

SEO Checklist

Get more traffic to your website using our free, comprehensive website checklist.



SEO 101

☐ Set Up Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a freemium web analytics service offered by Google that tracks and reports website traffic. Visit google.com/analytics and install the tracking code between the tags of your website

☐ Set Up Google Search Console

Previously called "Google Webmaster Tools", Search Console is free Google product for webmasters to check indexing status and optimize visibility of their websites according to best practices. Visit google.com/webmasters/ to get started.

☐ Connect Google Analytics To Google Search Console

Logged into Google Search Console, navigate to Settings (gear icon) > Google Analytics Property and connect your analytics to view Search Console data in Google Analytics.

☐ Set Up Bing Webmaster Tools

Bing Webmaster Tools (similar to Google Search Console) is free Bing product for webmasters to check indexing status and optimize visibility of their websites according to best practices. Visit bing.com/toolbox/webmaster to get started.

☐ Set Up Rank Tracking

Rank tracking services will allow you to track your SEO efforts over time by comparing your websites' organic search rankings in Google for different keywords. I recommend Whitespark's Rank Tracker.

☐ Set Up Heatmaps

Heatmaps give a visual representation of where users are clicking on different webpages and how far they are scrolling. These insights aren't found in free services like Google Analytics. I recommend crazyegg.com.



On-Site SEO

☐ Ensure NAP Consistency

Ensure that your business's Name, Address & Phone number (NAP) displayed on your website is consistent with your Google Business listing and all other online citations. Spelling inconsistencies and miss-matching phone numbers should be reconciled.

☐ H1, H2, H3,...tags

Organize your website content into logical hierarchies using header tags. Ensure one <h1> tag per page (typically this is the page title), and sub-categories of the content divided up by <h2>, and <h3>, <h4>, .etc beyond that.

☐ Optimize Page Titles & Meta Info

Ensure target keywords are present in your page title, meta description, and meta keywords. I recommend using Yoast SEO for ease of use and recommendations for character length.

☐ Optimize Image 'alt' tags

Write a description 'alt' tag for every image on your website. These 'alt' image descriptions are read by browsers and Google alike and displayed if an image fails to load. A description of an image if it fails to load creates a positive user experience.

☐ Optimize Page URLs

Ensure that your pages' URLs are concise, but contain target keywords. Avoid being too long or spammy looking.

☐ Create Relevant Internal Links Within Content

When appropriate, ensure that content on your webpages links to other pages of your website. Internal links create both a positive user experience and also gives Google a roadmap to the content hierarchy of your website—which may help prioritize certain pages in the SERPs.

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On-Site SEO (Cont.)

☐ Remove Duplicate Content

Google penalizes content that is duplicated across the website. Ensure that your website is not duplicating content word-for-word from other parts of your website or from other websites. However, it's okay if other websites are copying your content if your website is the original source.

☐ Install A Blog

Installing a blog is a great way to contribute content to your website that may not otherwise fit well into your site's navigation. Content can organize chronologically or by categories and has the added SEO benefit of targeting long-tail keyword searches.

☐ Link To Your Social Media Sites

If you have social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc., consider linking to these accounts either in your header or footer global navigation.

☐ Create A Privacy Statement

Create a privacy statement that explains the ways in which your website gathers, uses, discloses, and manages a customer or client's data. Link to this privacy statement in your site's footer.



Technical SEO

☐ Use a CDN

A CDN (Content Delivery Network) is a network of servers around the globe that will improve site load time by choosing servers closer to users geographically. I recommend Cloudflare and their free CDN solution.

☐ Enable Caching

Caching will drastically improve page load times by saving data (HTML, images, etc.) when it's first loaded so that it can load quicker if requested again. For WordPress, I recommend using WP Super Cache plugin

☐ Compress Your Images

Large images sizes are one of the biggest culprits driving down your page load speed. Ensure your site's images are compressed without noticeable sacrifice to picture quality. For WordPress users, I recommend using WP Smush Pro for an automated way to bulk compress your site's images.

☐ Minify Your CSS/HTML/JavaScript

Minifying your code will remove excess white spaces that aren't integral for executing properly, increasing page load speed. For WordPress users, I recommend Hummingbird plugin to automatically minify your files.

