SEO Glossary: 200+ Terms & Definitions You Need to Know by @MrDannyGoodwin

Editor's note: This is a chapter from Search Engine Journal's new e-book, ***SEO 101: Learn the Basics of Search Engine Optimization****. Want to read the full guide? Download your copy of SEO 101 now!*

Search engine optimization, like any specialized industry, has its own unique set of terminology, definitions, and abbreviations.

This SEO glossary compiles more than 200 of the most common terms you are likely to hear and will definitely need to know during your SEO career.

A

Above the Fold

Content that appears on a website before the user scrolls. Google created the Page Layout Algorithm in 2012 to lower the rankings of websites featuring too many ads in this space.

AJAX

Asynchronous JavaScript and XML is a type of programming that allows a webpage to send and receive information from a server to change that page dynamically without reloading.

Algorithm

A complex computer program used by search engines to retrieve data and deliver results for a query. Search engines use a combination of algorithms to deliver ranked webpages via a results page based on a number of ranking factors and signals.

Algorithm Change

Some algorithmic changes go completely unnoticed. However, the impact of a major algorithmic change can usually be seen quite quickly, though the change sometimes takes a few weeks to completely roll out. Algorithmic changes come in three forms:

- **Algorithm Update**: The search engine changes certain signals of an existing algorithm.
- **Algorithm Refresh:** The search engine re-runs an existing algorithm using the exact same signals as last time.
- **New Algorithm:** The search engine adds a new algorithm to improve search quality. For example: Google Panda, Google Penguin.

Alt Attribute

HTML code that provides information used by search engines and screen readers (for blind and visually-impaired people) to understand the contents of an image.

Also known as: Alt Text.

Analytics

The science of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to take future action based on what has (or hasn’t) worked historically.

Also see: Google Analytics

Anchor Text

The clickable word or words of a link. This text is intended to provide contextual information to people and search engines about what the webpage or website being linked to is about. For instance, if you were creating a link to send your visitors to Search Engine Journal, “Search Engine Journal” is the anchor text.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The science of making computers perform tasks that require human intelligence. Rather than following a set of programmed rules (like an algorithm), an AI computer system is basically a digital brain that learns. AI can also make and carry out decisions without human intervention.

Authority

The combination of signals search engines use to assess websites and webpages for the purposes of ranking.

B

B2B

Short for business-to-business. In B2B SEO, the buying cycle is longer, products and services are more expensive, and the audience is professional decision-makers.

B2C

Short for business-to-consumer. In B2C SEO, the buying cycle is typically shorter (though it still varies by industry), products and services are (mostly) cheaper, and consumers are

the audience.

Backlink

See: Inbound Link

Baidu

The most popular search engine in China, Baidu was founded in January 2000 by Robin Li and Eric Xu.

Bing

The name of Microsoft’s search engine. Bing launched in June 2009, replacing Microsoft Live Search (previously MSN Search and Windows Live Search). Since 2010, Bing has powered Yahoo’s organic search results as part of a search deal Microsoft and Yahoo struck in July 2009.

Black Box

A complex computer program that is poorly understood. Inputs and outputs can be observed, but there is no access to the process itself due to its confidential nature. For example, Google’s algorithm is a black box.

Black Hat

Risky tactics that go against Google’s Webmaster Guidelines.

Also see: Webspam

Blog

A publication of content, sorted in chronological order, with the most recent content appearing at the top. The content reflects personal or corporate interests, and can be written by an individual or a group of contributors. Blogs were originally called web logs or weblogs. However, as “web log”

can also mean a server's log files, the term was confusing. To avoid this confusion, the abbreviation "blog" was coined, and became the common term.

Bounce Rate

The percentage of website visitors who leave without visiting another page on that website. Bounce rates range widely depending on industry and niche. Although bounce rate can indicate potential content or website issues, it is not a direct ranking factor, according to Google.

Bot

See: Crawler, Googlebot

Branded Keyword

When a user's query includes an exact match, or variation, of a specific company or brand name. For instance, "Search Engine Journal", "SEJ", "SearchEnginejournal.com", and "Search Engine Journal SEO 101 Guide" are a few examples of branded keywords.

Breadcrumb

A navigational element that helps users easily figure out where they are within a website.

See: Website Navigation

Broken Link

A link that leads to a 404 not found. Typically, a link becomes broken when:

- A website goes offline.
- A webpage is removed without implementing a redirect.
- The destination URL is changed without implementing a redirect.

C

Cache

A technology that temporarily stores web content, such as images, to reduce future page loading times.

Cached Page

A snapshot of a webpage as it appeared when a search engine last crawled it.

Canonical URL

An HTML code element that specifies a preferred website URL, when multiple URLs have the same or similar content, to reduce duplicate content.

ccTLD

A country-code top-level domain. For instance, a company based in the United Kingdom would have a domain like this: www.example.co.uk, where uk is the ccTLD.

