Design systems and SEO: does it help or hinder SERP achievements?

30-second summary:

- All the copy and strategic use of keywords in the world will not impress search engines if your web design is not fit for purpose
- The design of your website or web app is linked intrinsically to user experience, which in turn impacts your Google quality score and SEO performance
- Website design must drive users from A to B without any unnecessary steps in between – while retaining relevant copy that ties in with your SEO strategy
- Review your website design when considering your SEO strategy KPIs – a drop in traffic may be due to a substandard or outdated layout
- Do not neglect copy, as UX meta copy will improve your CTR on paid advertising. In turn, though, ensure that your website's design system is strong enough to obtain a suitable quality score and keep your Google Ads spending within budget

In many respects, a website is the home of your business on the web. To this end, it's perhaps fitting that creating a website is not unlike building a house. To achieve your intentions, you'll need to establish solid foundations before commencing construction. When it comes to building a website from scratch, that means engineering your design systems and templates to maximize SEO potential.

Many businesses emphasize content and keywords in their SEO strategy, with design becoming an afterthought. To return to our housebuilding analogy, that’s like laying a solid roof upon unstable walls. There is no denying that superior copy is critical to enjoying a successful approach to SEO. Even the most gifted writer cannot overcome substandard web design and user experience, though.

What is a design system?

No website, no matter how well designed, will remain the same forever. Therefore, websites and web apps need to be regularly audited, refreshed, and even wholly redesigned. Such steps are the only way to retain your target audience’s interest and ensure that you remain one step ahead of Google’s ever-evolving SEO algorithms.

At the very least, a website redesign is necessary every three years. If you diagnose a plummet in traffic, it may become essential sooner than this. Take a deep breath, review your data, and ascertain what is to blame for your drop-in visitors. If you suspect that your web design is the issue, a wait-and-see approach will not yield results. Your traffic will continue to drop, and the longer you wait to resolve the problem, the more mountains you will need to overcome.

Now, as anybody that has ever built a website from scratch will know, the task requires two things in abundance – time and money. Both are precious commodities for a business, especially an SME.

Alas, all websites periodically need a little tinkering under the bonnet. If you have established a design system, this will be significantly less disruptive. Effective website design systems ensure that your tech team or design agency has a firm and reliable blueprint to work from, and everything is in its place. Essentially, any work on your website is editorial

rather than creative. As a result, you'll enjoy positive implications on labor intensiveness and expense alike.

Above all, design systems create a positive user experience. If you expect to have any measure of success with your SEO strategy, superior UX is non-negotiable. 21st Century consumers have more choice than ever before, and patience is in short supply. If your website design system does not meet users' needs quickly and efficiently, visitors will stay away – and Google will sit and take notice.

Do design systems influence SEO performance?

SEO and design systems initially appear to be opposites. Web designers focus on making a site look fabulous and providing accessible, fluid navigation. Copywriters ensure that the content meets a users' needs, convincing them to follow the steps laid out in web design. In reality, these two disciplines are entwined when it comes to maximizing SEO.

First thing's first – if you redesign a website without factoring your SEO into the equation, disaster awaits. Forget to apply 301 redirects, and Google may wipe your entire SEO strategy overnight. If all else fails, at least take advantage of UX microcopy to create engaging, interactive 404 pages. Ensuring that a redesigned website can still find high-performing pages is the only way to maintain SEO and SERP progress, though.

In addition, consider the impact of design on your SEO. Consider how mobile-friendly your design system us, and what coding you use. Anything more complex than industry-standard CSS or HTML may capture the imagination of a first-time user but can be considered a novelty. It may be challenging for readers to understand how to navigate such a site, and you'll struggle to optimize your content. These issues will have a

knock-on effect on your page ranking.

What makes the ideal web design for SEO and SERPs?

As discussed, any business or individual must update their website from time to time. Even if your site is still pulling in traffic, there is no harm in making tweaks. It’s much easier to keep traffic flowing than to regain loyalty and interest from lapsed consumers.

When reviewing your website’s design templates, ensure that you consider the following to maximize the impact of your SEO strategy.

1. Clear brand messaging

First and foremost, ensure that your website design templates clearly and directly explain your brand values and mission. Imagine that every click on your site is from a first-time visitor. Do they know what you can offer and how you’ll do so? If you cannot convince a user that you’re worthy of their attention in less than 15 seconds, they’re likely to click away and be lost for good. Google will acknowledge this bounce rate and adjust your quality score accordingly

2. Investigating competitors

As we have mentioned previously, all websites need to undergo periodic renewal, including your competitors’ online presence. Be sure to constantly check in on what your rivals are doing, especially those that seem to enjoy excellent SEO performance. Take your findings and build upon them, whether that’s taking a skyscraper approach to SEO copy or adjusting the layout and design of your site to meet the industry gold standard.

