13 STEPS TO ON PAGE SEO
THE BEGINNER'S CHECKLIST
WWW.WTCMARKETING.COM
1. Identify your page’s title tag.
2. Check your page’s meta description.
3. Organize your on-page content with header tags.
4. Maximize your content.
5. Make sure your URL structures are intuitive.
6. Add “image alt-text” to optimize graphics.
7. Direct potential searchers with links.
8. Get the right pages indexed with a robots.txt file.
9. Tidy up your site structure with an XML sitemap.
10. Test your page load speed.
11. Ensure your website is optimized for mobile.
12. Check your local “NAP citations.”
Your website talks about you behind your back. Do you know what yours is saying?

Millions of people use search engines every day to scour the internet’s offerings. For your website to be found, it needs to relay the right information to the search engine’s algorithmic software (also known as “crawlers” or “spiders”) so they can tell searchers what your business or service is really about.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a lengthy and complicated process, but it always starts in the same place: the internal makeup of your website. Most on-page elements need to be assessed and implemented on each individual page of your website. The coding of your website is talking, but is it spreading the right message?

On-page SEO is the language you can use to manage what your website says.

Optimizing these internal descriptions ensures your audience can find your website with ease. Let’s take a look at the basics of on-page SEO, why each element is so important, and how to identify potential problems on your website.
At its most basic, the title tag is the *name* of a certain page. To check your page’s title tag, go into your site’s source code by right-clicking anywhere on the screen (works for most PCs and some Macs), selecting “View page source,” and searching for “<title>”. It will be located in the “Head” section at the top of your HTML code. The coding will look like this:

**EXAMPLE:** `<title>Your Page’s Title Tag</title>`

Your title tag tells search engines that this is the *most essential information* about your page, so you want to make sure it’s accurate and descriptive.

- Search engines consider the first words in a title tag to be the most important.
- Title tags should start with a definitive keyword or two (as that’s what people will likely be searching for).
- If your services are geo-specific, include your location.
- To avoid being truncated in the search results, the title tag should be no longer than 512 pixels. This generally means it should be around 60 characters or less.
- Check [how your potential title tag will look](#) with a tool that mimics Google searches.

Examples of this are on the following page. -->
This is how your title tag will be displayed in search results. ^^^

<meta http-equiv="X-UA-Compatible" content="IE=edge" />
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=UTF" />
<link rel="shortcut icon" href="/favicon.png" />
<link rel="pingback" href="http://linkarati.com/xmlrpc.php" />

This is what your title tag looks like in the HTML code. ^^^

Your title tag is also displayed in your browser tab. ^^^
A meta description is the informative snippet that shows up directly below your title tag in the search results.

To show up in the search results, the meta description must also go in the “Head” section of your code. Check your current description with a “meta data” checker tool or look at your page source and search for the piece of coding that looks like this:

**EXAMPLE:**
<meta name="description" content="Your Meta Description Here"/>

The purpose of a meta description is to describe what your business or service does in a persuasive manner. This is where you establish who you are and what you do.

- Ideally, the meta description should convince people to click on your website instead of the one above or below it.
- Keep meta descriptions less than 160 characters to ensure your snippet doesn’t get cut off in the search results.
- Google doesn’t factor in meta descriptions when ranking your site in search results, but it is your opportunity to make a first impression on potential customers.
- Words contained in your meta description that are *also* contained in a searcher’s query will show up as **bolded text**, enticing them to click on your result.

An example of a meta description is on the following page. -->
This is a meta description (highlighted).

This is what your meta description looks like in the HTML code.
The function of header tags (H1, H2, etc.) is to prioritize the content on your website for the search engine crawlers. In your source code, header tags will look like this:

EXAMPLE: <h1>Your Header</h1>

Header tags send direct signals to search engine crawlers, informing readers and robots alike about the most important information within a specific page’s content.

