

The first and foremost rule in search engine optimization is to offer value, but that is subject to feelings and emotions, hence – it's always biased. In order to rank well within search engines – you have to provide clear signals that your pages are better than those of your competitors. There are a lot of strategies, tactics and best practices of how to achieve this, but the most important thing you can do is – optimize your content, make sure that everything you own and control is simply excellent. Also, remember that search engines will rank the most important of the most relevant pages. This means that, for a search query, they will first pick up a set of relevant pages and then display them in result pages according to their importance and notoriety.



On page optimization workflow

On-page SEO is all about Creating or Enhancing relevancy signals for a webpage with respect to the search query. Having some experience in optimizing and promoting websites, we were able to deduce few rules that are essential and that helped us to prioritize our work process and increase our results. We hope these rules will help you too.

Before you start writing any piece of content (including title, meta description, image name etc.), you should know which problem you're trying to solve, that is – what are people really looking for and which expressions have most search volume. You should also take the competition into account and choose the perfect balance between the most searched keywords and those with less competition.

You can do this research using plenty of tools, but the most popular ones are offered by Google (Search, Analytics, Webmaster Tools, AdWords, Trends etc.).

When analyzing the competition – start by googling for the super-keyword and pay attention to their title, meta description, URLs and headlines and then make sure to create better versions. It is of utmost importance to have great URLs, titles and descriptions, as these are the things that make a search engine result snippet.

A webpage should be tailored
around just one family of keywords.

One super-keyword

it should be optimized around one keyword (let's call it the super-keyword), and all the connected keywords (variations, synonyms etc.), which will be connected to each other

Good text amount

this is the page you wish to rank for with all the search queries in the same family, hence you need to have a decent amount of text that covers the topic well

One keyword family

relevancy signals should only include keywords in the targeted family, to avoid competition between different pages, which is also known as "keyword cannibalization"

Referring to keywords location, remember:

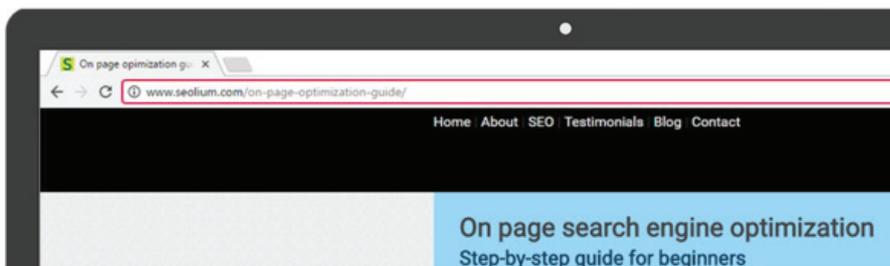
Use keyword variations (instead of just the super-keyword) in prominent locations.

The usage of keywords variation is less riskier (because of “over-optimization” penalties). It will help you to cover as much of the semantic field as possible (more long-tail keywords). Also, it’s good to know that long terms are better than short terms (it would be easier to rank for the super-keyword if we used it everywhere)

With the above in mind, it is important to prioritize keywords (based on their estimated search volume).

URL

The URL address should describe as closely as possible what the page is about. Users should be able to understand whether the page will fulfill their needs without loading it in their browsers. The URL address suffix (the last part, not including the domain name or parent folders) should be the shortest summary of the page. The URL address prefix (domain name + parent folders) should provide context.



◀ This is the URL

Try to meet the following requirements:

- keep URL length under 100 characters
- include the super-keyword
- separate words with dashes (-) rather than with underscores (_)
- be descriptive and memorable for the user
- avoid keyword stuffing
- avoid dynamic parameters (sortBy, sessionId, lat, lng etc.)

- avoid words without search potential (info, tag, article etc.)
- avoid special characters (except for languages such as Russian, Chinese etc.)
- make the URL shareable (same content should load no matter who, where from or when loads it)

As a conclusion, we can deduce the following rule:

The URL is the shortest summary of the page.

URL (the Uniform Resource Locator) is an address to a resource on the Internet. This element is important for On page optimization.

Target keyword

The URL should contain the target keyword, that will be relevant and representative for all page content. It is recommended for better crawl and good user experience. Always follow this rule!