Before you embark on any kind of website redesign, factor all

these matters into your thinking. If you create a website design system that meets all criteria, any future adjustments will be considerably more straightforward.

3. Understanding industry trends

As well as keeping an eye on your competitors, think about industry trends. While every consumer is unique, large groups can be relied upon to embrace a herd mentality. When building a design system, ensure that you can showcase any social awareness campaigns. Be ready to alter payment methods if a new financial platform takes the world by storm. Consider introducing one-click models to reach pages if these become popular. Few consumers will place their trust in a website that is deemed archaic and out of touch with contemporary tastes and expectations.

4. Be mobile-friendly

Website design packed with bells and whistles can look spectacular on a large HD screen. Consider how your site will perform when squeezed into a 5.5″ smartphone display, though. More and more people are eschewing desktop browsing for a portable alternative, which must factor into your design template. Failure to cater to the mobile market will place you firmly in Google’s bad books.

5. User experience

Arguably the most prominent concern of them all – you must ensure that your website design offers an enhanced UX for your visitors. Get people from A to B with a minimum of fuss. Do not be tempted to stuff your site with additional pages, creating more links in a chain to flex your copywriting muscles or cram in more advertising. Speed and simplicity will always win out.

6. Ease of adjustment

Is your website's design system engineered in-house or through an external agency? It's better to bring in outside help if you are not an expert in this field. If you do so, however, ensure that you understand how to make any changes yourself. Fast action may be required, and you will not want to be at the mercy of a third party's availability.

7. Get meta

Meta text and tags will not directly influence your page ranking with Google, as they do not influence a quality score. Appropriate meta tags on images can help images be sourced by search engines, though, as well as enhancing UX for visually impaired visitors.

8. Gather first-party data

Another consideration when building a website design system for your SEO is the capturing of first-party data. In 2021, the real currency is information. By understanding your target audience and obtaining data that they willingly provide themselves, you tailor your offering to those likeliest to use it. Do not neglect opportunities to source this data for yourself – it will save time and money and ensure accuracy when building a customer profile.

9. Think like Google

Whether we like it or not, this is Google's world, and we're just living in it. Set up alerts and do whatever you can to stay one step ahead of any algorithm updates, whether major or minor. History is littered with horror stories of websites that lost four figures of revenue overnight due to traffic slumps following an algorithm update. While it's impossible to predict what The Big G will get up to next, you can at least protect yourself by pre-empting changes.

10. Avoid intrusive advertising

For some websites, advertising is a necessary evil to maintain a revenue stream. Always consider the placement and style of advertising in your website design system. Static ads that fill a page or videos that slow down performance will infuriate users and lead to a high bounce rate. Google will also notice these issues and reduce your quality score accordingly. Slow loading speeds and an emphasis on advertising over quality content are both red flags.

11. Investigate ROI

Finally, think about how you will assess the success – or otherwise – of your SEO strategy. Is it time to update your choice of SEO tool? Think about the KPIs you measure regularly, and ensure your website design system supports such tools and plug-ins. There is little point in investing in SEO services if you are unaware of their performance.

Does copy influence SEO and SERPs more than design systems?

As discussed, a gold standard copy will not supersede poor website design. However, this does not mean that you ignore your copy needs in favor of focusing on aesthetics. Relevance and information are just as crucial to UX as rapid negotiation of a website. Never lose track of the importance of Google's algorithms, either. If you fall foul of E-A-T expectations, it can be challenging to regain your standing.

So, to answer the question above, copy is not more important than website design – but it's equally critical. A well-planned website will attract attention but great copy will retain it. Copy alone will not dictate a stellar Google quality score but can bolster conversions and improve CTR on paid advertising. Such steps are vital when taking advantage

of SERPs.

All of this raises an important question – what should come first when prepping an SEO strategy, copy or design? Returning to the housebuilding analogy that opened this guide, design is the sturdy, reliable bricks and mortar of a dwelling. Copy is the personal touch that makes a house a home and something uniquely your own.

If you were building a home from scratch, however, would you not feel strongly about ensuring it met your needs? You would ensure that the dimensions accommodate your existing furniture and that the blueprints provide enough space that you will not need to move any time soon.

If you have your copy planned out before creating a website design system, you will have a margin for error. You can tailor every step of the user journey to the text that you have prepared, and where necessary, streamline your content with the aid of data storytelling. Above all, you can adjust copy without too much fuss, adapting to the ever-shifting SEO landscape. A design system is considerably tougher to remold around your prose. Always keep this in mind when planning your website.

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https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2021/06/22/design-systems-and-seo-does-it-help-or-hinder-serp-achievements/