SEO SETUP

Study Notes
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LESSON 1:
KEY SEO CONCEPTS
INTRODUCTION TO SEO

What is SEO?

SEO or Search Engine Optimization, refers to all the techniques used to increase rankings in organic search results.

Organic site traffic

The Acquisition report that sits within Google Analytics breaks down all the different channels that are driving traffic to a given website. So you can see the traffic that’s coming through organic search, paid search, direct, referral, social, and so on. For most websites across all industry verticals, organic search drives the highest percentage of sessions (visits) to the site. This demonstrates the importance of organic rankings and organic traffic in overall SEO.

Benefits of SEO

SEO offers many benefits:

- With SEO, you appear high on page one of a search engine’s organic rankings. The higher an ad rank you have, the higher percentage of traffic that’s going to come through to your site and the better your click-through rates are going to be. Minor changes in ranking can have a huge impact on the success of your site.
- As well as delivering site traffic, a strong organic ranking has the benefit of improving brand awareness, brand acceptance, and trust. Web users tend to trust the brands that appear at the top of organic search results, especially for high involvement purchases.
- Organic search is often the top-performing channel in terms of sales, return on investment, and other website engagement metrics.

SEO versus PPC

Search engine results pages are constantly evolving. Typically, paid ads appear at the top of a search results page, and organic listings appear beneath them. Previously, there were three ads at the top of a search results page and seven ads along the right-hand side. However, Google have now removed all right-hand side ads, so now you can have up to four ads appearing at the top of the page. Organic listings appear below the paid ads and there are ten organic listings displayed on each results page.

Differences

What are the main differences between SEO and PPC?

With SEO:

- **‘Free’ website traffic**: Traffic is free, in that clicks on organic links don’t incur any cost. The cost is defined by the SEO practitioner who will be carrying out the work and this will be on a project basis.
- **Long-term investment**: SEO projects are a long-term investment. It can take weeks, if not months, for changes to have an impact and rankings to improve, so patience is required.
Stop SEO, rankings will maintain for a while: If you stop carrying out SEO, your rankings may maintain for a while, but if competitors have active SEO strategies, it is likely that you will be overtaken.

Good for core pages that rarely change: SEO also works best for core site pages that will not change. It is difficult to optimize pages that may change regularly or that may only be active for a short amount of time. So you should focus on the core pages of your site.

With PPC:

Pay per click: The cost is on a pay-per-click basis and is dependent on the competitiveness of the given auction.

Short-term investment: PPC is a short-term investment and you see immediate results. As soon as you activate your campaign, you will begin driving traffic to your site.

Stop spending, traffic stops: If you stop spending, your traffic will decrease immediately.

Good for time-sensitive/urgent campaigns: Paid search is particularly useful for time-sensitive or seasonal campaigns, where you can use paid ads to capitalize on increased search volume.

Many advertisers engage in both SEO and PPC campaigns at the same time to ensure they have maximum presence and visibility on the search results pages.

HOW SEARCH ENGINES ARE USED

Search queries

A user will type words or queries into a search engine. We call these keywords. And keywords can come in many forms. They can be:

Navigational: To find a specific page or website; for example, if your search term is 'Delta Airlines', you're looking for the Delta website specifically.

Informational: To answer a specific query; for example, ‘What is the population of Canada?’

Transactional: To buy or acquire a product or service; for example, 'Buy Gucci shoes online.'

Keyword formats

Keywords typically come in two formats: you can have short-tail or long-tail keywords.

Short-tail keywords typically have higher search volume.

Long-tail keywords give you a greater insight into what the user is searching for, because typically they contain more keywords. As a result, it can be easier to optimize individual pages to those terms.

Examples

An example of a short-tail keyword would be 'mortgage', for which you could only display quite general information.

A long-tail keyword in the same category would be 'mortgage rate comparison Germany', where the user is being a lot more specific and where you can create a webpage that is more relevant to their search term.
HOW SEARCH ENGINES WORK

Automated software

How do search engines actually work? Well, there are so many websites and so much content on the internet that search engines need to use a system through which they can comb through different websites, and discover and understand the content on them. This is achieved using automated software known as spiders, crawlers, or bots.

