



Search Engine Optimisation

Best practice advice for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to improve search results (and other methods of increasing your website traffic).

1. How do search engines work?
2. On-Site SEO
3. Off-Site SEO
4. Paid search results

1. How do search engines work?

Search engines try to catalogue the entire world wide web, and allow you to search that catalogue to find what you are looking for, providing results based on your search criteria.

Google is the most popular search engine but there are others such as Yahoo, Bing and DuckDuckGo.

WHEN A SEARCH TERM IS ENTERED INTO GOOGLE, IT DOES THE FOLLOWING:

- A. Discards all web pages that don't contain any terms/words *with the same meaning*.
- B. Lists the remaining results, based on an order determined by the following:
 - 1. The focus and relevance of the keywords on the page:
e.g. Is it used as a heading on the page, or in the actual page title or URL?
 - 2. The 'page rank':
Google then re-shuffles these results based on their 'page ranking', which is basically a measure of importance based on *incoming links*.

MORE ABOUT PAGE RANKING

Google awards every web page a ranking from 0 – 9 and places a high-ranking page over a low-ranking one when ordering the search results. The rank is determined by the number and quality of incoming links.

The 'quality' of an incoming link is based on the page rank of that linking page, so *while every website that links to your site will help to increase your page ranking, the higher their own ranking the better*.

BUT GOOGLE THEN PLACES PAID ADS ABOVE AND BELOW THESE ORGANIC SEARCH RESULTS (SEE PAID SEARCH RESULTS)

2. On-Site SEO

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) can be split into two groups: On-Site (optimisations made on your website) and Off-Site (factors outside of the website that are important).

THE MESSAGE FROM GOOGLE IS VERY CLEAR: DO NOT FOCUS YOUR CONTENT ON SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION. INSTEAD TRY TO DELIVER THE BEST POSSIBLE CONTENT FOR YOUR USERS.

...our advice for webmasters is to focus on creating high quality sites that create a good user experience.

Google's AI algorithm will try to 'read' your content exactly like a human being would, so sentences that don't make sense or don't read well should be avoided.

Matt Cutts
Google's head of search spam

TARGET YOUR KEYWORDS CORRECTLY

Decide on what key words and search terms you most want to target.

MORE CONTENT FOCUS = MORE TARGETED RESULTS

It's better to be on page 1 for a limited set of terms than on page 8 for dozens of terms

MAKE SURE THAT YOUR KEYWORDS APPEAR IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

The URL eg. www.yourwebsite.com/yourkeyword

The page <title> tag. This is the text which appears at the very top of the browser window.

In page heading(s) using <h1> <h2> <h3> tags etc.

The actual paragraph content (but not too many times... don't overdo it!)"

In the Meta tags. Although the Meta description is not used by Google as a search ranking factor, the meta description may still be picked up and displayed as the snippet of text underneath your search result and a well written description could result in more clicks.

AVOID SEO 'TECHNIQUES'

Google will penalise a website (drop in ranking) for anything that it deems as using a 'spammy' or a 'black hat' SEO technique such as:

- Lists of words or phrases that don't make sense.
- Words or phrases repeated too often.
- Tiny text or blocks of hidden/almost invisible text.
- Use of 'Link Farms' / Doorway pages / Duplicate Content etc.

We encourage you to focus on developing high-quality content rather than trying to optimize for any particular Google algorithm.

Amit Singhal
Head of Google Search

ON-SITE TECHNICAL FACTORS:

- Page loading speed is a factor, Google will penalise or downgrade slow loading websites.
- Avoid plug-in heavy sites, or overuse of frameworks where lots of unused javascript and CSS is being loaded.
- Use semantic HTML markup to help search engines understand the page structure, and for accessibility.
- Use modern optimisations such as lazy loading images and async loading scripts.
- Avoid heavy use of tracking and cookie loading, these can add a lot of page weight and loading time. Also avoid complicated Cookie consent instructions and obtrusive pop-ups by only using basic anonymous analytics tracking eg. No Facebook Pixels & Instagram cookies etc. *(do you really need all that tracking?)*
- Build a responsive and mobile optimised website - Google's algorithm is set to crawl as a mobile browser by default (it sees your website as a smart phone does).
- Optimise the Social Sharing settings to control the search snippet and image shown on social media sites.

