# SEO OPTIMIZATION

Getting Started

# INTRODUCTION

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) feels like an overused buzzword, but it still serves as an important marketing tool for your non-profit. Simply put, SEO is the act of helping Google (or another search engine) understand what your website is about. This way Google knows to show your website when people are searching for causes or non-profits related to you.

There are three main areas of SEO — technical, on-page, and off-page. Here's a quick overview of what each means:

### Technical
Technical SEO is making sure all the correct buttons and levers are set correctly on your website. It can seem overwhelming but we'll walk you through the steps to get it all setup.

### On-page
One-page SEO refers to the content on your website (words and pictures). You want to make sure the content is relevant to what potential donors may be looking for.

### Off-page
Off-page SEO is all about other relevant websites referencing your website. If important websites are linking to your website, Google sees that as validation that your website is a realible source.

Throughout this PDF we'll go each of these areas and look at them in more depth.

# TECHNICAL SEO

When it comes to Technical SEO you don't really need to know all the technical details. Instead, Technical SEO is mostly about going through a checklist to ensure you've done all the correct things Google wants to see throughout your website. Don't worry. We'll walk you through each step and explain why it's important.

*Note: Some options listed below are not available with certain website hosting providers. However, if your website is built with Wordpress you will have the ability to do everything listed below.*

## Permalinks

Simply put, your permalink settings dictate how your website URLs are styled.

For example, websites may displays URLs in the following styles:

**Plain** = www.sitename.com/?p=123
**Month & Name** = www.sitename.com/2022/04/page-name
**Post Name** = www.sitename.com/page-name

As you can see, the Post Name setting is easiest to read and understand what the page is about. The same goes for Google. The easier it is for Google to read the name the better.

**ACTION ITEM:** Set your permalink settings so it displays the 'Post Name'

## Slugs

While Permalinks determine URL styles, Slugs determine the exact wording of your URLs.

For example, if you have a page that is called Community Involvement, you will want to set your Slug to be www.sitename.com/community-involvement

Most website builders will auto-generate Slugs based on the title of the page itself. They will usually let you edit the Slug as well if you don't like the auto-generated version.

In the end, you want the Slug of a page to match the Title of the page as closely as possible.

## Site Speed

How fast your website loads has a direct impact on how likely someone is to stay and engage with your website — and Google's aware of this correlation. In fact,

There are a lot of technical factors that affect site speed, but the main things you can to do help your speed is to optimize images, use as few plugins as possible, and have good website hosting.

### Meta Data

Meta Data is the information that describes the page or blog post. It's also what Google and other search engines display in their search results. Meta Data is composed of two components:

- SEO Title

- Meta Description

**Adding Meta Data**

To add Meta Data to a page (or post) you'll first want to install the Yoast plugin (see our Yoast guide). Once the plugin is installed you simply go to the editor for that page and scroll down until you see the Yoast section.

The two main things we want to edit are the 'SEO Title' and 'Meta Description'.

For the 'SEO Title' field you'll want to add the name of the page. This will change your page's title in the search engines, so make sure it's a clear, catchy title.

For the 'Meta Description' you'll want to write a quick pitch about what your page contains and why someone should come to it. If possible, it's good include any keywords you think users may search for — but make the inclusion feel natural.

Yoast will help you determine the correct length for your 'SEO title' and 'Meta description'. It is important to have these fields not exceed the recommendation character limit. If you exceed those limits it's likely that your title and description will be cut off by search engines.

*Note: Most website builders will allow you to edit the meta titles and descriptions for each page, so make sure to take advantage of this option. It makes a big difference in how often someone chooses your website over another.*

### Categories

Categories help Google understand how your blog posts relate to one another.

Typically you want to have 5 – 7 categories for your website, and each category should have a name and a description (usually 1 – 2 paragraphs long).

Then you want to assign 1 category to each blog post. Assigning more than 1 category per blog post will confuse Google and make it harder for your post to rank.

