



Seventh-day
Adventist® Church

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Search Engine Optimization

SDAdata.org/SEO

*Created through a collaborative
partnership between the
Social Media + Big Data
department and the
Center for Online Evangelism.*



searching



I keyword ...

Acknowledgements

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart”
(Jeremiah 29:13, NIV).

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow”
(1 Corinthians 3:6, NIV).

Everyone has a part to play in spreading the gospel and making it accessible to seekers, but ultimately God’s divine hand is what produces the fruit. We know that no accomplishment, large or small, is possible without the Holy Spirit. May He continue to guide our Church as we strive to accomplish our great commission.

There are those involved in this project who deserve special recognition for their valuable contributions.

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We are eternally grateful for the support and foresight of our North American Division leadership as we seek to prioritize technology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at all levels, revolutionizing ministry delivery through use of innovative digital media.

To our friends, family, and colleagues, thank you for your support and prayers.

Blessings,

Jamie Domm
Digital Strategist
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Why Search Engine Optimization Matters for the Adventist Church



Search Engine Optimization, Online Marketing, Content Strategy, Big Data...why should the Seventh-day Adventist Church prioritize these digital strategies and tools?

Most of the world spends hours online each day. Many people have become addicted to research, googling anything they have a question about. They look for maps and 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 don't feel comfortable asking close friends or family. Many people may google questions about topics such as spirituality, health, or information to help them through an inner struggle.

To be specific, 74,000 people google “Bible study” each month. That’s almost the entire population of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

The name “Jesus” is googled 1,500,000 times a month, and “Adventist” 18,100 times a month.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "bible study". The search bar at the top indicates a volume of 74,000/mo, a CPC of \$1.17, and a competition of 0.63. Below the search bar, there are tabs for All, Images, Videos, Books, News, and More. The search results show about 46,700,000 results in 0.45 seconds. The first result is "Bible Study Tools" with a link to <https://www.biblestudytools.com/>. The second result is "Online Bible Study Guides and Articles - Bible Study Tools" with a link to <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/>. The third result is "Top 10 Bible Studies 2017 | Christian Bible Studies - Christianity Today" with a link to <https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/.../top.../top-10-bible-studies-2017.htm...>. The fourth result is "Bible Studies | Bible Study Lessons | Lifeway" with a link to <https://www.lifeway.com/en/shop/bible-studies>. The fifth result is "Bible Study Minute Daily Devotional - Crosswalk.com" with a link to <https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/bible-study-minute/>. To the right of the search results, there are two sidebars. The first sidebar is titled "Related Keywords" and contains a table with columns: Keyword, Vol, CPC, and Comp. The second sidebar is titled "People Also Search For" and contains a similar table. At the bottom of the search results, there is a map showing the location of "Glendale Bible Study" and "Intensive Care Ministries - Inductive Bible Study".

Keyword	Vol	CPC	Comp
bible study lessons	12,100	\$1.59	0.64
bible study topics	12,100	\$0.71	0.51
bible study guide	9,900	\$1.19	0.99
online bible study	9,900	\$2.39	0.74
daily bible study	3,600	\$1.17	0.69
bible study guide books	720	\$0.86	0.99
daily bible study online	480	\$2.93	0.58
online womens bible study	83	\$2.88	0.92

Keyword	Vol	CPC	Comp
bible study lessons	12,100	\$1.59	0.64
daily bible study	3,600	\$1.17	0.69
bible study fellowship lessons	1,900	\$1.23	0.39
bible study guide pdf	1,000	\$1.84	0.35
bible study guide books	720	\$0.86	0.99
bible study fellowship criticism	590	\$1.50	0.17
bible study guide for beginners	590	\$1.35	0.99
bible studies for small groups	450	\$0.91	1
online bible study tool	390	\$1.05	0.32

(Pulled August 2018 from keyword research tools Keyword Planner (Google Ads), Ubersuggest and Keywords Everywhere.)

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

Currently, however, that’s not the case. 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 blog series and resource guide (*coming soon!*) have been created. By educating our worldwide church body in fundamental Search Engine Optimization techniques, we can significantly bolster our collective web presence. We can ensure that Adventist resources are more easily findable and accessible to those ***already searching for what we already offer!*** We don't need to reinvent the wheel; we just need to focus on making our content searchable and accessible to the modern seeker.

What is SEO?

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. It is the process of utilizing a variety of techniques to positively impact a website's visibility in unpaid search engine results. The higher a website ranks when a person googles search terms related to it, the more web traffic it receives. Most people do not scroll past the first page of search engine results. With this important fact in mind, I challenge you to google Seventh-day Adventist Church, Jesus, Bible prophecy, or the name of your church, ministry, organization, etc. What do you find? What kind of digital "[curb appeal](#)" did your search results reveal? Was it good or bad? Are people being led away by the competition or misinformation?

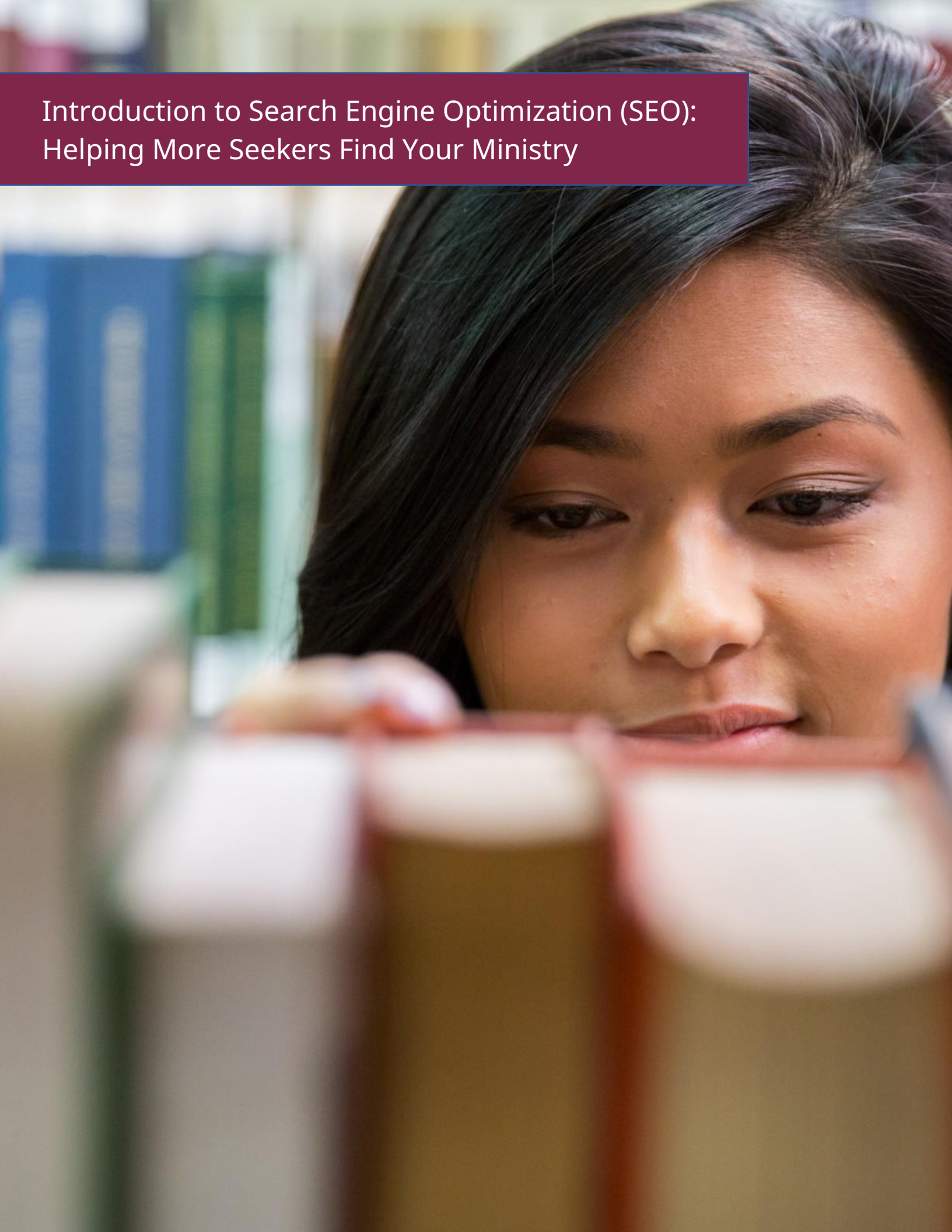
This resource will dive into what SEO strategies involve and how it relates to each of our ministries, from local to global. By being intentional and strategic, we can improve our digital curb appeal and encourage more people to encounter, and possibly embrace, our message.

