

Search Engine Optimization



As Evangelism

**Beginner SEO Handbook
for Seventh-day Adventist Ministries**

An Essential Step in Meeting People Where They Are (ONLINE)

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Preface

Search Engine Optimization, Online Marketing, Content Strategy, Big Data... why are we even talking about all this?

Most of the world spends hours online each day. Many have become addicted to research, Googling anything they have a question about. They look for location information, check product reviews, read articles, watch videos, post comments, check in with old friends...they'll even Google questions close to their heart—questions they won't even ask close friends or family. Spiritual questions, health questions, or information to help them through an inner struggle.

To be specific, 74,000 people Google "Bible study" each month.

The name "Jesus" is Googled 1,500,000 times a month, and "Adventist" 18,100 times a month.

This is a *huge* ministry opportunity—if Adventist websites can rank in the search results Google displays for these search terms.

Currently, however, that's not the case. Even when people type in search terms that could closely relate to Adventist organizations, *other websites* are catching this traffic.

This is a missed opportunity to introduce these seekers to the hope and help that the Adventist message can provide. To quote *Forbes*, "websites without SEO are like brick-and-mortar businesses without doors."

That's exactly why this guide was created. By educating our worldwide church body in fundamental Search Engine Optimization techniques, we can significantly bolster our collective web presence and digital "[curb appeal](#)." We can ensure that Adventist resources are more easily findable and accessible to those ***already searching for what we already offer!***

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, is an ever-evolving set of strategies used in online marketing to help organizations reach more of their target audience online. It involves a variety of techniques to positively impact a website's "rank," or visibility, in unpaid ("organic") search engine results—which matters immensely, since most people never scroll past the first few results on the first page.

Just as Seventh-day Adventists made strides in popular media throughout history—from print to radio to television—it's now time to leverage the near limitless missionary opportunities the internet provides us.

We can't ignore this vast online audience ("the online mission field") that already wants what we have to offer—an audience we may never otherwise meet!

SEO is both highly technical and an art form. Professionals in this arena are highly-sought-after and highly compensated by many types of businesses that know their true profitability depends on their findability and reputation online. But we can, with some education, invest for ourselves in the implementation of these valuable techniques. Here's your chance to learn insider information and use it for the gospel—ultimately aiding the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20).

With careful, prayerful guidance....here we go!

Table of Contents

1. Intro to SEO—Helping More Seekers Find Your Ministry

- a. What is Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?
- b. How Can SEO Help our Church and Its Ministries?
- c. Glossary of Necessary Terms

2. What's Involved in SEO?

- a. Basic Setup (Introduction Checklist)
- b. Writing and Optimizing Content
- c. User Experience Engineering (UXE)
- d. Off-page SEO
- e. Tracking and Analyzing Activity
- f. Technical Adjustments

3. SEO Setup Checklist—How to Prepare Your Site to Play Well with Google (and other search engines)

- a. Google accounts for your organization
- b. Site security - SSL certificates
- c. What does “Mobile First” mean?
- d. Verify your NAP (Name, Address, Phone Number)

4. Building Your SEO Foundation—Google Analytics and Search Console Setup

- a. Setting up Google Analytics
- b. Setting up Search Console
- c. Tutorials for Beginning Use

5. Intro to Keyword Research - content planning and strategy

- a. What is keyword research, and why is it necessary?
- b. The evolution of keyword research
- c. Optimizing for topic, intent, and opportunity (long-tail keywords)
- d. Recommended tools and methods

6. Intro to Content Marketing—Creating, Optimizing & Distributing Content to Engage Your Audience and Improve SEO

- a. Elements of Strategy
- b. Types of content
- c. Content Strategy Worksheet

7. Writing for an Online Audience

- a. Web copywriting techniques
- b. SEO-specific writing (Titles, Tags, Descriptions)
- c. Evergreen vs. time-sensitive content
- d. Repurposing content

8. Local SEO Setup—A MUST for Churches, Schools, and Brick-and-Mortar Ministries

- a. What is Local SEO and who needs to know about it?
- b. Claiming Map Listings
 - Google My Business / Google Maps
 - Apple Maps, Bing and Mapquest
- c. Intro to Directory Listings

9. Off-site SEO (Optimizing your entire web presence)

- a. What is backlinking, and why it should be handled with extreme care.
- b. Social Media
- c. Revisit directories and best practices (if local)
- d. Review sites (if local)
- e. External Publishings

10. Playing the Long Game—How to Keep Up Your Efforts so Your Hard Work Won't go to Waste.

- a. Why it has to be a long game
- b. What happens if you stop
- c. Tips for a long term strategy

11. Before Diving in—Beware! Top 10 SEO Myths That Refuse to Die

- a. "Set up your SEO, then relax and enjoy the benefits."
- b. "Do these things to rank on page 1 in 3-6 months..."
- c. "SEO is for the IT department. Let them handle it."
- d. "Don't worry about all the technical stuff. Just create good enough content."
- e. "It's all about using lots of keywords that get traffic."
- f. "Our website is awesome. We don't need to worry about all this extra SEO stuff."
- g. "Google changes its algorithms all the time. What's the point in keeping up?"
- h. "We just need lots of clicks to our site. The rest will fall into place."
- i. "Sweet! We just found a cheap SEO company to do all the work for us!"
 - When it's time to call in the professionals: tips to finding an SEO company that won't waste your time or money.

I. Introduction to Search Engine Optimization (SEO): *Helping More Seekers Find Your Ministry*

Whether you're a church, a school, a regional office, a service organization or a retailer, you may be asking:

What *is* SEO, and what does it have to do with my ministry?

One way to understand SEO is to think of the internet as a traditional library, but bigger. All the world's content is in this library. To find material on a certain topic, you don't just wander through each aisle. This is a large, multi-story building with shelves from floor to ceiling. If you want to find what you need and fast, you ask the librarian: Google.

You approach Google: "I need snow leopard information." With that, Google brings you stacks of books. There are travel magazines about zoos that have snow leopards, kids' picture books of snow leopards, decor magazines about snow-leopard-print area rugs, reference books on animal facts, a few encyclopedias, some National Geographics, and some support manuals for Apple OS X Snow Leopard.

You're overwhelmed, so you say, "Actually, I just want to know where snow leopards live."

Google whisks the previous stack away and returns with a smaller stack of literature. You pick the first book off top, quickly scan through, and find, "ah—they live in the mountains of Central Asia."

Done. And you only needed to look at the first few pages of the top book.

The goal of Google's search engine is to give searchers exactly what they're looking for. If it didn't do that very well, people wouldn't use their search engine.

So Google acts as the Great Virtual Librarian, seeking the content that best matches what was typed in the search box. The more specific the search query, the more specific the search results.

On the other hand, if an author wants *their* book to make the librarian's short list for a certain topic, they must demonstrate to the librarian that for a certain topic, their book is the best match.

An author might do this by designing a catchy cover. They also make the book title address common questions people have about this topic, they write a subtitle that further specifies what

readers will learn, and they craft the back cover copy as a teaser to draw the reader in. They also have someone write an author bio that positions that author as an expert in the field.

The author will also seek to get on bestseller lists, quotes in various magazines, even references from other authors. Maybe this author will write forewords to other books and have other prolific authors write the foreword in theirs. The author will be posting ads, participating in interviews, doing readings, etc.

The author creates a credible “buzz” and elevates this book as relevant for its topic.

The librarian sees all this and brings this book to all readers asking about this topic.

And if the library patrons willingly receive it, or even come back to read it again, all the more reason to keep bringing out this book for queries on this topic.

The author catered to the librarian by catering to what the readers were looking for.

Keep this analogy in mind as we go through each chapter. Each of those elements represent an online process involved in search engine optimization, and the success of your web presence.

See also: thegospelcoalition.org/how-mormons-are-winning-the-internet,

SEO is all about helping the right people in the “online mission field” find YOUR ministry. There are people out there that are searching for what is already your specialty—a cooking class, a good private school, a small friendly church, a big friendly church, a health seminar, an online Bible study, or simply information about a perplexing Bible verse, how to deal with peer pressure, or how to find help and support when your friends and family aren’t helpful.

You may have heard the term “SEO” or “Search Engine Optimization” if you work with websites, content management, social media, or web development.

It’s a catch-all term to describe a collection of efforts to make your web presence more prominent in search results after someone types a related phrase into a search engine (most likely Google, but some use Bing, Yahoo, etc.)

Because it’s such a widely-applied and ever-evolving process, SEO does not have a set definition in a dictionary—it has several definitions! The most important thing to keep in mind, however, is that:

SEO is all about people—their behaviors and preferences—not just search engines.

It's about your target audience's needs, desires, and questions, and how you can best make the connection so they realize that yes, *you* can provide what they need. *You* are worth their time. Then they either buy from you, subscribe to your content, follow you on social media, join your cause, or come to your event or location (all possible calls to action—which will be studied later in this guide!).

SEO combines some technical work with creative, strategic content work. Often a complete SEO project involves an SEO Specialist, a Content Strategist (copywriter), and a Web Developer. However, there are several SEO best practices you can implement yourself as a content manager, communication director, or webmaster.

The process of SEO can have a big effect on your ministry's online presence, whether your audience is local or global.

SEO is so big in the business world that there is an overabundance of tools and techniques being pushed by various “authorities” in the industry. It can be an overwhelming field to train into and keep up with, and it's often difficult to know who to trust. Even experienced specialists still find it challenging.

That's why this guide was created—to help you through SEO fundamentals, step by step, to make sure our church's ministries do not have to miss out on these potentially far-reaching benefits.

Glossary of terms in digital marketing and search engine optimization (SEO)

Based on generally accepted definitions as defined by Google as of September 2018.

Web presence - Any web page, whether owned by you or not, that mentions your brand and can show up as a search result listing. Your website certainly should be the most prominent part of your web presence, but other pages can show up as well, such as social media accounts, reviews from sites like Yelp or Google or Manta, externally published articles, videos on YouTube, mentions of your brand on other sites, and more. The bigger your web presence, the more you can dominate search results listings for search queries that relate to your brand.

Search engine - A software program that searches throughout a database of information to identify keywords or phrases specific by the user. Google is the largest and most popular search engine for online searches, followed closely by Yahoo! and Bing. Social media search engines also get a lot of press, such as that of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Algorithm - A process, set of rules, or program for the purpose of calculating various operations. In the context of SEO, the algorithms used by search engines determine which pages to suggest for a given search query.

Algorithm Update [Google] - Google is known for continually perfecting its search engine algorithm in order to deliver the most fitting, relevant results to the searcher. The more Google learns about natural language, searcher intent, and trends in content and web development, the more it fine-tunes its algorithm. If you keep up with digital marketing news, you may have heard of Google's recent major algorithm updates, such as "Hummingbird," "Panda," "Pigeon," etc.

Above the fold - Adapted from the newspaper term for the front page area above the paper's fold, this refers to the upper area of a website that appears on screen before the user has to scroll. It's important to put the necessary introductory information above the fold so new visitors don't have to scroll to figure out how to navigate the site. However, putting too much content above the fold can be distracting—the eye doesn't know what to look at first.

Alt text/Alt Attributes - Text applied to images on a website, within the image's HTML code, to explain what a picture/image placed on your site is about. This allows Google to index it, and it also helps blind users know what photos are on your site, via screen readers.

Analytics - Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from your website. Typically, this refers to Google Analytics, though some content management systems have their own analytics software that can provide similar data.

Anchor text - The clickable word(s) of an active hyperlink.

Anchor point - A point/location on a webpage, such as halfway down through the content or the very end, that a user can "jump" to based on a specially-coded link.

Authority (online credibility) - The combination of cues search engines use to determine websites and webpages' credibility, which affects ranking.

Backlink (inbound link) - A link to a webpage or website that originates from an external website.

“Black hat” - Risky SEO techniques that go against Google's Webmaster Guidelines. Most black hat methods were in attempt to “cheat the system” of Google's algorithms, so Google made updates to penalize this type of activity that impeded user experience.

Blog - A blog is a website or page that is consistently updated with new information about a chosen topic. Often run by a single person or a small group of people, the writing tends to be less formal and more like a conversation.

Internet Bot - a software application that does an automated task over the internet. These tasks are usually simple and repetitive, and performed much faster than any human could. Bots are used for crawling the web to analyze and file information from web servers. The most common is referred to as a Spider, which are used by search engines to understand and categorize content.

Broken Link - A link that leads to a 404 Not Found error code. Generally, a link becomes broken when the destination URL is changed without arranging a redirect, when a website goes offline, or a web page is removed without implementing a redirect.

Bounce Rate - Percentage of visitors who leave without visiting another page on that website.

CMS (Content Management System) - This could refer to two types of software that create and manage digital content, often in a collaborative environment: web content management (WCM) and enterprise content management (ECM). WCM can refer to a web development platform such as WordPress, Joomla, Drupal, AdventistChurchConnect, Squarespace, etc.; ECM means a system of managing content alone, separate from the web development platform, but used in conjunction, and with extended content-focuses features such as content scheduling and collaborative editing.

Content - any information you place on your website. Content can be anything from written information, to infographics, to charts, to photos.

Content Marketing - Is the practice of creating content that is intended for a specific audience and optimizing that content so it is more easily found in *search engines*.

Conversion - When a user/visitor completes a desired action on a website.

Call to Action (CTA) - is the primary “ask” on a webpage—the action you want your reader to do after reading the convincing content on your page. For example, “Register for Webinar” or “Watch video now” or “Join today!” or “Donate now!” or “Download PDF.” It could also be, “Will you join our cause by supporting our goal financially?”

Clickbait - Content, primarily headlines, created to attract people to click. Often overly-dramatic, playing on emotions, oversimplifying, communicating urgency, and suspected of overpromising for the sake of getting more traffic, more reads, more sales, more sign-ups, etc.. Google’s most recent update further scrutinizes clickbait headlines to protect against misleading content. However, clickbait content done carefully and correctly can still make a big impact.

Crawl / Crawler / Spider- An internet “bot” that systematically categorizes and indexes websites and webpages so they can be categorized and listed appropriately.

Crawl Error - When a googlebot is blocked from crawling your website or web page. A page that is not crawled by googlebots will not be indexed and therefore cannot be found on the web.

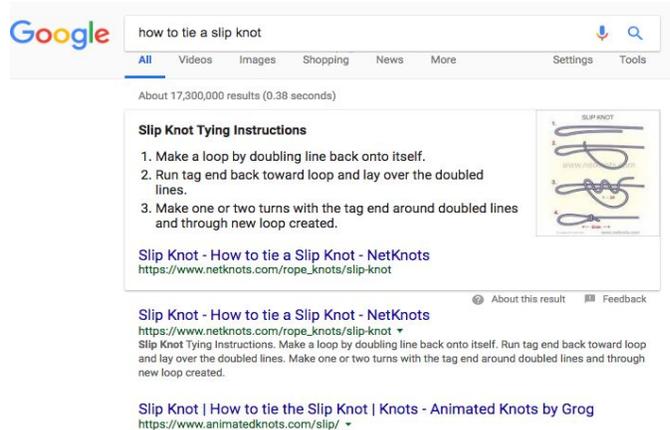
Directory - Phonebooks of the internet. A directory lists the location of your organization, hours of operation, brief description, phone number, and photos. This helps significantly with local SEO, as each directory listing can show up as a separate search result. (It is extremely important that all information in your directory listings match exactly. See entry for “NAP.”)

Domain Name - The part of a website’s URL that directs your browser to the web server where a particular website is stored. In “analytics.google.com,” the domain name is “google.com.”

Duplicate Content - Blocks of content on a webpage that match content that exists elsewhere on the same website or a different website. It is possible for duplicate content to cause one page to rank in search results while the other will not, as Google indexes it as covering the same content. Quoting or referencing content is safe, but *copied* content is not. ([Beware of tactics to “spin” content to make it only slightly different.](#))

Engagement - The level of interaction between a visitor and your website. Did they click on a link? Do they read each page of your website? Do they like, share, subscribe, or demonstrate loyalty in any way? All of these actions are looked at together to determine your website’s engagement. A website with high engagement will perform better in search results than one with low or no engagement.

Featured Snippets - Found at the top of search results pages for certain topics, these are short captions that answers a commonly-asked question. Each snippet is extracted from a webpage the googlebot thinks best addresses the topic in a concise way. (example: google a topic like “how to tie a slip knot” and note the featured box on the top of the page)



“Findability” - How easily the content on a website can be found, both by users and search engines.

Google Webmaster Guidelines - Google’s guidelines on acceptable website optimization practices, as well as improper practices that can result in manual action.

Google Analytics - A free web analytics program that can be used to contain performance, track audience behavior, traffic, content performance, and loads more.

Google Search Console - According to Google’s Search Console, it is a free service offered by Google that helps you monitor and maintain your site's presence in Google Search results.

Footer - The footer is the information found at the bottom of a web page. Here you should place information such as your privacy policy, contact information, copyright, site map, Terms of use, Social Media Icons, email signup, Login information etc.

Footer Menu - is the information placed inside the footer, such as Navigation.

Header - The top of a webpage that typically displays a page title, navigation menu, hero image, or other introductory content.

Heading(s) - In web development and in word processing, headings can refer to styles such as H1, H2, H3..., which indicate the content hierarchy. There should only be one H1 per page, and best practices recommend they include the webpage’s keyword and entice the visitor to read the page.

Homepage - The default, or introductory web page, of a website.

Hero Image- Is a large image at the top of the page that takes up much of the screen when you enter a website. Sometimes they have text overlay, sometimes they

HTML / CSS - HTML stands for Hypertext Markup Language used by web developers and is the standardized system that tags files so your site has the font, colors, graphics and hyperlink effects you want. CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets, or files dedicated to telling browsers how a page should be displayed, including various HTML elements. It is considered more efficient than using HTML alone, which can be repetitive.

HTTP - Hypertext Transfer Protocol is how data is transferred from a computer server to a web browser.

HTTPS - Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure uses a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) to encrypt data transferred between a website and web browser. Google prefers to rank secure websites, so those that display https instead of http may perform better in search results.

Inbound Link - A link coming from another site to your own website. Also referred to as a backlink. When these are legitimate, they can demonstrate authority and credibility, which are ranking factors. If they are purchased or coerced, Google can penalize your site for having them.

Internal Link- a hyperlink from one page of your site to another page on your site. If your site is about cooking and you mention egg substitutes on one page, instead of explaining it on that page while you already have a page all about egg substitutes, you make the words “egg substitutes” into a hyperlink to the “All About Egg Substitutes” page on your site.

External Link - a link on your site that leads the user to another site. Best used for reference, citing sources, referrals to trusted sources, or as a way of avoiding reinventing the wheel if another site has information you’d like to include in your content progression. (Note: set external links to open in a new browser tab, so users don’t have to leave your page to view it)

Index - The database search engines use to store and fetch information gathered during the “crawling” process.

Keywords - The words, phrases, topics, ideas, or questions that describe what your content is all about. This also refers to the words or phrases your target audience typically uses in Google searches. The goal is to match your audience’s language as much as possible, so Google sees your content as a good fit for their related searches.

Keyword Research - The process of discovering any relevant terms, topics, or subjects people enter into search engines. This can also include the rate of competition and the amount of searches conducted for each term or topic.

“Keyword Stuffing” - Repeating keywords beyond what is natural, in the hopes of increasing search rankings. This is now considered a spam tactic goes against Google’s Webmaster Guidelines and can result in a ranking penalty.

Landing Page - A stand-alone web page designed to capture leads or generate conversions, usually with persuasive content built around a single, clear, concise call to action (sign up, download, subscribe, register, enter contest, etc.)

Manual Action - Google’s term for a penalty. According to Google, *“The Manual Actions report lists instances where a human reviewer has determined that pages on your site are not compliant with Google’s webmaster quality guidelines.”* A penalized websites can either be demoted or removed from Google’s search results.

Metadata / Meta description - A description of a webpage’s content displayed under the webpage title in search results. While it isn’t used in ranking algorithms, it helps users preview the page content in the form of a teaser or intro, which can help convince them to click on that link.

Mobile Responsive / Mobile First - websites information like image, links, text, videos are easily shrunken and available across platforms like smartphones and tablets and still providing great user experience.

NAP - Internet acronym for “Name, Address and Phone Number,” used commonly in the subject of online directory listings, as it’s imperative that an organization’s NAP match exactly on each listing, or Google may count them as different/separate entities.

Navigation Menu / Website Navigation - A website’s main menu of links (Home, About, Contact, Services, Blog, etc.), telling the user what they can find on this website. It can also display the major topics the website covers.

Organic search results - What appears in search result listings after typing in a search query after paid ads or sponsored posts. “Organic” refers to the fact that the websites’ content is what caused them to rank, rather than pay-per-click advertising.

Page Speed - The amount of time it takes for a webpage to completely load. Page speed is ranking factor.

Paid search results - Pay-per-click advertisements that appear above and often below the organic results on search engines.

PPC (Pay-per-click) - A type of advertising where advertisers are charged a certain amount (usually determined by bid, relevance, account history, and competition) every time a user clicks on the ad.

Redirect - A technique that sends a user (or search engine) who requested one webpage to a different (but equally relevant) webpage. There are two types of redirects:

301: Permanent

302: Temporary

Permanent (301) redirects are recommended.

Robots.txt - The Robots Exclusion Protocol (or Standard) is a text file, accessible at the root of a website, that tells search engine crawlers which areas of a website should be ignored.

ROI: Return on Investment. While a broadly used business term, ROI is often discussed in digital marketing and SEO because these practices are not cheap to apply, but can have remarkably positive effects on an organization's online reputation, influence, and visibility.

RSS Feed - An acronym for Really Simple Syndication, RSS feeds allow content published on another site to display on your site. For example, daily news headlines, posts from a recommended blog, or even YouTube videos on a certain topic can be "fed" into a designated area on your website. You can also create content to be distributed via RSS to other websites.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) - to increase a website's visibility in search engine results pages with both *paid* and organic activities.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) - The process of optimizing a website which includes the content, so it will appear in prominent positions in the *organic* search results of search engines like Google.

Offsite SEO - Activities that are associated with your brand which take place outside of a website. Can include email marketing, social media marketing, TV, radio, high-quality natural backlinks, and more.

Onsite SEO - Activities that take place directly on your website that help your pages rank. This includes SEO focuses such as title tags, meta tags, intuitive website navigation, intuitive sitemaps, high-quality content, etc.

SERPs - Acronym for "Search Engine Results Page(s)"

Sitemap - A list of pages on a website. There are two types of sitemaps:

HTML: This type of sitemap, typically organized by topics, helps site users navigate a website.

XML: This type of sitemap provides crawlers with a list of webpages on a website and assists the indexing process.

SSL Certificate (http vs https) - A digital certificate used for website identity authentication and to encrypt information sent to the server using Secure Sockets Layer technology.

Subdomain - A domain that is part of a primary domain: **blog**.thiswebsite.com.

Top Level Domain (TLD) - The extension of a given web address, such as .com, .org, .net, .info, etc.

Traffic - The measurement of people (and sometimes bots) who visit your website.

URL - The “physical” address of a web page. For example, <https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org> is a URL—it tells your browser which website to “go” to.

UX (User Experience) - The overall impressions users have while interacting with a brand, its online presence, and its product/services. Those who work in the field of User Experience Engineering (UXE) work as software or website reviewers/testers, as an advocate for users specifically in the digital field.

User-generated content (UGC) - Forms of content like blog posts, comments, podcasts, reviews, videos videos, blog posts, etc. that is created by customers or users about a certain brand.

Vlog - a blog in video form.

Webmaster - A person who manages the technical aspects of the website. Note: a webmaster is not the same as a web developer, though at times one person can occupy both roles. A webmaster may use a CMS to create, post, archive, or move content without getting into the code at all, while a developer has the capability to edit a website at the code level.

White Hat - Tactics that comply with Google’s Webmaster Guidelines (as opposed to “black hat”).

Widget - A stand-alone mini-program that can be installed/embedded into a website through code to perform a certain action. Widgets can be ads, submission forms, quizzes or polls, or they can display content from another website, such as headlines, weather, etc.

Webpage - A document that exists on the World Wide Web and can be viewed by web browsers. A website is made up of several webpages, linked together by a sitemap, or navigational structure.

II. What's Involved in SEO

So what do we actually *do* to optimize our web presence?

Since **optimizing content for search engines primarily means optimizing content for people**, many principles of SEO follow fundamental principles of advertising, marketing, psychology and sociology. It's all about people and their behaviors.

However, since **search engines are the vehicle by which this content is delivered, there are several technical aspects involved as well**, such as web development, data gathering and analysis, and research. (Get your spreadsheets ready!)

This why digital marketing agencies typically have an entire team to carry out SEO for their clients, often comprised of copywriters, content managers, web developers, SEO specialists, and web developers. These team members spend considerable amounts of their time just keeping up with this industry, as trends and best practices can change even daily!

While this can sound overwhelming, take comfort that much of this research has already been done for you, and each chapter of this guide is based on the latest data available.

This chapter introduces the concepts and processes that are major players in a complete SEO strategy: A checklist overview, writing and optimizing content for online readers, User Experience Engineering (UX / UXE), off-site SEO basics, tracking and analyzing your audience's activity, and any technical setup or modifications that will be needed throughout.

Let's start with a checklist of major elements involved in SEO.

NOTE: Make sure to check version numbers as you read through—this document will be updated frequently, if trends change or if there's a major Google algorithm update

The following SEO fundamentals checklist has 3 categories: roles, onsite work, and offsite work.

ROLES refers to the different positions, expertise, and points of view that contribute to successful SEO. Often this means a job position, but it can also demonstrate the different facets involved in truly optimizing content for search engines (people).

ONSITE refers to adjustments and development done directly on the pages of your website.

OFFSITE refers to SEO efforts done on platforms other than your website, such as social media, directories, review sites, external websites, etc.. This can create more listings in search results that relate to your website/topic/organization, and they can also catch different

audiences and send that traffic back to your website. When done correctly and legitimately, offsite efforts can also be a big boost to credibility, relevance, and authority.

(Note: Most offsite SEO, especially with external websites, is also referred to a “backlinking,” and it must be managed with care.)

Also keep in mind that most of these list items will be covered in depth in later chapters.

1) COMMON ROLES IN A WELL-ROUNDED SEO TEAM

- **Copywriters and content writers** are trained differently than academic writers or creative writers. Advertising theory plays a big part in creating content that connects with its target audience.

Rather than an artistic focus, these writers focus on clarity, connection, directness, and appropriate emotional appeal. They write to *relate*, not to *elevate*. They write to enhance understanding and lift up the reader, making *them* feel like the hero of the story—not to condescend and make themselves, or their brand, be the star of the show. They inform and educate, emphasizing the benefits in store for the reader, not only the features of a product or service.

When it comes to SEO, these writers know how search engines work and how to use keywords/phrases without sounding unnatural. *Overall, it's important to note that not just any writer—even a very good writer—will be successful with copywriting or content writing without proper training.*

- **SEO specialists** often provide both a consultant and technical role. It's their job to stay current in what Google's doing, what the digital marketplace is doing, and how it's affecting the way people use the internet—how they consume content and what drives them to conversions (make a purchase, subscribe to a newsletter, donate to a cause, share content, etc.). This helps them advise writers, marketers and web developers and test or measure their effectiveness.

SEO specialists conduct audits for websites or the entire web presence, and they monitor and interpret analytics to see how users behave on a website or social media page. They do keyword research and use variety of software to audit websites, create content briefs, and keep up with the numerous ways a brand can expand and enrich its web presence [much of which will be covered further down in the checklist].

- **Web developers** play an integral supporting role to SEO specialists and writers. They use their knowledge of HTML, CSS, XML, Java, etc., along with user experience and web design best practice, to create a website that best supports the recommendations for content and SEO.
- **Social media specialists** are experts at the big picture of social media. They don't just write great posts, they coordinate campaigns, manage advertising and work to coordinate with a brand's overarching goals for SEO and the perception of its web presence.

2) ONSITE SEO BASICS

- **Keyword Research:** Refers to the process of discovering which words, phrases or entire sentences or questions are commonly typed into Google’s search box, as related to the topic you want to cover (e.g. “Easy Vegan Desserts,” or “Monetizing Your Blog”). Typically using software like [AdWords’ Keyword Planner](#) or [Keyword Explorer](#), and some free options as well, this process gives you a window into current search data to help you develop a strategy for content creation
- **Measuring and Analyzing User Behavior:** Knowledge is power. It’s hard to determine how to optimize your site if you don’t know how people are using it! Find out how many people come to your website, what page they come in on, how long they stay, what other pages they visit, links they click, etc.

You might find that the page you want people to see is getting skipped! Or, if you change something without looking at user activity, you might lose existing traffic—and recovering from that is tougher than gaining new traffic.

In short, this data tells you what’s working and what isn’t, so you can focus your effort where it makes the most difference. Properly installing [Google Analytics](#) and [Search Console](#) will show you this data, and much more. While there is a learning curve, they are *incredibly* useful tools. Don’t start your SEO plan without them!

- **Tags, Headers and Meta Descriptions:** These are the small pieces of content that make up the way your site appears in the list of search results. Based on keyword research, you make sure to use the best-fitting keywords on each of your pages’ titles (that appear at the top of the browser window), headers (headline and subheads for the page’s content), and meta descriptions (the intro blurb that shows underneath the page title and link—this helps draw users in by introducing the site’s content).
- **Fixing Page Errors:** If your website has broken links or other page-load errors, Google takes notice when it crawls your site. This dings your credibility with Google—and frustrates site visitors! There are several ways to [audit](#) for these errors, then you can fix link misspellings, apply redirects, or optimize other items that affect navigation.

