



tourism
northernireland

SEO basics for beginners

Google

seo



Bing

Search Engine Optimisation

YAHOO!

SEO

Search Web



Up Your Site with Structured Data - Bing Webmaster Tools

At Bing, enabling users to make key decisions through visually appealing, informative search results is a key component of our search experience.

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What is Search Engine Optimisation?

Search Engine Optimisation is a form of Search Engine Marketing (SEM) which allows you to connect your brand/ product/service with search engine users searching for it.

There are 3 main ways in which you can market your website via Google:

1. Organic search engine listings (via SEO)
2. Paid search listings (Via Pay per Click PPC e.g. Google AdWords)
3. On other websites e.g. Google AdSense and Google Display Network

The image shows a Google search results page for the query "accommodation northern ireland". The search bar at the top shows the Google logo, the search text, and a search button. Below the search bar are navigation tabs for "All", "Maps", "News", "Shopping", "Images", "More", and "Search tools". The results section indicates "About 15,400,000 results (0.57 seconds)".

The results are divided into organic and paid sections. The first organic result is "Northern Ireland - Lowest price guarantee" from booking.com, with a sub-heading "Northern Ireland". The second organic result is "Holiday Rentals & Apartments - Airbnb Northern Ireland - airbnb.co.uk" with a 4.9 star rating. The third organic result is "Northern Ireland accommodation, Hotel, B&B, self-catering in Belfast ...".

The paid section contains two results. The first is "Northern Ireland - Lowest price guarantee" from booking.com, which is highlighted with a pink background and a red arrow labeled "2". The second is "Holiday Rentals & Apartments - Airbnb Northern Ireland - airbnb.co.uk", also highlighted with a pink background and a red arrow labeled "2".

The third organic result is "Northern Ireland accommodation, Hotel, B&B, self-catering in Belfast ...", which is highlighted with a pink background and a red arrow labeled "1".

The fourth organic result is "Self Catering - Tourism NI - Discover Northern Ireland", which is highlighted with a pink background.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) allows your site listing to be seen by users, and is the only method out of the three which does NOT incur a cost with every click. The search results are displayed in a sequence according to relevance of match between the keyword phrase typed into the search engine and the web pages, according to the ranking algorithm used by the search engine. It is the method of achieving placement on this part of the search engine results pages which is SEO.

Why is Search Engine Optimisation important?

Over 81% of people will research their purchases online, whether they eventually buy online or not.

The majority of web traffic is driven by the major commercial search engines. In the UK, in 2015, the search engine market remained a tale of three companies – Google, Yahoo and Microsoft. Although social media and other types of traffic can generate visits to your website, search engines are the primary method of navigation for most Internet users.

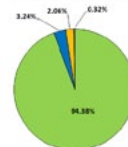
November 2015 - UK Search Market Share (Desktop)



UK Search Engine	Nov 2015 desktop share (%)	Oct 2015 desktop share (%)	Change
Google	88.09	88.35	-0.26
Bing	7.25	6.98	0.27
Yahoo	3.48	3.51	-0.03
Others	1.18	1.16	0.02

What about mobile?

November 2015 - UK Search Market Share (Mobile)



UK Search Engine	Nov 2015 mobile share (%)	Oct 2015 mobile share (%)	Change
Google	94.38	93.7	0.68
Yahoo	3.24	3.37	-0.13
Bing	2.05	2.62	-0.56
Others	0.32	0.31	0.01