Click Bait

Content that is designed to entice people to click, typically by overpromising or being intentionally misleading in headlines, so publishers can earn advertising revenue.

Click-Through Rate (CTR)

The rate (expressed in a percentage) at which users click on an organic search result. This is calculated by dividing the total number of organic clicks by the total number of

impressions then multiplying by 100.

Cloaking

Showing different content or URLs to people and search engines. A violation of Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

CMS

Stands for Content Management System. A web-based application that lets people create, upload, and manage digital assets.

Co-Citation

How frequently two websites (or webpages) are mentioned together by a third-party website, even if those first two items don't link to (or reference) each other. This is a way search engines can establish subject similarity.

For instance, imagine Search Engine Journal and Search Engine Roundtable never linked to or mentioned each other. However, other websites and blogs would likely mention both SEJ and SER on lists of popular search engine news publications.

To see this in action, see: related:https://www.searchenginejournal.com/ search engine journal

Comment Spam

Poorly written comments, often off-topic and self-promotional, posted by spambots in the hopes of getting a free (but ultimately worthless) link.

Competition

There are two types of competition:

- **Direct Competitors:** Companies that sell similar products

and/or services, serve the same needs, and target a similar audience both online and offline.
- **SEO Competitors:** Companies that vie for the same keywords and organic search visibility, but with unalike products or services that address different needs and/or target audiences.

Recommended reading:

Content

- Words, images, videos, or sounds (or any combination thereof) that convey information that is meant to be distributed to and consumed by an audience.
- One of the two most important Google ranking factors (along with links). Search engines want to reward content that is useful, informative, valuable, credible, unique, and engaging with better traffic and visibility.

“Content is King”

A phrase often used by speakers at conferences and writers on popular SEO (and digital marketing) publications. In this context, “content is king” usually means that content is essential for you to have any SEO, digital marketing, or business success.

This phrase actually dates back to a Bill Gates essay, “Content is King”, published January 3, 1996.

Recommended reading:

Conversion

When a user completes a desired action on a website. Examples of conversions include:

- Completing a purchase.
- Adding items to a shopping cart.

- Completing a form (e.g., requesting a demo, registering for a webinar/event).
- Downloading premium content (e.g., ebook, whitepaper).
- Subscribing to an email newsletter.
- Video views.

Conversion Rate

The rate (expressed in a percentage) at which website users complete a desired action. This is calculated by dividing the total number of conversions by traffic, then multiplying by 100.

Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO)

The process of improving the number or quality of conversions that occur on a website. Some popular CRO tactics include testing changes to website design, copy, images, price, call-to-action, and messaging.

Correlation

The extent to which a relationship exists between two or more elements. Often used in SEO research to infer relationships of variables on search rankings due to the black box nature of algorithms. Always remember, however, that correlation ≠ causation.

Crawl Budget

The total number of URLs search engines can and want to crawl on a website during a specific time period.

Recommended reading:

Crawl Error

- URLs that a search engine bot is unable to crawl.
- URLs that return a status code error.

Crawler

A program search engines use to crawl the web. Bots visit webpages to collect information and add or update a search engine’s index.

Also known as: Bot, Spider, Web Crawler

Crawling

The process of gathering information, using a crawler, from the billions of public webpages to update, add, and organize webpages in a search engine’s index.

CSS

Cascading Style Sheets describe how HTML elements (e.g., color, fonts) should appear on webpages and adapt when viewed on different devices.

Customer Journey

All of the potential moments (or touchpoints) at which a prospect is exposed to or engages with a brand. All of these interactions are designed to eventually persuade, influence, and convert that prospect to become a customer, client, or subscriber.

Though customer journeys can vary greatly by business type and industry, typically it is made up of four main “stages”:

Awareness > Consideration > Decision > Retention

Google’s Avinash Kaushik offers an alternative framework:

See > Think > Do > Care

Also known as: Buying Process, Consumer Decision Journey, the Customer Journey to Online Purchase, Marketing Funnel, Path to Purchase, Purchase Funnel

D

Data

All the hard numbers that represent real customers – the who, what, where, when, why, and how – all of which is needed to make informed decisions about SEO strategies and tactics.

Dead-End Page

A webpage that links to no other webpages. So called because once a user or bot arrives on this page, there is no place to move forward.

Deep Link

- A link pointing to any webpage other than the homepage.
- A link pointing to content within a mobile app.

De-index

When Google removes a website or webpage, either temporarily or permanently, from search results, specifically its search index. Google provides a Remove URLs tool in the Search Console for voluntary cases; however, a website may also be de-indexed as punishment for violating Google's Webmaster Guidelines, in the form of a manual action.

Also known as: Delisting

Directory

A list of websites, usually separated by related categories and maintained by human editors. Depending on the directory, inclusion could be free or paid. In the past, links from

directories were highly sought after (e.g., DMOZ), leading to widespread abuse and overall devaluing of this sort of link building.

