

WORDPRESS SEO 101

GET MORE SEARCH ENGINE TRAFFIC TO YOUR WORDPRESS SITE



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Introduction

WordPress is not just a blogging platform these days. It's a complete Content Management System (CMS) that will allow users to build pretty much any type of website imaginable using various plugins and themes.

One of the big problems with WordPress, however, is its serious lack of native SEO. It has only basic SEO functionality, and the rest must be taken care of manually.

There are myriad plugins available for WordPress SEO, but none of them will handle 100% of the optimization for your site. They also work differently and have different functions, so choosing the right one can be tricky.

In this guide, you're going to learn about the basics of setting up your WordPress for optimal search engine optimization, and how you can make sure your blog or site is set up with the basic foundation of proper SEO. We'll take a look at popular plugins, methods you can use to optimize your site, tools you can use, and more.

So let's begin.

Basics of SEO

Before you begin working on SEO for your WordPress website, it's important to understand basic SEO principles as they apply to all websites and that should apply for many years to come.

Remember that SEO does evolve and change over time. It used to be that simply stuffing your keyword over and over on a page (sometimes in text the same color as the background so visitors would not see it) could help you rank on the first page of pretty much any search engine.

But search engine algorithms have gotten much smarter and much more complex. And this will continue to happen as time goes on. You need to prepare for that and keep evolving with the search engines.

As of this writing, there are some basic SEO principles you can use to help your rankings:

1. **Keyword Research** – Keyword research will always be important, even as search engines evolve into using semantics. Sure, you might rank for “top golf tips” if you pick the keyword “best golf tips” because they are semantically similar, but you still need to know what topics are most commonly searched for to be sure you're creating the content that could help you rank for those searches.
2. **Title Tags** – The title of your page will probably always hold significant weight. Obviously, people are going to title their page based on their page's content, so search engines will look at that as

one of the most important factors when figuring out what a page is about.

3. **Headings** – Heading tags (such as H1, H2, etc.) are important because they are like your title. Most people use heading tags to enclose the title that is presented at the top of the page, like the name of the article.
4. **Page Text** – The text on your page should contain your main keyword phrase once or twice, but do NOT try to achieve some specific keyword density. Just write naturally. Semantics will take care of the rest.
5. **Backlinks** – You’ve probably read about how important it is to get backlinks already, but did you know you need to be very careful about how many you get, where they come from, the text that is used to link to your page, and a lot of other factors? We’ll take a look at backlinks in another section, but yes, getting links to your site (and your individual pages/posts) is very important.
6. **Social Signals** – Social signals, such as likes, shares, pins, tweets, etc., are another linking factor. While those links may not actually count as far as backlink juice (because most social network links are nofollow or cannot be seen by search engines because of user privacy) many of them ARE counted for SEO purposes.
7. **Content Length** – The length of your content now matters more than ever. Google believes longer content is more in-depth and will be more authoritative and useful to readers, so longer copy is key. The days of 250-300 words articles are long gone. These days, 750-1000 words is preferable, and anything longer is a bonus.

8. **Load Speed** – The speed at which your page loads is extremely important. If your page takes too long to load, it WILL affect your SEO rankings. Make sure your images are optimized and your hosting company is fast.
9. **Outbound Links** – Backlinks used to be the big factor in rankings. These days, they're important, but not the biggest ranking factor. But though a lot of people realize having links TO their site is important, few seem to know that linking OUT to other authority sites can boost your own rankings. It's a good idea to cite sources for your content with a link or recommend other good content that gives a different perspective than your own. Going overboard will harm your ranking, but a few links sprinkled into your articles to sites with good authority will help.
10. **Mobile Friendly** – Your site should be optimized for mobile browsers, either resizing dynamically or redirecting mobile users to a different version of the site. For WordPress sites, this means choosing a mobile-friendly theme.
11. **Trust** – Trust is a crucial factor. It's a measurement of how much Google thinks your site is trustworthy, and includes a number of different factors including domain age, length of time before the domain expires, linking to trusted authority sites, having a proper privacy policy, terms and conditions, etc., bounce rate, and other factors.

You can check your Trust Rank with Google Chrome using...

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/trust-checker/pffgendbkefdgodfpapflaoedmmmfcgnk?hl=en>

This is not, by any means, an exhaustive list of ranking factors. It would take a full-length book to describe all of them. But it's a good, solid foundation on which to build your SEO plan.

