SEO: Are you findable online?

April 2020

Introduction

Covid-19 presents many challenges to businesses across the world. It is more challenging than ever to connect with the consumer in the physical sense. Over the last number of weeks there has been an increasing shift towards digital solutions as a means of meeting the needs of consumers. Many clients are exploring how they can offer an online solution for their customers. This may be through E-commerce, social media and/or an improved online user experience.

One key challenge that many companies face is improving the findability of their website. This is particularly important if the website is new or recently updated as the site may not yet be appearing top of mind on Google.

We've set out to explore how our clients can adopt some simple, best practice Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) techniques to help them with this challenge. This document outlines some of the key principles for SEO applicable to all sizes of business.

This guide is part of Bord Bia's Think Digital programme, which seeks to enhance the digital capabilities of Irish food, drink and horticulture companies whilst also equipping businesses with the resources and supports needed to deliver best in class digital activation.

Section 1:
Fundamentals of SEO

What Is SEO?

SEO or Search Engine Optimisation is optimising the **content** on and **links** to a **well-functioning website** in order to make it more findable when people search for related topics on Search Engines.

What is a Search Engine?

It is the questions and answers machine – consumers use Search Engines to find answers to resolve their needs. Google is one of the most popular Search Engines used by consumers today.

Keywords are the basis of searching

Think of Keywords as questions that people are asking Google and think of search links that show up as the answers that you and competitors give to the consumer's question.

Important: It is our job to anticipate the questions that our consumers are asking and create the content on our website that relates to what they are searching for.

Remember, this content should position your produce/brand as the solution to their needs.
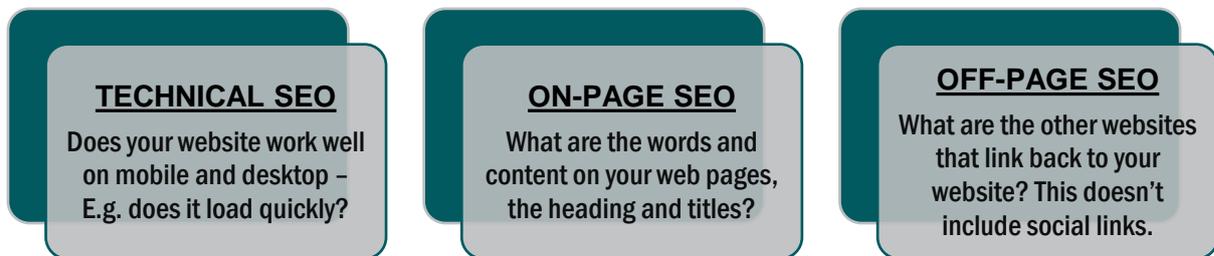
BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

How do we know what people are searching for?

We can use keyword tools to research what people are asking Google. This allows us to choose the most appropriate themes and topics and create relevant content so that our website appears when people are looking for these topics online. Try the following:

- Keywords Everywhere
- Moz
- Ubersuggest

The Three Pillars of SEO

Having the right content on your website is the most important thing as this is what people are searching for. However, we also need to ensure that our website is fully functional and has good website linking to be more visible on Google searches.

TECHNICAL SEO

Does your website work well on mobile and desktop – E.g. does it load quickly?

ON-PAGE SEO

What are the words and content on your web pages, the heading and titles?

OFF-PAGE SEO

What are the other websites that link back to your website? This doesn't include social links.

1. Technical Optimisation: Does your website work?

Make sure your website loads quickly and is readable on mobile devices. Ideally websites should not take longer than 2-3 seconds to load. Use this free Google tool to test your site.

2. On-Page Optimisation: What are the words and content on your web pages?

This is one of the most important areas and we go into this in more detail further in this document. You need to make sure the content that is on your web pages is based on what people are searching for in relation to your product or business. This is relevant for both your main website and your E-commerce platform. As people's needs change and adapt, they search for new things so it's important to keep your page content fresh. Blogs and News sections can be updated weekly while other pages like Product pages, About Us and Contact pages may be updated less frequently as this content is unlikely to change significantly over time.

Try to include images and videos where appropriate as it makes the content easier to read and engage with which will be a better brand experience. All of this will positively affect SEO (but ensure video and image files aren't too large as they will slow down your website!).

3. Off-Page Optimisation: What other websites link back to your website?

Make sure you have links from reputable websites linking back to you. You can attract links by having quality content on your website, the type of content that other websites would like to link to because it is useful to their audience. For example, a large food website might share a link to your website that contains tips for organic growing or recipes from garden produce because the readers of the large

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

food website might be interested in this content. Unfortunately, social media links don't count as quality links to your website, it has to be website to website linking to impact SEO.

