



Search Engine Optimization

This guide is meant for business owners managing, and trying to monetize, online content via Google Search. You might be the owner of a growing and thriving business, the webmaster of a dozen sites, the SEO specialist in a Web agency or a DIY SEO ninja passionate about the mechanics of Search: this guide is meant for you. This guide will provide you with an overview of the basics of SEO according to best practices. This guide won't provide any secrets that'll automatically rank your site first in Google (sorry!), but following the best practices outlined below will hopefully make it easier for search engines to crawl, index and understand your content.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is often about making small modifications to parts of your website. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic search results. You're might be familiar with many of the topics in this guide, because they're essential ingredients for any web page, but you may not be making the most out of them.

You should optimize your site to serve your business needs. One of those needs is a search engine, which helps users discover your content. Search Engine Optimization is about helping search engines understand and present content.

Getting Started

Glossary	
Index	Google stores all web pages that it knows about in its <i>index</i> . The index entry for each page describes the content and location (URL) of that page. <i>To index</i> is when Google fetches a page, reads it, and adds it to the index
Crawl	The process of looking for new or updated web pages. Google discovers URLs by following links, by reading sitemaps, and by many other means. <i>Google crawls the web, looking for new pages, then indexes them (when appropriate).</i>
Crawler	Automated software that crawls (fetches) pages from the web and indexes them.
Googlebot	The generic name of Google's crawler. <i>Googlebot crawls the web constantly.</i>
SEO	Search engine optimization: the process of making your site better for search engines. Also, the job title of a person who does this for a living.

Determine whether your site is in Google's index – How? Do a site search for your site's home URL. If you see results, you're in the index. For example, a search for "score" will return:

About 319,000,000 results (0.56 seconds)



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Search Results

[SCORE | Free Small Business Advice](https://www.score.org/)

<https://www.score.org/>

As a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), **SCORE** has helped more than 10 million entrepreneurs through mentoring, workshops ...

[SCORE Boston](#)

SCORE Boston provides business counseling from experienced ...

[Find a Mentor](#)

SEARCH FOR A MENTOR. Browse mentor profiles to find ...

[SCORE - Worcester](#)

Worcester SCORE has provided free, expert advice to Worcester ...

[Find a Location](#)

Browse by state or enter your zip code to find a local SCORE ...

[About SCORE](#)

SCORE is a nonprofit association dedicated to helping small ...

[SCORE Cape Cod](#)

Connect with Cape Cod & The Islands SCORE. Business ...

[Score | Definition of Score by Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/score)

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/score>

SCORE Association

Nonprofit organization

[score.org](https://www.score.org)

SCORE is a 501 nonprofit organization that provides free business mentoring services to prospective and established small business owners in the United States.

If your site isn't in Google - Although Google crawls billions of pages, it's inevitable that some sites will be missed. When Google's crawlers miss a site, it's frequently for one of the following reasons:

- The site isn't well connected from other sites on the web
- You've just launched a new site and Google hasn't had time to crawl it yet
- The design of the site makes it difficult for Google to crawl its content effectively
- Google received an error when trying to crawl your site
- Your policy blocks Google from crawling the site

How do I get my site on Google?



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Inclusion in Google's search results is free and easy; you don't even need to submit your site to Google. Google is a fully automated search engine that uses web crawlers to explore the web constantly, looking for sites to add to its index. In fact, the majority of sites listed in the results aren't manually submitted for inclusion but found and added automatically when Google search crawls the web.

Google offer webmaster guideline for building a Google-friendly website. While there's no guarantee that its crawlers will find a particular site, following these guidelines should help make your site appear in the search results.

Google Search Console provides tools to help you submit your content to Google and monitor how you're doing in Google Search. If you want, Search Console can even send you alerts on critical issues that Google encounters with your site. To sign up for Google's search console go to:

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home?hl=en>

Here are a few basic questions to ask yourself about your website when you get started.

- Is my website showing up on Google?
- Do I serve high-quality content to users?
- Is my local business showing up on Google?
- Is my content fast and easy to access on all devices?
- Is my website secure?

You can find additional getting started information on

https://www.google.com/webmasters/#?modal_active=none

Do you need an SEO expert?