- **Optimizing Page Load Speed:** You may have seen Google's latest [announcement](#) that page load speed is a ranking factor, especially for searches on mobile devices. If your page takes longer than 1.5 seconds to load, your ranking—and the patience of your audience—may be at risk. Fortunately there are several things you can do to address this.
- **Mobile-FIRST:** While you've heard about mobile-friendliness and mobile-responsiveness, [mobile-FIRST](#) is the most recent term sprinkled through articles and guides. Bottom line: Your website **MUST** be easily viewable and usable on a mobile screen. If not, users will leave your site AND Google will rank mobile-friendly sites over yours. Also keep in mind that this means more than just having a mobile friendly template. It has to do with content organization, text size, link click/tap-ability, and navigation.
- **Optimizing Site Security:** It's not a question of *if* your website will be hacked, but when—regardless of how much traffic it gets or what topics are covered. If you're not using good security plugins and your site is hacked, all your hard work on optimization can be lost as well. Additionally, websites without an [SSL certificate](#), which [tells browsers that a website is secure](#), can cause a lower ranking, along with [skeptical site visitors](#).
- **Optimizing Navigation:** You want to make sure your [XML sitemap is submitted to Google](#), and this sitemap should facilitate easy, user-friendly navigation throughout your site so users can follow a logical path that leads them to an action. To help users visit archived content and to give them whatever supporting information they need, use [internal linking](#) strategies.
- **Targeted, Topical, Reader-centric Content:** To achieve higher visibility for the key topics you want to work with, a good rule of thumb is to keep each webpage to one topic or subtopic, and [structure these subtopics logically](#). This makes for better navigation *and* it's easier for Google to determine what each page is about—and direct the right traffic to it.
- **Consistent Updates (Fresh content):** To determine if a site has fresh, relevant content, Google looks at how often a site is updated. If it hasn't been updated in 6 months—and other websites covering related topics have—it will cause the other sites to appear higher in search results. Additionally, if a site visitor spots out-of-date information, credibility is hurt as well. (Which is even tougher to recover from.)

- **Links to Other Sites Within your Web Presence (and some that aren't):** To help show relevance, linking to other websites can boost credibility—if the links are to quality content about similar topics. Additionally, linking to sister websites, your social media sites, or review sites can direct traffic where you want it to go, and demonstrate that you have a robust web presence. But don't overdo it! You don't want to end up ultimately leading your traffic away from you.

3) OFFSITE SEO BASICS

- **Social Media:** This is the best place to start for off-site SEO. Whether you use Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, or a custom combination, remember to *always link back to your website* for credibility's sake. Conversations happen on these platforms, but you'll often want to lead users back to your website's blog, contact page, product page, or landing page with a call to action.
- **Review Sites:** Make sure you set up or "claim" your entity on review sites like Yelp, and also on Google, Facebook, and other platforms that allow users to leave reviews. Bonus SEO points if you regularly respond to reviews ([with caution!](#)) and show an active interest in your audience!
- **Directory Sites:** Especially if you have a brick-and-mortar entity as a church, school, office, ministry, etc., directory sites such as [Google My Business](#), [Google Maps](#), [Yellowpages.com](#), [Better Business Bureau](#), and several [niche-specific directory sites](#), help legitimize your entity and provide places to add additional information, such as hours of availability, driving directions, parking information, additional contact information, area-specific information and more. Proper attention to directory sites can do wonders for your SEO—but this process also needs to be done carefully. Not all directory sites are respected. Learn more in chapter 7.
- **External Publishings:** When you're featured as a guest blogger, or you publish an article in an external online publication, you can name your organization in your bio. Additionally, anywhere your content is curated or quoted may show up in search results as well.
- **Other Websites:** When a webpage that is not run by your organization links to you, or even mentions you by name, it can show up as a listing in search results. If the page this mention/link appears on is a respected site with quality content, this can be a considerable reputation boost. However, if low-quality

websites/pages link to your site, this could actually ding your credibility (even worse—some organizations have created fake websites to link back to them. That'll get a Google penalty as well as a big reputation hit). This is why it matters how you represent your organization to other entities. (And if you do discover questionable sites linking to yours, [make sure to disavow](#) these links.)

While this checklist covers several of the fundamental facets of SEO, this is a process of perpetual motion. Your work is never “[done](#).”

Google releases updates, websites need to consistently post fresh content, and trends in online behavior can change almost instantaneously.

But a consistent, concentrated effort can reap big rewards. You can find these checklist concepts expanded in the coming chapters.

III. GETTING STARTED - YOUR SEO SETUP WORKSHEET

Now that you've learned about the importance to SEO and the fundamentals of what it entails, you don't want your organization to miss out on the far-reaching opportunities for exposure and influence. It's time to get started!

But what do you do first? How do you make sure your organization is ready?

This beginning worksheet will help you complete the first essential steps to your SEO plan.

SEO SETUP WORKSHEET

1) Make sure your organization has a dedicated Google account.

Much of your SEO work will be done within your organization's general Google account—a gmail account along with extended features and apps that is solely dedicated to the organization as a whole, not to one particular employee. It might be something like [MinistryName]Webmaster@gmail.com. You'll use this to set up and access Google Analytics and Search Console, set up your map and Google My Business listings, and more.

Having a dedicated general email account for your organization helps keep SEO and online marketing efforts separate from other email accounts, such as personal or employee-specific accounts, and in some cases it may need to be shared between 2-3 employees that are all involved in managing your organization's online marketing and reputation. This shared access can streamline your SEO efforts. And to keep things safe, the login information can be kept and monitored internally by a management position, in case of employee turnover.

What is your organization's dedicated, general Google account login information? If you don't yet have one, use this space to plan out your ideas:

Gmail address/Google login:

Username (do not use an employee's name, but something relating the organization. There is a spot for first name and last name, so something like [Organization] Webmaster will suffice):

Password (or use a [generator](#)):

Existing email address used for verification, and/or password recovery (make sure this is an email address that management has access to, so a single employee won't be in complete control of account recovery):

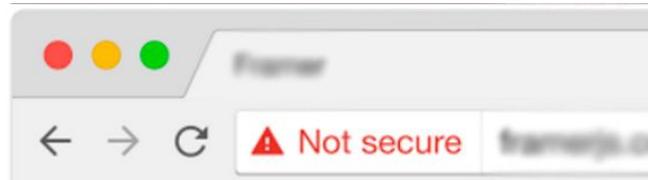
Phone number [preferably mobile] to use for account verification and/or recovery (if possible, use a mobile phone of a department head or management position that is close enough to your position that you can easily work together on any verification or recovery tasks):

Setting up your Google account (skip this step if your organization already has an account that meets the aforementioned requirements):

Start [here](#), filling in the information you wrote out in the previous section. Make sure you have quick access to the email and/or phone number you gave, as Google will send you a code you will need to enter to complete the account setup and verification.

2) Make sure your site appears secure to Google with an SSL Certificate (http:// vs. https://)

To ensure a user's connection to your website is secure, you want to make sure you have a valid SSL Certificate installed ([read more here](#)). This new security measure became a must in July 2018, when Google's Chrome browser started marking each site without an SSL Certificate (or https) as not secure.



Not only is this a [factor in search engine ranking](#), but it can also alarm visitors to your website. This is especially detrimental if you sell products on your website or accept donations.

Additionally, when you set up various analytics tools for your website, you'll want this set up properly so you can effectively track your user data. This is an important preliminary step in preparing for SEO work.

Getting an SSL Certificate does not have to be difficult or costly. They can be obtained for free at letsencrypt.org or set up through your hosting provider. These steps will help you determine the best way to get one for your organization's website (if you already have an SSL Certificate on your organization's website, skip to step 3):

- 1) **What is your organization's website's hosting provider?** (etc. [Siteground](#), Hostgator, GoDaddy, your ministry's parent organization, etc.)
- 2) **Will your hosting provider allow you to use an SSL Certificate from letsencrypt.org?** (You may need to check with your web developer, webmaster, IT dept., etc. to determine this)
- 3) **Your SSL Certificate is set up through:**
- 4) **Is your SSL Certificate [current/valid](#)?**

3) Is your website error-free?

Before you bring more traffic to your organization's website, you want to make sure they're not going to leave as quickly as they came due to frustration with errors! We recommend the following FREE tool to detect any errors on your website such as broken links, invalid redirects, server issues, and more. This is crucial to your onsite SEO efforts.

[Screaming Frog SEO Spider](#)

This free software saves you time from having to test each page, link, or image manually. Download this software onto your hard drive, open the program, and type in your organization's website information. The software will "crawl" the website to pull data to populate the program's chart. You can also export the data into an Excel spreadsheet.

Need more assistance? Try this beginning [walk-through](#) on SEO Spider.

4) Is your website [Mobile-FIRST?](#) (Mobile-friendly/Mobile-responsive)

You don't want to turn away new visitors with a website that doesn't read easily on a mobile screen! With [over half](#) of all website traffic worldwide coming from mobile devices, this cannot be ignored. What's more, Google is continually updating its search algorithms to [favor websites](#) that are optimized for mobile browsing. Your search engine ranking depends on this, too.

This involves more than just a mobile-responsive website theme. This also includes text size, page load speed, whether your site uses Java or Flash, if you have text in tables or embedded in an image, etc.

First, start with testing your organization's website to see if it's considered "mobile friendly."

<https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>

What do the results say? List any errors or page loading issues:

Use this space for notes to forward to your website developer, webmaster, designer, etc.

5) Verify your organization's N.A.P.

Especially if your organization has brick-and-mortar locations, you need to verify what Google considers your organization's **NAP: Name, Address, and Phone number**.

Sounds simple enough, but this is a way-too-common place for inconsistency, errors, and unnecessary knocks to your SEO.

These 3 bits of information are the most critical components of your local listing data, and they have to appear in exactly the same way (i.e., 123 Thisway Rd., vs. 123 Thisway Rd vs 123 Thisway Road) in every place they show: on your website, in directory listings, on your social media accounts, etc. Any discrepancies can cause Google to not list one of those URLs, or to treat a slightly-different NAP as a separate entity altogether.

After confirming your NAP with your organization, use this space as the official listing place for the name, address, and phone number. This can serve as a guide for all places your NAP will be listed:

If your organization has multiple locations:

Make sure all your locations are treated as separate entities, each with its own NAP.

(see <https://www.semrush.com/blog/local-seo-for-multiple-locations-everything-you-need-to-know/>)

If you have a large number of locations, create a centralized, master document that contains *all location details*. Create a new version each time any location data changes.

If you are a virtual organization:

Your NAP will be your organization **Name**, *email* **Address**, and primary **Phone** number.

Once you've completed this worksheet, you're ready to dive in to the foundational tasks of a successful SEO effort.

IV. Constructing Your SEO Foundation—Setting up Google Analytics and Search Console

It's the feedback you've always wanted! See how your audience is using your website.

This chapter is all about getting you connected to the right data that continually fuels your SEO strategy. You no longer have to rely on guesswork when determine what your audience likes or doesn't like about your website, your content, your products, etc.

As mentioned in the beginning checklist of SEO fundamentals, if you want to further improve both search-engine-findability and user experience, you first need to see how your website is currently being used.

It can be risky to change a link, move a page, or even change a title or headline without considering how many people are already visiting that page and how they're getting to it.

The information you get from [Google Analytics](#) and [Google Search Console](#) (previously called Google Webmaster Tools) helps you quantify specific goals and objectives to include in your overall SEO strategy. You can learn *a lot* about your audience!

Yes, this is a lot to learn, and it is highly technical. But skip this chapter at your own risk—all the SEO techniques you will learn in the following chapters only work as well as they apply to the data you find from these free, behind-the-scenes tools.

NOTE:

The following setup describes how to set up Google Analytics and Search Console for a [WordPress website](#), a highly recommended and widely-used development platform. If your organization's website is not a WordPress site, what you see may be slightly different, though the process tends to be similar.

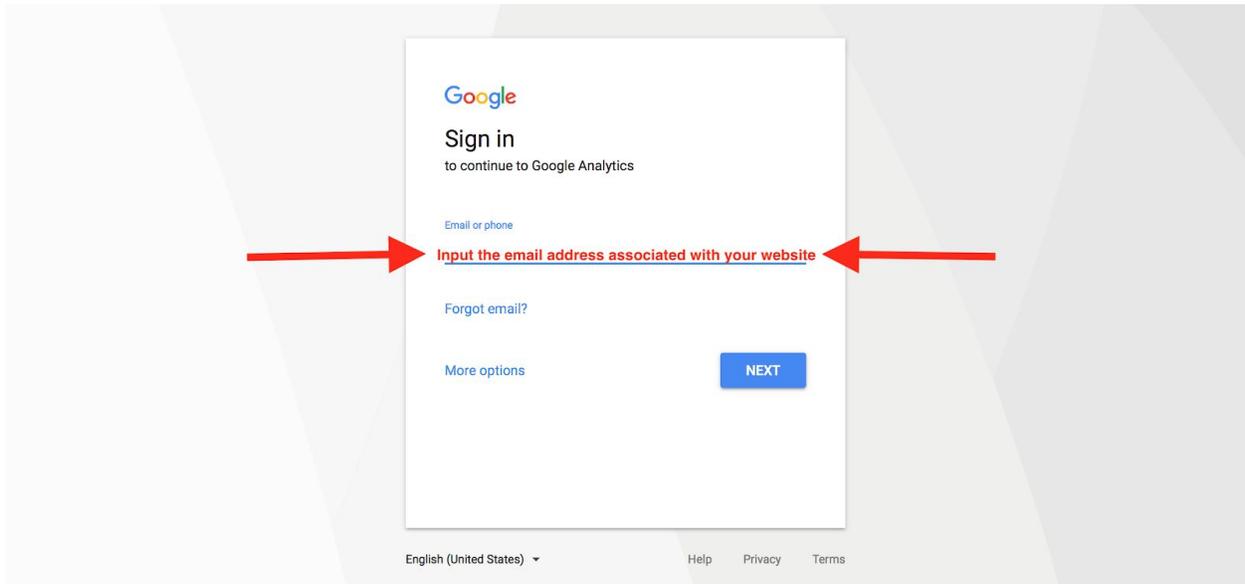
The key differences may arise during steps that involve web development, such as applying tracking codes and uploading verification files. If you have questions, contact your CMS or website provider's technical support.

Most major platforms are very familiar with this need and will have set instructions for setting up Google Analytics and Search Console. However, do check to see if your CMS allows the Analytics tracking code to be applied to each page of the website. If not, you miss out on most of the invaluable data for how users navigate your site. Make sure to get a clear answer from the tech support representative.

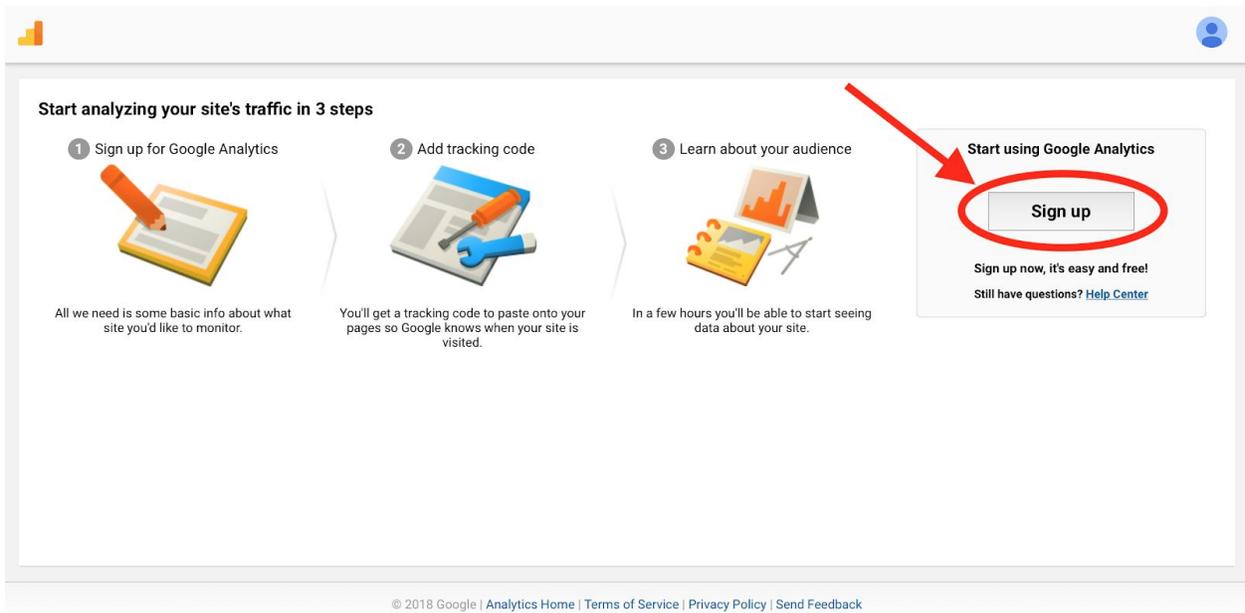
Setting up Google Analytics

“Any website worth building is a website worth tracking.”

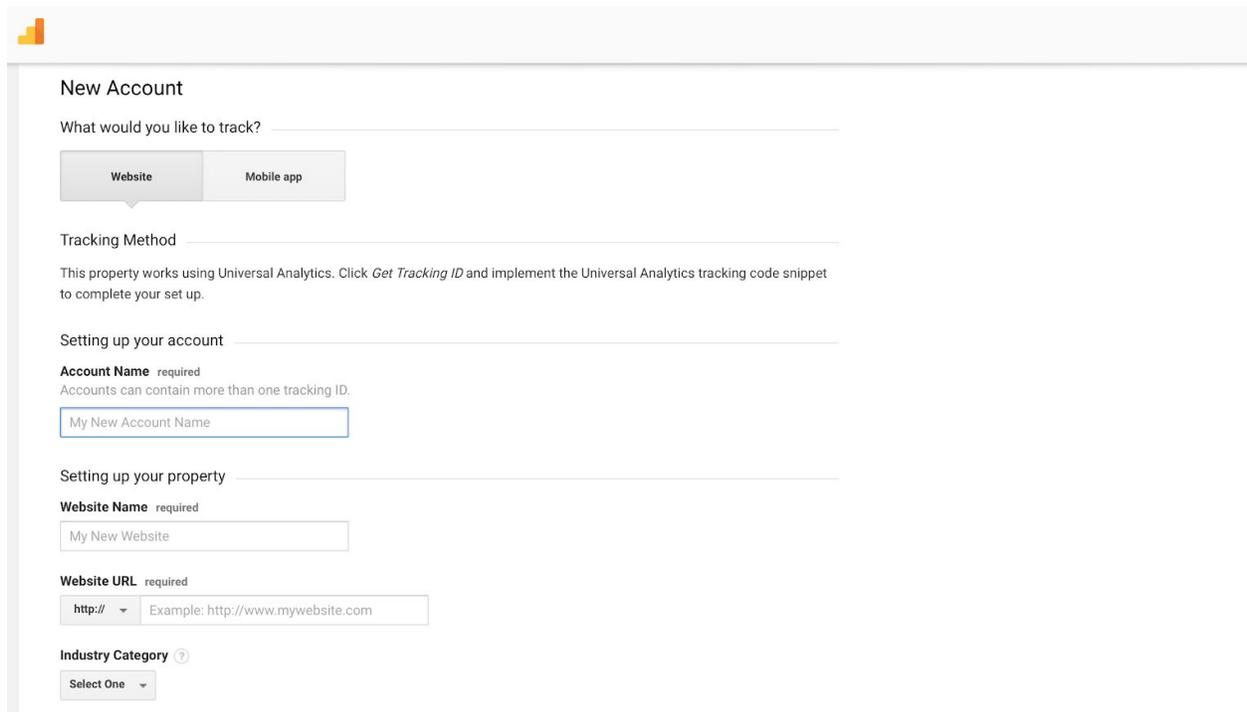
1. [Sign in](#) to your organization’s Gmail account.



2. After you enter in your email and password, go to analytics.google.com to sign up.



3. Make sure “website” is selected at the top left.



New Account

What would you like to track?

Website Mobile app

Tracking Method

This property works using Universal Analytics. Click *Get Tracking ID* and implement the Universal Analytics tracking code snippet to complete your set up.

Setting up your account

Account Name required
Accounts can contain more than one tracking ID.

Setting up your property

Website Name required

Website URL required

Example:

Industry Category ?

4. Input your organization’s name in “Account Name”

5. Use your website’s domain name for the “Website Name,” e.g., “myministrywebsite.com”

6. “Industry Category” is optional, but Google can show you benchmark data from similar types of websites so you can get a feel for what others are doing.

7. Enter the time zone of your organization’s primary location.

8. Before you finish on this page, note the check boxes. There are some data sharing options. You can read through these links and decide if you'd like to share this information with Google's support team and account specialists. If you don't want to share any of your analytics data, leave the box unchecked.

Data Sharing Settings ?

Data you collect, process, and store using Google Analytics ("Google Analytics data") is secure and kept confidential. This data is used to [maintain and protect](#) the Google Analytics service, to perform system critical operations, and in rare exceptions for legal reasons as described in our [privacy policy](#).

The data sharing options give you more control over sharing your Google Analytics data. [Learn more](#).

- Google products & services** **RECOMMENDED**
Share Google Analytics data with Google to help improve Google's products and services. *If you disable this option, data can still flow to other Google products explicitly linked to Analytics. Visit the [product linking](#) section in each property to view or change your settings.*
- Benchmarking** **RECOMMENDED**
Contribute anonymous data to an aggregate data set to enable features like benchmarking and publication that can help you understand data trends. All identifiable information about your website is removed and combined with other anonymous data before it is shared with others.
- Technical support** **RECOMMENDED**
Let Google technical support representatives access your Google Analytics data and account when necessary to provide service and find solutions to technical issues.
- Account specialists** **RECOMMENDED**
Give Google marketing specialists and your Google sales specialists access to your Google Analytics data and account so they can find ways to improve your configuration and analysis, and share optimization tips with you. If you don't have dedicated sales specialists, give this access to authorized Google representatives.

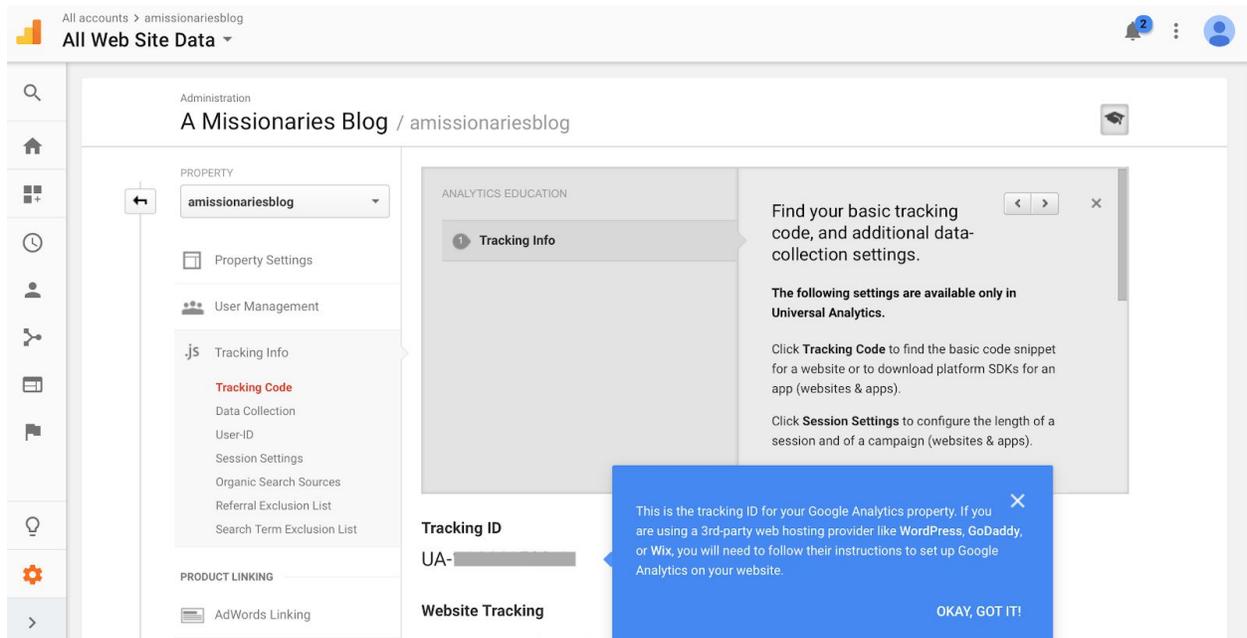
Learn how Google Analytics [safeguards your data](#).

You are using 0 out of 100 accounts.

Get Tracking ID Cancel

9. Click "Get Tracking ID," and a pop-up screen will ask you to agree to terms of service. You must accept before you continue.

You'll see a screen similar to this:

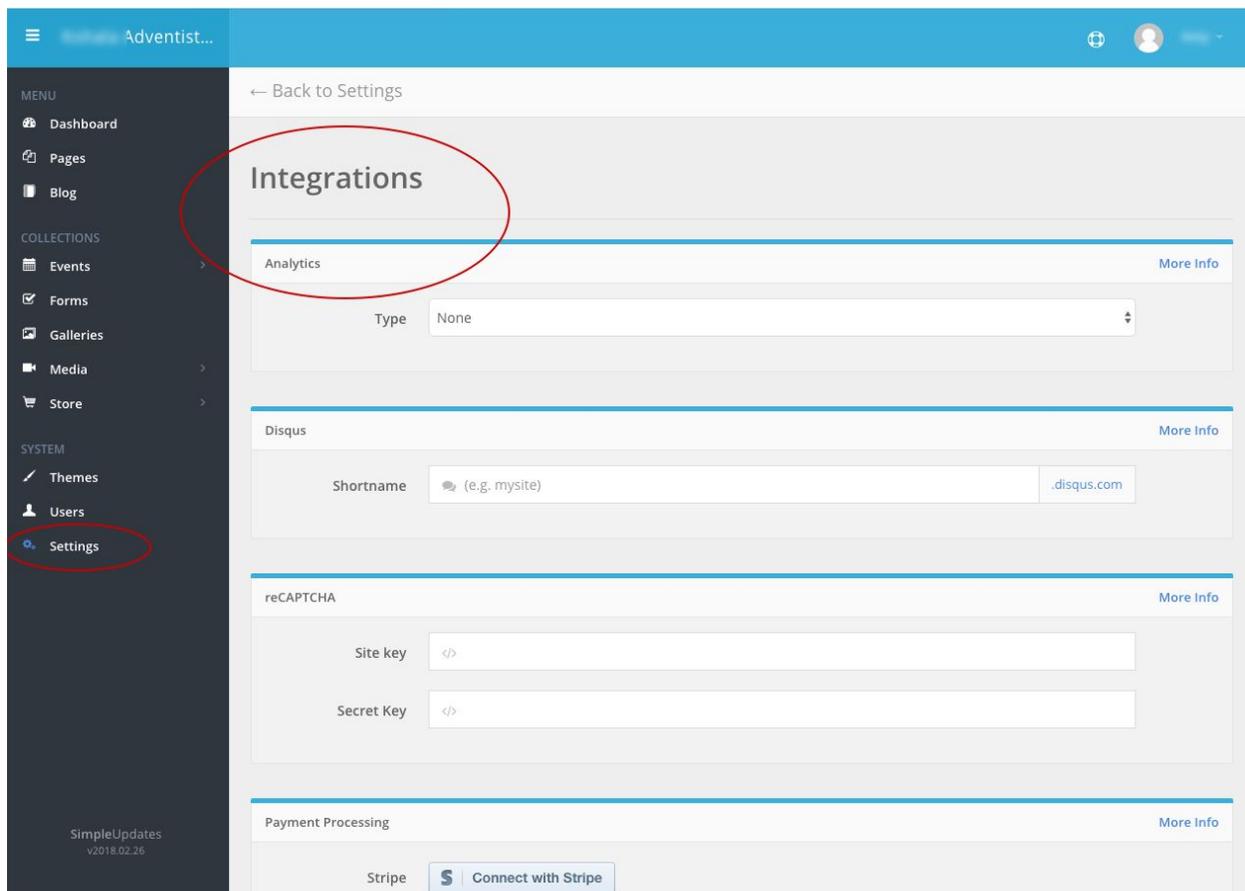


10. The Tracking ID and Website Tracking script you receive will need to be installed on each page of your website in order to start gathering information about how people are navigating your site and present it in its reports.

There are several ways to install Google Analytics on your site, and it mostly depends on the type of content management system (CMS) used for your organization’s website. We’ll go through 3 common methods:

1) Installing the code in AdventistChurchConnect or AdventistSchoolConnect 3.0

- From your ACC dashboard, go to Settings, then Integrations.
- At the top you’ll see an “Analytics” box. Select “Google Analytics” in the “Type” dropdown menu.
- A space will show up to enter your Google Analytics ID. This will apply it to the entire site.



2) Applying the Website Tracking script to your website's code.

- If you or your website developer is up for it, you can add this Website Tracking script directly to the theme of your WordPress website.
- This small javascript code is copied and pasted into your website's template page before the closing </head> tag.
 - NOTE: Your specific tracking code will replace "UA-XXXX-X"

```
<script type="text/javascript">

var _gaq = _gaq || [];
_gaq.push(['_setAccount', 'UA-XXXX-X']);
_gaq.push(['_trackPageview']);

(function() {
var ga = document.createElement('script'); ga.type = 'text/javascript'; ga.async = true;
ga.src = ('https:' == document.location.protocol ? 'https://ssl' : 'http://www') + '.google-analytics.com/ga
.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(ga, s);
})();
</script>
```

3) Using a free WordPress plugin, "MonsterInsights." (Note: There are several plugins designed for the purpose of applying Google Analytics to your WordPress website, this is just one of the recommended plugins)

- From your WordPress dashboard, go to "plugins" and "Add New."
- Do a keyword search for "MonsterInsights" to find the plugin.
- Install MonsterInsights and click "activate."
- Once activated, there will be a new section to your Admin area called "Insights."
- Go to Insights -> Settings. You'll need to authenticate your Google account, which allows Wordpress to communicate with Google and send its site visitor information.
- To authenticate, make sure you are still logged in to your organization's Google account. Check that the gmail address is up at the top right of the pop-up box from MonsterInsights. Click "Allow" and follow the prompts.
- You can also paste the code in manually. Check the "Manually enter your UA code" box, then go back to your Analytics account, click on the Admin link in the main menu, and then "Property Settings" under the "Property" column.

- Copy the code under “Tracking ID” (include the UA portion) and paste the code into the text box in the plugin.
- Click on “Save Changes” and your site should now be tracking your visitor data.

12d. There are also ways to add your tracking code to Wix, SquareSpace or other CMSs, many of which have instructions in their documentation or can be found online.

