Four common SEO problems with Shopify and how to fix them

30-second summary:

- While Shopify is one of the most popular platforms for ecommerce businesses, the CMS has a number of issues that can be problematic for SEO
- Best SEO practices generally apply to all CMS platforms, but Shopify has several in-built features that cannot be customized, meaning some items require more unique workarounds
- Edward Coram-James discusses issues such as restricted URL structure and duplicate content, providing advice on how to combat Shopify's shortcomings in these areas

Shopify is the most widely-used ecommerce platform, making it easier than ever before for businesses to sell their stock online. Its easy-to-use CMS has made it particularly beneficial for smaller retailers during the pandemic, allowing them to claw back around 94% of what would have otherwise been lost sales.

As with any new website, a fresh Shopify store will require a great deal of effort on the part of its webmaster to establish the necessary visibility for users to find the site, let alone convert into customers. And as with any CMS, there are a few SEO hurdles that store owners will need to clear to ensure that their website finds its audience efficiently. Some of these hurdles are more deep-rooted than others, so we've broken down four of the most common SEO problems on Shopify and how you can fix them for your webstore.

1. Restricted URL structure

In much the same way that WordPress splits content between posts and pages, Shopify's CMS allows you to divide your product listings into two main categories – products and collections – alongside more general posts, pages, and blogs. Creating a new product on Shopify allows you to list the individual items you have for sale, while collections give you the opportunities to bring your disparate products together and sort them into easily-searched categories.

The problem most people have with this imposed system of organizing content is that Shopify also enforces a predetermined hierarchical structure with limited customization options. The subfolders /product and /collection must be included in the URL of every new product or collection you upload.

Despite it being a huge bone of contention with its users, Shopify has yet to address this and there is no solution currently. As a result, you will need to be extremely careful with the URLs slug (the only part that can be customized). Ensure you are using the right keywords in the slug and categorize your posts sensibly to give your products the best chance of being found.

2. Automatically generated duplicate content

Another frustrating issue users have with classifying their content as a product or collection occurs when they add a specific product into a collection. This is because, although there will already be a URL in place for the product page, linking a product to a collection automatically creates an additional URL for it within that collection. Shopify automatically treats the collection URL as the canonical one

for internal links, rather than the product one, which can make things extremely difficult when it comes to ensuring that the right pages are indexed.

In this instance, however, Shopify has allowed for fixes, though it does involve editing code in the back end of your store's theme. Following these instructions will instruct your Shopify site's collections pages to internally link only to the canonical /product/ URLs.

3. No trailing slash redirect

Another of Shopify's duplicate content issues relates to the trailing slash, which is basically a '/' at the end of the URL used to mark a directory. Google treats URLs with and without a trailing slash as unique pages. By default, Shopify automatically ends URLs without a trailing slash, but variations of the same URL with a trailing slash are accessible to both users and search engines. This can normally be avoided by enforcing a site-wide trailing slash redirect via the website's htaccess file, but Shopify does not allow access to the htaccess file.

Shopify instead recommends that webmasters use canonical tags to inform Google which version of each page is preferred for indexing. As the only fix available so far, it will have to do, but it's far from ideal and often leads to data attribution issues in Google Analytics and other tracking software.

4. No control over the website's robots.txt file

Beyond the CMS forcing users to create duplicate versions of pages against their will, Shopify also prevents webmasters from being able to make manual edits to their store's robots.txt file. Apparently, Shopify sees this as a perk,

taking care of the pesky technical SEO issues on your behalf. But, when products go out of stock or collections get pulled, you can neither noindex nor nofollow the redundant pages left behind.

In this instance, you are able to edit the theme of your store, incorporating meta robots tags into the <head> section of each relevant page. Shopify has created a step-by-step guide on how to hide redundant pages from search here.

Are there any unique challenges your Shopify webstore is facing? Share them in the comments.

Edward Coram James is an SEO professional and the Chief Executive of Go Up Ltd, an international agency dedicated to helping its clients navigate the complexities of global SEO and the technical aspects of delivering location-specific pages to targeted audiences.

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https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2021/02/19/four-common-seo-problems-with-shopify-and-how-to-fix-them/