Common Shopify SEO pitfalls and how to avoid them

Shopify store owners looking to maximize their organic visibility have a number of pitfalls to navigate, some of which are inherent to the platform itself and others that are common to e-commerce sites. Overcoming these SEO challenges in Shopify can help sellers increase rankings on Google and organic search visibility.

No control over your robots.txt file

The problem. Shopify does not allow store owners to edit their robots.txt file. This is an issue because the platform creates duplicate URLs for products associated with a collection/category page.

“The ideal solution would be to use robots.txt disallow directives to block these pages from being crawled in the first place,” Kevin Wallner, founder of First Chair Digital, told Search Engine Land, noting that, while Shopify does add canonical tags pointing back to the correct product URL, this does not prevent the duplicate URLs from being crawled and potentially indexed.

Solutions: Editing your Shopify theme, as discussed in our technical SEO for Shopify guide, is one way to resolve this issue. Alternatively, pages not included in your robots.txt file can be hidden from search engines by customizing the section of your theme’s layout file, as detailed on this Shopify help page.

You can also use an app such as Sitemap & NoIndex Manager to add noindex tags and remove URLs from your sitemap, Wallner

suggested. “Unfortunately this won’t work for duplicate product URLs, but it works for several other special Shopify page types with little to no SEO value, so it’s still a good move,” he said.

Related: *Shopify SEO Guide: How to increase organic traffic to your store*

Wallner also advised that store owners avoid linking to duplicate URLs in their header, footer, sidebars, breadcrumbs and within the text on their pages. If particular pages have earned important backlinks, store owners can also get in touch with webmasters to request that they link to the preferred URL.

Low rankings on brand search results

The problem. “If you’re losing on branded terms, that’s high-intent, high-revenue keywords that you’re not getting organic traffic for,” Chris Long, SEO senior manager at Go Fish Digital, said during our Shopify SEO session of Live with Search Engine Land, adding that it’s not uncommon for other retailers to outrank a brand’s own D2C site for branded queries.

[embedded content]
Watch the full discussion on common Shopify SEO pitfalls.

Solutions. “Shopify store owners could review their AdWords data to find branded terms that convert well,” Long said, adding that Google Search Console would be another good place to hunt for those terms. Store owners can then use this data to ensure that the pages mapped to those terms are optimized in important areas such as the title tag and on-page content.

Brands whose e-commerce sites are just one extension of their organization may have a bit more to consider when tackling

this issue. “We’re actually sharing branded terms with the mothership,” said Ron Diorio, general manager of The Economist Store, referring to *The Economist* as an online publication, “We want them to succeed because eventually the funnel will drive people to us, but we also have some branded words that we would like, and so it’s a negotiation to figure out how do you defer in different places to make sure that you’re maximizing both the customer experience, like finding what they want to find in the right order, and also the revenue opportunity.”

Improper keyword mapping

The problem. Your site isn’t ranking at all for high-intent queries, or the pages that show in the search results aren’t the ones that convert or best match the users’ search intent.

Solutions. “Ensure that for every keyword that you want to rank for, you know what the SERP is showing: Is it showing your product pages? Is it showing category pages?” Long said, “And then set up content that actually meets that intent.”

“If you can’t get your product/collection pages to rank for important keywords and you see blog articles ranking on page one for those same keywords, try targeting them in blog posts instead,” Wallner said, “Some keywords have mixed intent and may perform better if targeted on an info intent article.”

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