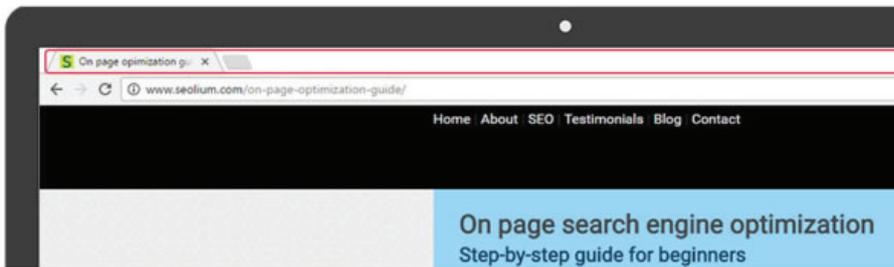
Give accessibility

Do you like how your URL looks like? It should be clear, readable and accessible for users (because the easier a URL is to read for humans, the better it is for search engines – it is an evident fact!)

The correct length

Of course, there is no fixed rules, but you should take into consideration the following factor – a short URL is better than a long one, because it looks more accurate, natural and is easier to remember.

Your title tag appears at the top of the browser and as the headline in search engine result snippets. Social networks also use it as part of the post when someone shares that URL. For these reasons it has both a huge SEO value (it's one of the most important ranking factors), and a "clickability" value (it serves as an incentive for people to click). You should try to find the perfect balance between excellent SEO and excellent user-friendliness.



◀ This is the
Page Title

Some tips:

- keywords should be closer to the beginning
- length between 50 and 60 characters
- should be unique
- should be compelling
- use the brand name (at the end) only if it will increase the click-through)

- avoid words without search potential
- avoid keyword stuffing
- avoid special characters (except for languages such as Russian, Chinese etc.)
- make the URL shareable (same content should load no matter who, where from or when loads it)

Considering the above tips, remember the next rule:

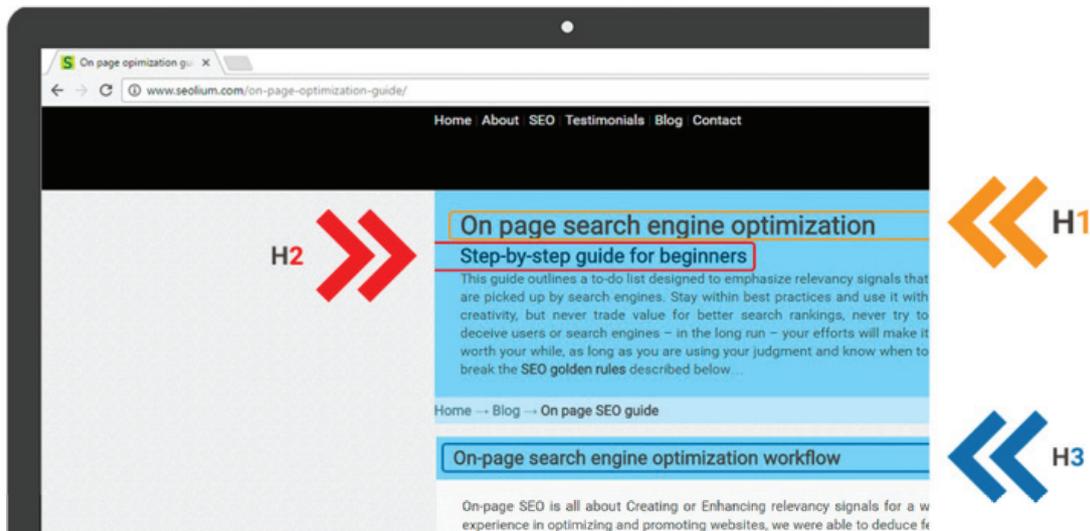
The title tag is the second shortest summary of the page.

Title tags are the document definitions, that you can see in various places around the web, including the tab in your web browser. That elements and are used to tell search engines and visitors what any given page on your site is about.

Headings

Usually they are implemented as HTML H1, H2... H6 tags, but in fact nowadays search engines are getting better and better at interpreting CSS and Javascript, so headings can really be implemented as anything. It's a classic scenario when size matters.

These are emphasized text pieces (titles, subtitles, etc.) which show human visitors and search engines the most important "takeaways".



Spiders pay a great deal of attention to the words used in headings, that's why they should always accurately describe the content below.

The H1 tag (the biggest headline) should appear at the top-center of the page and should be the first thing people see when they land on it. It should be tailored as a “synonym” (instead of the same text) of the title tag, hence – include the super keyword, or some close variation. There is no limitation to the length, but they should not be too long and should usually fit inside one or two lines.