Also, consider removing excess CSS code that is not being executed.

☐ Upgrade to SSL/HTTPS

According to a 2014 announcement, Google prioritizes pages using HTTPS encryptions. HTTPS/SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) provides a safer browsing experience for users. Many hosting providers can install an SSL Certificate on your website for you.

☐ Fix 404 Errors

Find all instances of 404 errors on your website and redirect those error pages to more appropriate landing pages (or to the homepage). I recommend using a product like Screaming Frog to download a report of your site's 404's, then edit your site's .htaccess to add 301 redirects.

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Technical SEO (Cont.)

☐ Create A Sitemap

A sitemap is exactly what it sounds like – a map of your website and the order of its pages. In order for engines like Google and Bing to index your site, they have automated crawling methods that check for all of the pages and store what they find. However, these methods aren't perfect, so creating a sitemap to guide the indexing process helps to ensure that all of your pages are found and indexed correctly.

☐ Submit Sitemap To Bing Webmaster Tools

Once you have completed the Create a Sitemap section of The SEO Checklist, submit it to Bing to ensure that your website is fully and correctly indexed.

Visit your Webmaster Account > Dashboard > "Sitemaps" Widget > Submit a Sitemap

☐ Use SCHEMA

SCHEMA is a markup language you may add to your webpage that is read by all search engines to more accurately contextualize elements on a page. Think of SCHEMA as a common vocabulary to help identify things like author names, review ratings, dates, etc. For example, the review stars that you see under certain Amazon products in a Google search is SCHEMA at work.

To get started using SCHEMA, I recommend using Schema App. This tool will generate structured data across all blog posts and your homepage for free. They also provide paid services to expand it across your whole site.

☐ Install a Favicon

A favicon is the small icon or logo that is commonly displayed in the tab on the top of browsers next to the page's title and next to bookmarks. Having a favicon shows your professionalism and differentiates your site from the users' other open tabs or bookmarks. Favicons are typically 16×16 pixels and can be installed by being linked in the section of your HTML. There are even plenty easy-to-use favicon generators, so you don't have to be graphic designer to create one.

☐ Submit Sitemap To Google Search Console

Once you have completed the Create a Sitemap section of The SEO Checklist, submit it to Google to ensure that your website is fully and correctly indexed.

Visit your Google Search Console Account > Select Your Website > Crawl on the left side bar > Sitemaps > Add/Test Sitemap > Enter the Sitemap > Submit

☐ Set Up Automatic Site Backups

Surprisingly, web hosting services aren't required to backup your websites for you, so if something goes wrong, it's on you. You can schedule times to backup manually, but I recommend using Updraft Plus for WordPress to set up automated weekly backups of all databases and files.

☐ Ensure There Is a Language Tag In Header

Ensure there is a language tag above the <head> of your website to ensure that Google is only serving your content to users that speak your target language. If your site is in English, confirm that the language tag <lang="en-us"> is implemented on your site to prevent Google from serving your content to French speakers, for example.

Pro tip: If your website serves content in multiple languages, we recommend

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Mobile-Friendly

☐ Test For Mobile-Friendliness

Test that your website is mobile responsive using Google's Mobile Friendly Test. Ensure your website is using responsive CSS coding to dynamically display the right layouts for varying size screens. Clickable elements, such as links, should be sized properly and with enough spacing to accommodate fingers.

Less optimal: If your root domain is not using responsive CSS and instead using a subdomain for mobile (ie. <http://m.example.com>), signal the relationship between two URLs by tag with `rel="canonical"` and `rel="alternate"` elements. Read more on using sub-domains has an alternative to responsive CSS [here](#).



Citations & Directories

☐ Verify Google Business Listing

Create a Google My Business Account using the same Google Account that is linked to your Google Search Console. From here, you can claim your business and follow the steps to verify. Once completed, you'll be free to manage all aspects of your Google Business listing.

☐ Verify Bing Listing

Search for your business on Bing Places for Business and click Claim. From there, you can manage all of your business's information. You can also add your business if it isn't already listed.

