The Ultimate SEO Guide 2018
Is SEO as hard as they say? Sure, it takes many factors into account, and it changes as often as Google updates their search algorithm. But when you know what you are doing, getting your site on page one isn’t just a dream anymore – it’s a definite possibility. Top positions in SERPs are for webmasters who give it their all while consulting a search engine optimization guide of the finest quality.

That’s why the team at WebCEO has prepared for you a complete guide to SEO in 2018. Its purpose is to help you optimize your website, to ensure the success of your business goals, and to make you confident in what you will accomplish this year.

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The purpose of SEO is to achieve high rankings for your site. Therefore, you should first to decide which keywords you will optimally rank for (you will loop back to reconsider this selection later). Thus begins your SEO journey.

**What are keywords?** They are words, phrases and sentences that users punch into search engines when they want to look something up online. Web pages that seem most relevant for those keywords will be displayed in search results. If your site is not relevant for any keywords, you will have no shot at page one for anyone whom you’d like to have come visit.

The goal of keyword research is to maximize your chances of landing your site in the top positions for relevant searches. Keep in mind that keywords alone won’t be enough to get there (unless you use a very unique keyword).

**How to choose keywords**

Based on their length, keywords can be categorized into short-tail and long-tail.

Short-tail keywords are single words and short phrases that don’t make the searcher’s intent immediately obvious. Here’s a simple example: “cake”. What goes through the mind of someone who Googles “cake”? Do they want to eat a cake? Do they want to bake one? Maybe they want to buy one, or perhaps read
about the history of cake? An ambiguous request will fill the SERPs with Wikipedia articles, recipe websites, a software company and lots of images, so your cake related site will be a needle in a heap of other, irrelevant sites - and the searchers will probably never even know your needle exists.

It’s a chaotic situation with few winners. The conclusion? Short-tail keywords alone will not make an SEO campaign. You will need bait for users with more tastyworms (or cake) on it. That’s where long-tail keywords come in.

You can tell a keyword is long-tail at a glance if it describes user intent clearly. For example, “Napoleon cake recipe”: you can be fairly sure why someone would type this in the search bar. They want to know how to make this specific type of cake. A clear, specified request makes a search easier both for the user and Google, as there will be much fewer irrelevant results. With less competition in SERPs, a site optimized for a long-tail keyword will be more visible (and then even more so if location is a relevant factor).

But a single long-tail keyword can bring you only so many visitors. To attract more, you will need to use variations of your target keyword. How users search for something varies from person to person, and you will need an SEO tool to discover all possible words and phrases. You can find all those variations and measure their usefulness for your SEO campaign with WebCEO's Keyword Suggestions tool.
The tool will display helpful information about each keyword in the list.

- Global monthly searches: how many times a keyword is searched for monthly all over the world.
- Local monthly searches: how many times a keyword is searched for monthly in specified locations.
- Search trends: a bar graph showing how many times a keyword has been searched for over the past 12 months.
- Keyword effectiveness index: an estimation of how easy it will be to rank for the keyword (the higher the value, the easier).
- Bid competition: a bar showing how many advertisers are bidding for the keyword.

With this data, you’ll be able to choose keywords that aren’t too competitive, are likely to be trending in the nearest future and will attract many visitors to your site.

**How to use keywords**

Once you’ve decided on the keywords, it’s time to use them on your site's pages. Search engines scan for them in the following places:

- Page’s URL address
- Page’s title tag
- H1-H4 tags
- Images’ filenames
- Images’ alt tags
• Body text

• Links’ anchor texts from other pages on the site (these are useful for the linked pages, not the linking ones)

It’s possible to misuse keywords and harm your SEO. Don’t do these things if you want to avoid a drop in site rankings:

• If you stuff your text with so many keywords that it begins to sound unnatural, Google will pick up on this and interpret it as an attempt to artificially increase your rankings. It won’t work.

• Stuffing the meta keywords tag with keywords.