Also known as: Web Directory, Link Directory

Disavow

If your link profile includes a high number of spammy, artificial, or low-quality inbound links that may be harming your rankings – and don't have the ability to get them removed for a legitimate reason (e.g., the link exists on a site you have no control over) – you can use Google's Disavow Tool tool to tell Google to ignore those links.

DMOZ

The Open Directory Project. This human-edited directory of websites launched June 5, 1998 and closed March 17, 2017.

Do-follow

A link that doesn't use the "nofollow" attribute. In other words, a link.

Domain

A website address – typically ending in an extension like .com, .org, or .net. For example: www.searchenginejournal.com is the domain of this website.

Domain Authority

- The overall "strength" of a website, built up over time, which can help a new page rank well quickly, even before that content has earned links or engagement.
- A score, between 0-100, SEO software company Moz uses to predict the ability of a website to rank in search results.

Recommended reading:

Doorway Page

Webpages that are created to rank in search engines for specific keywords only for the purpose of redirecting users who click on that page to a different website.

DuckDuckGo

A search engine that was founded September 28, 2008. It is often praised for its heavy focus on user privacy and a lack of filter bubbles (search personalization). DuckDuckGo relies on more than 400 sources to serve its search results, including vertical search engines, its own crawler, DuckDuckBot, Bing, and Yandex. In 2016, 4 billion searches were conducted on DuckDuckGo.

Duplicate Content

When a significant amount of content contained on one webpage matches, or is incredibly similar to, content that exists elsewhere on the same website or a completely different website.

Dwell Time

The amount of time that elapses between when a user clicks on a search result and then returns to the SERP from a website. Short dwell time (e.g., less than 5 seconds) can be an indicator of low-quality content to search engines.

E

E-commerce

The buying and selling of products, all conducted online.

Recommended reading:

Editorial Link

A link that is given by one website to another without the recipient asking or paying for it.

Also known as: Natural Link.

Engagement Metrics

Methods to measure how users are interact with webpages and content. Examples of engagement metrics include:

- Click-through rate
- Conversion rate
- Bounce rate
- Time on page/site
- New vs. returning visitors
- Frequency and recency
- Dwell time

Entities

People, places, organizations, websites, events, groups, facts, and other things.

Also see: Knowledge Graph

External Link

See: Outbound Link

F

Featured Snippet

For certain queries, usually questions (i.e., who/what/where/when/why/how), Google sometimes shows a special block above the organic search results. This box contains an summary (in the form of paragraph, list, table, or video), as well as the publication date, page title, link to the webpage from which the answer originated, and URL.

Also known as: Position Zero.

Recommended reading:

Findability

How easily the content on a website can be discovered, both internally (by users) and externally (by search engines).

Footer Link

Links that appear in the bottom section (or “footer”) of a website.

See: Website Navigation

G

Google

The search engine founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in September 1998. Google marked a radical departure from human-edited web directories, relying on web crawling technology and a complex algorithm to analyze hyperlinking patterns to rank websites. Google is the most-used search engine in nearly

every country in the world.

Google Analytics

A free web analytics program that can be used to track audience behavior, traffic acquisition sources, content performance, and much more.

Visit: Google Analytics

Google Bomb

A practice intended to make a website rank number one for a surprising or controversial search phrase. This was accomplished by having a large number of websites link to a certain webpage with specific anchor text to help it rank for that term.

For example, in 2003 President George W. Bush’s White House bio ranked number one on a search for “miserable failure.”

Googlebot

The web crawling system Google uses to find and add new websites and webpages to its index.

Google Dance

An outdated term for the volatile period of time during which Google updated its search index, roughly every month.

Google Hummingbird

A new Google search algorithm that was officially announced in September 2013 after it had been in use for a month. The purpose of Hummingbird was to better understand the full context of queries (i.e., semantic search), rather than certain keywords, in order to provide better results.

Google Panda Algorithm

A major Google algorithm update that initially rolled out in February 2011, it was followed by numerous subsequent updates. The goal of Google Panda was to reduce the visibility of low-value content, often produced by “content farms.” In 2016, Panda became part of Google’s core ranking algorithm.

Google Penguin Algorithm

A major Google algorithm that launched in April 2012, it was followed by a series of updates and refreshes. The goal of Penguin was to reduce the visibility of overly-optimized sites, or sites that excessively abused certain spammy tactics (e.g., building low-quality links, keyword stuffing). In 2016, Penguin started running in real-time as a part of Google’s core algorithm.

Google Pigeon Update

The name (given by the SEO industry, not Google) of a significant Google local search update launched July 24, 2014. The goal of Pigeon was to improve the accuracy and relevance of local searches by leveraging more traditional Google ranking signals and improving distance and locating ranking parameters.

Google RankBrain

A major Google algorithm change officially introduced in October 2015, although it had been in testing for months before this. With RankBrain, Google added machine learning to its algorithm and has been called the third most important ranking signal. In June 2016, it was revealed that RankBrain has been involved in every query and has an impact on rankings.