These terms can be quite interchangeable and to a wide extent they do a similar job. But they do have marginally different functions:

- **Spider**: A spider is a program run by a search engine to build a summary of a website’s content. Spiders create a text-based summary of content and an address (URL) for each webpage.
- **Crawler**: A crawler visits each webpage on a website and determines all of the hyperlinks on every individual page.
- **Robot**: A robot is an automated computer program that visits websites and performs predefined tasks. Its job is to understand how to crawl and index pages on a given website.

Three steps

There are three basic steps a search engine takes when searching for content: crawling, indexing, and ranking.

- **Step 1 - Crawling**: Crawling is when the search engine spiders or crawlers browse the web to identify and capture available content.
- **Step 2 - Indexing**: Indexing is where online content is analyzed, organized, and stored in huge databases, so that users can search it efficiently.
- **Step 3 – Retrieval or Ranking**: Ranking is the position where online content appears in the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) based on a specific user query.

RankBrain

During the indexing stage, search engines use an algorithm to help them process and understand web information. The algorithm operates within a set of rules and it’s a unique formula, and search engines use this formula to determine the significance of each individual web page.

Part of Google’s algorithm is called **RankBrain**. RankBrain is a machine-learning artificial intelligence system that helps Google process some of its search results, in particular rare or one-of-a-kind queries. Machine learning is where a computer teaches itself how to do something, rather than being taught by humans or following programming.

RankBrain was not introduced as a new way for Google to rank search results; it is simply part of Google’s overall search algorithm, a computer program that’s used to sort through the billions of pages it knows about and find the ones deemed most relevant for particular queries.
Rank
All our SEO efforts are focused on rank. The higher you rank, the more organic traffic you’re going to drive through to your site. It is also important to consider that factors such as location, language, and context will also effect whether a certain webpage ranks or not.

Aside from rank, there are a couple of other metrics that are important to monitor when optimizing websites:

- **Page authority**: The ranking strength of a specific page
- **Domain authority**: The ranking strength of an entire website domain

SERPS

Factors that contribute to ranking
To develop strong rankings, you need to focus on these areas:

- **On-page optimization**: Page title, meta description, URL, heading tags, images, page content, anchor text
- **Technical SEO**: Site architecture, content duplication, instructions for robots, website content, sitemaps, redirects, page speed
- **Off-page optimization**: Backlink analysis, social media profiles, Google My Business, review sites

Sitelinks
Another important area to be aware of within organic search results are sitelinks. Sitelinks appear below the main organic result, and appear as sub-links or additional links. Their goal is to improve the user journey by offering an alternative landing page to the homepage.

So, if a user visits a home page, and wants to go through to a deeper link page that’s more closely linked to their query or what they’re trying to achieve, they can click on a sitelink - and that will also boost that sitelink’s performance.

Sitelinks are typically generated based on site structure and historic CTRs of pages. You cannot select your individual sitelinks. However, you can use Google Search Console to demote individual sitelinks, if you don’t want certain links or pages to appear.

Rich snippets
SERPs are changing all the time and they often test delivering results in various formats. One of these search results formats is the rich snippet.

A rich snippet is the term used to describe when a search engine displays a bit more information about the actual result. It may take the form of a review or an image related to the user query. Rich snippets are achieved by using structured data mark-up that site operators can add to their existing HTML, which in turn allows search engines to better understand what information is contained on each webpage.
Knowledge panels

For many search results, where there is a specific answer to a question - such as 'What is the population of Canada?' - Google includes a knowledge panel. This displays structured and detailed information that answers the user query within the search engine.
LESSON 2: SETTING OBJECTIVES FOR SEO
BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

What are you hoping to achieve?

Before beginning an SEO project, you should consider your company’s business objectives and how your website plays into them. It is important from the outset to be able to describe your business offerings in simple terms. After all, the content you have on your site should simply and accurately answer the queries that a user is inputting into a search engine.