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 and digital technologies provide for 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 the time (and sometimes money) *ourselves* to implement these valuable techniques. This is your chance to learn insider information and use it for the gospel—ultimately aiding the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20).

As with all things digital, the technology and tricks-of-the-trade will continually change, but the underlying philosophy will remain largely the same. With careful, prayerful guidance, let us begin. We recommend working through this series in the order presented.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, looking down at a book. The background is a blurred library with bookshelves. A dark red banner is overlaid on the top left of the image.

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

Whether you're a conference, union, 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.

Google acts as the Great Virtual Librarian, seeking content that is most relevant to 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 or contains the most reliable information.

An author might do this by designing a catchy cover. They might also make the book title contain words that are often used when people ask questions 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, be quoted in various magazines, and even get recommended by 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 this series. Each of those elements represent an online process involved in search engine optimization and, ultimately, 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, 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—and not just search engines.

It’s about your target audience’s needs, desires, and questions, and learning 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 series!).

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, webmaster, or tech-savvy volunteer.

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 try to learn and keep up with, and it's often difficult to know who to trust. Even experienced specialists in this industry 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 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.

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](#), [Wix](#), [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 to make it 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 to make sure they are 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 - Is the interaction between a visitor and your website. Did they click on a link, does it seem like they have read whole pages of your website all of these actions are used together to determine your websites engagement. A website with high engagement will do better 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)

The image is a screenshot of a Google search results page for the query "how to tie a slip knot". At the top, the Google logo is on the left, and the search bar contains the text "how to tie a slip knot". Below the search bar are tabs for "All", "Videos", "Images", "Shopping", "News", "More", "Settings", and "Tools". Below the tabs, it says "About 17,300,000 results (0.38 seconds)". The featured snippet is titled "Slip Knot Tying Instructions" and lists three steps: 1. Make a loop by doubling line back onto itself. 2. Run tag end back toward loop and lay over the doubled lines. 3. Make one or two turns with the tag end around doubled lines and through new loop created. To the right of the text is a diagram showing the steps of tying a slip knot. Below the instructions is a link "Slip Knot - How to tie a Slip Knot - NetKnots" with the URL "https://www.netknots.com/rope_knots/slip-knot". At the bottom of the snippet are links for "About this result" and "Feedback". Below the snippet, there are more search results, including "Slip Knot - How to tie a Slip Knot - NetKnots" and "Slip Knot | How to tie the Slip Knot | Knots - Animated Knots by Grog".

“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 shrunk 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.sdadata.org/> is an 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, 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.

SEO Basics: Breakdown and Summary Check-List



You may be wondering, what can 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. Remember, 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 and large organizations typically have an entire team to carry out SEO strategies, often comprised of copywriters, content managers, web developers, and SEO specialists. 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 blog post in this series is based on the latest data available.

We'll introduce you to 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 the dates of our SEO blogs as you read through—this guide will be updated frequently as trends change or if there's a major Google algorithm update.*

The following SEO fundamentals checklist has three 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 specific job positions that work together as part of an SEO team, but it can also demonstrate the wide range of 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 boost 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.)

These items will be covered in depth in later posts.

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*. They write to enhance understanding and lift up the reader, making *them* feel like the hero of the story—not to condescend and make their brand the star of the show. They inform and educate, emphasizing the benefits in store for the reader, not simply describing 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 act both as a consultant and a technical implementor. 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 (making a purchase, subscribing to a newsletter, donating to a cause, sharing content, etc.). This helps them advise writers, marketers, and web developers, and also test or measure a strategy's effectiveness.

SEO specialists conduct audits on an organization's websites and/or their 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 programs 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 this 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 practices to create a website that best supports the recommendations for the site's 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 a brand's overarching goals for SEO and the perception of its web presence.

2) ONSITE SEO BASICS

- [Keyword Research](#)
 - **Keyword Research** refers to the process of discovering which words, phrases, or entire sentences or questions are commonly typed into Google's search box regarding 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](#), 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 pages they're most likely 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 will make 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 dictate the way your site appears in the list of search results. Based on keyword research, you should make sure to use the most-searched keywords in 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 (aka when google visits your website for tracking purposes. This is done by Google's Spider crawler). This dings your credibility with Google—and frustrates site visitors! There are several ways to [audit](#) for these errors, and 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, which will be discussed in a later post in this series.

- **Mobile-FIRST**

- While you've heard about mobile-friendliness and mobile-responsiveness, [mobile-FIRST](#) is the most recent term sprinkled through web development 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, and cause [skeptical site visitors to reject your site](#).

- **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 your site hasn't been updated in 6 months—and other websites covering related topics *have* been updated—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 such as a church, school, office, or ministry, 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, contact information, area-specific tips, 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.

- **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. Anywhere your content is curated or quoted may show up in search results related to your organization.

- **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 themselves. 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. 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.

