Search Engine Optimization

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What is Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of improving a website's visibility in search engines in order to drive more qualified traffic.

Why is SEO important?

Social traffic is significantly down for publishers, but many in the industry are seeing huge gains in organic search traffic as users turn to Google to replace news and information they were once receiving on Facebook. Even before this recent trend, organic search traffic was and still is our number one referral of traffic and streams to pbs.org.

Understanding Search Engines

Search engines strive to provide users with the "best" set of results for their queries. If you think of the keywords a user types into the search field as asking a particular question, then the top results that are returned should help answer the user's question. Each engine uses a different algorithm to determine which webpages to show in the results, but every search engine has the goal of showing its users high-quality and relevant results.

The first step to understanding SEO is to recognize that search engines order their rankings based on calculations of quantifiable data. While the exact ranking algorithms are unknown to all but the search engine engineers themselves, we do know many of the factors that are considered. When you build your website with an eye toward how a search engine might evaluate the page, you're off to a good start getting more traffic from sites like Google and Yahoo/Bing.

Understanding Common Problems

Common problems that will prevent your webpage from showing up at the top of the results can be grouped into a few categories:

- the search engine can't find your page
- the search engine doesn't understand what your page is about
- the search engine doesn't think your content is relevant to the user's particular query
- the search engine thinks your page isn't authoritative enough (i.e., there are other pages about the same topic that the search engine believes are more trustworthy than yours).

In addition to the common categories above, one more reason that your page(s) might not show up in any search engine results could be that your site has been banned. This will happen if a search engine believes you've participated in any behavior that goes against its terms of service.

Keyword Research

Keyword research is one of the most important first steps of SEO. Keyword research will tell you which search terms you should pursue in your optimization work. If you don't start the SEO process with research, you may end up wasting effort on low-quality keywords that won't send many visitors your way.

High-value terms are those that have the most potential to drive well-qualified traffic to your site. The terms you target should be:

- **Relevant** to the content you have to offer - so you're attracting traffic that will stay on your site rather than bouncing immediately.
- **High-volume** - so you attract sufficient traffic to make it worth your efforts.
- **Attainable** - you want to concentrate on optimizing for search terms you have a good chance at achieving high rankings for.

Several tools are available for keyword research, including:

- SEM Rush
- MOZ

Page Titles & On-Page Optimization

Start your SEO efforts by focusing on those things under your immediate control. Since you can easily control the text that appears on your webpages, on-page optimization is usually the lowest hanging fruit. In addition to the copy on the page itself, the other page element that's going to give you a lot of bang for your buck is the page title (i.e., the <TITLE> tag).

Include a call to action. Suggested length is between 25 and 60 characters.

Image Optimization

Unique images that are not stock images will result higher in image search returns. Image SEO starts with the file name. Use your focus keyphrase in the image file name. Loading time is important so try to compress images or use next generation file formats. A good rule of thumb is to keep images below 100KB.

There are several great tools available for optimizing images, including:

- JPEG Optimizer
- Optimizilla
- ImageOptim
- Kraken.io
- Compressnow
- Trimage

Use alt text and title text to maximize accessibility. Be sure to add alt text to every image you use, and make sure the alt text includes the SEO keyword for that page (if appropriate). Most importantly, describe what is in the image so both, search engines and people, can make sense of it.

Google Images automatically generates a title and snippet to best explain each result and how it relates to the user query. This helps users decide whether or not to click on a result. The most popular screen readers cut off alt text at **around 125** characters, so it's advisable to keep it to that character count or less.

Headings

H1 is the main topic of the page and the second most importantly crawled item on the page. Utilize H2-H6 headings to further structure and call attention to important content and keywords.

Site Structure & Internal Linking

How you structure your site directly impacts how search engines discover your content and what they think is important on your site. Pages within a site can work together to increase your search ranks for a broad array of search terms. By building your website with an SEO-friendly information architecture and a solid internal linking strategy, you're laying a strong foundation for achieving equally strong rankings for your current and future content. Links are believed to be one of the, if not the single most, important ranking factor in Google's algorithm. Taking a moment to assess your site's internal linking structure can be highly beneficial to your SEO effectiveness.