• Stuffing the title and the description with keywords. It won’t incur a penalty from Google, but will make them look unattractive to users when the page appears in SERPs. They’ll be less likely to click on your search result.

• Hiding keywords - for example, by making them the same color as the background. In fact, don’t hide any sort of content on your site (unless it’s meant to be a deliberate Easter egg or you’re James Bond sending a secret message to Doctor No from Q).

**Tracking keywords**

Have you put your keywords in all the places they should be? Well done. The final stage of keyword research is monitoring how well your site ranks for the keywords you use. It helps a great deal to know how your competitors rank for them, too.

[WebCEO’s Rank Tracking tool](#) displays just that.
This information will give you a firm grasp of your progress at all times. Your current position in search results indicates how much you have done for your SEO and how much you still have to do, which is why tracking your keywords is an absolute necessity. If the rankings just won’t go up for any particular keyword no matter what you do, it’s a valid tactic to exclude it from your campaign and try ranking for something different. By looking at your Dangerous Competitors report on WebCEO, you can determine that, if “irrelevant” websites like popular chain stores and industry journals dominate the rankings enough to push your site into oblivion, you will need to optimize your site for more specific searches, such as more location oriented searches.
Why is high-quality content so crucial for SEO? That’s because Google (like any other search engine) has a purpose: to offer users the best websites that exist online. They measure a website’s worth to users by several criteria, one of them being content quality. A web page’s position in SERPs depends on how well its content meets Google’s requirements. Those requirements aren’t arbitrary; they are based on what appeals to the majority of users, or what sort of content they deem high-quality.

Of course, it’s entirely up to you what to create on your site. You have total control there, as long as it’s legal. But when SEO is involved, there are recommendations that will increase your chances of ranking high. Your content should be:

- **Helpful.** Users Google things because they want something specific. Create content that will fulfil their wants and needs in the best way possible.

- **Factual and up-to-date.** Incorrect information isn’t helpful, and in some cases it can be harmful.

- **Visually appealing.** 90% of information goes to our brains through the eyes. If you want to get your users hooked on your content and keep them coming, make it enjoyable.

- **Well-formatted.** Is the goal of the page to impart knowledge to your
visitors? Then keep it professional, readable and without grammar mistakes.

- **Original.** Taking chunks of text from other sites or duplicating them completely will cause Google Panda, one of Google’s algorithms, to lower your whole site’s rankings - not just the offending page’s. Extreme cases can lead to your site getting removed from Google’s index or a copyright lawsuit from the content’s rightful owners. Not to mention that users aren’t interested in reading the same things on multiple sites. Everyone will appreciate you a lot more if your content is unique.

- **User-friendly.** Strive to provide users with the best possible experience on your site. Some elements like screen-blocking intrusive interstitials can ruin the experience and make users not want to come again.

## Optimization for semantic search

When writing content, it’s highly recommended to go into detail about your topic. Not only will it improve your content’s quality, it will also make Google’s job of digging through websites easier. Why does it matter? Because search can be complicated by those pesky things called homonyms.

For example, let’s say there’s a web page optimized for the word “china”. Without knowing the details, can you tell if it talks about the stuff they use to make teapots, or the country China? Context is desperately required there, especially since search queries aren’t case sensitive. Without it, Google risks giving users something they don’t need.

You can help Google by writing text optimized for semantic search. It means including words that are often used together with your keywords of choice, thus providing the much necessary context both for users and search engines.
Google Panda and how to avoid it

Google uses several algorithms to separate good websites from the bad. Panda’s job is to find sites with low-quality content and lower their ranking positions. Naturally, getting hit by Panda is a disaster for your SEO and business strategy, so you should avoid it at all costs and work hard on your content.

Google Panda targets sites guilty of:

- Duplicate content: copied from other sites or reused on multiple pages of your own site.

- Unhelpful content: sites with content that is thin and/or provides no value to visitors.

- Dubious content: sites with content that comes from unverified sources.

- Low-quality user-generated content: for example, forums and blogs where users post content of poor quality.

- Content that does not match the search query that found it.