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

GETTING STARTED: YOUR SEO SETUP WORKSHEET



Now that you've learned about the importance of SEO and the various fundamental features of creating a successful SEO strategy, you don't want your organization to miss out on the far-reaching opportunities for exposure and influence. It's time to get started!

You may be asking: "What does my organization need to do first? How can I make sure my organization is ready?"

This starter worksheet will help you complete the first essential steps of your SEO plan. [Click here](#) to download a fillable PDF.

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. In some cases, it may need to be shared between two or three employees that are all involved in managing your organization's online marketing strategy and reputation. This shared access can streamline your SEO efforts. To keep things safe, the login information can be kept and monitored internally by a management position, preventing problems in the event of employee turnover. [Click here](#) for more account management best practices for ministries.

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. Choose something relating to the organization. There is a spot for first name and last name, so something like First Name: [Organization], Last Name: [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 multiple people in management positions have access to, so a single employee won't be in complete control of account recovery.):

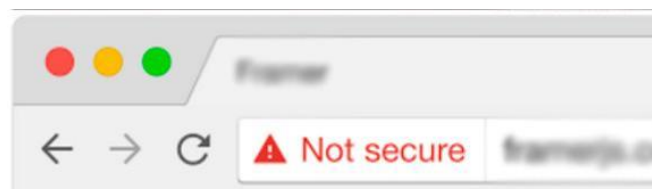
Phone number (preferably a mobile number to use for account verification and/or recovery. If possible, use a mobile phone of a department head or management position that is close enough to your position that you can easily work together on any verification or recovery tasks.):

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 that 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-have in July 2018, when Google Chrome 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 users who visit your website. This is especially detrimental if you sell products or accept donations online.

Additionally, when you set up various analytics tools for your website, you'll want the SSL certificate set up properly, so you can effectively track 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.

What is the hosting provider for your organization's website (e.g. [Siteground](https://www.siteground.com), Hostgator, GoDaddy, your ministry's parent organization, etc.)?

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 department, etc. to determine this.)

Your SSL Certificate is set up through: _____

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 from having to review and 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.

Does the report list any errors? _____

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

You don't want to frustrate new visitors with a website that isn't easy to read 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 will be impacted by this.

Being mobile-friendly involves more than just installing a mobile-responsive website theme. It means also considering text size, page load speed, whether your site uses Java or Flash, if you have text in tables or embedded in an image, and more.

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

Use: <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 NAP.

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](#).

It may sound simple enough, but this is a common place for inconsistency, errors, and can have an unnecessary negative impact on your search engine rankings.

These three 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 appear, including on your website, in directory listings, on your social media accounts, etc. Any discrepancies can cause Google to not list one of those URLs (website, directory listing, social media, etc.), 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 also: [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 **N**ame, *email* **A**ddress, and primary **P**hone number.

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

Constructing Your SEO Foundation: Setting up Google Analytics and Search Console



It's the feedback you've always wanted! Finally, you'll be able to see how your audience is using your website.

This chapter is all about getting you connected to the right data that will continually fuel your SEO strategy. You no longer have to guess 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 well if your actions are being driven by data from these free, behind-the-scenes tools.

We'll cover:

- How to set up Google Analytics
- How to set up Google Search Console
- Beginner Tutorial for Google Analytics
- Beginner Tutorial for Google Search Console

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 (CMS or Content Management System). If your organization's website is not a WordPress site, what you see will be slightly different, but overall the process tends to be similar.

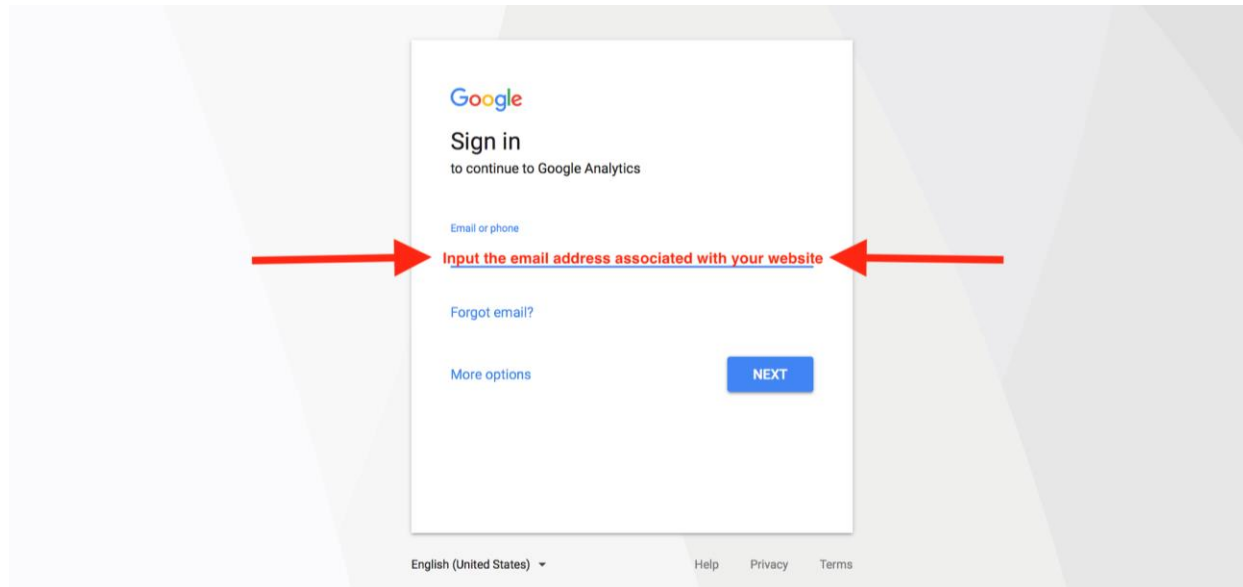
Key differences may arise during steps that involve web development, such as applying tracking codes and uploading verification files. If you have questions, contact your CMS or website provider's technical support, consult the help section of your platform or reach out to your IT team.

Most major platforms will have set instructions for setting up Google Analytics and Search Console. However, it's a good idea to confirm that 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 of how users navigate your site. Make sure to get a clear answer from the tech support representative.

