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Technical SEO for Ecommerce



You're likely familiar with search engine optimization (SEO). The idea of including keywords to attract the attention of search engine bots like Google is part of standard business for modern ecommerce platforms.

However, technical SEO goes beyond that to dig into the code and server level to up ecommerce SEO strategies. It optimizes the, well, technical aspects of a site to increase SEO, such as page loading times and how easy a site is to crawl. It's not all just product descriptions.

SEO ranking is more important than ever before: 68% of online experiences start with a search engine. For ecommerce businesses, it's vital to marketing efforts to ensure that they're taking advantage of every avenue possible to optimize their search performance.

Why Technical SEO is Vital to Ecommerce Success

The number of homepages, category pages, subcategories and product pages typical ecommerce sites have made technical SEO even more important than other traditional sites.

Most ecommerce retailers are selling several products and some have robust content marketing, which means they get traffic coming from a variety of directions and sources.

Having a site that is rich in target keywords technically proficient at giving search engines what they want and how they want it will help ALL products score better.

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How Site Speed Allows Businesses to Thrive

Google and other search engines put a premium on sites that load quickly. It's a signal of site quality and sites that move quickly are rewarded in the rankings. Having a fast site not only provides a superior user experience, it also positively impacts SEO.

Implement fast hosting.

As the title reflects, fast hosting involves using a site host that provides the server and computing power needed to support fast page loads during normal traffic times and the capacity to scale during busy seasons.

Minimize HTTP requests.

Scripts and plugins may be useful at times, but they come with a cost. The hit to site speed means that HTTP requests should be kept to a minimum.

Use one CSS stylesheet.

Using multiple CSS stylesheets creates confusion, for developers, users and site engines. Sticking a single, unified template creates a consistent experience and avoids hits to loading time.

Compress your image files.

Don't resize images through code, resize them natively. Having images that are optimized for web (don't forget alt text) use keeps file sizes at a minimum and means fewer bytes need to load.

Minify your site's code.

Minify means to reduce unnecessary or redundant data that only serves to slow your site down. Striping away code that serves no purpose streamlines site load times.

Eliminate redirects.

Older websites with legacy changes may be weighed down by a steady stream of redirects. Having them in place for a few months is fine, but without routine maintenance to remove older redirects, they can become burdensome.

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Why a Mobile Friendly Design Creates a Better Customer Journey

Beyond the search engine advantages, the benefits to the customer are significant. Ecommerce is moving more and more toward mobile, with an expected 42.9% of ecommerce sales by 2024. Customers expect an easy mobile experience and it's on the platform to provide it.

A good mobile design is streamlined and avoids many of the features that bog down desktop sites. This means direct navigation and basic on-page functionality. Don't worry about the bells and whistles, just perfect the basics.

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Building an Website Architecture to Last

Your taxonomy is the foundation of your content and structure. It will inform how customers interact with your site and navigate from product to product. Though your content architecture will evolve, the technical aspects should be baked into the site from the start.

Breadcrumb navigation.

Breadcrumb navigation — the series of catalog-like links that form your content architecture — should be included on every page. This enables site users to easily move backwards in their navigation.

Descriptive URLs.

Having URLs that actually tell users what's on a page is better for long-tail strategies, click-through rates and search engine rankings. Including keywords builds potential customer expectations that they will get the product information they're looking for.

Internal linking.

Don't make your navigation do all the heavy lifting. Having a backlink and internal linking strategy — linking to other pages within the content part of a website — builds trust with search engines and makes it easier for customers to find what they're looking for on your online store and increase conversion rates.

Orphan pages.

Orphan pages should be avoided. They'll be forgotten by content authors and can actually hurt your sight. They often include outdated information that can confuse customers. Ensure that all pages have a home and continue to be useful.

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Using Canonical Tags to Keep Content List Clean

Canonical tags are HTML code used to define the primary version of duplicate or near-duplicate pages. If you have product categories available under multiple URLs, a canonical tag will indicate which version should be indexed.

Duplicate Content.

