Rewriting the Beginner's Guide to SEO

Many of you reading likely cut your teeth on Moz's Beginner's Guide to SEO. Since it was launched, it's easily been our top-performing piece of content:



Most months see 100k+ views (the reverse plateau in 2013 is when we changed domains).

While Moz's Beginner's Guide to SEO still gets well over 100k views a month, the current guide itself is fairly outdated. This big update has been on my personal to-do list since I started at Moz, and we need to get it right because – let's get real – you all deserve a bad-ass SEO 101 resource!

However, updating the guide is no easy feat. Thankfully, I have the help of my fellow Mozzers. Our content team has been a collective voice of reason, wisdom, and organization throughout this process and has kept this train on its tracks.

Despite the effort we've put into this already, it felt like something was missing: your input! We're writing this guide to be a go-to resource for all of you (and everyone who follows in your footsteps), and want to make sure that we're including everything that today's SEOs need to know. You all have a better sense of that than anyone else.

So, in order to deliver the best possible update, I'm seeking your help.

This is similar to the way Rand did it back in 2007. And upon re-reading your *many* "more examples" requests, we've continued to integrate more examples throughout.

The plan:

- Over the next 6–8 weeks, I'll be updating sections of the Beginner's Guide and posting them, one by one, on the blog.
- I'll solicit feedback from you incredible people and implement top suggestions.
- The guide will be reformatted/redesigned, and I'll 301 all of the blog entries that will be created over the next few weeks to the final version.
- It's going to remain 100% free to everyone – no registration required, no premium membership necessary.

To kick things off, here's the revised outline for the Beginner's Guide to SEO:

Click each chapter's description to expand the section for more detail.

Chapter 1: SEO 101

What is it, and why is it important? ↓

- What is SEO?
- Why invest in SEO?
- Do I really need SEO?
- Should I hire an SEO professional, consultant, or agency?

Search engine basics:

- Google Webmaster Guidelines basic principles
- Bing Webmaster Guidelines basic principles
- Guidelines for representing your business on Google

Fulfilling user intent

Know your SEO goals

Chapter 2: Crawlers & Indexing

First, you need to show up. ↓

How do search engines work?

- Crawling & indexing
- Determining relevance
- Links
- Personalization

How search engines make an index

- Googlebot
- Indexable content
- Crawlable link structure
- Links
- Alt text
- Types of media that Google crawls
- Local business listings

Common crawling and indexing problems

- Online forms
- Blocking crawlers
- Search forms
- Duplicate content
- Non-text content

Tools to ensure proper crawl & indexing

- Google Search Console

- Moz Pro Site Crawl
- Screaming Frog
- Deep Crawl

How search engines order results

- 200+ ranking factors
- RankBrain
- Inbound links
- On-page content: Fulfilling a searcher’s query
- PageRank
- Domain Authority
- Structured markup: Schema
- Engagement
- Domain, subdomain, & page-level signals
- Content relevance
- Searcher proximity
- Reviews
- Business citation spread and consistency

SERP features

- Rich snippets
- Paid results
- Universal results
    - Featured snippets
    - People Also Ask boxes
- Knowledge Graph
- Local Pack
- Carousels

Chapter 3: Keyword Research

Next, know what to say and how to say it. ↓

How to judge the value of a keyword

The search demand curve

- Fat head
- Chunky middle
- Long tail

Four types of searches:

- Transactional queries
- Informational queries
- Navigational queries
- Commercial investigation

Fulfilling user intent

Keyword research tools:

- Google Keyword Planner
- Moz Keyword Explorer
- Google Trends
- AnswerThePublic
- SpyFu
- SEMRush

Keyword difficulty

Keyword abuse

Content strategy {link to the Beginner’s Guide to Content Marketing}

Chapter 4: On-Page SEO

Next, structure your message to resonate and get it published. ↓

Keyword usage and targeting

Keyword stuffing

Page titles:

- Unique to each page
- Accurate
- Be mindful of length
- Naturally include keywords
- Include branding

Meta data/Head section:

- Meta title
- Meta description
- Meta keywords tag
    - No longer a ranking signal
- Meta robots

Meta descriptions:

- Unique to each page
- Accurate
- Compelling
- Naturally include keywords

Heading tags:

- Subtitles
- Summary
- Accurate
- Use in order

Call-to-action (CTA)

- Clear CTAs on all primary pages
- Help guide visitors through your conversion funnels

Image optimization

- Compress file size
- File names
- Alt attribute
- Image titles
- Captioning
- Avoid text in an image

Video optimization

- Transcription
- Thumbnail
- Length
- “~3mo to YouTube” method

Anchor text

- Descriptive
- Succinct
- Helps readers

URL best practices

- Shorter is better
- Unique and accurate
- Naturally include keywords
- Go static
- Use hyphens
- Avoid unsafe characters

Structured data

- Microdata
- RFDa

- JSON-LD
- Schema
- Social markup
    - Twitter Cards markup
    - Facebook Open Graph tags
    - Pinterest Rich Pins

Structured data types

- Breadcrumbs
- Reviews
- Events
- Business information
- People
- Mobile apps
- Recipes
- Media content
- Contact data
- Email markup

Mobile usability

- Beyond responsive design
- Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP)
- Progressive Web Apps (PWAs)
- Google mobile-friendly test
- Bing mobile-friendly test

Local SEO

- Business citations
- Entity authority
- Local relevance

Complete NAP on primary pages

Low-value pages

Chapter 5: Technical SEO

Next, translate your site into Google’s language. ↓

Internal linking

- Link positioning
- Anchor links

Common search engine protocols

- Sitemaps
    - Mobile
    - News
    - Image
    - Video
- XML
- RSS
- TXT

Robots

- Robots.txt
    - Disallow
    - Sitemap
    - Crawl Delay
- X-robots
- Meta robots
    - Index/noindex
    - Follow/nofollow
- Noimageindex
- None
- Noarchive

- Nocache
- No archive
- No snippet
- Noodp/noydir
- Log file analysis
- Site speed
- HTTP/2
- Crawl errors

Duplicate content

- Canonicalization
- Pagination

What is the DOM?

- Critical rendering path
- Help robots find the most important code first

Hreflang/Targeting multiple languages

Chrome DevTools

Technical site audit checklist

Chapter 6: Establishing Authority

Finally, turn up the volume. ↓

Link signals

- Global popularity
- Local/topic-specific popularity
- Freshness
- Social sharing
- Anchor text

- Trustworthiness
    - Trust Rank
- Number of links on a page
- Domain Authority
- Page Authority
- MozRank

Competitive backlinks

- Backlink analysis

The power of social sharing

- Tapping into influencers
- Expanding your reach

Types of link building

- Natural link building
- Manual link building
- Self-created

Six popular link building strategies

1. Create content that inspires sharing and natural links
2. Ego-bait influencers
3. Broken link building
4. Refurbish valuable content on external platforms
5. Get your customers/partners to link to you
6. Local community involvement

Manipulative link building

- Reciprocal link exchanges
- Link schemes
- Paid links
- Low-quality directory links
- Tiered link building
- Negative SEO
- Disavow

Reviews

- Establishing trust
- Asking for reviews
- Managing reviews
- Avoiding spam practices

Chapter 7: Measuring and Tracking SEO

Pivot based on what's working. ↓

KPIs

- Conversions
- Event goals
- Signups
- Engagement
- GMB Insights:
    - Click-to-call
    - Click-for-directions
- Beacons

Which pages have the highest exit percentage? Why?

Which referrals are sending you the most qualified traffic?

Pivot!

Search engine tools:

- Google Search Console
- Bing Webmaster Tools
- GMB Insights

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Appendix B: List of Additional Resources

Appendix C: Contributors & Credits

What did you struggle with most when you were first learning about SEO? What would you have benefited from understanding from the get-go?

Are we missing anything? Any section you wish *wouldn't* be included in the updated Beginner's Guide? Leave your suggestions in the comments!

Thanks in advance for contributing.