Yoast's small SEO guide to optimize your website

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Colophon
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Table of Contents

Chapter 1
About this book 4

Chapter 2
The very basics of SEO 6

Chapter 3
Keyword Strategy 12

Chapter 4
Site structure 19

Chapter 5
Some technical SEO tips 24

Chapter 6
User experience best practices 28

Chapter 7
SEO content writing 41

Chapter 8
About Yoast 49

About this book

What to expect?

This book will cover the most important topics that will help you to optimize your WordPress site. We'll teach you the basics of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and explain the importance of User Experience (UX). Also, we will give the most important insights on improving your copywriting. The chapters are written by our very own experts in the field of SEO, Navigation, Conversion and Analytics.

Learn More?

If you would like to read more about certain topics, you can read one of our other eBooks. We have written an eBook about SEO for WordPress and one about content SEO. Our latest release is an eBook about user experience and conversion rate optimization, and we're currently working on an eBook about shop SEO.

You can also follow one of our new online SEO courses. We currently offer four courses: Basic SEO, Yoast SEO for WordPress, SEO Copywriting and Keyword research. In these courses, we will teach you how to do SEO in a set of videos, texts and exercises.

Need advice?

If you would like practical tips on how to improve your site specifically, you could order a Website review. In our reviews, we do an in-depth analysis of your website, checking more than 300 important SEO and Usability issues. The results is a clear overview of all the things you are doing wrong (and of the things you are doing right) and tips on how to improve.

The very basics of SEO

What does a search engine do?

Before you can start optimizing your site, it is very important that you understand what search engines exactly do. In this chapter, we explain how search engines find your site and what the basics of SEO are.

Search engine - terminology

In this book, we will often write *'Google'* when we refer to a search engine. Of course, there are many other search engines, like Bing and Yahoo. But since Google pretty much dominates the search engine market, we will only refer to Google in our texts.

What does Google do?

How does Google find your site?

Search engines like Google follow links. They follow links from one web page to another web page. A search engine like Google consists of a crawler, an index and an algorithm. A crawler follows the links on the web. It goes around the internet 24/7 and saves the HTML-version of a page in a gigantic database, called the index. This index is updated if Google has come around your website and found a new or revised version of it. Depending on the traffic on your site and the amount of changes you make on your website, Google comes around more or less often.

For Google to know of the existence of your website, there first has to be a link from another site in the index - one it already knows -

to your site. Following that link will lead to the first crawler-session and the first save in the index.

Google's secret algorithm

After indexing your website, Google can show your website in the search results.

Google has a specific algorithm that decides which pages are shown in which order. How this algorithm works is a secret. Nobody knows exactly which factors decide the ordering of the search results. Moreover, factors and their importance change very often. Testing and experimenting gives us a relatively good feel for the important factors and the changes in these factors.

Google's results page

Google's results page shows 7 or 10 links to sites which fit your search the best. We refer to these results as the organic search results. If you click to the second page, more results are shown. Above these 10 blue links are two or three paid links, most of the time. These links are ads; people have paid Google to put these links at the top of the site when people search for a specific term. Prices for these ads vary greatly, depending on the competitiveness of the search term. Similar ads could appear on the right of Google's search result pages as well.

The value of links for search engines

It's very important to have a basic understanding of how Google and most other search engines use links: they use the number of links pointing to a page to determine how important that page is. Both internal links (from your own website) as well as external links (from other websites) could help in the ranking of a website in Google. Some links are more important than others: links from websites that have a lot of links themselves are generally more important than links from small websites with little external links.

Yoast Tip

There are different ways how links help you rank. Read about the most important ways in our eBook SEO for WordPress.

Universal search

Next to the organic and paid results, Google also embeds news items, pictures and videos in its search results. This embedment is called universal search.

What is Search Engine Optimization?

High ranking in organic search results

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the profession that attempts to optimize sites to make them appear in a high position in the organic search results. In order to do so, SEO tries to fit a website to Google's algorithm. Although Google's algorithm remains secret, almost a

decade of experience in SEO has resulted in a pretty good idea about the important factors. In our view, the factors in Google's algorithm can be divided into two categories:

1. There are *on-page* factors which decide the ranking of your website. These factors include technical issues (e.g. the quality of your code) and more textual issues (e.g. structure of your site and text, use of words). The textual issues will receive in depth attention in this book. For more information about technical issues, check out our blogs about (technical) SEO.

2. There are the *off-page* factors. These factors include the links to your site. The more other (relevant) sites link to your website, the higher your ranking in Google will be. We will not go into *off-page* factors in this book.