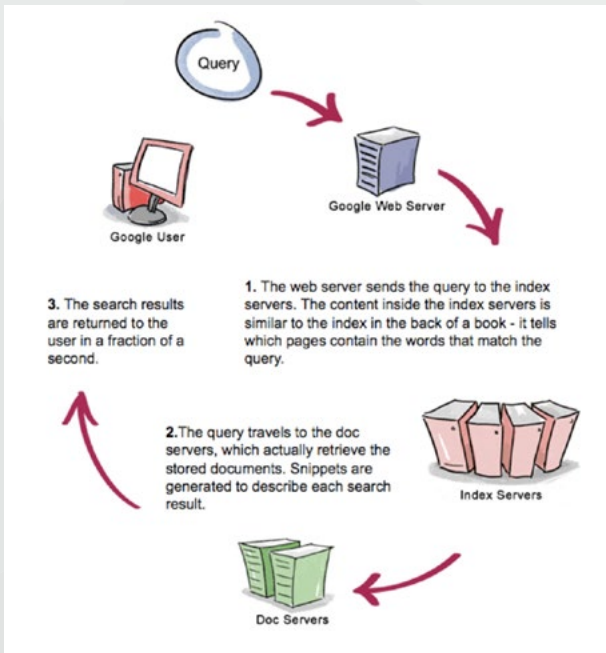
SEO is also much less expensive than PPC (Pay Per Click) enabling your site to have a presence amongst search results pages - as it's effectively free. SEO does not incur any cost per click; therefore you can obtain visibility on search engines with minimal costs, mainly time, incurred.

SEO is useful for driving visitors through targeting high volume, low intent generic phrases. Quite often using PPC for these types of terms can be very costly, but if you use SEO for broader and more obscure terms, you can get visibility at no cost and you can then use your PPC budget to greater effect by focusing on more specific and specialised terms.

While SEO is about increasing the visibility of your site across search engines overall, it is important to remember that often consumers will not travel past the first or second pages of search results therefore it is vital to try and rank as highly as possible within search results.

How Search Engines Work

Fundamentally when you search for keywords using search engines, it works as follows:

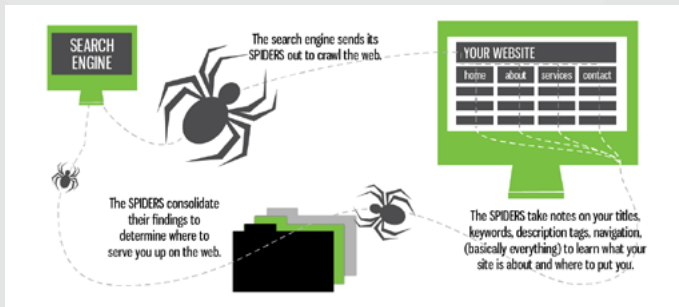


However search engines rank their listings in radically different ways, which is why you may find that your website can rank high under a specific keyword term on one search engine and not at all on another.

Google

When you carry out a Google search, you're almost instantly presented with a list of results from all over the web. Google creates its listings automatically by "crawling" the web compiling a massive index of all the words it sees and their location on each page and keeping a copy in a 'cache' database. When a user enters a query, Google's machines search the index for matching pages and return the results they believe are the most relevant to the user, determined by a range of on and off page factors such as the use of relevant keywords within urls, page names and copy, responsive design, site speed, relevant backlinks and regular content updates.

NOTE: A spider or 'robot' is server-side software which compiles an index containing every word on every page along with the page address / URL. These spiders find your website by reading and following links from other websites onto yours.



SEO - What determines your ranking?

Search engines use algorithms to weight different factors of a website to determine which pages of which websites most closely match the search term query. Each search engine uses different variations of search algorithms, which is why you will notice visible differences in your rankings across different search engines.

Search engine algorithms are regularly updated to provide better accuracy and relevancy to users using these search engines therefore it is important to be aware of any algorithm updates which occur, as this has the potential to have a huge impact on how your website ranks in search results pages.

One example of this would be Google's 'Mobilegeddon' update in 2015 which was designed to give a boost to mobile-friendly pages in Google's mobile search results and websites which weren't responsive saw their rankings fall.

SEO has two major components, on page and off page SEO.

On page optimisation

- Optimized titles and descriptions
- Proper URL Structures
- User friendly navigation (breadcrumbs, user sitemaps)
- Optimized internal links
- Text Formatting (use of h1,h2,bold etc)
- Image optimization (image size, proper image names, use of ALT tag)
- User friendly 404 pages
- Fast loading pages: While page speed is important to Google and for your rankings, it also impacts your user experience as a better experience often leads to better conversions.
- Fresh content
- External links (no broken links or links to 'bad' sites)

Off page optimisation

- Link Building
- Social Media
- Social bookmarking

Before you start: set goals

What goals are you trying to meet? What are your objectives? e.g. - to increase visitor numbers to your site, to increase bookings, to appear under a specific keyword (NOT your property name! You want to be visible to people who don't yet know you.) Whatever the goals, it is important that you work to them.