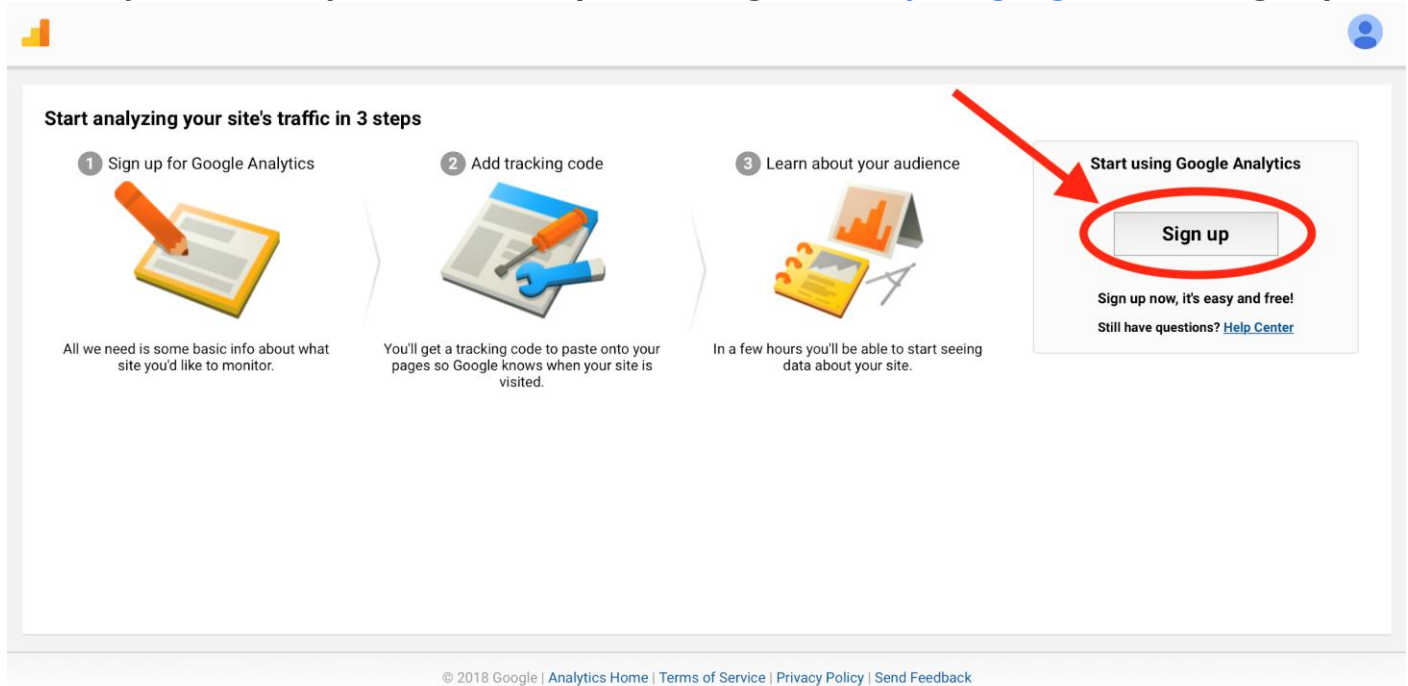
How to Set up Google Analytics

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

http://

Example: http://www.mywebsite.com

Industry Category ?

Select One

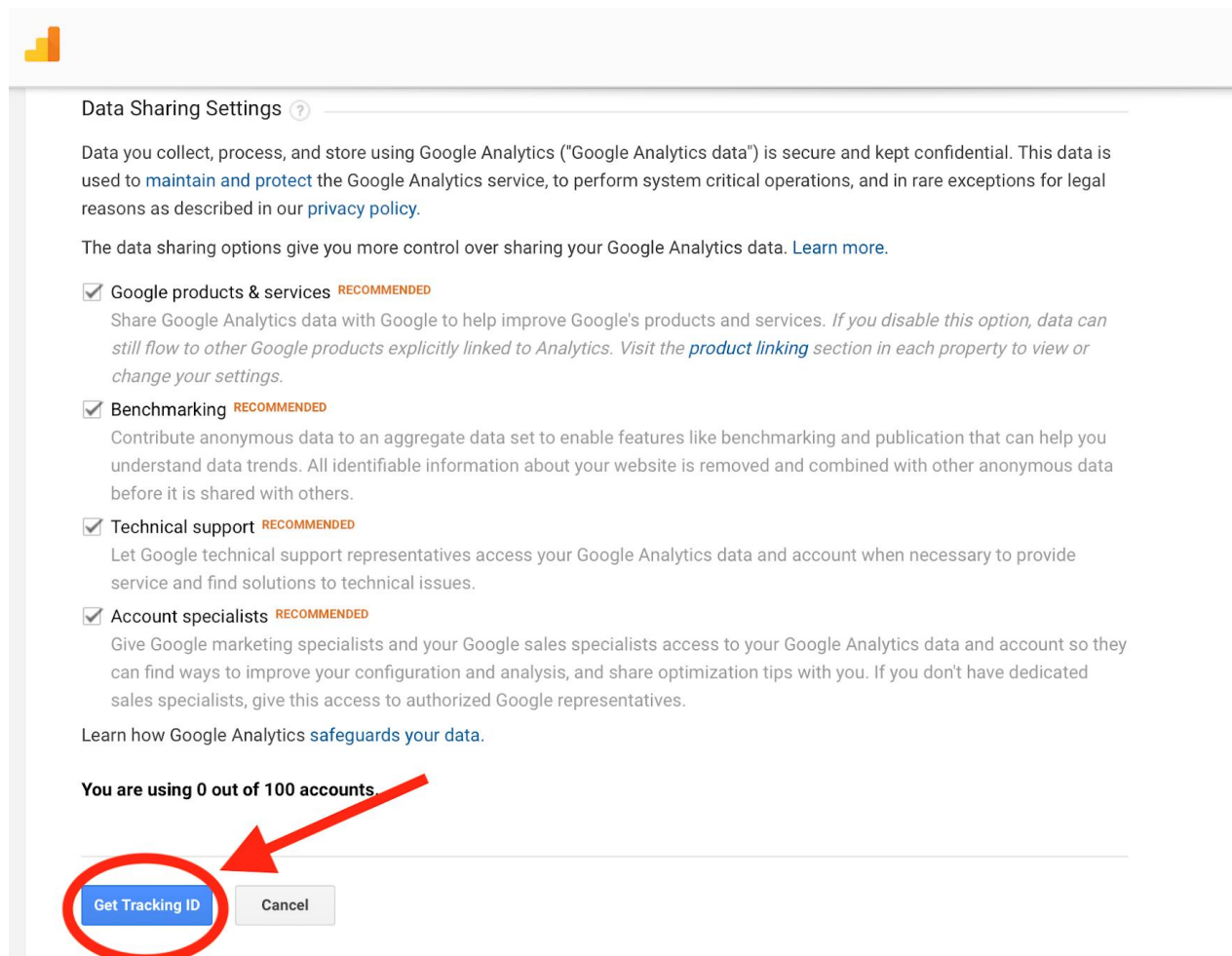
4. Input your organization’s name in “Account Name”

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

6. “Industry Category” is optional but recommended. This enables Google to show you benchmark data from the websites of similar organizations, giving you a general guide for evaluating website performance and setting expectations.

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 boxes 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.