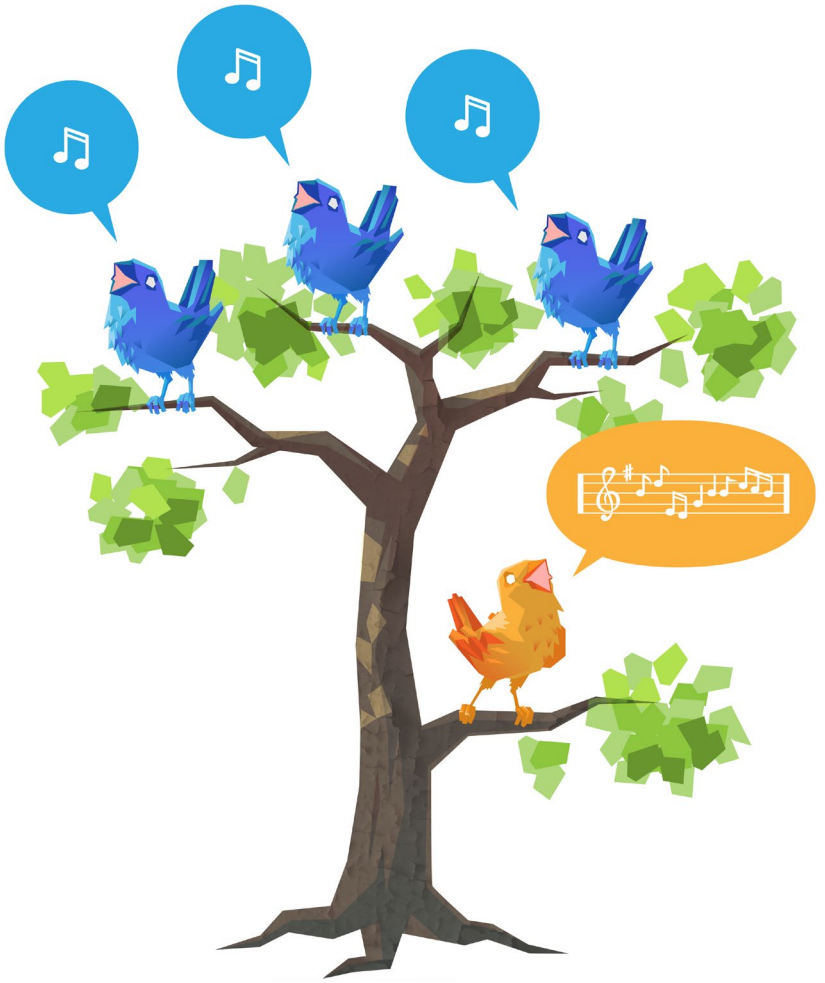
Yoast Tip

Need help with Search Engine Optimization on your WordPress site? Use our Yoast SEO Premium plugin! Most of the technical aspects of SEO you should do are also covered by our free Yoast SEO plugin. Installing this plugin and using the default settings already improves quite a lot. It even fixes some minor issues WordPress has. Our Yoast SEO plugin also helps in writing SEO-friendly content. Our advice is to download and install either the free or the premium Yoast SEO plugin on your website. In the premium plugin extra functionality is added and customers of this premium plugin can ask our team for support.

Photo: punkmedia.nl

At Yoast, we give SEO advice to (small) website owners and large consultancy clients (the Guardian, Facebook). Joost de Valk began his career in SEO over 10 years ago. And although Google has changed its algorithm quite a few times, most of the advice we give at Yoast has remained the same over the years. And this advice is very simple: you just have to make sure your site is very good. Do not use any 'tricks', because they usually don't work in the long run, and might even backfire. Google's mission is to build the perfect search engine that helps people find what they are looking for. Making your website and your marketing strategy fit this goal is always the way to go. You can read more about making and maintaining a great website in our eBook SEO for WordPress. You can learn more about optimizing your content in our eBook Content SEO.

Keyword Strategy



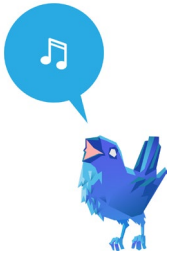
What's keyword research?

Keyword *research* can be defined as the activity you undertake in order to come up with an extensive list of keywords you would like to rank for. Keyword *strategy* can be defined as all the decisions you make on the base of that keyword research.

Keyword research is the basis of all search marketing. It starts with explaining what you do in the language your audience uses. Keyword research furthermore helps you to discover what you should be ranking for, or aiming to rank for.

Why is keyword research important?

Proper keyword research will make clear what search terms are used by your audience. And this is of great importance. At Yoast, we regularly encounter clients that have a specific set of words they use when referencing their products, while their users use a completely different set of words. Optimizing for words that people don't use of course doesn't make any sense. Doing good keyword research makes sure that you use the words your target audience uses, and therefore makes the whole effort of optimizing your website worthwhile.



Keywords and keyphrases

We tend to use the word keyword all the time, but we don't necessarily mean it's only one word. *'WordPress SEO'*

is a keyword, as is '*Google Analytics plugin*'. You can thus have keywords containing multiple words! We will refer to these keyphrases as keywords throughout this chapter.

Yoast Tip

In our eBook Content SEO, we take you through the process of executing your own keyword research step by step, provide concrete examples of keyword research and introduce handy tools you can use! You can also enroll in our Keyword research training courses to learn more about keyword research.

To consider: make sure keywords fit your site

Be aware that you should be found for terms that fit your site. If we get crazy and do our very best to let yoast.com rank for ballet shoes, people would be rather disappointed to find our site. They will probably instantly go back to Google. Ranking on ballet shoes will, in our case, lead to a massive bounce rate. And a high bounce rate tells Google that people do not find what they are looking for based on that search term. This will inevitably lead to a lower ranking on ballet shoes for our site (and totally justified, we know nothing about ballet or about shoes for that matter).

Repeat keyword research regularly!

Keyword research is an activity you undertake every now and then. If you have a clear definition about the product or service you want to 'sell' with your website, you should be able to come up with keywords, related keywords en even more related keywords to make your awesome website (more) findable. As your product and the market will evolve, your keyword strategy should do the same.

Yoast Tip

Keyword research is the basis of all search marketing. Read more about that in this post!

Resemble the vocabulary of your audience

The keywords you want to focus your SEO on, should closely resemble the vocabulary of your audience. In order to come up with the proper keywords you really have to get inside the heads of the people who search for your website. What terms will people use? How do people search? Which question does your website answer? You should create a list of all search terms people could use and think of combinations and nuances within these search terms.

Keyword research tools to use

Making a list remains hard. And up until a few years ago, doing your keyword research was much easier. You could simply check Google Analytics to see on which terms people found your website. That is no longer possible. So you're pretty much left in the dark about the terms people use in search engines to end up at your website. Luckily, there are some other tools which can make your keyword research a bit easier:

Google Adwords Keyword Planner

Use the Google Adwords Keyword Planner to find new and related keywords, but ignore the search volume data! The search volume data in the planner is really only useful for keywords that you're actually spending money to advertise on. Otherwise, these volumes are not reliable. While not really helpful to decide which keyword is most used by your potential audience, Google Adwords Keyword Planner makes a useful tool in coming up with ideas for potential keywords!

Yoast Suggests

Joost developed his own keyword research tool to come up with keywords as well! Yoast Suggests uses the Google Suggest functionality you know from searching in Google. It finds the keyword expansions Google gives and then requests more of them. So if you type *'example'*, it'll also give you the expansions for *'example a...'* till *'example z...'* etc. Just go on and try it and fill out some of your potential keywords. It's a great way to quickly find more long tail keywords you can focus on.