- Having more ads than actual content.
Hyperlinks connect web pages internally and make it possible to travel between them quickly. Being a major part of the Internet and any website, they naturally play a role in optimizing websites for search engines, too. Here’s how they affect SEO:

**Internal links make your site usable by humans.**

Unless your website consists of exactly one page, it must have internal links to ensure swift navigation between the pages that users are supposed to visit. A poorly designed internal linking structure can spell disaster for your business goals; lacking one altogether will make them impossible. So plan out the user’s journey on your domain. Rule of thumb: make sure you can jump from any page to any other page in three clicks or less.

**Internal links make your site’s pages visible to search engines.**

Links are used by search engines to crawl and index pages; this is true for both internal and cross-domain links. A page with no links pointing to it will not show up in search results. With few notable exceptions like robots.txt, there should be no unlinked (or linked with a “nofollow” tag) pages on your site.
Internal links pass authority (or “link juice”) between pages.

A page’s authority is determined by search engines based on how well it’s optimized. When a page with high authority links to a different page, it causes the latter’s own authority to increase, and it may appear higher in search results for its keywords. That doesn’t mean you should choose your most authoritative page and link from it to every other: the more outbound links on a single page, the less authority they pass individually. A well-designed internal linking structure will ensure every important page is getting as much link juice as possible.

You can check all of your pages’ authority in WebCEO’s Page Authority Analysis tool. Use it to plan the flow of authority across your site.

Internal links’ anchor texts help pages rank.

When search engine crawlers scan links, they associate their anchor texts with linked pages, effectively turning them into keywords. This is why you should avoid using generic and contextually unrelated anchor texts like “click here” in your internal links - it would make them less effective SEO-wise than they should be. Check all your anchor texts in WebCEO’s Link Text Analysis tool. It can detect even links without any text inside them – that’s definitely something that needs improvement.

You might be tempted to stuff your pages with lots of internal links with keyword-heavy anchor texts. Be aware that Google does not like webmasters who try to ‘game’ SEO. Any unnatural-looking links, internal or otherwise, are ground for manual actions from Google.
When your business goals involve driving customers to a certain place - for example, to the office where you conduct business - it’s best to make your site rank especially well in that specific location (be it a town, a city, a state or a country). It’s called local SEO: location-focused SEO activities. This type of SEO is strongly recommended to brick-and-mortar businesses: they need to be relevant to the local population, and search engines need to provide relevant results to prospecting customers.

The steps for performing local SEO on your site are as follows:

**Local keywords research**

On-site optimization begins with keywords, and it’s also the case with local SEO.

Let’s say you own a carpet cleaning business in Boston. How would someone in Boston look you up online? *Carpet cleaning Boston* is the most obvious keyword that comes to mind, and also the most perfect. What makes me so sure? It’s long-tail and captures user intent fully: what they want (a carpet cleaning service) and *where* they want it (in Boston). It’s safe and effective to optimize a local company’s site for this kind of keyword.
Remember to use WebCEO’s Keyword Suggestions tool to get variations of your keywords and measure their usefulness. To make the tool even more effective for local SEO, choose your location in Settings and watch the Google local search statistics column in the table (click at the top of the column to sort from the most popular keywords searched for locally, to the least popular).

If you are well-versed in your niche and know how to write specialized content, you’ll give your site a great advantage. Your prospective customers will see you as a professional, and search engines will appreciate what you do for semantic search.

Be sure to monitor your keywords’ local rankings in WebCEO’s Rank Tracking tool. You can choose the location in Settings -> Search engines -> Add a search engine.
Mobile optimization

Thanks to mobile Internet, the nearest shopping place is only a single voice command away. If you want to be easily found that way, include optimization for mobile devices in your local SEO. You’ll need it to attract all the Internet users who have converted to mobile – and they are a significant majority.
Optimize your site for proper display and easy use on mobile devices. Run a mobile-friendliness test on your site's pages with WebCEO's Mobile Optimization tool and see if you can improve them.