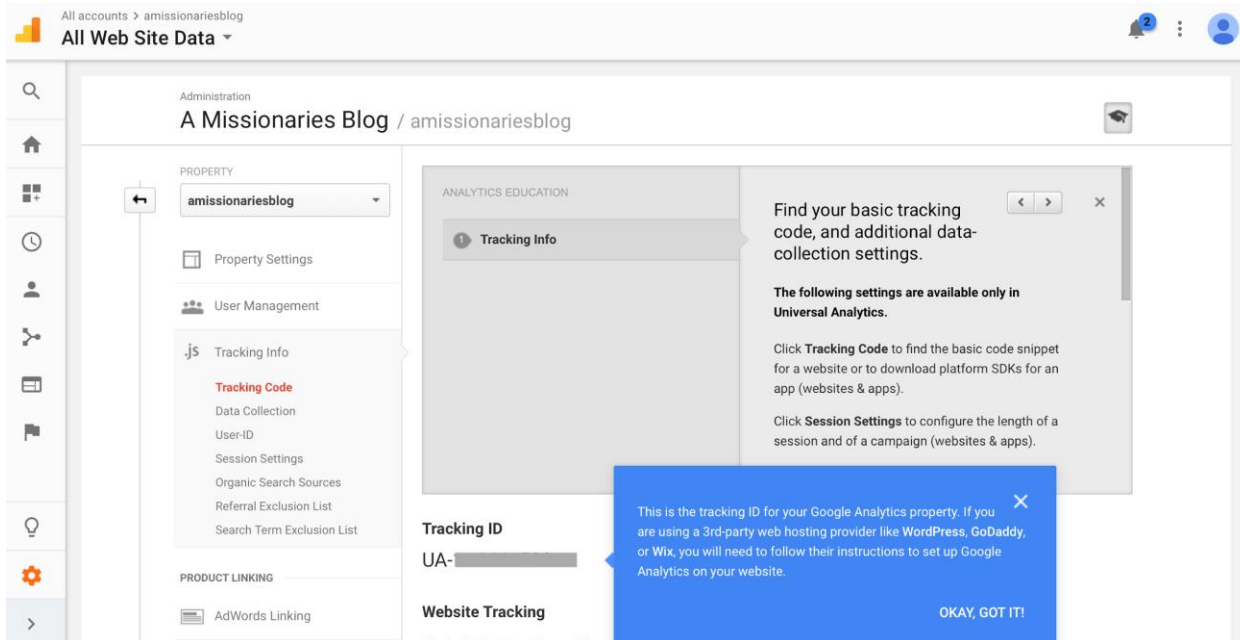
Learn how Google Analytics [safeguards your data](#).

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:

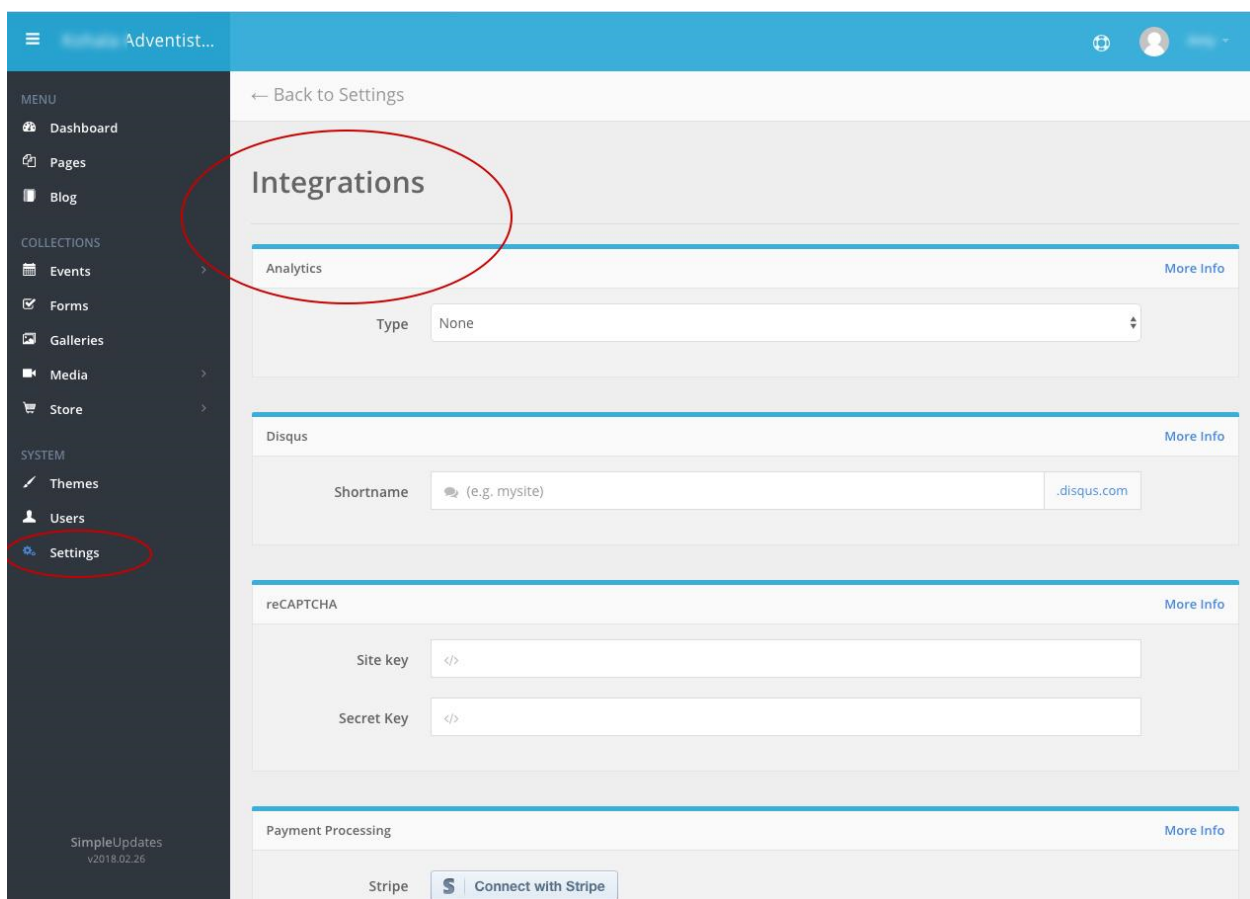


10. The Tracking ID and Website Tracking script (code) you receive will need to be installed on each page of your website in order to start gathering information about how people are navigating your site and to, then, present it in its reports.

There are several ways to install Google Analytics on your site, and it 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-XXXXX-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 in 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.

There are also ways to add your tracking code to Wix, SquareSpace or other CMSs, many of which have instructions in their help sections or can be found with a simple internet search.

