15 tips to increase your website's visibility

A beginner's guide to SEO.

You've got the right qualifications, years of experience, a great business, and a beautiful website... but you're struggling to generate the volume of enquiries you want. Sound familiar? **If you are not getting enough enquiries it's simply because not enough people know about you.**

This means you have to reach more people out there who are searching for your type of business, but don't know you exist yet. Your dream clients are out there frustrated that they cannot find the right person to help them (you!).

There are millions of ways to get more people to find your website, and you might feel a bit lost as to where to start. But if you look past the acronyms and jargon, search engine optimisation (SEO) isn't actually that scary. These practical tips will help to get your website in top shape and importantly attract the right traffic to your site so you can get those dream enquiries. It really can be exciting and very rewarding!

Unfortunately there's no magic formula to quickly increase your rankings on search engines e.g. Google or Bing. Like anything that's worthwhile, it takes time and effort, but it doesn't have to be a struggle. You don't need any prior SEO knowledge to action these tips, but you will need to be able to update your website (usually through a content managed system) e.g. Wordpress.

Contents

On-site

1. Optimise your page titles and descriptions

Page titles are a very important aspect of SEO. Every page needs a title, and that title needs to:

- Be unique to that page
- Accurately describe the page's content
- Be brief (50-60 characters)

> Your home page title could also include the name and location of your business and main USPs

A meta description is a snippet – a tag in HTML – which summarises a page's content for both users and search engines. Search engines such as Google often display the meta description in search results, which can influence click-through rates. Every page needs a description, and that needs to:

- Be unique for all pages and articles
- Be succinct (50–160 characters)
- Avoid repeating the title
- Naturally use the keywords that the page is targeting – without being stuffed with them (called Keyword stuffing)!
- Entice the reader to want to visit your site, so that they click on your title and land on your page

2. Create SEO friendly URLs

Every page of your website will have a unique URL. It's shown in the browser address bar and in the search results (above the page title), so it needs to be easy for both search engines and humans to read. Guidelines for creating SEO Friendly URLs:

- Use hyphens to separate the words that make up your URL
- Avoid lengthy URLs with unnecessary words
- Use words that describe what the page is about but avoid keyword stuffing

Good examples	www.mydomain.co.uk/financial-industry-news www.mydomain.co.uk/2020/Jan/financial-industry-news
Bad examples	www.mydomain.co.uk/URL/1234563/5005.html www.mydomain.co.uk/socialmedianews www.mydomain.co.uk/id=7&sort=A&action=70

3. Add a breadcrumb menu

A breadcrumb menu is a set of links which appears just under the menu bar on a web page to aid navigation. You should have a breadcrumb menu on every page of your website. If you are using WordPress there are many free plug-ins to create a breadcrumb.

4. Improve the quality of your content

In order for your SEO efforts (and your website) to be successful you MUST have great content, that people want to read, share, link to and come back to.

- **Create content that people want** – this may sounds obvious but it's surprising how many websites write about what they want people to know, rather than what people actually want to know! Go to https://answerthepublic.com/ and enter your brand/ topic/ keyword and it will return all of the questions people are asking. Many searches are a question, so answering your audience's questions will help generate traffic to your website
- **Make sure your title reflects what's in the content** – it needs to be interesting enough for people to want to read, but not misleading e.g. Top 10 reasons why people release equity from their home
- **Include stats and facts** – use authoritative research or surveys (where appropriate) to add gravitas to what you are saying
- **Have fresh content** – not only is it an incentive for visitors to come back but importantly for search engine bots to visit and crawl your website more often. But avoid publishing pages with similar content just for the sake of updating your website or blog. Use industry news, events and social media to find ideas for relevant and topical content
- **Remember it's quality over quantity** – It's better to write a quality post without counting words rather than an unnaturally long article for the sake of a longer word count. Use the tips from 5 below to ensure good readability!
- **Finally...** check your text for typos, spelling and grammatical errors.

> Check your analytics for indicators of how good your content is: first check the time users spent on a page (did they stay long enough to read the whole page?) and second look at the number of social media interactions (Facebook likes, tweets etc).