A website can have a number of roles:

- **To inform**, in which case the amount of time spent on site or amount of pages visited might be a sign of success
- **To entertain**, in which case user engagement with content will be a priority
- **To persuade**, in which case you will want a user to fill in a form, such as a contact form or newsletter sign-up
- **To sell online**, in which case the goal will be to move users right through the funnel to a purchase

Define your target audience

It’s important to consider the profile of your target audience. You want to know as much as possible about your ideal customer, so look at:

- Market segmentation
- Where they are located
- What language they speak
- What kind of behaviors they typically exhibit

You should also identify what motivates and interests each target audience by:

- Conducting market research, such as surveys or focus groups
- Learning best practice from the websites of successful competitors
- Talking to your Sales department to better understand customer needs or even customer frustrations

WEBSITE OBJECTIVES

What is a conversion?

A conversion is any interaction or engagement that a user makes with your website.

Before engaging in an SEO campaign, it’s important to examine your site and decide exactly what it is you want users to do once they reach your website. This could be filling out a form or it could be spending a certain duration of time onsite.
Types of conversions

To take this concept further, it is important to decide on some of the higher-level conversion goals that you would like users to take on your site.

Examples of conversion goals include:

- Viewing a video
- Downloading a brochure
- Filling out a contact form
- Completing a purchase

All of these goals can be created and tracked using Google Analytics. It’s a good idea to report on traffic and conversions on a weekly basis, so you can monitor trends and periods of strong website performance.

SEO OBJECTIVES

Important SEO metrics to monitor

As opposed to business and website objectives, the SEO objectives for a website are typically going to be concerned with improving the site’s organic rankings.

The knock-on effect of this is going to be more organic traffic being driven to the site.

Next, the goal is to increase user engagement by ensuring users are spending more time on site, visiting more pages, and consuming more on-site content like videos.

The final SEO metric to improve is your conversion rate. Conversion rate is a measure of the amount of sales or on-site conversions divided by the amount of traffic coming to the site. A high conversion rate is a really good metric – it’s a sign that more focused and high quality traffic is being driven to the site.

SEO TOOLS

Free tools

To help with your SEO project, there are number of tools you can use. A lot of the free tools are Google-owned products that you can use for different purposes:

- **Google Analytics**: Google Analytics is a tool whereby you can track and report on the traffic that’s coming through to your site, and see which channels this traffic is being driven through, the geographic location, the device used, and so on. You can also create goals and see how users are engaging with your site. Google Analytics offers a wealth of data and it is displayed in a very user-friendly format.

- **Google Search Console**: This tool is mainly aimed at website developers or people who manage websites. It allows them to check the health of their websites and to carry out manual tasks that can improve the overall performance of the site.

- **Google Keyword Planner**: This tool sits within Google Ads. It allows you to view search volumes for certain keywords and, as a result, to pinpoint the most important keywords that you need to optimize your site for.
Google Trends: This is similar to Google Keyword Planner, in that it allows you to input a set of keywords but, instead of showing search volume, it shows seasonality. The benefit of this is that it will display the months of the year that users are most likely to search for your target keywords.

Paid tools

There are also a number of paid tools that will help you with an SEO project. The paid tools are typically offered on a monthly subscription basis. Examples of these are:

- Majestic SEO: This tool boasts a large link intelligence database, so its unique selling point is for backlink or external link projects.
- Moz: This is one of the most popular SEO tools. It can be used to crawl your site and give an overall domain authority for your site. It offers client-friendly dashboards where you can dip in and out, and monitor your organic performance.
- SEMRush: This tool offers site crawl functionality and can help with link-building projects. You can also use it to monitor your competitor’s activity, as well as your own organic rankings.
- Screaming Frog: This is a website crawler that allows you to crawl websites' URLs and discover key elements towards analyzing onsite SEO. There is a free version, but you must pay to unlock some additional features.

Typically, these tools have the ability to crawl sites very quickly and pinpoint site errors that need to be fixed. SEMRush is particularly useful in that, once it crawls a site, it awards the site an overall score that will act as an initial benchmark. It also outlines the errors and warnings associated with the site. As you go through and carry out the fixes that the tool highlights, the overall site score improves.

However, it's worth doing some research to find out which tool is best suited to your SEO project needs.
LESSON 3: IMPLEMENTING TECHNICAL SEO
SITE ARCHITECTURE

Importance of site architecture

Follow a logical structure

Similar to the foundations and structure of a house, it is extremely important that a website is structured in a logical and consistent way that search engines will find easy to crawl and understand. A clear and easy-to-follow site structure leads to a great user experience, and great user experience usually leads to a website that ranks well. It also allows for easier crawling and indexing of the content, and better site links.