An SEO (search engine optimization) expert is someone trained to improve your visibility on search engines. By following this guide, you should learn enough to be well on your way to an optimized site. In addition to that, you may want to consider hiring an SEO professional that can help you audit your pages.

Deciding to hire an SEO is a big decision that can potentially improve your site and save time. Make sure to research the potential advantages of hiring an SEO, as well as the damage that an irresponsible SEO can do to your site. Many SEOs and other agencies and consultants provide useful services for website owners, including:

- Review of your site content or structure
- Technical advice on website development: for example, hosting, redirects, error pages, use of JavaScript
- Content development
- Management of online business development campaigns
- Keyword research



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- SEO training
- Expertise in specific markets and geographies

Before beginning your search for an SEO, it's a great idea to become familiar with how search engines work. If you're thinking about hiring an SEO, the earlier the better. A great time to hire is when you're considering a site re-design or planning to launch a new site. That way, you and your SEO can ensure that your site is designed to be search engine-friendly from the bottom up. However, a good SEO can also help improve an existing site.

Help Google find your content

The first step to getting your site on Google is to be sure that Google can find it. The best way to do that is to submit a **sitemap**.

What is a sitemap - A sitemap is a file where you can list the web pages of your site to tell Google, and other search engines, about the organization of your site content; search engine web crawlers like Googlebot read this file to more intelligently crawl your site.

Also, your sitemap can provide valuable metadata associated with the pages you list in that sitemap.

What is Metadata - Metadata is information about a webpage, such as when the page was last updated, how often the page is changed, and the importance of the page relative to other URLs in the site.

You can use a sitemap to provide Google with metadata about specific types of content on your pages, including video and image content. A sitemap video entry can specify the video running time, category, and age appropriateness rating. A sitemap image entry can include the image subject matter, type, and license.

Help Google (and users) understand your content

Let Google see your page the same way a user does

When Googlebot crawls a page, it should see the page the same way a user does. For optimal rendering and indexing, always allow Googlebot access to the JavaScript, CSS (CSS stands for **Cascading Style Sheets** and is a language used for describing the look and formatting of a document written in a markup language,) and image files used by your website. If your site's robots.txt file disallows crawling of these assets, it directly harms how well Google's algorithms render and index your content. This can result in suboptimal rankings.

Create unique, accurate page titles

A title tag tells both users and search engines what the topic of a particular page is. The title tag should be placed within the head element of the HTML document. You should create a unique title for each page on your site.



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Create good titles and snippets in search results

If your document appears in a search results page, the contents of the title tag may appear in the first line of the results (if you're unfamiliar with the different parts of a Google search result, you might want to check out the following YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOfhHPp5sWs>)

Best Practices:

Accurately describe the page's content. Choose a title that reads naturally and effectively communicates the topic of the page's content.

Avoid:

- Choosing a title that has no relation to the content on the page.
- Using default or vague titles like "Untitled" or "New Page 1".

Create unique titles for each page

Each page on your site should ideally have a unique title, which helps Google know how the page is distinct from the others on your site. If your site uses separate mobile pages, remember to use good titles on the mobile versions too.

Avoid:

- Using a single title across all your site's pages or a large group of pages.

Use brief, but descriptive titles

Titles can be both short and informative. If the title is too long or otherwise deemed less relevant, Google may show only a portion of it or one that's automatically generated in the search result. Google may also show different titles depending on the user's query or device used for searching.

Avoid:

- Using extremely lengthy titles that are unhelpful to users.
- Stuffing unneeded keywords in your title tags.

Use the "description" meta tag

A page's description meta tag gives Google and other search engines a summary of what the page is about. A page's title may be a few words or a phrase, whereas a page's description meta tag might be a sentence or two or even a short paragraph. Google Search Console provides a handy HTML Improvements report that'll tell you about any description meta tags that are either too short, long, or duplicated too many times. For example, consider the following page title and page description:

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Daniel's Baseball Cards – Buy Cards, Baseball News, Card Prices</title> ← this is the page title