Before you start: identify what terms people search

Before you can optimise your website, you need to know what keywords to include. This means identifying the core words and phrases which potential customers are searching for which have relevance to your website.

Searcher Behaviour

There are three stages to the 'search journey' (how people search on Google etc) that users typically follow:

1. Explorer – browsing stage, looking for inspiration: Example search term - B&B Belfast
2. Hunter – Now have made their mind up about exact requirements : Example search term – B&B Malone Belfast
3. Tracker – Now at booking stage – B&B Malone Belfast best rates

Searchers typically start off just browsing and continue to refine their search to more and more specific search terms as they come closer to booking.

(You can use the following tool to approximate searches:

<http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-tools/seobook/index.php>)

Some 'Lingo'

Short tail of search: the all-encompassing 'broad' keywords that drive large amounts of traffic but usually from people not ready to book.

Long tail of search: the very specific keywords that drive much less traffic to a site, but tends to be from people more ready to book

NOTE: It is important to appear under both types, because if people don't see you at all in the early stage you are not likely to be considered later.

Keyword tools

To assist you in finding out how people search and what words they use, there are free tools on the web that you can use, such as the Google Keyword Planner, however you will need a Google Adwords account to access this.

Your website stats package (Google Analytics) is also an essential source of information to monitor the keywords that are successfully driving traffic.

Writing for the web - the rules

1. Include the keywords and phrases where possible within web copy, with the most important of the keywords as close to the start of the copy as possible (and in headings where appropriate) however do not overstuff copy, it should still read well and make sense.
2. Grab the reader. Tell them what they want to know and get straight to the point. The first few lines are often the only ones a visitor to your site will read. If they don't convey the really important information, chances are that information will never be seen.
3. Keep paragraphs short and use bullet points where possible so that content can be skimmed at a glance.
4. Formalistic language slows the reader down. Try not to use complicated language when basic or everyday terms can be used instead.

Five simple tips for writing effective marketing copy

1. Write like a journalist. Newspaper writers ensure that the first paragraph contains all the key information and keywords, and then they breakdown the full store. You should too.
2. Keep it concise and include keywords in copy but ensure the language is natural and flows well. Unnecessary 'flowery' clauses, descriptions, side notes, and redundancies simply slow down and distract the reader.
3. Make your text visually accessible. Remember that you want the most important points to be readable at a glance. Don't make your reader work to find important information.
4. Break up the text and include the most important keywords in headings, or hyperlinked to relevant content where possible. Keep paragraphs short and limit each page to a single subject.
5. Check your spelling!

On page optimisation

Search Engine Optimisation is about ensuring that the copy on your website meet the needs of both your customers and of the search engine to ensure that your customers can find your site in the first instance.

Note: SEO occurs on a **page level** basis - NOT on a site wide level.

TIP: Read the clues that Google provide in their Webmaster Guidelines

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=35769>.

How does Google decide what to show at the top?

A basic overview as to how these on site factors all work together is as follows:

1. User searches for 'B&B belfast' in Google
2. Google checks through list of pages for those containing matching phrases and/or synonyms

Of those pages containing this phrase, Google checks for:

3. Highest keyword mentions within the copy on the page found
4. Matching keywords in header tags on page
5. **Text links** formed by keywords on pages that link into the page
6. Matching keywords in the page title tag
7. Matching keywords in the page description tag

As well as some other elements such as the number of other sites that link into yours, and how fast your site is in loading.

Google 'scores' or weights these factors and the page with the highest weighting or score.

Managing optimisation

It is recommended that meta tags are always optimised on the individual pages of a site. Meta tags are lines of code on all web pages which feed information into Google about the page name and what its about therefore these should be individual and unique.

As a rule of thumb, meta tags should stick to the following character lengths (as any bigger than this will result in the tags being truncated in the Google search results):

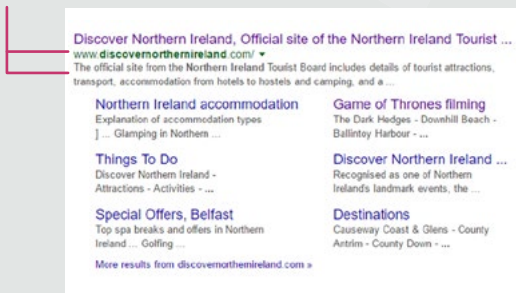
- Title Tag – 70 characters
- Description tag – 150 characters

What effect does managing optimisation have?

