

Module 16, Lesson 1 Handout:

SEO Best Practices

SEO is one of the most important aspects of creating a website and your content, but also one of the most confusing. There are aspects of SEO that only a developer can truly understand, there are aspects you can control on a daily basis, and there are aspects that change without any warning that will have you scrambling to figure out what you thought you knew.

Our goal here is to make you aware of the various aspects of SEO so you decide how much time, energy, and budget you want to put towards mastering or maintaining SEO both at the very start of building your business as well as for when you're seasoned but looking for ways to optimize what you've already done.

If you're completely new to SEO, we encourage you to read through [Google's How Search Works](#) and [The Google SEO Starter Guide](#) so you get an idea of what it is you're trying to accomplish with SEO, and why, straight from the mouth of Google.

Once you've got an understanding of the basics, then you're ready to really dive in and optimize your business.

Here are 4 Basic SEO Tips for Beginners:

- 1. Build a great website for both desktop AND mobile.** We already covered this, but we'll say it again. Free Wordpress templates will only get you so far, and they will eventually break. Set yourself up for success from the beginning and invest in a site that is modern, fresh, up to date, and a great experience for a user to come back over and over again. Use high quality images, make it easy to navigate, make sure pages load quickly, and make sure everything looks as spectacular on mobile as it does on desktop.
- 2. Make sure your SEO meta description and SEO titles are solid.** Google cares deeply about your homepage, since it helps them determine what your site is all about and how you should rank in searches. Before you even launch your site, be sure all the homepage SEO fields are filled out so you can hit the ground running.

3. **Choose a strong, doable, consistent, quality content strategy.** Sure, more is better when it comes to creating content. BUT, “more” means something different to everyone, and when taking into account time and resources you have to create content, “more” may not actually equal “better” if the content isn’t great. If you want to be an expert, your content must showcase your expertise, which means it needs to be high quality, authoritative, and consistent. Google knows how often you are posting new content, and how often readers are visiting your content, and will use this when calculating your search results. Bottom line, post as often as you can *consistently* and be sure the content isn’t too thin.

4. **Understand keywords.** Back in the day, you’d pick a keyword that you wanted a piece of content to rank for and you’d stuff it in as often as you could throughout the article. Google is too savvy for that now. Sure, you want to include it in your
 - headline
 - SEO title
 - slug
 - meta description
 - first paragraph
 - and wherever else it naturally makes sense

but you don’t need to just use the word or phrase just to use it. Google knows synonyms of your keywords and whether or not the rest of the content makes sense, so focus more on putting out great content that makes sense.

Now, what if you’ve been blogging for a while now, and feel you have those 4 tips down pat, but you’d like to see what else you could be doing to improve your SEO? Glad you asked. Obviously you’re looking to grow your organic search traffic, so let’s start with where we just left off: keywords.

It’s time to audit the content you’ve already created and see if you’re targeting the best keywords possible and if the content is actually performing well for you. Often, brands will publish a variety of content on various topics. For example, Nutritious Life publishes content under our verticals of Eat Empowered (food stories), Sweat Often (exercise stories), and Sleep Deep (sleep stories). If you’re doing the same, you want to be sure you’re listening to what the data is telling you, assuming you have your site connected to [Google Search Console](#) (formerly Webmaster Tools) and [Google Analytics](#).

The Nutritious Life 18 Point Checklist to Audit Your SEO:

- 1. Check out Google Search Console.** Click on Search Results and see what queries Google lists as the main drivers of clicks to your website from Google search pages. It will show you which of your URLs are ranking, and which aren't.
- 2. Check out your Google Analytics.** This will show you the actual traffic that each of those URLs you found in Google Search are driving to your site.
- 3. Analyze, analyze, analyze.** If one particular URL is performing well, can you write a similar story with a different keyword on that same topic, and begin to build out more content on that subject so Google will begin to really see you as an expert in that area? If another story just isn't performing at all, maybe reconsider that vertical, or accept that your audience just isn't interested in that topic. Or, perhaps update it with some new information, add a better photo, be sure your SEO fields are filled out properly, and try a re-release.
- 4. Optimize your page speed.** Page speed - as in, how fast your web pages load when someone visits them - is one of the many factors Google takes into consideration in their search algorithm. Your goal should be to have your pages load as quickly as possible, but you also need to accept that some business choices, such as running ads on your website, will indeed slow it down, and that's just something you'll have to accept in some cases. To find out your starting point, visit [Google PageSpeed Insights](#) and run your website through the test. Google does a great job of telling you exactly what your site is doing well and not so well, and gives you specific things that could help your speed improve.
- 5. Make sure your SEO meta description and SEO titles are solid.** Yes, we mentioned this above, but we're mentioning it again in case you are revisiting this after having an established website. Google cares deeply about your homepage, since it helps them determine what your site is all about and how you should rank in searches. Double check that all the homepage SEO fields are filled out so you can hit the ground running.
- 6. Analyze your backlinks.** If high quality, credible, popular websites link to your website, it tells Google that you are also a high quality, credible website that has

worthwhile content. However, if low quality spammy websites link to your website, it can actually hurt your reputation. It's worth auditing how many links point to your website so you can either reach out to see about getting more links from a great partner, or reach out and ask for links to be removed from a spam site. There are many backlink checkers out there (just google Backlink Checker). Many will let you do basic searches on a free account.

- 7. Analyze your broken links.** Similar to looking for backlinks, there are plenty of free broken link checkers. Broken links are those pesky 404 Error pages you see, hopefully not too often. If you find broken links, the easiest thing to do is to find that page in the back end of your website and redirect it to a valid page. Or, if the page was moved to draft for any reason, can it be refreshed and republished? Broken links that your backlinks are pointing to is a huge missed opportunity - be sure to fix those. There are plenty of "301 redirect" plugins available on Wordpress, so you can easily turn your 404s into 301s and keep our traffic moving.
- 8. Analyze your internal links.** Just as backlinks point from an external website to your website, internal links point from one page on your website to another page on your website. Google values internal links because it shows your content is relevant to particular subject matters. So, creating content that is relevant to other pieces of content on your site is a great way to plan your editorial calendar and create a web of internal links.
- 9. Check your affiliate links.** There's nothing wrong with having affiliate links on your site. In fact, it's a great way to earn money! But, you need to make sure that you aren't overdoing it. If having for too many links gets in the way of your user having a great experience on your website, Google will take notice.
- 10. Update old content.** Ideally, most of your content is evergreen, meaning it's useful and relevant any time of the year. This doesn't pertain to news sites, obviously, but for most other sites, creating content that isn't fleeting will be a much more effective way to operate. If you did a roundup of your 5 favorite face lotions last year, add a new favorite or replace one that no longer exists. Update the year in the headline, and make note in the date that the original story was updated. Google rewards current content. If the content is really old, you'll need to make some strategic

decisions. If you can do a rewrite and make it fresh so it will actually perform, then great! If not, then consider making it a “nofollow” page, which will basically hide it from Google altogether so it won’t count against you.

- 11. Check your seasonal content.** Yes, evergreen content should be the majority of your content, BUT seasonal content is also important! Your users want it, so it’s important that you deliver it. And, it’s easily updated each year by changing the year in the headline and adding one or two new tweaks to the story. If you could make your seasonal content more robust this year, add that into your strategy as a way to drive more audience to your site.

- 12. Check your content length.** Google is favoring long-form content these days, specifically articles 800-1200 words long. As we’ve mentioned before, Google is trying to find the highest quality, most relevant piece of content to put in the #1 slot when someone searches for that particular subject. So, Google considers articles that tend to be longer in length as higher quality than similar articles that are shorter in length. Articles that are shorter in length tend to be seen as “thin content” from within Google. If you have articles that are short and sweet, is there any way to beef them up that makes them even more useful, not just more long-winded? Do you need to rethink the types of articles you’re producing, and instead of 3 short articles per week move to 2 longer articles per week? Do what you can to make each piece of content the highest quality possible, and the most robust.

