The 5 SEO mistakes holding your ecommerce site back right now

Ecommerce sites are so different from other web platforms that SEO for them can almost be considered a separate branch of the industry.

While many fundamentals are the same, ecommerce, especially of the marketplace variety, introduces complications that could *almost* be ignored if they occurred on a smaller scale on a different type of website.

Let’s talk about five SEO mistakes that could be holding back your ecommerce site as we speak.

1. Duplicate content

Duplicate content is the bane of the ecommerce site’s existence, and I can almost guarantee you right now, if you have an ecommerce site that you haven’t audited for duplicate content, you have duplicate content. *Especially* if your site is on a marketplace model.

It doesn’t matter what platform you’re using or how informed you are about SEO – if you haven’t checked for it recently, it’s probably hurting your rankings.

Consider what Ben Davis at Econsultancy noticed happened to pages on three of Sports Direct's websites. The parent company hosted the same product with identical product descriptions and similar layouts, on three different sub-brands: Cruise, Flannels, and Van Mildert.

What he found is that none of the pages had a consistent presence in the search results. The brand's strong authority with search engines allowed the pages to rank with some semblance of consistency on the second page, but with a very important caveat: only one page would show up at a time.

Whenever one page did well, the others fell well below position 100 in the search results, effectively impossible to find.

This type of duplicate content is common for ecommerce sites, in particular marketplaces that sell products, which can be found elsewhere. Large marketplaces generally use generic product descriptions provided by the product seller, but in doing so they are creating duplicate content and, unless they are lucky, they almost certainly will not rank consistently on the front pages of the search results.

Custom product descriptions and design templates are highly recommended in order to combat this problem. Ecommerce sites with *very* large marketplaces can't necessarily hope to ever do this for every product.

But following the Pareto principle – an economic principle which states that 20% of the invested input is responsible for 80% of the results obtained – updating your highest performing and most promising product pages with unique content is well worth the effort if you do so with a strong background in both SEO and writing copy for conversions.

However, this isn't the only type of duplicate content that plagues ecommerce sites.

Another frequent issue is duplicates on your own site. The most common cause of this form of duplicate content is placing a filter in the URL parameter, such as a URL parameter for different colors of the same product, URL parameters to filter products on a category page, and so on.

While this form of duplication doesn't typically lead to results as extreme as duplicates across different websites, it does dilute the search engine authority dedicated to any single version of the page, and if done en masse it can result in a downgrade in your site's overall rankings because of Google Panda.

To deal with this type of duplicate content, you need to be sure to implement the **rel=canonical** tag in such a way that it consistently points to only one URL for any page with nearly identical variations.

2. Too many low-performing indexed content pages

The correlation between additional content on your site and additional search engine traffic is probably the most battle-tested strategy out there. A solid content marketing strategy is essentially guaranteed to increase your search engine traffic in the long haul, and we've seen it happen for literally every single client who stuck with it long enough to see the results.

Even so, there *are* circumstances in which a poorly optimized content strategy can actually backfire, produce too many irrelevant pages, and believe it or not, drag down your entire site in the search results. In fact, this happens a lot more often than many people realize.

Consider the case of Une Belle Vie. When they came to Inflow for help, they were seeing declines in search engine traffic.

After analyzing their site and performance in the search engines, Inflow concluded that the ratio of content to products was too high. This was diluting their authority with search engines and placing too much crawl budget and PageRank in the hands of low-performing blog posts.

After carefully identifying which pages to remove and which to keep, the site saw a steady increase in search traffic, a 30.04% jump in revenue, and a 5.25% bump in conversion rates.

So, does this mean you should shut down your blog?

No! I definitely wouldn't recommend that, certainly not as a first resort at least.

The lesson here is more nuanced. Simply adding content to your site is a strategy that can do more harm than good by diluting your authority with search engines. If I had to guess, I don't believe that Une Belle Vie's traffic losses were the result of *bad* content, but of an unfocused content strategy without consideration given to search engines.

