

# What is SEO?

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Ever wondered why certain websites appear at the top of Google's results page when you search for something? That's no accident – search engines are smart, but SEO is much smarter. Still, the majority of websites don't stand a chance in search engines because their creators don't know how to optimise them. The Internet is a crowded place, and if you want the right people to find your website, you need to be using these tactics to make it happen.

To implement and reap the benefits of SEO, you first need to understand what it is and how it works. Before we delve into the hows and whys of this practice, let's first look at the basics.



# What does SEO stand for?

SEO stands for search engine optimisation, which is the practice that makes online content more visible in search results.

Search engines use algorithms that sort through all the content on the Internet to find the most relevant links for the searcher's query. No one knows exactly how these algorithms work (apart from the people who created them) but several important data findings show us how they rank online content.

Most websites use SEO to increase the quality and quantity of traffic through organic search results. In fact, all sites high up in Google's listings are probably masters in SEO. If you want to be one of them, then you'll need to do your homework. Let's explore some key facts about SEO.



# SEO key terms

When you start learning about SEO (whether you choose to do it yourself or outsource to a professional), you will hear a lot of terms that may or may not make sense. Here are some of those terms explained:

**SERPS:** Search engine results pages.

What you see when you type a query into Google.

**Keywords:** Also known as “search terms.” These are the terms people are searching for that are relevant to your niche.

**Anchor text:** Text that links to an internal or external source.

**CTR:** Click-through rates (the number of times links are followed to your website).

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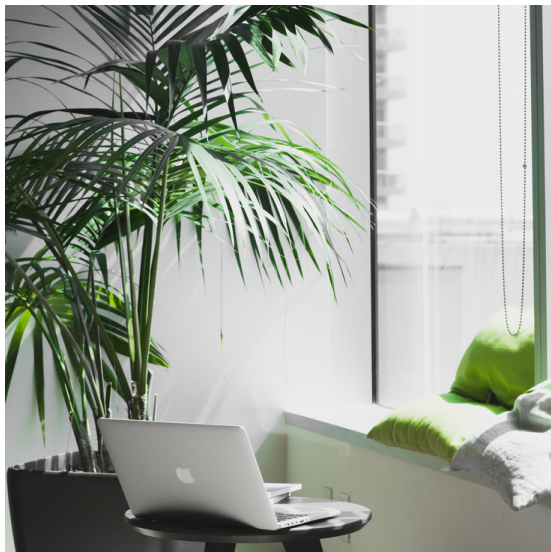
# Why is “visibility” so important?



We often talk about “visibility” being the goal of SEO, but what does this mean in practice?

Many people assume that once they’ve created a website and shared it on social media a few times, visibility is a given. If you’ve lovingly created a website with all your business information and examples of what you do, this is a start. However, it doesn’t mean you’re now visible, especially if you’re not showing up in search engines.

When we talk about being sites invisible, we mean they haven’t been built with the information necessary for Google and other search engines to find and index them. You won’t become number one on Google for your search term overnight. SEO is something that improves with age, so it’s best to get started right away.



# Why do I need SEO?

Over 40% of all website traffic comes from search engines. The need for SEO applies whether you're a small local business or a global franchise. These days, customers expect to find what they're looking for online, and for every company to have an established online presence. Otherwise, they may doubt your integrity.



In short, bad SEO is bad for business and your reputation. If you don't step up, you'll miss out on the hundreds, if not thousands, of competitors who Google is leading straight to the waiting arms of your potential competitors. You may have spent time and money on creating a fancy website, but that site is worth nothing if it doesn't generate traffic and revenue.



Google wants to direct its users towards relevant, authoritative sources, and you want to be one of them. However, to earn your place on a high-ranking results pages, you need to show Google that your site is worth advertising.

The practice of SEO aims to maximise a website's visibility and ascertain its authority by targeting the following areas:

**Keywords usage:** Partial and exact keyword matches in your content.

**Social metrics:** The quality and quantity of links and shares on social media.

**Page-level features:** The length, readability, quality and originality of your on-site co

**Brand mentions:** Whether your brand/domain name features in the news, press or media, both online and offline.

**Traffic:** Who visits your website and where they come from. CTRs, signals from browsers, toolbar clicks, etc.

**Backlinks:** The quantity and quality of external links to your domain.

Internal links: Quality of link sources used in your content, anchor text distribution, etc.

**How does  
it work?**

# On-site and off-site SEO

Search engine optimisation is divided into two camps: on-site and off-site SEO, and both are equally important parts of the equation. Let's explore the difference between the two disciplines and how each can boost your online presence.

## On-site SEO

On-site SEO means using optimisation tactics on a website rather than elsewhere on the Internet. Generally speaking, on-site SEO is focused on what people see when they visit a site, as opposed to what goes on behind the scenes, which is commonly referred to as off-site SEO.