Getting links to your site is a slow process but it's a very important part of SEO. Whenever you do a press release or if you write a guest blog on a foodie website, always ask the website owners to link back to your website. This will help your SEO a lot.

How does Google determine when my Website shows up?

Google does three things to save your website and show it to searchers who are looking for your content:

1. Crawling – Google sends out spiders or bots to read all of the pages on websites around the world, to find new pages on websites and to understand what the content of the site is about.

2. Indexing – after Google crawls and understands what your website is about, it's saved in its database. When a website is saved in the Google database, this is called indexing.

3. Ranking – Google then prioritises all of the websites in the index/database and will show some of websites in position 1,2,3 and others in lower positions like 23, 39 or 45 etc. The position of your website on the list of results when someone searches is called your rank.

You can improve the ranking of your site by including relevant keywords in your page titles, ensuring your website loads quickly and functions correctly and through attract links from external websites – this will boost your website's reputation. Google puts websites with a good reputation in high positions on the results pages.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

Section 2:
How to create and optimise content for SEO

Start with Keyword Research

Keyword research helps guide what content you should create for your website. Use keyword tools to see what people are looking for relevant to your product, then create content related to these searches so your website will appear when they are searching.

Follow the steps below to research keywords as these will guide what content and topics you could create for your website to improve your ranking.

1. Pick a Topic

Focus on one topic or theme at a time and imagine what the webpage will look like. You can get ideas for topics by starting to type something into Google and the suggest feature will give you a number of related topics which can help start the process. Behave like someone who might look for your brand, what would they look for? Start there.

2. Brainstorm Keywords and use Keyword Research Tools

Jot down keywords with similar meaning around a closely related topic and focus on quantity over quality at this stage, write as many as you can. This is how to approach brainstorming:

- o Think of closely related keywords

- o Think of synonyms

- o Include plural and singular keywords

- o Aim for quantity rather than quality (25+ where possible)

- o There are no bad topics, write everything down at the start

Once you have brainstormed some keywords and topics, enter them into a Keyword tool like the Google Keyword Planner (if you have an active Google Ads account), Keywords Everywhere or MOZ.

Examples of Keywords Brainstorming

- [ ] how do you make homemade banana bread?

- [ ] what is the recipe for banana bread

- [ ] what is a recipe for banana bread

- [ ] what is the best banana bread recipe

- [ ] how to cook banana bread evenly

- [ ] does banana bread go bad?

- [ ] why are my muffins sticky on top?

- [ ] how to make banana bread moist and fluffy

- [ ] why isn't my banana bread brown

- [ ] what makes banana bread dark

- [ ] why is my banana bread gummy

- [ ] how to fix dense banana bread

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

3. Review Keyword Value

Gather keyword monthly search data to help decide how useful the keywords are and whether they are within reach. You might use an SEO tool like MOZ to get monthly search volume. Keywords that get thousands and thousands of searches per month tend to be out of reach. To begin, focus on keywords that have lower searches per month, e.g. 10-100 searches.

4. Prioritise Keywords

Decide which keywords are the most important to help achieve your business objectives and which ones you wish to focus more on – this is where you can remove the lower quality keywords.

I have decided on my keywords and topics – what next?

Once you have prioritised your topics and keywords start to create the web page content that relates to these topics – now you are creating content based on what people are searching for rather than guessing what content should go on your website.

What about SEO for E-Commerce?

SEO and keyword research is no different for E-Commerce. Ask yourself, what is the content your customers are looking for to help them with their purchase? Is it product reviews, product features instructions for how to use a product etc. Try to figure out what your customer looks for before they buy, then create that content to help get the sale over the line

Writing Page Titles and Meta Descriptions

Page titles are the most important part of your website content for SEO. They are what Google reads first when crawling through your site and they are what Google will show the searcher when they look for something. You should also write a short description for the searcher to read that tells them about the page and why they should choose your website instead of the other websites available. Other elements to optimise include on-page content and images which are discussed later.

Titles and Meta Descriptions should follow this structure:

> **Primary Keyword** – Secondary Keyword – Brand Name
>
> www.your-website.com
>
> Write something compelling that tells the searcher about the content on your page

We can see how this looks in the example below:

> **What Do Dairy Farmers Do**? - Our Suppliers - Cathal Organic
>
> www.cathal-organic.com
>
> Learn all about **what** our **dairy farmers do** on a day-to-day basis to give you the best organic produce all year round directly from local Irish **dairy** suppliers.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

Practice yourself using this free tool: https://www.portent.com/serp-preview-tool/

You can edit your page titles and descriptions in the back end of your website and E-Commerce platform. Below is an example from a Wordpress site using the Yoast SEO plugin. You can edit your page titles by scrolling to the bottom of the page in the Wordpress backend and clicking on "Edit Snippet". If you're not sure how to edit this data, ask whoever runs your website and they can do it for you.