**Name, address, phone number**

Also known as NAP - the holy trinity of local SEO that’s used to identify your business on the Internet. NAP will serve you best as the anchor text of a backlink pointing to your site, but an unlinked mention is useful, too.

The most important requirement to NAP is consistency. Your company's name, address and phone number must be the same everywhere they are posted. If they aren’t, it will cause confusion both for your potential customers and for search engines who associate your NAP with your site. Always write it correctly, and if it changes, you’ll have to edit it everywhere it exists.

**Google My Business**

If you Google a company, you will most likely see it on a map right in the search results, with an address and phone number. Handy, isn’t it? How can you do the same for your own company?

You will need to submit a listing to Google My Business. Fill it out with as much information as you can, including your company’s NAP, open days and hours, photos of the building and website URL. Doing so will make your company's information appear in Google Maps, Google+ and organic search results. It will even get its own knowledge graph.
Structured data

Google Maps and structured data are a deadly combo. One shows you on the map, the other shows searchers all important information about your business without having to click any further. All you need to do is add some extra code on the pages you want to empower, and the information will be displayed right in search results. The catch is, you have to get those pages on Google's page one first.
Structured data comes in different formats, but Google recommends using JSON-LD and Microdata.

**Local link building**

There are many business directories (like the famous [Yelp](https://www.yelp.com)) where you can submit your company’s listing. Users often turn to those directories before Google to find the service they need, so it’s crucial to build your presence on them. Submit your listings only in the directories which are relevant to your business’s niche. The context around your backlinks must be of relevance to your site, or they will hurt your SEO.

**Gather positive reviews**

Customers trust each other. A single review can make or break a business. Give your customers the best service you can offer and then ask them to leave a review on your site - most of the time, they will. Gather as many positive reviews as you can and show them off and online, and many more customers will flock to you.
Technical errors are a nuisance. Not only do they disrupt the work of a website, they also ruin the user experience - an important Google ranking factor. That’s why it’s imperative to fix errors on your site as soon as they appear, or they’ll damage your campaign and rankings.

But when you have a big website with hundreds or dozens of pages, it’s humanly impossible to visit them all and manually look for errors. Fortunately, you have SEO tools for that. Scan your website for errors with WebCEO’s Technical Audit tool to find all issues of the technical sort. Remember to scan regularly!

Another technical aspect that affects rankings and user experience is the site’s loading speed. When a site is taking its sweet time to load, most users will just close the tab before it’s done and look for what they want elsewhere. Mobile users are the most impatient of all: they tend to bounce back after 3 seconds of waiting. This bouncing is a signal to Google to rank the site lower.

Content is king, but don’t overdo it. Avoid filling your pages with excessive content. Minify all the code (HTML, CSS, JavaScript) you use on your pages. If you have images, do all you can to minimize their file size. Compress, resize and pick the most optimal file format for them to reduce their loading time.
Run speed tests on your site’s pages in WebCEO’s Page Speed Insights tool. It will give you a score on a scale of 100 and useful tips for improving your website’s speed.
Link building is one of the biggest parts of SEO. The more credible websites link to yours, the more traffic you receive and the greater your chances of ranking high (provided the links can be crawled by search engines).

In an ideal world, all backlinks come from authoritative sources and point to content that is just as authoritative. We aren’t quite there yet, but it describes the most rewarding way of building links, and it’s possible right now. Naturally, Google is interested in all parties involved playing fair, so not every backlink will be good for your site. Let’s start with ways of acquiring backlinks that are SEO-friendly.

**How to build links**

The least complex strategy looks like this:

1. Create on your site content that is of high quality and valuable to users.

2. Share the link to this piece of content where lots of users can easily find it. Social media are a safe bet; forums and blogs are good *only* if your link makes a valuable contribution. Note that those links will likely be nofollow.

3. Wait for users to share the link to your content on their sites.
It’s the safest way of building links, but also the slowest, and the rewards are minimal. Methods where you involve yourself more directly are likely to result in more backlinks secured. Some of them are:

- **Guest blogging.** Offer an original piece of content to an interested party and include a link to your site. Make sure your niche matches with the linking site’s.