<meta name="description" content="Brandon's baseball cards
Provides a wide selection of vintage and modern baseball cards ← this is the page's description
for sale. We also offer daily baseball news and events.">
```

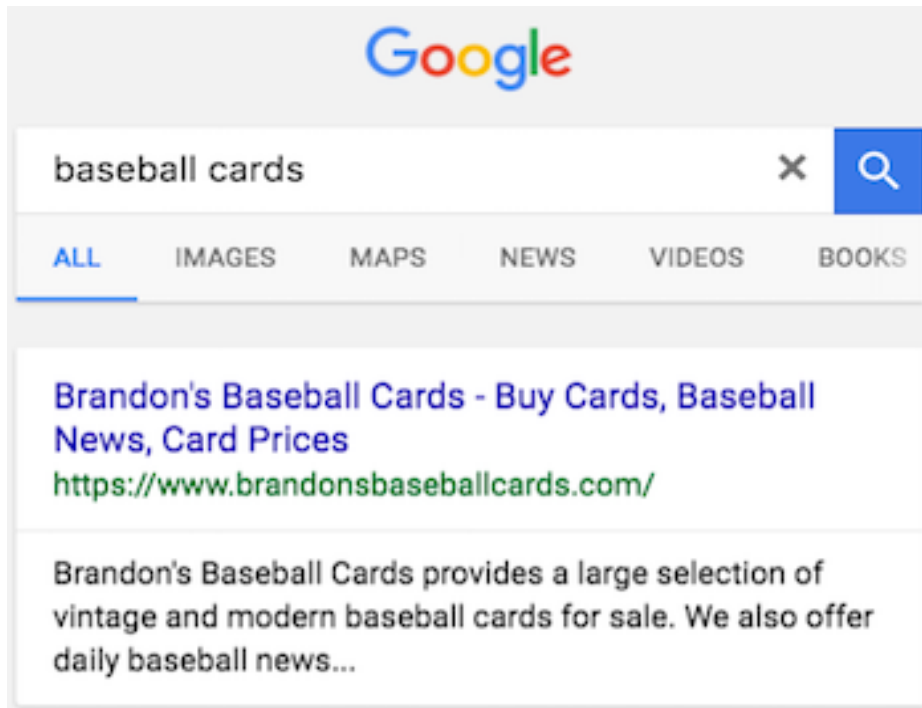


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```
</head>  
<body>
```

Description meta tags are important because Google might use them as snippets for your pages. Note that we say "might" because Google may choose to use a relevant section of your page's visible text if it does a good job of matching up with a user's query. Adding description meta tags to each of your pages is always a good practice in case Google cannot find a good selection of text to use in the snippet. Following is the actual search result:



Accurately summarize the page content

Write a description that would both inform and interest users if they saw your description meta tag as a snippet in a search result. While there's no minimal or maximal length for the text in a description meta tag, we recommend making sure that it's long enough to be fully shown in Search (note that users may see different sized snippets depending on how and where they search), and contains all the relevant information users would need to determine whether the page will be useful and relevant to them.

Avoid:

- Writing a description meta tag that has no relation to the content on the page.
- Using generic descriptions like "This is a web page" or "Page about baseball cards".
- Filling the description with only keywords.



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- Copying and pasting the entire content of the document into the description meta tag.

Use unique descriptions for each page

Having a different description meta tag for each page helps both users and Google, especially in searches where users may bring up multiple pages on your domain (for example, searches using the [site:](#) operator). If your site has thousands or even millions of pages, hand-crafting description meta tags probably isn't feasible. In this case, you could automatically generate description meta tags based on each page's content.

Avoid:

- Using a single description meta tag across all your site's pages or a large group of pages.

Use structured data

Structured data (<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/guides/intro-structured-data>) is code that you can add to your sites' pages to describe your content to search engines, so they can better understand what's on your pages. Search engines can use this understanding to display your content in useful (and eye-catching!) ways in search results. That, in turn, can help you attract just the right kind of customers for your business.

For example, if you've got an online store and mark up an individual product page, this helps Google understand that the page features a bike, its price, and customer reviews. It may display that information in the snippet for search results for relevant queries. We call these "rich results."

In addition to using structured data markup for rich results, we may use it to serve relevant results in other formats. For instance, if you've got a brick-and-mortar store, marking up the opening hours allows your potential customers to find you exactly when they need you, and inform them if your store is open/closed at the time of searching.