SEO Checklist

When creating a new website or a new page on your site, refer to the following checklist to help you take basic steps to improve SEO and avoid pitfalls:

- **For each page on the site, select 2-3 high-value keyword phrases that are directly relevant to the content on that page.**
  - If possible, fill out 5-8 additional related keyword phrases

- **Create a unique Title Tag for each page.**
  - Homepage Title Tag starts with program name. Include tagline if applicable or a short, descriptive keyword phrase that contextualizes what the program is about (e.g., Independent Films, History of the American Ballet Theatre).
  - Non-homepage Title Tags include target keywords selected in the previous step.

- **Use clean URLs. (Example: https://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/episode/looking-ahead-116th-congress)**
  - Use keywords in URL slugs
  - Separate URL keywords with hyphens; remove unnecessary words.
  - Avoid using variable strings (example: ?pageid=21&episode=chocolate&)
  - ⚠️ **Note:** Don't change URLs of existing pages without creating redirects

- **Write a unique, targeted meta description of 155 characters maximum and 70 characters minimum for every page.**

  - *** *No two pages share the same description.* ***
  - Each description includes the page's target keywords near the beginning of the meta description.
  - Meta description should be compelling copy that entices search engine users to click on the listing. ✅ **Tip:** Rather than describing what the page is about, think in terms of why someone would want to see it.
  - Do not put broadcast dates in the description.

- **Make sure each page has unique, descriptive text on it.**
  - Aim for *at least* 200 words of unique copy for each page
  - See tips on writing description text

- **Verify that code elements are SEO-friendly.**
  - Do not use Flash for navigation or critical content elements!
  - Make sure all images have descriptive alt attributes
  - Do not use frames
  - Use descriptive link text for all navigation elements
  - Use external CSS files for styling and positioning

- **Create SEO-friendly site architecture.**
  - Exclude site search results pages using robots.txt (You must architect your site so that internal search results URLs are in a separate subdirectory).
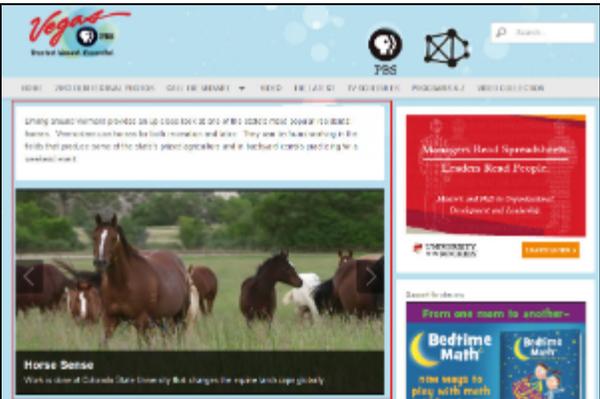 - Top-level navigation links point to the site's most important pages.

Things You Can Start Doing Today

Follow these five steps to start improving your SEO today:

1. Find one page on your site that doesn't get as much organic search traffic as you think it should.
2. Pick two or three keyword phrases for which you want that page to rank.
3. Create a unique Title Tag incorporating your primary keyword phrase (at the beginning!)
4. Make sure the page has at least 300 words of copy on it.
5. Find a related page on your site and add a link to your target page, using your keyword phrase as anchor text.

What Bento fields are important for SEO?

Name	Definition	Example
Slug	Text that appears at the end of the page URL.	