Google Trends

Google Trends allows you to compare the traffic for sets of keywords. You can even see the difference for numerous geographical regions. It's very important to check Google Trends if you expect that some of your keywords are seasonal, for instance due to regulations, holiday seasons etc.

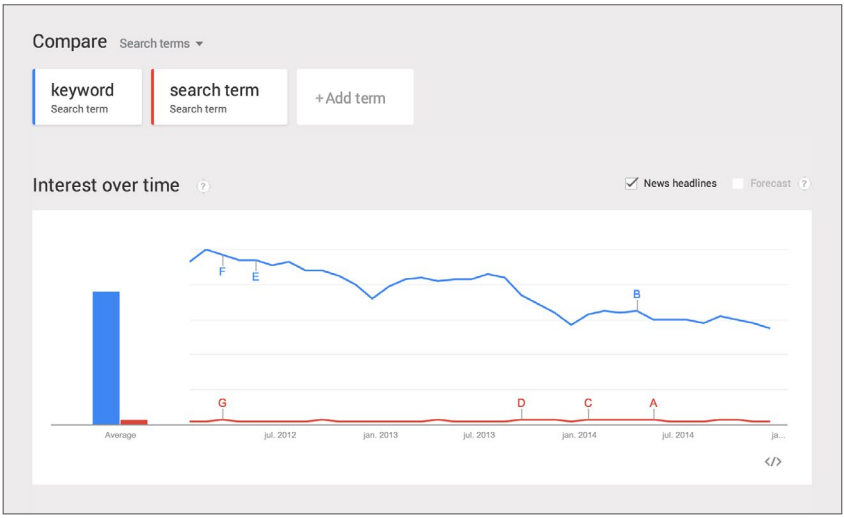


Figure 1: compare traffic for sets of keywords in Google Trends

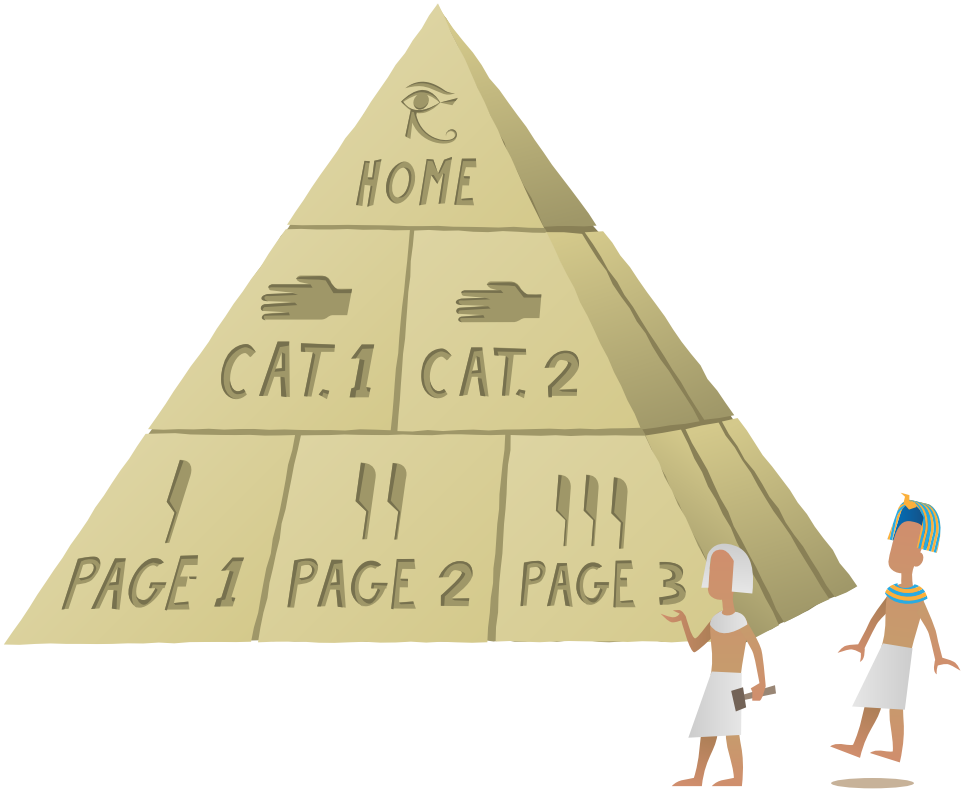
Your internal search engine

What are people looking for on your site? These terms are keywords in the vocabulary of your actual audience and should definitely be added to your keyword list. Do not forget to look at the keywords people filled in that didn't get any results: this was stuff people were expecting but didn't find. You can look into the results of your internal search engine with MonsterInsights Pro.

Conclusion

These keyword research tools should make it easier to create a list of relevant search terms. You should make sure to create awesome landing pages for keywords you want to be found on. You should also think about cornerstone content articles and a great internal linking structure in order to make your SEO strategy complete.
In the next chapter we'll tell you more about site structure.

Site structure



About this chapter

In this chapter we will give advice on how to set up or improve the structure of your site. We will explain why it is important to structure your website wisely. Subsequently, we will show you how to setup an ideal site structure. And, we will provide tips on how to (quickly) improve the structure of your site without totally disrupting the core of your website. Want practical tips applied to your website? Our Site review-team can help you optimize your website even further!

Why is site structure important?

In the previous chapter of this book, we explained all about keyword research. For a lot of people who want to improve their rankings, it makes sense to think about keywords. But what does the structure of your website have to do with your ranking in Google? For many people, this remains unclear. In this chapter, we will therefore try to explain the importance of having a good site structure. We will explain what an ideal site structure looks like and how you can improve upon your own site structure. For hands-on tips about optimizing your structure (like updating your internal link structure and evaluating your sections), read chapter 9 of our eBook Content SEO!

Yoast Tip

A good structure is well categorized, and pages within it only link to other pages on the same topic. We explain it all in his post Intelligent site structure for better SEO.