Since heading tags typically make text contained in them larger than normal text on the page, this is a visual cue to users that this text is important and could help them understand something about the type of content underneath the heading text. Multiple heading sizes used in order create a hierarchical structure for your content, making it easier for users to navigate through your document.

Best Practices

Imagine you're writing an outline

Similar to writing an outline for a large paper, put some thought into what the main points and sub-points of the content on the page will be and decide where to use heading tags appropriately.

Avoid:

- Placing text in heading tags that wouldn't be helpful in defining the structure of the page.



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- Using heading tags where other tags like `` and `` may be more appropriate.
- Erratically moving from one heading tag size to another.

Use headings sparingly across the page

Use heading tags where it makes sense. Too many heading tags on a page can make it hard for users to scan the content and determine where one topic ends and another begins.

Avoid:

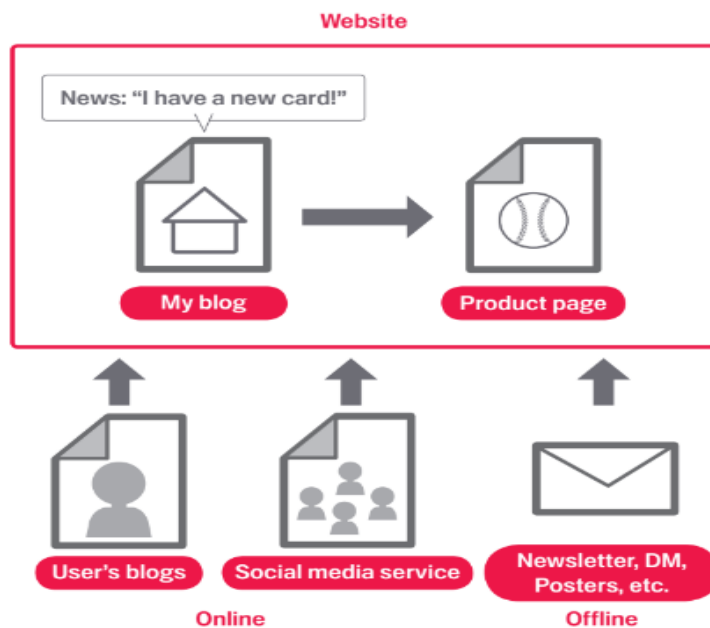
- Excessive use of heading tags on a page.
- Very long headings.
- Using heading tags only for styling text and not presenting structure.

Organize your site hierarchy

Make your site interesting and useful

Creating compelling and useful content will likely influence your website more than any of the other factors discussed here. Users know good content when they see it and will likely want to direct other users to it. This could be through blog posts, social media services, email, forums, or other means.

Organic or word-of-mouth buzz is what helps build your site's reputation with both users and Google, and it rarely comes without quality content.





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Know what your readers want – and give it to them

Think about the words that a user might search for to find a piece of your content. Users who know a lot about the topic might use different keywords in their search queries than someone who is new to the topic. For example, a long-time football fan might search for FIFA, an acronym for the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, while a new fan might use a more general query like FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS. Anticipating these differences in search behavior and accounting for them while writing your content (using a good mix of keyword phrases) could produce positive results. Google AdWords provides a handy Keyword Planner, <https://ads.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>, that helps you discover new keyword variations and see the approximate search volume for each keyword. Also, Google Search Console provides you with the top search queries your site appears for and the ones that led the most users to your site in the Search Analytics Report (<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6155685>)