5. Make your content easy to read

When publishing your website content remember that reading on a screen is much harder than in print. By following some basic formatting rules you will help not only your SEO efforts, but also improve the user experience by making it much easier to read. Guidelines for formatting a page on your website:

- Use headings – to help with readability you would naturally uses headings and sub headings. In coding these are called header tags e.g. <h1> HTML tag is the first header tag visible on a page (used for the title of a page or post), <h2> HTML tag should be used for main headings and <h3> HTML tags for sub headings. These header tags not only control the formatting of the text, but also tell search bots which bits of your page are most important. You don't need to worry too much about the coding aspect, as your content managed system (CMS) will do this for you but it's important to know that you should only have one <h1> tag per page, and not too many <h2> tags!
- Sentences should be short and to the point
- Use BOLD and italics to highlight key facts and quotes
- Write small paragraphs – 1 or 2 sentences per paragraph is recommended
- Use a font size that is easy to read on all devices e.g. smartphones, tablet and desktop

6. Add internal links to your content

Internal links are links in a page that point to other pages within your website, as opposed to external links which point out to other websites. Internal linking is a very important factor for website SEO and simple to implement, following these rules:

- Link related articles together either by using keyword anchor text e.g. linking the words 'equity release' to your page on equity release or by using the full article title e.g. 'Top 10 uses of equity release'
- Make sure that the links are useful to help the user navigate the site better, not just to help search engines crawl it
- Use intuitive linking text such as 'Go to finance blog' rather than 'Click here'
- Don't overdo it. A few internal links per page are enough, only create more if really necessary

> **Every few weeks go back to older pages and articles and link to new pages and articles. If you stay on top of it then it should be too time consuming and definitely worthwhile in terms of SEO benefit.**

7. Optimise your images

Images are often necessary to enhance the user experience, but are often overlooked from an SEO perspective. When using images you should:

- Use alt text (alternative text) - HTML code which appears if an image doesn't - to describe the appearance of an image on a page. You can include keywords, but don't keyword stuff!
- Use meaningful filenames (separated with hyphens) e.g. financial-adviser-with-client, instead of image1.jpg or person1.jpg
- Keep all image files in a dedicated folder in your site i.e. www.mydomain.co.uk/images/

8. Customise your 404 – The page cannot be found – page

The 404 page is the page shown when a user is looking for a page on your site that doesn't exist – by mistyping a URL or following a broken link. If your 404 page is not configured it creates a dead-end, which is obviously not helpful for the user. As SEO is about improving the user experience anything that negatively impacts that needs fixing. To create a personalised and useful 404 page you should:

- Display info to the user of what happened, rather than saying 'The page cannot be found'
- Have a design consistent with the rest of your website
- Include links so the user can easily navigate to other pages of the site

Technical

9. Use webmaster tools and analytics

Google has Search Console and Bing have what is called webmaster tools – these are free web services that will help you to improve your website's performance on these search engines. You can sign up, verify that you own the website (usually by adding a little bit of code to your home page) then you'll be able to log in to access reports which measure your site's search traffic and performance, fix issues and make your site shine in search results.

When you submit your website to Google and Bing you can:

- Tell them about your website (by submitting your sitemap)
- Track the number of incoming and internal links
- Get feedback on the number of pages indexed
- Get notified about potential problems i.e. access issues that restrict websites from crawling your content

You should also set up a web analytics tool (Google Analytics is free and by far the most popular) in order to:

- Find out how visitors come to your website e.g. direct visits, search, email, referrals, etc.
- See how many pages they view per visit and how much time they spend on your pages (and on which pages)
- Find out what keywords they used to find your website

10. Improve your page speed

Fast websites improve the user experience, prevent people bouncing straight off your site and encourage them to come back. Plus Google has confirmed that page speed is a ranking factor and it's likely that this will grow in importance, as search engines continue to strive to provide the searcher with the most accurate results in the fastest time. But tackling issues related to performance is technical and so some things may be beyond your capabilities to fix. However, you should be able to do the following:

- Reduce image sizes – first save the image in the smallest dimensions you can without it ever having to be stretched to display. Then use a compression tool (tinypng.com is a free online one) to reduce the file size. The smaller the file size of the image the faster your website will load
- Reduce the number of dynamic elements, sliders, widgets, social icons and fancy fonts – these may look appealing to the eye, but negatively impact the user experience. If you are using Wordpress use a lightweight theme
- Remove any unnecessary plug-ins (if you are using WordPress) and JavaScript from your pages
- Clean-up your database – delete any old pages (remember to put a redirect in place), images, folders and plug-ins