Google Sandbox

A theorized and debated (but never confirmed by Google) “waiting period” that prevents new websites from seeing the full benefit of their optimization efforts. Typically, this effect is witnessed most often with new sites targeting competitive keywords and can only be overcome when the site gains enough authority.

Google Search Console

Google’s Search Console offers several helpful features, including the ability to monitor sites for indexing errors and site speed. These pages are also used to communicate manual action notifications.

Recommended reading:

Google Trends

A website where you can explore data visualizations on the latest search trends, stories, and topics.

Visit: Google Trends

Google Webmaster Guidelines

Google’s guidance on good website optimization practices, as well as “illicit” practices that can result in manual action. Simply:

- Make unique, valuable, and engaging websites and webpages for users, not search engines.
- Avoid tricks and techniques that deceive users and are intended only to improve search rankings.

Recommended reading:

Gray Hat

A supposed “gray” area between techniques that adhere to Google’s Webmaster Guidelines, but then add an element that bends the rules a little.

Guest Blogging

A popular link building tactic that involves developing content for other websites in exchange for a backlink pointing at your own pages.

Also known as: Guest Posting.

H

Heading

Heading tags (H1-H6) separate content into sections, based on importance, with H1 being the most important and H6 being the least important. Headline tags should be used naturally and should incorporate your target keywords where relevant, as doing so may provide a small SEO benefit.

Headline

An H1 tag.

Head Term

A popular keyword with high search volume that is usually difficult to rank for.

Also known as: Head Keyword, Short-Tail

Hidden Text

Any text that can’t be seen by a user that is intended to manipulate search rankings by loading webpages with content-rich keywords and copy. This technique is against Google’s Webmaster Guidelines and can result in a manual action. For example, adding text that is:

- Too small to read.
- The same color as the background.
- Using CSS to push the text off-screen.

Hilltop Algorithm

Influenced by the HITS Algorithm, and added to Google’s algorithm in 2003, Hilltop assigned “expert” status to certain websites or webpages published about a specific topic that also link to unaffiliated pages about that topic.

Recommended reading:

- Hilltop: A Search Engine based on Expert Documents (Krishna Bharat & George Mihaila)

HITS Algorithm

Hyperlink-Induced Topic Search is a link analysis algorithm that assesses a value not just based on content and inbound links (authorities), but also its outbound links (hubs).

Recommended reading:

Homepage

The default, or introductory webpage, of a website.

.htaccess File

A server configuration file that can be used to rewrite and

redirect URLs.

HTML

Stands for Hypertext Markup Language. HTML tags are specific code elements that can be used to improve the effectiveness of SEO for webpages and websites.

HTTP

The Hypertext Transfer Protocol is how data is transferred from a computer server to a web browser.

HTTPS

Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure uses a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) to encrypt data transferred between a website and web browser. HTTPS is a minor Google ranking factor.

Hub Page

An authoritative central resource (e.g., page or article), dedicated to a specific topic (keyword), that is continually updated and linked to, and also links out to topically-relevant webpages.

I

Inbound Link

A link to a webpage that originates from an external website. For example, if Search Engine Journal were to link to Google, that would count as an inbound link on Google’s side; if Google were to link to Search Engine Journal, that would be an inbound link on SEJ’s side.

Index

The database search engines use to store and retrieve information gathered during the crawling process.

Indexability

How easily a search engine bot can understand and add a webpage to its index.

Indexed Page

A webpage that has been discovered by a crawler, has been added to a search engine index, and is eligible to appear in search results for relevant queries.

Information Architecture

How a website is organized and where various content and navigational elements are located on webpages.

Information Retrieval

The process of searching for information (e.g., text, images, video) from a large database and then presenting the most relevant information to an end user.

Internal Link

See: Website Navigation

IP Address

An Internet Protocol Address. IP addresses can be:

- **Shared:** Numerous websites share an address within one server or a group of servers (a.k.a., virtual hosting).
- **Dedicated:** A website has its own address.

Neither will help you rank better; however, a dedicated IP

address can increase site speed.

J

JavaScript (JS)

A programming language that makes it possible to dynamically insert content, links, meta data, or other elements, on websites. JavaScript can potentially make it difficult for search engine bots to crawl and index webpages and increase the time it takes for webpage to load for users.

K

Keyword

The word, words, or phrase that an SEO professional or marketer targets for the purpose of matching and ranking for what users are searching for. The words used on webpages can help search engines determine which pages are the most relevant to show in organic results when a searcher enters a query. Keywords usually represent topics, ideas, or questions.

Also known as: Keyphrase.

Keyword Cannibalization

A type of self-competition that occurs when multiple pages from one website rank for the same query on a SERP. This can result in a lower CTR, diminished authority, and lower conversion rates than from having one consolidated webpage that ranks well.

Recommended reading:

Keyword Density

How often a word or phrase appears within the content of a webpage. At best, this unproven concept is outdated, if ever really mattered to search engines. There is no ideal percentage that will help a webpage rank better.

