

THE

SwissMadeMarketing



GUIDE TO

RICH

CONTENT

OPTIMIZATION

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Overview

For gaining and *maintaining* high ranking positions in Google, keeping your website visitors engaged on your site is become more and more important.

As ever, Google's goal is to weed out the low-quality sites from the search results and one of the **most effective ways in which they can do this is by “spying” on whether users stick around on your site or hop right back to Google to find a better result for their search.**

Even though this is an important SEO factor, it's been largely under-emphasized or not mentioned at all, in most SEO guides I've read.

In this short guide, you'll find exact instructions on how to optimize your pages for the Google bots (“classic” optimization) as well as proven ways to increase user-engagement (“rich” optimization).

Engagement = Profit

Apart from anything else and even if it had zero impact on SEO, increasing engagement on your site is one of the most important goals to pursue. The reason is simple: visitor engagement generally means more profit for you.

Only an engaged user will click through to the order-page and make a purchase.

Only an engaged user will click on your affiliate link and consider buying the product you promote.

Only an engaged user will leave a comment, adding content and social proof to your site.

Only an engaged user will subscribe to your RSS feed or newsletter and become a returning visitor.

With that said, let's dive right in and look at the basic factors for on-page SEO as well as the proven methods for reducing your bounce-rate and increasing user-engagement.

One Fell Swoop: WordPress



[WordPress](#) is certainly not the only website-builder out there, but it's the one I most highly recommend. Why? Because if you use WordPress and a [decent SEO plugin](#) with standard settings, a huge array of technical on-page SEO factors are immediately taken care of, in one fell swoop.

If you know what you're doing from a technical standpoint, use whatever you want to build your sites. If you don't want to get knee-deep into coding and web-development, I recommend you use WordPress. To put it differently, if you have a self-coded website it could mean hours upon hours of work to make sure all technical on-page factors are in place and to fix any issues. Installing WordPress takes a few seconds.

Results Optimization

Each individual page on your website should be optimized for one specific keyword. Now, we want to make sure that we give Google very clear signals about what keyword each page is most relevant and at the same time, we want to make sure that our site's presentation in the Google results is as attractive as possible. Here's how to do that:

Add Your Keyword to the Page URL

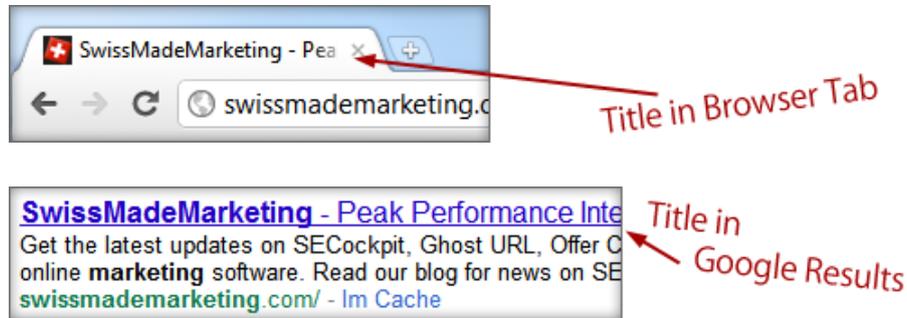
In general, you should make sure that your page URLs are attractive looking and contain only words, no special characters and no gibberish.

A good, optimized URL could look something like this:

<http://yoursite.com/your-main-keyword/>

Add Your Keyword to the Page Title

The page title is what shows up as the blue underlined link in the Google search results. It's also what shows up as the descriptive text in the browser tab.



The page title should contain your keyword and be an attractive, interesting page title that describes your content and evokes curiosity.

Add Your Keyword to the Meta Description

The meta description is a summary of your page is about *which doesn't appear on your actual website*. In other words, your actual human visitors can't see the meta description on your website, only the Google bot can. Your visitors *do* see the meta description in the Google results, however. Google usually displays your meta description below the page title in the search results. **Also remember that this description is limited to 156 characters.**

As with the title, you do want to put your keyword in there, but what's more important is to make the description attractive and compelling, so that people will be inclined to visit your site when they see it in the search results.