3. OFF-SITE SEO

PAGE RANKING / IMPORTANCE / TRUSTWORTHINESS

More than ever the Search Engines are now prioritising what they deem to be the trustworthiness of the source. Google do this with their Page Ranking algorithm but the others also include a form of it in their algorithms — meaning that even if your website is optimised perfectly for the search term used, another website might be deemed more important or more trustworthy.

These factors include:

- The domain age (new websites can struggle against established competitors).
- How many external references the website has (incoming links).
- How important those referring websites are.

For example, a link from a well established and popular website can be very valuable — increasing your ranking and boosting your placement in search results.

SOME OFF-SITE SEO STEPS:

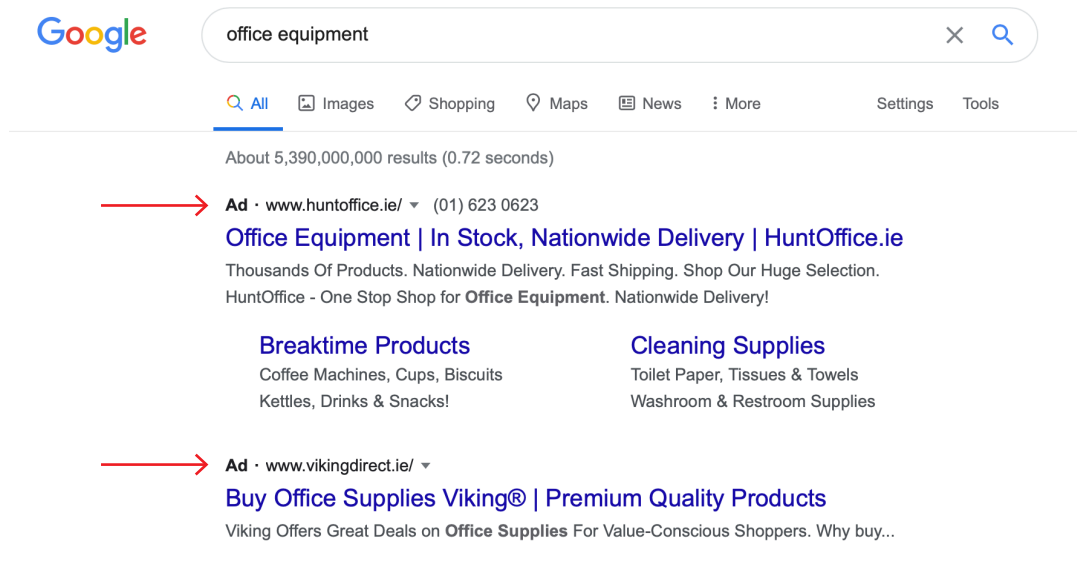
- Add an SSL cert to the domain (and set up a redirect so that it always uses https)
- Register a sitemap with Google Search Console and Bing
(*Yahoo and DuckDuckGo read from Bing*)
- Add a Business Listing to Google ('Google My Business')
- Get positive reviews on your Google Business Listing
- **Add as many incoming links to your website as possible**, from multiple points
Social Media accounts; Email Signatures; Newsletters; News & Industry websites; Other Websites & Blogs; Paid online advertisements.

Where possible, feature keyword text on your incoming links eg. 'See our Capel Street tool shop' or add a short description along with the link (Google will pick up on the surrounding context).

Decide on one primary address for your website and always link to that, for example always using https and www. [<https://www.fuel.ie> instead of <http://fuel.ie>]

4. Paid search results

Paid search results / Ads are the links that appear above and below the organic search results. They are currently only differentiated by the word 'Ad' appearing in front of the web address:



These results are created using Google Adwords.

Adwords is a 'pay per click' (PPC) service which means that you only pay when people click on your ad. You set your preferred price for the PPC and are then effectively in a bidding war with other competing adverts which have bid for those same keywords (in the same region). Whoever pays most (per click) will appear at the top of the paid search result.

You can set a monthly cut-off budget for your ad. It will then stop appearing in search results when you've reached that limit, so you won't rack up a huge Adword bill.

You start the process, write your own advert text and then choose which keywords will trigger the ads: the fewer keywords you choose, the more 'targeted' the search result will be.

TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING & COMMUNICATIONS

Of course there are also other pathways to your website, outside of Search Engines, and these can be crucial —especially for a new business.

Posters/Signage; Radio; TV; PR/Events etc. leading to word of mouth / reputation and direct incoming links (someone typing your web address into the browser directly).