Now I have optimised my Titles & Meta Descriptions – What Next?

The next most important element of your content after the page title and description is what's written on your web page. This can be a few paragraphs about the topic you identified in your keyword research. When writing this content try to position your products or business as the solution to the searcher's needs.

You can break up your content with Headings over paragraphs and through use of images. All of these are important for the reader and the Search Engine. You can add alt text to an image which is a way of telling Google what the image is about. It's possible to do this in the website backend.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

Section 3:
B2B SEO Content

How can I create content for B2B Sales?

Creating content for B2B sales follows the same keyword research process as outlined in the previous section but you might want to get your sales team involved too for additional insights specific to your organisation and sales process. Remember, brainstorming with your B2B sales team allows you to create SEO sales content.

How Can I Brainstorm Topics with my Sales Team?

Try to follow a process and always think of the buyer's needs and likes. Then develop this content to help them decide. Try asking your sales team the following and apply the solutions

Question: What are common objections, to buying from retailers/stockists etc? (i.e. reasons why companies don't buy from your sales team)
Solution: Create content to proactively deal with objections

Question: What questions do customers typically ask in a sales conversation?
Solution: These are your keywords, create a page and paragraphs that answers them

Question: From recent sales conversations, are there any 1 or 2 things that really gets potential customers excited?
Solution: Create the content that excites potential buyers when they search

Question: Is there something that typically seals the deal for them?
Solution: Present this topic visibly on the page and website navigation

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD

Section 4: Measurement

How do I know if my SEO activities are working?

Whether you are doing SEO yourself or working with an agency there are a few key areas and metrics that will show if your efforts are working.

1. **Organic Search Traffic**: the purpose of doing SEO is to increase the amount of visits we get from people searching for keywords related to the content on our website. The first metric we should see is organic search traffic growing. This can take time, it is good to measure it over a 2 week to 3 month period to fully see the impact. You can measure your organic search traffic in tools like Google Analytics in the Acquisition Menu on the left-hand side. Then choose 'All Traffic and Channels'; this is where you'll see your organic search traffic.

2. **Keyword Rankings**: to help us understand why we are driving more traffic or why we are not doing as well as expected we can look at our keyword rankings.
   Using Google Analytics and Google Search Console we can see what keywords our website shows up for and what position on the list we appear, i.e. position 1 or position 56 etc.
   If our content shows up in a high position (like position 1 or 2) when people search for the words we identified in our keyword research, then we are doing well.
   If we are in lower positions, we might need to change our page title or write better content on the page so Google sees that we are a reputable website like the Irish Times or a famous food blogging site.

3. **Referrals and Links to our Website**. Remember the more links we get from other websites, the higher the reputation of our website in the eyes of Google, so attracting links is important.

   It is possible to see a list of links to our website by looking in Google Analytics, Search Console and using SEO tools like Ahrefs or Moz. It's important to measure the number of quality links we have so we can see if they are growing each month. Good SEO will result in higher numbers of links over time.

4. **Site Engagement and Sales/Conversions**: **Using tools like Google Analytics,** you can see how many contact requests, leads and sales that are generated through Organic Search in tools like Google Analytics and in many CRMs. Try to identify the keywords that drive most sales or leads and create more of this type of content as it's clearly working.

What are The Top 3 Common Mistakes to Avoid?

1. Keyword Stuffing

Don't overload your page titles or on-page content with keywords. Do not repeat keywords again and again, your page titles and paragraphs on your webpages should read naturally. Use other words, synonyms and different ways to describe what you're talking about on the website. The key is to write naturally. Google will penalise you if you repeat words unnaturally on your website.

2. Duplicate Content

Don't duplicate content from other websites and put it verbatim on your webpages. If you want to include content from another website that you are collaborating with, rewrite the content slightly, paraphrase the original content and make sure you reference the original source.

Try not to have duplicate pages across your own website either, don't copy large amounts of your own text and paragraphs and re-paste them across your own website. Not only is this bad for the reader and website visitors, Google will penalise you for this.

3. Buying Links

Links to your site are important, but never pay for links. They tend to be low quality, Google can identify this and will penalise you for this. You need to build links naturally by creating useful and interesting content that attracts links from other websites.

In Summary:

SEO doesn't have to be technical or scary: You should be able to plan your SEO content using an A4 notepad / MS Word and some online research – the key is to anticipate and know what people are looking for so you can create the right content, put it on your website and ultimately be found!

For further information on specific Think Digital marketing supports available to Bord Bia clients please contact:
adam.baker@bordbia.ie or nicola.martin@bordbia.ie

This guide has been produced in conjunction with Cathal Melinn, founder of Digital Basics.

BORD BIA
IRISH FOOD BOARD