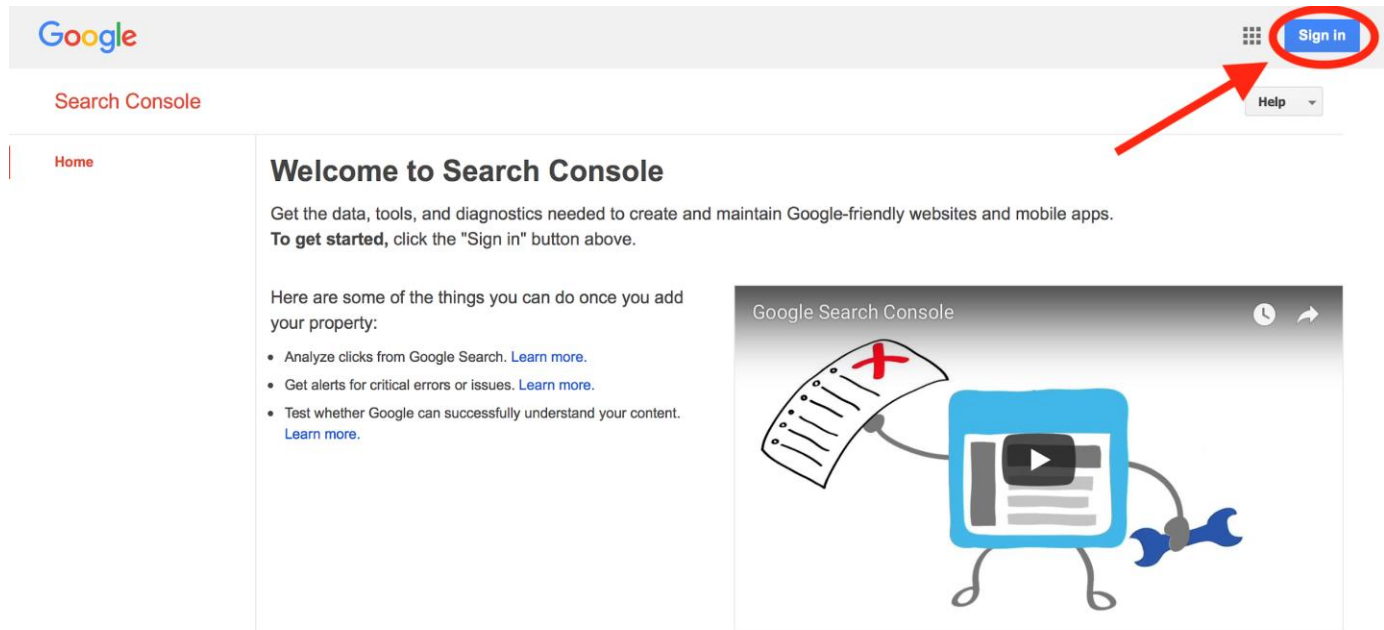
Now that your code is applied to your site, check back in a few days to make sure everything is working. You should see some activity through most of your webpages, though it will take about 30 days to truly get a picture of the regular activity.

Once you have verified that Analytics is successfully installed, then you can install Google Search Console. This essentially submits your website to Google, enabling you to monitor how your website interacts with search engines. It is also a useful tool to check for errors that might keep Google from crawling your site.

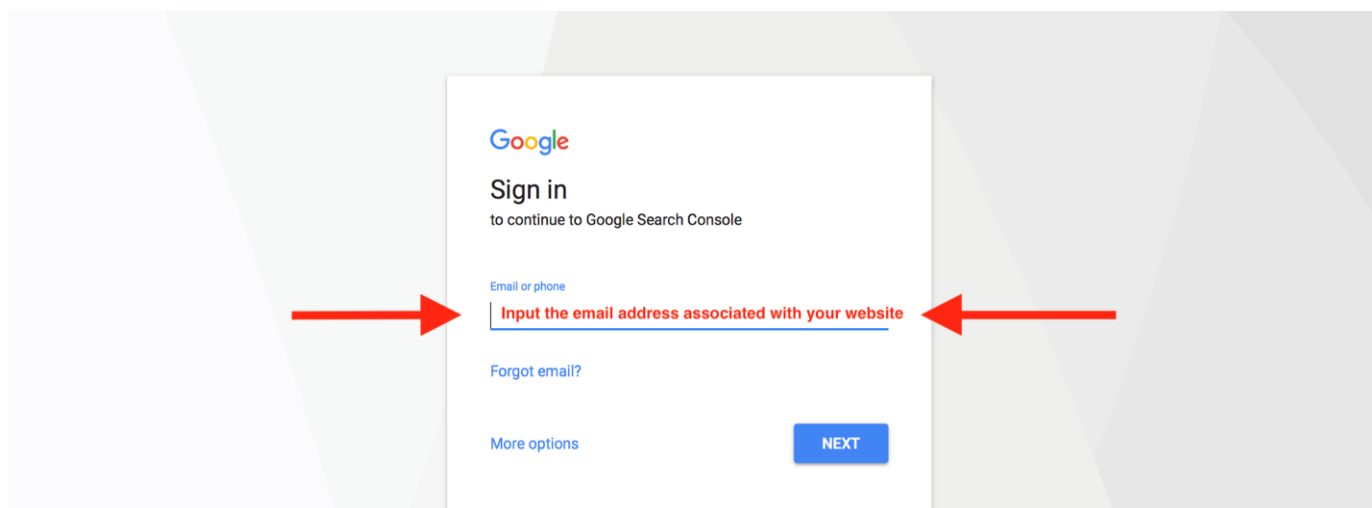
How to Set Up Google Search Console

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

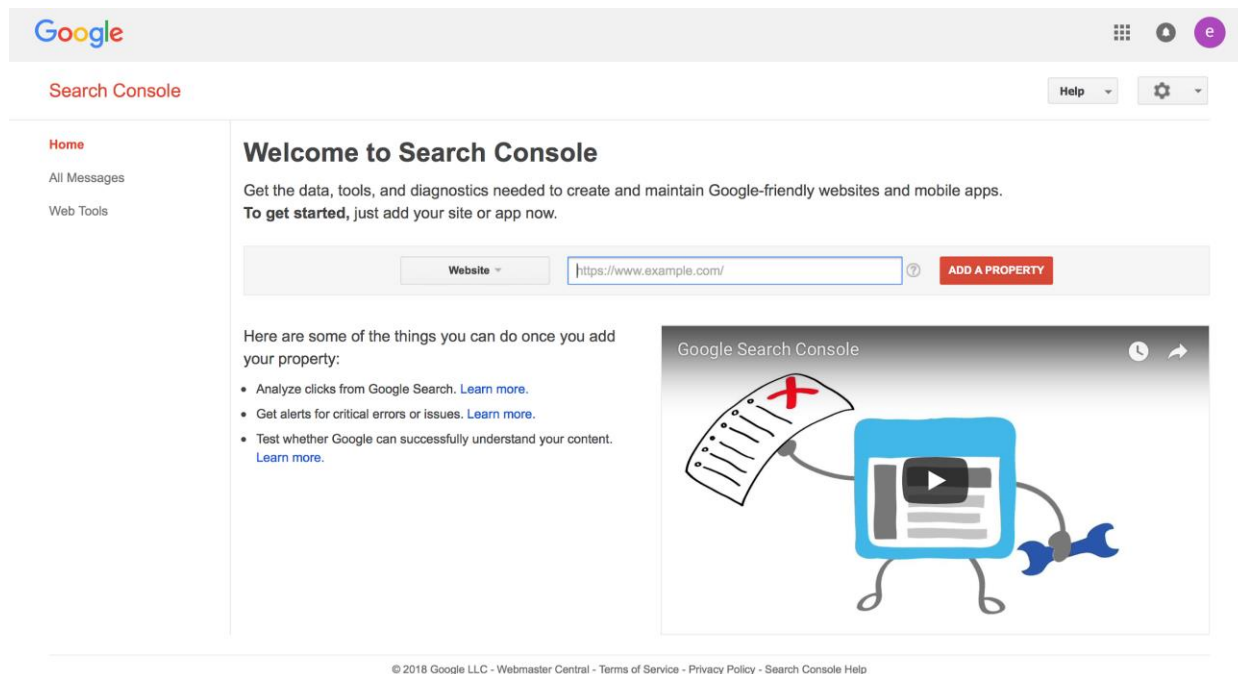
1. Go to [Search Console](#) and click "Sign In."