Keyword Research

The process of discovering any relevant topics, subjects, and terms searchers enter into search engines, as well as the volume and competition level of those terms. This practice is made possible by a variety of free and paid tools.

Keyword Stuffing

Adding irrelevant keywords, or repeating keywords beyond what is natural, to a webpage in the hopes of increasing search rankings. This spam tactic is against Google's Webmaster Guidelines and can result in a manual action.

Knowledge Graph

An entity database Google uses to surface facts and information on people, places, and things (a.k.a., entities) – and their connections – in a Knowledge Panel or carousel at the top of search results on relevant queries.

Knowledge Panel

A box that appears at the top of, or on the right rail (desktop only), of Page 1 of Google's search results for relevant queries. This panel contains facts and information on people, places, and things, as well as links to related websites or Google searches.

KPI

Stands for key performance indicator. A measurement method businesses use to gauge whether marketing and business objectives, targets, and goals are being reached.

L

Landing Page

- Any webpage that a visitor can navigate to.
- A standalone webpage that is designed to capture leads or generate conversions.

Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI)

An information retrieval method designed to help search engines identify the correct context of a word. LSI doesn’t play a useful role in SEO today.

See: Google Latent Semantic Indexing

Lead

A person who may or may not be interested in your product(s) and/or service(s). A lead willingly shares their email address (and usually other personal or contact information) in exchange for something they deem of value from the website.

Link

A connection between two websites built using HTML code. A link enables users to navigate to websites, social networks, and apps. Links play a critical role in how search engines evaluate and rank websites.

Also known as: Backlink.

Link Bait

Intentionally provocative content that is meant to grab people’s attention and attract links from other websites.

Link Building

A process designed to get other trusted and relevant websites to link to your website to help improve your organic search rank and visibility. Link building can be done by:

- Conducting outreach to media outlets, bloggers, influencers, and webmasters.
- Attracting editorial links naturally, by publishing various types of high-quality or sensational content.
- Paying for them. For example, you can obtain links via sponsored content, paid reviews, or paying for a specific type of link to appear on another website.
- Forging partnerships.
- Manually. For instance, you link together various properties you manage or own, or add your site to online directories or review sites.

Link Equity

The value of inbound links, in terms of relevance, authority, and trust.

Link Farm

When a group of websites link to each other, usually using automated programs, in the hopes of artificially increasing search rankings. A spam tactic.

Also known as: Link Network, Blog Network, Private Blog Network

Link Juice

A term you should never use in public or online.

Did you mean…: Authority or PageRank

Link Profile

Every type of link that points to a particular website. The quality of a website's link profile can vary widely, depending on how they were acquired and the anchor text used.

Link Velocity

How quickly (or slowly) a website accumulates links. A sudden increase in link velocity could potentially be a sign of spamming, or could be due to viral marketing or doing something newsworthy (either intentionally or unintentionally).

Log File

A file that records users' information, such as IP addresses, type of browser, Internet Service Provider (ISP), date/time stamp, referring/exit pages, and number of clicks.

Log File Analysis

The process of exploring the data contained in a log file to identify trends, administer the site, track user's movement around the site, gather demographic information, and understand how search bots are crawling the website.

Long-Tail Keyword

- Highly specific multiple-word terms that often demonstrate higher purchase intent.
- Less popular keywords that have low search volume that are usually easier to rank for.

M

Machine Learning

A subset of Artificial Intelligence in which a system uses data to learn and adjust a complex process without human intervention.

Manual Action

Google’s term for a penalty. Google will take manual action on a website after a human reviewer (i.e., a Google employee) manually reviews a website to confirm whether it has failed to comply with Google’s Webmaster guidelines. Penalized websites can either be demoted or removed entirely from search results. Manual actions can be assessed to the entire website or just certain webpages.

Meta Description

A tag that can be added to the “head” section of an HTML document. It acts as a description of a webpage’s content. This content isn’t used in ranking algorithms, but is often displayed as the “snippet” that appears in the search results. Accurate and engaging descriptions can increase organic click-through rate.

Meta Keywords

A tag that can be added to the “head” section of an HTML document. Adding a bunch of keywords here won’t help you rank – search engine algorithms have ignored this tag for ranking purposes for years due to abuse (in the form of keyword stuffing).

Meta Tags

Information that appears in the HTML source code of a webpage to describe its contents to search engines. The title tag and meta description are the most commonly used types of meta tags in SEO.

Metric

A way to measure activity and performance in order to assess the success (or lack thereof) of an SEO initiative.

N

Natural Link

See: Editorial Link

Negative SEO

A rare but malicious practice where webspam techniques are used to harm the search rankings of another website, usually a competitor.

Recommended reading:

Niche

A specific market or area of interest consisting of a small group of highly-passionate people.

Noarchive Tag

A meta tag that tells search engines not to store a cached copy of your page.