Group related content together

Some other concepts to grasp when it comes to site architecture are that:

➤ Subfolders should be used to group related content together.
➤ Within the URLs themselves it is important to use relevant keywords at the beginning; the keywords should be ordered from left to right in order of importance, as this is how search engines crawl URLs.

Ultimately, the goal of your site and the architecture within it, is to drive users through to conversion in as few clicks as possible.

Case study: BMW

So for example, let’s say a user visits BMW.com and they want to book a test drive for a BMW X5. The user will typically land on the homepage or even better on the SUV’s page itself. From that page, they should ideally find a subcategory page that will bring them to a form to book a test drive at their local dealership. In this scenario, the user went from typing in a search engine to booking a test drive in three clicks, which is an ideal scenario for site architecture.

Internal links

A final concept to be aware of with site architecture are internal links. Internal links are ones which go from one page on a domain to a different page on the same domain. They can help search engines identify content, understand the relationship between different pages on the same site, and assess the density of related content. They are commonly used in the main navigation of a site.

Internal links are used for three main reasons:

➤ They allow users to navigate a website more easily
➤ They help establish the information hierarchy of pages for a given website
➤ They help spread authority from the home page to other content on the website
Robots.txt Files

Instructions for robots

The robots.txt file is a simple text file placed on your web server, which tells web crawlers whether or not they should access a file on your website. The robots.txt file controls how search engine spiders see and interact with your web pages.

If there are any areas of your site that you would rather a search engine didn’t crawl – i.e. that you don’t want it to index – you can issue a robots.txt file that disallows the URL path that you ultimately want to block.

If you disallow any page that contains a forward slash, you can block all access to the site. You can also block individual folders or image files if you wish them not to be crawled. (See slide ‘Instructions for robots’ for examples of these instructions.)

You can check if a site has a robots.txt file from any browser. The robots.txt file is always located in the same place on any website, so it is easy to determine if a site has one. Just add “/robots.txt” to the end of a domain name.

Sitemaps

Different types

A sitemap is a file where you can list or index all of the web pages on your website, to tell search engines about the organization of your site content. Search engine web crawlers read this file to more intelligently crawl your website.

You can use a sitemap to provide Google with further information about specific types of content on your pages, including video, image, or mobile content. For example, you can give Google information about video length in a video sitemap, and about image subject matter in an image sitemap.

Generating a site map

You can create a sitemap manually or choose from a number of third-party tools that you will find online and that will crawl your site and generate a sitemap for you.

Sitemaps can be tested and uploaded using the Google Search Console Sitemaps testing tool.

You should also make your sitemap available to Google by adding it to your robots.txt file and submitting it, along with image, video, and mobile sitemaps, to Search Console.
LESSON 4: IMPLEMENTING ON-PAGE SEO
ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

Definition

On-page optimization is: “The process of refining the content and structure of a website, so that it will be indexed and ranked by search engines by means of keywords, new content, meta tags, and other site reports.”

Basically, on-page optimization looks at all the on-page components you can improve across each webpage of your site.

Meta titles

First, let’s look at meta titles or as they’re sometimes called, page titles.

A meta title is the main text that describes a webpage and is one of the first things that search bots crawl when they are analyzing page content.

Meta titles can appear in two places. You will see them on:

- Page headings in your search browser
- Search engine results pages within the search listings

The keywords you use in your meta title are crucial, as they are the main cues that search engines use to understand the content of the page.

A well-structured meta title:

- Uses all the important, relevant keywords
- Is the right length
- Is well spaced
- Is descriptive
- Includes the brand name at the end rather than at the beginning

SEO best practices – meta titles

There are a number of best practices that you need to follow when writing meta titles for your site:

- The meta title needs to be unique for every page of your site. If you have a duplicate title across a number of pages, the search engines won’t know which page contains the most important content or which page to index.
- The title needs to be keyword-rich, and contain keywords of high value and search volume.
- The title needs to be within 65 characters. Even though titles are actually measured in pixels, 65 characters is a good gauge of how long they should be. If you go above 65 characters, you risk part of your title being truncated, which will make it less legible.
- It is important to structure the page title, so that the keyword you’re optimizing the page for appears at the beginning of the title. Often, you will see a brand or company name at the start of a page title, but it’s better to have the keywords first, followed by a description of what’s on-page, and then the brand name at the end.
Meta descriptions

Meta descriptions sit just below the meta title on search engine results pages. They are used to preview the content of a given webpage. While not important to search engine rankings, meta descriptions are an extremely important factor in gaining user click-through from search engine results pages.

