The Ultimate Blog SEO Checklist by @BrianHarnish

Building any website or blog takes research, hard work, and dedication.

It can be daunting to assess everything you will need at the outset and everything you should track in order to ensure that your people are doing a good job.

Creating an “ultimate” blog SEO checklist doesn’t necessarily mean implementing all ranking factors at once.

It does mean implementing all of the factors meant to help you gain traction in any niche, regardless of your skill level.

However, if you are just starting out, I suggest hiring a professional or two to walk you through the process first, because one misstep can cause many issues later on.

Also, a note for other SEO professionals. I realize that some of these are not directly impactful in terms of SEO rankings directly, but there are considerations for putting some of these items here.

For example – while “correct” W3C valid coding does not necessarily mean great rankings, it does mean that your site will be cross-browser and cross-platform compatible. Also, it eliminates code bloat that may come with certain designs.

In addition, when coding correctly and focusing on a minimal mindset, it is possible to make your site’s load time much faster as a result.

Many of these items, while they may not directly impact rankings can impact other factors that in turn can impact rankings. It’s all interrelated.

And while it is possible to create a site that performs without some of these items present, it is important to note that said performance can come at a cost – that the elimination of some of these items will cause you to expend additional effort elsewhere that was not necessary.

In addition, there are many blog platforms available. From Drupal to Typepad to Blogger, there is no shortage of blogging platforms you can choose from.

Without further ado, let’s take a look at how you should build your site with this ultimate SEO checklist.

1. Are You Targeting the Right Keywords?

Targeting the right keywords is important.

If you don’t do keyword research to figure out what you can reasonably rank for, you are leaving money on the table.

That’s why it is important to begin with a competitor

analysis.

A typical competitor analysis begins with approximately 10 competitors and keyword research across that competitor landscape in your industry.

From there, it is possible to extend this research to competitor links, and even drill down to more specific attributes if you so desire.

2. Are You Doing Any Keyword Optimization Within Your Content?

The answer to this question is usually surprising.

I have had several experiences with website audits where this sticks out like a sore thumb – the client did not optimize for any keywords whatsoever.

Contrary to some belief systems by those who don't know any better, using keywords is not a bad thing. It's keyword stuffing that's bad.

Any SEO worth their salt should be using keywords naturally within the content. It is an SEO best practice.

If the keyword does not appear in the page title and meta description, how will Google assess what your page is about?

Too many pages targeting the same keyword leads to keyword cannibalization. This is a situation where multiple pages on your site are competing for the same keyword, because you over-optimized for it.

This can dilute the ability of your pages to compete well in the search results, and can lead to lost website performance, traffic, and rankings.

Make sure that you have a solid keyword research plan in

place, and that you are targeting a healthy monthly search volume to keep your site sustainable.

3. Are You Optimizing for Supporting Keywords?

Targeting the right keywords is a good first step, but it is not the be-all, end-all panacea of optimization.

You must also include the right keywords in the right places in your title tag, meta description, and throughout the page itself.

It’s also helpful to use supporting keywords like synonyms and antonyms.

We won’t even get into the debate of Latent Semantic Indexing.

The fact is, LSI does not exist. It’s SEO bullsh!t and is SEO snake oil, and has been for a long time.

4. Are You Optimizing Keywords in Content Effectively?

Are you optimizing for low-hanging fruit or out-of-reach highly competitive keywords?

When targeting keywords, some SEO practitioners choose arbitrary metrics; usually, search volume.

The higher the search volume, the more competitive the keyword will be (usually, although there can be some exceptions depending on your keyword research data).

The term low-hanging fruit refers to those keywords that you can easily rank for without much effort. This should be one of your first targets in your optimization strategy.

Next, you want to consider medium competition level keywords. These are the not-so-low-hanging fruit opportunities that you want to get next that will be of more medium difficulty.

Next, are your significantly high competition level keywords. These are the ones that you wouldn't expect to get rankings for until at least a year (or more) has passed.

Think 1 million or more in search volume, as these keywords are usually super highly competitive. They will require a significant amount of expenditure to get any traction at all, and will require tons of link acquisition to accomplish.

In other words, you could spend years going after these particular keywords, depending on your industry.

5. Does Word Count Have Any Consideration on Your Blog?

No, this is not what you may think I am getting at. Brute force pounding 4,000-word posts every day on Google will not necessarily make it great content.

What I mean is, are you considering how much you are writing, along with its quality, vs. the competition?

A competitor analysis of the usual SERPs will reveal what the competition is writing about, the word counts they are using, as well as the quantity of blogs they are posting every month.

