The pages of this document contain excerpts from Google’s Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide. This guide leads you through the how-to's and best practices of developing effective content for your website, as it relates to search engine optimization and getting found online.

We at Marquis are providing this information as a service to you, in an effort to help you improve your search engine rankings. We hope that you find it useful in the development of your new website’s content. As always, we are available for questions and can point you to an SEO expert should you require assistance with this work. Happy writing!
Welcome to Google's Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide

This document first began as an effort to help teams within Google, but we thought it’d be just as useful to webmasters that are new to the topic of search engine optimization and wish to improve their sites' interaction with both users and search engines. Although this guide won’t tell you any secrets that’ll automatically rank your site first for queries in Google (sorry!), following the best practices outlined below will make it easier for search engines to crawl, index and understand your content.

Search engine optimization is often about making small modifications to parts of your website. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic search results. You're likely already familiar with many of the topics in this guide, because they're essential ingredients for any web page, but you may not be making the most out of them.

Even though this guide's title contains the words "search engine", we’d like to say that you should base your optimization decisions first and foremost on what's best for the visitors of your site. They're the main consumers of your content and are using search engines to find your work. Focusing too hard on specific tweaks to gain ranking in the organic results of search engines may not deliver the desired results. Search engine optimization is about putting your site's best foot forward when it comes to visibility in search engines, but your ultimate consumers are your users, not search engines.

Your site may be smaller or larger than our example site and offer vastly different content, but the optimization topics we discuss below should apply to sites of all sizes and types. We hope our guide gives you some fresh ideas on how to improve your website, and we'd love to hear your questions, feedback, and success stories in the Google Webmaster Help Forum.
Create unique, accurate page titles

Indicate page titles by using title tags

A title tag tells both users and search engines what the topic of a particular page is. The `<title>` tag should be placed within the `<head>` tag of the HTML document. Ideally, you should create a unique title for each page on your site.

Page title contents are displayed in search results

If your document appears in a search results page, the contents of the title tag will usually appear in the first line of the results (if you're unfamiliar with the different parts of a Google search result, you might want to check out the anatomy of a search result video by Google engineer Matt Cutts, and this helpful diagram of a Google search results page). Words in the title are bolded if they appear in the user's search query. This can help users recognize if the page is likely to be relevant to their search.

The title for your homepage can list the name of your website/business and could include other bits of important information like the physical location of the business or maybe a few of its main focuses or offerings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search engine</th>
<th>HTML</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer function that searches data available on the Internet using keywords or other specified terms, or a program containing this function.</td>
<td>Abbreviation for HyperText Markup Language, a language used when describing web page documents. It denotes the basic elements of web pages, including the document text and any hyperlinks and images embedded within.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head tag</td>
<td>Search query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An element that indicates the header in an HTML document. The content of this element will not be displayed in a browser.</td>
<td>Single or multiple terms which are input by the user when performing a search on search engines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Best Practices**

**Accurately describe the page's content**
Choose a title that effectively communicates the topic of the page’s content.

**Avoid:**
- choosing a title that has no relation to the content on the page
- using default or vague titles like “Untitled” or “New Page 1”

**Create unique title tags for each page**
Each of your pages should ideally have a unique title tag, which helps Google know how the page is distinct from the others on your site.

**Avoid:**
- using a single title tag across all of your site’s pages or a large group of pages

**Use brief, but descriptive titles**
Titles can be both short and informative. If the title is too long, Google will show only a portion of it in the search result.

**Avoid:**
- using extremely lengthy titles that are unhelpful to users
- stuffing unneeded keywords in your title tags

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**Links**

- The anatomy of a search result
- Diagram of a Google search results page
  http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=35891
Summaries can be defined for each page

A page’s description meta tag gives Google and other search engines a summary of what the page is about (1). Whereas a page’s title may be a few words or a phrase, a page’s description meta tag might be a sentence or two or a short paragraph. Google Webmaster Tools provides a handy content analysis section that’ll tell you about any description meta tags that are either too short, long, or duplicated too many times (the same information is also shown for <title> tags). Like the <title> tag, the description meta tag is placed within the <head> tag of your HTML document.

What are the merits of description meta tags?

Description meta tags are important because Google might use them as snippets for your pages. Note that we say “might” because Google may choose to use a relevant section of your page’s visible text if it does a good job of matching up with a user’s query. Alternatively, Google might use your site’s description in the Open Directory Project if your site is listed there (learn how to prevent search engines from displaying ODP data). Adding description meta tags to each of your pages is always a good practice in case Google cannot find a good selection of text to use in the snippet. The Webmaster Central Blog has an informative post on improving snippets with better description meta tags.