A well-structured meta description gives users an insight into the type of content they can expect on a webpage, and encourages them to click.

SEO best practices – meta descriptions

Here are some best practices for writing meta descriptions:

- As with meta titles, it is important that descriptions are unique and that there are no duplicates across the site. Search engines struggle with duplicate content.
- Keep within the character limit. Meta descriptions ideally need to be between 70 and 160 characters in length.
- Meta descriptions should be keyword-rich and ideally should include a call-to-action.

URL structure

URL stands for Uniform Resource Locator and, much like the postal address of your house, a URL is the address of a webpage. Each page has its own unique URL, which is how your computer locates the webpage that you are trying to find.

URL structure is another important component to consider in providing a better user experience to your customers. As the URL is displayed on the search engine results page as part of the search result snippet, users will be more likely to click on a URL structure that is readable and relevant.

Examples

This URL follows a structured approach, listing relevant keywords:
www.example.com/mens/shirts/short-sleeved/shirts

This URL displays an internal method of sorting pages, which would be confusing to a user:
www.example.com/pageid=2/productid=46

The first URL is far more likely to get a click.

SEO best practices – URL structure

In terms of best practices for URL structure, URLs should:

- Contain target keywords, to reassure users that the page content is relevant to what they are searching for.
- Be as concise as possible. Long URLs can be difficult to read and confusing. Short URLs have a much stronger click-through rate than overly long URLs.
- Use hyphens to separate words for improved readability.
Use a breadcrumb structure, to help users understand that they will be visiting a page more deeply linked through the site. An example of a breadcrumb structure is /mens/shirts/short-sleeved/shirts.

Heading elements

Another aspect of on-page optimization is header, or H1, tags. You should have a Heading or H1 title for each page. Headers allow you to quickly display to a user what is on the page and also allow you to separate on-page content.

It may not add any additional SEO value to the page, but having at least a H1 enables search engines to understand the structure of what is on the page.

The heading should act as a further reinforcement for what the page content is about.

SEO best practices – heading elements

In terms of best practice for header tags, it’s important to:

- Have only one H1 tag on each page
- Avoid duplication of H1 tags
- Use H2 or descending header tags to further categorize or separate page content

Image tags

Search engine crawlers are unable to crawl or understand images when they crawl the content of a page. As a result, it’s very important to add alt tags to each image on your site.

The purpose of an alt tag is to provide a description of an image that a search bot can read and understand.

For example, a search bot can’t read the image of a tree, but it can read and understand the alt text, alt=‘tree’ and so knows how to index and potentially serve this image.

The reason alt tags are important is that they provide text for users who can’t see images in their browsers, or for visually impaired users. They also potentially allow the images on your pages to rank in image search results.

SEO best practices – image tags

With site images, you should:

- Upload and store all images to a central location or folder on your site.
- Ensure the file name you give the image is descriptive and keyword-rich. The file name can give Google clues about the subject matter of the image.
- Include image names and locations in an image sitemap.
- For alt text, use descriptive yet easy-to-read phrases or sentences. Include your focus keyword and variations of your focus keyword within alt text.
Anchor text

Anchor text, also known as a hyperlink, is the clickable text that links one webpage to another. Anchor text links can be from a page within your website to another page or to an exterior site linking to you.

Using anchor text for internal links can increase the number of pages that a user visits each time they come to your website, which improves site engagement and reduces bounce rate.

