IMPROVING SEO RESULTS

A Fast Start Checklist to review the key activities needed to improve your SEO

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## SEO still demands attention from businesses

Despite all the recent focus on content marketing and social media marketing, if executed well, SEO can still be a fantastic way to drive quality visitors who want to do business with you to your site. Some businesses and blogs, including SmartInsights.com deliver well over half our traffic from SEO through their SEO mastery, or the strength of their brand. We drive over 80 percent of our 500,00 monthly unique visitors from SEO!

SEO Essentials

SEO helps you increase visibility in the natural listings of the search engines shown in the example search below. It's about getting your products and services in front of searchers who are researching or ready to buy.
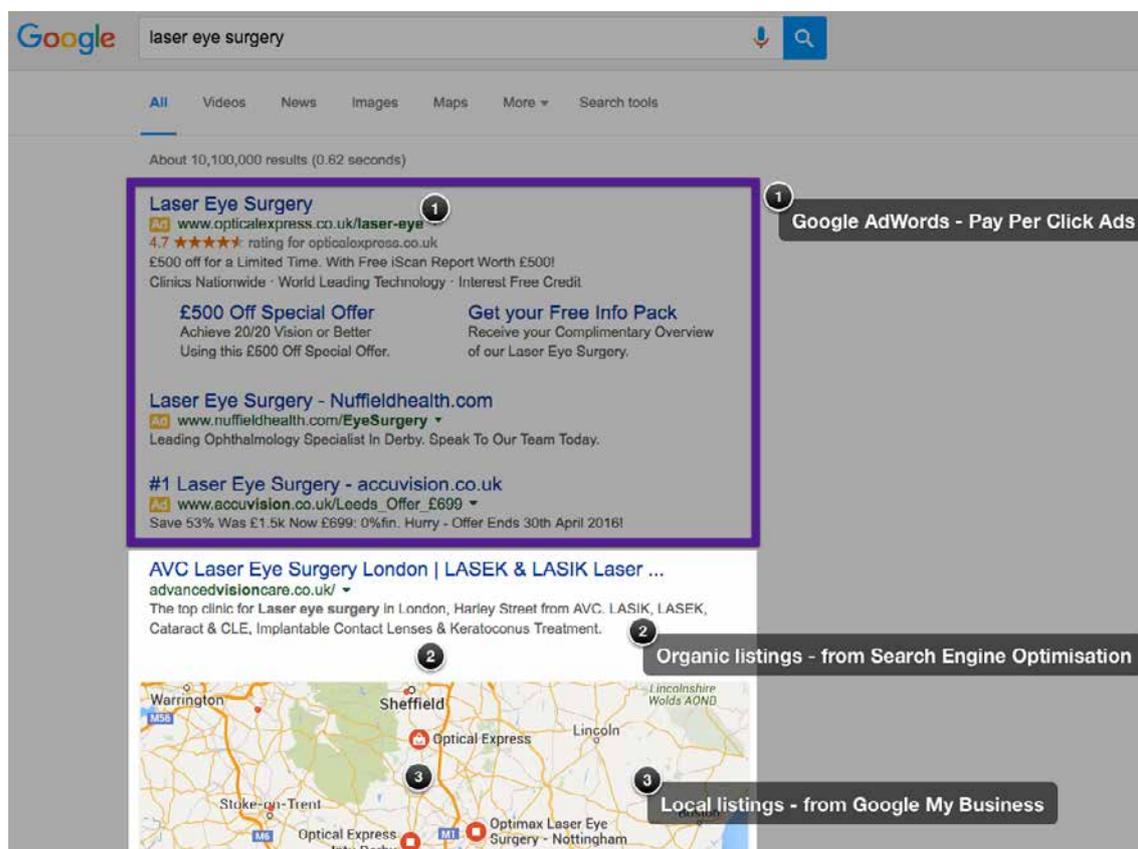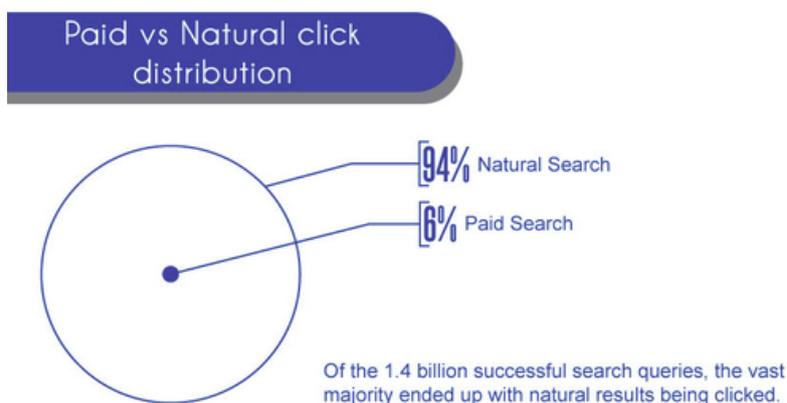
You will know that over the years, Google has made changes to increase the prominence of its paid ad listings, including removing the right sidebar ads in March 2016. Yet searchers favour the natural listings and since everyone who uses the web searches for products and services, you can't understate its importance. It can make or break a business, unless your brand is extremely well-known.