Words in the snippet are bolded when they appear in the user’s query (2). This gives the user clues about whether the content on the page matches with what he or she is looking for. (3) is another example, this time showing a snippet from a description meta tag on a deeper page (which ideally has its own unique description meta tag) containing an article.

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Snippet</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text displayed beneath the title of a corresponding web page on the search results pages of a search engine. A web page summary and/or parts of the page that match the search keywords will be displayed.</td>
<td>An address on the Internet that indicates the location of a computer or network. These are administered to avoid duplication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world’s largest volunteer-run web directory (a list of Internet links collected on a large scale and then organized by category).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Best Practices

Accurately summarize the page's content

Write a description that would both inform and interest users if they saw your description meta tag as a snippet in a search result.

Avoid:
- writing a description meta tag that has no relation to the content on the page
- using generic descriptions like "This is a web page" or "Page about baseball cards"
- filling the description with only keywords
- copying and pasting the entire content of the document into the description meta tag

Use unique descriptions for each page

Having a different description meta tag for each page helps both users and Google, especially in searches where users may bring up multiple pages on your domain (e.g. searches using the site: operator). If your site has thousands or even millions of pages, hand-crafting description meta tags probably isn't feasible. In this case, you could automatically generate description meta tags based on each page's content.

Avoid:
- using a single description meta tag across all of your site's pages or a large group of pages

Use description meta tags to provide both search engines and users with a summary of what your page is about!
Offer quality content and services

Interesting sites will increase their recognition on their own

Creating compelling and useful content will likely influence your website more than any of the other factors discussed here (1). Users know good content when they see it and will likely want to direct other users to it. This could be through blog posts, social media services, email, forums, or other means.

Organic or word-of-mouth buzz is what helps build your site’s reputation with both users and Google, and it rarely comes without quality content.

Anticipate differences in users' understanding of your topic and offer unique, exclusive content

Think about the words that a user might search for to find a piece of your content. Users who know a lot about the topic might use different keywords in their search queries than someone who is new to the topic. For example, a long-time baseball fan might search for [nlcs], an acronym for the National League Championship Series, while a new fan might use a more general query like [baseball playoffs]. Anticipating these differences in search behavior and accounting for them while writing your content (using a good mix of keyword phrases) could produce positive results. Google AdWords provides a handy Keyword Tool that helps you discover new keyword variations and see the approximate search volume for each keyword (2). Also, Google Webmaster Tools provides you with the top search queries your site appears for and the ones that led the most users to your site.

Consider creating a new, useful service that no other site offers. You could also write an original piece of research, break an exciting news story, or leverage your unique user base. Other sites may lack the resources or expertise to do these things.
Best Practices

Write easy-to-read text

Users enjoy content that is well written and easy to follow.

Avoid:
• writing sloppy text with many spelling and grammatical mistakes
• embedding text in images for textual content
  - users may want to copy and paste the text and search engines can’t read it

Stay organized around the topic

It’s always beneficial to organize your content so that visitors have a good sense of where one content topic begins and another ends. Breaking your content up into logical chunks or divisions helps users find the content they want faster.

Avoid:
• dumping large amounts of text on varying topics onto a page without paragraph, subheading, or layout separation

Create fresh, unique content

New content will not only keep your existing visitor base coming back, but also bring in new visitors.

Avoid:
• rehashing (or even copying) existing content that will bring little extra value to users
• having duplicate or near-duplicate versions of your content across your site
  - more on duplicate content

Create content primarily for your users, not search engines

Designing your site around your visitors’ needs while making sure your site is easily accessible to search engines usually produces positive results.

Avoid:
• inserting numerous unnecessary keywords aimed at search engines but are annoying or nonsensical to users
• having blocks of text like “frequent misspellings used to reach this page” that add little value for users
• deceptively hiding text from users, but displaying it to search engines

Links

Keyword Tool
https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

Top search queries
http://www.google.com/webmasters/edu/quickstartguide/sub1guide5.html

Duplicate content
http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=66359

Hiding text from users
http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=66353
Write better anchor text

Suitable anchor text makes it easy to convey the contents linked

Anchor text is the clickable text that users will see as a result of a link, and is placed within the anchor tag `<a href="..."></a>.