Nofollow Attribute

A meta tag that tells search engines not to follow one specific outbound link. This is done in cases when a website doesn’t want to pass authority to another webpage or because it’s a paid link. The nofollow attribute looks like this:

Anchor text goes here

Noindex Tag

A meta tag that tells search engines not to index a specific webpage in its index.

Nosnippet Tag

A meta tag that tells search engines not to show a description with your listing.

“(not provided)”

After search engines moved to secure search in 2011, keyword data was removed from Google Analytics, replaced with “(not provided)” – thus making it impossible to know which queries were responsible for visitors finding a website.

Recommended reading:

O

Off-Page SEO

Demand generation and brand awareness activities that take place outside of a website. In addition to link building, promotion tactics can include social media marketing, content

marketing, email marketing, influencer marketing, and even offline marketing channels (e.g., TV, radio, billboards).

On-Page SEO

These activities all take place within a website. In addition to publishing relevant, high-quality content, on-page SEO includes optimizing HTML code (e.g., title tags, meta tags), information architecture, website navigation, and URL structure.

Organic Search

The natural, or unpaid, listings that appear on a SERP. Organic search results, which are analyzed and ranked by algorithms, are designed to give users the most relevant result based on their query.

Orphan Page

Any webpage that is not linked to by any other pages on that website.

Outbound Link

A link that directs visitors to a page on a different website than the one they are currently on.

P

PageRank

According to Google: “PageRank is the measure of the importance of a page based on the incoming links from other pages. In simple terms, each link to a page on your site from

another site adds to your site’s PageRank. Not all links are equal.” The algorithm was named after Google co-founder Larry Page.

Recommended reading:

Page Speed

The amount of time it takes for a webpage to completely load. Page speed is ranking factor.

Pageview

A webpage is loaded in a browser.

Paid Search

Pay-per-click advertisements that appear above (and often below) the organic results on search engines.

PBN

Stands for Private Blog Network.

See: Link Farm.

PDF

Stands for Portable Document Format file. PDFs can contain text, images, links, videos, and other elements.

Recommended reading:

Penalty

See: Manual Action

Persona

A fictionalized representation of an ideal website visitor or

customer – their demographics, behavior, needs, motivations, and goals – all based on actual data.

Also known as: Buyer Persona, Marketing Persona

Personalization

When search engines use search history, web browsing history, location, and relationships to create a set of search results tailored to a specific user.

PHP

Hypertext Preprocessor is a scripting language used to create dynamic content on webpages.

Piracy

Search engines aim to reduce the organic search rankings of content that infringes on copyright. Google introduced a filter in 2012 that reduces the visibility of sites reported for numerous DMCA-related takedown requests.

Recommended reading:

Pogo-sticking

When, after entering a query, a searcher bounces back and forth between a SERP and the pages listed in those search results.

Also see: Dwell time

Position

See: Rank

PPC (Pay Per Click)

A type of advertising where advertisers are charged a certain amount (usually determined by bid, relevance, account history, and competition) every time a user clicks on the ad. Combining PPC and SEO can result in more SERP real estate, clicks, and conversions. Also, PPC data can inform your SEO strategy, and the reverse is also true.

Q

QDF

Stands for query deserves freshness, where a search engine might decide to show newer webpages in search results (rather than older pages) if a particular search term is trending, perhaps because a news event has resulted in a surge in searches on that topic.

Recommended reading:

Quality Content

Content that helps you successfully achieve business or marketing goals (e.g., driving organic traffic or social shares, earning top search rankings, generating leads/sales).

Quality Link

An inbound link that originates from an authoritative, relevant, or trusted website.

Query

The word, words, or phrase that a user enters into a search engine.

Also known as: A search.

R

Rank

Where a webpage appears within the organic search results for a specific query.

Ranking Factor

An individual component which contributes to a complex series of algorithms that determine where webpages should appear with the organic search results for a specific query. For years, Google has said that its algorithms “rely on more than 200 unique signals” to help users find the most relevant webpage or answer.

Also known as: Ranking Signal.

Reciprocal Links

When two websites agree to exchange links to one another.

Redirect

A technique that sends a user (or search engine) who requested one webpage to a different (but equally relevant) webpage. There are two types of redirects:

- 301: Permanent
- 302: Temporary

Referrer

URL data that identifies the source of a user’s webpage

request.

Reinclusion

The process of asking a search engine to return a website or webpage(s) to its search index after de-indexing.

Relevance

A way search engines measure how closely connected the content of a webpage is aligned to match the context of a search query.

Reputation Management

The practice of crafting a positive online perception of a brand or person – including in search results and on social media – by minimizing the visibility of negative mentions.

Also known as: Online Reputation Management, Public Relations

Responsive Website

A website designed to automatically adapt to a user's screen size, whether it's being viewed on a desktop or mobile device.

