools, strengthening positive signals and quickly correcting negative signals will help you protect the site traffic you already have. But there's more that you can do to drive revenue through SEO, and most retailers miss it – it's the opportunity of user-generated SEO, as mentioned in Step Five, "Consider User-generated SEO to Boost Quality Traffic."

User-generated SEO, when done correctly, produces high-quality landing pages that are indexed by Google and other internet search engines. It is a simple but highly effective tool to extend your site's SEO footprint and make more of your content findable. It drives more traffic to your site while increasing your brand visibility.

The premium user-generated SEO solution available today is [SLI Site Champion™](#), which is built upon [SLI Learning Search™](#) technology to create organic search landing pages that relate to actual users' popular searches. Site Champion™ complements, rather than competes with, your existing SEO strategy by creating relevant pages and capturing clicks for long-tail searches. Since Site Champion landing pages are optimized for internet search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo!, they rank higher in organic search results over time – and also change over time to reflect visitors' changing shopping habits.

Site Champion offers a way to increase visibility for an e-commerce site, without additional effort from IT or marketing teams. The Site Champion-created landing pages show customers a variety of products and search suggestions, increasing likelihood of a sale. And since they are created dynamically, rather than manually, they drive increased revenue without placing an additional workload on your staff.

Benefits of Site Champion User-generated SEO:

- Increased traffic to your site
- Improved brand visibility
- Higher rankings on internet search engines
- Increased revenue

How Site Champion User-generated SEO Works

Site Champion automatically creates category pages for search phrases with known high levels of interaction. Search phrases are chosen for page creation using the powerful learning-based technology of Learning Search™, which determines the greatest relevancy by monitoring the activities of actual site visitors. The influence of Learning Search on page creation is the reason why the SEO landing pages are considered user-generated SEO.

Once Site Champion earmarks a phrase for page creation, SLI's learning-based search algorithms determine which products are shown and in what order they appear on the page (the most relevant items appearing first). SLI carefully adheres to Product Listing Page SEO best practices to ensure internet search engine crawlers understand the page topic and content as well as possible. Then, Site Champion automatically adds the newly generated pages to the site, where the pages can be crawled and indexed by internet search engines.

Indexed pages are continually adjusted with Site Champion, which ensures the pages that exist correspond to what actual site visitors currently search for. Chances are high that what people search for locally on your e-commerce site is the same as or similar to what they will search for on internet search engines.

Strengths of the User-generated Approach

Do more with less: Those who are engaged in working on SEO aspects of their site know the limitations of what they can do themselves with finite resources. Site Champion offers a way out of this predicament by providing a way to group individual properties together and get them indexed quickly. This allows web teams to make a greater impact on traffic and revenue than they would be able to without such a tool.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts: The individual products shown on a webpage reinforce the topic of the page. If you bring them together on one topical page, then the ranking will be significantly higher than what individual pages would rank on their own.

You only pay for the traffic you actually get: With Site Champion, you are only invoiced per referral or revenue share – in other words, you pay only once for the traffic you get or the revenue that is attributable to Site Champion – not for crawls.

You can modify the pages if you want to: While Site Champion doesn't require manual intervention to work effectively, some clients choose to refine Site Champion pages by adding topical banners to the page through the SLI Merchandising Console. This can further tie together the page topic and content for an even better user experience.

You can dismiss competing pages: Should a Site Champion generate a page that competes with one of your site's existing landing pages, you can select the page in the Site Champion console and dismiss it.

Check what you are ranking for: The Site Champion Console integrates with Google Search Console to allow users to discover which Google search terms your Site Champion pages are ranking for.

Strengths of a Learning-based Approach

Site Champion actually creates quality content, rather than just spitting out links as ineffective user-generated SEO efforts have tried. While others rely on algorithms that they can't prove will work, our unique approach is based on years of success and a proven track record of staying current on industry best practices and major algorithm updates.

Site Champion is flexible and can work as a subdomain or proxied implementation. We have clients that use our search API and also use Site Champion.

We optimize results for all devices by building mobile- or tablet-specific Site Champion pages or implementing for responsive sites. Better results are seen when the client has mobile product detail pages, which SLI also offers, should the client not be able to produce them.

We ensure optimal performance of the content we generate by regularly checking our own metrics as well as those of leading internet search engines Google, Bing, and Yahoo! We monitor clients' Webmaster Tools stats, perform client testing and audits, and have a checklist of at least 50 tests to run for each client site to make sure it's healthy. Our careful checks and balances ensure your upward revenue potential, without the concern of negative signals.

Site Champion performs well under recent Google updates, including Panda, Pigeon, Penguin, Hummingbird, Fred, and Mobile First. SLI reviewed the statistics of more than 100 Site Champion clients after recent Google updates and found a large number of sites actually had significant increases in referrals – some over 100%. For your site to be a candidate for Site Champion, the data feeds we receive must be technically sound and the site should be generally healthy.