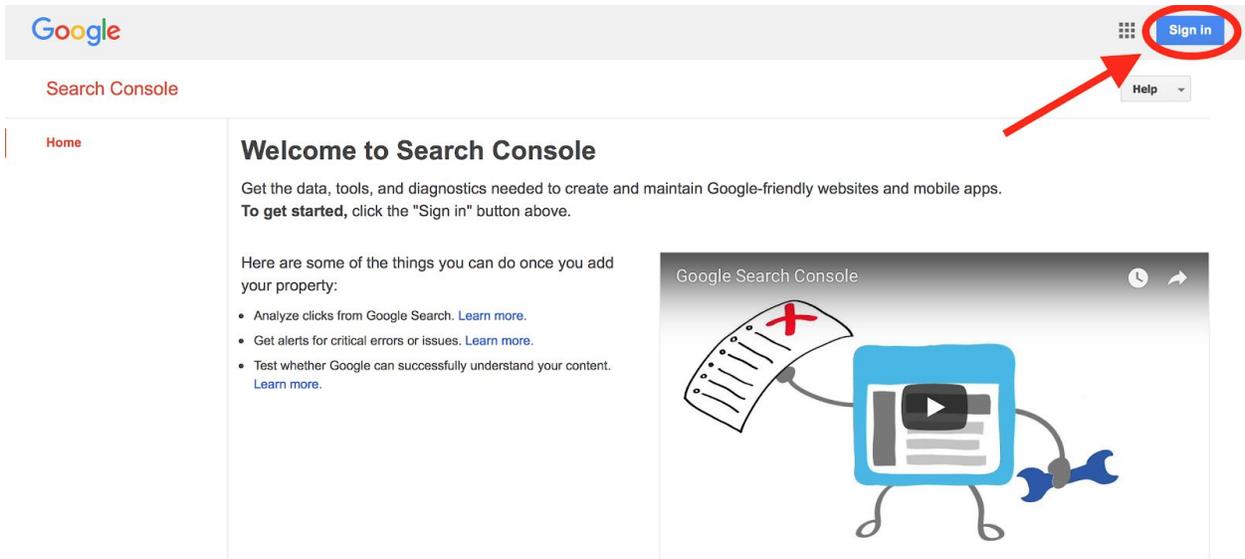
Now that your code is applied to your site, check back in a few days to make sure everything is working. You should see some activity through most of your webpages, though it will take about 30 days to truly get a picture of the regular activity.

Once you have verified that Analytics is successfully installed, you can install Google Search Console to submit your website to Google and monitor how your website interacts with search engines. You can also check for errors that might keep Google from crawling your site.

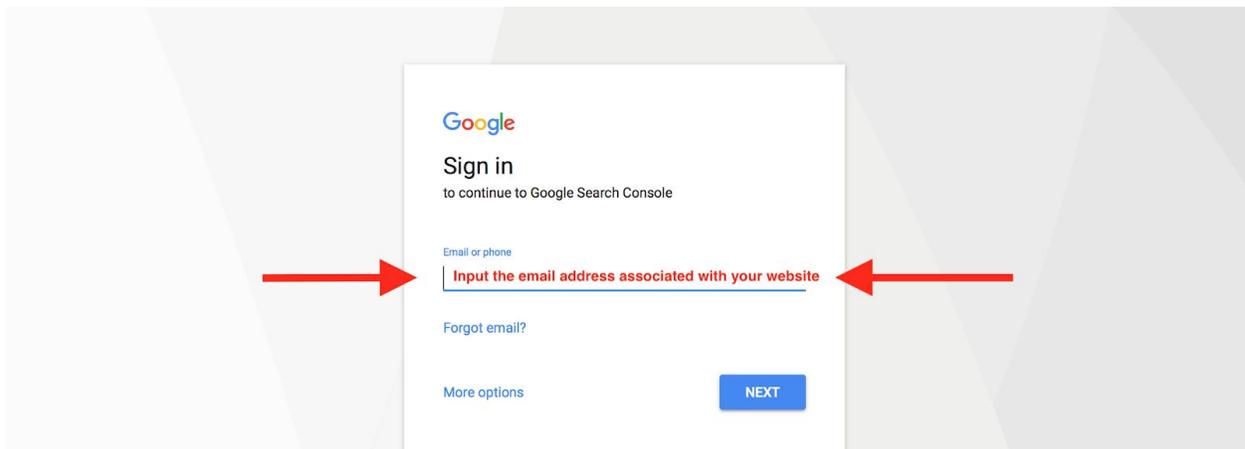
Setting up Google Search Console

Monitor how your website interacts with Google searches, and if any errors are preventing users from finding your organization's website.

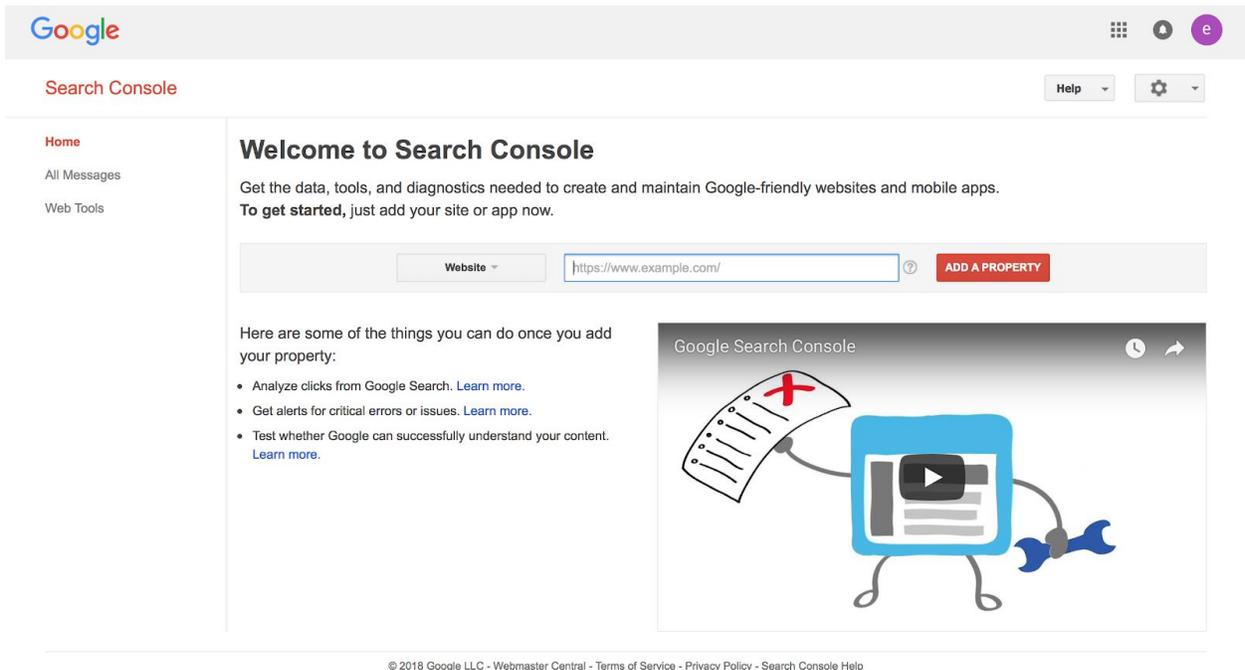
1. Go to [Search Console](#) and click “Sign In.”



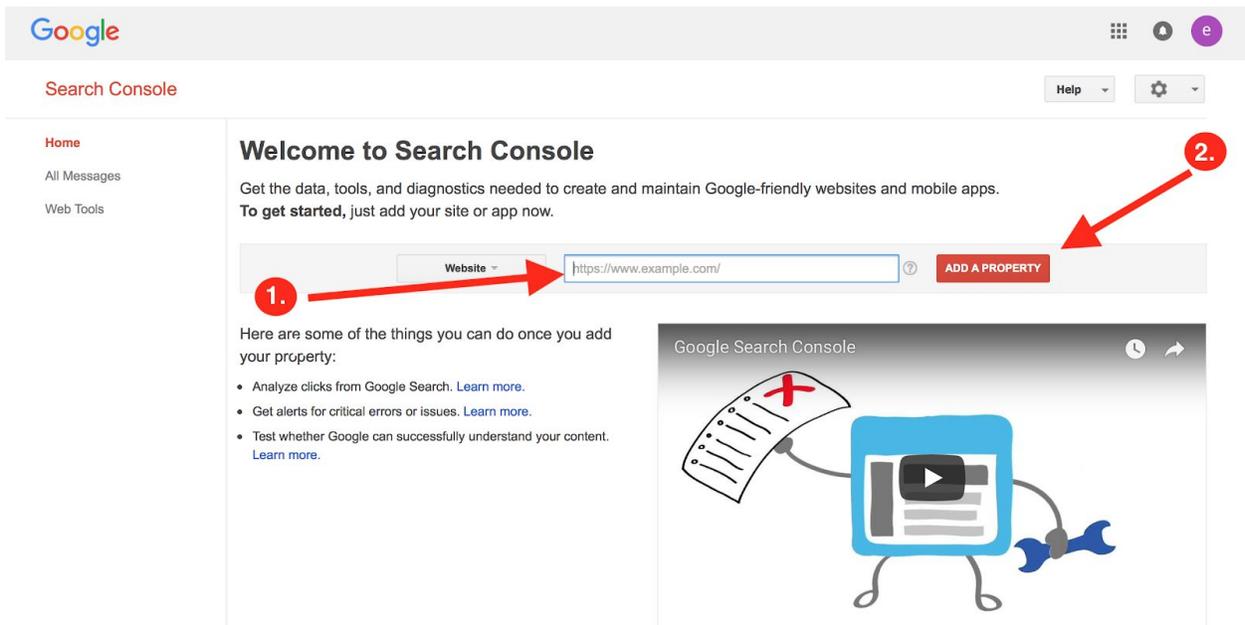
2. Enter the email address & password associated with your organization’s website.



3. Once you enter email and password, you will see the welcome page.



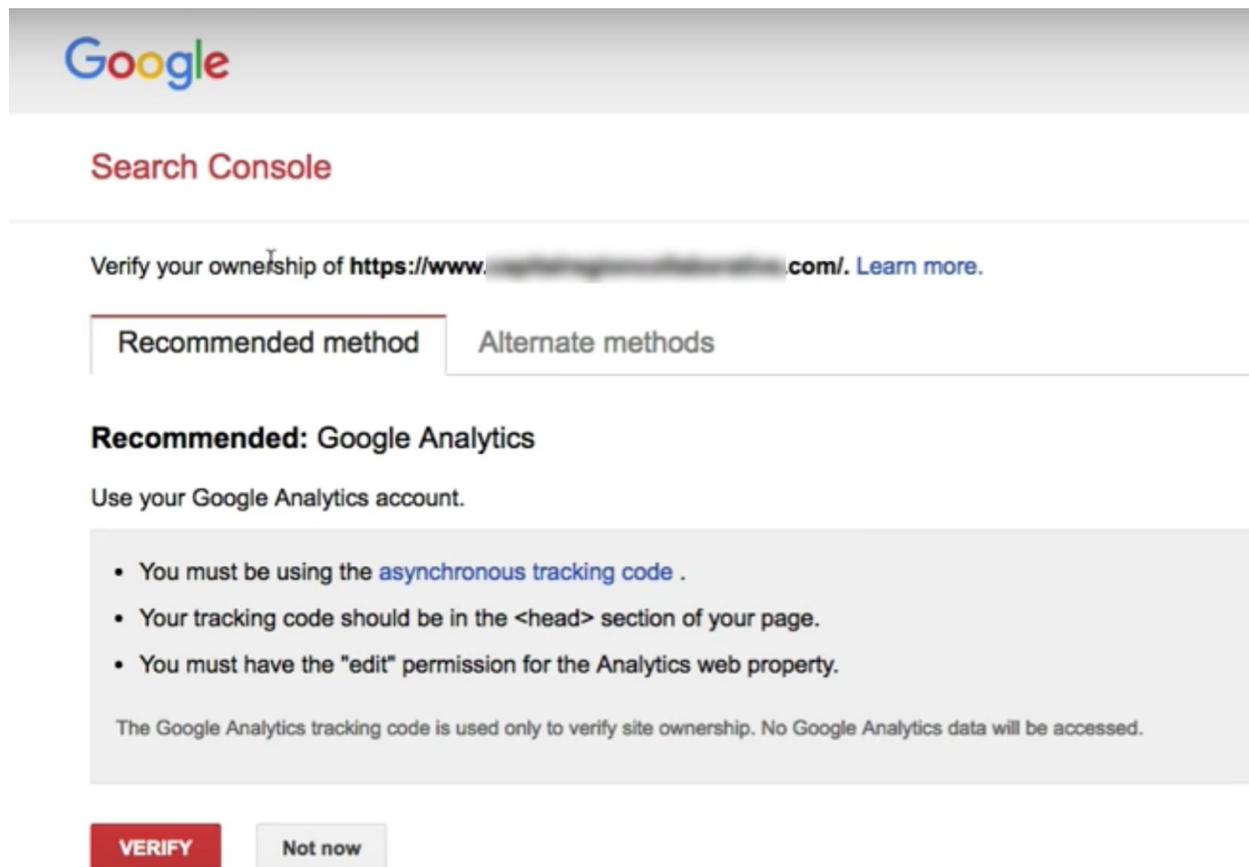
4. First, add the name of your website and secondly, click “Add a property.”



NOTE: The actual function of adding a property isn't included in the **NEW** Google Search Console yet. That's why Search Console automatically switches back to the old version where you can add your website. *(Google Search Console recently updated and is slowly getting rid of the old format. The Center will provide an updated lesson with newer screenshots when Google permanently removes the old format.)*

5. Next you'll be asked to verify if you own the website. Since you already have Google Analytics installed and are logged in to the same Google account, you may try the first recommended method of verification/ownership. Hit "Verify," and then you'll see a confirmation page.

NOTE: If this method of verification does not work, please see the next step for additional instructions. If you are not using WordPress, this process may need an alternative method of verification.



The screenshot shows the Google Search Console interface. At the top is the Google logo. Below it, the text "Search Console" is displayed. A message prompts the user to verify ownership of a website, with a "Learn more" link. Two tabs are visible: "Recommended method" (which is selected) and "Alternate methods". Under the "Recommended method" tab, the heading "Recommended: Google Analytics" is shown, followed by the instruction "Use your Google Analytics account." A list of three bullet points provides specific requirements for using Google Analytics for verification. Below the list, a note states that the tracking code is used only for verification and that no data will be accessed. At the bottom, there are two buttons: a red "VERIFY" button and a grey "Not now" button.

Verify your ownership of [https://www. \[redacted\] .com/](https://www. [redacted] .com/). [Learn more.](#)

Recommended method Alternate methods

Recommended: Google Analytics

Use your Google Analytics account.

- You must be using the [asynchronous tracking code](#) .
- Your tracking code should be in the <head> section of your page.
- You must have the "edit" permission for the Analytics web property.

The Google Analytics tracking code is used only to verify site ownership. No Google Analytics data will be accessed.

VERIFY Not now

6a. Just in case this process needs a few extra steps, it may be a good idea to have your website administrator/developer available for guidance or assistance. Note the recommended methods of verification:

- **HTML file upload**—which requires ftp access to your website. Google will give you a file to download, and you will upload that same file to your ftp. Then come back to Search Console and click “Verify.”
- **HTML tag**—There are plugins available to assist in this, such as Jetpack or Yoast SEO. This involves adding a meta tag to your site’s homepage. You may add this meta tag straight to your website’s theme’s header php file, though if you change your theme you’ll need to paste this meta tag back in.
- **Domain name provider**—This signs in to your domain provider account to upload a file. Google will provide steps to walk you through this process.
- **Google Tag Manager**—If you are using Google Tag Manager, you can use this process. Tag Manager is not covered in this lesson.

If you are still having trouble verifying your website for search console, feel free to ask for help at info@centerforonlineevangelism.org.

Verify your ownership of <http://amissionariesblog.wordpress.com/>. [Learn more.](#)

Your Google Account will be recorded in Google's systems as an official owner of this property.
Note - your ownership information will be stored and be visible to other owners (both current and future).

Recommended method

Alternate methods

Recommended: HTML file upload

Upload an HTML file to your site.

1. **Download** [this HTML verification file](#). [googleba5819ed9ead3051.html]
2. **Upload** the file to <http://amissionariesblog.wordpress.com/>
3. **Confirm** successful upload by visiting <http://amissionariesblog.wordpress.com/googleba5819ed9ead3051.html> in your browser.
4. **Click Verify** below.

To stay verified, don't remove the HTML file, even after verification succeeds.

I'm not a robot



VERIFY

Not now

6b. For WordPress users who use Yoast SEO we recommend using the HTML tag within the ‘Alternate methods.’

You can easily copy this code and paste it into the “Webmaster tools” tab within the Yoast SEO plugin:

Verify your ownership of [http://www.yoast.com/](#). [Learn more.](#)

Recommended method **Alternate methods**

Choose the HTML tag under Alternative Methods to Verify Site

HTML tag
Add a meta tag to your site's home page.

1. Copy the meta tag below, and paste it into your site's home page. It should go in the <head> section, before the first <body> section.

```
<meta name="google-site-verification" content="54-230_@0WGOOL3W1MLYED-5YU4#085#HTA" />
```

Note: Copy only the code

▶ [Show me an example](#)

2. Click **Verify** below.

To stay verified, don't remove the meta tag, even after verification succeeds.

Domain name provider
Sign in to your domain name provider.

Google Analytics
Use your Google Analytics account.

Google Tag Manager
Use your Google Tag Manager account.

VERIFY

Place the copied code in the Google Search Console box. After saving this, you can return to Google Search Console and click on the ‘Verify’ button to confirm.

Dashboard **General** Features Your info **Webmaster tools** Security

Dashboard

Titles & Metas
Social
XML Sitemaps
Advanced
Tools
Search Console
Premium
Collapse menu

Webmaster Tools verification

You can use the boxes below to verify with the different Webmaster Tools, if your site is already verified, you can just forget about these. Enter the verify meta values for:

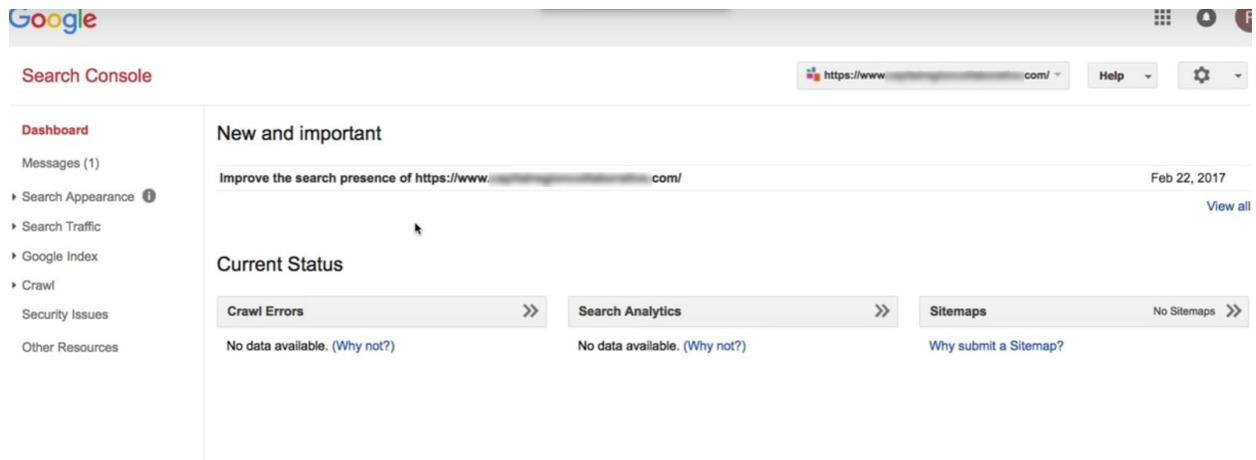
[Bing Webmaster Tools:](#)

[Google Search Console:](#)

[Yandex Webmaster Tools:](#)

Save changes

7. Once your website ownership is verified, your Search Console dashboard should look similar to this:



You will have to wait 5-7 days to see any meaningful data. Make sure to check back regularly—set calendar appointments to make sure you don't forget!

After you've confirmed that both Analytics and Search Console are properly set up and working, the next chapter will show you how to start using these important tools.

If you want to keep learning more, here are some recommended videos:

How to Set up Google Search Console (and add a sitemap)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beEEksQ5a5c&t=195s>

How to Increase Your Search Traffic Using Google Search Console

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df3bnPfiNkA>

Beginner Tutorials for Google Analytics & Search Console

Helping you get the most out of viewing and interpreting this valuable data so you can best determine what your website needs.

When you first log in to Google Analytics or Search Console with no prior knowledge of these tools, it can be tricky to know what to look at first!

But soon you'll discover just how much you can learn from this data, and how useful it can be in planning any technical or content updates. It will get easier!

You'll learn how to quickly check for site errors that may affect search engine performance or user experience, while also determining how users are navigating your site. You'll find out if any important pages are being missed, or if certain pages are causing a drop-off in traffic.

By tracking your audience's patterns, you can better plan your content to match their preferences and behavior, which can dramatically affect engagement.

We'll start with terms and basic functions, followed by a screenshot-assisted walk-through of each tool.

You will see these terms in the menus and reports of Google Analytics or displays of Search Console, so you'll likely understand them even better when you see them in context. A technical vocab list can seem intimidating at first, but as you get to know the platform it will quickly start to make sense. (NOTE: Not all terms will be covered in these tutorials—only the most immediately necessary.)

Google Analytics Terms and Functions

Sessions: A “set” of a user’s interactions within your website that take place within a given time frame (set to a default of 30 minutes). This can mean multiple page views, social commenting, or ecommerce transactions. (For more information, try this [Google support article](#))

New Visitors: A first-time visitor to the website (unique IP address)

Bounce Rate: The amount of users that come to the website and then click out immediately, signifying that they did not find what they were looking for. The lower the number, the better. When the number is higher, this tells Google the page isn’t relevant to the search terms being used to find it. *NOTE: Don’t take this number too seriously—Google often considers it a “bounce” whenever someone hits the “back” button, which doesn’t always mean that the person didn’t find what they needed in the page content!*

Page/Session: This shows how much a visitor engaged on the website, such as pages they clicked on.

Average Session Duration: The average amount of time a visitor stayed on your website. 2 -3 minutes is favorable, while under 1 minute implies that visitors didn’t find what they were looking for.

Users: People who have started at least one session during the date range.

Unique Visitors: These are “search visitors” who have arrived to your website from search engine results.

Direct Visitors: Direct visitors have come to your site by typing in your exact URL into the address bar in the their browser.

Referral Visitors: Visitors who visit the website because it was mentioned somewhere on another website or blog that they were visiting.

Behavior: This measures how users interact with your site, or applications on the website. Standard metrics include the number of users interacting with your application, the number of sessions those users create, and the screens or web pages they visit.

Conversion: completion of an activity that is important to the success of your business, such as a completed sign up for your email newsletter (a Goal conversion) or a purchase (a Transaction, sometimes called an Ecommerce conversion).

Key Performance indicators (KPIs) are a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively your website is achieving its objectives, such as number of sessions, target bounce rate, number of returning visitors, demographics engagement, etc.

Navigating Your Google Analytics Dashboard

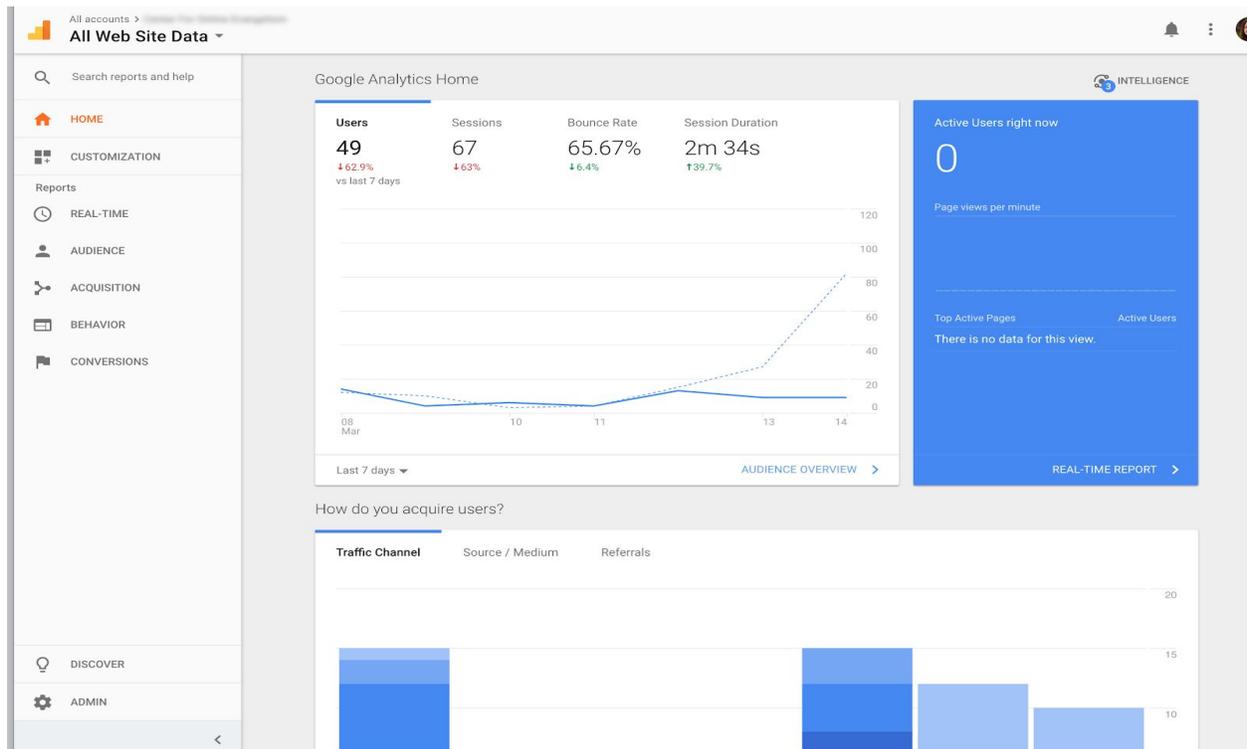
NOTE: If you just set up Google Analytics, we recommend letting it gather a month's worth of data before making in-depth analyses. Otherwise you will not have a enough data to truly determine usage patterns.

After logging in, you'll immediately be taken to your Home area that provides a snapshot of (by default) the last 7 days of activity on your website.

By selecting "28 days" at the drop-down menu on the bottom left of that box, you'll get a more complete picture of average use patterns.

Other boxes on the Home screen show user trends, region users are browsing from, and which devices are used for browsing (desktop, mobile, tablet).

It can also be helpful to scroll to the last box that displays which pages your users visit, with the most popular on top.



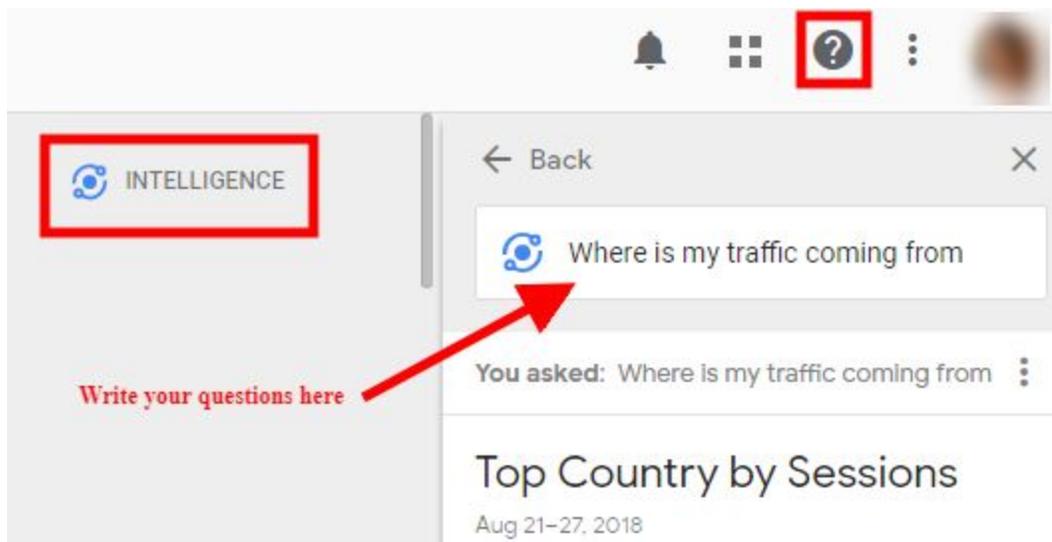
Got specific questions already?

A great place to start your Google Analytics journey is at the top left of the page, the **Intelligence** section.

This will guide you through Google Analytics by asking [questions](#) like “Where is my traffic coming from?” or “What were my most popular pages from July 1-24”.

This will also notify you of any inconsistencies in your data. These **anomalies** (the term Google uses) will be presented as insights.

Insights will explain opportunities, trends, or changes that can make an impression on your website. For example, it can show you that a certain landing pages is getting more traffic than before, or if the number of new users is dropping. Knowing these things allows you to adjust accordingly.



You can find your insights on your home page in the second row on the right.

The screenshot displays the Google Analytics interface for 'All Web Site Data'. The top navigation bar includes the Analytics logo, account information, and utility icons. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Google Analytics Home:** Features a summary of key metrics: Users (↓ 2.8% vs last 7 days), Sessions (↓ 2%), Bounce Rate (↑ 0.7%), and Session Duration (↓ 13.7%). Below this is a line chart showing trends from August 23rd to 29th.
- Active Users right now:** Shows a real-time count of 0 active users and a bar chart for page views per minute.
- How do you acquire users?:** A stacked bar chart showing traffic channels (Organic Search, Social, Direct, Referral, Other) from August 23rd to 29th.
- Anomaly Detected:** A red-bordered box highlights an alert for a spike in pageviews for a specific page on August 8, 2018. The alert text states: "Anomaly Detected: spike in Pageviews for Page [url redacted] on Aug 8, 2018. For this Page, we forecast Pageviews of 2.31-42.7 for Aug 8, 2018, and your actual Pageviews of 79 is higher than this range." A small line chart below the text shows the actual value (79) as a red dot significantly above the forecasted range.

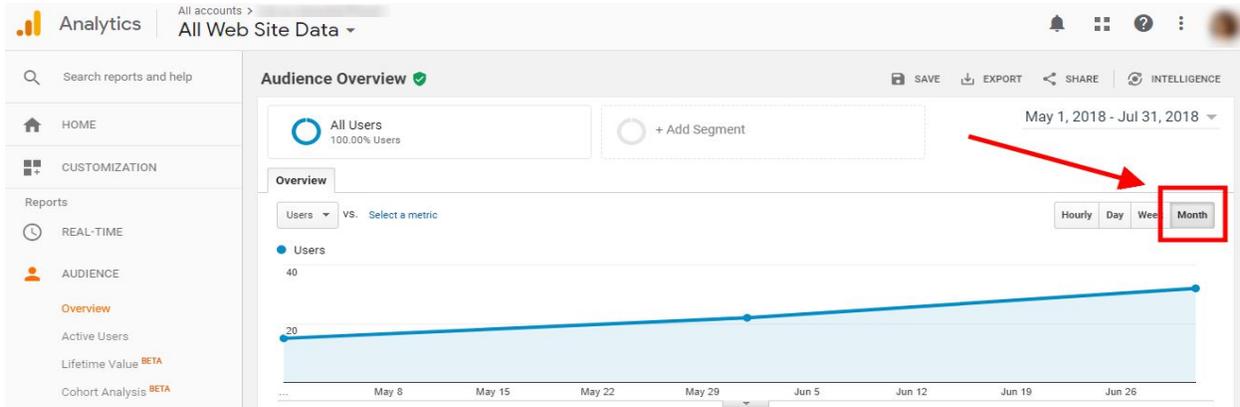
A red arrow labeled "Insights" points from the top of the page to the anomaly alert box.