Rich Snippet

Structured data can be added to the HTML of a website to provide contextual information to the search engines during crawling. This information can then be displayed in the SERPs, resulting in an enhanced listing, known as a rich snippet.

Recommended reading:

robots.txt

The Robots Exclusion Protocol (or Standard) is a text file, accessible at the root of a website, that tells search engine

crawlers which areas of a website should be ignored.

Return on Investment (ROI)

A way to measure the performance of SEO activities. This is calculated by dividing how much revenue you earned via organic search by the cost of the total investment, then multiplying by 100.

S

Schema

A form of microdata which, once added to a webpage, creates an enhanced description (commonly known as a rich snippet), which appears in search results.

Scrape

A technique used to copy website content or information using a computer program or script. Search engines, such as Google, scrape data in order to build a searchable index of websites.

Also known as: Web scraping.

Search Engine

A computer program that enables users to enter a query in order to retrieve information (e.g., files, websites, webpages) from that program's index (i.e., a web search engine, such as Google, indexes websites, webpages, and files found on the World Wide Web). A search index is built and updated using a crawler, with items being analyzed and ranked by a series of algorithms.

Also see: Baidu, Bing, DuckDuckGo, Google, Yahoo, Yandex

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

An umbrella term for increasing a website's visibility in search engine results pages, encompassing both paid and organic activities.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The process of optimizing a website – as well as all the content on that website – so it will appear in prominent positions in the organic results of search engines. SEO requires an understanding of how search engines work, what people search for (i.e., keywords and keyphrases), and why people search (intent). Successful SEO makes a site appealing to users and search engines. It is a combination of technical (on-page SEO) and marketing (off-page SEO).

See: On-Page SEO, Off-Page SEO

Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

The page search engines display to users after conducting a search. Typically, search engines show about 10 organic search results, sorted by relevance. Depending on the query, other search features may be shown, including:

- AdWords Ads (above and below the organic search results)
- Featured snippets (a.k.a., Position Zero)
- Images
- Knowledge panels
- Local Pack (with map)
- News
- Related questions
- Related searches
- Shopping results
- Sitelinks
- Tweets
- Videos

Also known as: SERPs, when referring to multiple search engine results pages.

Search History

Search engines track every search users conduct (text and voice), every webpage visited, and every ad clicked on. Search engines may use this data to personalize the results for signed in users.

Also known as: Web Browsing History.

Share of Voice

How many impressions a brand receives in the SERPs for search terms when compared to the total impressions that the brand's competitors receive for those same search terms.

Sitelinks

Up to six algorithmically-chosen links that appear below the listing for the same website of a top-ranked organic search result. Pages can be blocked from appearing as sitelinks within the Search Console or Bing Webmaster Tools.

Also known as: Deep Links (Bing).

Sitemap

A list of pages on a website. There are two types of sitemaps:

- **HTML:** This type of sitemap, typically organized by topics, helps site users navigate a website.
- **XML:** This type of sitemap provides crawlers with a list of webpages on a website.

Sitewide Links

A link that appears on every page of a website, typically in a

sidebar or footer of blogs or websites that use templates.

Social Media

Platforms (websites and apps) where users can interact with each other, as well as create, share, and consume content.

Social Signal

Any factors that demonstrate authority and influence on popular social networking websites. For example, the social authority of a user on Twitter.

Although many correlation studies have indicated that socials signals impact rankings (e.g., number of Likes/shares a piece of content receives), Google has publicly stated that social signals are not a direct ranking factor. Popular sites that have a lot of social media engagement tend to rank well for other reasons.

Spam

See: Webspam

Spider

See: Bot

Split Testing

A controlled experiment used to compare at least two webpages to measure the effects of a different variable on conversions. After the pages are shown for a long enough period of time to site visitors to gather an adequate amount of performance data, a “winner” can be declared.

Also known as: A/B Testing.

SSL Certificate

A digital certificate used for website identity authentication and to encrypt information sent to the server using Secure Sockets Layer technology.

Status Codes

The response codes sent by a server whenever a link is clicked, a webpage or file is requested, or a form is submitted. Common HTTP status codes important to SEO:

- 200 (OK)
- 404 (Not Found)
- 410 (Gone)
- 500 (Internal Service Error)
- 503 (Service Unavailable)

Stop Word

A frequently used word. For example: a, at, for, is, of, on, the. Search engines have, in the past, ignored these words to save time/resources when indexing. Search engines have evolved greatly since the early days, and stop words sometimes are meaningful, so this isn’t something to worry much about for SEO purposes.

Recommended reading:

Subdomain

A separate section that exists within a main domain. For example: http://jobs.searchenginejournal.com/ is a subdomain that exists within the main domain of https://www.searchenginejournal.com/

T

Taxonomy

Organizing and categorizing a website to maximize content findability and help users complete desired on-site tasks.

Time on Page

An inexact estimation of how long a user spent looking at a particular webpage. Pages with high exit rates can greatly skew this data.