You in the SERP – Example

The three factors we've looked at above are all part of how you appear in the SERP (search engine results pages). It's very important to optimize this aspect not only for the Google bot, but also for human visitors. Consider this example illustrating a good and bad example of what a site selling fishing gear might look like in Google:

Bad example:

[fishing gear](#) | [fishing rods](#) | [fishing gear deals](#)

Fishing Tackle Unlimited Fishing Tackle Unlimited Home fishing tackle, fishing Rods, fishing gear, fishing equipment, fishing accessories, fishing store...

www.fishesnyou.com/store/public-pages/cat0012/?p=1237 - Cached - Similar

Here we see an all-too-common attempt to optimize for several keywords on one single page. The title isn't enticing at all, as it's simply a collection of keywords. The same goes for the meta description, which is just a list of keywords. Finally, we have an unappealing URL to add to the mix.

Good Example:

[Find the Best Fishing Gear Deals for Your Next Weekend Right Here!](#)

Select from our "best-brands-only" store, enjoy the best prices and deals for fishing gear, tackles and equipment anywhere. Super-fast delivery.

www.fishinggeardeals.com/store/ - Cached - Similar

Here, we still have the keyword in all the right places, but we've also got an interesting and inviting title, a short, memorable URL and a description that is actually descriptive.

As I'm sure you can imagine, the second example will be much more likely to get people to click through and actually visit the site, when it shows up in the SERP.

Both of the above examples are fictional and not taken from actual websites, by the way. But all you have to do is some random Google search to find various good and bad examples of results optimization.

Your Page Content

Next, let's take care of the basics for your "in-page" content:

Add Your Keyword to the H1 Header

The H1 tag simply signifies the main headline for any piece of content and it's something that is especially relevant when it comes to Google figuring out what your page is about. So, be sure to add your main keyword in the main headline.

In WordPress, the page or post title you enter usually represents both the title-tag and the H1-tag, unless otherwise specified by you.

Add Your Keyword to an H2 Header

H2 signifies a sub-header and also a slightly stronger signal about your page content than the normal paragraph content.

More H-Tags?

Sometimes you'll see guides recommending you also add H3, H4, H5 etc. tags, all with your keyword inside. I have never seen this make a difference to rankings of a site and in terms of making your page relevant and useful to human readers, it's counter-productive to have a whole series of sub-headings, all containing the same keyword. My advice: stick to H1 and H2 and you'll be fine.

Keyword Density

How often should you repeat your target keyword in the actual text on the page? Simple: more than once, but not more often than makes sense.

Don't force a repetition of your main keyword again and again and try to shoehorn it into the opening and closing sentences, hoping that this will increase your rankings. It's much more important to make the text interesting and readable for human visitors than trying to hit a certain percentage of how often the keyword is repeated.