I recommend signing up for Moz Local who will automatically claim your Bing listing as well as other top-tier directories.

☐ Verify Yelp Listing

Head to Yelp's Business Page and search for your company. Find your listing and click the claim button. From there, you'll be prompted to create a Yelp Business Account. Once claimed, Yelp may call the listed business number to verify that you're the one claiming the business.

☐ Build Citations

Improve local SEO by ensuring your businesses information is listed completely and accurately on many directory websites like yellowpages.com, yelp.com, foursquare.com, and more. I recommend using online services like MozLocal & Whitespark Citation Building for reasonably priced outsourcing.

☐ Verify Apple Maps Listing

Search for your business name in the Apple Maps app. If your listing isn't present or has errors, tap the 'information' icon at the top-right to "Add a Place" or "Report an Issue".



Linkbuilding

☐ Find Local Sponsorships

By sponsoring a local sports team, charity, or other nonprofit organization, you have a chance to gain a link while making an impact in the community. Additionally, you may find that organizations that you already sponsor may not be linking to you, but are willing to if you just ask.

☐ Brand Mentions

A great way to get links is to find any mentions of your brand on the web and ask the author to link the branded text back to your site. However, be careful how you word your email because they don't have to link to you, even if it's a direct quote.

Moz's Fresh Web Explorer is a good tool to find any existing mentions of your brand on the internet.

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Linkbuilding (Cont.)

☐ Niche Or Local Blog Outreach

I recommend using a blog directory such as Best of the Web Blogs or Blog Search Engine to discover local blogs, forums, and subreddits to become active on. Ensure that your contributions are genuinely useful and don't come off as overly promotional or as blatant advertisement for your business. On the other hand, encourage these niche and local blog owners to link back to your website where relevant. Keep systems and schedules that ensure you are regularly discovering and checking in on local niche bloggers.

☐ Interviews & Expert Testimony

Many news stories require expert testimonies or interviews when they're based around a very specific subject. Being an expert that can be quoted in the article may likely earn you additional exposure and possibly a link through the publication. PR Newswire's Profnet is a paid membership in which you can register yourself as an expert and have the media come to you if a big story breaks in your area of expertise.

☐ Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking sites such as Reddit, Digg, and StumbleUpon are websites that allow user created content. Because the content is user generated, businesses have the ability to post backlinks to their own site. Therefore, the SEO impact of social bookmarking has unquestionably gone down in the past few years. It's best to just become an active user on the sites related to your company's niche and drop a link to your site only when it will add genuine value and won't be seen as spammy or overly promotional.

☐ Alumni Links

.Edu websites are a highly trusted source of backlinks. If you have a passion for speaking, donating, or contributing in other ways to your alma mater as an alumnus, research the ways in which you can become involved that would earn you a link on the university's website.

☐ On-Topic Comment Links

Join the discussion by posting comments on related blogs, forums, and subreddits, including a link back to your site. Tread carefully with this tactic as it can be frowned upon and viewed as spammy on certain sites. Make sure that you're on-topic with your comment and don't come off as self-promoting or advertising. If your comment comes off that way, there's a chance that it will be deleted by moderators.

☐ Create Linkable Content

Creating linkable content is all about creating value. If you create a truly valuable asset, links will happen more organically and you'll have a mutually beneficial reason to outreach for backlinks. Similarly to the Niche Infographic section of The SEO Checklist, strive to create a blog post/checklist/how-to guide/etc. that is unique in its design, voice, information, accessibility, or aggregation.

☐ Research Competitors' Backlinks

The sites that are linking to your competitors may also be willing to link to you. I recommend using Moz's Open Site Explorer Tool to discover every site and directory that links back to your competition. With a list of those domains and webpages, you'll be able to comb through individually and consider whether your business could also get links on these sites – even if it means reaching out directly to their authors and webmasters.

☐ Barnacle SEO

Barnacle SEO is all about latching your brand to the already-established sites for the top keywords in your industry. You can do this by offering free resources to include on their page such as images, videos, or an infographic. Do several online searches the way your customers would and look for opportunities to be featured on pages that already rank well.