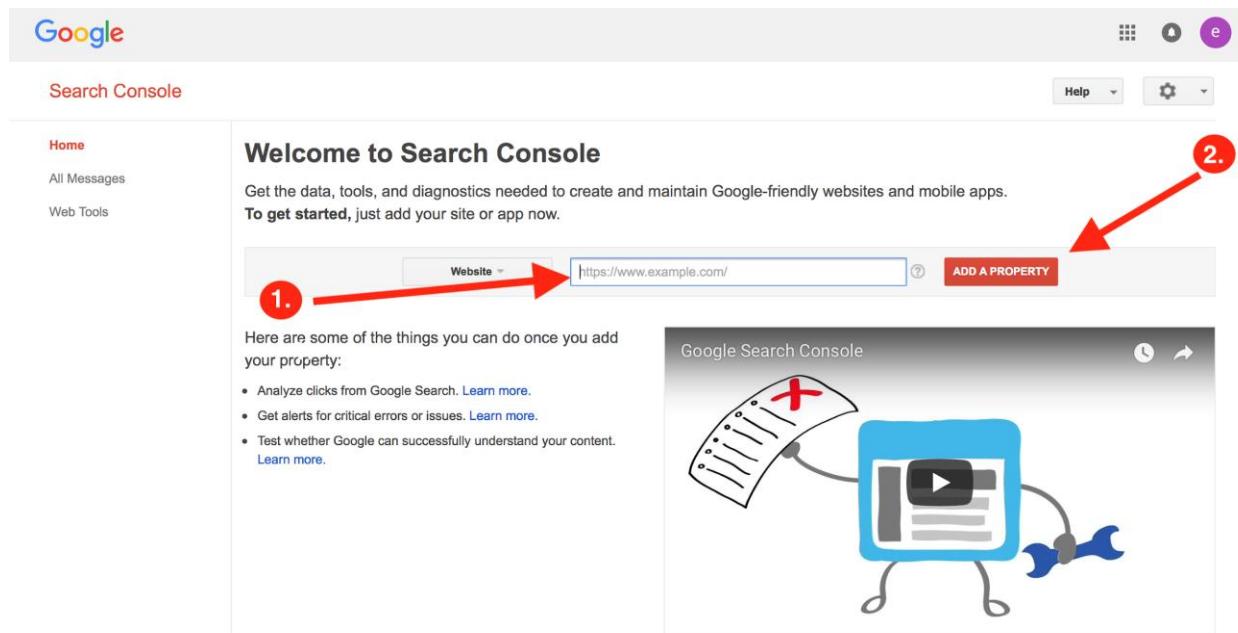
2. Enter the email address & password associated with your organization's website.



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



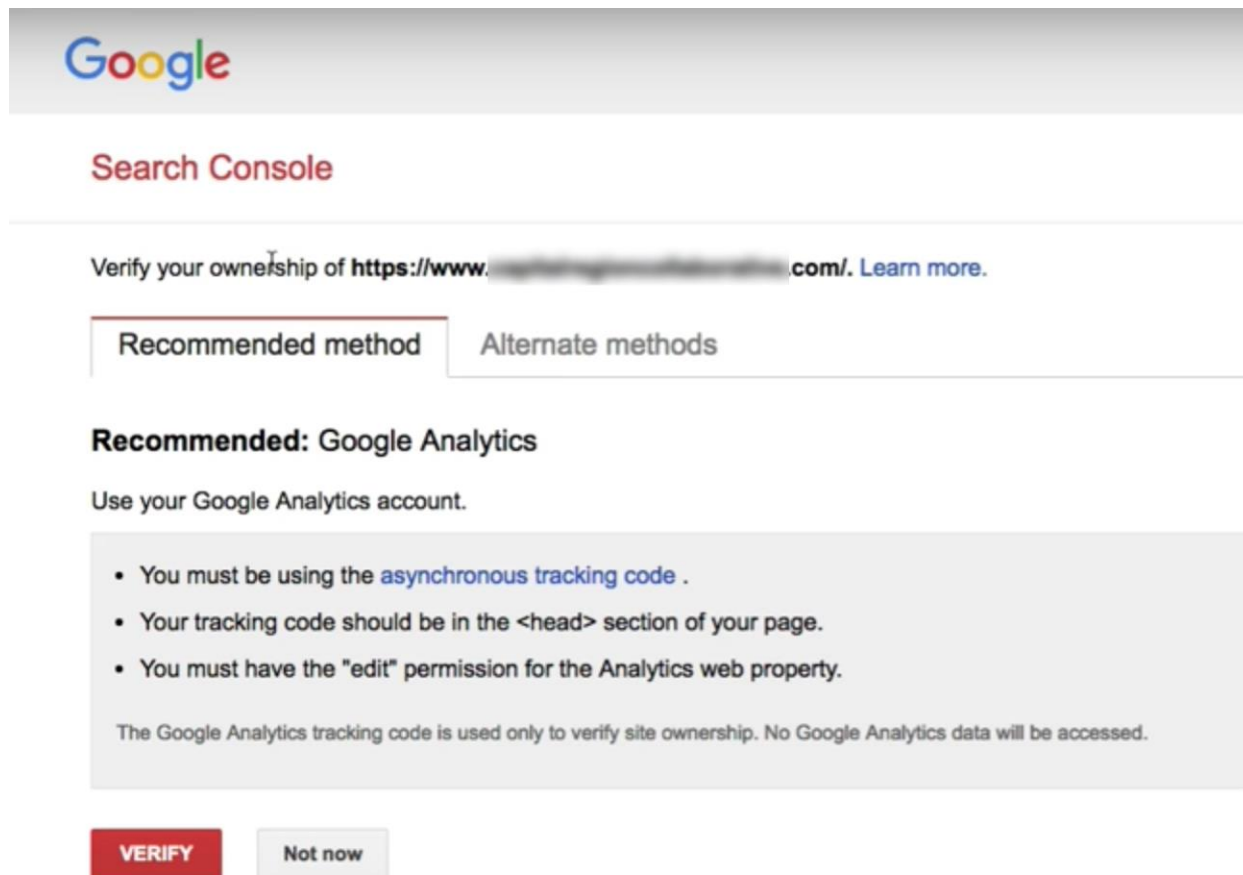
4. First, add the name of your website and then, click “Add a property.”