Two reasons why site structure is important

In our opinion, there are two main reasons why site structure is an important ranking factor:

1 A decent structure makes sure Google 'understands' your site

The way your site is structured will give Google important clues about where to find the most important content. Your site's structure determines whether a search engine understands what your site is about, and how easily it will find and index content relevant to your site's purpose and intent. A good site structure could thus lead to a higher ranking in Google.

By creating a good structure, you can use the content you've written that has attracted links from others to help other pages to rank as well. Your site's structure can help spread some of that link juice to the other pages on your site. On a commercial site, that means that you can use the quality content you've written to boost the search engine rankings of your sales pages too.

2 A decent structure makes sure you do not compete with your own content

On your website or weblog, you will probably write multiple articles about similar topics. At Yoast, we write a lot about SEO. If we would write eight different articles about SEO, Google would not know which of the articles is the most important one. If we didn't solve this with our site structure, we'd be competing with our own articles

for a high ranking in Google. Solving this problem with a good internal linking structure will thus result in higher rankings.

Yoast Tip

Clean up your site once in a while! Read this post on how to clean up your site structure.

The ideal site structure

In theory, you should build your site as a pyramid. On top of the pyramid is your homepage and under the homepage are a number of other pages (categories). These pages in turn refer to even more pages.

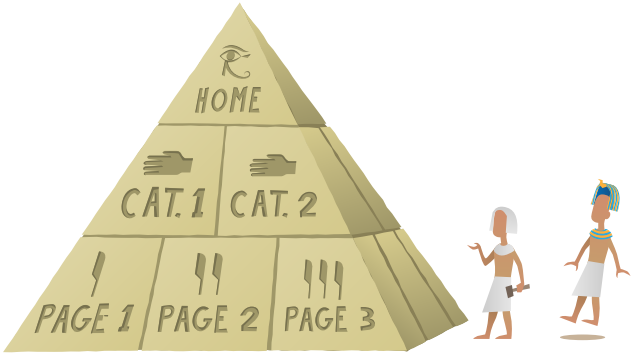


Figure 2: the structure of your website should look like a pyramid

Focus keyword and site structure

Using the Yoast SEO plugin allows you to choose a focus keyword and to optimize your post using the features of the Content Analysis tool. Some people seem to think that every post should focus on

the same keyword. This is not the case. In fact, every post should have a *different* focus keyword. Subsequently, posts about similar topics should be linked to each other.

Keyword strategy and site structure

Your keyword strategy and the way you structure your site should be related. In a proper keyword strategy, you would have thought about common, competitive keywords as well as more long tail niche search terms.

A similar dichotomy should be made in your site structure. Pages focusing on more common search terms should appear high in your pyramid, while pages optimized for more long tail keywords should appear in a lower part of your site structure. These long tail pages at the bottom of the pyramid should then be linked correctly to the pages higher in the pyramid. Read this post to learn more about long tail keywords.

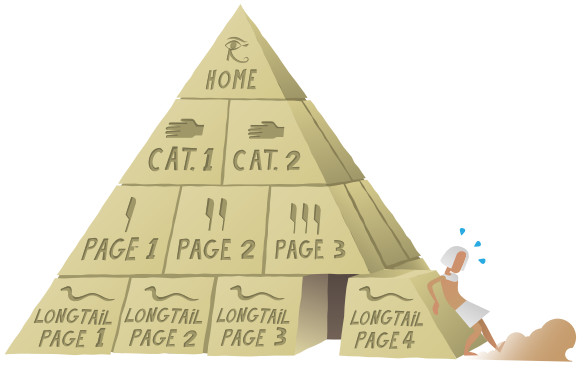


Figure 3: long tail pages should be at the bottom of the pyramid

Some technical SEO tips

About this chapter

In the previous chapters, we have given information about keyword research and site structure. The next step is making sure that Google can index your website properly and rank your site when people use these search terms. In this chapter, we will give the very basics of the technical aspects of SEO. On yoast.com, you can find numerous articles which dive much deeper into technical SEO.

Yoast Tip

If the technical stuff just isn't your cup of tea, we can also check all technical aspects of SEO for you in a Website review.

Check your crawlability

A condition for your website to rank in Google is that Google can crawl through your site. No crawling, means no saving of your site in the index and thus no ranking. A quick way of checking whether a page on your site *can* be spidered is by doing a Quix SEO check. Simply go to the Quix SEO check page, enter the URL and check the results. If it's not green, you've got stuff to fix!

Wrong canonical

If you have two pages holding the same content, that's problematic for your rankings. To fix this problem, Google introduced the canonical link. Matt Cutts explains this in this video. The basics are that a canonical link is used to indicate to Google which page you would like Google to display in the search results.

A canonical link should thus be used when two pages have the same content. For instance, if you have two URLs that have the same (or 95% the same) content, it would be beneficial to use a canonical link from the duplicate page to the main page (you can do this with the Yoast SEO plugin). If you don't know which one is the 'canonical' one: pick one. Not doing anything is more hurtful than just picking one.

The problem comes when you're setting the canonical wrong. This could occur for instance by inserting a link to a 404 page or simply a non-existing URL in that canonical link. Also, if your canonical link refers to a page which is actually very different from the original page, Google will get confused and your ranking may reduce as well. So make sure you use the correct canonical links. It's a powerful tool, use it wisely.

Breadcrumbs

Breadcrumbs show the path people take when they click through your site. They are often visualised on the top of a page so visitors can see how they navigated. A breadcrumbs path could be *Home » Clothes » Dresses*. Using breadcrumbs will allow Google to easily grasp the structure of your site and this could well result in higher ranking.

Yoast Tip

Breadcrumbs provide a way for the user to easily navigate up and down your site. Our Yoast SEO plugin makes this even easier!

Tools to check your site speed

In our Website reviews, we always check the speed of a website. Obviously, site speed is different when checking it from different locations. Just one reason why speed tools do not always provide the same results. That is why we use *all* these tools in our site reviews (and do not rely on just one):

- Google PageSpeed Insights
- Pingdom Tools
- Yslow
- WebPageTest

Google Page Speed Insights splits mobile and desktop, *Pingdom Tools* allows for multiple locations and *Yslow* has segmented the checks nicely. *WebPageTest* has a few main checks it grades nicely. We would recommend to use all of these tools to check your site speed. Combined they give the most complete overview of the speed of your website.