- Header tags are an organizational hierarchy. “H1” tags are the most important.
- There should only be one piece of information with H1 status on a page, but every page must have an H1. The rest of the “H” tags are weighted accordingly (i.e. Google sees H1 tags as more important than H2 tags, and H2 tags as more important than H3 tags, and so on).
- H1 tags will appear on your site as big, bold text.
- The page’s title, or a keyword or two, is ideal for an H1 tag. If you’re having trouble deciding between two or more of the most important topics on page, consider starting a new page for one of the topics.

Examples of this are on the following page. -->
Google Penguin Resource Guide

Welcome to Linkarati’s Penguin Resource Guide. We have worked to compile what we feel is the best, most informative content around the web regarding Google’s famous Penguin algorithm.

Google rose to power as a search engine because they consistently produced better results than their competitors in the 90s. These better results came from a unique

This is an H1 tag. ^^^

This is what your H1 tag looks like in the HTML code. ^^^
Content is the overarching term for “everything on your site.” It generally refers to text, but it also includes graphics, videos, and other media.

Technically, title tags and meta descriptions are part of your “on-page content.” Content is the most important aspect of user experience and it carries a lot of weight in search ranking factors.

- For both human and SEO purposes, the copy on your website or blog needs to be updated often and provide legitimate value for its users and readers.
- On-page copy should be clean and written in a natural voice. Include relevant keywords in your content, but do it in a contextual and organic way.
- Make sure the language of your content is varied. Use synonyms and comparable phrases to avoid veering into what SEOs call “keyword stuffing.” Google considers this to be a highly spammy practice and will penalize your site.
- Learn more about Google’s penalties for low-quality content and duplicate content.
CONTENT = ALL THE THINGS... ^^^
Your URLs need to describe the page in a way that’s as obvious as possible.

People searching for information, products, or services are more likely to find your site if your page is telling the search engine crawlers that this is exactly what they’re looking for.

- Optimal URLs should be short and include a content description or target keyword, not gibberish numbers and letters. Consider URL structure when titling blog posts in particular.
- You don’t need filler words like “with” or “and.”
- Use hyphens instead of underscores for spaces.
- URLs should be front-loaded. The most relevant information needs to be listed first.

This is the URL for a Linkarati Tutorial Tuesday titled “Setting Up Automatic Email Replies in Outlook and Gmail.” Notice that only the most essential words are used in the URL. ^^^
Alt-text coding for graphics means search engines are able to “see” your images, too.

Keywords or short descriptions in the alt-text provide visual context for search engine crawlers and people with accessibility issues.

- Alt-text helps those with visual or certain cognitive disabilities to interpret the visuals on your page.
- If a specific image includes text, those words should be in the alt-text.
- Image file names should be suitably descriptive before you upload them. If the images are of your actual products, this step is absolutely crucial.
- While you’re at it, make sure images are sized correctly for devices of any proportion. Learn more about optimizing images.

**WHAT WE SEE**

**WHAT SEARCH ENGINES SEE**

![Image of two men in suits, one holding a piece of paper and the other writing in a notebook.](http://linkarati.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/outreach2.jpg)

alt="Male stenographer taking dictation"
There are two kinds of links. *Internal* links send people to other pages on your own domain; *External* links send people to other websites.

Links are extremely important for easy navigation of your site and for SEO purposes. (They’re a *very* big factor in search rankings.)

- External links are considered a “vote of confidence” from your site to another page, so make sure you’re only linking to high-quality, relevant sites. Also make sure your links open in a new tab so you’re not directing people away from your site.
- Internal links hold your site together and are a guide for anyone on your page -- they must be user-friendly if you expect people to explore the rest of your site.
- Anchor text, the words that are hyperlinked, should be descriptive without being stuffed with keywords.
- Beware of links that don’t point where they’re supposed to (also known as “broken links”), as they’re detrimental to search rankings.
- There are tools available for scanning your internal/external links for any errors, broken links, or duplicates.
Internal links and external links look exactly the same to a reader, but lead to different places. ^^^
“Robots” is the actual name of a coded text file. Essentially, it details what search engine crawlers avoid on your site. To find yours, type your site’s URL followed by “/robots.txt”.

A robots.txt file lets the search engines know what they should ignore using a “disallow function.” Unlike title tags, header tags, etc., the information in your robots.txt file will affect all of the pages across your site.