SEO best practices – anchor text

When using anchor text:

- Avoid linking general text like ‘here’ or ‘click here’
- Use keywords that describe the destination page that you are linking to
- Be careful not to flood a webpage with links, to the point that it affects the legibility of the page

SEO best practices – page content

The content of your page can take many forms: it could be text-based, image-based, video-based, or an infographic. Ideally, a webpage will be a combination of all of these. When thinking about the content of your webpage, remember:

- Quality is more important than quantity. You don’t want to flood users with content. Instead, try to create well-structured pages that are visually appealing and informative.
- A general rule of thumb is that there should be a minimum of 400 words on each individual page.
- All of the content should be unique. If there is similar content on different pages, it may appear as duplicate content and search engines can have difficulty identifying which page is of higher importance.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Definition

Keyword research is the activity of identifying the most useful keywords to be used in describing your offerings. It is an essential component to carry out at the beginning of an SEO project.

Keyword research involves compiling lists of keywords and keyword phrases for each offering using various tools (for example, Google’s free tools) and techniques.

Before engaging in an SEO campaign, it is important to research search volume and search trends for keywords that are specific to your product or service.

The reason this is important is because you will be able to pinpoint high volume keywords that users are searching for and that you should optimize your page towards.

You may also uncover some longer tail keywords that have high search volume, but are less competitive.
LESSON 5:
IMPLEMENTING
OFF-PAGE SEO
**BACKLINK ANALYSIS**

**Link building**

A **backlink** is a hyperlink from an external page on a website that links back to your own website.

**Link building** is the process of acquiring hyperlinks from external websites that link back to your own site. The number and quality of external links can be a huge factor in SEO. In recent Google algorithm changes, there has been a shift toward **quality of external links** rather than the quantity.

Previously, there were black hat SEO methods whereby you could pay to get your site hyperlinked on numerous websites across the web. A lot of these sites, however, were of poor quality. So recent algorithm changes have sought to reward high quality backlinks from reputable sites, rather than multiple links from spam sites.

Poor quality or deceptive backlinking strategies may harm a page’s rank.

**SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES**

**Driving qualified traffic through your social presence**

Maintaining an active social media presence is very important, as it is a great way to **increase your business profile** and to speak directly to your audience. It can also be a very useful way of **encouraging external traffic to visit your site**.

If you place articles and content on your social pages, users can click through and be directed from Facebook or Twitter, for example, back to your own website. You may be surprised to learn, however, that despite having huge audiences, these social media sites are treated like any other webpages for search. Google does not currently use signals like Facebook or Twitter followers as an attribute for search ranking.

So ensure your company is on social media, not for search rankings, but to **build up your brand** and **drive qualified referral traffic**.
LESSON 6: IMPLEMENTING SEO IN A MOBILE ENVIRONMENT
MOBILE FRIENDLINESS

Google’s mobile-friendly test

A very simple and handy tool to use is the Google Mobile-Friendly Test. This tool allows you to test your URL to see if the mobile version of your site is considered ‘mobile friendly.’

If there are any issues with your site, you can make improvements.

Page layout

A very important component of mobile SEO is page layout. Keep these factors in mind:

- Obviously, mobile screens are smaller than those on desktops, so it is important to reduce the number of on-page elements, like imagery and text.
- It is also crucial to ensure that buttons stand out by formatting them in a different color.
- Buttons should also be responsive to touch. Poor design – if your buttons are too big, too small, or in the path of a finger that’s trying to get the page to scroll - can lead to accidental clicks and a very poor mobile experience.

Mobile content

When creating content for mobile pages, it is important to consider that search queries on mobile can typically be quite different to desktop, in that people are often looking for immediate and localized information.

Target using niche keywords

A lot of niche keywords are used in mobile searches. This means there is an opportunity to target users based on these niche keywords. They will often be localized searches, such as ‘apple store fifth avenue’, or contain call-related intent, such as ‘barclays bank phone number’. These are typical searches that are carried out on the go, when a user is searching for very specific information.

Capture essential information only

Another consideration when putting together mobile content is to avoid lengthy conversion forms. On mobile, aim to capture only the most important information and to make it as easy as possible for the user to submit the form.

Mobile functionality

In terms of mobile functionality:

- Simplify mobile landing pages: Aim to simplify the page content as much as possible. Often, when a user visits the desktop version of a site, there may be an animation or a moving carousel displaying a site’s latest news or range of products. Not all mobile sites would be able to support these formats.
- Create nested tables: Sites can be divided by different headers along the top of the page. For mobile, a nested table containing the different site sections typically performs better, both visually and from a user-experience perspective.
Avoid pop-ups: Pop-ups or mobile interstitials are to be avoided at all costs. They can be frustrating for users and lead to high bounce rates.