Your content efforts need to be focused, and it's crucial that any authority built by your content strategy is channeled to your product landing pages.

As an important point, I would always first consider optimizing existing pages over removing them. Pages that perform relatively weakly often do so because they don't send a message clear enough to the search engines, about their purpose.

It is also often the case that several thin pages of content should be combined into a single, comprehensive resource. Keyword research and knowledge of technical SEO are a big plus here.

Only after addressing opportunities for optimization should you start cutting pages. In the process, it's important to

ensure that the pages you remove:

- Are not a source of existing search engine traffic
- Are not capturing inbound links from external sources
- Are redirected to related resources to capture any inbound authority they may have already had

3. User-generated content (not enough or too much)

User-generated content is a double-edged sword. It can work wonders. Wikipedia is entirely user-generated, and it wins the search results. It's been central to Amazon's success, with user reviews building more trust with buyers than any branding efforts ever could.

But the dark side of user-generated content is as ugly as its upside is beautiful. When Google first released Panda, eBay fell from #6 to #25 on Moz's list of sites with the most top ten search result listings. The low quality content produced by seller/users on eBay was definitely a factor and likely central to those losses.

So, how should you deal with user generated content?

First, I want to stress that user-reviews are almost certainly a good move. Recent studies have shown that adding user reviews to your website improves organic search traffic by approximately 30%.

It's difficult to estimate to what extent this is due to a subsequent reduction in portions of duplicate content, to rich snippets including star ratings in the search results, to Google ranking pages with user reviews higher directly, or to user behavior, sending more positive signals to Google after user reviews were added.

However, it is that these factors add up, the end result is

clear. Adding user reviews to your site will almost certainly improve your search engine traffic.

If you're afraid of user reviews trashing your reputation, that's less of a concern than you might think. Believe it or not, products with diverse star ratings actually perform better than products with five-star only ratings. By including some authentication into the process, you can cut down on trashing from anonymous sources, and if you respond well to criticism, it can often improve performance better than never having been criticized in the first place.

Bear in mind that most people won't leave a review unless you ask. Research by Trustpilot indicates that people are twice as likely to leave a review if you ask them (jumping from 14 to 29%).

So, what about the dark side of user-generated content? Consider the case of eBay versus Wikipedia. Both are user-generated content sites, but Wikipedia thrives under Panda while eBay suffered after its introduction.

The key is process. Wikipedia has processes in place to ensure quality. While those processes wouldn't satisfy a college professor, they are sufficient to create a relatively trustworthy resource with the ability to consistently meet quality expectations.

Putting moderators and other processes in place to keep the quality level high are vital if you want user-generated content to work for your ecommerce platform. Giving users the ability to rate one another's content also helps keep quality levels high. Take Amazon's ability to sort reviews by "most helpful" as the gold standard here.

4. Not optimizing existing pages

with better keywords

This is one change that every ecommerce site should make, preferably on some sort of repeated schedule.

Keyword research is one of those factors that's so important for SEO that it's taken as obvious, and for that reason it also paradoxically gets ignored more often than it should. This is *especially* true when it comes to optimizing your *existing* pages.

Here is a process that I recommend using that Darren DeMatas calls the "Double Jeopardy" technique, and he shares an example of using it to boost search traffic by an unparalleled *1780%*.

Here is the gist of the process:

1. Go to Google's Keyword Planner and add your product page *URL* to the tool. To narrow it down to informational keywords, you can add "who," "what," "when," "where," "why," and "how" as required terms. This is good for blog posts and similar content, but not a good fit for product landing pages.

2. Take the keywords to SEMrush or a similar tool in order to identify which keywords have competition you can beat. In addition to metrics provided by tools like this, you should also scope out the competition on the front page for those phrases in order to ensure that they have the quality levels you can beat.

3. Find your highest performing pages for the target keyword by performing a "site:domain 'keyword'" search in Google. This will tell you which page on your site already performs best for the keyword.