# ON-PAGE SEO

On-page SEO refers to how the content on a page is structured. When you format your content properly it helps Google understand information on the page and how it relates to the rest of your website.

Luckily On-page SEO is not difficult — all you need to do is remember a few best practices.

## The Content Itself

The most important thing to remember when writing the content for your website is it should be easy to read and serve the reader. Content that is clear and helpful (versus overly optimized content) is preferred by search engines.

So, always write with the reader in mind — not the search engine algorithm.

## Headers

Just like a book, your website pages should be broken down in sections. There are some best practices search engines like to see when it comes to how you structure your headers.

### H1

Google gives this header the most priority so it should clearly state what the page is about. Only have one H1 on a page.

### H2

Think of these as the chapters of your page. Every time the content on your pages shifts into a different subject or category mark the change with an H2. The H2 should explain what the rest of the content in it's section is about.

### H3

H3s are the subcategories of your H2 sections. These headers should be used to mark key points related to the H2.

## Alt Text

Google and other search engines don't read the images you have on your website. Instead, they rely on 'alt text' to understand what an image is.

Alt text is essentially a short description you give to every image on your website.

To write effective alt text you want to accurately describe what the image is about and how it relates to your non-profit.

**ACTION ITEM:** Make sure each image on your website has alt text.

### Using Keywords

Most of the time search engines will rank a page on your website for only one key term or phrase. Because of this it's important to figure out what key term (or phrase) you want the page to rank for.

Once you know that, think of words often associated with your chosen key term (or phrase) — these are keywords.

When writing your content you want to include these keywords through the page. But, make sure to include them in a way that feels natural and adds value to the content.

Remember, clear and helpful content is always better than overly-optimized content.

### Interlinking

Google and other search engines will navigate your website to better understand the big picture of what your website is about. To assist the engines in this process you want to find natural ways to link pages within your website.

For example, you have a page about volunteering and you mention your annual cleanup event. You should have the 'annual cleanup' text in that sentence link to annual cleanup page. This helps the search engines understand the association between your two pages.

# OFF-PAGE SEO

The best way to summarize off-page SEO is it's a search engines way of determining how reputable your website is. The more other high-profile websites link to yours the better it makes your website look.

For many non-profits there is little benefit to putting resources towards off-page SEO. It's too resource intensive and those resources are better focused on on-page and technical SEO.

However, we want to at least give you some insights on how off-page SEO works.

### Backlinks

Of the biggest factors for increasing your DA is through backlinks.

Backlinks are a link someone else has on their website that links to a particular page on your website. It's the equivalent of saying, "Hey these people over at this website have content you may find valuable, so click here to see what they have to say."

Search engines look at this backlinks and how reputable the websites linking to yours are. Links from reputable websites are considered high quality backlinks, while backlinks from new or spammy websites are considered low quality.

Lots of high quality links will increase the reputation of your website.

There are a lot strategies to get backlinks but the best strategy you can implement is to make the content on your website helpful and knowledgeable.

### Domain Authority

One thing you may hear about when it comes to SEO is your Domain Authority (DA) — which is a way to represent your website's reputation. Even though DA is not a ranking factor, it's important to know what it is and why it's talked about in regards to SEO.

Websites are ranked on a scale of 1 – 100 (higher number being better).

Each search engine determines DA differently so there is no way to truly know your DA. But, some SEO tools can provide you a general ballpark of what your DA likely is.

**Google Business Profile**

If your non-profit has a physical address we encourage you to create a free Google Business Profile. Getting a Google Business Profile is how you get your non-profit to show up Google Maps.

In addition to being on Google Maps, Google uses the data on your Business Profile to better understand your non-profit. Once you've linked your Business Profile with your website, Google can these associate the two together.

# CONCLUSION

If your head is spinning a bit don't worry — SEO can be overwhelming. Luckily, we have additional blogs and resources to help you in your journey.

Simply go to designersfornonprofits.us/resources/ to learn more.

As always if you have any questions or would like a free consulting session please make sure to reach out to us — we're here to help!

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