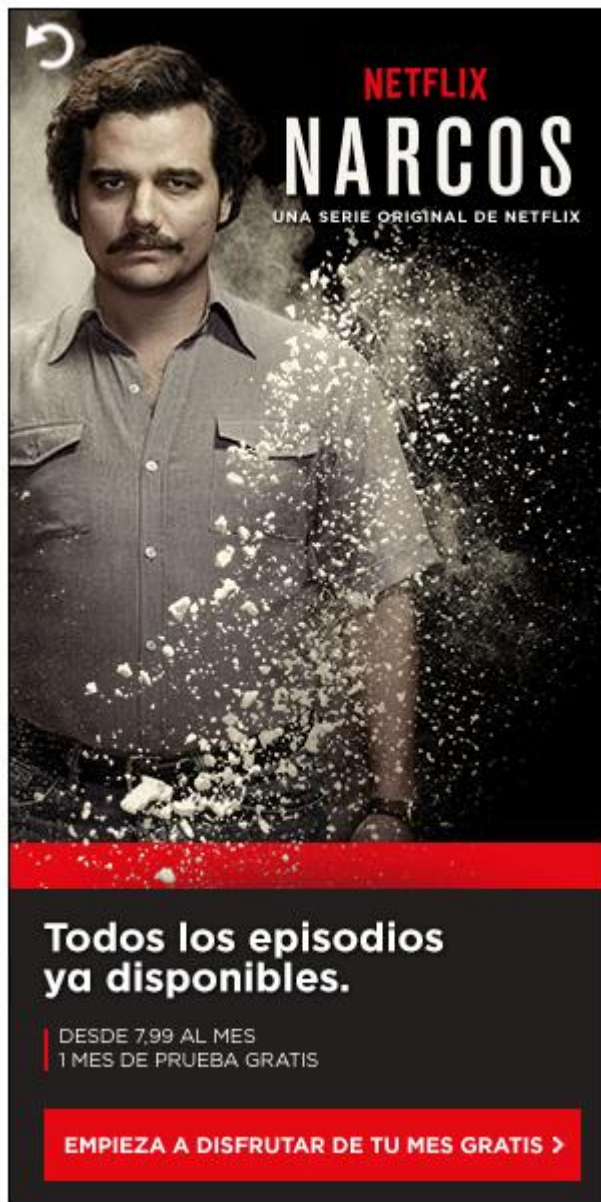# Conducting a detailed SEO analysis of Netflix

Early in 2015, with subscriber growth staggering in a competitive and saturated US market, Netflix made **globalization its number one priority**. One year later, the company announced a simultaneous launch in 130 countries, thus expanding its presence to almost every corner of the planet.

Marketing globally is challenging because you need [a local touch](#) if you really want to thrive. And that's expensive because operating costs multiply by manifold.

As a matter of fact, Netflix is planning to spend [$1B on marketing this year](#). Some of that money goes to producing and buying localized display ads like the one on the left.

Surprisingly, at the same time, looks like Netflix is not paying that much attention to a channel that is internationally scalable and could improve customer acquisition cost: **Organic Search**.

Netflix outranked

A few months ago, as I was doing some research for a post about [the challenges of going global for Netflix](#), I realized that their site was being outranked in organic search results for keywords like *"catálogo de netflix en españa"* or *"como ver netflix en españa"* (Spanish for *"netflix catalogue in spain"* and *"how to watch netflix in spain"*).

During the last two years, I have been reading, learning and working on some Multilingual SEO projects. So, this performance by a company like Netflix peaked my curiosity, and I decided to look further into it.

Let's take a look at some of the things that Netflix (or any other international company with a global website) can do to improve its organic search performance in multiple languages.

The recipe for SEO success

As you may already know, Google takes into account dozens of factors and signals when ranking pages in search results. [The Periodic Table of SEO Success Factors](#) by **Search Engine Land** summarizes those factors pretty well**:**

- Domain Authority of 90/100 (as per Moz's [Open Site Explorer](#))

- High dwell time thanks to *binge-watching*.

- Hundreds of links from respected sources pointing to the domain.

However, when it comes to **_On-page SEO_** there seems to be some room for improvement. The good news for Netflix is that **_On-page SEO_** is relatively easier to tackle than **_Off-page SEO_** one.

Let's take a look at some of the things that Netflix could do in order to improve its organic search performance.

1. Keyword Research

Any good SEO strategy requires at least a minimum **keyword research**. After all, companies want their page to show up high in search results when potential customers are looking for their products or services. But also when they have questions regarding them.

Many companies put a lot of effort in SEO for their main market. But what happens when they try to attract customers who speak a different language?

More often than not, companies end up translating their website and their lists of keywords into the languages of the countries or regions that they are targeting. And then, they hope to see a bump in organic traffic from those regions.

In the last decade, many translation services providers have added **International SEO** to their portfolio of services. However, most of them don't do any sort of keyword research. Instead, they translate the keywords from their clients and sprinkle them over the content.