- 13. Check your recipes.** Do you have recipes on your site? Google considers recipes content, and so the same rules apply to your recipes as your articles. [Recipe cards](#) are a great user experience and there are plenty of Wordpress plugins to implement them on your site. Not only do they create what your users want - nutrition facts, serving size, print button, etc. - but also the structured data code that will help enhance results and drive your click through rate. The more you get users to click on your recipes, the higher you’ll rank. Also, add videos to your recipe pages! Users love videos, especially in relation to the recipes they are viewing, and Google is rewarding them. Recipe ratings and comments can also help you in Google’s search algorithm. If your recipes are getting high reviews and engagement, it helps your time on site, pages per session, and bounce rate, which ultimately affect your rank. Finally, be sure you have enough content on your recipe page that tells Google it isn’t “thin content”. The longer a user scrolls on your page, the higher their “time on page” is, the more

ads they will see if you're running them, and the more Google will see your users as loyalists.

14. Check your headlines. Ever wonder why someone isn't clicking on your amazing article? Maybe it's a simple headline issue! Take the time to audit your headlines and be sure they vary, are interesting, and invoke a feeling - happiness, fear, FOMO, curiosity, etc. Then check your heading tags. Heading tags are H1 - H6. Your blog title is your H1 should include your keyword or keyphrase, and this tells Google it's the main topic. Your H2s are your subsection headlines throughout the blog. Breaking your content up into sections helps with user experience, since most users are skimming content. It also creates a natural break for in-body ads, as long as you don't overdo it.

15. Check your images. Images are super impactful in so many respects on your website. They visually show your brand, they tell the story of what your article is about, and they create an overall look and feel. But, they can also make or break your site in many ways. If your site has a ton of generic stock images, your reader won't spend nearly as much time viewing it than if you had higher quality, eye-catching images. If you have too many images, or if your images are too large, your page speed could be negatively affected. There are several plugins that can compress your images automatically that will greatly reduce load time, and you can also implement [AMP pages](#) to greatly speed up web pages, particularly on mobile. You should also be sure of the file name of the image and the alt text.

- The image name should include the keyword you've set for the article and also be relevant to what the photo is actually of.
- The alt text helps search engine crawlers understand what an image is showing and then properly index it. Your alt text should describe the image accurately using the keyword you've set for that particular story where the image appears. Keep it under 125 characters.

16. Check your about page. Google wants to know that behind your great content is a real human or business, so you need to have this information available online. The perfect place to have it? On your about page! Be sure to include the history of your brand, your expertise, and your overall mission. Not only are you making your users

aware of who you are and what you can do for them, but you're letting Google know the same things here.

17. Check your sponsored content. Has a brand hired you to write content for them? Congrats! Just remember there are some SEO implications you should keep in mind with this particular content. First, be sure to appropriately label the fact that it is sponsored content or that it contains affiliate links that might earn you commission. Your credibility with your audience depends on this disclosure. Second, be sure there is plenty of copy discussing the product or brand you are promoting, and only a couple of links to the actual product. If it's the other way around - a lot of links and only a couple sentences - you'll get dinged. Whenever you link to products in these posts, or any affiliate links for that matter, you want to make sure they are "nofollow" links. There are several Wordpress plugins that can help you easily set these links up properly.

18. Check your site ads. Running ads on your site? Great, just be sure they aren't interfering with a great user experience or slowing your site down too much (they will slow it down some - this happens to everyone running ads). Check how everything is rendering on desktop or mobile. Are popups or auto-play videos the cause for your soaring bounce rate? Is an ad blocking the copy from an article? Audit your ads and be sure to work with your ad partner if anything needs to be tweaked.