Page speed

Page speed is even more important for mobile users than desktop users. A fast site offers a good user experience (UX), and a good user experience leads to higher conversions. Very slow sites lead to bad user experiences.

According to an official webmaster tutorial from Google, the threshold for page speed is two seconds. Anything above this is deemed to be too slow and likely to cause frustration, high bounce rates, and a loss of rank over time. At Google, they aim for under one second.

As Google continues to move toward a mobile-first online environment, page speed is going to continue to grow in importance.

Improving page speed

There are a number of ways in which mobile page speed can be improved. Some best practices are to:

- **Leverage browser caching** - whereby some large website files are stored locally in the user's browser
- **Enable compression** - compression allows your web server to provide smaller file sizes, which load faster for your website users
- **Optimize images** - ensuring all site images are below a certain file size
- **Minify CSS, JavaScript, and HTML** - reducing the amount of code on-site can drastically improve page speed
- **Eliminate render-blocking JavaScript and CSS in above-the-fold content** - render means loading, so if something is render-blocking, it means that it is keeping the page from loading as quickly as it could

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP)

Obviously, with more and more searches, and more and more site traffic coming through mobile, it is in Google's interest to create an environment where mobile sites are as fast as possible and where mobile pages load instantaneously.

As a result, Google has created a project called **Accelerated Mobile Pages** or AMP. This is a Google-backed project, which aims to speed up the delivery of mobile pages. This can be achieved through the use of stripped down code known as AMP HTML.

Google has created a site with best practices and guidelines on how you can make your site AMP-friendly.
LESSON 7: IMPROVING LOCAL SEO
**LOCAL SEO**

**What is local SEO?**

Local SEO is concerned with smaller local businesses, and their efforts to rank well in local search queries. General SEO principles apply to local SEO also. However, there are additional steps that small community businesses can take in order to rank for web users in their area.

Local SEO allows local businesses to promote their services to customers in their area at exactly the time they’re looking for their type of business. It removes the guesswork from local marketing. So, for example, instead of doing leaflet drops or putting an ad in a local paper - which may or may not be seen by someone interested in your service - your site can appear for people in your area who are searching for products or services that you are selling.

**NAP consistency**

NAP is an acronym for:

- Name
- Address
- Phone

NAP consistency means your business’s name, address, and phone number are consistently listed the same way across the web.

As local results will be served based on a web user’s location and IP address, it is crucial that a business establishes its physical address. This can be done through NAP.

You need to ensure that you have your full NAP across your whole website. Furthermore, you must use the exact same details or format when you mention your address on other websites.

**Local optimized content**

It’s also important for the content of your website to be localized.

The idea in a localization content strategy is to identify what content segments are unique to each geographical area and highlight those at a state, city, or even micro local level by building dedicated pages for each of these audiences.

Some variables that may differ by location and, as a result, warrant individual pages include:

- Shipping rates
- Warranty information
- Repair locations
- Dealer locations

By building bespoke pages that cover all of the above information for customers in each of your target locations, you will improve localized rankings.
GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

Localized social media profile

Google My Business is becoming ever more important as part of an SEO strategy, especially for local businesses. Google My Business listings now regularly accompany brand searches and also appear above organic listings (but below ads) for many generic searches.

A well-optimized Google My Business page will index well in search engines and act as a further referral source for site traffic.

To set up a Google My Business page, you need to:

- Create a profile online
- Include all relevant instore information, such as opening hours, business description, telephone number, and so on
- Verify the business address

Once you have done this, your Google My Business profile will be live and available to index for search results.

Best practice

A Google My Business page can be optimized in the same way that regular webpages are optimized, so you should:

- Add a long, unique description that’s formatted correctly
- Choose the correct categories for your business
- Upload as many photos as possible
- Add a local phone number to your listing
- Add your business address that’s consistent with that on your website and local directories
- Upload a high-resolution profile image and cover photo
- Add your opening times/days
- Get real reviews from customers

LOCAL REVIEWS

Impact on search rankings

Local reviews have a direct impact on local search rankings, so it’s important that your business acquires them. Reviews are a critical area through which to drive incremental traffic to your site.