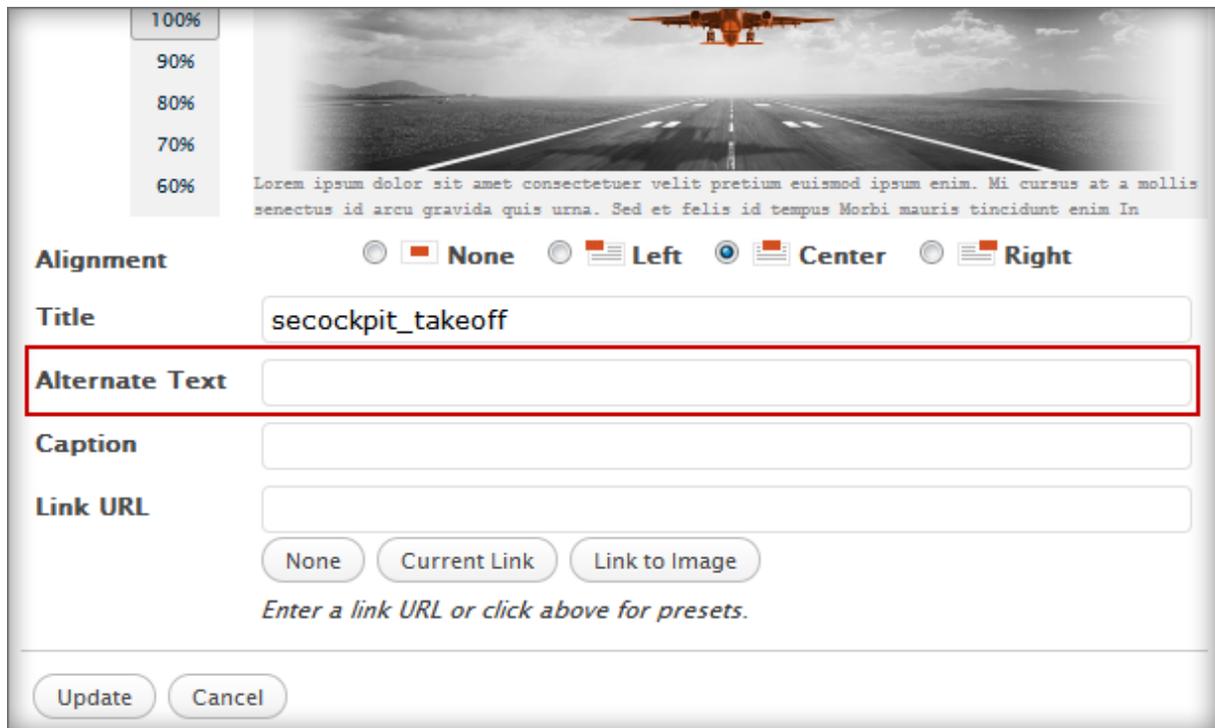
Text Decorations

Having **bolded** and *italicized* main keywords does seem to have a tiny influence as a rankings factor. With the emphasis being on *tiny*. What's much more relevant is that bolding and italicizing text will make your content more pleasant to read, if used right.

Therefore, the rich-SEO advice is to use text decorations to make your content more engaging and more pleasant to read and if you include your main keyword in one of the bolded or italicized section, that's a nice bonus. Once again, though, don't force it just for the sake of SEO.

Image Alt-Tag

The image alt-tag is an alternative description for your image, which displays in case the image cannot be loaded. Add a descriptive alt-tag to all of your images and include the page's main keyword in this description. Also add your keyword to the image's filename before you upload it.



The screenshot shows the WordPress image editor interface. At the top, there is a zoom slider set to 100% and a preview of an image showing an airplane taking off from a runway. Below the image is a text area containing placeholder text: "Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur velit pretium euismod ipsum enim. Mi cursus at a mollis senectus id arcu gravida quis urna. Sed et felis id tempus Morbi mauris tincidunt enim In". Below the text area are alignment options: None, Left, Center, and Right. The 'Center' option is selected. Below the alignment options are input fields for 'Title' (containing 'secockpit_takeoff'), 'Alternate Text' (highlighted with a red box), 'Caption', and 'Link URL'. Below the 'Link URL' field are three buttons: 'None', 'Current Link', and 'Link to Image'. At the bottom of the form are 'Update' and 'Cancel' buttons.

In WordPress, you can specify the alt-text for each image in a simple text field.

User Engagement

Once the more technical details above are taken care of, the following optimization steps are mainly concerned with increasing user engagement. Remember: higher user-engagement doesn't only mean more visitors, more interaction and more money for you, it also means higher rankings because your site visitors aren't sending "I don't like this site" signals by quickly returning to the Google search results after seeing your site!

Design



I'm not going to go into too much detail on this, because much of it is subjective and also kind of obvious. Your site design needs to be good. "Good" can be extremely simple and doesn't mean that your site needs to be flashy and graphically extravagant (although it can be that, if that's what you want and it fits your market). The most quantifiable factor for "good" design for our purposes is that your content is very readable and accessible.

Some factors to take into account:

Fonts

Make sure that the font on your site is of a decent size, so you don't have to strain to read it and make sure that there's no color-clashing. Avoid frilly fonts and bold background colors. Simple, black text on a white background is always a winner. Bright text on a dark background should be avoided as tests have shown that people avoid reading bright-on-dark text for longer periods of time.

Above the Fold

"Above the fold" is the portion of your site that is visible in an average browser-window, without scrolling down. The vast majority of web-users today have screens with a vertical resolution of something between 800 and 1080 pixels (data from January 2011). Address-bars and toolbars in browsers will occupy around 60 to 100 pixels, leaving the rest for your content to display.

There are two things you should optimize your above the fold area for:

1. **Clarity**

Your above the fold area should very clearly state and/or illustrate what your site is about and include a simple navigation.

