6MARK017W
Digital Marketing, Social Media & Web Analytics

WEEK4 –SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION TECHNIQUES PART B

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Introduction

Last week we talked about 'on-site' and 'off-site' SEO techniques, and we categorised them as follows:

- ➢ 1. Keywords and site content [on-site SEO] (covered week 3)
- ➢ 2. Site organization and technical SEO:
  - ➢ domain name;
  - ➢ URLs,
  - ➢ root domains & sub domains;
  - ➢ structure;
  - ➢ navigation;
  - ➢ internal linking;
  - ➢ meta tags – snippets;
  - ➢ sitemaps.xml and robots.txt,
  - ➢ speed

[on-site SEO]

Introduction

3. Backlinks (external links) [off-site SEO]

Optimization via social media, could be considered under the 'backlinks' technique

This week we'll talk about 2. and 3.

Also, we'll discuss:

Unethical SEO

SEO: Site organization

Make your site visible to search engines by always following some principles:

a) Domain Name – optimize your domain name (some ideas):

◦ Use one of your main keywords in the name **Very Important!**

◦ Make domain unique (not to be confused)

◦ .com

◦ Easy to type

◦ Easy to remember

◦ Make it short (or long?)

◦ Fulfil expectations (etoy.com example)

◦ Do not follow latest trends, if they do not serve any purpose!

SEO: Site organization

b) URLs

○ Which URL is 'better'?

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-60246032

https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/feb/03/my-life-completely-turned-around-is-manifesting-the-key-to-happiness-or-wishful-thinking

◦ Why? (Remember how spiders/SE work)

○ URLs and keywords

c) Root domains & sub domains

Avoid multiple sub domains – they become unnecessarily long.

Consider main domains

SEO: Site organization

d) Structure

o Logical based

o Category clustering

o Flat vs deep website. Flat is better for users and search engines. Ideal: for any site with less than 10,000 pages everything should be accessible within 3 clicks.

SEO: Site organization

e) Navigation

- o Text based navigation

- o Beware of 'spider traps' (HTML code 301 'moved permanently' and HTML code 302 'found' http://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616-sec10.html)

- o Pages that require specific cookies / sessions are NOT accessible by spiders

- o Server / Hosting problems – choose your hosting environment *carefully*

- o *Create links to pages you want to be visible to spiders – include them in the main navigation bar.*

SEO: Site organization

f) Internal linking

Linking pages inside the site is a powerful SEO tool that developers tend to ignore.

It does not only help spiders but humans as well!

Examples of internal linking: compare products and link the name of each product with the product name; further content that expands topics, provides explanation / clarification / further information; FAQs that link to internal pages (these are just few examples).

https://www.seoptimer.com/internal-link-checker

Follow and NoFollow links ('hint for indexing and crawling' since March 2020): https://www.semrush.com/blog/linkbuilding-dofollow-vs-nofollow-semrushchat

SEO: Site organization

g) Meta tags and snippets

What is a 'meta tag'?

A bit of code that controls how your site will look in the listing.

E.g.
<title> NFL Jerseys </title>
<meta description='Buy NFL Jerseys and NFL Jerseys and Football Shirts at the Official NFL Europe, Middle East & Africa Online Store. PayPal, American Express available.'/>

In the search engine's results page the above will appear as:

NFL Jerseys | NFL Europe, Middle East & Africa Online Store
europe.nflshop.com/stores/nfl/en/c/jerseys ▾
Buy **NFL Jerseys** and **NFL Jerseys** and Football Shirts at the Official NFL Europe, Middle East & Africa Online Store. PayPal, American Express available.

SEO: Site organization

g) Meta tags and snippets

Using snippets (or 'rich snippets') you give users a sense of what the page is about and why it is relevant to their query.

Over time snippets have involved from a pure text format to include video, music info, business organisations, etc. This type of snippets provide more catching eye options than the pure textual results.

Google recommends Microdata as a **mark-up format** for creating snippets.

Bing and Yahoo has also joined Google and also support it. (source: http://blog.schema.org/search?q=Google+Bing)

Microdata can:
- extend HTML5 and add extra semantics.
- help the search engines understand the semantic focus of certain pieces of content on our page
- present users with more information about the page on the SERP (search engine result page)

SEO: Site organization

g) Meta tags and snippets

Schema.org provides a collection of schemas (e.g. html tags) that developers can use to markup their pages in ways recognised by major search engines.

Schema.org is not the only specification for Microdata.

Schema.org uses HTML5 Microdata with new elements like <time> although, it still uses examples with <div> and <span>, which we will try to use in our examples more <section>, <article> etc.