Helpful Reports

With several reports to choose from, the most immediately helpful reports can be:

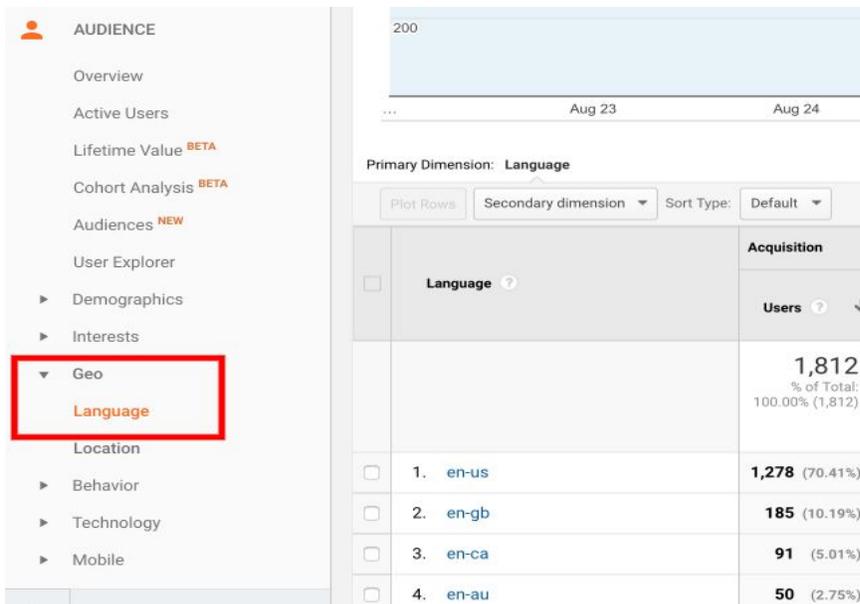
AUDIENCE—Overview. (Who's visiting?)

Above the line graph to the right, select “Month” to get a clearer average. This will show you a more in-depth look at how many users are coming to your site and how they spend their time.



AUDIENCE—Geo

Under **Geo** you can view the **Language** used by the viewer. If you see significant percentages in different languages, it could be a tip that a translated page could be helpful to your audience.



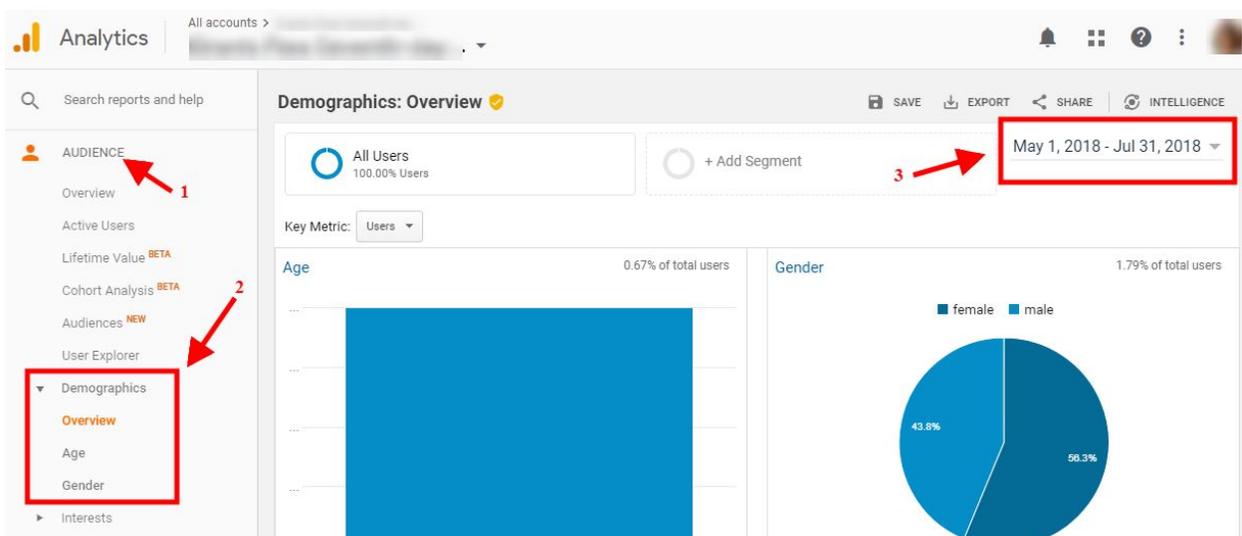
If you are a local organization that depends upon local traffic to your website, click **Geo > Location > City** to see if your target area is engaging with your site.



AUDIENCE—Demographics—Overview

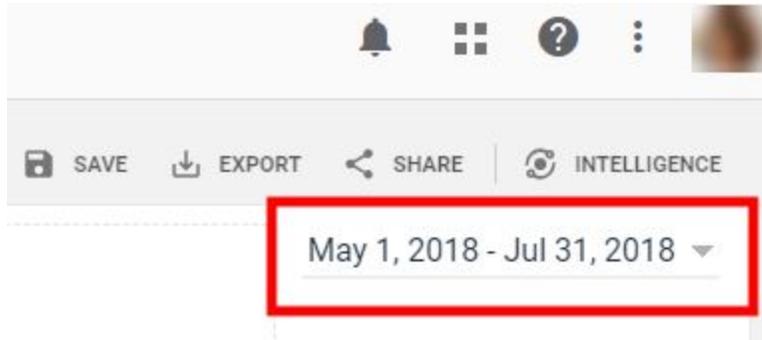
If your content is targeted to a certain age or gender, you'll want to look here. You can view the age and gender (2) of the users who visited in the last selected timeframe.

At the top right you can customize the timeframe by date (3).



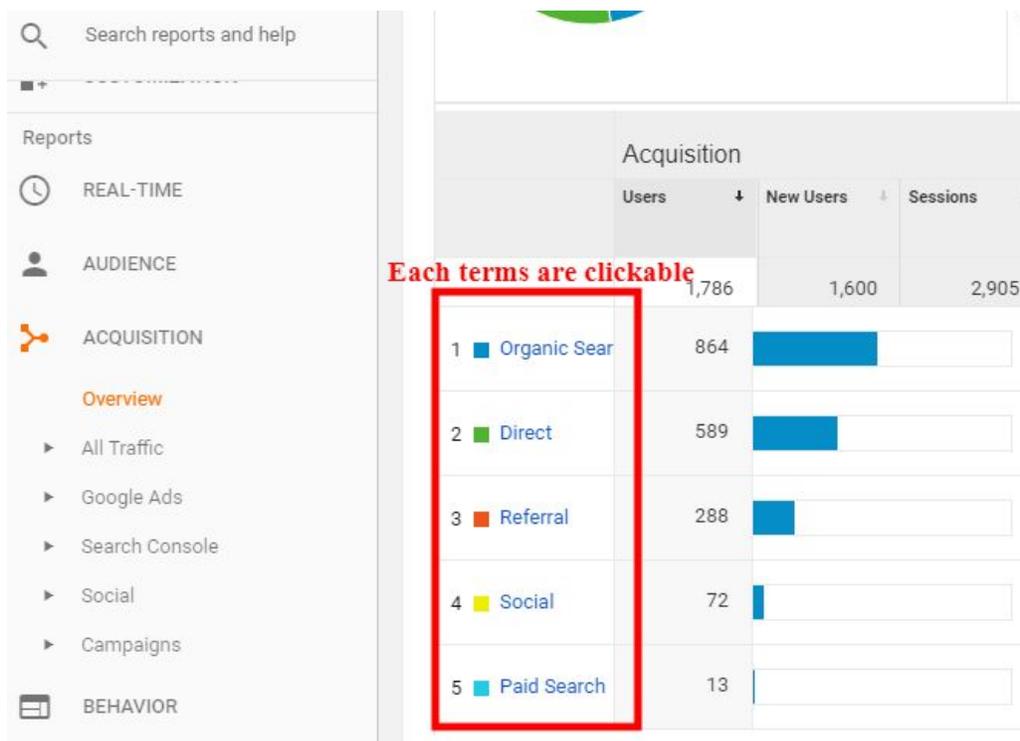
ACQUISITION—Overview. (How are they getting here?)

With the default timeframe set to 3 months (found in the right corner of the page), view how people are getting to your site:



These visitors may have clicked to your site via:

1. **Organic Search** (they searched for a keyword or phrase, found your site in the listing and decided to click on it).
2. **Direct** (they typed your URL into their browser)
3. **Referral** (link from another site)
 - a. To find out which sites are linked to yours, you'll need to use Search Console)
4. **Social** (link from social media)
5. **Paid Search** (by clicking on a pay-per-click ad)



ACQUISITION—Social—Overview

Scroll down to the Overview window to Social Value. Unless you've worked ahead, you won't have any goals here. But you can see how many sessions have come from which social media platform. Use this data to match against how many posts you've published in the selected timeframe (3-month default).

through your site.

Don't show education messages.

This Report Uses Goals

Goal conversions are the primary metric for measuring how well your site fulfills business objectives. A goal conversion is registered once a user completes a desired action on your site, such as a registration or download.

Contact your view's administrator to enable goals.

% of sessions: 100.00%

Social Value

You haven't defined any goals, so we're unable to measure the value of social referrals on your site. [Create a goal](#)

0 (\$0.00)
Contributed Social Conversions

0 (\$0.00)
Last Interaction Social Conversions

Sessions: **1,113**

Sessions via Social Referral: **128**

Conversions: **0**

Contributed Social Conversions: **0**

Last Interaction Social Conversions: **0**

Social Sources	Social Network	Sessions	% Sessions
Social Network	1. Facebook	116	90.62%
Pages	2. Twitter	12	9.38%

Shared URL

Social Plugins

Social Network

[view full report](#)

ACQUISITION—Social—Network Referrals

This is big for social media managers! This report lets you see which pages users are coming in on through social media referrals. This can help you track which posts were sending users to your site, depending on which URL was linked in the post.

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics interface for the 'ACQUISITION' section. The left sidebar menu is visible, with 'Social' expanded and 'Network Referrals' highlighted in orange. A red box highlights the 'Social' and 'Network Referrals' items. The main content area shows a bar chart with a value of 250. Below the chart, the 'Primary Dimension' is set to 'Social Network'. A dropdown menu for 'Secondary dimension' is visible. The 'Social Network' report shows a list of social media sources:

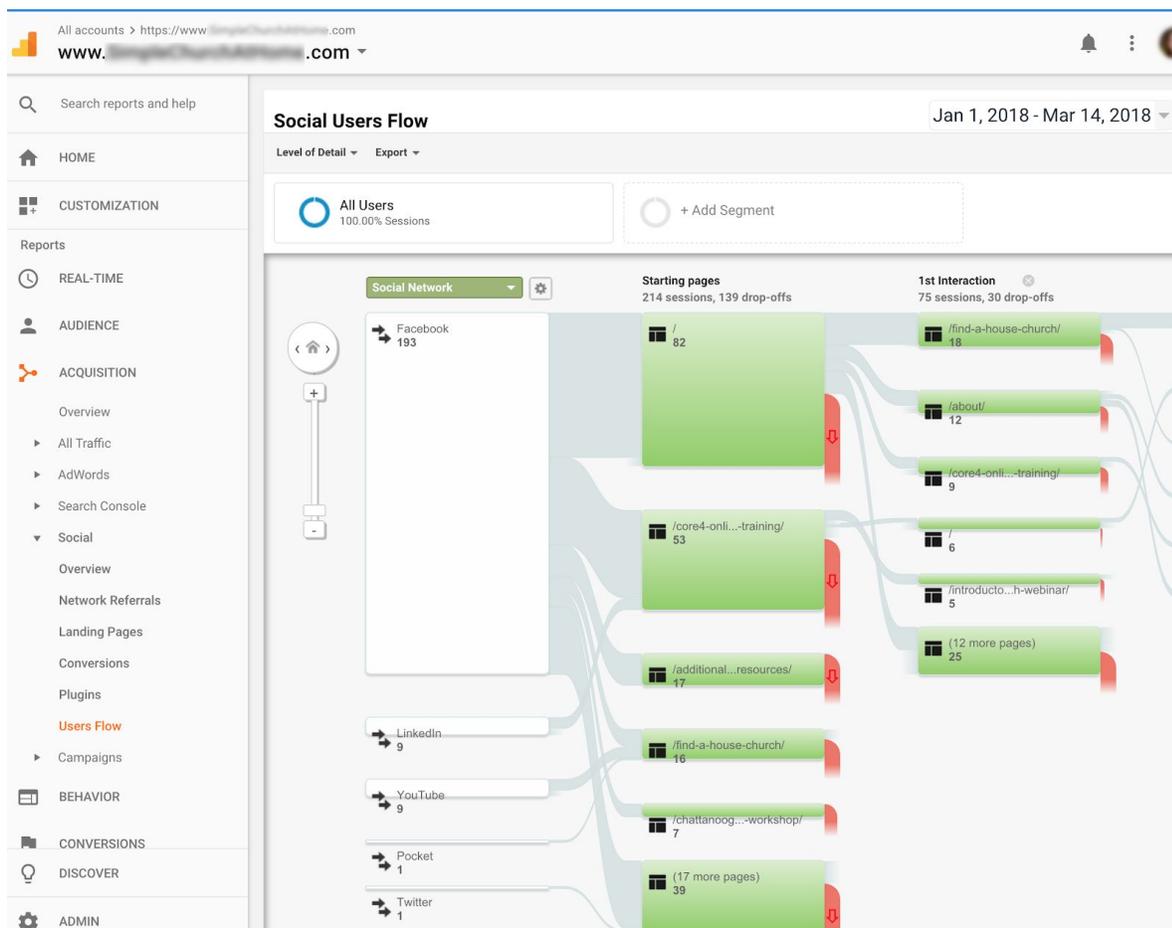
Social Network
1. YouTube
2. Pinterest
3. Facebook
4. WordPress

A red arrow points to the 'Facebook' entry in the list. Below the arrow, the text 'Clickable Terms' is written in red.

ACQUISITION—Social—Users Flow

This journey map starts instead with the social media platform that brought the user to your website. See which page URL they clicked on, which can indicate which posts are getting the most activity and which events are encouraging click-throughs.

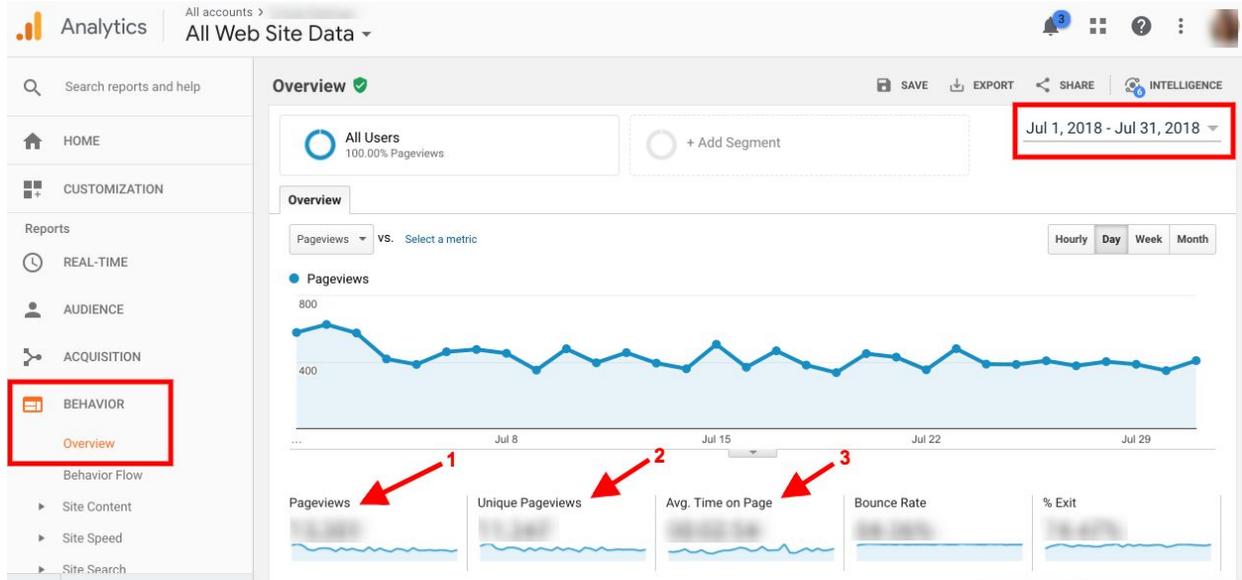
If you hover over the Starting Pages or Interactions, you'll see a pie chart representation of how many users kept navigating your site, and how many dropped off at this point. Use this data to measure against your site content, which will help determine if users are finding what they need, or getting frustrated or bored and leaving.



BEHAVIOR—Overview. (What are they doing?)

The Behavior Overview provides a graph showing the amount of traffic your website receives and how they use your site. Make sure to select “Month” above the line graph.

These 3 are the most important metrics here: 1, Pageviews, 2. Unique Pageviews, and 3. Avg. Time on Page.



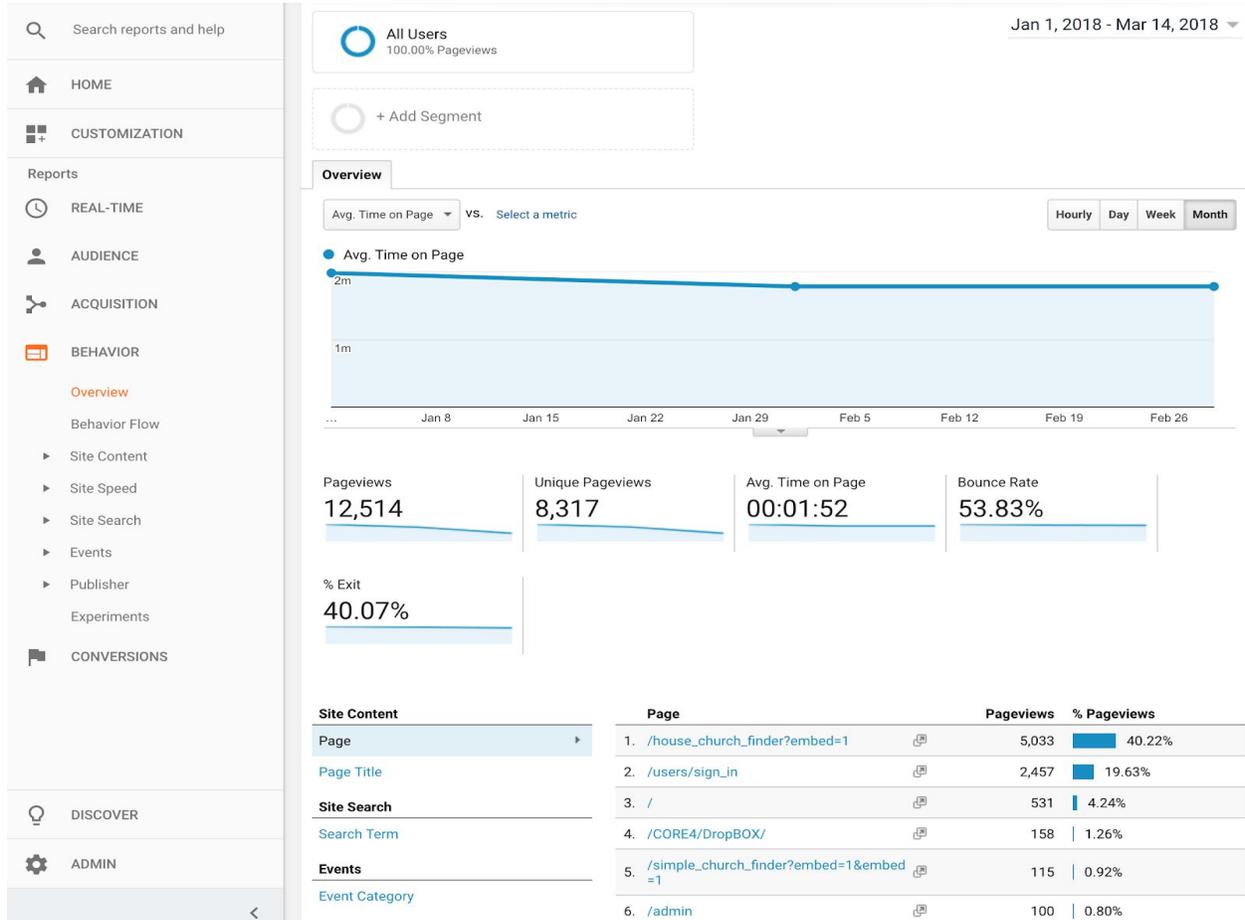
The **Site Content** section consists of how visitors engage with pages on your website. For example, under **ALL PAGES** you can see your top pages and how many views, average time on page, plus more this page gets, which helps your determine what content performs best on your website. (Remember the best way to determine this is to select it by month on the upper right on the screen)



The screenshot shows the 'All Web Site Data' report in Google Analytics. The 'Site Content' section is highlighted in the left sidebar. A table lists the top performing pages on the website. A red arrow points to the first row, which is labeled 'Top performing pages on your website'.

Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit	Page Value
Top performing pages on your website							
1. [Page Name]	3,604 (27.10%)	3,145 (27.72%)	00:04:13	3,090 (31.20%)	87.83%	86.02%	\$ [Value]
2. [Page Name]	1,574 (11.83%)	1,352 (11.92%)	00:04:59	1,325 (13.38%)	87.62%	84.37%	\$ [Value]
3. [Page Name]	759 (5.71%)	656 (5.78%)	00:05:23	638 (6.44%)	86.21%	83.40%	\$ [Value]
4. [Page Name]	520 (3.91%)	376 (3.31%)	00:01:04	324 (3.27%)	47.84%	41.35%	\$ [Value]
5. [Page Name]	507 (3.81%)	354 (3.12%)	00:01:01	209 (2.11%)	57.89%	37.28%	\$ [Value]
6. [Page Name]	425 (3.20%)	364 (3.21%)	00:04:56	349 (3.52%)	84.24%	81.65%	\$ [Value]
7. [Page Name]	391 (2.94%)	324 (2.86%)	00:04:53	318 (3.21%)	83.33%	81.07%	\$ [Value]
8. [Page Name]	276 (2.08%)	244 (2.15%)	00:03:03	225 (2.27%)	85.33%	81.16%	\$ [Value]
9. [Page Name]	238 (1.79%)	196 (1.73%)	00:04:52	174 (1.76%)	85.06%	75.63%	\$ [Value]

If you find that your most popular pages are different from the ones you'd like more people to view or spend time on, you might need to adjust your content or how your sitemap is organized.



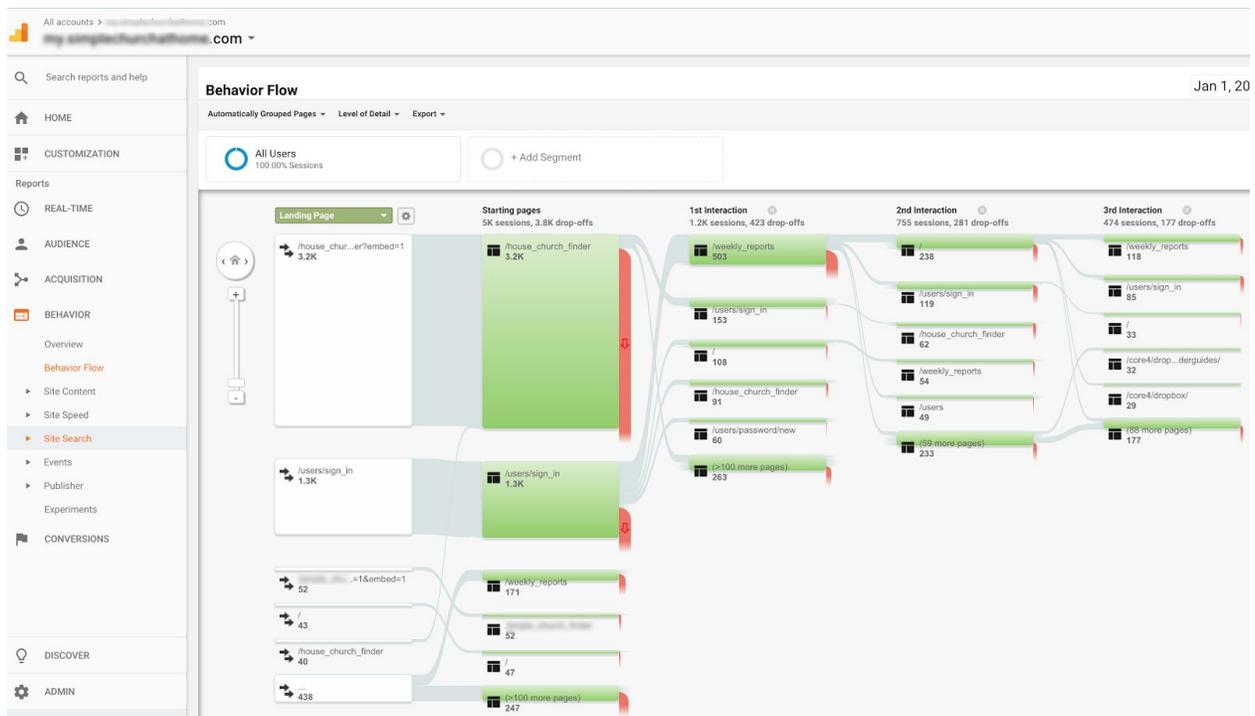
BEHAVIOR—Behavior Flow. (Where are they going?)

Another visual journey map shows you which pages users came in on (listed as the Landing Page), which may be the Home page or it may be an article, contact page, or a bookmarked link that has a map or login function.

You can drag the map to the side, viewing 1st - 3rd interactions, to see where users clicked to after coming to the site.

You can use visual data like this to see if users are taking the path you intend for them. If not, or if they're dropping off before they get to a page where you want them to take an action, such as read an article, download a PDF, make a purchase, etc., it may mean:

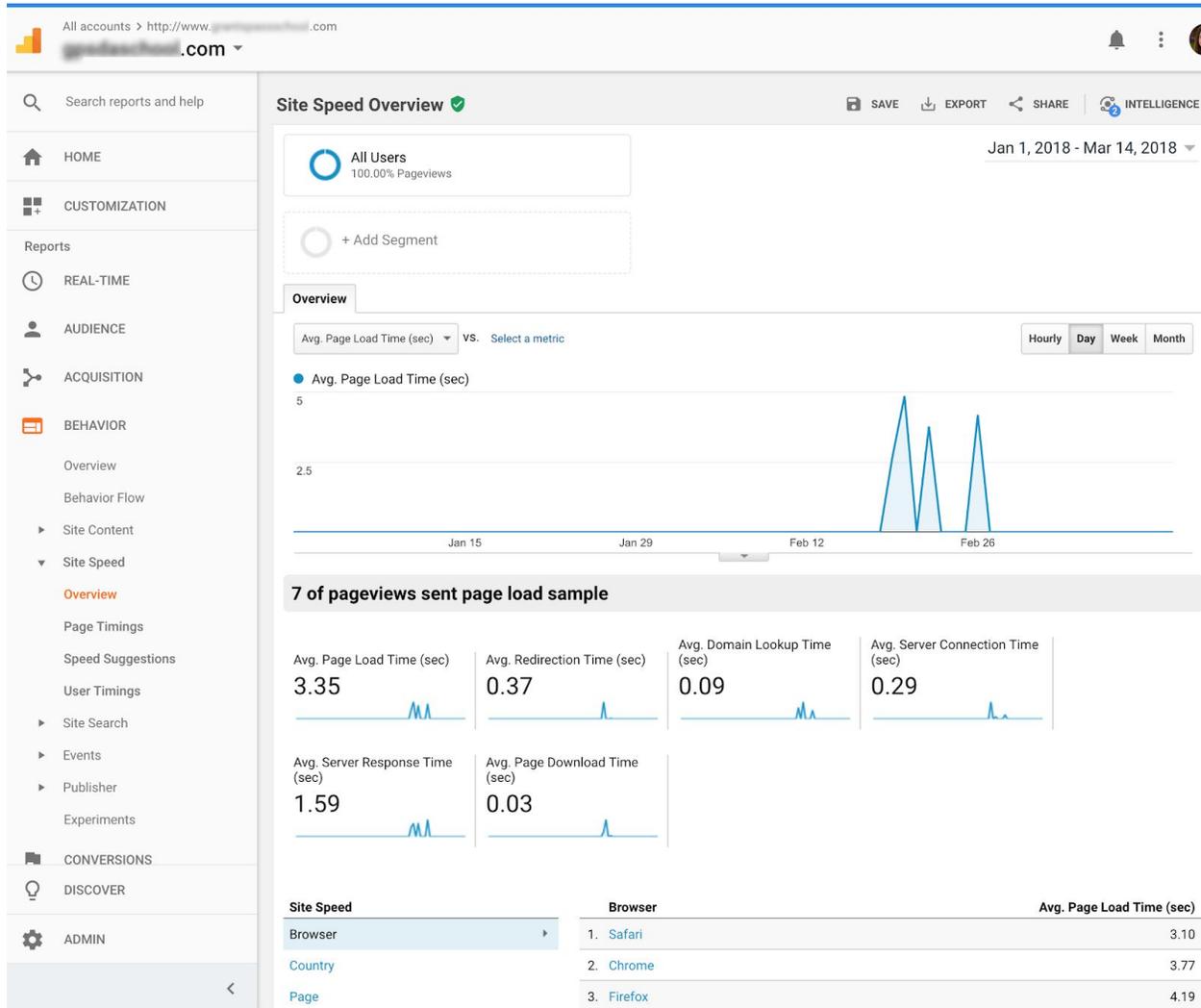
- Your content needs clearer calls to action
- Your content needs more persuasive language to encourage them to keep reading
- Users are finding the info they want before reaching the page
- Users are deciding not to buy/read/download



BEHAVIOR—Site Speed—Overview

Select “Month” at the top right over the graph. Remember, you’re shooting for a page load time of under 2 seconds.