On-site SEO refers to content created for landing pages, blog posts and product listings, as well as the HTML source code of each page.





# On-site SEO

SEO consultants tend to focus on the following areas:

Internal and external links

Images

Keywords and search terms

Metadata

Mobile responsiveness

URL structure

Page load speed

It may sound a little complex, but all of these elements come back to the same fundamental principle: SEO improves the user experience. Google's algorithm recognises this and then ranks your website higher in search engines. It's also worth mentioning that a positive experience means people are more likely to revisit and share your website content, generating more traffic and potential leads.



# SEO content

Written content is important to search engines, which is one reason why so many companies now keep blogs. As well as being an excellent promotional vehicle for your business, regular on-site content also improves your search engine rankings. You can share across multiple channels and grow an audience. The more content you put out there, the more people will come to your site, and the more people visit your website, the better your SEO.



SEO content is a self-perpetuating cycle, in the best possible way.

So, are there specific rules when it comes to creating this content? Yes, and Google favours certain types of content more than others. All search engines are a little different, and there's no way of knowing their exact algorithms. However, as a general rule, Google looks for content that is:

In-depth: Filler content (or “thin” content as it is often called) is an obvious target for today's search engines. Content must be thorough and valuable to have a good chance of ranking. 400–600 words is the sweet spot, though there is an increasing need for “long form” content as search engines adapt and change.



Original: Content duplicated from elsewhere on the Internet will negatively affect your SEO and could even have you penalised. There may be legal ramifications of repeating existing content, even if it's your own. Of course, you can share content multiple times on social media or via email marketing, but you should never duplicate something you or someone else has already written.

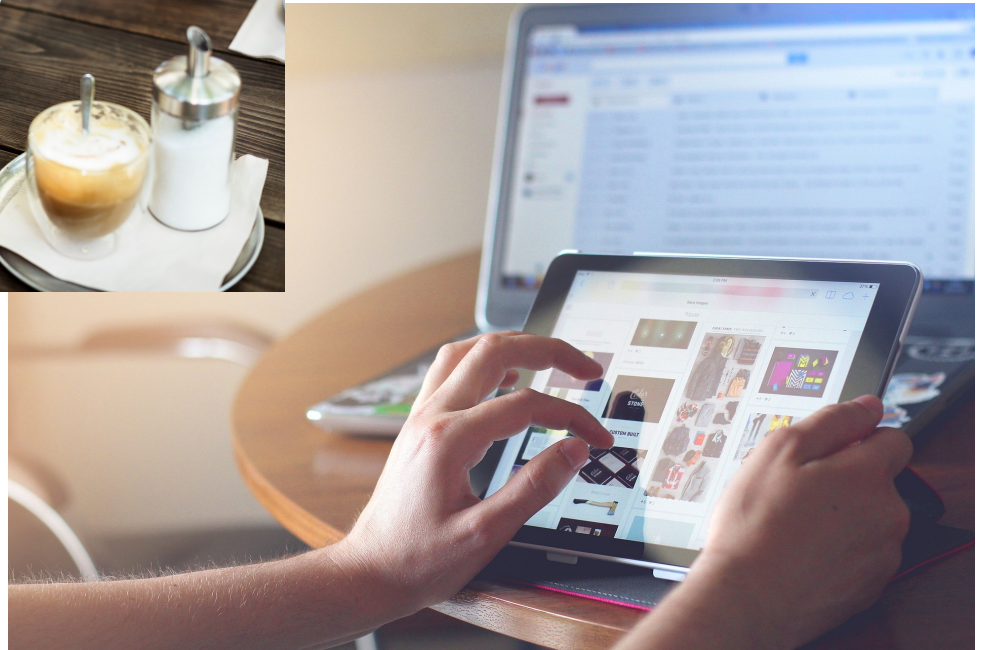
Relevant: You must make sure your content aligns with searcher intent. This means understanding your target web user and delivering what they are looking for. Your content topics and links should all be relevant to the queries in which they rank; otherwise it won't be seen.

User-friendly: You could create the best piece of written content on the web, but if it's not readable, no one will gain value from it. User-friendly content is clean, grammatically correct, easily navigable and neatly organised. Don't make your readers work to find your value -- make it concise, easy to understand and free from ads and pop-ups.

## Keywords and SEO

Many people assume that SEO is all about keyword use, but this is a misnomer. In fact, domain level keyword usage only makes up around 7% of ranking factors in Google. While once upon a time keywords were considered the centre of SEO, the landscape has changed. Search engines are more sophisticated, and now there are many other determining factors to consider.