4. Do an "inurl:forum" search for your keyword to see what information people have on the topic that you won't necessarily find on the front page of search results. Forums

are a great place to start the research, since they give you an idea of exactly what people want to know or are struggling with.

Whether you are using this to put together a blog post or a landing page that overcomes buyers' objections, this research is incredibly useful. Other creative searches and sources of information are also encouraged.

5. Now update your content to ensure that it would be the most promising thing on the front page for that search phrase. That means your title should stand out and that the content on your page either solves users' needs better than anything else on the front page, or that it overcomes buyer objections and understands their purchase intents better than any other landing page, on the front page.

We've developed similar processes internally and they almost never fail to increase search engine traffic, especially when applied as a strategy for your entire site, as opposed to an occasional tweak to a few pages on your site.

Using this process, you capitalize on your existing page data and authority, in order to rank for the kinds of terms that Google is already prepped to reward you for, as opposed to simply picking the highest traffic keywords off, of the list of suggestions that Google's Keyword Planner gives you, after plugging in a generic and obvious keyword.

Keep in mind that you can also put a competitor's URL into the keyword planner to get suggestions.

Another common issue with keywords on ecommerce sites is their hyper-focus on branded keywords. Most product pages are built around the product name and the brand name.

By no means should you *remove* this information or take it out of the most prominent keyword locations (like the URL, title tag, and first paragraph). However, in addition to this

branded information, you should also make an effort, to include keywords related to the product that aren’t about the brand or product model.

These may be referred to as “generic” keywords, although it’s still important to make an effort to use highly specific keywords matching very specific user needs. The point is that you should step up your keyword game and indicate what the page will do for people who aren’t searching for specific brands or product names.

5. Poor internal linking

Ecommerce sites often have an enormous number of products, and as a result it can be incredibly difficult to reach any given page using the links on the site. This doesn’t just mean it’s hard for a user to navigate to a page, it also means that PageRank flow through your site can become diluted, leading to important pages receiving less authority with the search engines than they ought to.

Victorious SEO was able to help Blomdahl USA earn 440% ROI, in large part by repairing poor link architecture.

Getting your link architecture under control is an absolute necessity if you want your ecommerce site to be optimized for search engines. Issues with link architecture generally come in four different forms:

Share this article

Related articles

Poor semantic structure

A link architecture with this issue doesn’t organize the site,

hierarchically. Pure PageRank is only one factor the search engines consider, and the relevance of the links is also a crucial consideration.

Site navigation, folder structure, and interlinking should be systematic. Some organic contextual cross-linking between categories is of course fine, even preferred, but if there is no clear hierarchy in place at all, your interlinking does very little for you.

Excessive link depth

Something is very wrong if it takes more than a few clicks to get from the homepage to any product page. Consider the six degrees of separation rumored to connect any two individuals on the planet. If it takes 10 degrees of separation to get from your homepage to a product page, even the most obscure one, you do not have an optimized site.

Too many links from one point to the next means it’s difficult for search engines to crawl your site and discover pages. It also means that those deep pages receive almost no PageRank.

No prioritization

This is the opposite of excessive link depth. It’s what happens when there are so many links on every page that the most authoritative and important pages on your site receive virtually no attention from search engines. This is a case of diluting your authority by not prioritizing what matters.

Not enough links

Related to excessive link depth, sometimes it’s the case that a page may not be reachable at all from links elsewhere on the site. The most common cause of this is using two different platforms to create separate sections of the site, then failing to interlink them.

Conclusion

I’m not sure if I’ve ever seen an ecommerce site that wasn’t suffering from SEO issues of some kind.

There is essentially always room for improvement, and these five mistakes are the typical places I find myself starting. If you run an ecommerce site, I highly recommend starting with these issues.

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You might not be a media and content-oriented company, but you should st

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% of senior executives say that they will opt for video when given the choice betw

een video and text.

https://searchenginewatch.com/2018/03/01/the-5-seo-mistakes-holding-your-ecommerce-site-back-right-now/