For the end user, you may not even have duplicate content. However, search engines crawl URLs and not web pages. For example, a single web page with different parameters for geography will be pushed to those in a specific location.

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Generate Sitemaps to Enhance Marketing Efforts

Functionally, sitemaps may feel like an idea from a time long ago. However, from a technical aspect, they are valuable for search engines to understand the structure of your site and how it works.

XML sitemaps.

XML sitemaps are a listing of your site's URLs and show search engines your site's content and how to reach it.

HTML sitemaps.

An HTML sitemap is an index of every page on your site and shows your site architecture. While XML sitemaps are targeted to search engines, HTML sitemaps are for humans and help them to understand a site's structure.

Robots.txt file.

The robots.txt file tells search engines which pages it can crawl. This helps avoid overloading a site and keeps it running smoothly.

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The Importance of Structured Data

Structured data markup is code which you add to your website to help search engines better understand the content on it. This data can help search engines index your site more effectively and provide more relevant results.

Additionally, structured data enhances search results through the addition of 'rich snippets' - for example, you can use structured data to add star ratings to reviews; prices to products; or reviewer information.

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Increase Customer Trust with a SSL Certificate

Secure Sockets Layer — SSL — is a security technology which creates an encrypted link between a web server and a browser. You can spot a site using SSL fairly easily: the website URL starts with 'https://' rather than 'http://.'

In 2014, Google announced that they wanted to see 'HTTPS everywhere', and that secure HTTPS websites were going to be given preference over non-secure ones in search results.

So it makes sense, where possible, to ensure your site is secure — this can be done by installing an SSL certificate on your website, though most top website builders now include SSL by default.

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Tools for Ecommerce Technical SEO

Technical SEO is big business and there have been many quality tools and platforms that can enhance your site. These are some of the most commonly used.

Screaming Frog website crawler.

Screaming Frog is a website crawler and SEO guide that audits the URL structure and identifies most common issues.

Oncrawl.

Oncrawl is a crawler that optimizes a website for SEO. It analyzes websites and provides solutions to increase ranking.

Google Search Console.

Google Search Console is the search engine giant's proprietary tool (along with Google Analytics) that goes through an SEO checklist to help developers measure performance and optimize search rankings.

Ahrefs.

Ahrefs is an all-in-one tool that performs SEO audits of your site — as well as competitors — to better understand your customers and what they're looking for.

Semrush.

Semrush is a research tool that helps content creators with metrics and keyword research and understand the most valuable keywords to target.

Schema.org markup validator.

The Schema markup validator tests structured data to ensure that all schema.org-based data is properly embedded.

WebPageTest.

WebPage Test lives up to its name by performing a technical SEO audit of websites for broken links, performance and vital information.

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Google PageSpeed Insights.

Google PageSpeed Insights takes a deep dive into site load time and shows what may be slowing your pages down.

Ayima Redirect Path Chrome extension.

The Ayima Redirect Path extension for Chrome shows what redirects appear on your site and where they direct to.

META SEO Inspector Chrome extension

The META SEO Inspector extension for Chrome extracts the metadata and meta descriptions from pages and shows how to improve them.

Web Developer Toolbar Chrome extension.

The Web Developer Toolbar extension for Chrome adds a host of developer tools to the browser, making it easier to optimize pages.

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The Final Word

Any ecommerce website looking to increase search or organic traffic must embrace technical SEO. Optimizing a page's content using these standards must be part of the standard workflow of page publishing.

Every visitor is a potential buyer, so maximizing traffic is vital to maximizing revenue.

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FAQs About Technical SEO for Ecommerce

What is Technical SEO?

Technical SEO refers to website and server optimizations that help search engine spiders crawl and index your site more effectively (to help improve organic rankings).

What are the benefits of Technical SEO?

Ultimately, for ecommerce stores, it increases page ranking, increases traffic to the most important pages and provides a high-quality user experience.

How does Google's algorithm work?

That's the million-dollar question. On a technical level, it crawls sites and indexes them to create a search engine result page (SERP). From there, hundreds of ranking factors are considered that determine where a site ranks. It's a highly complex —and secretive — process.

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