Keyword use still matters, but it's not as simple as jamming the right words and phrases into your content and hoping for the best. Modern SEO is less about keyword placement and repetition and more about relevance. Of course, keyword research is crucial for SEO, but it's only a tiny piece of the puzzle. Google has also become smart to "keyword stuffing" and can recognise when your words and phrases are not natural or relevant.

It should also be stated that before you even think about keywords for your website, you also need an in-depth understanding of who your users are and what content topics will best fulfil their needs. This understanding is vital to all areas of SEO, and it's one area where a full-service Internet marketing agency like Click Intelligence can make you a cut above the rest.



If you decide to do your own keyword planning, you can use tools like Google's keyword planner tool to help you plan your content, or AdWords to bid on key search terms for ads.

## Other keyword considerations

Keyword research and targeting sound simple enough, but they can be a bit more complicated in practice. For instance, if you run an online store selling fitness clothing, you might want users to find your site by searching "fitness clothing" or "buy fitness clothing online."





# Keyword considerations

There are other factors to consider, including:

**Search volume:** You need to know how many people search for any given word or term. The more people searching for a specific term, the bigger the audience you need to reach, and the more competing sites there are.

**Relevance:** You might think you can trick Google and other search engines by piggybacking off a popular search term and “cheating” your way to the top, but search engines are smarter than this. What’s more, you will undermine your site’s trustworthiness and risk having your site removed from your search engine’s indexes. Relevance is key; anything less is not worth the risk.



# Off-site SEO

Off-site SEO refers to the optimisation tactics used outside of your website to impact your rankings on SERPS. While content optimisation is essential, it is not necessarily effective without off-site SEO. These actions taken outside your main site will build on your relevance, trustworthiness and authority and improve your rankings.

There are multiple strategies used to build off-site SEO, but the heart of the practice is link building. Let's look first at backlinks to understand why they are so crucial for search engine optimisation.

## Backlinks

Backlinks are the bread and butter of off-site SEO, but they are often misunderstood or overlooked entirely. Otherwise known as inbound or external links, backlinks are links to your site from elsewhere on the Internet. They are useful to search engines like Google because they give a strong indication of the popularity of your website. Think of them as “votes of confidence” from other reputable sources. The process of earning these backlinks is usually referred to as “link-building,” and it's something most SEO companies deliver.





# Backlinks

You might think that earning a link to your little corner of the Internet is valuable, no matter where it comes from. However, it is rarely that simple. When researching sites to approach for backlinks, you need to consider their page ranking, content and search engine authority. You also need to make sure the website providing your backlink uses approved, white hat techniques, and that they don't belong to a private blog network (PBN). If your site is affiliated with one that breaks the rules, your site could also be penalised. You can learn more about how to avoid private blog networks by clicking [here](#) (link to PBN site).





# Other off-site SEO strategies

SEO relies on Internet activity, namely that people like and share your content. This is the online equivalent of word-of-mouth, and it should not be underestimated. The more people consume and appreciate your content, the more likely it is to get shared around the Internet, and for more people to see it.

Google picks up on this activity and assumes your website must be an authoritative, trusted source of information. Again, it is a win-win situation that helps more people find and share your content, which in-turn encourages Google to rank you highly.

Here are some other off-site SEO strategies. Although these strategies usually fall into the “non-link building SEO” category, it’s worth mentioning that all of them rely on links back to your website.

Social media marketing.

Brand mentions/influencer marketing.

Guest blogging.

Commenting on other blogs (with a link to your site, of course).



# Can I optimise a page or website myself?

Search engine optimisation is tricky, though clearly, some elements require more technical know-how than others. On-page SEO, for example, requires an understanding of HTML and in-text optimisation; whereas off-page optimisation takes time and social media prowess. There are plenty of books and online guides to break down each part of the SEO process, but understand that it is a comprehensive topic you're not going to master overnight.

## Hiring an SEO firm

Many business owners don't have the time or technical know-how to take care of their own SEO, which is why they outsource. However, there is a lot at stake when you start working with an SEO vendor, so you need to be clear about what you're looking for.





# What to look for in an SEO firm

Here are some key attributes to look for

**Established portfolio:** You want to see which companies they've worked with and the ROI they've delivered.

**Facts and figures:** Your SEO company should be able to tell you how many visits they provided on a company's website, as well as how this impacted their turnover.

**Testimonials:** Look for positive testimonials from multiple, established sources. There should be a company name, as well as the name and position of the person who gave the review.

**Certifications:** Look for certifications from Google and other search vendor partners.

**Transparency:** Your SEO firm should be able to tell you exactly what they are doing both on and off your site and why they are doing it.



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information:**

**[www.clickintelligence.co.uk](http://www.clickintelligence.co.uk)**

**01242 807842**

**[hello@clickintelligence.co.uk](mailto:hello@clickintelligence.co.uk)**