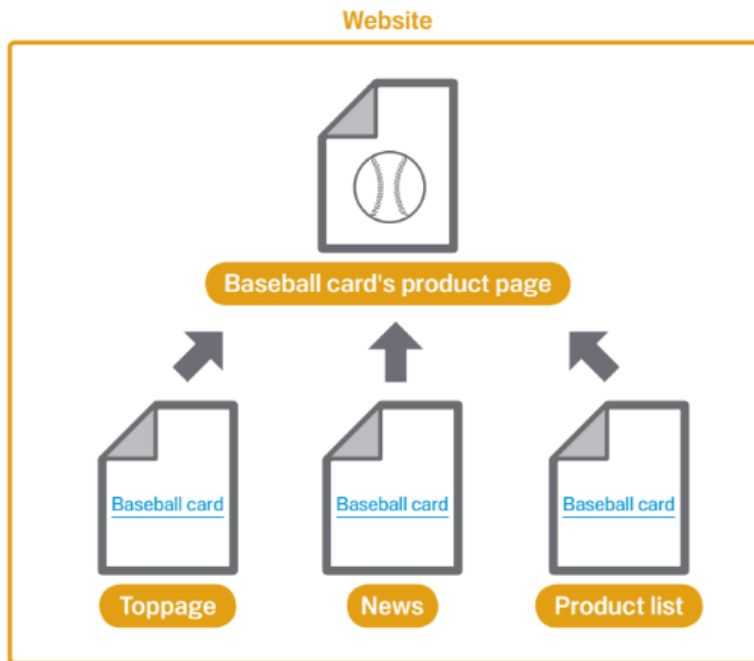
Consider creating a new, useful service that no other site offers. You could also write an original piece of research, break an exciting news story, or leverage your unique user base. Other sites may lack the resources or expertise to do these things.

Write good link text

Link text is the visible text inside a link. This text tells users and Google something about the page you're linking to. Links on your page may be internal—pointing to other pages on your site—or external—leading to content on other sites. In either of these cases, the better your anchor text is, the easier it is for users to navigate and for Google to understand what the page you're linking to is about.



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With appropriate anchor text, users and search engines can easily understand what the linked pages contain.

Choose descriptive text

The anchor text you use for a link should provide at least a basic idea of what the page linked to is about.

Avoid:

- Writing generic anchor text like "page", "article", or "click here".
- Using text that is off-topic or has no relation to the content of the page linked to.
- Using the page's URL as the anchor text in most cases, although there are certainly legitimate uses of this, such as promoting or referencing a new website's address.

Write concise text

Aim for short but descriptive text—usually a few words or a short phrase.

Avoid:

- Writing long anchor text, such as a lengthy sentence or short paragraph of text.

Format links so they're easy to spot



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Make it easy for users to distinguish between regular text and the anchor text of your links. Your content becomes less useful if users miss the links or accidentally click them.

Avoid:

- Using CSS or text styling that make links look just like regular text.

Think about anchor text for internal links too

You may usually think about linking in terms of pointing to outside websites but paying more attention to the anchor text used for internal links can help users and Google navigate your site better.

Avoid:

- Using excessively keyword-filled or lengthy anchor text just for search engines.
- Creating unnecessary links that don't help with the user's navigation of the site.

Be careful who you link to

You can confer some of your site's reputation to another site when your site links to it. Sometimes users can take advantage of this by adding links to their own site in your comment sections or message boards. Or sometimes you might mention a site in a negative way and don't want to confer any of your reputation upon it. For example, imagine that you're writing a blog post on the topic of comment spamming and you want to call out a site that recently comment spammed your blog. You want to warn others of the site, so you include the link to it in your content; however, you certainly don't want to give the site some of your reputation from your link. This would be a good time to use "nofollow" – It will tell Google that certain links on your site shouldn't be followed or pass your page's reputation to the pages linked to.

Optimize your images

The world is mobile today. Most people are searching on Google using a mobile device. The desktop version of a site might be difficult to view and use on a mobile device. As a result, having a mobile ready site is critical to your online presence. In fact, starting in late 2016, [Google has begun experiments to primarily use the mobile version of a site's content](#)⁴² for ranking, parsing structured data, and generating snippets.

Understand the difference between devices

- **Smartphone** - In this document, "mobile" or "mobile devices" refers to smartphones, such as devices running Android, iPhone, or Windows Phone. Mobile browsers are like desktop browsers in that they can render a broad set of the HTML5 specification, although their screen size is smaller and in almost all cases their default orientation is vertical.



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- **Tablet** - We consider tablets as devices in their own class, so when we speak of mobile devices, we generally do not include tablets in the definition. Tablets tend to have larger screens, which means that, unless you offer tablet-optimized content, you can assume that users expect to see your site as it would look on a desktop browser rather than on a smartphone browser.
- **Multimedia phone** - These are phones with browsers that can render pages coded to meet XHTML standards, support HTML5 Markup, JavaScript/ECMAScript but might not support some of the extension APIs in the HTML5 standard. This generally describes the browser in most 3G-ready phones that are not smartphones.
- **Feature phones** - On these phones, browsers lack the capability to render normal desktop web pages coded using standard HTML. This includes browsers that render only cHTML (iMode), WML, XHTML-MP, etc.