- Robots.txt ensures that pages with out-of-date content or private information aren’t being read and indexed by search crawlers.
- Be careful. When the wrong information is “disallowed,” it can rapidly tank your rankings in the search results.
- Before you build one, learn more about what should and should not be included in a robots.txt file.

Examples of this are on the following page. -->
This is what your robots.txt file might look like. ^^^
A sitemap outlines the way your URLs are indexed by search engines.

**EXAMPLE:** http://www.yourdomain.com/sitemap.xml

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sitemap</th>
<th>Last Modified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://linkarati.com/post-sitemap.xml">http://linkarati.com/post-sitemap.xml</a></td>
<td>2015-01-14 17:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://linkarati.com/page-sitemap.xml">http://linkarati.com/page-sitemap.xml</a></td>
<td>2015-01-13 18:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://linkarati.com/author-sitemap.xml">http://linkarati.com/author-sitemap.xml</a></td>
<td>2014-12-31 16:40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is one of the only on-page elements that is exclusively for search engine crawlers and it’s not necessarily a requirement for every website. Often, it’s included in your robots.txt file and likewise pertains to all of the pages on your website.

- There are certain instances where it’s highly recommended to have a detailed sitemap: extremely large sites with tons of URLs, newer websites with very few external links, and sites where it’s difficult for your URLs to “talk” to each other.
- Extensible Markup Language (XML) is the preferred form for sitemaps.
- Learn more about sitemaps and whether you need one, or submit your completed sitemap through Google Webmaster Tools.
A quick page load speed is essential for positive user experience, but it’s also used as a ranking factor in Google’s search algorithms.

Slow page load is directly tied to a high bounce rate (as in, people leaving your site immediately).

- If your website is taking forever to load, the person has likely already left to find their information elsewhere.
- There are free tools available for testing your site’s load time.

Via Kissmetrics ^^^
Your website *must* be accessible on-the-go, for every type of mobile device.

Page load speed for mobile devices is extremely important, as is streamlining your code so it works on *all* smartphones and tablets.

- If most of your business is done through mobile devices, avoid pop-ups and use HTML5 instead of Flash for your fancy special effects.
- Google provides a free tool to check if your site is mobile-friendly.
An NAP citation is any reference to your company’s name, address, and phone number.

If your business has a brick-and-mortar location (as opposed to purely e-commerce), consistent NAP citations are essential for directing local search traffic.

- NAP citations are a huge factor for ranking in local search queries and ensuring your potential customer base knows how to find you.
- There are tools that check a variety of local business directories to make sure your website’s NAP citations are present and identical.
If you have a website, you’ll want to make sure Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools are installed.

- Both services can be used to help you understand what your users are doing on your website.
- They provide a way to track user data, website traffic, search queries, security issues, and more.
- For a quick immersion, check out the beginner’s guide to Google Analytics and another for Webmaster Tools.
You’ve worked hard to put good content on your website. Your on-page SEO will help people find it.

Now that you know what on-page elements matter and why, it’s time to get optimizing. Remember to keep your audience in mind as you tackle each piece of the puzzle.

Your website says a lot to robots and humans alike. Going through this checklist is a good way to get the coding and nitty-gritty out of the way so you can focus on reaching people.
Test your title tags:
Check your meta descriptions:
http://seositecheckup.com/tool/all_meta_tag
Learn about low-quality content:
https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/2604719?hl=en
Learn about duplicate content:
https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66359?hl=en
Check for link errors:
http://www.brokenlinkcheck.com/
Learn about robots.txt:
http://www.robotstxt.org/robotstxt.html
Learn more about sitemaps:
https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/156184?hl=en
Submit your sitemap:
https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/156184?hl=en
Test your site’s load speed:
http://tools.pingdom.com/fpt/
Check if your site is mobile-friendly:
Check your NAP citations:
https://moz.com/local
Learn more about Google Analytics:
http://wtceducation.com/ultimate-beginners-guide-google-analytics/
Discover more FREE resources at:

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