2. **Header and Logo Size**

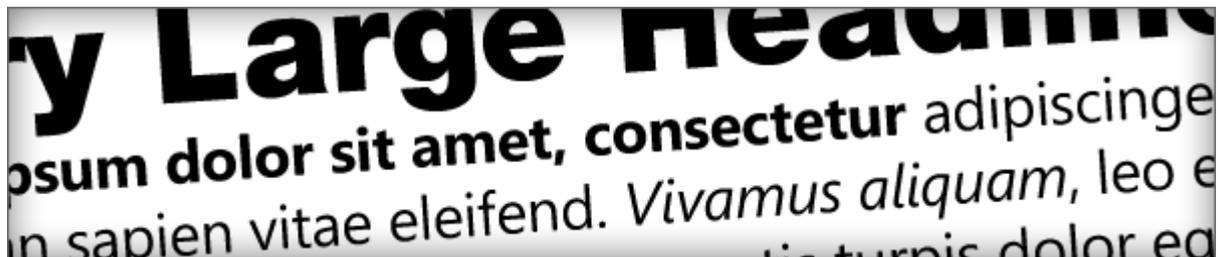
Make sure that your header graphics, logos, navigation etc. don't occupy too much space, pushing down your actual page content.

Content

Your content should be awesome. Well, duh, right? Interesting, well-written content will, of course, be more engaging for your users than boring content. You already knew that, though.

So let's get back to some more juicy stuff. ☺

Text Formatting



Text formatting and writing style have a [huge impact](#) on user engagement. An important fact to be aware of is that most people *scan* online texts before they read them. Many might also only read a couple of sections which they are particularly interested in, but not the entire text. Here's how to use this in your favor:

Paragraphs

Break up your text into relatively small paragraphs. If you present visitors with a huge wall of text, many will hit the "back" button immediately.

Sub-Headlines

Use sub-headlines throughout the text to describe what a following segment is about. This helps people pin-point the parts of the content they are most interested in and also helps them get an overview of the content with a quick scan through the page, making it more likely that they'll decide to stay and read more.

Text Highlights

As discussed further above, highlight important points in your text by using bold or italic text decorations. This makes the content look more “lively” and helps gather information when scanning through the text.

Lists

Lists are huge, online (huge in terms of popularity, that is). Whether it's a “top 10” style list where you list the best or worst of something or whether it's just a list of bullet-points summarizing part of your message, lists are a sure-fire way to increase user engagement.

Images

A page that is “media-rich” is always more engaging than one that isn't. Add images to text to get more attention and to break up the page and keep it visually interesting.

Here are some sources for free images you are allowed to use on your sites:

- [MorgueFile](#) – large collection of free-to-use images
- [FindIcons](#) – Filter by “license: commercial use”. Larger icons = great, illustrative pictures
- [flickr](#) – Do an advanced search for images with a creative commons license

Video

Video is another fantastic way to increase user engagement. Adding a video to a page will **almost always increase the amount of time people spend on your site** and if you call to action in a video (e.g. “click the link and buy my stuff!”) you usually get more people complying than if you call to action just in text.

The only downside is that making videos is quite a lot more time-consuming than writing text. However, you can still just find some relevant videos on [YouTube](#) or [vimeo](#) and embed them on your site.

Formatting Example

Let’s take a look at a good example of formatting from people who’ve been in the business of formatting content for centuries: the news.

