Improve Content Searchability in Minutes: SEO Tips for Authors

Petsy Mathew and Sheela PS, Cisco Systems, Bangalore

Introduction

This presentation focuses on strategies that writers can easily adopt to enhance search results, at no additional cost, while creating content. Using the Search engine optimization (SEO) techniques covered in the presentation your content can gain traffic from search engines helping your customers find the relevant content in the shortest possible time. Failing to plan for SEO in the initial stages of your content development may hinder the purpose that you are trying to achieve through your documentation.

Basics of Search

– Types of Search: Information on Paid/Sponsored Content versus the Organic/Un-Paid Search. Search Engine Optimization is for the organic or the unpaid searches.
– Some Search Facts: When it comes to search traffic, an overwhelming majority of users — 94% — prefer organic results to paid ads. In the Organic Results, of the top results returned, the first result is the one that receives the most clicks. On the search engine giant, Google, the top result receives 33% of website traffic, based on the ranking alone. The second result receives 18% of web traffic, and traffic degrades from there. Ranking on Page 1 matters!
– What Drives Traffic from Search Engines?
  – Looks for pages that contain high quality, relevant information about the searcher’s query.
  – Determines relevance by “crawling” (or reading) your website content mostly based on the keywords it contains.
  – Determines the “quality” of your site by:
    – Quality of other websites linked to your page and your site as a whole.
    – How people engage with your site (Do they find the information they need and stay on your site, or bounce back to the search page and click on another link? Do they just ignore your listing in search results altogether and never click-through?)
    – How much unique content you have (versus very “thin” or duplicated, low-value content)

What is SEO?

SEO stands for “search engine optimization.” It is the process of getting traffic from the “free,” “organic,” or “natural” search results on search engines. SEO is about ensuring your content
generates the right combinations of ranking factors or signals for the search engines to rank your content in an organic search.

- Customers are driving data. More demand for Knowledge Base, and other collaborative medium for end-user support.
- Search plays a crucial role to help users complete their tasks. If your content is not easily searchable and is not among the first few result on the SERP, you are failing the purpose.
- Search engines reward pages with the right combination of ranking factors or “signals.”

Demystifying the SEO Periodic Table

Three major groups covered in the Periodic Table:
- On-The-Page SEO: On-the-page search ranking factors are those that are almost entirely within the publisher’s own control.
- Off-The-Page SEO: Off-the-page ranking factors are those that publishers do not directly control.
- Violations: There are some techniques that search engines deem “spam” or “black hat,” which could result in your pages receiving a ranking penalty, or worse, banned from the search engines entirely.

**SEO Factors work in combination:** No single SEO factor will guarantee search engine rankings. Having a great, HTML title will not help if a page has low-quality content. Having many links will not help if they are all low in quality. Having several positive factors can increase the odds of success, while the presence of negative factors can worsen those odds.

What Can I Do As An Author?

- Identify if there is a quick way to make your docs easy accessible on the search engines. Take the help of the SEO team. For example, adding Quick Links on your home page with relevant docs for a release.
- Identify the On-The-Page Factors that influence your Search Rankings. Understand these content signals and raise an awareness around factors these among your writers. Include these factors as a checklist.
- Identify how optimized your content is for Search Engine.
- Use the SEO Tools to check your SEO adherence. Refer to the section SEO Resources in this slide.
- Arrive at a list of keywords.
- Work with your Marketing teams and customer facing teams to identify the keywords that customers use to search your products. Store the keywords in a central location for all writers to access this.
- Make sure, when you are releasing new content or changing content there are cross-linking opportunities between site areas.

Understanding the On-The-Page SEO Factors

- Page Title and Description: Search Engines display Page titles in their results pages. So this title is quite often the most prominent thing for your users, and for Search Engines. Tip: For higher rankings, place important keywords towards the beginning of your title. The page description meta data is an important on-page element, so give it particular attention. Not only do search engines consider it to understand what your page is about, but they also show it to users in
search results. Hence, it is important that your Meta description is both **keyword-rich** and appealing to human searchers.

- **On the Content:**
  - Heading should be meaningful. Headings should tell the story of what the content is about (Task-Based Heading).
  - Keywords are included within the first 250 words for a topic. Keywords, phrases, and their natural synonyms should appear multiple times throughout the topic.
  - Keyword stuffing to ‘force’ relevance can reduce credibility and page rank. So be careful while using the same word multiple times. Use natural synonyms to avoid this. To test, read out-loud or to someone else for excessive repeats and clarity.
  - Body Text: Maintain a logical structure, use headings and bullet points, add visuals and other multi-media content. Try to emphasize your keywords: put them in H1 and H2 headings texts. Where you have prominent ideas on the page, express them using your keywords, and make this text bold or italic.
  - Indexable Content: Assign images in gif, jpg, or png format "alt attributes" in HTML to give search engines a text description of the visual content.
  - Provide a transcript for video and audio content.
  - Anchor text is a text that provides a hyperlink to another page and creates a relationship that tells search engines what other pages say your page is about.
  - Link Building: Lq (Link Quality): A link from any large, respectable site is going to be higher on the quality scale than a link you might get from commenting on a blog. In addition, links from those in your “neighbourhood,” sites that are topically relevant to your site, may also count more.
  - Lt (Link Text/Anchor Text): Anchor text is a text that provides a hyperlink to another page and creates a relationship that tells search engines what other pages say your page is about.
    - If you are using any of the following; “Click here”, “Learn more”, “Next page”, “at this link”, “here” you are often missing an opportunity to add meaningful anchor text. Instead use, for more information see “section name”.
  - Ln (Number of Links): The value that a link passes is diluted by the presence of other links on a page. Thus, a page with few links is better than a page with many links.

**Conclusion**

SEO is a complex, multidimensional, ever-evolving science. It is only natural that you cannot afford to focus on every detail; and you do not have to, either. If you prioritize your efforts, focus on the factors shared in this presentation, you are sure to have a better ranking in the SERPs.

**Contact:**

pemathew@cisco.com
sheps@cisco.com