If you are to beat the competition in your industry, it is important to mirror what they are doing, or figure out a way to reverse-engineer and make your content better than theirs.

Using a tool like SEMrush's SEO content template is a great way to accomplish this goal. This tool will help you analyze your top 10 competitors for the keywords you select, and output content ideas that will help you beat them.

These competitor analyses are useful in helping you assess what kind of content you will want to write next.

6. Is Code Compatible With the Current Doctype?

You can’t just copy and paste code into another doctype and expect it to validate (or work correctly).

This often creates polyglot documents, or documents where copied code does not match W3C doctype specifications.

An example of this includes copying code from a site written in XHTML 1.0 to a site written for HTML 5.

Errors can happen. There is no way around this.

You must bite the bullet and re-code the site from the ground up. This is the only way to ensure a blog is of top quality.

Code compatibility issues also cause cross-platform and cross-browser compatibility issues.

These can, in turn, interfere with user experience, and if severe enough, can cause issues with site performance overall.

7. Does the Site Have a Fast Page Speed on Both Desktop & Mobile?

Page speed is a be-all, end-all factor nowadays.

It is currently baked into Google's algorithm, so if you haven't yet optimized your site for the fastest page speed, you're losing out.

Google's suggestion is to aim for 2-3 seconds.

But, if you want to continue to be competitive, a page speed of 1-2 seconds or less is preferable. This should place you above 90 percent of competitors on Google who are not optimizing for page speed.

8. Does the Site Have a Fast Page Speed on Both Desktop & Mobile?

This means the following:

Was the blog designed to be responsive and viewable on all resolutions, devices, and platforms?

If you are not paying attention to this, you are losing out on a substantial cross-section of your traffic who may be using the devices you are not paying attention to.

9. Does the Blog Take Advantage of Plug-ins to Optimize Images or

Speed up the Cache, & Video As Well?

Use a plug-in like Smush to automatically re-size and optimize images in your WordPress blog.

Use W3 Total Cache or another similar caching plug-in to speed up slow-loading pages that may not be caching properly.

Make sure your videos all load in a reasonable time frame (less than 2-3 seconds is not a bad idea when also taking into account buffer time).

You should also consider plug-ins to make your http:// to https:// transition easier by auto-redirecting everything that’s not https://, and an easy 301 redirect plugin that makes importing of 301 redirects exceedingly simple.

10. Are Page Titles Optimized?

This means including the keyword phrase that your page is

targeting at least once in a way that makes sense.

Don’t make titles too short or too long, otherwise, you risk the rest of your title tag being cut off at the end.

Make sure you are observing character limits along with pixel width limits.

11. Are Meta Descriptions Optimized?

This means including the keyword phrase that your page is targeting at least once in the meta description, in a way that also makes sense.

Don’t make your descriptions overly short or overly long.

Also, please do make sure that you are observing character limits along with pixel width limits.

While Google has said that they do not use the meta description as a basis for ranking, it can add another point of relevance and can help indirectly.

12. Does the Site Optimize Images Properly?

Optimizing images properly is a must.

You can use a plug-in like Smush to do it.

Make sure you follow best practices for image alt text and title text.

No, there is no such thing as an alt tag. It’s the alternate text attribute of the image tag.

Following that, learn how to do lossless compression with

Adobe Photoshop, the industry standard in image optimization.

13. Did You Install Google Search Console?

Making sure you have Google Search Console installed right is super important.

It will tell you many things that you need to know about your site, your traffic, and any potential errors you may face.

It will also tell you if your site has a manual action against it, which is important if you want to get back into Google's good graces.

14. Did You Install Google Analytics?

This may be a super simple, discussing the obvious deal, but during the course of website auditing, I have seen many sites that did not have the correct Google Analytics ID, or even Google Analytics installed altogether.

It's extremely frustrating attempting to audit a site only to hit a wall that is blocked by – you guessed it – no Google Analytics data.

15. Are Any Other Tracking Tools Installed?

Are you using STAT analytics instead of Google Analytics? What about Adobe Analytics?

It is important to make sure that any tracking tool you want to implement is installed right.

Otherwise, you risk underreporting, overreporting, or otherwise not getting any actual data that you can use at all.

16. Did You Make Sure That Your Secure Certificate Was Ordered Correctly?

This may seem like one of those super obvious things again.

But, you would be surprised how something like this can be screwed up.

If you ordered your secure certificate for www.domain.com, you'd better make sure that your address bar outputs www.domain.com, and the same goes true for any other domain name configuration.

If it isn't matched up properly, your secure certificate can throw errors in the browser, resulting in significant website performance issues.