If you want to test your site speed, you can fill out the url of your website in these tests. They review the speed of this site and give a list of options on how to improve upon your site speed. Both Google and YSlow have reasonably good, though slightly techy, explanations on the various aspects that you can improve. The other tools show somewhat less explanation and are a bit harder to interpret.

User experience best practices

The user comes first

When optimizing your website for search engines, people often forget that even for Google, the user comes first. If a user or visitor can't find what he or she is looking for, they will hit the 'Back' button (bounce) to go back to Google and pick one of the other results. If this happens more than once, Google will value (read: rank) your website less for the keyword used to find your website. For that very reason, you want your website to be the best usable website possible. To achieve this, you can use a number of best practices, which we will clarify in this chapter. Our team of experts reviews hundreds of websites a year. If you would like an expert review on the User eXperience (UX) of your website, you are welcome to order a Website review.

Clarity

When a visitor finds your homepage for the first time, it should be immediately clear what your website is about, and what your products and/or services can do for the visitor. If possible, you even want to communicate your values and standards so the visitor can immediately bond with your company.

If you want your visitor to immediately bond with your company, you should have a killer homepage or a killer landing page. The main difference between the two is that a landing page is designed to convert the visitor into a customer *on that page*, where a homepage is much more like a warm welcome and a guide to different parts of your website.

Both a landing page as well as a homepage should include a clear introduction. In that introductory content, you will explain what your business is about, and what you can do for the visitors. Use layman's language. This is really important. Let me use our business as an example. Our pitfall is, since we are selling software products (plugins), we tend to go into technical details too quickly. Instead of focusing on all the brilliant technical stuff that's in our plugins, we need to explain how the plugins will make the business of our customer better, easier or more profitable. 'User first' is a popular saying, and in case of the introduction, this is very true.

Some website have an immediate focus on product images instead. While we strongly advise against using a slider, a lot of websites still use these. That doesn't mean that you can't add that introduction! If you would write an awesome tagline or slogan, and add that in the header of your website right above that slider, you could already trigger people to dig a bit deeper in your website.

Content focused design

Content is king, right? That also goes for the content placement in your design. If your sidebar screams *'Sale!'* or *'Subscribe!'* or is crammed with banners, chances are the user is distracted by these elements instead of being able to focus on the main part of that page: the content.

Figure 4: focus on your content

Unfortunately, you can't control content placement within your business model *all of the time*. Some websites simply 'need' that focus on these banners, as these banners are their main source of income. The dilemma in this is that more focus on the content will probably give you more visitors, which equals more banner revenue. But one can only assume that. You would have to test that somehow. As the effects of content focused design will only become visible after a certain period of time, this will be very hard to A/B test (more on tests later); you'll *probably* need to run the content focused variation for a couple of months, and your current revenue will need to allow for such a test.

Bottom line is that content focused design will at least reduce bounce rate. There will be no surplus of banners or other sales items scaring your visitor away, and it will be immediately clear by focusing on the actual content if your website is going to provide the answers your visitor is looking for. The right title and paragraph headers, and an image about the subject at hand will of course strengthen that belief.

Call-to-action

We can't ignore calls-to-action, when talking about user experience and conversion. A call-to-action is an element on a page, that triggers the user into an action. Oftentimes people think this has to be a button, but a text link or banner might be used as well.

The call-to-action of a page triggers the user to click to the next page, order your product or subscribe to your newsletter, just to name a few. There are a number of best practices for setting up a good call-to-action.

- **No clutter.** If you add a call-to-action, there shouldn't be other elements demanding the visitors attention. No social share buttons right below your call-to-action button.
- **Add urgency.** Why act now? Because there are 'only three slots available' or 'just one left'. Webshops use this a lot these days.
- **Size does matter.** Make sure people are able to view the button without any trouble. Don't go overboard; there has to be a balance so you won't become too aggressive.

- **Add trust.** A money-back guarantee will make it 'easier' for the visitor to click your order button. A great testimonial below your contact form will lower barriers to contact you.
- **Be clear about the benefits**. Mention them near your call-to-action. For instance, a short bulleted list naming the main advantages of your product or service can convince visitors to click the buy button..
- **Right below your price.** Adding the call-to-action right below your price will entice visitors to click the call-to-action (if they like your price). No time to hesitate.
- **Color is important.** If your entire design is using blue and orange, your call-to-action will stand out a lot more if it's green, for example. Using blue or orange will make the call-to-action blend in too much.
- **Be brief.** If your call-to-action is a button, don't use '*Buy this product now and get a 20% discount*' as the main button text. Use '*20% OFF*'. You get the drift.

Mobile design

Responsive design is a website design that adjusts to the viewport of the device you are using to visit that website. Most site templates can be made responsive by adding extra settings in the CSS or style-sheet of a website. We explained a bit more about this in a post on our website.

Designing your website for both desktop and mobile visitors is even more important since Google rolled out 'Mobilegeddon', as we tend to call it. It's an update in the way Google ranks websites in their mobile search results that takes into account if the website is 'fit' for a mobile device. Google even created a Mobile-Friendly test to help you find out if your website is mobile friendly.

As your mobile screen is much smaller, most responsive websites consist of just one column and a lot of scroll distance. This means that the setup of your mobile website probably needs to be just a tad bit different from your desktop site setup. You need to decide what details your mobile visitor is most likely to be looking for. If you have an actual shop location, people probably need address details or a phone number. List these in the first mobile view, so visitors don't have to look for them.

In order to decide on the information your visitors need, you might require some testing and/or a survey. Ask your (mobile) visitors what their primary tasks on your mobile website are and design your pages accordingly.

Now besides this so-called task based design, you need an escape. Just in case someone is really looking for something else. That escape should be provided by the addition of a search option in for instance a sticky menu (a menu that is always visible, even when scrolling down).