This text tells users and Google something about the page you’re linking to. Links on your page maybe internal—pointing to other pages on your site—or external—leading to content on other sites. In either of these cases, the better your anchor text is, the easier it is for users to navigate and for Google to understand what the page you’re linking to is about.

With appropriate anchor text, users and search engines can easily understand what the linked pages contain.

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSS</th>
<th>Text style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation for Cascading Style Sheets; a language for defining the design and layout of a web page.</td>
<td>Formatting, such as the font, size and color of the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choose descriptive text
The anchor text you use for a link should provide at least a basic idea of what the page linked to is about.

Avoid:
- writing generic anchor text like “page”, “article”, or “click here”
- using text that is off-topic or has no relation to the content of the page linked to
- using the page’s URL as the anchor text in most cases
  - although there are certainly legitimate uses of this, such as promoting or referencing a new website’s address

Write concise text
Aim for short but descriptive text—usually a few words or a short phrase.

Avoid:
- writing long anchor text, such as a lengthy sentence or short paragraph of text

Format links so they're easy to spot
Make it easy for users to distinguish between regular text and the anchor text of your links. Your content becomes less useful if users miss the links or accidentally click them.

Avoid:
- using CSS or text styling that make links look just like regular text

Think about anchor text for internal links too
You may usually think about linking in terms of pointing to outside websites, but paying more attention to the anchor text used for internal links can help users and Google navigate your site better.

Avoid:
- using excessively keyword-filled or lengthy anchor text just for search engines
- creating unnecessary links that don’t help with the user’s navigation of the site
Best Practices

Use brief, but descriptive filenames and alt text
Like many of the other parts of the page targeted for optimization, filenames and alt text (for ASCII languages) are best when they’re short, but descriptive.

Avoid:
- using generic filenames like "image1.jpg", "pic.gif", "1.jpg" when possible—some sites with thousands of images might consider automating the naming of images
- writing extremely lengthy filenames
- stuffing keywords into alt text or copying and pasting entire sentences

Supply alt text when using images as links
If you do decide to use an image as a link, filling out its alt text helps Google understand more about the page you’re linking to. Imagine that you’re writing anchor text for a text link.

Avoid:
- writing excessively long alt text that would be considered spammy
- using only image links for your site’s navigation

Supply an Image Sitemap file
An Image Sitemap file can provide Googlebot with more information about the images found on your site. Its structure is similar to the XML Sitemap file for your web pages.

Learn how to optimize images on your site!

Links
- JPEG: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JPEG
- BMP: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMP_file_format
- Image Sitemap: http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=178636
Use heading tags appropriately

Use heading tags to emphasize important text

Heading tags (not to be confused with the `<head>` HTML tag or HTTP headers) are used to present structure on the page to users. There are six sizes of heading tags, beginning with `<h1>`, the most important, and ending with `<h6>`, the least important (1).

Since heading tags typically make text contained in them larger than normal text on the page, this is a visual cue to users that this text is important and could help them understand something about the type of content underneath the heading text. Multiple heading sizes used in order create a hierarchical structure for your content, making it easier for users to navigate through your document.

Best Practices

Imagine you’re writing an outline

Similar to writing an outline for a large paper, put some thought into what the main points and sub-points of the content on the page will be and decide where to use heading tags appropriately.

Avoid:
- placing text in heading tags that wouldn’t be helpful in defining the structure of the page
- using heading tags where other tags like `<em>` and `<strong>` may be more appropriate
- erratically moving from one heading tag size to another

Use headings sparingly across the page

Use heading tags where it makes sense. Too many heading tags on a page can make it hard for users to scan the content and determine where one topic ends and another begins.

Avoid:
- excessively using heading tags throughout the page
- putting all of the page’s text into a heading tag
- using heading tags only for styling text and not presenting structure

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HTTP Headers</th>
<th>Wildcard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol), different types of data that are sent off before the actual data itself.</td>
<td>A character (*) that takes the place of any other character or string of characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;rem&gt;</code></td>
<td>HTaccess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertext access file, a file that allows you to manage web server configuration.</td>
<td><code>&lt;strong&gt;</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An HTML tag denoting emphasis. According to standard, it will indicate emphasis through use of italics.</td>
<td>Referer log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;strong&gt;</code></td>
<td>Referer information that is written into the access log. When it is traced, one can find out from which sites visitors arrived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An HTML tag denoting strong emphasis. According to standard, it will indicate emphasis through use of bold print.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check out Google's SEO resources and tools.

Google Webmaster Central

http://www.google.com/webmasters/