Accessibility and SEO: Where they overlap and how to optimize for both

The general misunderstanding is that web accessibility standards stand in a way of search engine optimization tactics preventing SEO experts from doing their job properly. Well, that's not true. In fact, SEO and web accessibility overlap in many areas.

Web accessibility has recently become a hot topic in the digital marketing industry due to a wave of widely publicized scandals, that is, web users suing big and small businesses for failing to provide them with a smooth user experience.

Moreover, Google helps to raise awareness by helping web accessibility standards to be widely adopted. Google has official guidelines explaining accessibility and how they help create a better user experience.

> *Broadly speaking, when we say a site is accessible, we mean that the site's content is available, and its functionality can be operated, by literally anyone.*

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And yet, while smart marketers have recognized the tangible

benefit of making your site accessible (that is, making it possible for more web users to buy from your site), web accessibility seldom makes it to marketing priority lists.

What if I told you that by making a site accessible you can actually improve your SEO? Let’s see how:

1. Site and page structure

The foundation of web accessibility is very similar to that of an SEO strategy: You need a clear, logical site and page structure.

1.1. Site structure

Site-wise this includes:

- Clear navigation
- Sitemaps
- Breadcrumbs

All of those elements are considered essential for SEO too to provide search bots with an easy way to crawl and understand the site structure. According to Google:

> *The navigation of a website is important in helping visitors quickly find the content they want. It can also help search engines understand what content the webmaster thinks is important.*
>
> *Although Google’s search results are provided at a page level, Google also likes to have a sense of what role a page plays in the bigger picture of the site.*

For WordPress sites, an easy way to quickly improve navigation is to add breadcrumbs using a free Yoast plugin: It’s really one-click integration.

Image: Screenshot created by the author

1.2. Page structure

When it comes to page structure, this includes:

- The meaningful use of subheadings
- Clickable table of contents taking you to a specific subhead

Both are recommended for web accessibility purposes as they enable screen readers to navigate a page. From an SEO perspective these two elements have very important benefits:

- Using your target keyword in subheadings improves its visibility (helping the page rank higher)
- A table of contents generates “Jump to” links in search snippets improving its click-through

- For guidelines on how to use subheadings refer to this detailed article on article structure
- To create a clickable table of contents, use a plugin called “Easy Table of Contents”. It automates the process, so you don’t have to do anything apart from ensuring the consistent use of H2-H3 subheadings:

Image source: wpbeginner.com

Additionally, structured markup helps all types of devices to better understand and interpret information, so using schema

never hurts. Here’s are a list of six free Schema generators to semantically structure your content.

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2. Alt text for visual content

The basic SEO principle is that you need keyword-optimized alt text for every image on your page to make it easier for Google to understand what it is about.

This rule applies to web accessibility as well. The only difference is that when it comes to web accessibility, the alt text should make sense. Imagine going through your page without actually seeing any images but instead reading the alt text. Are you able to understand the full context?

People with visual difficulties are using assistive technologies that rely on image alt text to describe the image contents to the user. This makes alt text so important for usability.

The featured snippet tool may be of help here showing you which images are missing an alt tag and which images show a meaningless alt tag, on-page by page basis:

Image: Screenshot created by the author

If you operate a huge website and going from page to page is not an option, accessiBe can automate the process. AccessiBe utilizes AI image recognition technology to provide accurate

alt text to images site-wide. This is a great way to make your site accessible (and SEO-friendlier) without too much money or time investment.

Check out multiple examples of how the tool works to better understand what it does:

Image source: Screenshot from the demo video

3. Video transcripts

Providing text context for your video page helps deaf users to still understand what it is about. In fact, when it comes to accessibility video transcript is the only required element.

A video transcript also helps the video page to rank for a wider variety of queries because text context is as important to Google.

Youtube video description is what Google uses to rank the page in organic results, as well as featured snippets and people also ask results:

Image: Screenshot created by the author

There are lots of automated solutions for creating video transcripts but I really prefer Speechpad.com.

4. Readability

Finally, another accessibility principle that can also boost your SEO, making your copy readable means writing in a clear

way, using simple words. Basically, this includes:

- Write in short sentences and paragraphs
- Use simple short words
- Provide definitions for any professional terms or slang

We don’t know exactly how Google is using readability level analysis in its algorithm but what we know for sure is that focusing on easier readability levels will help:

- Get featured more: Google prefers concise, easy-to-understand answers to feature
- Rank in voice search: Voice search devices are just screen readers. They need easy wording and structure to adequately transfer the message to a human being. Google knows that, so it is featuring easier answers and consequently those are the ones that are being read in response to a voice query.

Keep readability in mind when having your content created. Some smart content creation platforms already have readability integrated. For example, Narrato uses artificial intelligence to match content orders to content writers, allows them to select the writing style, specify the writer’s expertise, and upload content guidelines to keep your content quality and readability to the required level.

Image: Screenshot created by the author

[You can read more about Narrato’s process]

Again, Yoast has a reading level analysis integrated into its free plugin version, but there are also multiple tools to analyze and improve the readability of your content.

At the end of the day, web accessibility is basically about making your site easier to navigate and understand. It’s pretty much what SEO is about too.

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Related reading

The interview with well-known SEO expert, Dr.

Marie Haynes about E-A-T, what it is, and how you can improve it. More on Google

’s Quality Rater Guidelines.

From images to pop-ups, page load speed to site navi

gation, here’s a round up of top UX mistakes and how to fix them for improved SEO.

Link building and the art of creating a great link profile can immensely help yo

ur business meet its end goals. Different tactics for B2B and B2C listed.

Courtney Messerli, Director of Ecommerce and Search at goop, discusses her upco

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