I can't say whether Netflix followed that approach, but it does seem so when you look at the meta title of their home page in Spain:
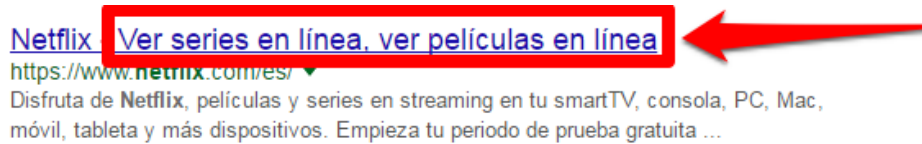
From the point of view of a Spanish native speaker, there's nothing wrong with that meta title (Spanish for **"Watch series online, watch movies online"**). It is clear and easy to understand. But, with a little bit of brainstorming and a keyword research tool, it only takes a few seconds to come up with a better choice.

By simply replacing the Spanish term **"en línea"** with the English **"online"** in the meta title, chances are that Netflix could boost its ranking for the keywords that they are targeting in Spain:

Screenshot from SEMrush Keyword Difficulty Tool

As you can see in the screenshot above from **SEMrush Keyword Difficulty Tool**, the keywords *"ver películas online"* and *"ver series online"* have 165,000 and 74,000 average monthly searches, respectively.

That's a big difference when compared to the synonyms used by Netflix in their current meta title: 140 and 40 average monthly searches, respectively. Even a more natural phrase (and just as keyword-rich) like *"ver películas y series online"* has a higher volume of searches than the keywords used by Netflix!

This is a clear example of why **translating keywords doesn't work for SEO**. While *"en línea"* is a correct translation of *"online"*, the data indicates that far more people in Spain use the English term *"online"* when they want to watch movies and series online.

2. Optimized content

Once we have chosen the right keywords, it's time to use them wisely throughout the content. As we've seen in the previous example, meta titles are important. But so are the meta descriptions, headings, URLs and body copy.

In 2014, Patreon's Director of Marketing [Graham Hunter](#) published an [article](#) on how Netflix was missing on a big opportunity in organic search. He was surprised by the fact that one of the top 10 sites on the internet was ranking so poorly on search engines.

So, he suggested that Netflix should create some sort of [IMDb](#) database on their website, with comprehensive information about the content

available in its catalogue. I'm not sure if that would be the best solution, but it would probably help enhancing their organic results.

From my point of view, optimizing content is a win-win for Netflix. On one hand, they could position their brand and website on top of the search results. On the other, they would be fighting piracy by taking the first positions from deceitful websites.

So, maybe that's why I would expect the Netflix website to rank first on organic search results (in any language) for questions that a potential subscriber may have. For example:

- **How to watch Netflix in** *[Country Name]*

- **Netflix catalogue in** *[Country Name]*

- **Netflix pricing in** *[Country Name]*

- **How to watch** *[Netflix original title]* **online**

What's funny is that Netflix does have an answer for most of those questions in their website. Except for the one about the catalogue — you can only see their originals from a drop-down list in a corner of the homepage footer.

Then, why are they not ranking?

I think the problem could be in the use of subdomains, since most of this information about Netflix can be found under:

http://help.netflix.com

The **subdomain vs subfolder discussion** is a recurrent one in the world of SEOs. Google representatives like **John Mueller** and **Matt Cutts** have stated in the past that the search engine is able to identify and associate content in a subdomain with the same domain.

3. Geo-targeting & hreflang Annotation

The technical part of SEO is probably the least favourite one for search marketers. It's definitely not as fun as researching keywords, optimizing content or monitoring rankings.

However, any SEO efforts may be in vain if the code of your global site is not properly setup. As a matter of fact, Hubspot recently reported a 50% increase in organic traffic by implementing a series of technical SEO updates.

One of the first things I learned about doing **SEO for multilingual websites** was the importance of **geo-targeting and the hreflang annotation**. Two years ago, SEO consultant Vagelis Varfis published a case study about how Netflix was handling the issue (Netflix Case Study about Hreflang and Geo-Targeting).

In his article, Vagelis highlighted an important problem: **the language versions of the Netflix site did not appear on the respective country domains of Google.** In that period, Netflix used **URL parameters** for the different language versions of its site:

- *www.netflix.com/?locale=es-ES*

With that kind of setup, it wasn't possible to do **geo-targeting** (delivering specific content to users based on their geographic location). Another issue was the lack of **hreflang tags** (used to inform search engines like *Google* and *Yandex* about the versions of your content that should show up in the search results for different regions or languages).

Looks like Netflix followed Vagelis' advice and switched to a different URL structure that allowed geo-targeting. In this case, a **subfolders structure with generic Top Level Domains** (a.k.a. *gTLD*):

- *www.netflix.com/es/*

Beyond permitting geo-targeting through the *Search Console*, this URL structure also **allows the local versions of Netflix to benefit from its strong main domain** (which doesn't happen with subdirectories). On the other hand, though, the signals to local search engines are weaker with this approach.

In the case of the *hreflang* tags, for some reason, they are still nowhere to be seen on the Netflix site. Creating them is relatively easy with tools like *The hreflang Tags Generator Tool* by Aleyda Solis and *The hreflang XML Sitemaps Tool* from the guys at **The Media Flow**.

How to get global SEO right:

This case study about Netflix has helped us identify 3 key areas of on-the-page SEO that are critical for the success of any international SEO strategy:

- **Keyword research:** use the same words that your potential clients would use when researching your products or services.

- **Content optimization:** provide answers to the questions that your potential customers may have and make sure that content is optimized.

- **Technical SEO:** make sure that the code is properly setup for international audiences to make the most out of your efforts.