What is it? Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
SEO is a proactive, structured approach used to improve the position of a company in the natural or organic results listings of search engines for the keyphrases you target. It's aim is to increase awareness and drive visits to a site from new prospects and existing customers.

SEO is a fantastic opportunity for marketers since we don't have to pay for the cost of AdWords, but you can see the challenge of SEO from the screen grab since much more screen real-estate is devoted to paid AdWords listings. Yet this research[*] shows the ongoing importance of SEO to business. It shows that the vast majority of searchers still click on the natural rather than paid listings.

Paid vs Natural click distribution

94% Natural Search

6% Paid Search

Of the 1.4 billion successful search queries, the vast majority ended up with natural results being clicked.

Which ranking factors are important to help me get more visits from SEO?

To get the most from SEO you need to know which levers to pull will make the biggest difference to your rankings. Google engineers have said there are over 200 factors, but in this Fast Start guide we will show you the ones that really matter. We've outlined over 20 factors to review to help you improve your SEO with links through to more detailed guidance. Our 40,000 word 7 Steps Guides to SEO and Elearning course for Expert members which we link to will give you the full details.

* Smart Insights: Comparison of Google clickthrough rates by position in different sectors

For Expert members – The Smart Insights Search Engine Optimisation Toolkit

This sample 'Fast Start' guide will introduce you to some key issues for getting more from SEO and how to structure how you manage it. For more practical recommendations, Smart Insights Expert members can consult the other resources in the SEO toolkit in the members area boost their SEO – see full listing of resources in the SEO Toolkit. We recommend:

☑ Score your capability using our interactive benchmarking tool which gives you a score for 7 areas of SEO and then recommends where to focus

☑ Audit your keyword effectiveness with our gap analysis toolkit that pulls in data from Google Analytics and the Search Console

☑ Download the in-depth guide to SEO, which goes into the detail you need to get better results from technical SEO, on-page SEO, off-site SEO and content marketing.

☑ Complete the E-learning course which takes you through key areas to improve your SEO, with each section marked off as you complete it

☑ Download the SEO checklist for more details to ensure you've got everything

Learn more about our the full set of resources in our SEO Toolkit.

MANAGING SEO FAST START CHECKLIST

About this checklist

If you know the basics of SEO you can use this checklist to review your approach across all of search engine optimisation, following-up the details or the recommended tools using the links on the right.

If you're serious about improving your SEO we recommend our in-depth 7 Steps to SEO guide. It clearly explains the best practices of SEO for non-specialists, but with enough detail to improve SEO for your own site or to manage SEO specialists or an agency.

Our SEO Elearning follows a similar structure – we link to the most relevant resources with an asterisk (*) in the right column, so that Expert members can access these direct.

