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What is SEO and how it works in 2021

SEO or search engine optimisation became an integral part of the article-writing process during these last years, as well as necessary knowledge for any blogger or copywriter.

In this article, we will give you some basic SEO advice that is always, indefinitely worth remembering. Then, we will look at some of the 2021 SEO trends – because yes, there *are* trends and tendencies in SEO and you better know about them! What's more, Google keeps updating its algorithm concerning SEO almost every year, and you, too, should be up to speed on it. Not knowing it is just not worth it.

SEO basics, or how to be the first, the last, and the best click

First, let's get something straight – SEO is, indeed, a *search engine* optimisation, with crawlers making sure you publish relevant content and keywords and snippets being analysed, highlighted and selected. But remember – you're still writing for humans. Don't try to outsmart the algorithm – you will most definitely fail, and what's more, you will deliver the content that will be at least unclear, at most – harmful to the readers, but most importantly to yourself. All in all, you will *not* deliver. So, here it is – some basic SEO knowledge that you should have known for a long time. We don't know if you do, but here's your chance to. If you already know it – congratulations!

1. Page speed

It's probably one of the main things you should think about, and one of the most obvious and banal! Yes, we know, it's 2021 and slow pages just shouldn't be there anymore. Yet somehow, they find their way to our browsers and take more than 2 seconds to load. Make sure it's not your case! Remember to optimise your images, minify your code, enable compression. If you're using WordPress, deactivate plugins you don't need. Just so it's clear – a slow page is a very bad beginning and not many clients will wait even a couple more seconds for your content to load, and seeing your bounce rate increase dramatically is just very sad. What's more, site speed is one of the ranking factors of the Google algorithm, and it is since APRIL 9, 2010. Be sure to be up to speed with your speed.

2. Links

Don't hesitate to link to other blogs in your articles – it will probably pay off and give your website a little boost and the opportunity to be linked, too! Also, encourage other sites to link to you. It's just like building a network in real life – the more contacts - or in this case backlinks - you have, the better, the more possibilities of collaboration and success you have.

3. Descriptions

Write meta-descriptions for your page, for they are the first element your clients see when they look your website up on Google. Therefore, spending some time to make it perfect is absolutely worth it. Try to put the essence of your website in your meta-description. Put the title tag, too!

Also, don't forget to add alternative text to your optimised images. It's not only a good SEO practice but also an important feature for your visually impaired readers or when a page is not loading correctly. But not only! Alt description and the right file name for your image are also necessary for engine crawlers to correctly index it. What's more, according to Search Engine Journal, in 2018, over 20% of all U.S.A. searches were happening on Google Images. In 2021, it's way more, and for a reason – people want to search and even buy by images, and Google wants to let them! Google Lens and Pinterest are thriving. Be a part of the solution and participate in this visual revolution by posting only perfectly optimised described images.

4. URL

Be sure your URLs are simple and clear. Forget about numbers and weird, random letters. With your URL, you want to give your reader a hint of what he is about to experience, and `www.johnswebsite.net/555577688=file%2r` won't tell him anything.

Bonus (you should know it, but we'll say it anyway, in case you forgot): Google doesn't read underscores, so-use-hyphens. Also, use lowercase all along your URL. Forget that uppercase ever existed!

5. Overall consistency

Consistency has many aspects. The ones you should retain are consistency in writing – post your unique, original content regularly; and consistency in your website personality. What do you mean, you will ask – we won't tell you to stick to your visual identity, we are not qualified for that. We mainly mean sticking to your domain name. It may sound obvious but is not. Your domain name is just like your phone number – people will (we hope) use it to get in touch with you, to give you some feedback, to interact. Make it as easy as possible! And most importantly, think hard and long about your domain name before choosing it! It's better to put some time and effort into it at the beginning and to save time and faithful readers later on. If your website is undergoing some maintenance, try to make it as short as possible to not lose valuable clients. Also, try to limit the redirect chains that tend to frustrate users. They like the beautiful simplicity of seeing what is being shown to them, not of clicking to get somewhere else.

6. Regular updates

Re-optimize and relaunch the articles that are no longer up to date. It will give you more traffic and avoid your users' confusion.

7. Keywords

We don't want to talk too much about keywords that are one of the main SEO elements and for sure the most well-known. Our message is: avoid keyword stuffing and focus on long-tail search phrases instead of single keywords.

8. Your! Website! HAS! To! Be! Responsive!

According to Business News Daily, since July 2018, Google has prioritised mobile page load speed as a key metric when determining a website's search result ranking. From July 1, 2019, mobile-first indexing is listed as a ranking factor for all new websites. What's more, over 50%

of all global web traffic comes from mobile devices! They play an enormous role in our lives, but also in the SEO process and you shouldn't forget about it. Also, in 2021 it kind of goes without saying – your website is, by default, responsive. Period.

SEO in 2021

With this basic but fundamental knowledge in mind, it's time for important 2021 updates. How does SEO works in 2021? What's important this year?

On SEMrush blog, the first trend listed for 2021 is “Artificial Intelligence will play a larger role in SEO”. You bet! Contentyze is making this point true, and very well, too. Other trends were recurrent in most of the lists for this year, and we went through a bunch of them: Backlinko's colossal *Definitive guide to SEO in 2021*, SEMrush's *12 SEO Trends to know for 2021* or Moz's *21 Smart Google SEO Tips for 2021*. In real SEO spirit, we also looked at some very useful Google features like People also ask, where we found questions like *Is SEO still relevant in 2021* or *why is SEO important in 2021*. In our humble opinion it *is* still relevant in 2021, and here are some hints to up your SEO game this year.