☐ Niche Infographic

By creating a useful and shareable infographic about a specific topic, you're creating a linkable asset that may generate links as well as grow exposure through new audiences. Outreach and share your infographic to niche blogs, subreddits, or news organizations that would find your infographic valuable.

☐ Provide Testimonials

Just like you understand the value of testimonials for your business, other companies do too. That's why reaching out to provide a testimonial for a product or service that you use may ultimately lead to a feature or link on their website. If you're going to write a testimonial, take the time to write one that speaks to the entire customer journey. A high-value testimonial like this will add more value to their business and will increase the likelihood of your testimonial being featured.

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Linkbuilding (Cont.)

☐ Reclaim Broken Links

Broken links not only lead to ranking issues, but they also create a poor user experience. Find and fix all of the broken links on your site as well as all of the external sites that are linking to you. I recommend using ahrefs.com so scan for broken link opportunities.



Reviews & Reputation

☐ Promote More Online Reviews

If you're following the SEO Checklist in order (you should be), then you've already created accounts for many review sites such as Google Business, Yelp Business, and Angie's List. So, now it's time to start getting some reviews! This can be done by simply asking your customers for reviews and making it as easy as possible. Ideally, direct your customer to a quick link or on-site widget through a follow-up email or SMS.

If you are incentivizing your customers to review your business, only ask for honest testimonials and don't manipulate customers into writing only positive reviews. That's not cool.

☐ Respond To All Negative Reviews

While it may be tempting to focus just on the positive reviews for your business, ensure that you respond to every review that you receive, including the negative ones. Responding to all reviews shows your professionalism to potential customers and gives you a chance to address any mistakes or issues that may have caused the bad review.



Social Media

☐ Set Up Facebook (Optional)

Head over to Facebook Business > Create a Page > select your business type > fill out form > Get Started. Easy as that. Your page is now completed and you can start posting away!

Invite your friends, family, and past customers to follow your page. Only use this platform to share valuable content and avoid being overly spammy or self-promotional or people may unfollow you.

☐ Set Up LinkedIn (Optional)

Once you have created your own personal LinkedIn account with your business's verified email address, head over to LinkedIn Business. Click Create a Company Page > enter company name and LinkedIn URL > Create Page

☐ Set Up Twitter (Optional)

Create an account for your business from the Twitter homepage. Be prepared to enter a username, email address, password, and profile picture for your account. Once created, you'll be free to start posting and running ad campaigns.

☐ Set Up Instagram (Optional)

Download the Instagram app on your iPhone or Android. Since Facebook owns Instagram, you have the option to sign up with your Facebook account, but I recommend using your business email as this will be your company's account. Sign up with a phone number or email > enter email address > enter business name and password > create username > add profile picture. You're all set to start sharing amazing photos and videos!

Pro tip: Instagram users are very discerning and critical of low-quality content. As a general rule, if the content isn't extremely high quality, best not post it at all.

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Social Media

☐ Set Up Foursquare (Optional)

Foursquare is an online directory that lists businesses and allows customers to check-in and share their location with friends in real time.

I recommend setting up FourSquare through MozLocal. See [The SEO Checklist > Citations & Directories > Build Citations](#) for more information on MozLocal.

☐ Set Up Pinterest (Optional)

If you have a personal account, log out of it and head to Pinterest Business. Join as a Business > Fill out the form including your Business Type and Website > Continue and now you're ready to start Pinteresting!



Additional Tips

☐ Use Customer Focus Calculator

Write copy that focuses on how the products and services of your business will benefit the customer directly. Remember that the customer is the hero of the story, not you. Visit the [Customer Focus Calculator](#) to test your website's copy.

☐ Use Child Theme in WordPress

Instead of customizing or editing core files of your WordPress site (like functions.php, header.php, or style.css), use a Child Theme to prevent conflicts within your code that may occur while updating to newer versions of your theme, WordPress, or plugins. A Child Theme uses duplicated files from your Parent Theme that don't get overwritten during an update. This means that all of your hard work and customization won't be lost.

☐ Set up Automatic Copyright Year Updates

Having the copyright year of your website updated is crucial to showing users that you own the material and that the site is routinely updated. Make sure that the year is updated. If someone else does these tasks for you, reach out to them. It's an easy, yet very important change to make.