One more thing about mobile websites. Make sure these are blazing fast. As not all your mobile visitors will have Wi-Fi access, chances are they need to download all the MBs of your website while trying not to exceed their carrier data limit. Although mobile internet is getting faster and faster, if your site loads in less than a second, that will for sure improve user experience. Common problems that slow your site down are:

- the use of large images on your website, obviously;
- too much CSS and JS files being loaded in the head section of your website, before the content;
- slow loading share buttons, which is the case for a lot of social WordPress plugins, by the way;
- not compressing your website, for instance using Gzip.

There is much more to say about mobile UX, which we also mention in our article on improving mobile UX on our website.

A/B testing

A/B testing means you test your original page (A) versus a variation page (B), to see which version performs better. 50% of your visitors will be shown version A, and 50% will be shown version B. You will test for a certain amount of time (usually a week or two), and see what the differences are between the two versions. In general, the variation that made you more money or subscribers will be the variation you will go for.

However, you do have to actually think about what you're going to test. If you're testing wildly in hope of finding a gold nugget, A/B testing can be a real waste of time. That's why you need to use A/B testing to address important issues on your site. Before starting any A/B test, make sure you follow, or at least think about, these steps:

1. **Use your analytics.** You can use your analytics to find pages that have issues. Are you seeing pages that get (a lot of) traffic, but no sales for instance?

2. **Find your Intensive Care Pages.** You'll probably find more than one issue in your analytics. That's why you need to focus on your Intensive Care Pages. Intensive Care Pages are the pages that are the most important. These are usually your sales pages.

3. **Ideas of improvement.** Come up with a way to improve these pages for your visitors. You can do this by using surveys, or in some cases just common sense.

4. **Hypothesize.** You need to use hypotheses. This basically means you write down what you think will change and why this change will occur, according to you.

5. **Test the big changes first.** There's no need to get lost right away in testing every single small change you can think of. Combine most of your ideas (to go) into one big change. If this variation works better, you can then start optimizing for the smaller things.

6 **Double check your findings.** Some A/B testing tools, which we'll go into next, are known to have some issues. So always double check the findings of your tools to the actual hard data from your business.

You can read more about planning and hypothesizing your A/B test on yoast.com.

A/B testing tools

There are a few tools specifically for A/B testing out there, most of which are pretty similar. At Yoast we use convert.com, but there are other tools such as Visual Website Optimizer and Optimizely. It's up to you to choose whichever you prefer most, but our preference is clearly Convert Experiments (convert.com).

Apart from the tools performing the actual A/B tests, there are also a lot of tools that can help you find out where your problem areas lie. Here's a list of tools you might find handy to use:

- Google Analytics
- CrazyEgg
- HotJar

Data pollution

When running tests, you should always keep in mind that data pollution is a factor. It's always hard to know whether the result of your test is actually the result of your test. While running tests on a website, especially big sites, there are a lot of things 'polluting'

your data. This is because there are always things going on on and around your website; you're changing and tweaking things, you're blogging, you're being active on social media and so forth. These are things that can and probably will influence your data.

There's nothing we can really change about this, but you do have to keep it in mind. If you don't want this to happen, you basically have to run your test for at least a week and not do anything else to your website. For anyone running a business, this is next to impossible. The main takeaway here is that you shouldn't fool yourself. While the results are good guidelines and probably a good representation, the results will probably not translate 100% to real life. Of course this could work both ways. Maybe your winning variation performs worse than the test showed, but it could also perform better.

Checkout

While A/B testing is important, there are quite a few things that will generally work. This section contains a few best practices that your checkout should probably have. Obviously, don't mindlessly copy this, but it's a good place to start.

Progress bar

The progress bar is actually feedback to the visitors. It shows them how far along in the process they are and how much more to expect. Along with giving the visitors insight, it also makes people want to finish the steps, a process called 'gamification'. And to take this

positive feedback one step further, you could make your progress bar so you always enter in step 2 out of 4 of the checkout process. The reason behind this is that the visitor has actually already taken the biggest step: clicking the buy button. And a decision like this is something that should be rewarded.

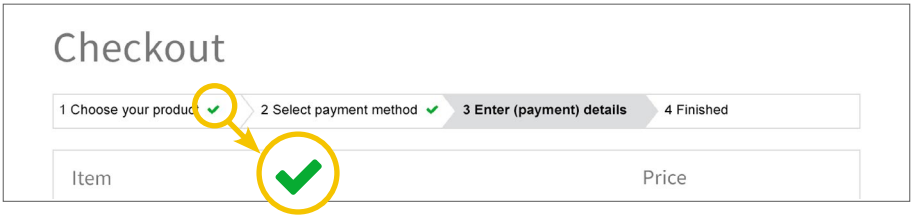


Figure 5: progress bar, gamification

Continue shopping

When people enter your checkout, you have to make sure this is not just a closed off section of your website. Allow people the option to keep shopping. A simple link to bring people back to the general shop can be enough.

Caching

It happens quite often that people add a product to a cart, but don't buy it right away. However, these people are likely to come back to your website to finish the transaction. To cater these people, it's important to increase the caching time of your shopping cart and checkout. This basically means your website will remember what's in the cart/checkout for a visitor for a longer period of time. Increase it to about 24 hours and you will have covered most of the people likely to come back.

Want to know more about user experience and conversion rate optimization? Check out our eBook UX & Conversion from a holistic SEO perspective!

SEO content writing

The basics of SEO copywriting

The text on your website is a very important factor in Google's algorithm. Google spiders your text and indexes the relevant words. Your text should thus be written in such a way that your keywords and search terms have a prominent place. However, using your keywords too often severely damages the readability of your text. In this chapter, we will give some practical tips and teach you the basics of SEO copywriting.

Writing your text: Think before you write

Copywriting is a true profession. It can be quite hard. And copy-writing in order to optimize your website for search engines makes the job even harder. Make sure the mission of your product is crystal clear. Write it down. Think hard about the message of your text. What do you want to tell your readers? And what is the purpose of your text? What do you want your readers to do at the end of the page? Write down the answers to these questions before you start writing.