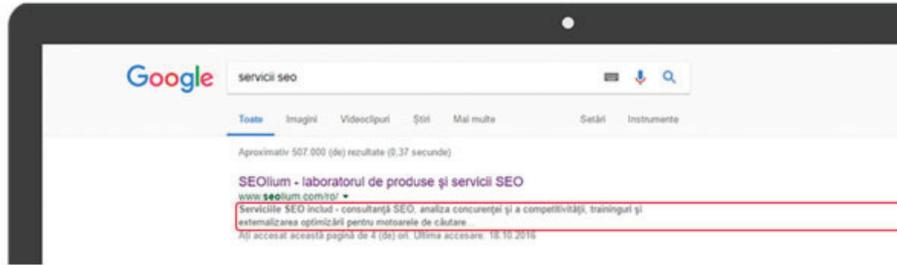
Some tips: Headlines should clearly communicate the subject of the page they are introducing.

Remember that the page headlines are another reflection of your content.

The headline (H1) is the third
shortest summary of the page.

Considering the above tips, remember the next rule:

Meta description is a summary of the page and appears as part of a search result snippet, below the page title. It helps people decide whether to click on your site, or other sites above or below. The key is to experiment until you get satisfying click-through rates.



**This is the
Meta Description**

Try to meet following requirements:

- length of 150-160 characters, but preferably no more than 156
- include the super keyword once closer to the beginning and some variation / synonym after it, in conversational format, user-friendly and easily understandable

- provide valuable, compelling information to make people visit this page
- should be unique within the domain (but also the whole WWW)
- avoid keyword stuffing

Also note that sometimes it's a good idea not to write a meta description at all, but this is subject to experiments. When search engines don't find a description – they will generate one and use that inside the snippet. This is sometimes better because the auto-generated description uses content pieces that contain the search query, thus is relevant and compelling to the user. It's important to understand that search engines don't use meta description as an SEO ranking factor. At all. It merely serves as an incentive for users to click on this search result, and not on others so there's absolutely no need to stuff it with keywords.

The meta description essence it is reflected by the following rule:

The meta description is the
fourth shortest summary of the page.

Meta description it is the HTML attribute that provide a brief summary or an explanation of the page content. It is used on search engine result pages (SERPs) to display preview snippets for a given page. Even if it hasn't a significant role for SEO, it is an important factor of user-friendliness. It should compelling, super-informative and attractive for the visitors.

Content

We can say that content runs the site. Or that content is King. This is what ultimately drives people to the website, keeps them happy, makes them share it and spread the word.

The user searched for something, then reviewed a list of search results, analyzed URLs, titles and meta descriptions etc. then decided to visit your page. Here is when things really get interesting.

One important rule to keep in mind is that a user will spend 2 or 3 seconds to decide if what they searched for is actually here. This is a critical time frame and everything in front of the user should be crafted to ease that decision.

The headline is the first thing they will see. First paragraph is second and only then will they decide whether or not this page is a good fit for their needs. If they bounce back to the search engine result page ("pogo-sticking") – your rankings will be hurt. If they stay – the content still has to prove itself worthy.



There are no strict rules of how to write great content, but it indeed needs to be great. One thing to remember though – the look and feels should be designed in such a way that the user shouldn't need to read every single piece of content in order to get the basic ideas. Instead – he or she should just be able to scan the page and easily extract the most important takeaways. You can achieve this by playing with headlines, bolded texts, internal table of contents, ordered or unordered lists of elements, etc. as long as you just need to read these and get the idea.

Here are some tips and tricks:

- write content for people, not for search engines
- write at least several hundred words
- make the first paragraph a summary of the page
- place your targeted keywords at the beginning of the text
- begin the content with text only, then feel free to add other formats as well
- avoid Flash banners
- avoid ads
- include at least one image to make the content friendlier
- add at least one link to another excellent page, especially if the visitor would get more details there
- provide unique value, relevant information, expand on the title, be interesting and informative for the potential visitor
- place the most important takeaways at the beginning and then elaborate on that
- people usually scan the page, so write short paragraphs which expose one idea only

- use the super-keyword just 2 or 3 times throughout the page
- use variations and synonyms of the super-keyword a few times
- don't care about keyword density – just work on creating excellent copy
- don't stuff keywords, but mind that keywords will get indexed and will bring traffic
- include at least one list of ordered or unordered elements (instead of paragraphs or enumerations), no more than 7-10 points, make list items short – it helps people to remember them
- group paragraph and include sub-headlines with important keywords
include a table of contents at the beginning, link to the sub-headlines
- use text in **bold**, *italic* or underline to emphasize keywords and important ideas
- check the content for typos and spelling errors before placing your content on the page

We can deduce the following rules:

A webpage content should
be unique and valuable

Obviously, it should be able to stand on its own (valuable and different from other web pages) and easily solve “the problem” (provide information/answers, take action etc.)