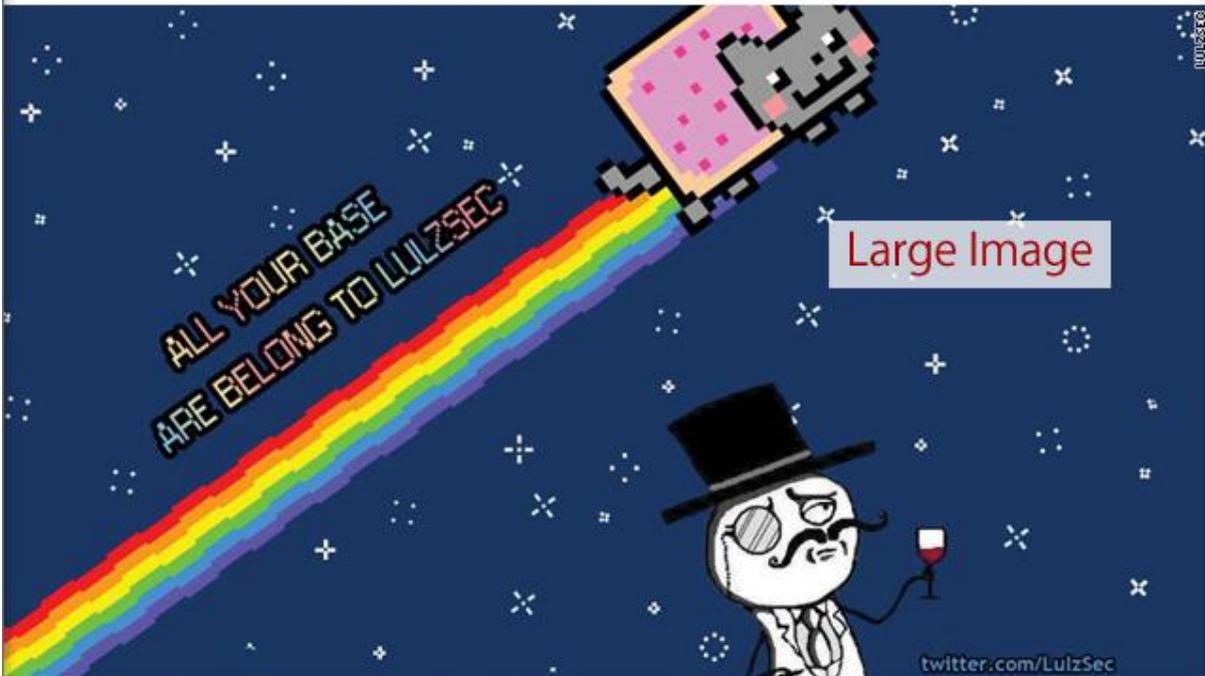
Here’s an article from [cnn.com](#) (see next page):

Hacker group LulzSec says it is disbanding

By the CNN Wire Staff

June 26, 2011 — Updated 0853 GMT (1653 HKT) | Filed under: [Web](#)

Large Headline



Large Image

After 50 days of hacking into websites, Lulzsec says it will stop its cyber exploits.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- The group claims to have hacked the CIA website, among others
- It says it hacks websites to push them to increase security
- But it also says it does so because it's fun

A

RELATED TOPICS

[Hacking](#)

(CNN) — LulzSec, the gleeful and secretive band of hackers who appear to be responsible for a string of high-profile and sometimes embarrassing Internet attacks, said it was disbanding.

B

"For the past 50 days we've been disrupting and exposing corporations, governments, often the general population itself, and quite possibly everything in between, just because we could," the group said Saturday in a statement posted on multiple websites. It did not cite a reason.

C

If true, the collective's final act was the posting of what it said were internal company documents from AT&T along with private data from other companies.

First of all, we've got a large headline. This one could, perhaps, be more interesting and more curiosity-invoking, but it's a good, clear headline nonetheless. Next, note that there's a large image, which is there mainly to grab attention and increase user engagement.

Also note that the image is placed *below* the headline. Above the headline, it would occupy too much space above the fold, but with this formatting, the most crucial text on the page is very clearly above the fold, even on small screens.

Then we've got three parts that I've annotated with letters:

A) Summary/List

Catering to people who want to scan before they read, there's a short *list* of bullet-points summarizing the contents of the article.

B) Short Summary Paragraph

Again, completely catering to the "scanners" the first paragraph is very short and conveys exactly what the article is about.

C) Main Content in Paragraphs

Finally, we get to the main body content of the article, which is broken up into very easily digestible chunks, using paragraphs.

Link to More

If you offer people clearly visible links to more content, they're more likely to click on them and stay on your site for longer. That much is self-evident.

However, there's a particular kind of link or link-list that helps boost user-engagement very significantly. I recommend that you include something along the lines of a "most popular posts" or "highest rated products" (on a review site) or "most popular products/bestseller" (for an online store) in the sidebar and/or in the page footer menu.

The key to this is that you imply "here's something that a lot of other people have liked". Humans are herd-animals and as such, we are always drawn to what's already popular with other people.

Recommendation:

- Add "related posts" or "people who bought this also bought..." to the end of the page content.
- Add "most popular posts/products" to the sidebar and/or footer.

Clear Call to Action

There's one main thing you want your visitors to do on each page (and if there isn't yet, that needs fixing), whether that be purchasing a product, clicking on an affiliate link, leaving a comment or any number of other things.

The more clearly you ask your visitors to take that particular action, the more likely they are to take it. Here's an easy solution: add a highlighted box to the end of each post or page, telling people what you want them to do.