SEO copywriting: Use your keywords wisely

Of course, the keywords and search terms you want to be found for will have a prominent place in your text. But make sure that you don't use these search terms too often. If you want to rank for a certain term – say children's clothes – and you write a text which has the words children's clothes in every sentence, chances are that your audience will be pretty annoyed. Your text just isn't

readable anymore. Keep in mind that Google wants to facilitate its users. Users want texts that are understandable, well structured and easy to read.

Yoast Tip

Not sure what keywords fit your audience? Check out this post about keyword research tools!

As a general rule of thumb: try to put down your search terms in about 1 to 2 percent of your text. Make sure your articles have a minimum of 300 words. So in an article of 300 words, you should mention your search terms 3 to 6 times. The minimum of 300 words isn't an exact science, of course, nor is the amount of keyword mentions, but 300 is a decent minimum number of words for an article that needs to show authority.

Yoast Tip

In our eBook Content SEO, we explain how to write well structured, high quality copy that has a clear objective.

Use of subheadings

If you write longer texts and want people to find their way in your articles, you should use subheadings. Headings help Google to grasp the main topics of a long post and thus can help in your ranking. Use of subheadings will probably let you get away with using the

keyword less. Subheadings will lead people, help them scan your page, and make the structure of your articles that much clearer. Make sure that your keywords are used in the subheadings, but do not put your keyword in every subheading (as it will make the text unreadable). You can read more about headings in one of Michiel's posts.

Make sure you add pictures or illustrations to your text which fit the content of your story. When you put a picture in your article, always try to add an alt tag (containing your keyword) that is still descriptive of the image.

Beware of over-optimization

Over-optimization in your copywriting can result in Google thinking you're trying too hard. Google will then push your website down in the search results. Always keep your audience in mind and write texts that are aimed at your audience and easy to read.

Yoast Tip

Writing great copy is a skill you can learn. In our SEO copywriting training we will help you master this skill. You'll find all our courses at Yoast Academy.

Content writing with the Yoast SEO plugin

Our Yoast SEO plugin actually helps you to write a SEO-friendly text. If you want the help of our plugin you should start by choosing your focus keyword and entering it in the appropriate box. This is the most important search term you want people to find this particular page for. Our plugin actually measures many aspects of the text you are writing and helps with making your text SEO-friendly. We will describe the most important ones:

1 The plugin allows you to formulate a meta description. This description has to be a short text which indicates the main topic of the page. If the meta description contains the search term people use, the exact text will be shown by Google underneath your URL in the search results.

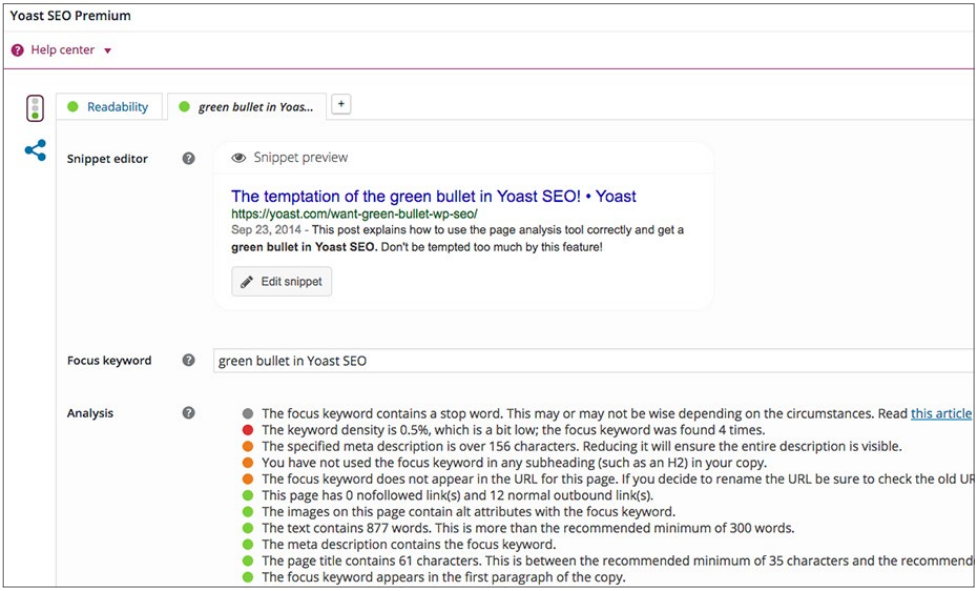


Figure 6: Yoast SEO Premium

2 The plugin analyzes the text you write. It calculates a Flesch reading ease score, which indicates the readability of your article. The Flesch reading ease score for example takes into account the length of sentences. The plugin also checks the use of passive voice, the length of sentences and paragraphs, and the use of transition words. It's a great tool to help you write excellent texts.

3 The plugin does a pretty big number of checks.It checks whether or not you used your keyword in important locations: the article-heading, the title of the page, the URL of the page, the content of the article and the meta-description. The plugin also checks the presence of links in your article and the presence of images in the article. It calculates the number of words and the density of usage of the focus keyword in the article. Above that, the plugin also checks whether or not other pages on your website use the same focus keyword, to prevent you from competing with yourself.

If you write a text which is relatively SEO friendly (based on the aspects mentioned before) the plugin will indicate this with a green bullet. Writing pages with green bullets will help you improve the ranking of the pages on your website. Plus, your visitors will get to read the quality content they came for.