- **Become a source for a reporter’s article.** Services like HARO exist to help reporters and credible sources meet and join forces in creating articles. Keep in mind that they accept only the most professionally written texts.

- **Link reclamation.** Sometimes people mention your site in their content, but don’t link to it for whatever reason. You can reach out to those people and ask them to add a link. Find your unlinked mentions with WebCEO’s Web Buzz Monitoring tool.

- **Broken link building.** When a web page disappears or changes its URL, all links leading to it become broken. If you find a broken link that used to point to a piece of content similar to what you have on your own site, you can contact the person who made the link and offer a worthy replacement. Look for such links in WebCEO’s Competitor Backlink Spy tool.

- **Online interviews.** This door doesn’t open to everyone; you need to have at least some renown in your niche and expertise to answer any questions. But if you do, then a site that does interviews with people from your niche might accept you as an interviewee.

- **Events and meetups.** The requirements are the same as with online interviews, but you will have to speak in front of the public in real life. If the host runs a site and will release an announcement, update or synopsis about the event, your site is very likely to be mentioned in it.
• **Link round-ups.** Some news sites and blogs regularly release updates which are collections of links pointing to other resources. Before the next round-up, contact the people in charge of it and offer them a piece of your content. It has to be fresh.

Ingenious minds can come up with many more link building tactics. What strategy do you prefer?

**How not to build links**

Below are the wrong ways to build links that will hurt your site's rankings and, in the most extreme cases, get it removed from Google’s index.

• Spammy backlinks. Don’t put links to your site where they don’t belong. Places where you can (but shouldn’t) spam links are sites that support user-generated content, such as blogs and forums. This includes both manual and software-assisted spamming.

• A sudden, irregular increase in backlinks. If you aren’t a big, established brand, it’s next to impossible to build more backlinks than you normally do overnight, so Google will be suspicious of you.

• Link schemes. Buying links, exchanging them for links from your own site, or trading them for goods and services are against [Google’s Webmaster Guidelines](https://developers.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps). While keeping this in mind, note that some reputable PR service content is indexed, although you paid for it. Some major directories require a payment for listings and these listings often count as quality backlinks.

• Links from contextually unrelated web pages. If you run an SEO blog, would it normally get a backlink from a site selling stuffed animal toys?

• Links from low-quality sites. They aren’t as convincing as backlinks from high-quality, authoritative sites.
Hidden links. They are a blatant attempt to game SEO, and Google hates cheating.

Admittedly, link building isn’t 100% under your control - sometimes backlinks are created without your involvement. If you notice a sudden drop in rankings or manual actions from Google, one of the possible reasons could be low-quality backlinks. Use WebCEO’s Toxic Pages tool to bring up a list of all backlinks that are likely to be harmful (the criteria of which are fully up to you in the Settings).

Once you’ve found all toxic links, time to get cracking. Reach out to people who created those links and ask them to take them down. If it doesn’t work, use the last resort: the Google Disavow tool. Check the boxes next to all the links in the Toxic Pages tool that you want to disavow and press the Report button to generate a file with them, then submit this file in Google’s Disavow page.
We’ve talked about earning backlinks, finding online mentions and collecting positive reviews from customers. Those are all factors Google uses to rank your site. But why does Google treat them as such? It’s because they are proof of the authority your site is gaining. Every signal of approval made on the Web contributes to building your online presence.

Page one of Google isn’t the end of brand building, though. It’s possible to land in the top results and watch all the traffic go to your competitors because their brands are more famous. Don’t rest on your laurels, or your glory will not last! Sites with a low click-through rate don’t stay on page one for long. Once you’ve started building your brand, commit to it and never stop.