❑ Include meta-tags for all elements – not only the description of your site
❑ Use your keywords in meta tags and snippets.

SEO: Site organization

g) Meta tags and snippets

❑ The rise and fall of meta-tags / snippets.

❑ Title tag (https://moz.com/learn/seo/title-tag) and metatags (https://moz.com/learn/seo/meta-description)

❑ In the past it was considered one of the most important techniques; not any more.

❑ Please notice that in New Google Sites, you could add meta tags only through HTML. In the past you could add meta tags from the 'Settings'.

SEO: Site organization

h) 'Sitemaps.xml' & 'robots.txt'

◦ Search engines automatically look for a special file on each website called 'sitemaps.xml' – it is a map of your site

◦ You can create it automatically using online tools. E.g.:

XML Sitemaps Generator: http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/

◦ When the file is generated, upload it to the main directory

◦ New Google Sites do not create a sitemap automatically and do not allow you to upload your own file

◦ A 'robots.txt' file is a plain text file that blocks areas of your site to be fount by search engines using 'Disallow: / page_name'

SEO: Site organization

i) Site Speed

"Google has indicated that site speed (and as a result, page speed) is one of the signals used by its algorithm to rank pages. And research has shown that Google might be specifically measuring time to first byte (***) as when it considers page speed. In addition, a slow page speed means that search engines can crawl fewer pages using their allocated crawl budget, and this could negatively affect your indexation."

(from: https://moz.com/learn/seo/page-speed)

*** **'time to first byte':** time required for the browser to receive the first byte of information from the server – not to load the whole page

Check your site speed:

https://tools.pingdom.com/

Changes & suggestions from Google about site organization

Google constantly reconsiders the algorithms used and what is important for SEO. Recent remarks / changes in relation to 'site organization':

➢ Domain name → Exact Match Domain name (EMD). EMD was considered a good practice. Not ***necessarily*** any more.

➢ EMD is a domain name that matches precisely a targeted search engine query to obtain high rank in searching for this query (main keyword = domain name).

➢ Does EMD offer advantages?

➢ True in the past – less true now.

Changes & suggestions from Google about site organization

On the other hand, there is no sign that Google penalises EMD – *Google scrutinises these sites much more*.

IF sites show other signs of low quality (lot of links; keywords etc) then the EMD is considered negative.

What about brand names?

Changes & suggestions from Google about site organization

➤URLs; root domains & sub domains; structure; navigation; internal linking: no significant changes although most of these techniques are related with the quality and the correct use of keywords.

➤ Meta-tags

A) misinterpretation: tags are NOT long lists of keywords. Google does not like tags that look like long list of keywords ; duplication.

https://moz.com/blog/featured-snippets-qa-content

MOZ Webinar on snippets – October 2019:

https://hsinfo.moz.com/featured-snippet-essentials-webinar

B) Change: 'Death of metatag'?

https://www.semrush.com/blog/meta-keywords/

➤sitmaps.xml and robots.txt: no changes

SEO: Backlinks

The last SEO technique we'll examine is 'back-links'.

This is an off-site technique.

In the past 'back-links' were misused and this made Google to introduce 'Penguin' algorithm.

SEO: Backlinks

Links from other sites that point to your site is the main off-site SEO technique.

They are also called: inbound links, external links(?), inlinks, inward links.

Some examples of links:
◦ Facebook shares
◦ Total facebook activity
◦ Facebook comments
◦ Facebook likes
◦ Tweets
◦ Blogs
◦ Other Sites
◦ Authors

SEO: Backlinks

The number of backlinks is often used by SE as the most important factor for determining the site's engine ranking, popularity and importance.

According to Google's founders 'a link to a site is a vote for this site'.

One website pointing to your website means: 'I trust you enough to refer to you and even send traffic to your site.'

"The best way to get other sites to create relevant links to yours, is to create unique, relevant content that can quickly gain popularity in the Internet community. The more useful content you have, the greater the chances someone else will find that content valuable to their readers and link to it. Before making any single decision, you should ask yourself: Is this going to be beneficial [and useful] for my page's visitors?" (Source: Google)

SEO: Backlinks

Main things that matter for search engines:

➢ **Number** of links pointed at your site
➢ **Quality** of links:
  ◦ Authority (how long they exist, people behind them are leading experts in the field e.g. long-run sites, professors etc))
  ◦ Trustworthiness (links are from well-established / recognised organisations e.g. Universities, government etc)
  ◦ Relevancy (directly related to your business e.g. 'Financial Times' point to a business vs 'personal blog' that point to the same business).