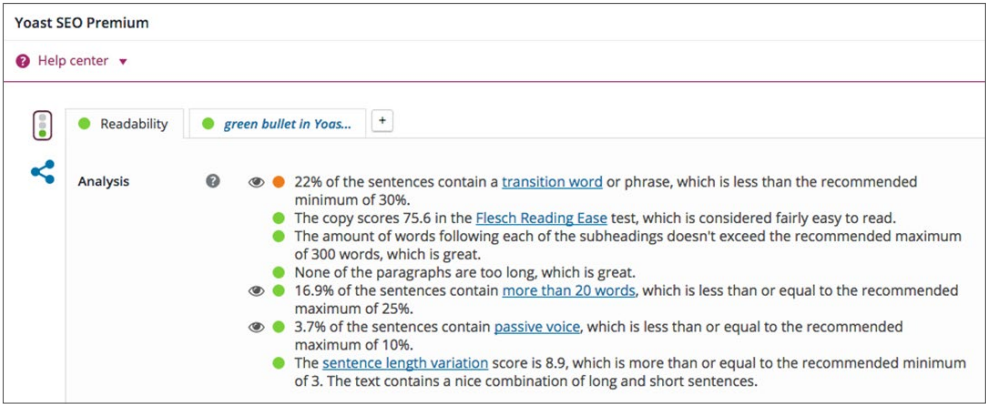


Figure 7: the (green) bullets in the Readability tab

Yoast Tip

The gamification of the page analysis within our Yoast SEO plugin helps you to upgrade the SEO-friendliness of your post. It can be a fun game to get as many green bullets as possible! However, be aware of The temptation of the green bullet!

Keeping your site up to date

There are many myths around having to keep your site updated for Google. It's not entirely clear whether regularly updating your website leads to a higher ranking in Google. But our advice is simple: make sure that you regularly work on your website.

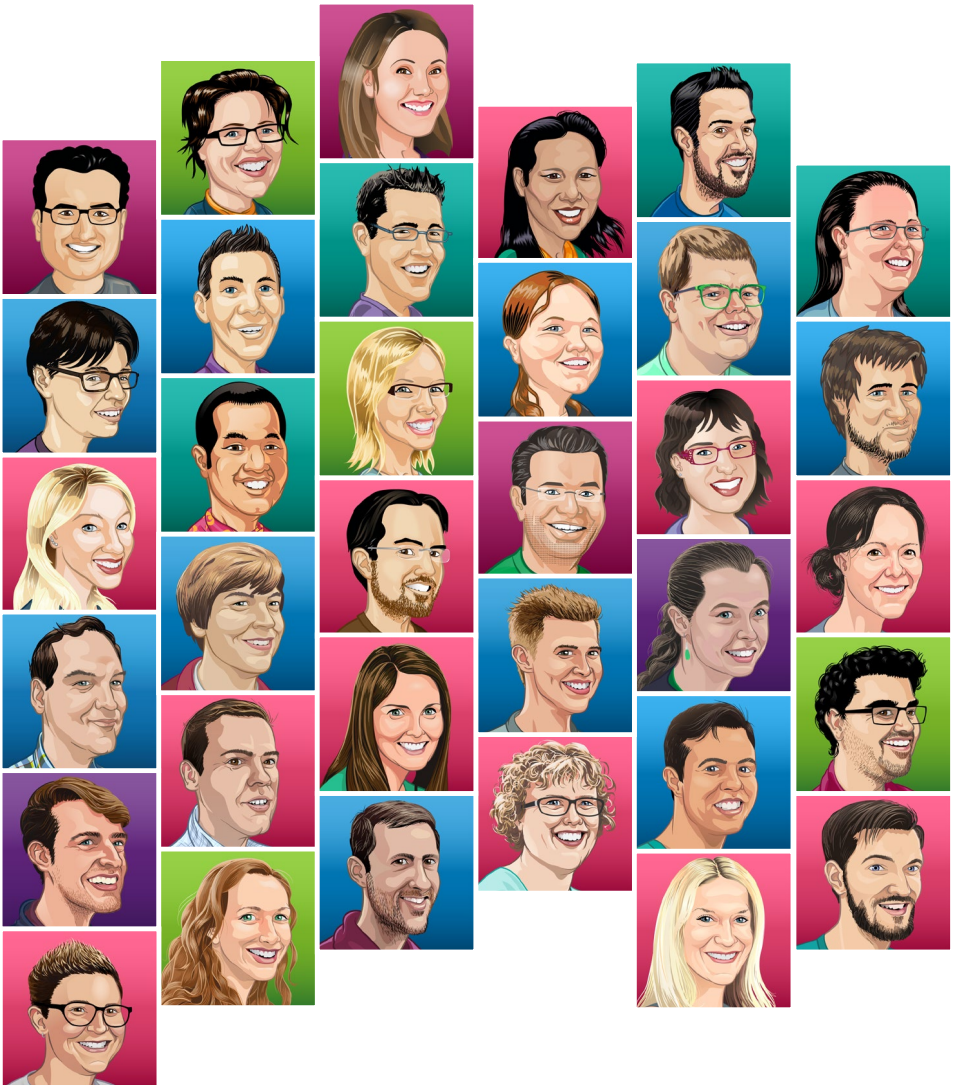
Adding an article regularly to your website will do the trick, which is why a blog is very useful. Adding actual and functional information to your website will give Google the idea that your website is alive. If it is not an active website, Google will crawl it less often and it

might become less appealing to Google to include the page in the search results. Next to that, make sure you keep your cornerstone content up-to-date.

Yoast Tip

Cornerstone articles are the most important articles on your website. Read more about this in chapter 11 of our eBook Content SEO!

About Yoast



It's is all about improving the web

Yoast helps you optimize your website in many ways. With our blogposts on yoast.com, we give lots of free advice on how to do this optimization yourself. For those who'd rather have professional advice for their website, we sell Website reviews. With a review like this, we'll go over your entire site to check every bit of it. Based on our review-findings, we give you some recommendations on how to optimize your site's SEO, user experience, conversion rate and more! Yoast also offers several plugins, free and premium. These plugins help to optimize your website in a very easy way. Our most important plugin is the Yoast SEO plugin, but we also offer Video, Local, WooCommerce and News plugins. Besides that, we offer eBooks and courses.

At Yoast we're constantly evolving and sharing our knowledge. We try to learn as much as we can and we're eager to share our findings with the rest of the world. At the moment, there are more than 30 people working at the office in Wijchen. And we've got more employees working for us from all around the world, to make sure we're able to give support on our plugins 24/7.

In the future, we hope to keep on growing and developing our company. The importance of a healthy and friendly work environment will stay our number one priority. With the enthusiasm of our employees and our users, we're looking forward to all the great things we'll be experiencing in the future.