Basic Setup

The first thing you need to do for WordPress SEO is to be sure you've completed the basic, essential setup for your WordPress site.

URL

First, you need to decide whether you'd like your site to be found at:

<http://yoursite.com>

OR

<http://www.yoursite.com>

Either one is fine for SEO purposes, so it's up to you which you use. If you have an aged domain you might want to check MozTrust for your domain to see if one version has more trust than the other, you'll obviously want to use that one.

To change your URL, simply visit Settings > General. Your WordPress URL and your Site URL will probably be the same unless you installed Wordpress in a subdirectory. The default does not have the www included. You can leave it if that's how you want it to be, but you can add the www if you prefer that or if the www versions has more MozTrust.

Once you do this, you'll want to visit [Google Webmaster Tools](#) to make sure they use the right version.

Under Webmaster Tools, visit Settings > Preferred domain. There you can set it to display URLs with or without the www.

Permalinks

One of the most important basic setup steps you can take for SEO for your WordPress blog is to change the permalink structure found under Settings > Permalinks.

The default structure is ?p=postid which is terrible for SEO purposes. It doesn't allow the use of keywords in the URL and doesn't offer any useful information to search engines.

To change your structure, select either "Post name" or "Custom structure". If you choose post name, your URLs will look like this:

<http://yoursite.com/title-of-your-article>

You can also use a custom structure such as %category%/postname%.

This would make your URLs look like this:

<http://yoursite.com/category/title-of-your-article>

Either one is fine for SEO purposes, but using the category/title provides a good "Silo structure", which basically means it helps the authority of your pages because everything is organized into specific categories instead of being lumped in together.

Choosing an SEO Plugin

There's a plethora of plugins out there to help you control the SEO of your WordPress site, but they come down to two very popular choices:

[WordPress SEO by Yoast](#)

[All-in-One SEO Pack](#)

Both are very similar in features, and either one will work fine for SEO purposes. They are slightly different in terms of features, so you might want to briefly try both just to see which you like better.

Yoast has a slightly better overall rating on the WordPress website, and is used by over 1,000,000 blogs. All-in-One is also currently used on over 1,000,000 blogs. As you can see, they're both very comparable.

Dan Shure of Evolving SEO did a complete side-by-side comparison of Yoast vs. All-in-One here:

<http://www.evolvingseo.com/2014/02/14/all-in-one-vs-yoast-seo-test-drive/>

He found a definite benefit of using Yoast over All-in-One. In fact, Yoast won by a large margin when weighed against All-in-One on a large number of SEO factors.

If you look in the comments, he mentioned he can see All-in-One working well for smaller sites or bloggers, but Yoast is definitely the best option when SEO really matters.

This article was written in 2014, and things can change rapidly in the world of SEO and plugins, so it's still a good idea to test options yourself. This article just provides a good starting point to help you decide for yourself. (It also gives you a basic understanding of the importance of some SEO factors.)

Whichever plugin you choose, be sure to read its instructions well and be sure you're using every possible feature included. Too many people install the plugin and expect it to work automatically, but there are things that must be tweaked, and you'll need to include some extra information every time you make a post such as the main keyword you want that page optimized for.

Google Webmaster Tools

Webmaster Tools isn't just for WordPress sites, but it's important that you sign up for it, just the same. Webmaster Tools will allow you to keep track of any issues your website might have, set certain preferences for your site, and keep tabs of certain things such as what keywords people are using to pull your site up in Google.

If you have the WordPress SEO plugin by Yoast, it's easy to verify your site in Webmaster tools. Log into Webmaster Tools here:

<http://google.com/webmasters/tools>

Select the "Alternate methods" tab and choose "HTML tag". Copy the meta tag shown in the box by highlighting it and pressing CTRL-C, or pressing COMMAND-C on a Mac, or right clicking and choosing copy.

Now go to your blog and log in. Under the SEO tab in your WordPress admin (Yoast SEO) choose Extensions. You'll see several fields where you can enter codes for various sites. Enter your code in the Google Webmaster Tools section, and then go back to Webmaster Tools and click VERIFY. Viola! All done.

Google Analytics

Another critical element of SEO is having analytics so you can track your progress and figure out exactly how you're doing. Google Analytics is the most common tool for this.

Unfortunately, changes to Google's privacy settings have destroyed a lot of the usefulness of Analytics. It used to be that you could see almost every keyword used to find your site. Now, you can only see a handful of keyword searches.