Search engines take into consideration:
  ◦ How relevant backlinks are to your industry and field.
  ◦ How long they exist as a website and as an organization.
  ◦ Whether the people behind these websites are leading experts in your field or industry.
  ◦ How close they are to your business address (e.g. local directories). (Source: Google)

SEO: Backlinks – building

How can you 'create' back-links?

Building back-links:

A) Submit your website or business to different web directories but be very selective:

➢Don't submit to spamming directories which advertise that they will submit your website everywhere for £2.

➢Check whether these directories have strict guidelines which accept only relevant and trustworthy websites. Avoid directories which don't have guidelines.

➢Submit to local business directories.

➢Submit to specialty-directories, e.g. list services unique to your industry

➢Always be careful where you submit your website!

SEO: Backlinks – building

Building back-links:

B) Gain links from other websites or blogs

- ➢Good content can do this on its own sometimes
- ➢But, sometimes you have to contact personally people
- ➢Find websites or blogs with relevant content to yours.
- ➢Contact experts in your field or industry, and let them know that you have content which relates to their content.
- ➢Ask them to publish a link to their blog or website. In this way you gain a very trustworthy link.

C) Finally, explore the backlinks of the competitors who rank well and try to get linked to the same websites.

SEO: Backlinks – find out who points to your site?

How to find out who points to your site?

You can submit a web address (your web address or a competitor's web address) online and find out what are the backlinks.

One of the first tools was the 'open site explorer' (now 'link explorer') by MOZ. https://moz.com/link-explorer

Now it is accessed only through an account that offers 10 free queries per month.

SEO: Backlinks – find out who points to your site?

Another tool for analysing, building and maintaining high quality links

"SEO review tools":

https://www.seoreviewtools.com/valuable-backlinks-checker/

SEO: Backlinks – problems

'Back-linking' was a technique heavily misused by developers in the past.

'Link – farming': web sites created for link purposes only.

SEO: Backlinks – problems – Penguin

Google strikes back...

What is 'Penguin'?

Another algorithm from Google released in 2012 (more updates 2013-4 till today). Mainly targets spam links. Sites were degraded.

In order to create many links developers tended to exchange links / 'cross-linking', to buy links, to create 'link farms' ('niche sites') etc.

It is not only that sites will not get good ranking – sites are punished:
- Dropping a website in rankings for minor things
- Dropping a website altogether for major things

Other areas of concern?

"AUTHORITY – AUTHORITY – AUTHORITY"

"Authority" seems to be the new motto of Google.

AUTHORITY where?
- ➢ Site;
- ➢ Links;
- ➢ Blogs → AUTHOR / AUTHORS

❖ **Site: '**time everywhere': to be discovered by spiders, to build authority

❖ **Links:** take care if links that point to your site are not respectful. You can report them in webmaster tools.

❖ **Blogs**: build the authors fame / ranking

Other areas of concern?

TIME

Search engines can 'take their time' to:
- discover changes on your website
- re-assess the relevance and authority of your website

Also,

Developers and SEO experts must dedicate time on SEO, monitor and improve the site and SEO techniques constantly.

SEO is not an one-off task.

Other areas of concern?

In order to 'target' blogs Google checks the 'reputation' of the author.

Authority of authors (in blogs)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMxC3wQZOyc#t=41

Guest blogging as a way to get more links:

The decay and fall of guest blogging for SEO

Unethical SEO

Strategies that are likely to incur a <u>search engine penalty</u> due to over-optimization: optimization beyond the 'tolerance level'.

High risk

◦ Doorway pages

◦ Hidden text

◦ Link farming

◦ Keyword spamming

Medium risk

• Duplicate content

• Thin content

• Paid links

What is the 'tolerance level'? It seems that the 'tolerance level' is not the same for all sites…

Advice… https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AmRg3p79pM

What can I do if…

My site is not listed at all?
- o If it is a new site you might just need to wait
- o Monitor closely your site
- o Built links
- o Confirm your keywords
- o Take care of your content

My site's ranking has dropped off?
- o Rethink SEO approach
- o Make sure there are no 'bad' backlinks – You can inform Google in this case
- o Check what your competitors do

In most cases SEO problems are recoverable
In extreme cases you might need to start a new site

Advice from Google

SEO is not about QUANTITY any more – it is about the **QUALITY**

The message Google sends to web developers is clear:

focus on users – not search engines

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8s6Y4mx9Vw&list=SP3ABD5CD91559A1DC

Next week

So far, we have seen how search engines work; SEO techniques, how SEO techniques have changed over time.

We talked about keywords, site organization an backlinks as SEO techniques as well as PANDA and PENGUIN algorithms.

Next week we will talk about social networks and how they are related to SEO.