Your average page load time averages data from all your pages.



BEHAVIOR—Site Speed—Page Timings

This shows the average load time of each individual page, so you can better pinpoint what might be affecting the average site load time.

(You can also run the Screaming Frog SEO Spider tool to determine which elements are affecting page load time, or check [Google's Page Speed Insights tool](#).)

These overview reports will be most helpful for you as you begin consistent use of this tool.

Getting a big-picture view of how your current audience is interacting with your site can help you identify the locations of any “roadblocks” that might be inhibiting users from completing a desired action.

It will also help you plan your future content by showing you which content is inspiring further browsing throughout your site.

If you're interested in a full course on the effective use of Google Analytics, check out [Google Analytics Academy](#), Google's free resource for Analytics users.

Beginner Tutorial for Google Search Console

How is Your Site Interacting with Google Searches?

Search Console is incredibly useful in a variety of ways. It's like a peek under the hood to make sure everything is running properly. Not only will it show how Google is interacting with your site when it comes to searches, it can also notify you if the site has been hacked or if there are navigational errors.

Google Search Console Important Terms and Functions

Anchor Text: Anchor Text is the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink. In modern browsers, it is often blue and underlined, such as [this link to the moz homepage](#).

Crawl: The process when Googlebot discovers new and updated pages to add to the Google Index.

Internal Links: When one page on your website links to another page on your website in order to provide reference information, to continue the user on the intended content journey, or to lead them to action. Being strategic with internal linking provides different types of users with the proper pathways to finding what they want.

XML SiteMap: A file where you can list the web pages of your site, in its hierarchical order, to tell Google and other search engines about the organization of your site content. XML stands for "extensible markup language" schema, which is more precise than HTML, or "hyper-text markup language."

Google Index - In order for your site's contents to be included in the results of your custom search engine, it must be Google Indexed. (Think of a library!) Google index lists all of the web pages it knows about. When Google visits your site, it detects new and updated pages and updates the Google index.

Search Console Home—Your Properties. (Are You Verified?)

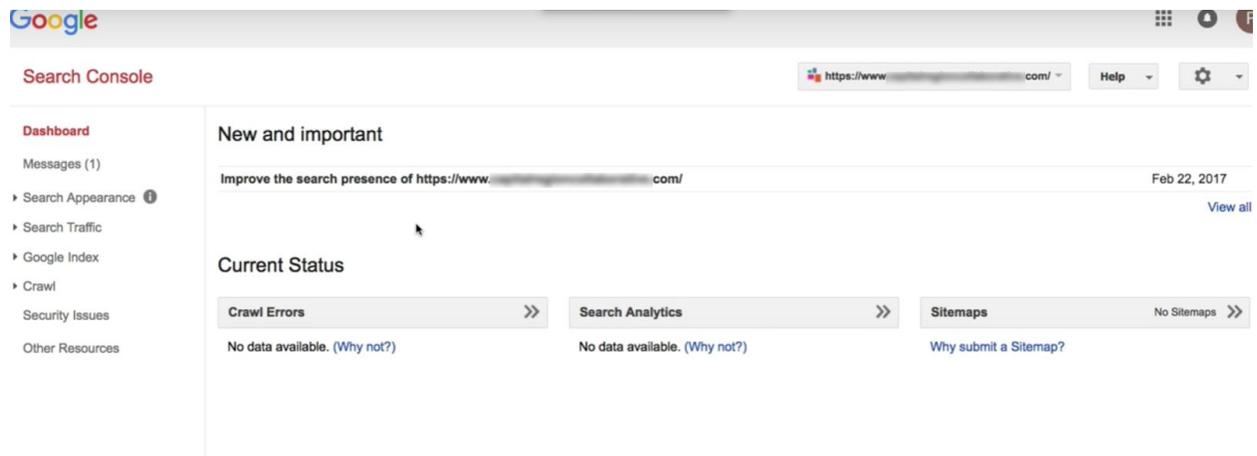
After logging into your Google account and navigating to <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home?hl=en>, you'll see the Properties (websites) you selected to manage. If any of them say "Not verified" at the top left of the thumbnail, you'll need to refer back to [page 34](#) for verification methods. Most of the Search Console functions will not be usable until the Property ownership is verified.

Once you click on the property/website, you'll be directed to the **Dashboard**.

You'll see 3 tabs under **Current Status** in the lower half of your screen:

Crawl Errors, Search Analytics and Sitemaps.

Here you'll be alerted if there are any immediate issues that need your attention in these areas. However, for the purpose of this lesson, we'll take you through the top priority functions in the left side menu of Search Console as you start to get used to this tool.



Crawl (left menu)

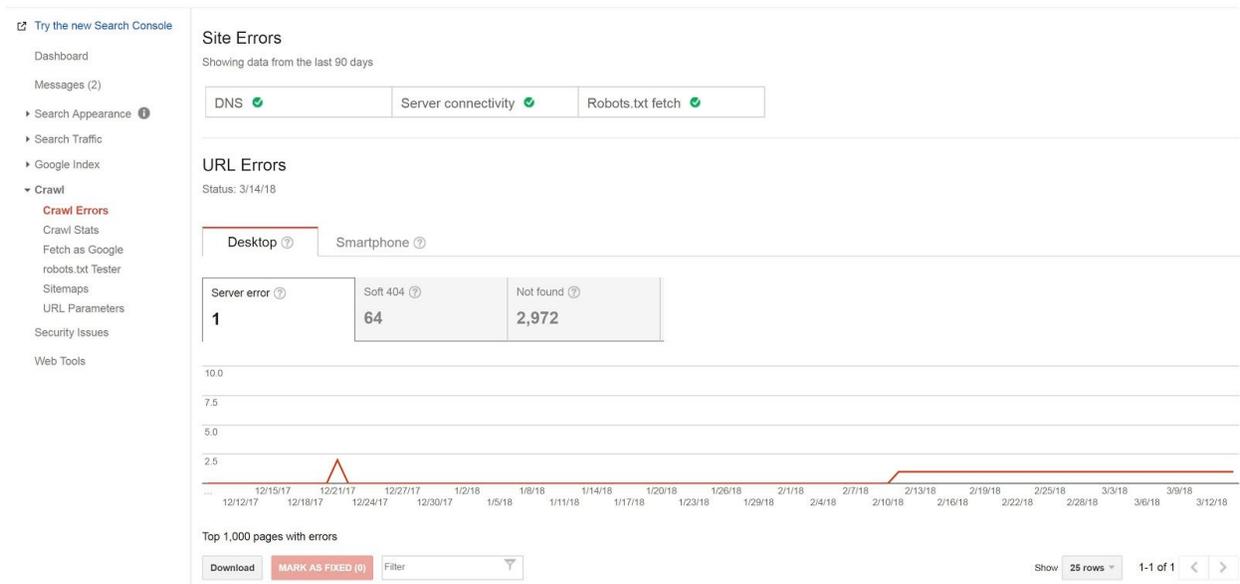
If you have any crawl errors, you can click on **Crawl > Crawl Errors** in the left side menu to learn more about what's causing these errors.

You'll first want to see if your server is causing any crawl errors. If these errors persist, you may need to contact your hosting provider.

Being behind a firewall can also affect Googlebot's ability to crawl your site. You may need to adjust your firewall settings.

Another common crawl error has to do with a [robots.txt file](#), which tells Google which pages it can crawl and which pages you do not want it to crawl. In many cases, though, you want Google to crawl your entire site, and you don't even need a robots.txt file.

If you have any broken links, they will be listed under "URL Errors" below the line graph.



Crawl—[Sitemaps](#)

To help Google properly crawl your site with its Googlebot, you'll want to submit a sitemap.xml.

If your website is on the AdventistChurchConnect platform, a sitemap has been created automatically. If you're using WordPress, you'll need a plugin to generate a sitemap.xml file.

(For additional guidance:

<http://www.wpbeginner.com/beginners-guide/what-is-a-wordpress-sitemap-how-to-create-a-site-map-in-wordpress/> or

<https://www.elegantthemes.com/blog/tips-tricks/how-to-create-a-sitemap-for-your-wordpress-website>)

At the top right you'll see the red "Add/Test Sitemap" button. Click the button, which will bring up a dialogue box with your website URL with a forward slash. Type in "sitemap" (ACC) or "sitemap.xml" (WordPress et. al.), then submit.

(If your website is on another development platform, such as Wix, Squarespace, 1&1, etc., check with your technical documentation or ask support for information on sitemaps.)

Search Traffic (left menu) — Search Analytics

NOTE: If you just set up your Search Console account, Google may not have yet had a chance to crawl your site again and send back data. You may need to wait a few days.

This may be the most important tab for your website in Search Console, at least for now. You can gather a snapshot of how your website is doing in the midst of your SEO efforts.

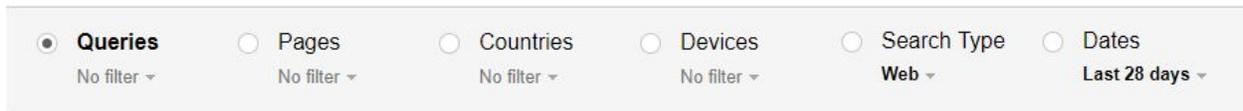
Before selecting an option, make sure to check the boxes of **Clicks**, **Impressions**, **CTR** (click-thru-rate) and **Position**. You'll want to see all this information when you click on the various reports.

Search Analytics

Analyze your performance on Google Search. Filter and compare your results to better understand your user's search patterns. [Learn more.](#)

Clicks Impressions CTR Position

Right now we'll look at the report that will be most immediately useful to you—**Queries**.



The image shows a horizontal navigation bar with six filter options, each with a radio button and a dropdown menu. The options are: **Queries** (selected), Pages, Countries, Devices, Search Type, and Dates. Below 'Queries' is the text 'No filter'. Below 'Pages' is 'No filter'. Below 'Countries' is 'No filter'. Below 'Devices' is 'No filter'. Below 'Search Type' is 'Web'. Below 'Dates' is 'Last 28 days'.

Queries

This lists search keywords and phrases that pull up your site in the search results. Ideally, these terms would match what you intend to rank for.

If you notice a discrepancy in how you wanted people to find you and how they ended up finding you, you might want to adjust your content to include these keywords, or better optimize your content for the keywords you *want* to rank for.

All in all, this gives you an insight into your audience's preferences and goals, as compared to what your site offers. You'll want to ask questions like:

- Are people searching for the keywords you're using, or are there others represented here that you may not have thought of yet?
 - How can you optimize your content for these different, or additional, keywords?
- Are people finding your site through a non-relevant keyword, then leaving your site because it's not what they expected? This can raise your bounce rate.
 - Why might you be ranking for this keyword that is not exactly matching your content?

Search Traffic (left menu) — Links to Your Site

This section shows you which outside websites have active links to your site (backlinks). If you just set up your Search Console account, there may not be any data here yet. If you have had Search Console set up for at least a few days and there still isn't any data in this section, it could mean that you have no backlinks at this time.

Having other sites link to your site in a legitimate, true-referral manner (i.e., someone referencing your site in a blog post, social media post, etc.) can act as a significant SEO boost. It tells Google (and people) that other entities online recognize you as a credible authority for the given topic.

Examining your backlinks gives you another look at which content is most popular, by looking at the **“Your most linked content”** section. This is especially positive, meaning that not only did this page get a lot of traffic, it was liked well enough to receive a link to it from an outside source. This is a better representation of content quality than page traffic alone.

The screenshot shows the 'Links to Your Site' report in Google Search Console. The interface includes a top navigation bar with the site URL 'https://www.sagemeters.com/' and a 'Help' button. A left sidebar contains navigation options such as 'Try the new Search Console', 'Dashboard', 'Messages (2)', 'Search Appearance', 'Search Traffic', 'Search Analytics', 'Internal Links', 'Manual Actions', 'International Targeting', 'Mobile Usability', 'Google Index', 'Crawl', 'Security Issues', and 'Web Tools'. The main content area is titled 'Links to Your Site' and features a summary box showing 'Total links: 14,606'. Below this, there are two tables: 'Who links the most' and 'Your most linked content'. The 'Who links the most' table lists external domains and their link counts. The 'Your most linked content' table lists specific pages and their link counts. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'How your data is linked' which lists various internal links.

Who links the most		Your most linked content	
pagedebate.com	4,457	https://www.sagemeters.com/	2,979
bsmmag.com	1,235	/concrete-moisture/	1,240
prospeclab.com	847	/top-40-woodworking-tools/	522
f2170reports.com	365	/warning-signs-on-wood-floors/	399
yellowpages.com	344	/slabmaster/	369

More »

More »

How your data is linked

- shop now
- building inspection articles
- building inspection moisture detection
- rapid rh newsletters
- forest products articles

Search Appearance (left menu) — HTML Improvements

Here you'll look for any HTML errors, such as missing or duplicate title tags, or titles that are too long to be shown in their entirety. If any pages have duplicate or missing meta descriptions, you'll want to craft a 162-character page description to encourage searchers to click through to your site!

Having duplicate or missing tags can affect how well Googlebot crawls your site. But these can be simple fixes, especially if you run a WordPress plugin such as [Yoast](#).

You'll want to go to all the pages with either duplicate or missing content and replace with new titles and meta descriptions. (Learn more about meta descriptions in Section VI.)

Google Index (left menu) — Index Status

Especially if you've just set up Search Console, you may have to wait for "googlebot" to index your website. Once it's indexed, you'll be able to view Google's last index in a line graph.

The blue line shows you how many pages were indexed, and the orange line (click on **Advanced** to view) shows how many pages were blocked (i.e., these pages will not show up in search results).

Moving Forward

These introductory steps can keep you plenty busy. Especially if your website is large with several functions, you may find several areas to improve or optimize right away. If your website is still new and growing, this can give you direction for the site's future development.

If you'd like to continue ahead into more advanced features of these tools, here are some recommended resources:

How to Get Actionable Data from Google Analytics in 10 Minutes

(Setting goals and measuring data against your website goals)

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/how-to-get-actionable-data-from-google-analytics-in-10-minutes/>

A Complete Guide to the Google Search Console

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-search-console-guide/209318/>

An Insider's Guide to Using Google's Search Console to Fix Your Site

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/google-search-console-tips/>

Google Support's introduction to Search Console

https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6258314?utm_source=wnc_376106&utm_medium=gamma&utm_campaign=wnc_376106&utm_content=msg_743502&hl=en

V. Intro to Keyword Research and Content Strategy

Now that you've established the foundation of your SEO strategy and can track activity and engagement, you get into the nitty gritty of search engine optimization.

Content—the *right content*—is what internet users are searching for. Sure, many are ultimately looking for products, services, locations, restaurant recommendations, etc., but the reason they trust the internet to get them those things is they can find *content* that educates them along the way; content that guides them toward the best decisions; content that answers their questions.

A blog post might convince them to join a gym, or a Yelp review might convince them to eat at Joe's. Some are googling how to tell if they should take their kids to the ER, or for tips on getting out of credit card debt. Or maybe they're bored, sitting in a waiting room, watching cat videos on their phones.

There are a 1001 ways to consume content. Using search engine optimization helps you create your content to best match what your target audience is searching for.

But that's the thing—how do you know what they're searching for?

Keyword research is the stuff of SEO copywriting, or writing persuasive content based on search engine optimization principles. It removes most of the guesswork in figuring out which topics (related to your organization) make the most sense to cover in your content marketing, in writing titles and headlines, in naming resources or products, etc. It bridges the gap between your hunches and the data.

Keyword research uses search query data from Google and other search engines to determine what kind of content people want. Each phrase typed into the search box is like a voice proclaiming, "I want to see content about this!"

By using the right tools and tactics, you'll find out what terms or phrases people are googling and how often. It will also list how competitive those keywords are. When you find out which keywords have a high search volume but a lower rate of competition, that's the sweet spot. Writing about *that* means a better chance your content will be found in search engines.

1) Define your topic

For example, say you want to start a blog to help Pathfinder leaders.

"Pathfinders," of course, is the topic. But if you title your blog, "Pathfinders," it's not specific enough to get search traffic. You'd have to differentiate from Nissan Pathfinders, Pathfinder International, or the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.

But you know your audience pretty well, so you feature keywords in your titles, headlines and posts, such as:

- Pathfinder leadership
- Pathfinder club meetings
- Pathfinder honors
- Pathfinder investiture
- Pathfinder campouts

While definitely more specific than “Pathfinder” alone, these are also considered **broad-match keywords**, as they can still have a wide variety of subtopics. They’re certainly good ideas, and posts on these topics can be helpful and even enjoyed by your readers. But they’re harder to rank in Google search results without further specificity.

Let’s say it’s a burgeoning trend to create Pathfinder blogs. This broad topic of Pathfinder leadership is now a highly competitive arena. How do you get your blog to stand out?

2) Refine your topic

You have to get more specialized in your focus, so you start brainstorming “**niche topics**” —subtopics within the broad subjects of Pathfinders and meetings and honors and campouts that people might be searching for information about. Some of these might be:

- Pathfinder knot-tying honor
- Pathfinder winter campouts
- Pathfinder club meeting activities
- Pathfinder Bible bowl prep
- Pathfinder Oshkosh fundraising ideas

These are considered **long-tail keywords**, or keyphrases. You can also start brainstorming possible blog posts for these subtopics and long-tail keywords:

- How to teach knot-tying to Pathfinders
- Top 10 activities for Pathfinder campouts
- Tips for teaching Pathfinders with disabilities
- Preparing your Pathfinders for Bible bowl
- Best Pathfinder fundraising ideas to cover Oshkosh expenses

Other examples of broad-match vs. long-tail keywords:

- Water bottles vs. BPA-free wide-mouth water bottles
- Vegan recipes vs. 5-minute vegan breakfasts
- Elastic hair ties vs. pink diamond-studded elastic hair ties

Location information can also make effective long-tail keywords, as Google can match the location of searchers' IP addresses to the locations you're mentioning in your content. If you're putting together a website for a cupcake bakery in Austin, TX, you'll certainly include the address and phone number on the contact page. You might also want to use local keywords, such as the part of town it's in, or the recognizable businesses it's near, or even local annual events.

These location keywords can be especially helpful in titles and meta descriptions:

6 of Austin's Sweetest Bakeries to Satisfy Your Cupcake Craving

<https://austinot.com/best-cupcakes-austin> ▼

Nov 30, 2017 - Here are the results of my quest to find the best **cupcakes** in **Austin**. ... Owners Olga and Ben Lee's **bakery** is near The University of **Texas** ...

Sweet Treet's Bakery

www.sweettreetbakery.com/ ▼

Sweet Treet's **Bakery** is located in **Austin, Texas**, in the Oak Hill area, that makes custom wedding **cakes**, grooms **cakes**, **cupcakes**, cake balls, and specialty ...

If we apply this to the Pathfinder topic, if you decide to make your Pathfinder blog specific to your area, mention which cities are involved and make sure to list the address of the church your Pathfinder group is held at. You could even list well-known areas nearby that the Pathfinders visit or volunteer at.

You'll also want to consider **seasonality**. Keyword activity will change depending on the time of year, especially in topics that deal with a school year, holidays, sports, or activities relating to spring, summer, fall or winter.

3) Test your topic

Start by Googling your topics, including any related words or phrases. Then ask the following questions:

- What exists already?
- Can you improve on what's already written?
- Are there certain aspects of the topic that aren't already covered in depth (or at all)?
- How are other users responding to this competing content?

This is your first peek at opportunity.

Maybe you find that the knot-tying honor already has several articles that are well-written and popular. Lots of positive comments on those posts. Perhaps another topic would be more effective in making your blog stand out.

However, maybe there's one particular knot you don't feel the other writers have explained very well, even though the rest of the post is good. Maybe you'll find a couple comments on other blogs about how they'd like more information on the hunter's bend. You might then decide to write a post on "mastering the teaching of the hunter's bend knot."

This is an excellent use of the knowledge your testing helped you gather, and you created a long-tail keyword opportunity for your blog post.

4) Test some more

Here's where dedicated keyword research tools come in.

These tools access data that tells how many people are searching for a certain keyword or keyphrase (**search volume**), as well as how much content already exists about that keyword (**competition**). The sweet spot is when you find a word or phrase that has high search volume and low competition.

Here's an example from Google Keyword Planner

<input type="checkbox"/> Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition
<input type="checkbox"/> seventh day advent...	40,500	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> sda	12,100	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> seventh day advent...	14,800	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> sda church	4,400	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> 7th day adventist	14,800	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> sda songs	260	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> adventist church	2,900	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> seventh day advent...	5,400	Low

Many of these keyword research tools provide a ratio of search volume and competition, as well as what the average keyword costs “per click” if you were doing [pay-per-click \(PPC\)](#) advertising. (But we won’t focus on that in this beginner’s guide.)

There are free options for keyword research, too. And in many cases you’ll find similar data that represents estimated search volume and rate of competition.

If nothing else, these free keyword tools can show related keywords or phrases that might also be good content ideas. Overall, you’ll get a general idea what people are searching for, so you can create content that will connect your organization with the needs and interests of your audience.

Here are some recommended *free* options for keyword research or keyword ideas:

[Keywords Everywhere](#) is a free browser add-on for Chrome and Firefox that gathers data on every term you search for on Google. It’s especially easy to use since you don’t have to open a separate program, it already displays keyword results on the side of your browser window. It can also help you find related topics to cover in support of your main topic.

[Ubersuggest](#) was created by renown digital marketing strategist and author, [Neil Patel](#), because he felt that aspiring digital marketers should have a free keyword research tool they could trust. It is touted by many marketers as a great way to get keyword ideas for blog posts, and to possibly provide even more ideas than Google’s Keyword Planner.

[Keyword Planner](#) has been the standard tool by which keyword research was measured. It is still a technically free keyword research tool embedded in a Google Ads (formerly Google AdWords). You will need to set up a Google Ads account to use it. While it costs money to run Google Ad *campaigns*, you can do keyword research with this tool without an active campaign running.

[Twin Word](#) (10 free searches a day) This tool provides similar data, but is known for helping you find patterns, and for its filters in how you want results displayed. One such filter shows User Intent in 5 categories to help you determine the intent your audience may have when searching for a particular keyword. If it doesn’t match up with what you’re offering, you’ll want to find other keyword options. (*Find out more about how and [why you should consider user intent.](#)*)

[Google Search Console](#) has functionality that shows what keywords are leading users to your website, as well as lite keyword research.

These tools differ from true keyword research but can be very helpful for “informed brainstorming.”

[Answer the Public](#) is a tool best used for brainstorming, rather than measuring search volume and competition ratios. It's effective for finding out what kind of questions people are asking about a certain topic. It's based on UK data, but the info is still relevant. For example, if you're writing about boy scout activities, after typing this in you'll find an image like this that illustrates the questions people are asking, or the topics they're interested in.

[Google Trends](#) allows you to compare two or more different topics to see which one is searched more often.

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/soovle-have-fun-with-your-keywords/20053/>

[Soovle](#) lets you type in a keyword or phrase and it displays related keyphrases and topics, pulling from data from major websites.

YouTube keyword research:

[vidIQ.com](#) helps YouTubers grow their channel through optimizing keywords.

[TubeBuddy](#) is a YouTube certified and integrated YouTube growth tool that you install onto your YouTube account.

([Ubersuggest.com](#) also has a keyword research option for YouTube.)

5) Other terms to know

Here are some common terms we haven't yet covered in this section. If you're using a keyword research tool, you'll often come across these words, though some you may not need to give much attention to unless you are doing pay-per-click advertising.

Location - Tools with this option can tell you the search volume and competition of various terms and phrases within a specified geographic location, or even a location range.

Language - Find search volume data for searches conducted in a certain language.

Search Volume - A metric that displays how many people are searching online for the specified query.

Competition - This number represents a ratio of the how much a term is searched compared to how much content already exists on this topic. Ideally, you want to find keywords/topics with

high search volume and low competition. Lower numbers are generally 0.1 - 0.3, moderate competition is 0.4 - 0.7, and high competition is 0.8 and over.

Pay-Per Click (PPC) Advertising: Most keyword research tools are made to support this type of advertising, in which advertisers create ads that appear on top of search results pages or websites set up to show ads. Advertisers only pay for the amount of clicks they get, and certain keywords cost more per click than others. Keyword research is important for PPC because advertisers want their ads to show up when people type in the related keywords or phrases.

If you're just using keyword research tools for content ideas or research, you won't need to get in-depth into this subject.

Cost per click (CPC): If you were doing paid ads, this is how much it would cost the advertiser each time someone clicked on their ad that contained this keyword.

Click-thru Rate (CTR): In advertising, this represents the ratio of users who click on a link compared to the total users who view the ad, or the page the ad appears on. Google Ads, as well as several other

6) When to pay for a keyword research tool

When businesses rely on search engine ranking for the profitability or exposure of their brand, they want the most exact keyword information possible—especially if their brand must survive in a highly competitive market.

If your ministry relies on ecommerce or content marketing to thrive, AND it operates within a competitive industry, such as health, you can also benefit from high-level keyword research tools that also provide insight on what competitors are doing, what they're ranking for (or not ranking for), and a number of other add-ons that help you determine the best possible content opportunities.

Especially if you want to boost your traffic through PPC advertising, this kind of research tool can help you choose the best content strategies for your ads.

Here are a few of the top paid keyword research tools:

Google Ads' [Keyword Planner](#) provides more specific keyword data (notably in Search Volume) when you're regularly spending over a certain amount on active campaigns (currently it looks to be around \$1000/month). However, Keyword Planner can help you get a closer look at the search behavior of a certain demographic.

[SEMrush](#) is a comprehensive research tool. In addition to unlimited keyword research and keyword strategy suggestions, it also audits your website (and your competitors' websites!) to find errors, SEO opportunities, and content "weak spots." This tool has proved useful in many

businesses' Online Reputation Management (ORM) efforts, as it can even show how much competitors are spending on ads and for which topics.

[Ahrefs](#) dives deep into competitor research, provides keyword opportunity alerts, and provides access to a wealth of digital market data. It can also monitor how your site's ranking changes over time.

[Keyword Explorer](#) by Moz has long been used by digital marketing professionals to gather data from its "vetted keyword database" to apply to their content marketing strategies.

While your ministry may not yet have the budget for a keyword tool like these, many come with a free trial period so you can test how useful a tool like this might be for your organization.

7) Creating content from keyword research

When you've used these tactics and tools to determine which topics are popular and which content opportunities exist, it's time to use this research for your content planning.

Keyword research used to be much more technical, more of a science than an art.

It's not like that anymore.

Due to shady content practices like "[keyword stuffing](#)"—when content writers would repeat keywords over and over on a page so it would rank higher in search results—Google has taken measures to ensure its users aren't led astray by webpages that are trying to "beat the system."

Google has since improved its algorithms to detect the thoroughness of **topic coverage, rather than keyword density**. It factors in synonyms, phrases, and related topics, so that when a page is written about a single topic and covers it well, that page can rank higher.

So keyword research does more than just tell you which words to use. It tells you which topics are popular, which topics are competitive, and where your content opportunities may be.

This is good news! This means that the organizational methods you learned for writing essays and research papers can pay off. Write to introduce a topic (one webpage), then cover the topic (another webpage), then cover related topics (more separate webpages) or background information (another separate webpage or two). It's essentially writing an outline, and each section of the outline is a webpage. Blogs organized like this score highly in both search engine visibility and user-friendliness.

NOTE: This outlining method also comes in handy when a webmaster is designing an optimized sitemap, or navigational structure, for a website.

With topics and topic coverage being stronger ranking influencers than individual words or phrases, this better rewards quality writing and presentation.

However, keywords do still matter!

Keyword research is done so we know what words and phrases people are using. We still want to use those words and phrases as often as we can on a page—*naturally*. If it sounds hokey to keep repeating a phrase, find another way to say it that means the same thing. Overall, you still want the content to read as naturally and conversationally as possible, as if you were telling this information to a friend.

Here's a quick example of thorough topic coverage in natural language:

If you were telling your friend about Pathfinder knots because you'd done the research and knew they were interested in teaching this honor, you'd certainly use the proper names of each knot, as well as some common nicknames or synonyms.

You'd also provide context for how you learned to master each knot, and highlight some parts of the learning process that were trickier than others.

You'd give advice regarding the best time to use one knot over others.

You'd highlight common mistakes people make when determining which knot to use.

Then, if you had a rope, you'd do a demonstration.

You'd sum up the main ideas and conclude that knot-tying is important, and that there's a reason so many knots exist, because they all serve a unique purpose.

After that, you might ask if your friend had any questions.

Most content pieces can be written in a similar fashion. You work your way through a topic, writing as much applicable information as possible. You might also throw in pictures and videos to supplement the text. You might even post a quick quiz at the end so readers could make sure they gathered the info they needed. Then, there might be a form to submit questions about the topic.

So be prepared to write outlines, topic trees, bubble graphs, and other content organization techniques. Using this as your foundation for content creation helps you determine topical goals, objectives, and key takeaways. It makes the whole writing process more straightforward.

We'll discuss types of content presentation in the next section.

Learn more:

“SEO Basics: What is Keyword Research?” (Yoast)

<https://yoast.com/keyword-research/>

“How to Find Long Tail Keywords” (Backlinko)

<https://backlinko.com/long-tail-keywords>

“Ultimate Guide: Your Content Marketing Keyword Strategy” (Curata)

<http://www.curata.com/blog/content-marketing-keyword-strategy-guide/>

“Keyword Research for SEO—The Ultimate Guide” (Yoast)

<https://yoast.com/keyword-research-ultimate-guide/>

**“How to Understand Searcher Intent and Use it to Boost SEO Rankings”
(SearchEngineLand)**

<https://searchengineland.com/how-to-understand-searcher-intent-and-use-it-to-boost-seo-rankings-299501>

“Ho to do Keyword Research the Smart Way: Targeting Interest and Intent” (Neil Patel)

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/keyword-research-smart-way/>

“How to Dominate Keyword Research in Just 30 Minutes a Day” (Neil Patel)

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/dominate-keyword-research/>

“How to Use the Keyword Planner Tool Effectively” (Google Ads)

<https://ads.google.com/home/resources/using-googleads-keyword-planner.html>

VI. CONTENT MARKETING—Creating, Optimizing & Distributing Content to Engage Your Audience and Improve SEO

You've researched keywords to get an idea of what your target audience is searching for. You've looked at what could be considered competition and found opportunities in a few niche topics that relate to your ministry. You've made your topic outlines and are ready to start creating!

