

Design and Development Requirements for SEO

While SEO does not end at the building of a website, how a website is designed and built can affect it's ability to get traffic from the search engines.

When you build a website, make sure you follow these requirements- if you don't your SEO might have to come back later and fix your website:

Design Elements:

- Each page should have one, clear call-to-action. This should stand-out from the design and not blend-in. Secondary calls-to-action should not distract from the most important one. Don't be afraid of being direct- your visitors want to accomplish something, that's why they've come for a visit.
- In order to be mobile-friendly, use responsive web design (see below on specific guidelines for code).
- The design should accommodate at least 300 (but possibly more) unique words on each page. Good design and words are not contradictory. The users want to be reassured that they've come to the correct page by reading what the page is about. The search engines can't read words in images nor can it infer what a web page is about by the content of the image.

Code Elements

- Words on each page should be rendered using server-side scripting languages and not browser side programming languages such as javascript, for example. This means you have to be careful when rendering a page using parallax but can also including hiding text under certain click-to-display elements.
- Each page should have the ability to display a unique <title> tag. Each page should also have the ability to display a unique <meta> description.
- Mobile
 - The website should use responsive web design in order to be viewed on mobile devices. When I say "responsive" here I mean that the website's layout should change using media queries in a CSS file. You should not attempt to detect a user and send them to another copy of a page if they are coming from a mobile device.
 - Calls to external scripts, files or images should be kept to a minimum.
 - While things should look good, avoid large image files.
- URLs
 - The URLs should be descriptive and human-friendly. Use their structure to organize the content of your website into different groupings or categories. Just don't try to stuff keywords into them and make them awkwardly long.



- If redirects are used to render page content, they should always be a 301 redirect.
- Only one specific URL (the “canonical” URL) should be able to access one particular page.
 - The following variations in URLs should be rewritten on the server-side or use a 301 redirect to the canonical URL:
 - www vs. non-www of every page. It doesn't matter which you pick, just make sure you stick with one and 301 redirect all requests of the other version of a page to the one you want.
 - http vs. https can also create duplication issues. Make sure your site is only accessible through one of these protocols. If you can see the same page through either, use a 301 redirect to resolve to the one you want to use. Be consistent.
 - Typically all URLs should only use lower-case letters, numbers, and dashes. Avoid Upper Case letters, spaces and special characters in the URLs. There's nothing magical about lower-case letters but we're trying to avoid the same page rendering whether or not you have UpperCase or lowercase letters in the URL. Spaces in URLs really mess things up, too, so avoid them like the plague.
 - Each URL should end consistently with either a slash or not. It's not as important which one you use, just that it's consistent and that the same page can't be rendered whether or not you have a slash at the end of a page.
 - In circumstances where variations in URLs are unavoidable (such as query strings that sort content on a page and can theoretically appear in any order) you must put a unique canonical tag on each page, pointing to the canonical version of that particular URL.
- Tracking
 - The website should have the ability to add tracking codes to each page. This is usually accomplished by including a file on every page so, if we need to change or update the tracking code we can do it in one place rather than have to update it on every single page or on different template files. There should be a place for this within the <head> version of each page and also right before the closing </body> tag of each page.
 - Each call-to-action should be trackable.
 - Use a form that sends users to a confirmation page to a user once a form has been submitted. Do not display email addresses on web pages- they are not trackable and will only get spammed.
 - If you're selling products on your website, be sure to send sales information into your analytics package.



The following items are best-practices but not “requirements”:

- Linux servers are a whole lot easier to use than Windows or other servers.
- There should be only one <h1> tag on each page. This should contain words that describe the unique topic for this page, and not just the company or website’s name. <h2> to <h6> tags should not be used to render text sizes (that’s what CSS is for) but to provide an outline of the page’s contents.
- Include a blog as part of your website.
- You should have a user-friendly “Page Not Found” page that throws a 404 header code.

It is always easier to build your website in light of SEO than attempt to fix SEO problems in a live website. If you follow these guidelines, you’ll begin to see results from your SEO campaign more quickly.

If you need help making sure your website is being setup in light of SEO, please don’t hesitate to [contact me](#) for help. If your website was already built, you might consider getting an [SEO audit](#).