Example:



People taking some kind of action on your site automatically mean higher engagement and lower bounce rates. It may seem almost too obvious to even mention, but too often, we forget just asking people for what we want them to do.

Super-Sneaky Psychology



Now, let's get into some more sneaky psychological stuff to get users even more engaged.

Humans Like Faces

Humans are hardwired to react positively and be generally interested in human faces. If it fits the context, add an image of a face somewhere to the page. In most cases, faces increase attention and also conversion rates on websites.

Directing the Eyes

Here's something even more powerful: **have that human face look in the direction of your content or your main call to action.** We follow other people's gaze and amazingly, if you have a picture of a person looking at your opt-in box on a web-page, you're likely to get more people to opt in.

Similarly, if you simply have a picture of someone facing towards your content (i.e. facing sideways) rather than looking straight ahead, this will draw your visitors' eyes towards your content.

Directing the Eyes, Part 2

Finding suitable pictures of people looking at stuff isn't always easy and won't always match your content, so here's an alternative (one that I'm sure you've seen many times before): use arrow-graphics to point at important stuff.

Try it out. For example, if you have a call to action like "please share this site" and a retweet button, chances are good that if you **simply add an arrow** between the "please share" text and the button, **you'll get more shares.**

More Technical Stuff

Here's a quick rundown of some more technical on-page optimization stuff worth considering.

Site Speed

Google have officially stated that loading speed is a factor they take into account when ranking web-pages. This only makes sense since it's also a very important factor for user engagement. Nobody likes to wait for more than a few seconds, for a site to load.

If you are using WordPress, there are two very simple tweaks you can do, to keep page loading times to a minimum:

- 1. Pick a Fast Theme**

There can be very big differences in site loading speeds between different themes. If you are experiencing slow loading times, switch back to the original WP theme and see if it improves. If it does, your loading speeds are a theme issue and it's time to look for a better one.

- 2. Use a Caching Plugin**

Use a [caching plugin](#) to serve your pages faster (this will make the pages load especially quickly for returning visitors).

Other factors that contribute to loading speeds are:

- **Plugins and Widgets**

Keep plugins that load information from external sites to a minimum. Things like flick photo-streams, slideshows, social sharing buttons that display share-numbers and more can have an impact on your loading speeds. In general, try to keep your site on the slim side concerning widgets, plugins and extras.

- **Images**

Uploading large, uncompressed images can cause long loading-times for site visitors. For advanced users: consider loading images as CSS-sprites.

- **Hosting**

Your hosting can have an impact on your site loading speeds as well. Switching hosts should be a last-resort thing, but it's necessary if nothing else helps.

URL Canonicalization

Canonicalization is a way to organize duplicate pages on your site. In many cases, any given piece of content might appear in several places on your site: on it's own page, on a category-page, on a tag-page...

Canonical referrers tell Google which page is the original and should be listed in the search results and which ones are copies that can be ignored.

If you use WordPress, all you need is an [SEO plugin](#) to have this taken care of.

www to non-www Redirect

In the eyes of a search engine <http://www.yoursite.com/> and <http://yoursite.com/> are two completely different sites. You want to make sure that one of these sites is clearly counted as the “correct” site and the other one simply redirects to it.

Once again, WordPress plus an SEO plugin take care of this for you. Otherwise, you can contact your hosting provider and ask them to set up a 301 redirect from all your www URLs to the non-www ones.

Sitemaps

Create a sitemap for your users as well as one for Google. For your users, it can simply help them navigate your site and for Google, it helps in getting your site frequently and correctly crawled, including as many pages as possible in the search results.

If you are using WordPress, use this [Google XML Sitemap plugin](#).

Checklist

Here's a handy super-short checklist for rich on-page optimization. This is for a specific page on a website where we assume the site-wide technical details are sorted out.

- Write enticing page-title including your target keyword.
- Write an inviting meta-description including your target keyword.
- Include your keyword in the page URL.

- Include your target keyword in the H1 headline.
- Include your target keyword in an H2 headline.
- Break up your text into short paragraphs with sub-headings.
- Include a bullet-point list or numbered list.
- Use bolded and italicized text to highlight important sections of text.

- Include at least one image on the page.
- Add an alt-text to the image, including your target keyword.
- If applicable, add a video to your page.

- Add one clear call to action to the page.
- Highlight the call to action with an arrow or other graphical element.
- Offer a list of internal links going to popular posts or products.