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
Step 1 Do an audit and set your goals			
1	**Understand your market potential against market share for SEO** *Review the customer demand, i.e. number of monthly searches in your market for key products and services to see how important SEO is and could be for you. Do a **gap analysis** structured by key consumer behaviours to assess your market share for different keyphrases.*	☑ Set goals for SEO * ☑ Define categorised target keyword list * ☑ Gap Analysis spreadsheet ☑ Competitor benchmark *	❑
2	**Setup dashboards and use analytics reports to review the contribution of SEO to your business** *You'll get more from your SEO if you know how much value it contributes in terms of visits, conversion, plus leads or sales. You also need to separate out the brand visits including your brand name or URL. Then you'll have a baseline to improve against.*	☑ Gap Analysis spreadsheet ☑ Google Search Console - link to Google Analytics now many phrases are reports as "Not Provided" - see Improve SEO through analytics lesson *	❑

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
3	**Create a categorised target keyphrase list based on customer behaviour** *It's better to have a list of target keywords rather than none at all, but even better to group keyphrases by behaviour, e.g. brand, compare, cost adjectives.*	☑ Define categorised target keyword list *	☐
Step 2 Make sure the search engines can find your content			
4	***Complete a platform or CMS audit for indexing and visibility including Google's quality guidelines*** *An audit will identify whether Google's robots can find different types of content and that they are included within the search listings.* *You should audit the site for poor quality links which may cause your site to be penalised by Google's Panda or Penguin anti web spam filters (see below).*	☑ Google's Webmaster Technical and Quality Guidelines ☑ Understand how to avoid Panda and Penguin penalties - in Introduction to SEO lesson *	☐
5	**Maximise visits from the non-text listings** *Images, video and news sources are excellent opportunities to drive quality visits if you can beat your competitors in this area.*	☑ Lesson - Improve image SEO *	☐
6	**Review whether duplicate content is causing a problem** *"Dupe content" is often a problem on large sites and can reduce rankings, so work with your agency or SEO specialists whether they have audited this recently...*	☑ 4 techniques to avoid duplicate content *	☐
7	***Review mobile search volume and consumer behaviour*** *Google's keyword planner no longer includes mobile search volume, but Google promises to bring it back. Use analytics to check your mobile SEO is effective - Google has said they may penalise if there is a poor experience on mobile.*	☑ Improve visibility of mobile content *	☐

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
8	*Optimise local content and get listed on Google My Business if you offer local services and* *Simple. If your business has a local presence like stores or offices it's essential to have good visibility within Google+ Local and improve reviews, markup and links to these local services.*	☑ Improve local SEO * ☑ Google My Business ☑ Structured data markup for star rating snippets	❏
9	*Put appropriate resource into multilingual SEO (if relevant)* *Google has become a lot better at identifying local sites, but for businesses who need a local web presence in their major markets this is a major issue which may need specialist assistance - contact us for recommendations on the agency options.*	☑ Improve international SEO *	❏
10	*Use Schema - Structured markup (if relevant)* *Google and other search engines use schema.org markup to give additional information which is essential for retailers to use., for example, reviews and ratings. It can be important in other sectors, e.g. restaurants.*	☑ Improve Schema markup *	❏

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	Step 3 Work on on-page SEO		
11	**Follow-best practice for on-page SEO - audit and re-engineer** *See the detailed guidance for each of these in our 7 Steps SEO guide and checklist for content owners/writers:* ☑ *Define Primary, secondary and tertiary keyphrases for page* ☑ *URL.* ☑ *Page title.* ☑ *H1 tag.* ☑ *Keyword inclusion in body copy.* ☑ *Keyword proximity* ☑ *Internal links.* ☑ *Image titles and alt tags.*	☑ On page SEO lesson *	❑
12	**Ensure your brand messages are effective within the natural listings** *For prospects, the search results pages in Google (often called the SERPs by search specialists) may be the first time they experience your brand, so make sure you're explaining clearly why you're worth doing business with to encourage clickthrough and explain your offer.*	☑ Using analytics to review SERPs message effectiveness	❑
	Step 4 Create awesome content for SEO		
13	**Ensure you have a solid content strategy or develop linkbait to engage and gain links** *A content strategy to create content that naturally attracts links and sharing isn't only vital to SEO today, it helps drive awareness and interaction through social media and online PR plus aids conversion and retention too.*	☑ Content marketing strategy 7 Steps guide	❑