> **Search for 'Google PageSpeed Insights'. Go to the FREE tool, enter your domain and check your results for both mobile and desktop. This will give you tips about things you can do to improve your page speed.**

11. Make sure your website is mobile-friendly

It's very likely that a significant number of your website visitors are on a mobile device, which means you need to ensure they are getting the same great experience as your desktop users. The best way to achieve this is through a responsive website design.

12. Create an XML sitemap

A sitemap is a list of all the page/articles in your website (in XML format) that you need to submit to Google, Bing and other search engines to that they can effectively understand what your website is about. Usually your CMS e.g. Wordpress will have a plug-ins to create and update your website's sitemap.

13. Check your external links

External links (links in your website pointing to other sites) are important for SEO. In general ensure that:

- You have no broken links i.e. links to websites or pages that no longer exist. You can check your links with a free tool such as https://smallseotools.com/website-links-count-checker/
- You are not linking to websites with inappropriate content or spam websites
- You never sell or exchange links that aren't relevant
- Any links in your comments section carry the 'nofollow' directive

Off-site

14. Get links from other websites

There's no way of avoiding talking about link building when we talk about SEO, as search engines still use links as 'votes of trust' and this has a positive effect your ranking position. Today, it's all about quality (where these links are coming from) and not quantity (how many links are pointing to your website). Link building is a hard work and unfortunately there are no short cuts to getting quality links, but following these dos and don'ts will ensure that your efforts will produce results:

Do	Don't
• Publish great content on your website that people will naturally want to link to • Use social media channels to contact bloggers and website owners to tell them about your website and particular pieces of content • Link to other websites and let them know that you have. If they like your website, they may return the favour • Guest post e.g. publish content on other sites (usually articles/ blogs) and add links back to yours • Read Google's guidelines on link building • Use tools like SEMrush (www.semrush.com) to analyse the link profiles of your competitors and try to learn as much as you can about their link practices • Build your link profile gradually (any sudden changes to the number of incoming links may raise some warnings signals in the ranking algorithm) • Check your link profile frequently and take action if necessary to clean your profile from unwanted links	• Buy links – artificially generated links can get you in trouble • Do any form of massive link building • Add your link to low-quality websites • Link from comments or forums – these can sometimes do more harm than good (unless they are genuine and from well-trusted sources) • Get links from any old website – the link should be from a website related to your niche or industry

💡 **Learn the difference between a 'follow' and 'nofollow' link – it's only 'follow' links that will add value to your SEO efforts.**

15. Fix duplicate content issues with canonical URLs

Duplicate content can be a complicated subject, but put simply when search engines crawl many URLs with identical (or very similar) content, it can cause a number of SEO problems.

The problem is that we, as humans see pages differently than search engines, so sometimes we don't identify duplicate content in the same way a search crawler would. For example all of these URLs represent a single page, but to a search crawler, every single one of these URLs is unique:

- http://www.mydomain.co.uk
- https://www. mydomain.co.uk
- http:// mydomain.co.uk
- http:// mydomain.co.uk/index.php
- http:// mydomain.co.uk/index.php?test

To avoid these problems you need to add a canonical tag – bit of HTML code that goes in the <head> tag - to every page of your website to tell search engines which specific URL is the master copy of a page. Practically speaking, the canonical tag tells search engines which version of a URL you want to appear in search results.

You don't need to worry about understanding the code bit, as your CMS will do it for you, as long as you understand that you need to know which version of your page is the master one and point all other pages to that one as the canonical.

What next?

Of course, there are many things you can do to help your website achieve better rankings, but the SEO tips included in this guide will get you results without any risk of a penalty. Once you have implemented these steps you will no doubt have the confidence to move on to more advanced SEO work... and may even enjoy it!

Start referring today

It only takes a few minutes to register and make an equity release referral, just visit **www.keypartnerships.co.uk**. Or contact us:

refer@keypartnerships.co.uk   0800 138 1663