**Research your target audience**

Those people will make you king one day. Your relationship with them begins with getting to know them. Answer these questions: who is your website for? What are their needs? What can you do to satisfy those needs? Ultimately, what will you give them in exchange for high rankings and conversions?
Research your competitors

Don’t build yourself in a vacuum; you need to know your rivals before you can surpass them. There’s a lot you can analyze:

- Their keyword rankings. They most likely use some of your keywords; how well do they rank for them? This factor will decide if you should compete against them in the first place (you obviously shouldn’t if they all rank better than you do for a given set of keywords). Once you’ve picked your opponents, monitor how their rankings compare against yours in WebCEO’s Rank Tracking tool.

- Their on-site performance. How did they optimize their websites? What kind of user experience do they offer? Maybe you can learn a trick or two from their book.

- Their social media activity. What kind of content do they post on their pages and how often? How engaging is it? Can you create something better? If you are serious about competing with them, be sure to use WebCEO’s Social Engagement tool to compare your social metrics to theirs.

- Their link profile. Find out who links to your competitors with WebCEO’s Competitor Backlink Spy. It will give you many potential sources to gain backlinks for yourself. You can spend all year just working with this tool.

Create your brand’s unique identity

Every brand must be unique, if only to avoid copyright issues. On a more serious note, users won’t be interested in a brand that resembles (or worse, rips off) something they already know. Make it special. Create a one-of-a-kind combination of a unique name, memorable design and a likable personality that will connect you with people. Share a story about how your brand came to be and the challenge that inspired its creation - it will make your audience feel like
participants in your journey. Show them that there's a living person (or people) just like them behind the website.

And make yourself a cool logo, too.

**Build your reputation**

This is the stage where you roll out into the wild and carry out your self-imposed duties. When visitors come to your site, help them leave with a sense of fulfillment - that’s the basis of making a site prosper.

Leverage social networks to engage with users in more places. Post regularly and refer to [WebCEO’s Social Engagement tool](#) in order to measure your activity and progress. Blogs can be used for the same purpose as social media, although your own blogs will require SEO just like your main website.

Most importantly, be in control of your online reputation and watch out for things that could jeopardize it. Not just your personal blunders; keep an eye on your brand’s online mentions, especially the negative ones. If [WebCEO’s Web Buzz Monitoring tool](#) picks up any, you should do everything in your power to come out of the situation unscathed (be gracious, generous and helpful to any disgruntled customers).
The mobile Internet has become huge in this decade. Over 50% of all online searches are now done via a mobile device. Rest assured this trend will not go away: the mobile Internet now dictates standards for SEO and user experience. Add to this Google’s plans to launch their mobile-first index, and it should make for a convincing argument to optimize your site for mobile.

Start with using WebCEO’s Mobile Optimization tool to evaluate your site’s current state. The tool has several built-in recommendations, but it will be faster to just give them to you here.

- **Responsive design.** A responsive website can adapt its content to a screen of any size, ensuring all elements occupy the space inside the display organically, saving users excessive scrolling in all directions and not creating a mess.

- **Fast loading speed.** Nobody likes a slow-loading site, but mobile users are the most impatient of all. Make sure nothing hinders your loading speed. Optimize your images, minimize the code in pages and avoid redirects. Test your site’s performance in WebCEO’s Page Speed Insights tool.

- **Accelerated mobile pages (AMP).** You can speed up a page tremendously by removing all JavaScript and leaving the bare minimum of HTML and
CSS. Consider doing this on pages which you can afford to strip of the code.

- **No intrusive interstitials.** Some popups are useful and necessary, like those that inform you about using cookies or which ask visitors for their age before letting them view the content. Other interstitials just block the screen and annoy users even more than slow websites. It’s best to not use them at all, but if you have to, make them unobstructive and easy to dismiss.

- **Large, readable text.** Mobile screens are small, so you shouldn’t make users zoom in every time they visit your site. Use large enough fonts to save them time, especially above the fold where you are supposed to catch their attention.

- **Touch elements.** If you have buttons or checkboxes on your site’s pages, there are two things you should do. A) Make them large enough to touch without missing and B) make some distance between them. It’s pretty frustrating to miss the OK button on the first try, but it’s even worse to press Cancel by mistake.