1. Google EAT rule as a ranking factor

EAT stands for expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness and it existed long before the creation of this article. But it's just now that its importance has dramatically increased. In other words, the bits written by qualified experts will rank higher; in the age of fake news that is often hard to verify, Google decides to make our lives easier and safer by putting up the articles written by specialists. It's especially abided when it comes to subjects like finance and health (“your money, your life” label). Don't hesitate to back up your articles with statistics and facts, choose your sources wisely and verify them. Be transparent about who takes care of your articles as well as while creating your *About* and *Contact* pages. Finally, get cited! We wrote about it before, but seeing your name outside of your page will be a perfect confirmation of your legitimacy for Google.

While creating your content, analyse who you are creating it for by defining your target audience and search intent – this will facilitate you the task of giving your readers a well-crafted article full of valuable information.

2. Google passage ranking and featured snippets

Google passage ranking feature makes it possible for Google to rank specific parts of the page - passages, independently. However, it doesn't mean that it won't evaluate the relevancy of the entirety of your page. Your chance to rank high lies in dividing your website into sections arranged by a clear, specific theme. You can classify your sections by giving them all an H3 subheading. Your passage doesn't have to be long; it just has to be extremely on point.

Another chance to rank high is by including a featured snippet on your page. The difference between a featured snippet and a passage is that the passage is evaluated independently of the general context of the website, and that's why it has to be, as stated before, extremely on point. Featured snippet indexing is based on the content and the context of the entire website. However, you can help Google by writing your snippet. For the needs of their article *How to Optimize for Google Featured Snippets [Research]* SEMrush analysed over 7 million featured

snippets and came up with an average of 40-50 words or 250-300 characters for a perfect material for a featured snippet.

And speaking of feature snippets: it doesn't only refer to written content. There are 4 featured snippets formats: paragraph, list, table and video. This leads us to the third point:

3. The rising importance of video

According to CISCO, by 2022 video will make up 82% of all online traffic. It's already giving the users most of the answers they need by presenting them with video featured snippets that jump the users to the right place in the video, providing them with the answer to their question in a matter of seconds. To improve the chances of your video getting noticed, proceed just like with the written content: divide your video into clear sections arranged by theme. This will make it easier for Google to make a featured snippet out of your video. Provide a suitable title containing your keywords, tags, descriptions, and finally a transcript. If you don't have it yet, think about creating and growing your YouTube channel. This platform is already the second – yes, second largest search engine with more than a billion users. And while making a successful YouTube video takes some time and preparation, it's worth it, especially taking into consideration the fact that most of the marketers don't make video content because they think it's ineffective, they don't have time to do it or they just don't want to.

4. Semantically related keywords & long-form content

For a couple of years now, Google has been becoming more and more intelligent and understanding of its users' search intent. Not only by developing its web of potential keywords, but also its conversational search. In 2021, the semantic search will be even more important, giving the search engines more precise tools to understand full questions asked by users and thereby provide even more relevant answers and reduce spam. Semantic search gives more personalised results than just the keywords; also, because of the context and the location, our chance to reduce the search time and get made-to-measure answers is increased.

We also mentioned long-form content – it is not *better* than the short-form content and it doesn't mean that the short-form one is *worse*. It is not, and it can rank very high on Google. However, according to SEMrush's study *The Anatomy of Top Performing Articles: Successful vs. Invisible Content*, long-form content tends to get more likes and shares. What's more, so-called longreads or the articles that have more than 7k words perform the best, driving almost 4 times (!!!) more traffic than your average-length article of around 1,200 words.

5. Mobile-friendliness

We talked about it in point 8 of our previous, fundamental list. But here's some more on the subject.

According to CNBC, 73% of users will access the internet *only* with their mobile phones by 2025. That's why you really should make sure your website is mobile-friendly. You can do so by going to the source, Google Search Console Help, and by taking a mobile-friendly test. It's free and it can tell you a lot about your website!

Next, think about doing a mobile parity audit – it will give you information about the eventual differences between the mobile and the desktop version of your website, and give you the possibility to take care of it. And you should absolutely do it to be sure your mobile website is optimised, regularly updated, if everything works as it should and if no links or tags are missing.

6. Page experience

Google's newest update talks about the page experience becoming a part of its ranking system starting June 2021. While the change won't be drastic and fully seen until August 2021, it will stress the growing importance of user experience in designing and maintaining your website. According to Google Search Central, this particular update will consider so-called *page experience signals*, some of which we have covered in this article. We're talking Core Web vitals, mobile-friendliness, safe browsing or your website's connection security, all of which being fundamental elements every website should have. To know more, make sure to read the Page Experience report in Google Search Console.

SEO can be an amazing, useful tool, but only if you know how to use it and if you are honest in your practice. If in 2021 you're still using black or even grey hat SEO, drop it immediately. Google has multiple ways of verifying it and won't hesitate to penalise you if needed. And you don't want to be blacklisted! Always opt for organic search results and remember: in SEO honesty is really the best policy. And to answer the initial question of why is SEO important in 2021 – with just a bit of work it can help you make your business successful, let others know what you do, and make you a part of the (Google) answer! And this is quite relevant.