Still, Analytics is useful for a variety of reasons. It will allow you to see how much traffic you're getting, where your traffic is coming from, what your bounce rate is (the percentage of people who leave your site without viewing any other pages), and other important information.

There's a plugin from Yoast that will allow you to easily add Analytics to your WordPress site. You can download the plugin, as well as find installation and usage instructions, from this URL:

<https://yoast.com/wordpress/plugins/google-analytics/>

Page Speed

Another major element of SEO is the speed at which your page loads. Google wants its visitors to enjoy the sites they visit, and if a site takes too long to load, visitors will often leave quickly. This increases bounce rate, and also makes Google unhappy.

To check your page speed, including discovering actionable information you can use to speed up your page, take a look at Google's Page Speed Insights.

<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>

Using this will help you figure out what needs to be changed in order to speed up your site. It might involve getting a new host, or it may be as simple as optimizing your images or installing a caching plugin.

W3 Total Cache is one of the most popular caching plugins. It will turn your dynamic pages into static ones, meaning they load faster.

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/w3-total-cache/>

Crosslink Posts

Once you have the foundation of your SEO set up, it's time to make sure you're doing all you can every time you make a post to ensure the best outcome for your SEO.

That means making a few key posts that you might think of as cornerstone posts, and then referencing those posts in other similar posts.

For example, let's say you have a post called "10 Ways To Increase Traffic". It might be very in-depth, detailed information about using ten different social networks to increase a website's traffic.

Then you could write smaller blog posts on each of those traffic sources and link to your cornerstone post by saying something like:

"Facebook is just one way you can increase your traffic with social media. Check out my post '10 Ways To Increase Traffic' for more ways to explode your website's traffic."

Not only will this help lower your bounce rate, it will also benefit you by giving a boost to the SEO potential of your cornerstone posts.

Social Signals & Backlinks

You know it's important to get backlinks to your site, but did you know the source of your backlinks and the text used to link to your site is just as important as getting a lot of links?

You want to make sure you get backlinks from quality sites, and from a wide variety of different domains. You also want to be sure you're NOT using the exact same text to link to your site every time, because this can appear spammy. Instead, vary the text used to link to you between a few similar keyword phrases, and potentially the name of your site, too.

Social signals are also increasingly important. The more likes and shares you get on a large variety of platforms and from a large number of accounts, the better.

Be sure you have a plugin installed to help you get more likes and shares to your content.

Here are a few to try:

<https://sumome.com/app/image-sharer>

<https://sumome.com/app/share>

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/aas-digg-digg-alternative/>

Conclusion

SEO is a complex, ever-changing game. You need to stay on top of it if you expect to get significant traffic from Google and other search engines.

And you definitely want to tap into such a massive, targeted traffic source. What kind of traffic could be more targeted (thus, ready to potentially buy something) than someone who deliberately searches for what you're offering?

Now that you've read the complete guide, you should have a good working knowledge of SEO and how it applies to WordPress sites.

You'll know about some of the most important plugins and tools you should be using, and you'll be prepared to implement them.

If you're serious about getting your site to rank, you'll want to delve deeper into some of the big SEO topics like social signals and backlinks. These topics will help you get even more from your SEO efforts.

I wish you all the best with your WordPress SEO efforts, and I hope you get all the traffic you deserve!

Resources

Here are quick links to the resources mentioned in the guide:

Check Your Trust Ranking With Chrome:

<http://moonsy.com/moztruhttps://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/trust-checker/pffgendbkefdgodfpapflaoedmmfcgnk?hl=en>

Google Webmaster Tools:

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/>

SEO by Yoast:

<https://yoast.com/wordpress/plugins/seo/>

All-in-One SEO:

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/all-in-one-seo-pack/>

Analytics by Yoast:

<https://yoast.com/wordpress/plugins/google-analytics/>

Page Speed Insights:

<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>

W3 Total Cache Plugin:

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/w3-total-cache/>

SumoMe Image Sharer:

<https://sumome.com/app/image-sharer>

SumoMe Share:

<https://sumome.com/app/share>

Digg Digg:

<https://wordpress.org/plugins/digg-digg/>

Additional Resources:

Like the Social Share Monkey example above - these additional Monkey web-apps contain no Monkey Branding and provide unique, exciting and professional "outside of the box" solutions to many of today's common web-mastering challenges.

Landing Page Monkey: <http://landingpagemonkey.com/>

Pop Up Monkey: <http://popupmonkey.com/>

Conversion Gorilla: <http://conversiongorilla.com/>