Although there is a debate as to the level of effect that these tags have, what is definite, is that if you do not have them in place, your rankings will be lower.

These tags are also important in terms of the actual listings that you have within the search engines. When a user is searching through the pages of search results, what attracts them to click on your listing? It is important that the title of your page, as it appears in the search results, will attract users and encourage them to click through to your site.

The information in the following search results listing is taken directly from the Title tag and the description tag of the page.



The image shows a search engine results page for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board website. A red bracket on the left side of the page highlights the title and description of the search result. The title is "Discover Northern Ireland, Official site of the Northern Ireland Tourist ..." and the description is "www.discovernorthernireland.com/ ... The official site from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board includes details of tourist attractions, transport, accommodation from hotels to hostels and camping, and a ...". Below the title and description, there are several links to other pages on the website, including "Northern Ireland accommodation", "Game of Thrones filming", "Things To Do", "Discover Northern Ireland ...", "Special Offers, Belfast", and "Destinations".

Discover Northern Ireland, Official site of the Northern Ireland Tourist ...
www.discovernorthernireland.com/ ▼
The official site from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board includes details of tourist attractions, transport, accommodation from hotels to hostels and camping, and a ...

Northern Ireland accommodation
Explanation of accommodation types
] ... Glamping in Northern ...

Game of Thrones filming
The Dark Hedges - Downhill Beach - Ballintoy Harbour - ...

Things To Do
Discover Northern Ireland - Attractions - Activities - ...

Discover Northern Ireland ...
Recognised as one of Northern Ireland's landmark events, the ...

Special Offers, Belfast
Top spa breaks and offers in Northern Ireland ... Golfing ...

Destinations
Causeway Coast & Glens - County Antrim - County Down - ...

[More results from discovernorthernireland.com »](#)

Other lingo

As mentioned previously, anchor text links (these are hyperlinks embedded within text e.g. [current affairs](#)), internal site links, bolded text and headings all can contribute to a well optimised page.

Anchor text links

Anchor text links are important within the site, as any keyword that actually clicks through to a relevant page that contains relevant content and the same keywords can help improve the ranking level of that page.

Headings

Become familiar with creating proper page and section headings. This doesn't mean just making a piece of text bold or increasing the font size – use your website content management system to set a range of 'Heading' options i.e. H1, H2 etc. which can be used to break up content. Note that the H1 style should only be used once on any page as the overall page title however H2 can be used as many as required.



ALT tags

Google cannot read or see images; therefore it is important that you tell them what the image is about. When you upload images you are usually asked to supply what is called an 'Alt' attribute- this is an alternative written description which contains descriptive text about the image.

SEO practices to avoid

Manipulative SEO practices can cost your website to lose rankings, traffic and business. Google has the power to penalise websites which it identifies as breaking their guidelines or employing unethical SEO practices.

The following are just some of the practices which can have a direct negative impact on your site:

Low Quality and Paid Links

Avoid buying links from other third parties. Not only may they not be relevant to your site but Google measures the quality of the links pointing towards your site and will penalise sites which engage in the practice of buying links only with the intention of increasing search ranking.

Keyword Stuffing

The inclusion of keywords and phrases in various parts of your content, headers, page titles are a very important part of SEO however, when keywords are simply repeated throughout sections of text or “stuffed“, the content will stop making sense and become nonsense. Search engines will detect this and sanction your site for attempting to manipulate their algorithm.

Meta tag/descriptions stuffing

In addition to keyword stuffing, avoid meta tag/description stuffing. This is the practice of filling meta tags and meta descriptions with keywords and phrases in an effort to convince search engine crawlers to index and rank webpages high for those keywords and phrases.

Duplicate Content

If your site only contains content duplicated from another source, it will always be at a disadvantage in comparison to sites that create their own content. Always create content which is unique to your site in order to differentiate your business from the rest.



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