What Site Champion Is NOT

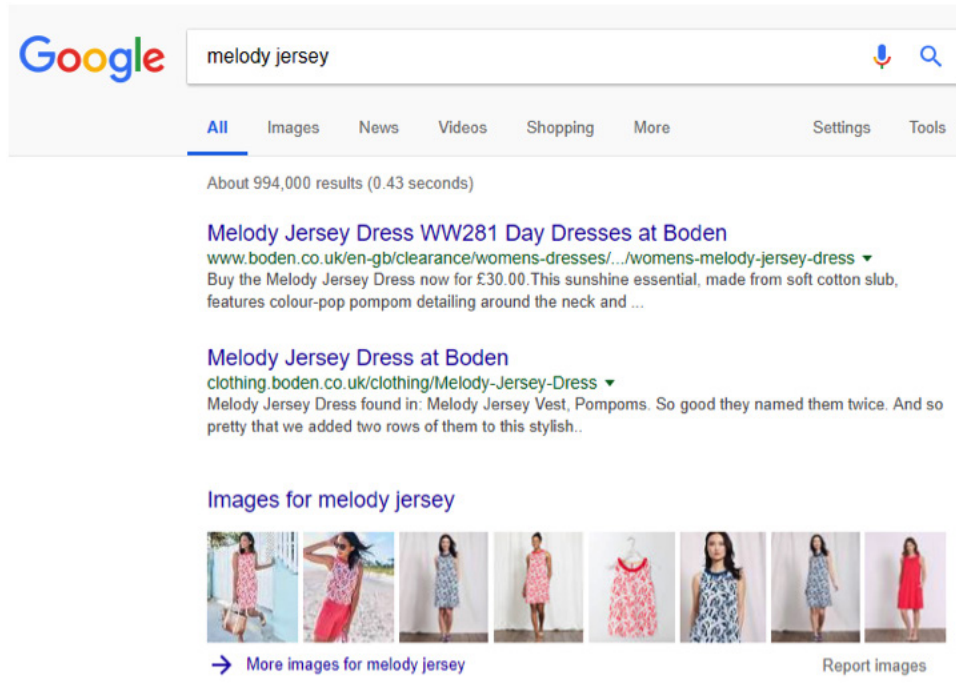
Previously in this paper, we've talked about the type of spammy content-building that Google quickly penalizes, rather than rewards – duplicate content, thin or shallow content, doorway pages, etc. To alleviate any concern about the quality of Site Champion pages, we provide the below examples of how Site Champion pages are vastly different than any SEO "no-no's" that could trigger a negative response.

Not Duplicate Content

The way Site Champion pages show product information and relate to other Site Champion pages is unique and does not conflict with other content. Duplicate content is only “negative” when it occurs within the domain. Even when hosted on the same subdomain, Site Champion pages are different than client pages, which avoids the potential of being flagged as duplicate.

To illustrate how this works, notice in the below example that client-hosted pages and Site Champion pages both appear in top positions on the SERP. If internet search engines were to consider Site Champion pages duplicate to content on the client’s domain, they would not display both of the pages.

Example



A search for “melody jersey” returns results for both the client-hosted pages (1) and Site Champion pages (2), dominating the results page.

Not thin or shallow content

What internet search engines consider to be thin or shallow content are “cookie-cutter” type pages that don’t add substantial value to users. Site Champion pages will never fall into this category since each page is unique with a distinct combination of different manufacturer-provided product information. Furthermore, the order of products shown, the page-specific markup, and (optionally) custom SEO data sources are tailored for each Site Champion page, which prevents them from being flagged as thin content.

Not doorway pages

Doorway pages are designed to draw traffic through multiple pages targeting high-traffic keywords and then funnel users to a single destination page.

Site Champion pages are created for a different purpose. Site Champion pages are created to rank for a specific phrase, as is the case for most landing pages. It is considered best practice to focus on one phrase or topic when generating a page – otherwise the focus becomes too broad and the page might not rank at all.

In addition, Site Champion pages are the destination themselves rather than a funnel to direct visitors to a single subsequent page beyond itself, as is the case with doorway pages. Site Champion pages are landing pages that you want visitors to arrive at so they can select the product that is most appropriate to their needs.

If Site Champion were to be compared to another type of page, it would be to a category page, which shows many relevant products the visitor can choose from.

Summary and Next Steps

The rules of SEO continually change as various SEO disciplines evolve. The rewards of improvement are more quality traffic and increased revenue. The pitfalls of not paying attention to SEO include damage to your site's domain authority followed by weeks, months, or even years of repair.

It's critical to stay on top of your site's SEO by knowing the key factors you can influence, the monitoring tools you can use, and the practices to avoid. At the same time, you should be aware of the opportunity to gain more site revenue through user-generated SEO.

Whether you work directly with your webmaster or have a larger team or agency, there's always something you can do to improve your SEO.

Here are next steps you can take to ensure you're getting the greatest return from your SEO efforts:

- If you aren't involved in your site's SEO, start today
- Make sure you've correctly set up analytics and Webmaster Tools
- Focus on the most promising pages first
- Create user-friendly URLs
- Monitor and improve content to boost SEO on key pages
- Avoid damaging SEO practices
- Consider user-generated SEO as an additional revenue stream

To discuss the possibilities for user-generated SEO on your site, contact SLI Systems and request a demo of Site Champion at discovery@slj-systems.com.

Contact SLI Systems

USA

San Jose, California
P (866) 240 2812

AUSTRALIA

Melbourne
P 1800 139 190

NEW ZEALAND

Christchurch
P 0800 754 797

EUROPE

London, United Kingdom
P +44 (0) 203 217 0321

JAPAN

Tokyo
P +81 03 5715 8052

EMAIL

discovery@slj-systems.com

To learn more visit slj-systems.com.

About SLI Systems

SLI Systems (SLI.NZ) accelerates e-commerce for the world's top retailers by generating more traffic, converting shoppers into buyers and maximizing order values. The SLI Product Discovery Suite™ uses sophisticated machine learning to predict what each shopper is most likely to buy right now, and includes solutions for improving site search, navigation, mobile, merchandising, recommendations, and SEO. The SLI Commerce Console™ organizes key sales insight and tuning capabilities into one easy-to-use control center. For 17 years, established brands have trusted SLI Systems to deliver innovative features, knowledgeable service, and reliable SaaS-based infrastructure, that delights customers and increases revenue. SLI operates on five continents, in 20 languages, and is a leader among cloud-based site search providers to U.S. Internet Retailer Top 1000 retailers. For more information, visit www.slj-systems.com