Our recommendations are geared toward smartphones, but we encourage multimedia and feature phones site owners to follow the same advice where they feel appropriate.

Choose a mobile strategy

There are multiple ways of making your website mobile ready and Google supports different implementation methods:

- [Responsive web design](#) (*Recommended*)
- [Dynamic serving](#)
- [Separate URLs](#)

Configure mobile sites so they can be indexed accurately

Regardless of which configuration you choose to set up your mobile site, there are key points that you should take note of:

1. If you use Dynamic Serving or have a separate mobile site, signal to Google when a page is formatted for mobile (or has an equivalent page that's formatted for mobile). This helps Google accurately serve mobile searchers your content in search results.
2. If you are using Responsive Web Design, use meta name="viewport" tag to tell the browser how to adjust the content. If you use Dynamic Serving, use the Vary HTTP header to signal your changes depending on the user-agent. If you are using separate URLs, signal the relationship between two URLs by <link> tag with rel="canonical" and rel="alternate" elements.
3. Keep resources crawlable. Blocking page resources can give Google an incomplete picture of your website. This often happens when your robots.txt file is blocking access to some or all your page resources. If Googlebot doesn't have access to a page's resources, such as CSS, JavaScript, or images, it may not detect that it's built to display and work well on a mobile browser. In other words, it may not detect that the page is "mobile-friendly," and therefore not properly serve it to mobile searchers.
4. Avoid common mistakes that frustrate mobile visitors, such as featuring unplayable videos (for example, Flash video as the page's significant content).



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5. Provide full functionality on all devices. Mobile users expect the same functionality - such as commenting and check-out - and content on mobile as well as on all other devices that your website supports. In addition to textual content, make sure that all important images and videos are embedded and accessible on mobile devices. For search engines, provide all structured data and other metadata - such as titles, descriptions, link-elements, and other meta-tags - on all versions of the pages.
6. Make sure that the structured data, images, videos, and metadata you have on your desktop site are also included on the mobile site.

Promote your website

While most of the links to your site will be added gradually, as people discover your content through search or other ways and link to it, Google understands that you'd like to let others know about the hard work you've put into your content. Effectively promoting your new content will lead to faster discovery by those who are interested in the same subject. As with most points covered in this document, taking these recommendations to an extreme could harm the reputation of your site.

A blog post on your own site letting your visitor base know that you added something new is a great way to get the word out about new content or services. Other webmasters who follow your site or RSS feed could pick the story up as well.

Putting effort into the offline promotion of your company or site can also be rewarding. For example, if you have a business site, make sure its URL is listed on your business cards, letterhead, posters, etc. You could also send out recurring newsletters to clients through the mail letting them know about new content on the company's website.

If you run a local business, adding its information to [Google My Business](#) will help you reach customers on Google Maps and web search.

Analyze your search performance and user behavior

Major search engines, including Google, provide free tools for webmasters to analyze their performance in their search engine. For Google, that tool is [Search Console](#).

Search Console provides two important categories of information: Can Google find my content? How am I performing in Google Search results?

Using Search Console won't help your site get preferential treatment; however, it can help you identify issues that, if addressed, can help your site perform better in search results.

With the service, webmasters can:

- See which parts of a site Googlebot had problems crawling



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- Test and submit sitemaps
- Analyze or generate robots.txt files
- Remove URLs already crawled by Googlebot
- Specify your preferred domain
- Identify issues with title and description meta tags
- Understand the top searches used to reach a site
- Get a glimpse at how Googlebot sees pages
- Receive notifications of quality guidelines violations and request a site reconsideration

Microsoft's [Bing Webmaster Tools](#) also offers free tools for webmasters.

Analyzing user behavior on your site

If you've improved the crawling and indexing of your site using Google Search Console or other services, you're probably curious about the traffic coming to your site. Web analytics programs like Google Analytics are a valuable source of insight for this. You can use these to:

- Get insight into how users reach and behave on your site
- Discover the most popular content on your site
- Measure the impact of optimizations you make to your site, for example, did changing those title and description meta tags improve traffic from search engines?