

## HOW TO SEO

When we talk to tourism businesses about SEO, their eyes tend to start to glaze over, I can see them zoning out, looking for an escape!

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is such an important part of any tourism businesses marketing activities, it's key to building a strong digital footprint and driving potential visitors to your website.

The average traveller visits 22 travel related sites over 9.5 research sessions before booking - that's a lot of searching!

With over 1 billion websites web today, businesses need to work harder than ever to have their page found by the right travellers when they are researching, planning and booking their trips.

You can have a website that ticks all the boxes as in:

- It looks great
- Has beautiful images and videos
- You're content is inspiring
- There is an online booking mechanism
- It's mobile friendly and loads quickly

But without some basic SEO, your site might not appear in search engine results when 'ready to buy' travellers are for your product or experience.

### So...What is SEO?

Like you, search engines want to provide the best experience they can for their customers. Google is wanting to provide users the most **relevant** and **authoritative** results for a search term in the shortest time possible.

Google, Yahoo, and Bing try super hard to provide the relevant results for whatever someone types into their magic little search box.

When you type a query into Google's search box, robots scan or 'crawl' all the content on the Internet. SEO tells the robots what your site is all about. It's like signposts for the robots to let them know when your page is relevant to a search and helps it to return the most relevant results to the end user.

Smart SEO strategies help bump your web page toward the top of the "natural", "unpaid" or "organic" search results, making your post more visible to users and ultimately driving more visitation to your site. SEO is about making your website easy for both users and search engine robots to understand.

But meta descriptions, site architecture, reputation, key words, stuffing, crawlers and headers sounds like a bunch of mumbo jumbo, and can feel too hard and we get that not everyone can afford to pay an SEO expert to help.

With a little bit of know-how, you can implement some simple strategies that will make a big difference, yourself.

With SEO there are a lot of different factors involved, that all work together to influence your page rankings.

So where do you start?

### Top 7 SEO Fundamentals

Before we go any further, here are the key fundamentals of SEO.<sup>1</sup>

1. Keyword research and integration
2. Focus on the user experience
3. Optimize title tags
4. Optimize your meta description
5. Publish valuable content for your audience
6. Tag images
7. Link internally

SEO includes hundreds of tactics that can help a brand increase their search rankings. These white hat SEO techniques are often grouped into three categories.

- **On-page SEO** optimises each individual page of a website to target a specific keyword and appeal to search engines. These strategies include: keyword research, content creation, and keyword optimization. On-page optimisation in SEO helps search engines understand a page of content and, therefore, give it higher ranks.
- **Technical SEO** optimises the non-content elements of a website and the website as a whole to improve its backend structure and foundation. These strategies relate to: site speed, mobile friendliness, indexing, crawlability, site architecture, structured data, and security. Technical SEO improves both user and search crawler experience, which leads to higher search rankings.
- **Off-page SEO** builds a website's reputation and authority by connecting it to other high-quality websites. Off-page SEO techniques include: link building (acquiring high-quality backlinks) from other websites and managing local listings and directory profiles. When many websites link to a brand's website, it shows search engines that the brand's website is trustworthy, reliable, and reputable, which increases its search rankings.

A strong SEO plan doesn't focus on just one of these three types of SEO but instead combines all three strategies to produce the best results.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.webfx.com/blog/seo/seo-principles/>

## Research your keywords

Put your customer hat on and think about the words and phrases your ideal customers might type into the search box when they start researching their trip.

Do some old fashioned brainstorming and start making a list of the words and phrases your potential customers might use?

Then hop online and use these free tools from Google to work out which words are most effective:

- **Google's Keyword Planner** - <https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner> will help you to gauge the popularity of your keywords and the competition for them. You'll need to create an Adwords account to use it, but you don't need to spend any money just to research.
- **Google Trends** - <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore> is helpful to see the popularity of terms and related queries by category, location, and time. Different ways of saying the same thing can generate vastly different amounts of search queries. Google Trends allows you to compare keywords popularity over time. So you can decide which combination of words will be most effective, e.g. 'Things to do in Uluru' compared with 'activities in Uluru'.

Words that you think customers are typing into Google (or their preferred search engine) aren't always the ones that you think they will be.

Do your research!

## Create your keyword plan

Now take these keywords and phrases and get a plan together for how you are going to use them to optimize your site. As a rule of thumb you should have a 'focus keyword/phrase' for each page of your site.

You'll want to use the keywords in:

### Page Title

- The page title is the clickable headline that is displayed in search engine results - they are important for usability, SEO and social sharing.
- Use your keywords at the start of your page title, and keep the title to fewer than 55 characters.

### Meta description

- This is a short description of what the page is about. While they are no longer a factor in Google's search algorithm, they are effective in enticing users to click through to your page.
- Keep your meta description to under 160 characters, make sure they are descriptive, relevant and contain keywords.

### **Page Content**

- Create keyword rich content, sprinkle keywords and phrases throughout your page in the body text and headers, making sure that the information is useful, unique, clear and accurate.
- Write for your customers not for search engines – search engines are smart, they know when you are trying to trick them. Keep your content relevant to the page.
- The key thing to remember when creating all your page content is to keep it human - “Create quality content for users not search engines!”

### **Page URL**

- Give each page a unique, descriptive, human friendly URL that contains keywords. Like your page content, your URL should accurately reflect the information contained on the page.

### **Image Alt Text**

You need to optimise your images for search too. Do this in two ways:

- Use your keywords in the file name when you upload the image to your site. Instead of IMG1028364.jpg, make the name descriptive, like ‘family friendly accommodation Port Stephens’.
- Be sure to add your keyword rich description to the image alt text once you have uploaded it to your site.

These days’ most content management systems (CRM or the back end of your website) have SEO Tools which can help - if you're not sure if you have one, ask your web developer.

### **Monitor your analytics**

What you measure grows!

To keep growing traffic to your site, you’ll want to monitor your SEO efforts through Google Analytics.

Check your Google Analytics at least once a month to monitor traffic to your site, understand where it is coming from, key search terms visitors are using, how long they stay on your site and where they leave.

Like anything in your business, SEO should be a process of continual improvement, making tweaks and changes to improve all the time!

### **Be consistent**

It’s not enough to do one big hit of SEO; it needs to be an ongoing part of your marketing activities. SEO isn’t just about keywords; it involves lots of factors that work together.

When you are reviewing your analytics, set-aside time to do additional SEO activities, like making sure all your online listings are consistent, having a good social media plan and creating regular, inspiring, useful content on your blog.

### **Review your business listings**

- Simple things like having the same name, address and phone number across all your online listings go a long way to building trust with search engines - it shows that you are a real legitimate business.
- When was the last time you checked yours? No time like the present! While you're at it, create a register of all your online listings, so you can easily update them all in the future.

### **Check your social media presence**

- Are all your platforms set up correctly, with keyword rich, current, relevant information in your content?
- Does your social media link back to your website and vice versa?
- Are you posting and sharing content regularly?

*All this is good for search!*

### **Create new content**

Blogging is one of the best ways to consistently create new, compelling, quality content to inspire your customers (and improve your search rankings).

Establish a blog schedule and regularly publish fresh, interesting, valuable content for your customers.

Of course you will want to incorporate keywords into your blog posts, along with images and maybe some video. Keep your content scannable for easy reading, include links and make sure you share it through your social media channels.