This can, and should, be done automatically with a little bit of coding. I simply put "Copyright © <?php echo date("Y"); ?>" into the footer.php to ensure that it will be changed every year without having to manually do it.



Monthly & Recurring Tasks

☐ Update Platform

Ensure that you're running the latest version of your CMS platform (i.e. WordPress). Updating from an outdated version may improve your site security and reduce any potential conflicts with plugins. Many platforms will notify you when a new version is available, so log into your dashboard and follow the prompts to update.

Note: Updating your platform may cause conflicts with any customized plugins or theme, so backup your website and database before updating.

☐ Update Plugins

Updating outdated plugins may improve your site security and reduce any potential conflicts with your platform or theme.

Note: Be aware that updating a plugin may overwrite any customization made to that plugin.

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Monthly & Recurring Tasks (Cont.)

☐ Run Check For Malicious Software

I recommend using an automated site security tool like Sucuri's Website Security Platform and Firewall. Their services will notify you sooner of security breaches and help remove malicious code.

☐ Delete Unused Plugins & Themes

Keeping the backend of your site clean makes it easier to manage and improves site speed, so schedule regular intervals to review and delete unused plugins and themes.

☐ Delete Unneeded Post & Page Drafts

Sometimes an idea just doesn't work out and you're stuck with the remnants in the form of a draft. These can add up fast and may clutter the backend of your website. Go through your drafts, ensure you won't want or need them in the future before deleting them. Who knows, maybe there's a hidden gem in one of your drafts that you simply forgot about.

☐ Check Bounce Rates

A high bounce rate on a page is a red flag that something may be wrong with how the page loads or that the content isn't matching users' expectations. I recommend visiting Google Analytics > Behavior > Overview > view full report to review your highest trafficked pages and compare their bounce rates to look for red flags.

☐ Find & Fix Broken Internal Links

Broken internal links are hyperlinks on your website that for whatever reason no longer correctly link to their intended page. Often this happens when a page that is linked to gets deleted or the URL structure changes. I'm sure you understand why broken links are bad – they negatively affect both SEO and conversion rate. So, it's best practices to regularly check for and fix broken internal links. This can be done manually, but I recommend using one of the many online broken link checkers like Atomseo's Tool or Screaming Frog's SEO Spider.

☐ Review & Delete Comment Spam

Assuming that you have a blog with a comment section, there's a high chance that you'll get spam comments. Review your articles' comments and ensure that users aren't just trying to drop a link to their site. Not all comments with links are spam, though. Use your best judgment to determine if the comment and link are on-topic and add value to your article.

☐ Optimize Database

Your database stores all of your website's content, settings, form entries, and much more. Over time and after a lot of updates, your database can grow very large, causing detrimental effects on your website's load time and overall performance. To combat this, constantly optimize your database to reduce the size and get rid of unnecessary content or settings.

☐ Check For 404 Errors

Find all instances of 404 errors on your website and redirect those error pages to more appropriate landing pages (or to the homepage). I recommend using a product like Screaming Frog to download a report of your site's 404's, then edit your site's .htaccess to add 301 redirects.

☐ Recheck Mobile Friendliness

Continually check your website using Google's Mobile Friendly Test. This is especially important whenever you make changes to your site. Set up a recurring reminder on your calendar to check the mobile friendliness of your site as well as checking after changes to ensure your users are seeing what you want them to see.

With so many different size phones and tablets out there, it can be difficult to ensure your website displays properly on all screens. I recommend dragging the width of your browser to different sizes to quickly check responsiveness across different device widths.

☐ Delete Unused Widgets

Over time, you'll change which widgets you actually use and want on the backend of your site. Simply keeping them visible causes a lot of clutter and can actually cause some loss in performance. It's a good idea to go through periodically and delete the widgets that you don't use anymore. We recommend using a plugin for WordPress like the Remove Inactive Widgets Plugin.

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Overwhelmed with SEO?
Focus on serving your customers
and **we'll take care of the rest.**

Email me at hello@justincollier.com for a free SEO consultation.