Title Tag

An HTML meta tag that acts as the title of a webpage. Typically, the title tag is the title search engines use when displaying search listings, so it should include strategic and relevant keywords for that specific page. The title tag should also be written so it makes sense to people and attracts the most clicks. Typically, title tags should be less than 65 characters.

Top-Level Domain (TLD)

The extension of a given web address. These include:

- .com
- .org
- .net
- .info

There are also many more industry and country-specific options. See:

Also known as: gTLD (Generic Top-Level Domain); Domain Extension.

Traffic

The people (and sometimes bots) who visit your website.

Trust

Generally applies to the history of a domain (e.g., whether it cites or features expert sources, builds a positive reputation, adheres to Webmaster Guidelines).

TrustRank

A link analysis technique used to separate good “reputable seed pages” from web spam.

Recommended reading:

U

User-Generated Content (UGC)

Any form of content – videos, blog posts, comments, reviews, etc. – that is created by users or customers.

Universal Search

When search engines pull data from multiple speciality databases to display on the same SERP. Results can include images, videos, news, shopping, and other types of results.

Also known as: Blended Search.

Unnatural Link

Any links Google identifies as suspicious, deceptive, or manipulative. An unnatural link can result in Google taking

manual action on your website.

URL

A uniform resource locator is the specific string of characters that lead to a resource on the web. The term URL is usually short-hand for the letter-based web address (e.g., www.searchenginejournal.com) entered into a browser to access a webpage.

URL Parameter

The values added to a URL in order to track where traffic comes from (i.e., which link someone clicked on to discover your website or webpage). Here's an example of a URL parameter (bolded):

https://www.searchenginejournal.com/example-article-url/999999/?**utm_source=share-back-traffic&utm_medium=desktop-share-button&utm_campaign=twitter**

Also known as: Query String.

Usability

How easy it is for people to use your website. Site design, browser compatibility, disability enhancements, and other factors all play a role in improving usability and making your site accessible for as many people as possible.

User Agent

Web crawling software.

User Experience (UX)

The overall feeling users are left with after interacting with a brand, its online presence, and its product/services.

V

Vertical Search

A specialized type of search where the focus is only on a specific topic, type of content, or media. For example, YouTube (video), Amazon (shopping), Kayak (travel), Yelp (business reviews).

Virtual Assistant

A bot that uses natural language processing to perform tasks, such as conducting web searches. For instance, Apple’s Siri or Microsoft’s Cortana.

Visibility

The prominence and positions a website occupies within the organic search results.

Voice Search

A type of voice-activated technology that allows users to speak into a device (usually a smartphone) to ask questions or conduct an online search.

W

Webpage

A document that exists on the World Wide Web and can be viewed by web browsers.

Website

A collection of webpages hosted together on the World Wide Web.

Website Navigation

How a website connects its webpages to help visitors navigate that site. Website navigation comes in a few different forms, including:

- **Main Navigation:** The major topics or subjects your website is focused on. For instance, on SEJ our Main Navigation consists of SEO, News, PPC, Content, and Social.
- **Secondary Navigation:** Topics related to the main navigation. For instance, on SEJ secondary navigation includes links to webinars, podcasts, guides, SEJ Summit, and other topics.
- **Footer Navigation:** Typically this includes links to pages that contain important informational resources about a brand or business. These pages usually aren't important for ranking purposes. For example, SEJ's footer navigation links to our About Us page, privacy policy, and our various social profiles.
- **Related Links:** This area usually appears in the right rail or beneath content. It might be called "Most Popular," "Most Read," or "Trending Now."
- **Content Links:** Links that appear within your main content (e.g., articles, landing pages).
- **Breadcrumb Navigation:** This type is less popular than it once was. Essentially, each webpage shows a "trail" to help quickly tell visitors where they are on your site. For example: Home > SEO > Link Building > What Is Website Navigation?

Also known as: Internal Links (or Internal Linking), Site Architecture

Webspam

Any methods that exist solely to deceive or manipulate search engine algorithms and/or users.

Also known as: Black Hat SEO, Spam, Spamdexing, Search Spam

White Hat

Tactics that comply with Google’s Webmaster Guidelines.

Word Count

The total number of words that appear within the copy of content. Too little (or thin) content can be a signal of low-quality to search engines.

WordPress

A popular blogging and content management system.

X

XML

Extensible Markup Language is a markup language search engines use to understand website data.

XML Sitemap

A list of all the pages on a website that search engines need to know.

Y

Yahoo

Yahoo was born in April 1994 and was an incredibly popular search engine and portal in the ’90s. Yahoo search was mostly human-powered, at least until June 2000 when a then-unknown search engine called Google began powering Yahoo’s organic search results. That deal continued until 2004, when Yahoo started using its own search technology. Since 2010, Yahoo’s organic search results have been powered by Microsoft’s search engine, Bing.

Yandex

The most popular search engine in Russia, Yandex was founded September 23, 1997 by Arkady Volozh and Ilya Segalovich.

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