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
14	**Create and maintain a blog for fresh content and to attract links** *Often product or service content won't attract many links and is rarely updated. To win in Google's eyes you need to have engaging content which attracts links - this is why a content hub, blog or similar news or community section are essential.*	☑ We're often asked this question: Which is best for blog SEO: separate domain, subdomain or subfolder?	❏
15	**Ensure you're not a Victim of the Panda search filter** *Google penalises content which doesn't engage users. Make sure your content is shareable through social and attracts links and comments to avoid this penalty.*	☑ Understand how to avoid Panda and Penguin penalties - in Introduction to SEO lesson *	❏
Step 5 Gain more quality links using content marketing			
16	**Focus SEO activity on improving link quality via content quality** *This is THE most important of the success factors, and the toughest to get right... Issues to consider include:* ☑*Number of unique linking domains (dofollowed and nofollowed)* ☑*Domain authority of unique linking domains* ☑*Natural link profile - from a range of different sites.* ☑*Link types - text links are better than image links generally* ☑*Anchor text quality - better if it includes keywords, but must be diverse or subject to Penguin filter* ☑*Quality links are do-followed. Many blog comments and social media updates are nofollowed and do not pass significant link benefits.*	☑ Understand how to avoid Panda and Penguin penalties - in Introduction to SEO lesson *	❏

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
17	**Work on blogging outreach, partnering and syndication** *Working with other site owners is still an effective technique provided you don't break Google's quality guidelines. Never buy links, but consider:* ☑ *Quality guest blogging of original content on high quality sites* ☑ *Content syndication (sharing existing content)* ☑ *Approaching other sites and publishers when you have outstanding content to share to encourage them to feature your content* ☑ *Niche directories offering links on quality pages that are indexed by Google (less effective than previously)* ☑ *Press releases on quality sites (less effective)*	☑ Smart Insights 7 Steps to Influencer marketing guide	❑
18	**Avoid being a victim of the Penguin webspam filter** *Penguin is a group of updates focused on what Google calls 'webspam'. Some sites received notifications in Google Webmaster Tools of potential problems. Google reviewed the profile or patterns of sites linking to a site, in particular the anchor text pattern.*	☑ Understand how to avoid Panda and Penguin penalties - in Introduction to SEO lesson *	❑

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
19	**Increase your "social signals" by using social media optimisation (SMO)** *Social media signals started to play a part in search engine algorithms back in December 2010 but it wasn't until 2011 that the likes of Google really started to pay attention and dedicate more effort to indexing social content and using social signals to boost content in search results.*	☑ What is SMO?	❑
Step 6 Refine your internal linking			
20	**Refine your internal linking** *Internal linking isn't discussed as much as other SEO techniques. But we think it's really powerful to give better SEO results AND you control it!*	☑ Review 8 techniques to improve internal linking *	❑

	SEO management activity	Recommended tips and resources	
Step 7 Improving SEO through analytics			
21	**Use Advanced Segments in Google Analytics to review success** *We recommend setting up 4 advanced segments to help review SEO success and how it's integrated with paid search.*	☑ Using Google Analytics to audit and improve SEO	❏
22	**Report on not-provided** *Google Analytics now reports the majority of keywords to sites today as 'not provided'. In our 7 Steps guide we explain alternatives to finding the actual keywords used to reach a site.*	☑ Reporting on not-provided	❏

We hope you have found this Fast Start summary of the success factors for SEO useful. If you're looking for more in-depth advice on SEO, Expert members of Smart Insights can download our other resources on SEO:

☑ 7 Steps to Successful SEO guide
☑ SEO audit template
☑ Video course and tutorial on SEO keyword analysis

If you have any questions or comments, we'd love to hear from you - please contact us.

Dave Chaffey and the Smart Insights team