Basically, in order to achieve on-page SEO nirvana, you have to design the content in such a way that it will be clear to anyone (both humans and bots) what they are about. The way you can do this is to insert targeted keywords in prominent locations, i.e. – those areas that users are most likely to pay attention to:

The first paragraph is the
fifth shortest summary of the page

Remember that the first paragraph is a key-element that can capture user attention. Make it carefully and think about your potential visitors – what they expect from you? How can you convince them to read the following text and stay on your website?

Be Original

The first paragraph is the mirror of the entire text and the bridge between you and your visitors. This is why, it must be unexpected, containing phrases that will attract the users attention and gain their sympathy.

Be Clear

Obviously, people do not have time. This is why, the first words of your article or content should be very clear, concise and logically structured, in order not to scare and not to complicate the user experience. Pay attention to this!

Be Relevant

Despite of the desire to impress you potential visitors by using specific formula, the first paragraph should remain very relevant and informative, contain a brief content plan and the most important keywords.

The body content is the longest
“summary” of the page

We know you’ve heard this a hundred times, but if you have interesting, valuable, informative and funny texts, you’ll attract traffic naturally. Everything in SEO is based on this simple truth.

As mentioned above – search engines will first analyze its URL, then the title, headline, description and so on. Optimization is just making sure that these elements are very suggestive and accurately reflect your ranking intentions.

All pages should have images as they are important in search ranking. They have an opportunity to show up in an image search, but they contribute to regular SEO as well. It's considered good user experience to have cheerful, good-looking pages and professional graphics can easily add the missing ingredient. Advanced search engines can also interpret texts within images, but it's not recommended to hide perfectly crawlable keywords inside them. When optimizing, use the most important keywords for the first image, next ones (synonyms, variations) for the second image, long tail keywords for the third and so on.

Image optimization should meet following requirements:

- filename should closely match the URL suffix
- separate keywords inside filename with dashes (-)
- use only lowercase characters in image filename
- don't use special characters in filename
- make sure to use high quality images
- use the right resolution
- make sure image file size is as small as possible (use gif, png, jpg appropriately)

- provide an ALT attribute – alternative text displayed by the browser when the image cannot be loaded; it should closely match the meta description
- provide a TITLE attribute – the name of the image, it appears as a tooltip when holding the mouse over the image; it should closely match the page's <title> tag



Links are very important for SEO. It's considered good user experience to link to other excellent resources that cover the topic further. They are also usually (and should always be) highlighted within the text so they ease the process of scanning through the document.

When optimizing links, consider the following best practices:

- keep the number of links low (< 10)
- link only to excellent resources
- **bold**, *italic* or underscore if you want it to carry more weight
- provide a TITLE attribute, it appears as a tooltip when holding the mouse over the link and should accurately (but concise) describe the page the user is going to land on after clicking on the link
- use keywords with search potential as anchor text (not just the URL or "click here")

- use an absolute path for the referenced URL
- don't use redirects for the referenced URL
- don't use Javascript or other technologies to produce the link
- avoid keyword stuffing in the anchor text or title attribute
- link to pages you want to rank higher

Speed Optimization

Performance of your website remains and is a strong ranking factor and is something which you need to focus on. Time and time again, Google has confirmed that websites which load faster rank better than those which don't. In particular, this will become a stronger ranking signal as mobile search ranking. Mobile connections tend to be slower in general, thus websites which have not been optimized for performance will tend to load even slower on mobile devices. Speed being a ranking factor makes sense even from a user perspective – a fast, snappy website is a good user experience and the user metrics have now become core at ranking.

Slow websites also tend to increase your bounce rate, which will negatively affect your rankings. If you want to optimize your website for speed, follow this easy (but detailed) guide on CollectiveRay which is sure to make your website load faster.

DOs

- Optimize images for performance (keep them small in size)
- Use a fast server such as VPS to host your site
- Use a clean light-weight theme
- Enable various caching mechanisms
- Perform all possible technical optimizations

DON'Ts

- Don't use a cheap, shared hosting server
- Don't install a lot of plugins and 3rd party scripts
- Check for broken links and resources
- Don't force downloads of large downloads (such as video headers)