17. Does the Secure Certificate Allow for All Variations of Wild-carded URLs?

You would be surprised how often I come across this. When the secure certificate does not allow for all variations of a URL to redirect properly.

This can result in website performance issues down the line, because Google can't properly crawl everything that's available.

18. Did You Create a New Google Search Console Profile for the Secure Certificate?

No, really. Did you?

If you didn't when you did the secure certificate, then you are missing out on a ton of traffic.

This should be one of the first (or second) things you do after your secure certificate has been installed.

19. Did You Make Sure That Google Analytics Is Also Tracking the Secure URL?

No, really, I say again. Did you?

If you did not, then your Google Analytics may not be correctly reporting your traffic data.

In fact, it could be underreporting.

Make sure that you also set your Google Analytics to properly track the new secure URL implementation.

20. Are You Engaged in Any External Link Promotion for Your Blog?

Do you really think that if you “just write great content” that links will automatically come to your blog?

Let’s get a bit more realistic here.

You *have* to have a pre-existing list of sites or emails that you have been maintaining as part of a newsletter for that to happen.

You *have* to have some sort of outreach strategy for that to happen. This is especially true in “boring” niches where it is impossible to create content that people will link to.

That being said, there are linking techniques that don’t require “just write great content” that are effective.

One technique includes going after other sites and 404 links on their pages and asking them to replace it with your own.

You can perform influencer outreach and execute an email / social media campaign to these influencers.

21. Are You Observing Link Anchor Text Best Practices?

This means: don’t constantly keyword stuff anchor text.

Make sure your link anchor text includes branded URLs, naked URLs, and branded anchor text.

If you use exact match anchor text, use it sparingly. Don’t make it a focal point of your blog.

22. Does Your Blog Take Advantage of the Proper Dimensions for Mobile?

This also means making sure that your buttons are properly sized for most mobile devices.

Nobody is going to convert on a site where the buttons are far too small to be usable.

In addition, don’t forget making sure that photos and other graphics are of high enough quality for devices like iPhones.

23. Does Your Blog Take Into Account Mobile Page Speed?





Both mobile and page speed are baked into Google’s algorithm now.

This means that if your blog is not doing mobile correctly and also doing page speed right, that you could be one of the first ones filtered out of the Google SERPs, rather than being ranked.

24. Do You Target Visitors on Mobile Devices When It Comes to Content?

No, this does not mean creating 5,000 words of content and brute force publishing it to your blog every day.

But, it does mean taking into consideration SERP analysis, competition analysis, and assessing your users’ mobile experience.

Whereas in some cases slightly longer content may be appropriate, other cases content easily digestible on mobile is appropriate.

Of course, don’t just cloak and show different content for your mobile users than you do your desktop users.

That’s just bad.

25. If You Have a Mobile Domain for Your Blog, Are Redirects Effective & Complete?

And, if you do, why have you not yet made the jump to a responsive design?

The question is, in general, quite rhetorical. But, it

deserves to be asked.

If you have not made the jump to a responsive design, why not?

It is considered a design and SEO best practice at this point, and should be done on every website launch.

It’s not a question of whether or not you should, but whether or not you want to get the most out of your blog.

26. Does Your Blog Take Advantage of Conversion Points in Your Marketing Funnel?

This is not, in general, a usual SEO consideration but it should be. Different points in the marketing process will require different types of writing.

You wouldn’t write to a buying customer the same way that you would write to someone looking for information would you?

In the same vein, writing to an ecommerce customer would be slightly different than writing to someone looking for real estate.

Doing this will make your approach more effect and you’ll avoid missing out on points of user intent.

SEO has evolved from simple keyword research and optimization to more complex implementations involving user experience and user intent.

Take the time to analyze and take advantage of differing conversion points along your marketing funnel, and your users will thank you.

27. Do You Have Any Means of Conversion on Your Blog?

Calls to action, calls to action, calls to action.

This means things like:

- Call buttons.
- Contact forms.
- Ads persuading your users to take action on your products and services.
- Banners.

Users won't do these things on their own. They need a guide.

A/B testing a variety of different buttons and calls to action will help you nail down exactly what works for your users.

28. Are There Social Sharing Buttons for Every Blog Post?

For most industries, this should not be an afterthought.

You never know at what point along your marketing funnel someone is going to want to share your blog post with others, so you will want to focus on the top platforms for your industry.

These Are Not the Only SEO Points You Should Consider

While there are still other SEO points to consider that will help increase your blog's performance, it's paramount to make sure that your blog is fully crawlable and indexable.

Following these steps will make sure that you have a crawlable blog that is good enough to compete on the search engines.

Anything else you do to optimize the blog will be gravy, and will only serve to enhance your performance in the SERPs.

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