It’s worth mentioning that this doesn’t just mean Google reviews. You’ll also want to focus on getting reviews on your Yelp page, along with other local directories.

It may be difficult to do, but it is important to encourage customers to review your business and to be completely transparent. If a customer leaves a bad review, rather than letting that damage the business’s reputation, reply to the negative review constructively and address the customer’s complaints.

Some statistics to note:
90% of consumers say their buying decisions are influenced by online reviews
86% say buying decisions were influenced by negative online reviews

LOCAL LINK BUILDING

Getting links on relevant localized sites

Localized link building follows the same process as wider link building projects, but in this instance the goal is to get links from other local websites that are really relevant to your business. It’s less about getting links from high-authority websites (although these obviously help) and more about getting links from websites local to you that are talking about similar things to what you talk about.

This means that local directories are a useful resource for link building, especially when it comes to building citations.

A citation is an online reference to your business’s name, address, and phone number (NAP).

Examples of local link building could be mentions and links to your business in:

- Local publications
- Organizations
- Events
- Other prominent local business websites
LESSON 8: MEASURING AND REPORTING ON SEO CAMPAIGNS
Monitoring and measuring SEO activities

“If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.”

As with all other areas of digital marketing, **SEO should be tracked and monitored** right from the outset of a campaign.

- At the beginning of a project, it is important to benchmark organic rankings for a set of approximately 30 to 50 keywords.
- You can then monitor fluctuations in ranking over time.
- You should also benchmark average monthly organic traffic and conversions.
- As well as that, it can be interesting to monitor year-on-year data to track annual trends and seasonality.

Obviously, the goal of your positive SEO efforts will be to improve keyword rankings, drive more site traffic, and boost conversions.

Tagging solutions

To ensure that all of your SEO efforts are being recorded correctly, you should ensure that all on-site activity is being tracked. You can track activity through tools like **Google Analytics**. But another tool you could look at is **Google Tag Manager**.

Google Tag Manager is a container tag system that holds all on-site tags and minimizes the amount of code that needs to be placed directly on-site. This is crucial because the more code you add, the slower the site gets.

By implementing goals within Google Tag Manager, you will be able to measure the effectiveness of your SEO efforts, to see if they are increasing site visits and boosting on-site engagements.

SEO tools

Aside from measuring changes to rank and organic traffic, some paid tools include other metrics that can be measured against.

**SEMRush**

SEMRush gives an overall website score (or domain authority, as it’s known in Moz) based on the errors identified on-site.

As you work through an SEO project and fix the various errors, the tool will re-crawl the site and you will see your site score improve.

The tool also tracks variances to organic ranking, as well as competitor reports, and so demonstrates the extent to which paid tools can help your ongoing SEO reporting.
There are other SEO metrics you should pay attention to. For example:

- **Number of external backlinks**: If engaging in a link-building project, it’s obviously important to grow the number of external sites that are linking back to your site over time. A lot of paid tools, such as Moz and SEMRush, will allow you to see the number of external links your site has in comparison to competitors.

- **Quality of backlinks**: Having a lot of links is not enough, however. Search engines do not treat all external links equally, so it is important to gain external links on very reputable sites or ones that have a strong domain authority. To track improvements, it would be useful to have a reporting system that, for example, looks at the number of links on external sites with a domain authority greater than 30.

- **Organic traffic year on year**: As well as monitoring monthly organic traffic, it is interesting to compare monthly results against the same period in the previous year. Google Analytics allows you to track this very easily, so that you can monitor annual trend volumes and the percentage increase or decrease of organic traffic versus the previous year.

- **Referral traffic**: In addition to monitoring organic traffic, referral traffic is a useful metric to measure each month. Referral traffic is a term used to describe visitors to your site that come from external links on other websites. So the more success you are getting from link-building campaigns, the more traffic you should see through referrals.

- **Landing page performance**: Landing page performance can be reported on individually. The goal here would be to take five landing pages that get a high volume of traffic and monitor some key metrics from them, such as bounce rate, time on site, and any on-page conversions. Each month you can continue to monitor these metrics and trial different versions of the page, so that you are constantly optimizing and improving landing page quality.