While we've been talking a lot about writing, "content" is more than just text. Content can refer to any form of information aimed at an audience.

When it comes to digital marketing, content is made to inform, to educate, to entertain—all to attract and nurture a loyal audience that promotes your cause or buys your products.

Furthermore, content marketing is so effective because it allows brands to build awareness and even recruit a following *before it even tries to sell a product!* **The currency of content marketing is in E-A-T—Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness** (though we might also add "Empathy" to this list, especially when dealing with spiritual topics and life lessons).

Once your messaging is established, focus on the delivery. To further engage your audience, and to have more content variety to get picked up by Google's search algorithms, it's best to use **multiple forms of content**. Though keep in mind that certain forms of content will perform better with some audience than with others.

Here's how the different types of content work together in a content marketing [process](#):

Strategy - Purpose, goals, topics to cover, niche opportunities to target, outlining topic coverage, distributing content, measurement and analysis.

Copy - the words within the content. What is this content saying to your audience?

Imagery - the pictures, the videos, the icons, the graphics. What's your visual theme?

Medium/Media - The final home(s) for the copy and imagery of this project. Where will it live? On your website? In an app? On another website? On various social media platforms?

As you continue through this section, consider how each of these elements will fit into the above 4-part template.

1) Most popular types of online content

Text

We have to start here, as the written word is foundational for any type of content. Ideas are written down first, whether in the form of notes or scripts or outlines, before they're turned into anything else. Also, written content often accompanies and supports the other content types, so when you set your content marketing goals, you want to make sure to prioritize quality writing.

(Keep in mind, however, that good writing in an academic sense is not the same as what's considered good *content* writing or *copywriting*. This style is much more straightforward, casual, conversational, and concise.)

The most common forms of written content online are:

- **Website copy**, as in the text throughout your ministry's entire website. A thorough outline or bubble diagram is a must in writing for a website, with each page having a clear purpose that is made obvious in the headline and first few sentences on each page. Typically, you'll start with writing copy for a home page, about page, services page, and contact page. Then you'll expand from there, depending on your type of ministry.

The more high-quality content your website has, the more likely it is to show up in search results for related products, topics, causes, etc. Especially if it has a blog.

- **Blogs**, or a consistently-updated topical collection of articles. The word "blog" originally came from the word "weblog," back when blogs were more like online journals for individuals posting their opinions, their recipes, or documenting their parenting journey, etc. Now blogs are used both individually and commercially to engage conversation as they inform (and often persuade) their readers.

Many blogs have inspired the formation of online communities, especially if they prominently link to their corresponding social media presences, such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Many commercial websites also have blogs in order to build a community around their brand's values. [If their blogs contain useful or thought-provoking information, and are properly promoted](#), it can skyrocket their online influence—and often their sales.

- **Landing pages**, or a stand-alone page all about one big call to action. It's not just a page where users "land" after a search, it's more where people are "sent" to by a link on your website, on your social media, in your email, etc. It's a true landing page when there's a place for someone to enter their email address in exchange for something like:
 - A subscription to your newsletter

- Registration for a webinar
- Signing up for a free trial
- A “lead magnet,” such as a free ebook, how-to guide, etc. on the topic of interest

The primary purpose of landing pages is to gather email addresses for your list, for email marketing purposes. It’s a highly valuable tool for growing your online influence.

Beyond gathering new email addresses, landing pages also can get you more registrations, sign-ups, downloads, purchases, etc. It helps if your landing page is explaining a limited time offer that helps readers feel like they’re getting an exclusive opportunity.

- **Email content.** [Email marketing](#) is still a key player when it comes to online influence. While this content is not indexed by search engines, it helps nurture your audience so they more actively participate in your online activities, which definitely boosts your SEO.

It starts with a catchy subject line that convinces the reader to even *open* your email. And once they do, the email content is written as concise and straightforward as possible, as you only have a matter of seconds to engage the reader.

Most email content is in the form of e-newsletters, keeping subscribers apprised on news, product information, new content, sales or promotions, etc. Sometimes they follow a blog, or sometimes email campaigns can be an educational series.

Think about what you get in your inbox. Do you subscribe to a retailer’s newsletter so you know when to shop the sales? Do you belong to a gym that sends out regular updates on class schedules or bring-a-friend promotions? Are you on the email list of your alma mater? Maybe you’re on an email list that sends you a daily devotional. Whichever types of emails you receive, careful thought went into how that content was presented. Email content is for keeping readers engaged and feeling special, so they don’t wander down to the footer to click “unsubscribe.”

- **Case studies** feature customer stories to help promote your product, service, event, or cause. Storytelling remains a top marketing practice because we’re drawn to the narrative of someone “just like us” experiencing a problem, seeking the right solution, trying this and trying that, then finally discovering how to overcome the problem.

Case studies allow your product or service be the “great discovery” that helped this person succeed and find a happy ending to their story. Within that story you can highlight how your product works, what your service provides that competitors don’t, and give readers a glimpse of what their lives would be like if they used your product,

service, methodology, etc. Case studies are often published on the company's own website.

- **White papers** are the longest pieces of content you'll write, but they are highly effective in demonstrating authority in a subject area. White papers are educational and research-heavy, but written to be easily readable and subtly persuasive. You may see them in the form of "ultimate guides" or comprehensive reports, and they appeal to their topic's audience because they go in-depth about a common problem and outline a solution. They are usually in PDF format and are frequently offered as lead magnets, enticing people to sign up for their email list in order to receive the featured white paper.

They often promote a product, service, method or theory through a more indirect approach. For example, a software company might publish a white paper about the common security risks of a certain type of file transfer, as well as what do about them. Readers are given value through increased awareness on a subject of interest. The company might mention how their software minimizes those risks, but there won't be a big flashy call to action to buy their product. Instead, they might direct you to their website to "learn more" about what a software like theirs can do for you.

- **eBooks** are still long-form content, but typically shorter and "lighter" than white papers. Their purpose is to educate readers (provide value) about a topic of interest. For an audience that might be overwhelmed by a white paper, an ebook is a good option to go deeper than a blog post or social media post allows.

While white papers are best for highly technical or complex topics and are more common in the business-to-business (B2B) arena, eBooks are more attractive to individuals, whether as a PDF read on a computer or an ePub file to be read on a mobile device. These are also a great way for your organization's brand to demonstrate authority and credibility, and eBooks can be terrific lead magnets as well.

- **Social media posts** aren't all silly cat pictures. Many organizations assign their best writers to engage their followers on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and various niche-specific platforms. Social media writing requires short, punchy messaging that encourages discussion, inspires shares, or includes an enticing call to action to click over to a landing page, blog, purchase page, full video, etc.

Social media is today's "word on the street." It's the site of online conversations, and if they want to have their posts read, liked and shared, social media writers have to write in that same style, catering to the audience's interests, frustrations, convictions, etc., and using strong, specific calls to action.

Social media "buzz" can have a dramatic effect on the prominence of your organization's web presence. Not only is it a good source of active backlinks that can drive traffic to your website, your social media profiles can appear as additional search results as well.

- **SEO titles and tags**, such as page titles, headlines (or H1s), meta descriptions, and ALT tags are priorities for SEO copywriters, as what written in these areas can make the difference of which webpages get clicked on in search results.
- **Microcontent** refers to headlines, subtitles, subheaders, lists, pull quotes, sidebars, meta descriptions, calls to action, etc. [While this may seem minor](#), this is actually the area that demands the most creativity from the writer. It makes content more scannable, defeating the “wall of text” issue that deters so many potential readers. More often than not, the microcontent is what convinces a reader to *start* reading and to *keep* reading.
- **Transcripts** for videos or podcasts. Some sites post them verbatim, while others optimize them for readability and add microcontent. This can make the transcript just as popular as the recording, for those that prefer to read content, and it also makes the content of the recording indexable for search engines.
- **Checklists** can stand alone as their own type of post. They can appeal to hurried readers, who love their scannability, and to thorough readers, who like the idea of a concrete list they can check off as they apply each step. Detailed checklists can also be effective lead magnets to the right audience, especially if your content teaches a process, or provides ways to upgrade an existing process.

Video

This is nothing new. People have always been visual creatures, and online video continues to be a popular way to consume content—[for all ages!](#) In fact, [one-third](#) of *all online activity* is spent watching video.

Video is a great enhancer, as well. Have you noticed that when you click on a news story, the page often has both the written article as well as the video from the newscast? Not only does it involve two different types of content consumers, it also adds perceived depth and authority to the story.

Video content is ideal for educational content, especially when a “how-to” processes is involved. Demonstrations, interviews, timelapses...some things were just made for video.

The increase in mobile device usage has made video more popular as well. With a smaller screen, it’s easier and faster to watch videos than to read text.

When it comes to [YouTube](#), this platform has created its own niche of search engine optimization. YouTube’s search algorithms rely heavily on keywords, titles, tags, thumbnail images and microcontent such as video descriptions and channel descriptions.

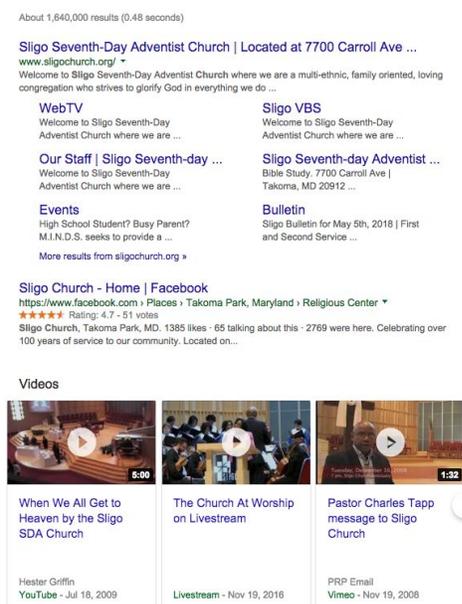
But that’s not all. YouTube also measures “[watch time](#),” or how long a viewer watches before clicking away or going back to search results. The more of a video that gets watched, the better

that video must be, so YouTube ranks it higher in its search results. Longer videos, especially if frequently watched until the end, get even more of a boost. (Outside of YouTube, however, it is still generally recommended to keep videos short, around 3-5 minutes or less.)

Livestreams

This is when longer videos are just fine. [Livestreaming](#) your events, whether on [Facebook Live](#) or your website, can widen your audience, further engage your existing audience, and even provide an archived piece of [evergreen content](#) that can later be repurposed. This is great for church services, special performances, [programs at a school or university](#), conference sessions, and more.

When it comes to SEO, livestreams can have a sizeable effect. Facebook [announced](#) that its ranking algorithm favors live videos in its searches. YouTube promotes YouTube Live videos. And even if your organization's livestreams are hosted off-site, it's another link that could show up in search results—especially if you're live often!



Webinars

Taking video up another notch, [webinars](#) are exclusive live educational presentations. Like its name suggests, it's a seminar broadcast over the web using tools such as [GoToMeeting](#), [Zoom](#), or even [Google Hangouts](#). Participants are typically invited to this webinar through a private link.

While the webinar itself would not be indexed by search engines, its power to engage audiences boosts SEO through lead generation, increasing activity, trust, and loyalty to your organization.

This is ideal for organizations that can use their niche to teach useful information, provide background on a popular issue, or facilitate live online discussions.

Images

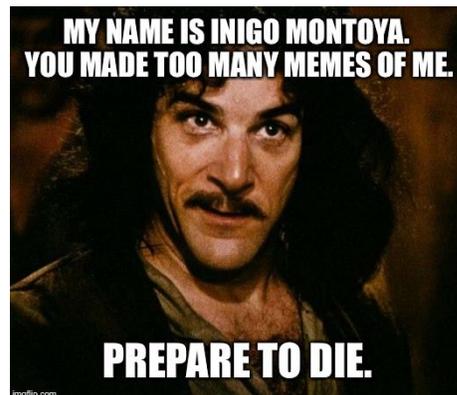
One The right pictures can elicit emotion, the right designs can inspire action and highlight strategic details. Careful planning is necessary to make sure the chosen images indeed emphasize the intended emotion, that it's clear what's happening in the picture, and that it looks genuine, as opposed to a cliché corporate **stock photo**.

Stock photography isn't always bad if it's carefully selected. And it's easy to find free stock images at [pixabay](http://pixabay.com), [pexels](http://pexels.com), [unsplash](http://unsplash.com) and free-images.com.

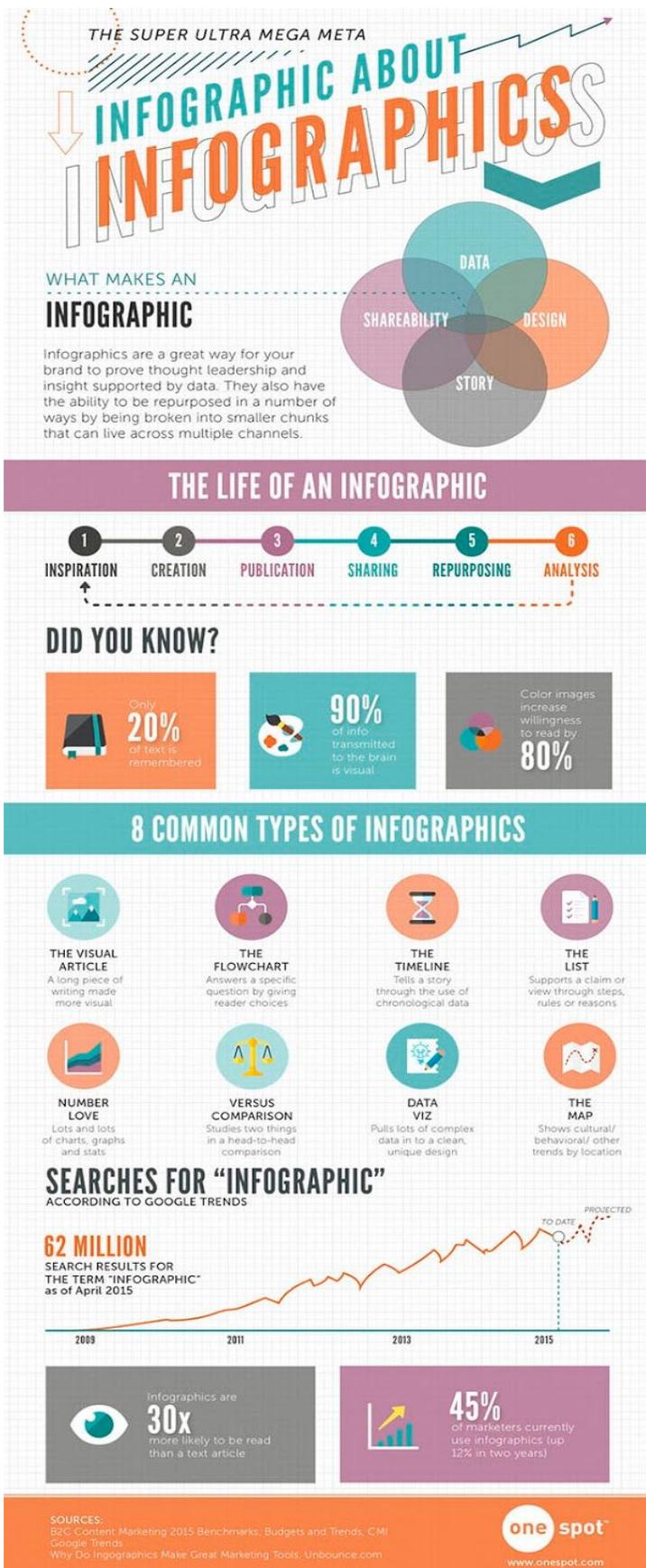
For websites, **hero images** continue to be trending (large image that dominates the top area of a website). These pictures must be high enough resolution to avoid appearing pixelated (appx. 1600 pixels wide), but low enough resolution to keep from slowing down the site's load time.

For images that appear on your website that are not hero images, stick to file sizes under 250k if possible. ([Learn more](#) about image best practices for church websites.)

Certain images also go viral as **memes**, or pictures familiar to a specific audience, overlaid with block text, that use an adaptable but repeated theme to say something funny, sarcastic or inspiring, or even to evoke sadness or outrage. Sometimes a fitting meme every now and then can boost engagement on your blog or social media content—but they can also be overused.



For each image you use on your website or blog, make sure to apply [ALT text](#) to its code, which is indexed by search engines to determine what the picture is about. It also can provide text that can be read by screen readers to tell blind internet users what pictures are on a page.



Infographics

When explaining a process in text, an accompanying visual is a must.

If, when talking about your topic, you find yourself saying, “here, let me show you...” or “why don’t I just draw this out,” an infographic would probably come in handy.

[Designers and writers must work closely](#) to create an infographic with a clear direction, so the eye knows what to read first and where to go next.

Infographics illustrate each step of a process, each bullet point, with short and straightforward text to accompany each picture.

If you’re short a graphic designer, some [free tools](#) like [Canva](#) can help you create simple infographics so you can add a splash of color to your page, post or feed as you inform and engage your audience.

And as you see in the image to the left, infographics don’t just make your page more pleasant to look at—people actually *google for infographics* on certain topics. They’re also shared frequently on social media.

Podcasts

Interviews, sermons, vocal essays, monologues, presentations, seminars, etc. Podcasts can be featured on your website or uploaded to iTunes so users can subscribe (if already hosting through a provider such as [SoundCloud](#) or [Blubrry](#), or even [Google Drive](#) or [archive.org](#)). These simple audio files make for a highly shareable piece of content people can listen to while driving, walking, exercising, or cleaning their garage.

Podcasts with your organization's name, or even a prominent personality associated with your organization, can do wonders for brand awareness, which ultimately benefits overall SEO.

Interactive content (quizzes, polls, calculators, etc.)

This requires audience participation, making for a more memorable interaction with your organization.



You've probably seen character quizzes on Facebook or Twitter, which are highly shareable because to the audience, it feels like they're sharing information about *themselves*, not about the organization that designed the quiz.

[Interactive content](#) that strives to be helpful or practical might be assessment-type quizzes, calculators, interactive graphs or charts, or polls and surveys. They can also help you with gather data for your organization's strategic planning.

And anything that deepens engagement also boosts SEO! It's always beneficial to keep people on your website longer.

There are several tools to help you create interactive content, such as [qzr](#), [SurveyMonkey](#), [Doodle](#), [Vizia](#), and more.

Courses

This can be big for Google's E-A-T (Expertise, Authority, Trustworthiness) value while also providing yet another way for your audience to consume your content. If your organization is qualified to teach even a simple skill that has value in your audience's life, creating courses can bolster your content marketing and SEO, *and* become an additional product you offer. For

starters, check out [Skillshare](#), [Lynda.com](#), or you can even host a course on [YouTube](#). There are several higher-level course software choices as well.

9. Create a “topic tree” or bubble diagram to outline your content’s topical progression.

10. What possible article titles come to mind?

11. Which of these subtopics would benefit from a visual element, such as a video, infographic or image?

12. Which platforms best suit these topics and/or content types?

13. Start drafting article assignments, complete with guidelines for visual content, and describe the places and forms it will be published in.

VII. Writing for an online audience

Even the best of writers must adapt for online writing.

Classically-trained writers typically focus on articles, academic pieces, journalistic pieces or even books. Professors tend to encourage their scholars to describe things colorfully and thoroughly, to fill the page with rich wording and to emanate cleverness and elevated thinking throughout each paragraph.

While learning the rules and best practices of academic or journalistic writing creates a solid educational foundation, online writing is when you learn how to break these rules in order to get the point across as quickly, clearly and persuasively as possible.

At first, writing for an online audience may feel too simple. It's true, this type of writing is more casual and technical. But it's also backed by years of research that tout its effectiveness.

Most forms of online writing follow the fundamental principles of copywriting, which also bridge into the niche area of content writing. We'll discuss the difference between the two further on.

The bottom line: The goal of writing online content is to connect with the reader, not elevate the author. It's about meeting the reader where they are, and giving them the information they seek, all while "desiring their good."

[\(Sound familiar? MH, 143\)](#)

1) 4 primary purposes for online writing (content marketing)

Especially in content marketing, when you're consistently creating and distributing content to attract, engage and nurture an audience, your goals will be:

To inform your readers about a topic of their interest, giving them new information—or old information with a new twist, new application, new perspective, etc. This is still aimed at providing value, making the reader feel like they've become more knowledgeable than before.

To educate your readers with answers to their questions or methods to solve their problems. This can demonstrate authority while also providing value to your audience. Most educational articles will start with "How" or "How to" or "Learn." You can also use videos, quizzes, courses, step-by-step guides, checklists, eBooks, whitepapers, handbooks, reports, etc.

To entertain the readers that are searching for something lighthearted to pass the time or provide a pick-me-up. This type of content can even inform or educate in a fun way, without demanding too much brainpower. Entertaining content is often viewed while on a commute (when the reader is not the driver!), in waiting rooms, in between classes, on breaks at work, while waiting for something to start, or on the couch, winding down after a long day.

Here is where you'll want to use forms of content such as quizzes, games, polls, short videos, memes or humorous writing.

To inspire your readers to take an action, like changing a habit, sharing a post, buying your product, supporting your cause, or even donating to it. Inspiring content aims at the emotions, stirring up feelings of "agitation," whether positive (excited, emboldened) or negative (angry, shocked).

However, emotional content performs poorly if the reader detects it to be overblown or insincere. Be realistic, and test this content first, when possible.

2) Write like you're talking to a friend

The best online writing is conversational yet straightforward. Think about how you'd explain something new to someone you know.

You wouldn't spend too much time on choosing flowery, poetic words, and you'd try to relate your concept to your friend's life. You'd be up front about why this subject might be of interest to them, and how it could benefit their life.

You don't spend a lot of time on technical details or bells and whistles, unless you know your friend is interested in that. Instead, you focus on how this topic will affect them, personally.

(Otherwise...why would you be talking to them about it in the first place?)

The great part of writing online content is that as long as you're clear about your topic, your readers will *already be interested in what you're writing about!*

Since your readers used a search engine, social media post, email message or other website to get to your content, you don't have to worry about convincing them that the *topic itself* is interesting. You have to convince them that you have information *about* their chosen topic that is better, deeper, more interesting or more applicable *than other websites*.

Getting to your point early—like in the headline, subtitle, and opening paragraph—is key.

Think about that interaction with your friend, but flip it around. Have you ever been in a conversation where your counterpart struggled to get to the point?

They're over-explaining the setup to the scene, giving too many examples or metaphors, or trying to come up with language that softens the blow of a new or edgy idea instead of outright saying what they mean.

You're suddenly focused on your own precious time, and you're tempted to cut your friend off and ask someone else!

That's how an online reader feels when the content doesn't get to the point.

They'll click "back" and go to the next link in search results.

3) Boldly make your claim up front, then use the rest of your content to back it up.

If the point you're making is a bit jarring, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Remember the idea of inspiring people via agitating emotional states:

"People don't do things because they're comfortable. People don't do things because they're bored. People do things because they're excited, outraged, empowered, inspired, shocked..."

- Christofer Jeschke

We're emotional beings, and the most effective writing tugs at these emotions without going overboard, without being manipulative or sensational.

4) Move your reader to action

The heart of [copywriting](#) is to persuade readers to take an action.

Sometimes we think of advertising copy or sales copy and think about those spammy subject lines that over-promise, or clickbait headlines for videos or blog posts, or overzealous sales letters that used to come in the mail to get you to subscribe to magazines or buy retirement plans.

Well, if thinking of sales copy puts a bad taste in your mouth, keep in mind that you're thinking of *bad* sales copy. [When copywriting is done conversationally](#), with the reader's feelings, interests and beliefs in mind, it can be incredibly effective.

Define the problem

Throughout a piece of writing, a reader is moved to action by [introducing a problem that the reader needs to solve](#). They want something, they're confused about something, or they don't know the next step in a process.

You outline the problem, describe the implications of this problem, and then give them the solution—your product, your method, your information, etc.

Benefits vs. features

When describing how great your product/method/service/information is, don't just list its features—describe the benefits it will provide to your reader, and why those benefits are in their best interest.

For example,

“Buy our hibiscus tea!”

Why?

“Our blend has more antioxidants.”

Ok...what does that mean?

“Antioxidants decrease free radicals in your bloodstream.”

Ok...what does that mean?

“Antioxidants keep the cells in your body from breaking down!”

Ok...but what does that mean for me?

“Well, this tea has been shown to help lower high blood pressure, according to the American Heart Association's 2008 study.”

That sounds pretty important. How does it taste?

“Great! Especially with honey!”

Well all right then—why didn't you say so?

Sometimes, when we're excited about the subject of our writing, we get lost in the details. But the readers aren't there yet. They need to see a connection between what they're searching for and what you have to offer.

For example,

“You’ve been diagnosed with high blood pressure, and it can be tough to give up some of the foods and beverages you’ve enjoyed for years—like coffee, black tea, soda, etc.”

You speak the truth. It’s like you’ve been there, man!

“But what if there was a soothing hot drink that could be just as tasty, AND help lower your blood pressure at the same time?”

Is there? That would be so helpful right now! Tell me more!

Superperfect Tea Company offers hibiscus tea. And according to a 2008 study by the American Heart Association lowers, it blood pressure in pre-hypertensive and mildly hypertensive adults.

I could use that! How does it taste?

This ruby-red herbal tea has a slight tart flavor reminiscent of cranberries. Add a little honey, and it delivers a light, tangy “bite” that can pick you up in the afternoon or calm you down in the evening.

Mmm. Can I try some?

Notice how the problem was outlined in the introduction, and the primary benefits immediately following. Meet the readers where they are, *then* tell how your amazing product is just what *they* need...and why.

Calls to action (CTA)

Once you’ve “sold” the product through connecting with your reader’s needs, now it’s time to tell them to buy it!

Don’t leave them hanging. They *want* to take action. And the more clear and straightforward the call, the more likely they are to follow through.

You may have already imagined a call to action following the last line of the hibiscus tea conversation:

“Yes! Get 20% off your first box of tea when you order now!”

or

“Yes—get your free sample sent to you now!*

Copywriting isn't complete without a call to action. And they don't have to be overly clever or cute, they just need to make sense. Here are common calls to action that appear online:

- Order now!
- Download here.
- Watch this video.
- Join today!
- Donate to ZZZ & get a free travel mug!
- Listen now!
- Start your free trial today!
- Secure your spot!
- Get the full version!
- Access exclusive information!
- Sponsor a child today!
- Book your appointment now!
- Find out if you qualify!

5) Storytelling

If this sounds rather formulaic, that's because it is. Yes, wordsmithing is a creative process, but copywriting is a science backed by research. These elements of copywriting have been market tested for decades and proven to work.

But a great way to add creativity to the elements of this formula is through storytelling. People can't help but be interested in stories. We want to know how things turn out!

These stories can be in the form of case studies, testimonials, or simple anecdotes that describe how a person just like the reader struggled with this problem. Maybe they tried several things until finally discovering what really worked.

Where can we find these stories? As a ministry, you might already have them. Think of the people you've served. Think of the events you've held.

Going deeper, what analogies or metaphors can you draw from what you do? Can it be related to everyday life concerns?

Check out this [article on finding marketing stories in everyday life](#).

6) Content writing vs. copywriting

While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different. Copywriting refers to the science, the persuasive writing formulas, the headlines and the calls to action. Content writing could be considered the filler content that fleshes out the formulas for content marketing purposes: the stories, the details, the background information, the educational steps or the valuable pieces of information you're offering your reader.

In many ways these two writing styles overlap, work hand in hand, and occupy vital roles in the digital marketing process.

There are several more specific definitions of these two terms across the internet, but there's no need to get sidetracked by those at this point. The bottom line is that these styles and formulas work together to provide value to the reader and persuade them to stick around, eventually to make a purchase, subscribe, or share.

Learn more about copywriting for SEO:

Free Copywriting Worksheets! (Copyhackers)

<https://copyhackers.com/copywriting-worksheets/>

The Ultimate Guide to No-Pain Copywriting (Copyhackers)

<https://copyhackers.com/2015/10/copywriting-formula/>

A Simple Guide for Content Creation That Drives Traffic [Strategy, Writing] (Scripted)

<https://www.scripted.com/content-marketing/guide-to-content-creation-that-drives-traffic>

Is Your Website Content Written Conversationally? (Center for Online Evangelism)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/website-content-written-conversationally/>

How to Create Amazing Articles Even If You Suck at Writing (Neil Patel)

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/how-to-write-an-article/>

How Are Your Readers Reading? (Center for Online Evangelism / Anne Wylie)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/how-are-your-readers-reading/>

Why Your Readers Aren't Reading, and How to Get Them to (Center for Online Evangelism)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/why-your-readers-arent-reading-and-how-you-get-them-to/>

Stock Your Writer's Toolkit for 2018 (Center for Online Evangelism)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/stock-writers-toolkit-2018/>

Steal These Insider Secrets to Get Your Content Noticed (Center for Online Evangelism)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/steal-insider-secrets-get-your-content-noticed/>

10 Common Online Copywriting Mistakes (eConsultancy)

<https://www.econsultancy.com/blog/67708-10-common-online-copywriting-mistakes>

10 Copywriting Tips You Think You Know (Conversion Sciences)

<https://conversionciences.com/blog/copywriting-tips/>

SEO Clickbait: How to Write Headlines Everyone Loves (Neil Patel)

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/clickbait-headlines/>

595 Power Words That Will Instantly Make You a Better Writer (Jon Morrow)

<https://smartblogger.com/power-words/>

4 Reasons People Stop Reading Before the End of a Page (Copyblogger / Nick Usborne)

<https://www.copyblogger.com/why-people-stop-reading/>

The 35 Headline Formulas of John Caples (Lars Lofgren)

<http://larslofgren.com/copywriting/the-35-headline-formulas-of-john-caples>

6 Ways Writers Can Master SEO Best Practices in 2018 (Forbes)

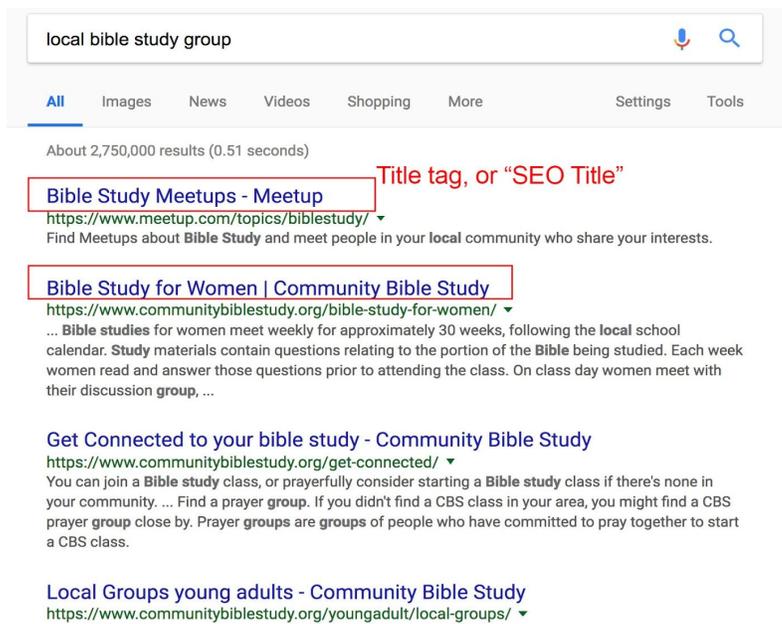
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/denispinsky/2018/06/06/seo-for-writers/#6ed74a88315d>

7) SEO-specific elements of writing (Titles, Tags and Descriptions)

While seemingly small, these areas can make a big difference in how Google views your site, and in convincing people to click on your webpages in search results.