Page Content	Content that appears in the body of the page such as a text component, Explorer Carousel, or Explorer Custom Promo.	
SEO Settings (page title, description, keywords)	Page information used in the search engines' ranking algorithms and displayed to users in search results and other places (like Facebook).	
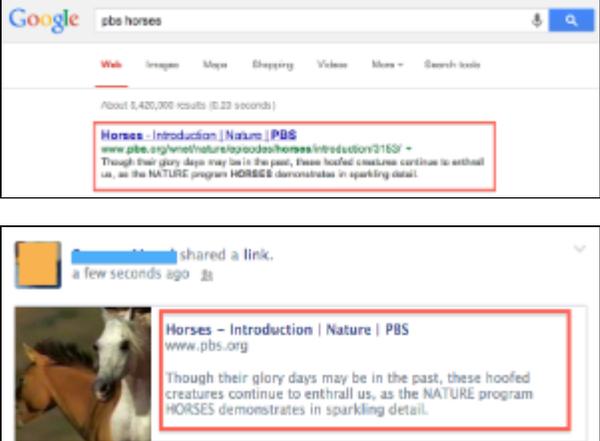
Where these fields appear in the Bento admin tool
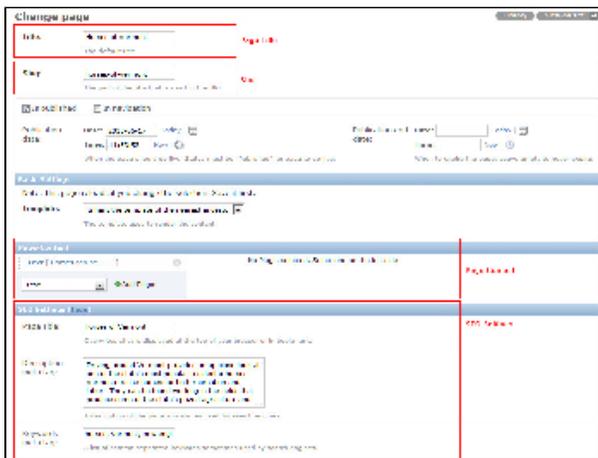
SEO Title Tags

The Title tag is a piece of metadata on a webpage that tells users and search engines about that page. The Title tag, along with the meta description, are also displayed when you or a user post a link to your content on social sites such as Facebook. Therefore, it should be descriptive, specific, concise and compelling. Additionally, a well-written title tag is one of the most important "on page" ranking factors for getting visibility in search rankings.

By default, Bento auto-generates Title tags for each page. However, you do have the option to override the default tag by entering your own carefully crafted Title in the SEO Settings section of each Bento page.

Learn more about Title Tags

Descriptive Text

The Meta Description is displayed in search results (and Facebook postings) as the page description (Figure 1).

> ⓘ The description is not a ranking factor, but can impact click-through rates.

Figure 1 - Meta Descriptions
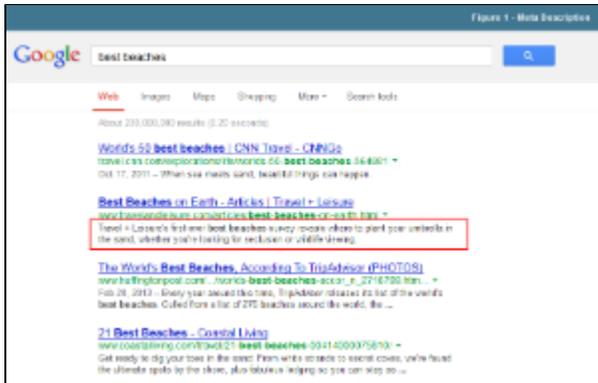
Tips on writing descriptive text

1. When writing your meta description, be sure to make it compelling and relevant to your target keywords so people will want to click on your result.
2. Descriptions should not exceed 155 characters in length.
3. Be sure your description text reads well, makes sense, and is engaging to readers. You have one sentence to get users interested in viewing your website.
4. Don't duplicate your descriptions across website pages.
5. Make an effort to add keyword(s) at the beginning of the Meta Description while still retaining a sensible sentence structure that is easy to read.
6. Avoid using any unusual characters, unless they are included in the keywords you are using. Try to use basic text, without unnecessary symbols.
7. Try to include your station or program name within the Description so that people will see recognizable text in search results.
8. Always try to add in a variant of your main keywords or key phrase. Try to choose broadly used terms that people may use when searching.

Keywords

Keywords have no impact on SEO ranking and can be kept blank, however, you can add two or three phrases as a reminder of editorial intent.