Title Tags

Sometimes called the “SEO Title,” this is the title that appears in search engines and what is displayed at the top of a browser tab when a reader opens your page.



Be clear and straightforward about what your page content covers. If your page is about Bible studies, make sure those two words are in the first three words of the title. According to the SEO

experts at Backlinko.com, Google “puts more weight” on words found at the beginning of title tags.

For example, say you want to rank for the keyword/phrase “couples Bible study” and you thought of two SEO Title choices:

- 1) Weekly Couples Bible Study - ThisTown Church
- 2) Looking for a Bible study that caters to new couples?

Google would rank the first one over the second one simple because it would deem it more relevant and topic-centric. The second one is not a bad headline (save it for your H1!) [but Google favors SEO Titles that are more direct.](#)

To set your page title at the code level looks like this:

```
<head>  
  <title>THIS IS YOUR PAGE TITLE</title>  
</head>
```

Otherwise, most content management platforms have a designated space to add or change a webpage’s title.

NOTE: If you already have significant traffic coming to your page with your current page title, even if it’s not optimized for the intended keyword, you might want to [check your analytics](#) before changing it. If visitors that come in through that page are staying on your site and clicking, downloading, buying, etc., you may want to reconsider changing it for the time being, because you don’t want to lose that current traffic. If you notice that people are coming in through this page but then leaving the site, a title change could be highly beneficial.

Meta Tags or Meta Descriptions

This is the approx. 200-character teaser-like blurb that appears directly below the SEO title in search results. Often, this is what convinces the reader that your content is valuable.

You can write as long a meta description as you want, but Google will cut it off anywhere between 250-300 characters depending on the amount of pixels those characters occupy.

(While the recommendation used to be 160 characters, Google [recently raised](#) the amount of available pixels as of December, 2017. It was changed again in the Spring of 2018, then returned to the recommended 200. In light of this apparent state of flux, keep it as short as possible while including the necessary information).

These are the teaser blurbs that appear directly under your SEO titles in search results.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "couples bible study group". The search bar contains the text "couples bible study group" and has a microphone icon and a search icon. Below the search bar are navigation tabs for "All", "Images", "Shopping", "Videos", "News", "More", "Settings", and "Tools". The results show "About 2,030,000 results (0.50 seconds)". A banner reads "Shop for couples bible study group on Google". Below this are five sponsored product listings:

- Crazy Like Us Series DVD** by Andy Stanley, \$17.99, Christianbook.c...
- Wiser Together Study Guide** with "Learning to Live the Right Way" by Bill Hybels, \$18.50, ChurchSource, Special offer.
- The Uncommon Marriage** by Tony & Lauren Ebcency, \$20.97, Audible.com, Free shipping.
- Christian Dating In a Godless World** by David Platt, \$18.95, The Catholic C...
- Table for Two: Doing Life and...** by David Platt, \$4.05, Thriftbooks.com.

Small group studies - FamilyLife

www.familylife.com/smallgroups

Meta Description

Preparing for Marriage. Preparing for Marriage small **group study**. Prepare **couples** for the important task of building a Christian marriage in seven areas. Each session includes **Bible study**, discussion, and projects for the couple to complete together. More details ...

Top 10 Bible Studies on Love and Marriage | Christian Bible Studies

www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/...10/top-10-bible-studies-love-marriage.html

Jan 25, 2010 - This **study** offers insights from **Scripture** on how to seek God as a couple and as individuals within the context of marriage. In prayer, in worship, and in the Word, **couples** can pursue a relationship with God and learn to rely on him—together. 7. Communication in Marriage Marriage Partnership Course

Couples | Bible Studies by Audience | Small Groups

www.smallgroups.com/bible-studies/audience/couples/

If you are newly married, soon-to-be married, or know someone who fits those categories, this six-session course is for you. Song of Songs: Love in the City · **Bible Study** · Song of Songs: Love in the City. God tells us what true love should look like in a love-starved culture. Finding Joy in the Difficulty of Marriage · **Bible Study**.

Using keywords in the meta description can give a small boost in search engine optimization, but the primary purpose of meta descriptions is to get the Googler to click on your site. This is where you expand on your page title, pitching why your website has what the seeker is looking for.

For example, if you're selling vegan gluten-free granola bars, you might want your meta description to say something like:

VEGLUFRE—A fast, tasty, healthy breakfast option! Packed with protein, fiber, vitamins & minerals, our vegan, gluten-free granola bars make a great meal or snack. 5 Flavors! Order in bulk & save!

Make sure to connect the benefits of your product, service, or idea/cause with the needs and interests of those you hope will click on your link. List a key selling point or two, then describe what they'll find on the page and why it matters to them.

Most content management platforms will have an area for you to enter the meta description for each page, or you can install a WordPress plugin like [Yoast](#) that allows you to edit the entire snippet, or area that shows in search results under your link.

To enter a meta description straight into the HTML, the <meta> element will always go inside the <head> element. It will look similar to:

```
<head>  
<meta name="description" content="THIS IS YOUR META DESCRIPTION"/>  
</head>
```

NOTE: Every page should have its own unique meta description. Google notices if multiple pages have the same meta description, and many SEO auditing software programs note that as an SEO error.

H1 Tags / Headers / Headings

This tag doesn't typically show up in search engine results, but it is the first thing Googlers will see after clicking on their page. To make sure they stay there, devote attention to [creating effective headlines](#). Make sure specify what they'll find there and why they will be interested to read on.

Throw a keyword in there somewhere, pinpoint a benefit, and a brief hint at what the content covers.

For example,

Can't decide which Bible translation to use? Learn the history and differences.

or

7 Ways to Simplify Complex Recipes for Easy, Healthy Dinners

In this example, “Coping with Depression” is the H1 tag, and a keyword is used in the first three words. The subtitle, “Tips for Overcoming Depression...” is designated as H2, as is the subhead “How do you deal with depression” lower on the page.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/coping-with-depression.htm>. The page header includes the logo for HELPGUIDE.ORG, described as a "Trusted guide to mental & emotional health", and a navigation menu with links for Home, Topics A-Z, HelpGuide & Harvard, Our People, Donate, and Search. On the left side, there is a sidebar with various links related to depression, including "How to deal with depression", "Stay connected", "Do things that make you feel good", "Get moving", "Eat a healthy diet", "Get a daily dose of sunlight", "Challenge negative thinking", "When to get professional help", and "Topic Page Depression". The main content area features the article title "Coping with Depression" in a large, bold font, which is highlighted with a red box and labeled "H1 tag". Below the title is the subtitle "Tips for Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time". A photograph of a woman looking thoughtful is displayed below the subtitle. The article text begins with "Depression drains your energy, hope, and drive, making it difficult to take the steps that will help you to feel better. But while overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, it's far from impossible. You can't just will yourself to 'snap out of it,' but you do have more control than you realize—even if your depression is severe and stubbornly persistent. The key is to start small and build from there. Feeling better takes time, but you can get there by making positive choices for yourself each day." Below the text is a subheading "How do you deal with depression?" followed by a line of text: "Dealing with depression requires action, but taking action when you're depressed can be".

You designate your text as H1 by adding the `<h1>` tag to the code, or by selecting “Headline” or “H1” or similar from your content management platform in the “Style” section.

This will typically make the text larger and bolded, possibly a different font, depending on the theme or template you're using.

Each page should have **only one H1**.

For subtitles or subheadings, which are excellent for breaking up long text blocks and making the whole post more skimm-able, can use H2 or H3 tags, which will typically appear smaller than H1-designated text. H2 and H3 tags do not have an SEO impact, but can work well with your style template.

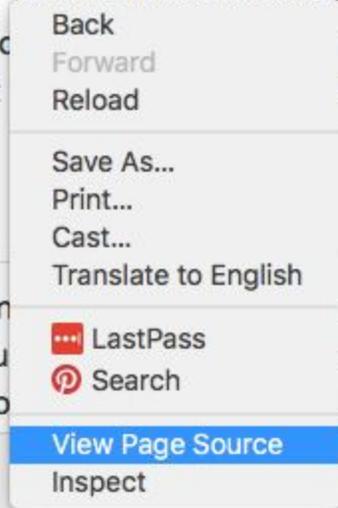
If you can't get into your content management platform at the moment and want to check how a certain paragraph is designated, right click on the page and select "View Page Source" to view the code. You can also highlight the area, right click, and select "Inspect."



and drive, making it difficult to take the steps th
coming depression isn't quick or easy, it's far fro
to "snap out of it," but you do have more contri
severe and stubbo
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```
view-source:https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/ coping-with-depression.htm
<div class="helpguide-logic-text">HELPGUIDE.ORG
</div>
<div class="tagline">Trusted guide to mental, emotional & social health</div>
<div id="wrapper" class="container-fluid">
<div class="row">
<div class="col-sm-3 col-md-2 hidden-xs">
<div id="article-nav" class="fixed">
<ul class="nav nav-pills nav-stacked">
<li class="list-item">Home</li>
<li class="list-item">About</li>
<li class="list-item">Contact Us</li>
<li class="list-item">Privacy Policy</li>
<li class="list-item">Terms of Use</li>
<li class="list-item">Feedback</li>
<li class="list-item">Help</li>
</ul>
</div>
<div class="col-sm-9 col-md-8">
<div id="article">
<h2 class="text-align: center;">Coping with Depression
<h3 class="text-align: center;">10 Steps to Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time</h3>
<div class="text">
<p>Depression drains your energy, hope, and drive, making it difficult to take the steps that will help you to feel better. But while overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, it's far from impossible. You can regain control of your life by taking small, positive steps each day. The key is to start small and build from there. Feeling better takes time, but you can get there by making positive choices for yourself each day.</p>
</div>
<div id="content">
<h4>How do you deal with depression?</h4>
<p>Dealing with depression requires action, but taking action when you're depressed can be hard. Sometimes, just thinking about the things you should do to feel better, like exercising or spending time with friends, can seem exhausting or impossible to put into action.</p>
<p>It's the catch-22 of depression recovery: The things that help the most are the things that are the most difficult to do. There is a big difference, however, between something that's difficult and something that's impossible. You may not have much energy, but by drawing on all your reserves, you should have enough to take a walk around the block or pick up the phone to call a loved one.</p>
<p>Taking the first step is always the hardest. But going for a walk or getting up and dancing to your favorite music, for example, is something you can do right now. And it can substantially boost your mood and energy for several hours—long enough to get a second recovery step into action, such as preparing a meal, making a call, or arranging to meet an old friend. By taking the following small but positive steps day by day, you'll soon lift the heavy fog of depression and find yourself feeling happier, healthier, and more hopeful again.</p>
</div>
<div id="related">
<h4>Related with Depression</h4>
<ul style="list-style-type: none; padding-left: 0;">
<li>11. Reach out and stay connected</li>
</ul>
</div>
</div>
</div>
</div>
```

ALT (image) Tags

This code-level text makes images searchable by Google. Also known as an "alt attribute" or "alt description," this HTML tag is applied to an image on your webpage. It doesn't show up on the page, but googlebots pick it up and can use that to help determine the topic depth of your page.

While Google can determine several aspects about images, Google won't always "see" the message it's intended to illustrate or support. To help Google do that, it relies on ALT tags to determine what the picture is and how well it relates to the topic of the page.

Additionally, ALT tags also provide the image information for:

- Visually impaired Googlers using screen readers
- Those who can't see images in their email or browser (if images or HTML is disabled)

When writing your ALT tags, include a 2-3-word description of the image in relation to a keyword. For example, if your page is about sermon tips and you have a picture of a megaphone to illustrate a point, you might use the description, “megaphone; project voice.”

Don't make it too long, and make sure not to “keyword stuff,” an old “[black-hat](#)” SEO practice that Google will not favor. For example, for the same image described above on the “sermon tips” page, keyword stuffing might look like: “megaphone sermon tips project voice sermon audience sermon strategies public speaking presentation methods.”

Add your ALT text into your content management system, or into the HTML by editing the source code:

```

```

For example, in the picture on the previous page about coping with depression, this is how the ALT text appeared in the source code:

```
134 <h2 class="subtitle">Tips for Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time</h2>
135 <p class="hide-md"><a class="btn btn-info" href="/es/articulos/depresion/haciendole-frente-a-la-depresion.htm">Español</a></p>
136 <picture>
137 <source srcset="/images/depression/depressed-young-woman-500.jpg" media="(min-width: 768px)">
138 
139 </picture>
140 <p>Depression drains your energy, hope, and drive, making it difficult to take the steps that will help you to feel better. But while overcoming depression isn't the easiest, it's far from impossible. You can't just tell yourself to
```

(Learn more at: <https://moz.com/learn/seo/alt-text>)

Using these seemingly-minor titles and tags can not only improve your SEO but also your user experience, as the content will clearly and enticingly direct seekers to click on your site to find information relevant to their search.

In short:

- Your **title tag** answers the “what” questions of seekers.
- The **meta description** answers “why” they should click on it.
- The **H1 tag** answers a combo of “what” “why” and “how” by introducing the topic in relation to what it will do for seekers or how it will help them.
- **ALT text** helps Google know that images relate to the subject matter as well, making it a more complete page, AND also help visually impaired people understand what your page is about and what the images are, as they can be read by screen readers.

8) Evergreen vs. time sensitive content

There are two primary categories to consider when crafting your overall website content: Time-sensitive content and evergreen content.

While indeed simple concepts, when it comes to SEO, content marketing and user experience, there are strategies to consider in creating these two types of content.

Announcements, breaking news, special offers or promotions, seasonal content, events, etc, these are time-sensitive by nature. It's good to have some time-sensitive information on your website (if you consistently keep it up to date). It demonstrates to site visitors that your organization is active and aware.

However, it can be frustrating to go to a website *without* up-to-date information. If an event from a couple months ago is still headlining, how can the site visitor trust that the rest of your information is current?

Evergreen content, however, refers to elements on your page without an expiration date. It's static content that doesn't change (much) over time. It doesn't need to. It's written to stay relevant and useful to your audience.

For general website copy, this could be:

- About page
- Services page
- FAQ
- Archived posts or [cornerstone articles](#)

Special care is given to creating this copy so it will stay relevant for as long as possible with minimal upkeep.

When it comes to content marketing, however, you're publishing content regularly on a blog, social media, email, etc. You're churning out new, helpful content to stay fresh and up-to-date. But that doesn't mean that each piece of content has to be time-sensitive. You can cultivate them to be evergreen right from the start.

To keep new content evergreen, the key is to stick with topics rather than dates.

While some of your social media or email content may contain time-sensitive information, that doesn't mean that these items can't be slightly adjusted to stay continually relevant, especially if they link back to the same blog post that covers a topic thoroughly, and that you periodically update if any information changes.

To help your posts, pages and articles stay evergreen in SERPs, try removing the publication date from your post (unless it's necessary). For the many seekers that check the date on webpages before clicking on them in search results, this can help present your content as timeless.

If you're a church posting each week's sermons as videos or podcasts, the first priority to keep these elements evergreen is to title each one as topical rather than the date of the service (i.e., "Teaching Your Kids to Pray" vs. "Sermon 4-25-17 on Prayer").

(You can still show the date in the subtitle or descriptions, as members often search by date, but the title should perform like a headline).

The topics covered should be "enduring topics," such as common experiences of the human condition (job interview best practices, dealing with grief and loss, etc.), timeless skills (cake baking, how to change a tire, etc.) or opinion/discussion pieces (dogs vs. cats, should I exercise in the morning or evening, etc.).

Additional ideas for effective evergreen content:

- **Case studies** ("How Pathfinders Made Me More Confident")
- **Day-in-the-life posts or videos** ("Shadowing a Pathfinder Director at Oshkosh")
- **Interviews** ("This Guy Was a Pathfinder Leader for 40 Years. He Tells Us His Best Stories")
- **Adapted livestreams** ("Pathfinder Leadership Training—What Not to Do Skit")
- **Demonstration videos** ("Advanced Knot Tying")
- **Topical blog post** ("7 Ways to Deal With Rambunctious Kids")
- **Topical blog series** ("Getting the Most Out of Oshkosh, Part 1 of 3")

Learn more about best practices in creating evergreen content:

"How to Research and Create Evergreen Content" (BuzzSumo)

<https://buzzsumo.com/blog/research-create-evergreen-content/#gs.xHhkbeq>

"9 Evergreen Content Formats for Long-term Success" (Content Marketing Institute)

<https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2018/06/evergreen-content-formats/>

"Turn Livestreams Into Evergreen Content" (Center for Online Evangelism/DigitalPew)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/turn-livestreams-into-evergreen-content/>

"How to Plan and Create Evergreen Content for SEO" (SearchEngineWatch)

<https://searchenginewatch.com/2018/03/14/how-to-plan-and-create-evergreen-content-for-seo/>

9) Repurposing content

We've covered the different formats of content that can be created to reach a variety of content consumers, as well as what makes content "evergreen," or relevant past its publication date.

These principles can come in handy in the beginning stages of your SEO and content marketing strategy when it comes to repurposing content. Instead of creating a different pieces of content for each platform you publish to, you can make one core content piece turn into many.

Take this short article for example:

How to Make 1 Blog Post Explode Into 10 Different Pieces of Shareable Content

You, a nationally-renown sandwich artist, wrote a winning post for your fancy sandwich-making fans.

- 1) **Publish post:** "5 Creative Ways to Slice Sandwiches for Dazzling Hors d'Oeuvres Trays."
- 2) **Create teasers** for your blog post for your followers on:
 - a) **Facebook**
 - b) **Twitter**
 - c) **Instagram**
 - d) **Pinterest**
 - e) **etc.**
- 3) Create an **infographic**, illustrating the step-by-step process of each fancy slicing technique.
- 4) Put together a **slide deck** for further details on each step of sandwich-slicing artistry.
- 5) Announce this fantastic post to your **email list**.
 - a) You could even create an exclusive **autoresponder series** that focuses even more in-depth on each of the 5 sandwich slicing methods.
- 6) Host a **webinar** about these 5 slicing strategies for aspiring sandwich artists, with Q&A afterward.
- 7) Turn that webinar into an evergreen **video** that will live on your YouTube or Vimeo channel.
- 8) Host a **podcast**, where you gather with a fellow sandwich aficionado or two and discuss these 5 slicing techniques.
- 9) Type up **transcripts** of the podcast discussion for those who prefer to read.
- 10) **Turn your feedback into more shareable content.** Are you getting lots of comments on your blog post, your social media channels, or your videos? Did anyone submit ideas or questions? Publish a follow-up post or video that showcases your followers' pictures of their own slicing results, blooper videos, or new discoveries. Or create a quick video to share tips about part of the 3rd slicing method that your virtual proteges are having a tough time with.

Repurposing content can allow a specific topic to be discussed online for longer, by spreading out the publication of each repurposed item.

On the other hand, similar to the article example above, the same topic repurposed into 10 different forms can create a bigger splash for its online debut. It can create more options for Google to index, increasing your chances of showing up prominently in search results, and it also allows your content to show up in the search engine results for various social media platforms as well.

VIII. Local SEO Setup—a MUST for Churches, Schools, and Brick & Mortar Ministries [Map & Directory Listings]

NOTE: If your organization does not have a physical location, you may skip this section.

Effective “Local SEO” is all about helping nearby people find you *that are already looking for you*. Google [reports](#) that more than one-third of mobile searches are “local-related,” and the first step in local SEO is to verify and optimize online map and directory listings.

Today, people decide where to go by typing keywords into map apps on their phones. Some might do this on their desktop computers while at work, others while sitting on their couches with their laptops. They make their decisions based on what their map app finds close by that best matches the word or phrase they entered, such as “fast food” or “coffee shop” or “nail salon.”

This map data also shows up in Google’s search results when someone searches for a location. So if someone typed in, “church in Springfield,” the map data will show up to the right of search results, or right above them on a mobile screen. Needless to say, map data is highly regarded by both Google and its users. This is an essential part of search engine visibility for your organization.

What are map listings?

You probably already use Apple maps, Google Maps, Mapquest, or other map apps that determine your location and direct you to relevant listings close to you. It’s how we find hair salons, gas stations, the highest-rated Chinese restaurant, auto garages, pharmacies and more, especially when we’re traveling or new to an area.

These apps, as well as search engines, use the location data of mobile devices or computer IP addresses to determine the location of the seeker conducting the search, and which nearby results best match their search.

Statistics show that these map searches have nearly replaced yellow pages—even the online version! We want to find what we need, and we want to find it fast, close, and rated 5 stars.

Does my organization have a map listing?

Try googling your church, school, business, ministry, etc., by name. Your organization may already be listed on Google or Apple maps, even if you didn’t create that listing. (Sometimes

data is pulled from wikipedia.org or other listings, or from public information sources.)

Academy is a Seventh-day Adventist co-educational high school located at Fourth and [redacted] is located midway between [redacted] 25 miles south of [redacted]. [Wikipedia](#)

Address: [redacted] Rd, [redacted] 59

Phone: [redacted] 6

[Suggest an edit](#) · [Own this business?](#)

In your search results, you should see a featured box with your location listing.

Desktop view: Listing to the right of search results

The screenshot shows a Google search for "victoria adventist church". The search bar at the top contains the text "victoria adventist church" and shows "About 392,000 results (0.62 seconds)". Below the search bar are tabs for "All", "Maps", "Images", "News", "Videos", "More", "Settings", and "Tools".

On the left side, there are several search results:

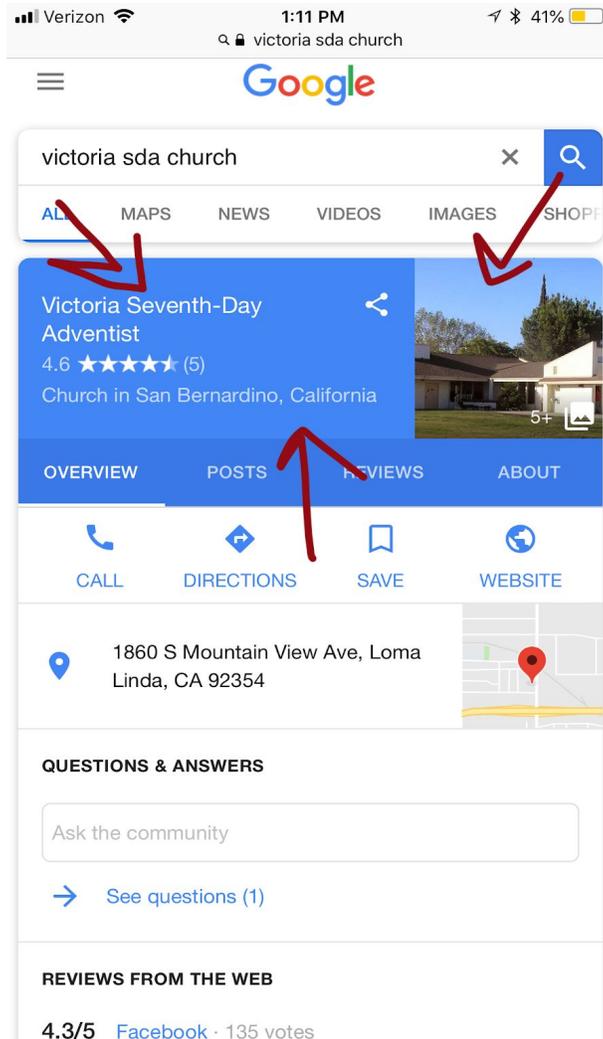
- Victoria Seventh-day Adventist Church**
<https://www.victoriaadventist.org/>
Serving San Bernardino, Redlands & Loma Linda, California.
- Victoria Seventh-day Adventist Church - 4.1 Pastor McMillan's Story**
www.victoriaadventist.org/pastorbio
I have had the honor of being Victoria's pastor since 1998. I have served several congregations prior to Victoria, among them are the Campus Hill Church (1986-1987, 1996-1997) Riverside Community Church (1993-1996) Ontario Seventh-day Adventist Church concurrently with the Rancho Cucamonga Adventist ...
- Victoria Seventh Day Adventist® Church Victoria BC: Home**
<https://www.churchinvictoria.org/>
Victoria SDA Church, a Seventh-day Adventist church in Victoria, BC. Looking for a church to join? Visit your local Seventh-day Adventist church in Victoria, BC and see how you and your family fit in to the Christian community provided by this SDA church.
[About Us](#) · [Calendar](#) · [Ministries](#) · [Online Giving](#)
- Victoria Seventh-day Adventist Church - Home | Facebook**
<https://www.facebook.com> > Places > Loma Linda, California > Church
★★★★★ Rating: 4.3 - 135 votes
Victoria Seventh-day Adventist Church, Loma Linda, CA. 14158 likes · 6 talking about this · 625 were here. Dedicated to sharing the good news of Jesus...
- Victoria SDA Church - Adventist Organizational Directory**
www.adventistdirectory.org > GC > NAD > SCIC > BCOC
Apr 10, 2017 - 983 Pandora Ave Victoria BC V8V 3P4 Canada. Members: 227. Pastor: Marian Kossovan. Phone: 250-383-1510. Email: info@vicsda.ca. Website: www.churchinvictoria.org. Maps: Google (Español) (Portugués) (Français) (Lat/Lon) - Bing - Yahoo (Maps may not show correct location).

On the right side, there is a featured listing for "Victoria Seventh-Day Adventist" with a star icon. The listing includes:

- A photo of the church building and a map showing its location.
- Buttons for "See photos" and "See outside".
- Rating: 4.6 ★★★★★ 5 Google reviews
- Buttons for "Website" and "Directions".
- Address: 1860 S Mountain View Ave, Loma Linda, CA 92354
- Phone: (909) 796-7869
- Buttons for "Suggest an edit", "Know this place? Answer quick questions", "Questions & answers" (See all questions (1)), and "Ask a question".
- Reviews from the web: 4.3/5 Facebook · 135 votes

A red arrow points from the search results on the left towards the featured listing on the right.

Mobile/phone view: Listing on top of search results



If your organization does not show up when you Google it, you may need to create a map listing from scratch.

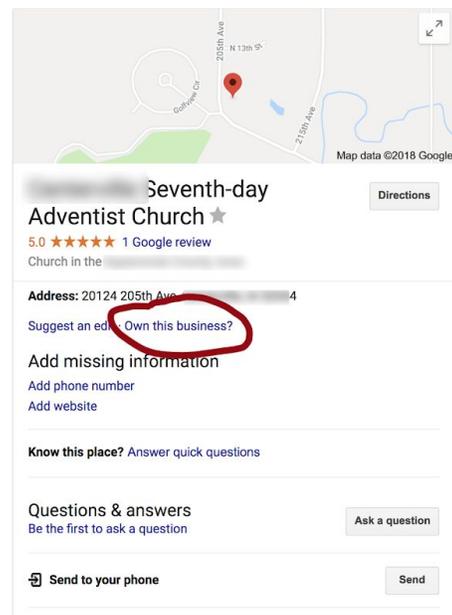
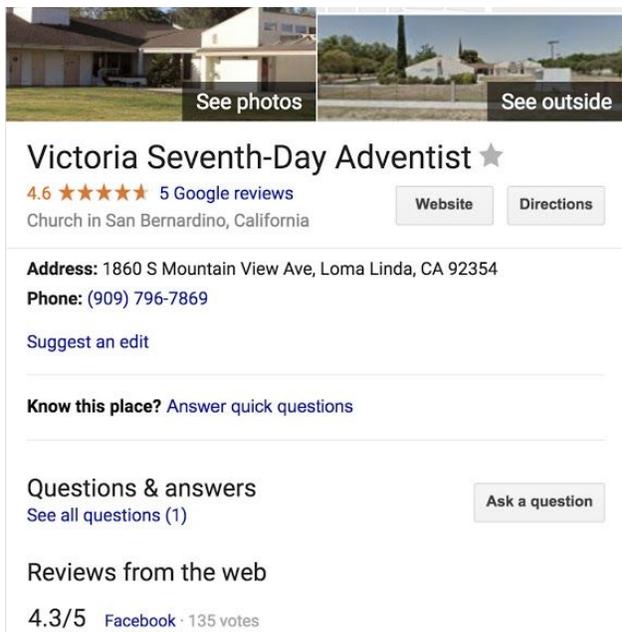
Note: If you find duplicate listings for your organization, there are more steps you'll need to complete, and the process may become complicated. Before making any changes, you'll need to determine which one is the original. Find out more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

How can I tell if my map listing is claimed?

If you found your organization's listing when you Googled it and you're not sure if it has been "claimed" yet, here's how to tell.

Notice in the images below that the one on the left has pictures, a clickable phone number, reviews, etc. This listing has been claimed and verified.

The listing on the right is noted to have "missing information" and also has a link that says, "Own this business?" This listing is unclaimed, and someone can start the process of claiming it simply by clicking on the "own this" link. That's all it takes...which is why you want to it before someone else does.



How do I claim or create my organization's Google map listing?

Whether you're claiming a listing or creating a new one, this is done through "Google My Business" at business.google.com. You'll be working with the [Google account](#) you created in Section III that you use for Google Analytics and Search Console. *Make sure you are signed in to this account before the following steps.*

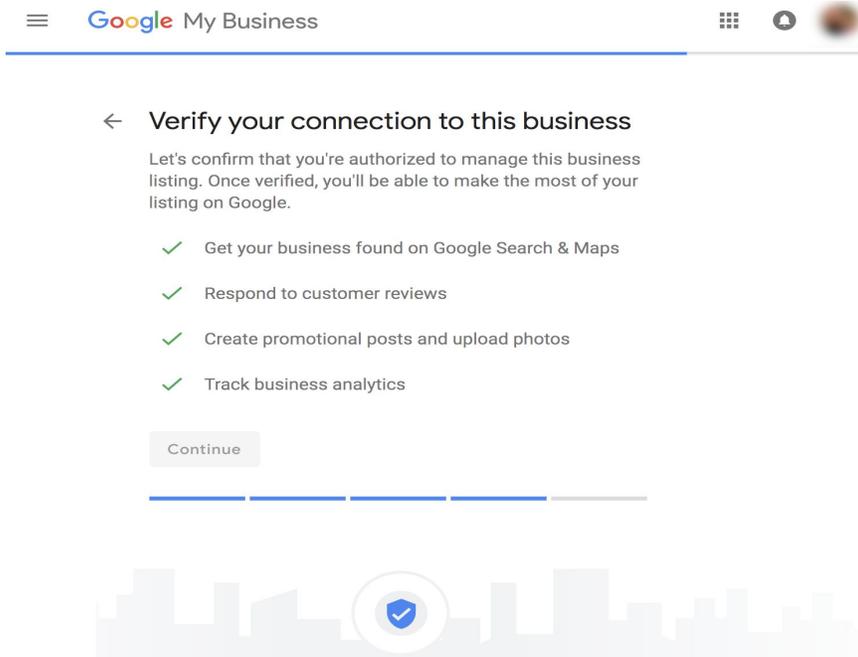
1. To **claim** your listing, click on "Own this business?" This will take you to Google My Business, where you can start entering information such as the correct business name, location information, etc.

2. If you are **creating** a new listing, you'll end up in the same spot—it's just a different starting point. You'll go straight to business.google.com and click "Start Now," which will prompt you to enter the business name and location information.
3. **Do you deliver goods and services to clients/customers?** Notice the box to check at the bottom of the location information page.

- i. If your ministry involves deliveries to a service area, you must check this box and read these notes from [Google Support](#).
 - ii. If most of your services are conducted at your location, you can leave this box unchecked.
- b. **Business Category.** Here is where you list what type of services you provide, whether you're a church, an educational institution, a service-based ministry, an administrative office, etc. You'll select the best-matching category from the drop-down list.

- c. **Make Connections.** It's important to list the **phone number** for your organization that you want the public to know and use, and make sure this phone number is consistent throughout your web presence, such as your website, social media, directory listings such as Yelp or YP.com, etc.

For your **website**, enter the URL for your organization's website's home page—not a parent organization. If you work at one location of a larger entity, use the website for your location at the address you entered.



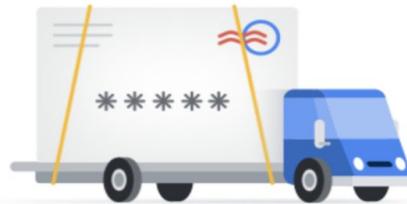
- d. **Verification!**¹ Google wants to ensure accuracy by sending you a code via the phone number or address you entered. This is how Google confirms that each of its listings contain legitimate information, keeping fake listings and advertisements at bay.

Click continue to view the verification methods.

¹ Google does allow the option of verifying later, but it is strongly recommended to get the process started while you're building your listing. Some reasons to wait on verification is if there are any issues with a proper mail receptacle at your address, or if the phone number is not currently monitored (then wait to verify during office hours, or when someone can be by the phone. It takes less than a minute for the call to come in after submitting the request to verify.)

Postcard is on the way

You'll get a postcard with your verification code and instructions in about **5** days.



Attn: [Redacted]

1267 [Redacted] #200, [Redacted] 20

Customize your listing by adding photos, a logo, and your opening hours. These updates will appear on Google once you've been verified.

[Customize listing](#)



- e. The recommended verification method is having a **postcard** sent to your organization's address with a **code enclosed**. When you receive that postcard, you'll enter the code in your Google My Business account.
 - i. You can also choose to verify your business via phone call or text, though physical address method is preferred.
 - ii. Meanwhile, after clicking "**Customize listing**" you'll be taken to your Google My Business dashboard where you can **add information and photos**. You'll see the "**Pending verification**" box at the top of your dashboard screen.
- f. Upon receiving the code, you'll go back to business.google.com and log in to your dashboard. Click on "**Verify Location**" in the left menu column and it'll

bring you to a screen that allows you to enter the code you received either from a phone call, text, or postcard mailed to your organization's address.

The screenshot shows the Google My Business dashboard. At the top left, the Google My Business logo is visible. On the left side, there is a navigation menu with several options: Home, Info, Photos, Website, Users, Create an ad, Add new location, Manage locations, **Verify location** (highlighted with a red arrow), Linked accounts, Settings, and Support. The main content area is divided into three sections. The top section is titled 'Pending verification' and contains the text: 'You requested a verification postcard on May 2, 2018. Most postcards arrive within 5 days.' with a 'Learn more' link. The middle section is titled 'Complete your listing' and contains three sub-sections: 'Make sure your customers know when you're open for business.' with an 'Add hours' button; 'Tell customers about your business in your own words.' with an 'Add description' button; and 'Add a profile picture so people can recognize your business across Google.' with an 'Add profile photo' button. The bottom section is titled 'Advertise easily in minutes' and contains the text: 'Show up whenever customers are looking for you online - on their computers or mobile devices. Set up in minutes, and only pay when your ad is clicked.' with a 'Learn more' link and a 'Get started' button. Below this section are two buttons for downloading the app: 'Download on the App Store' and 'GET IT ON Google Play'. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text: '©2018 Google - Terms - Privacy Policy - Content Policy - Help - Get Android app - Get iPhone app'.

How should I fill out my Google Maps/Google My Business information?

1. Under **Complete your listing**, you'll find recommended options to fill in right away, such as **hours of operation**, the **description** of your organization, and a **profile picture**.
 - a. Be as accurate as possible in your **hours of operation**. While unplanned closures or longer days are needed occasionally, Google uses this information to display “Open Now” or “Closed” or “Opens tomorrow at 9 a.m.” when someone comes across your listing from search results. They're likely to see that notification even before reading about your business. It's also smart to list holiday hours as well (whether reduced or expanded), especially if that's a busy time for your organization.
 - b. For your **description**, be clear and upfront about what kind of organization you are, why you exist, and who you aim to serve. Be sure to include what benefits you ultimately seek to provide your audience, don't just talk about what you do. When someone comes across your listing and mentally asks, “What's in it for me?” “So what?” “Why should I care?” preemptively answer their questions in your description content!
 - c. For a **profile picture**, if your organization is based on an individual personality, the picture can be of that person. Otherwise you may wish to use your logo. (Remember you also have a “cover image” to use, which is larger, as well as spots for additional photos.)
2. **Info (NAP)**: As discussed in Section III, this is an SEO acronym for **Name, Address, Phone number**. While this isn't complicated information, it is imperative that your organization's name, address and phone number *match exactly, everywhere it appears*—on your website, on social media, in directory listings, on websites of sister or parent organizations, etc. You'll enter this information in the **Info** section from your left menu column.
 - a. Since your Google My Business map listing is a primary directory site linked to a heavily-used search engine, you want this listing to be the standard, aside from your website. **Google is even nit-picky enough to consider “St.” “St” and “Street” as different NAP listings.** You can use whichever you want, as long as it's consistent.
 - i. You may want to refer back to your Section III worksheet to make sure your organization's NAP is listed exactly the way you want in your site's footer and contact page.

3. **Messaging.** Seekers may want to send your organization a message through your Google listing, and you can prepare for that with the **Messaging** section in the left menu. This is especially popular in mobile search.
4. There is much more you can do with Google My Business—this is the foundational starting information that sets you up for your local search engine optimization.

Apple Maps, Bing , Mapquest, and others

- g. While Google Maps/My Business is the recommended starting place for claiming and optimizing your organization’s map listings, you’ll want to do the same with other popular map sites and apps.
 - i. **Apple Maps**, frequented by over 42 million iPhone users, operates similarly to Google Maps, directing users to listings close to their location that match their search queries. Get started at <https://mapsconnect.apple.com/>, and learn more at <https://localmarketinginstitute.com/claim-apple-maps-listing/>
 - ii. **Bing Places** is also similar to Google My Business, and you can get started at <https://www.bingplaces.com/>. Information from Bing searches are commonly used for Alexa questions/commands.
 - iii. Yes, there are still **MapQuest** users out there! Learn more about setting up your listing: <https://business.mapquest.com/products/business-listing/>.
 - iv. You don’t have to stop here. There are countless directory sites that can be valuable to your organization. Several have to do directly with map listings, others focus on industry, region, audience type, and more. We’ll cover these next.

NOTE: Even when you follow step-by-step guides, glitches or anomalies can surface and create extra hurdles for you to jump over when claiming, verifying or optimizing your map listings. Fortunately, if this happens, you’re not alone. You can search Google support and its related forums for similar situations, what questions were asked, and what advice was given. You can also contact us directly at info@centerforonlineevangelism.org with your local SEO questions!

How online directory listings can boost your search visibility

Directory listings, or citations, are external websites that can reference, in full or in part, your organization's [NAP](#) and website URL. Directory sites are today's phonebooks, and each of these can show up as an additional search result, too, giving your SEO a sizeable boost.

Fortunately, there are many directories that automatically pull your information from your Google My Business profiles. But the most popular directories, as well as those that cater to your industry or niche, will need to be managed manually.

Recommended online directory list

Here are the directories we recommend you start with, based on their popularity, domain authority, and consistently-updated platforms (borrowing some data from [BrightLocal](#)).

General Directories

1. [Google My Business](#)
2. [Facebook](#)
3. [Apple Maps](#) (iphone maps)
4. [Bingplaces.com](#)
5. [Foursquare.com](#)
6. [Mapquest.com](#)
7. [Yelp.com](#)
8. [LinkedIn](#)
9. [Yellowpages.com](#)
10. [Yellowbook.com](#)
11. [Superpages.com](#)
12. [Manta.com](#) allows for free listings but also has a paid option that helps you manage and optimize your listing *and* to manage *all* your directory listings as well, connecting you to hundreds of directory sites.

School Directories

1. [Niche](#)
2. [Great Schools](#)
 - a. (NOTE: Other education-related directory sites can pull information from your Great Schools listing)
3. [Private School Review](#)
4. [Adventist Education](#) (note - you may have to contact the administrator to make any changes)
5. [Adventist Directories](#) (note - you may have to contact the administrator to make any changes)

Church Directories

1. [Adventist Directories](#) (note - you may have to contact the administrator to make any changes)
2. [eAdventist.org](#) (note - you may have to contact the administrator to make any changes)
3. [Adventist Yearbook](#) (note - you may have to contact the administrator to make any changes)

Optimizing your directory listings

TO DO FIRST: Google your organization, looking throughout the first few pages. Are you already listed on some of the above directories? Is the information accurate, matching the NAP you established in Section III? If not, you'll want to correct these as quickly as possible.

When filling out your listings, make sure to include:

1. Your NAP (Name, Address, Phone), which must be consistent across all directories.
2. Detailed, seeker-oriented description of your organization; why it's unique
3. Pictures, if the option is available
4. Hours of operation
5. Landmark information, parking information, if applicable.
6. Don't leave anything blank!

Important details about Yelp and other directory sites with reviews

Most directory sites also offer the option for users to review your organization. While that can sound scary at first, remember that even if you didn't claim your directory listings, people can still review you—and you won't be able to respond to those reviews until you claim it.

Yelp and other review-centric sites can offer fantastic opportunities for engagement and reputation management. Just claiming and filling out your profile lets the public know that yes, you are a legitimate organization that is transparent enough to allow online discourse.

To help your Yelp improve your search engine visibility, make sure to add as much information as possible. Yelp provides more customizable space than other directories, so you can add longer descriptions, more pictures, even a call-to-action button for users to call, send a message, book an appointment, etc.

Then, make sure to consistently monitor your profile. Make sure Yelp's email notifications aren't going to a spam folder, and check your page every so often. **Respond to as many reviews as you can, both positive and negative.**

But DO NOT ask for reviews! In wanting to maintain a review platform where customers are in control, not businesses, Yelp is adamant that if they detect any details that make a review seem solicited (or even encouraged), they can remove the review or even make your organization rank lower in their search algorithm.

How to respond to negative (and positive!) Yelp reviews

There's always the chance for a negative review. It can plague even the best. Mistakes do happen, and sometimes people just want to rant.

But fear not! There are ways to handle negative reviews that actually *improve* your image.

1. **If there was an honest mishap**, apologize for the person's experience and assure them that their experience was not your organization's intention and that this occurrence is not the norm. If further investigation is necessary, simply reply that you'll be looking into it and will keep in touch.
2. **Acknowledge your reviewer's feelings** and refrain from arguing, even if they are in the wrong—that will only escalate the online exchange. Instead, offer your sympathies that this happened. Uphold what your organization stands for and what it seeks to accomplish, and if it feels right, invite them to return and introduce themselves.
3. **If there is a true misunderstanding** that can be easily corrected by explaining the facts in a careful, sympathetic way, go for it. Make sure to put yourself in the reviewers shoes and try not to sound unintentionally condescending. Do apologize that they received a different message than what was intended.
4. **If the review is truly a rant** or an overly emotionally-fueled misunderstanding, that does make things tricky—especially if you don't know what they're talking about! If you suspect that this is fake, you can explain that you have no memory of this incident or that you can't find a person/event in your records that fits that description.

In all cases, if possible, offer a way for them to contact you directly so they can provide more details or ask other questions. Many ranters won't actually bother with this, but it will often stop them from posting more negative reviews.

Additionally, if a review is poorly written or includes name-calling, other reviewers can spot these "trolls" and disregard their reviews—especially if you have several other positive ones!

So how do we get better reviews if we can't ask for them?

What you *can* do to encourage positive reviews is simply let your audience know that *you are on Yelp*. You may have seen businesses with posters on their windows that say, "We're on Yelp!" You can also add the Yelp icon to your website, blog, social media images or other promotional materials. (You can include icons of other review sites as well, such as Facebook, Google, Yellowpages, etc.) Your audience will catch on.

For more information about responding to reviews:

“How to Respond to Negative (and Positive!) Online Reviews”

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/how-to-respond-to-negative-online-reviews/>

For more information on maximizing your Yelp potential:

Responding to Negative Yelp Reviews:

<https://www.toistersolutions.com/blog/2014/6/16/how-to-respond-to-negative-yelp-reviews>

Yelp Cracks Down on Review Solicitation:

https://searchengineland.com/yelp-increasingly-cracking-review-solicitation-across-internet-286290/amp?mc_cid=b1a85cc858&mc_eid=8900c747ed

Yelp’s Guidelines for Responding to Reviews:

https://biz.yelp.com/support/responding_to_reviews

Learn more about maximizing your local SEO efforts:

“Top 50 Local Citation Sites for USA, UK, Canada & Australia” (BrightLocal)

<https://www.brightlocal.com/2018/02/08/top-50-local-citation-sites/>

“How to Create Content to Support Local SEO & Rock the Rankings” (SearchEngineLand)

<https://searchengineland.com/create-content-support-local-seo-rock-local-rankings-290638>

“How to Optimize Google My Business and Leverage it for More Sales” (Neil Patel)

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/optimize-google-my-business/>

“Best Local SEO Tools & Software” (LocalSEOGuide)

<http://www.localseoguide.com/local-seo-tools/>

“Local SEO: The Ultimate Guide to Ranking Your Business” (The Hoth)

<https://www.thehoth.com/local-seo/>

“A Complete Local SEO Checklist” (SearchEngineJournal)

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/complete-local-seo-checklist/196227/>

“How to Get Started with Local SEO” (SearchEngineWatch)

<https://searchenginewatch.com/2018/01/23/how-to-get-started-with-local-seo/>

“Optimize Your Nonprofit Organization’s Yelp Page” (Center for Online Evangelism)

<https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/organization-yelp-things-consider/>

IX. Offsite SEO—Optimizing Your Entire Web Presence

When you Google a well-established organization, you'll find more than just their own website in the search results. You might also see:

- A wikipedia page
- The organization's Facebook page
- The organization's Google My Business listing/sidebar
- A news article about the organization in an online magazine
- One or more online directory listings, such as Yelp, YellowPages.com, etc.
- The organization's YouTube channel

And the list may not stop there!

This many separate search listings means this organization has prominent web presence. Its brand exists in more places than just in its own official material.

To maintain a credible, influential online presence, it pays to expand your SEO strategy beyond your own website.

In SEO-land, these other search listings are technically called **backlinks**, or any link to your website from a page, file, site, profile, account, etc., that is not part of your website itself.

When backlinks are legitimate, Google regards them as evidence of your influence or credibility. However, not too many years ago, before Google refined its algorithms to better interpret natural language and develop a clearer understanding of search behavior, creating a bunch of spammy backlinks was a common "black-hat" SEO trick that actually worked. Until Google shut it down.

These [shady backlinks](#) would come from places like websites devoted to posting links to other sites (at a price). They could also come from blog comments, social media posts, duplicate social media accounts or other places that had nothing to do with your website...you'd just insert a link to your business in each comment or post.

Practices like that will now get your website penalized in search results. Seekers just won't be able to find you.

(If this has happened to your website, there is specific work to be done to remedy this. Contact info@centerforonlineevangelism.org re: Help, I'm blacklisted)

The practice of backlinking (tread carefully)

Bottom line: backlinks should be *earned*, not *created*.

The reason a genuine, legitimate backlink is so highly regarded by Google is because your content has to be useful enough and respected enough for another website, post, article, etc., to link to your site within their own content.

(You'll notice this SEO Guide is full of backlinks to websites and articles we feel are worthwhile in your pursuit of this knowledge. All those businesses did to earn those links in here was to continually create high-quality content and present it in a way that is helpful to their audiences.)

If you're just beginning your SEO journey, you'll notice heavy reference to backlinking in the SEO community. However, we recommend tabling this topic for the time being. If you're focused on building quality content and playing by Google's rules, you may end up earning backlinks over time anyway. It doesn't need to be an item on your SEO to-do list.

That being said, here are some off-site strategies you can use to bolster your online presence through various brand-building best practices. Consistent activity, conversation, and promotion of quality content can pay off in a big way.

Social Media

Your social media profiles can show up as search result listings if you keep them active and up to date. Just *having* open accounts won't generate much effect, [but if your audience is interacting with your posts, Google is more likely to take notice.](#)

NOTE: Even if you don't foresee much activity happening with certain social media audiences, it's a good idea to set up an official account on major social channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. Similar to review sites and map listings, this way, no one can create one using your organization's name and brand.

One way to set up an evergreen social media account with low planned upkeep is to fill out the profile as descriptively as possible, then mention where the action is and direct users there. For example, a little-used Facebook page could say, "We're happy to connect with you! To get up-to-date information, go directly to our blog at [link]." Or, "Thanks for stopping by! To find the latest information about our organization, check our Twitter feed."

Pinterest

We felt that Pinterest might need its own mention, apart from other social media platforms. With the still-growing popularity of Pinterest, many ministry organizations can benefit by creating “pin-worthy” content. These pins can count as backlinks, especially if multiple users are pinning your content.

Consider the opportunities here. Ideas for kids’ Sabbath school, Pathfinder activities, crafts, church holiday decor, youth events, etc., could be very popular on Pinterest boards.

Learn more about creating “pinnable” content:

<https://www.highvisibility.com/blog/generating-backlinks-with-pinterest/>

Directory sites

If you are a brick-and-mortar organization, online directory listings count as an online presence booster. For best practices in creating helpful directory listings, see section VIII.

Review sites

Similarly, review sites such as Yelp can show up as search results listings, so you’ll want to take good care of your accounts. Refer back to section VIII for advice on filling out your profile and responding to both positive and negative reviews.

External Publishings

While Google no longer puts as much weight on guest posts or publishing articles in online magazines as far as backlinking, it can still be great for brand-building and building E-A-T (Expertise, Authority, Trustworthiness). In the long run, this does support your SEO progress.

IX. Playing the Long Game for Big Results

Keep Up SEO Efforts so Your Hard Work Doesn't Go to Waste

Since Google considers performance over time as an indication of your website's quality, spotty SEO efforts can send the message that you're not in this for the long haul.

What's more, the internet itself is an [ever-evolving](#), [always-competing](#), market-driven medium that regularly has to reinvent itself. If you wish to be successful in marketing your organization within this arena, why should you expect your strategies to be any different?

Here are some tips to keeping your SEO efforts consistent:

- Integrate SEO and content marketing into your overall communications and marketing strategies. These areas overlap significantly, and can mutually benefit one another.
- Regularly Google your own organization, as well as topics that relate to your organization, and document what you find. Do the result listings change from month to month? What other websites might be showing up more prominently than before?
- Maintain your Google Analytics! Often companies don't realize Google has changed its algorithm until they see a big change in their analytics data.
- Keep up with respected SEO resources, and stick with articles written in the last 6 months.
- Keep up with this guide! This is a "living document," and we will update this SEO guide 2-3 times per year. Watch the version numbers!

X. Before Diving In—Beware! 9 SEO Myths That Refuse to Die.

Especially if you're already somewhat familiar with the principles of SEO, it's hard not to want to jump right into the deep end and make things happen. But with SEO, no matter how badly your organization needs it or how eager you are to improve your online reach, you must approach it the same way you brush a shark's teeth—very carefully.

The first step in SEO care is to keep up to date on the industry. Things change fast—both in the ways people search for and consume content, and in the ways Google continually seeks to improve its process *based on* people's changing behavior.

What's more, [not that many years ago](#), businesses tried to cheat the system and developed many SEO techniques now considered “black hat.”

However, even though these practices are now heavily frowned upon *and* can get your site penalized by Google, causing your ranking to plummet and become even more difficult to regain, for whatever reason they still circulate through corners of the industry and are even still advertised as tips, or advertised as strategies for some “cheap” SEO companies.

In other cases, some SEO tactics that used to have dramatic effects now have lesser or just plain different effects, or we've just found out that your efforts are better spent in other areas.

To safeguard your SEO efforts for your organization, here are some of the top SEO myths that still persist today, and what to do instead.

1) Get a sweet SEO setup, then relax and enjoy great traffic and engagement.

An SEO's work is [never done](#). Just as a business is run with care, doing its best to adapt to market changes, or implementing customer feedback, or updating with new technology when necessary, SEO is also a continual, even evolving process. While getting “set up” for good SEO is highly recommended, know that spending a lot of time and money in this area doesn't mean you can set it and forget it.

If you do create a grand strategy and set up tons of stuff, also include as a step in your setup a plan, a strategy for ongoing seo that helps you continue to grow, adapt, measure, learn, and grow more.

2) “If you do these things, you’ll rank on page 1 in 3-6 months...”

Maybe you’ve received one of these ads or phone calls, offering SEO services that more or less guarantee a ranking, and fast. That is your first tip to stop listening to that particular source. No one, not even Google, can guarantee rankings.

Also, ranking for what? For which keywords? And which specific page of your website?

There are so many factors involved in ranking. And even apart from the fact that no one can guarantee rankings, it can take years of consistent to rank on page one if your organization is in a competitive niche.

SEO is a long game, but it’s worth it because of the near-limitless good it can do. After all, knowing that millions of people are actively searching for spiritual answers online, yet *not* being led to Adventist websites, how could we pass up this incredible opportunity, no matter how much effort it took?

And like any marketing process, it has to be a long game with a long-term, flexible strategy that allows for measuring and testing and adapting. And throughout this process, even while things keep changing right before your eyes, your organization can grow in authority and engagement, maintaining relevance, and reaching more and more people each day.

If you do receive one of these solicitations, we recommend politely declining. No one from Google will call your organization, and no one can promise a certain results for an up-front, flat fee.

Remember that the principles of Authority, Credibility and Trustworthiness, coupled with quality content creation and careful monitoring of what your target audience wants, are the true foundational blocks that effective SEO is built upon. Anything that feels like a short-cut should make you hesitate, and anything that sounds too good to be true probably is.

3) “SEO is for the IT department. Let them handle it.”

Yes, you access the internet with computers. But that’s about as far as this connection goes.

The internet is a media channel, just like radio or TV. But this medium has surpassed all others in popularity, accessibility, and potential for outreach and mission work. The attention needed here is that of a marketing and ministerial approach, rather than technical.

The foundation for effective online outreach follows the principles of advertising and marketing, but through a ministerial lens. Marketers have the training in what works and doesn’t work online, and they’re also close to the consumer (or to the seeker). An IT department’s goal is to see that an organization’s computers and network are functioning efficiently so the organization

can do what it needs to do. For an organization to use the internet for content marketing and outreach, you'll need a digital marketing strategist.

While some organizations do have web developers categorized as IT, SEO also extends well beyond web development. Developers take their SEO cues from the content strategists and SEO specialists.

While this is a newer "department" for our ministries to factor in, think about the outreach potential. Combining up-to-date marketing strategies and professionals with a forward-thinking, media-savvy board of pastors and evangelists could have exponentially effective ministry results.

4) Don't worry about all the technical SEO stuff. Just create good content.

On the other hand, there is still a significant technical side of SEO. Creating good content is a must, but if that's all you do, with no intentional promotion or SEO setup, that good content risks going to waste.

SEO specialists and web developers can help you set up analytics tools you'll need throughout the SEO process. There are also slight adjustments to coding or plugins that can make a difference, or there might be undetected website errors that are harming Google's ability to crawl your site.

Additionally, since SEO specialists' first order of business is to keep up on the industry, if anything changes, they'll be the first to know about it. It may be months until it gets into the radar of content creators working on their own, and by then, an unanticipated algorithm change could have already done some damage to your ranking.

SEO works best as a team effort, with multiple points of view working together to craft the best content, supported by the best systems and technical framework.

5) It's all about using lots of keywords that get traffic.

As mentioned before, "keyword stuffing" is now considered "black hat" SEO, or as an attempt to cheat the system. Google will not prioritize keyword-stuffed content in its rankings, and your site may even get penalized and not show up in searches at all.

However, since keyword research is still a foundational practice within the scope of SEO, some less-experienced businesses or individuals still think they can make shortcuts by using repeated words.

Right now, Google focuses on thorough topic coverage, natural language, and searcher intent. Quality content writers and skilled SEO specialists can easily formulate a content strategy that leaves keyword-stuffing in the ashes.

6) “Our website is awesome. We don’t need to worry about all this extra SEO stuff.”

You may have the sleekest, more vibrant website in the universe. But if it’s not optimized to be found in searches, who’s going to see it?

Sure, you might put a link to your website on your signage, in your emails, etc., but it’ll be hard to grow your audience if the only way they could find you would be from driving past your building or already being on your email list.

With all the opportunity it affords, there’s little reason not to look into an SEO strategy for your organization. You can engage with any type of audience you want to, as long as your content is relevant to their needs, interests, and desires. You can look for donors, or for clientele. You can market to youth, or to their parents.

All in all, don’t let your beautiful website go unseen. Share it with the world through SEO!

7) Google changes its algorithms all the time. What’s the point in trying to keep up?

Daily—that’s how often Google fine-tunes its search algorithms. But that doesn’t have to be a concern unless you’re trying to game the system with shortcuts or downright “black hat” SEO techniques.

The reason Google updates its methods so often is because more and more data is received each day, providing new knowledge to apply to the way we use this major search engine. Google’s goal is to give us the search results we want, so that’s where their research and development will consistently focus.

8) We just need lots of clicks and traffic. The rest will fall into place.

Even if thousands of people click on your website from search results, Google pays attention to how long they stay on your website. If they’re clicking the back button in the next several

seconds, that tells Google that your content was not relevant for that search query. You were not what these people were looking for.

So how do you get people to stay on your website?

[The focus is not just getting traffic](#) but getting the *right kind* of traffic—people who are actually interested in your content already. Those who are asking the questions your website is answering.

That's why content marketing and copywriting principles are integral to the SEO process. It's less technical than it used to be, because Google found that its users were understandably fed up with clickbait-and-switch SEO approaches. They wanted high-quality, relevant content instead of sensationalist headlines with keyword-stuff content.

9) Sweet! We just found a company that will do all our SEO and content marketing for super cheap!

Beware. If the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If an SEO agency or freelancer's selling point is that they're fast and cheap, you might want to ask them some specific questions before moving forward.

“What strategies do you plan on using to boost my rankings?”

Note any over-reliance on backlinks or pay-per-click advertising, with little focus on content.

“How do you measure success?”

“Tell me about your past projects. What have you been able to accomplish for your clients?”

“How quickly can my site move to the top of Google's search results?”

Note: This is a trick question. If they have any sort of definitive answer for this, (other than that no one can guarantee a ranking position or a timeframe, especially if they haven't reviewed your online presence yet), they might be using outdated tactics or preying on small businesses that feel they can't afford high-quality SEO professionals.

“How will you be demonstrating your monthly progress?”

“What are some 'easy wins' you see for your organization right now?”

“Tell us what kind of ROI we can expect.”

“What kind of upkeep will this require after the initial setup? Is that included in your pricing?”

Depending on their answers, you will likely get a feel for their expertise, authority and trustworthiness.

Don't be afraid to shop around and get multiple bids, comparing not just prices but the answers each of them give to these questions.

Other recommended reading:

“8 ways SEO has changed in the past 10 years”

<https://searchengineland.com/8-ways-seo-changed-past-10-years-260686>

“How to create video content for content marketing”

<https://insights.newscred.com/infographic-how-to-create-video-content/>

“How to get developers to implement SEO recommendations”

<https://searchengineland.com/get-developers-implement-seo-recommendations-280318>

SEO for Schools:

Hubspot’s [“Education: SEO Dos and Don’ts for Schools”](#)

“SEO for Schools: Strategies for a 1st-page ranking”

<https://www.finalseite.com/blog/p/~board/b/post/seo-for-schools-strategies-for-a-page-1-ranking>

“How to improve local SEO for student recruitment”

<https://www.higher-education-marketing.com/blog/improve-local-seo-student-recruitment>

“What is local SEO?” (applies to school marketing)

<https://www.brightlocal.com/about-local-seo/>

SEO for churches:

“8 SEO trends to keep an eye on in 2018”

<https://www.ourchurch.com/blog/2018/01/26/8-seo-trends-to-keep-an-eye-on-this-2018/>

“Church marketing ideas: 5 tips for SEO success”

<https://www.rev.com/blog/church-marketing-seo/>

Keep an eye out for updated versions of this “living” SEO handbook!

Online trends can change in an instant. Stay current with blogs and newsletters aimed at keeping Seventh-day Adventist ministries current in digital marketing best practices:

Centerforonlineevangelism.org

SDAdata.org/SEO



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