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. We 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 using a CMS other than WordPress, this process will likely 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 in red. A line of text says "Verify your ownership of https://www. [redacted] .com/. [Learn more.](#)". Below this are two tabs: "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." Below this is a list of three bullet points: "You must be using the [asynchronous tracking code](#) .", "Your tracking code should be in the <head> section of your page.", and "You must have the 'edit' permission for the Analytics web property." Below the list is a note: "The Google Analytics tracking code is used only to verify site ownership. No Google Analytics data will be accessed." At the bottom are two buttons: a red "VERIFY" button and a grey "Not now" button.

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 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 involves signing 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 utilize this process for verification. 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

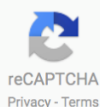
Upload an HTML file to your site.

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.heliosolutions.net/](#). [Learn more.](#)

Recommended method

Alternate methods

☒ **HTML tag**

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

Choose the HTML tag under Alternative Methods to Verify Site

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="5A-C330_#K0W6G0SL3N1MLYt60-fjL5w988w74" />
```

▶ [Show me an example](#)

2. Click **Verify** below.

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

Note: Copy only the code

☐ **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.

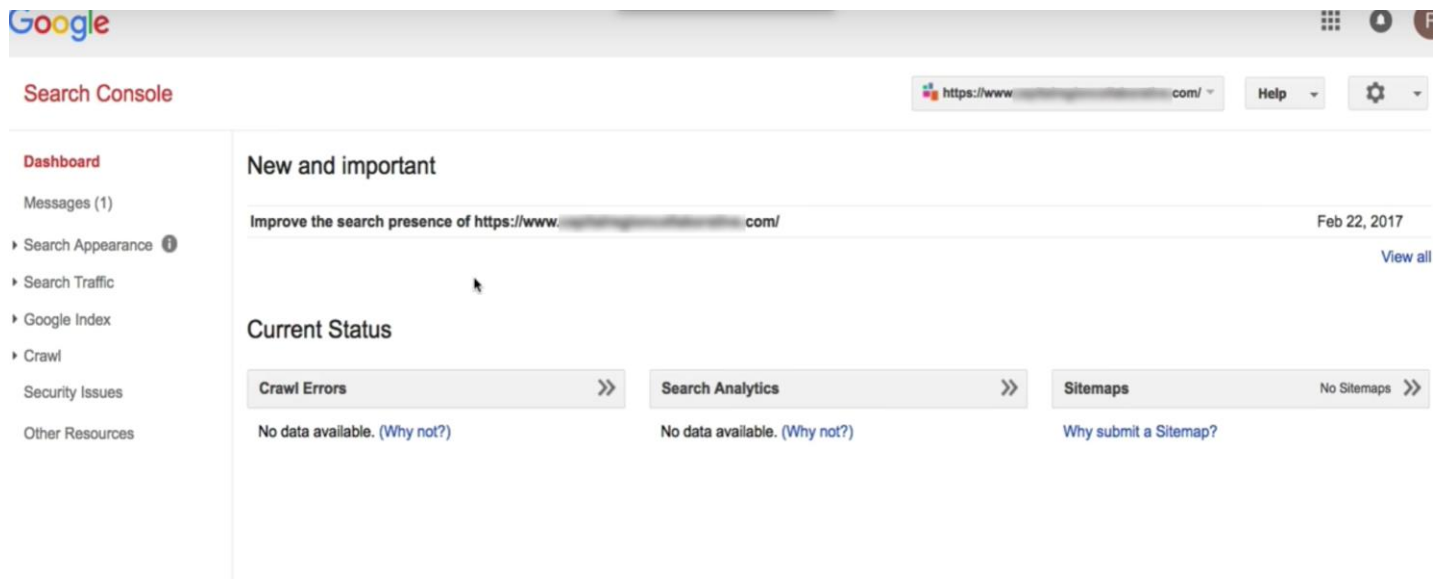
VERIFY

Not now

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.

The screenshot shows the Yoast SEO plugin interface. On the left is a sidebar with a menu: SEO, Dashboard (highlighted with a red box), Titles & Metas, Social, XML Sitemaps, Advanced, Tools, Search Console, Premium, and a Collapse menu button. The main area has tabs: Dashboard, General, Features, Your info, Webmaster tools (highlighted with a red box), and Security. Below the tabs is a 'NEED HELP?' dropdown. The 'Webmaster Tools verification' section contains instructions and three input fields for verification codes: Bing Webmaster Tools, Google Search Console (highlighted with a red box), and Yandex Webmaster Tools. A 'Save changes' button is at the bottom.

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 \(and add a sitemap\)](#)
- [How to Increase Your Search Traffic Using Google Search Console](#)

Beginner Tutorial for Google Analytics

Helping you get the most out of viewing and interpreting this valuable data to most effectively optimize your website.

When you log in to Google Analytics or Search Console with no prior knowledge of these tools, it can seem overwhelming!

But soon you'll discover just how much you can learn from this data, and how useful it can be in planning technical or content updates. It will become second nature with continued use.

In this section, you'll learn how to quickly check for site errors that may affect search engine performance or user experience, and you'll learn to interpret how effectively 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 improve 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 in Search Console displays, so you'll likely understand them even better when you see them in context. A technical vocabulary list can seem intimidating at first, but as you get to know and interact with 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

Terms change so if you run across a term in Google Analytics that you are unfamiliar with, hover over it and a brief description pops up.

Average Session Duration: The average amount of time a visitor stayed on your website. Two to three minutes is favorable, while less than one minute implies that visitors didn't find what they were looking for.

Behavior: This element measures how users interact with your site, or with 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.

Bounce Rate: The percentage 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! It may be that they found what they needed on that one page and left.

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).

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

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Measurable values that demonstrate how effectively your website is achieving its objectives, such as number of sessions, target bounce rate, number of returning visitors, demographics engagement, etc.

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

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

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

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](#)).

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

Navigating Your Google Analytics Dashboard

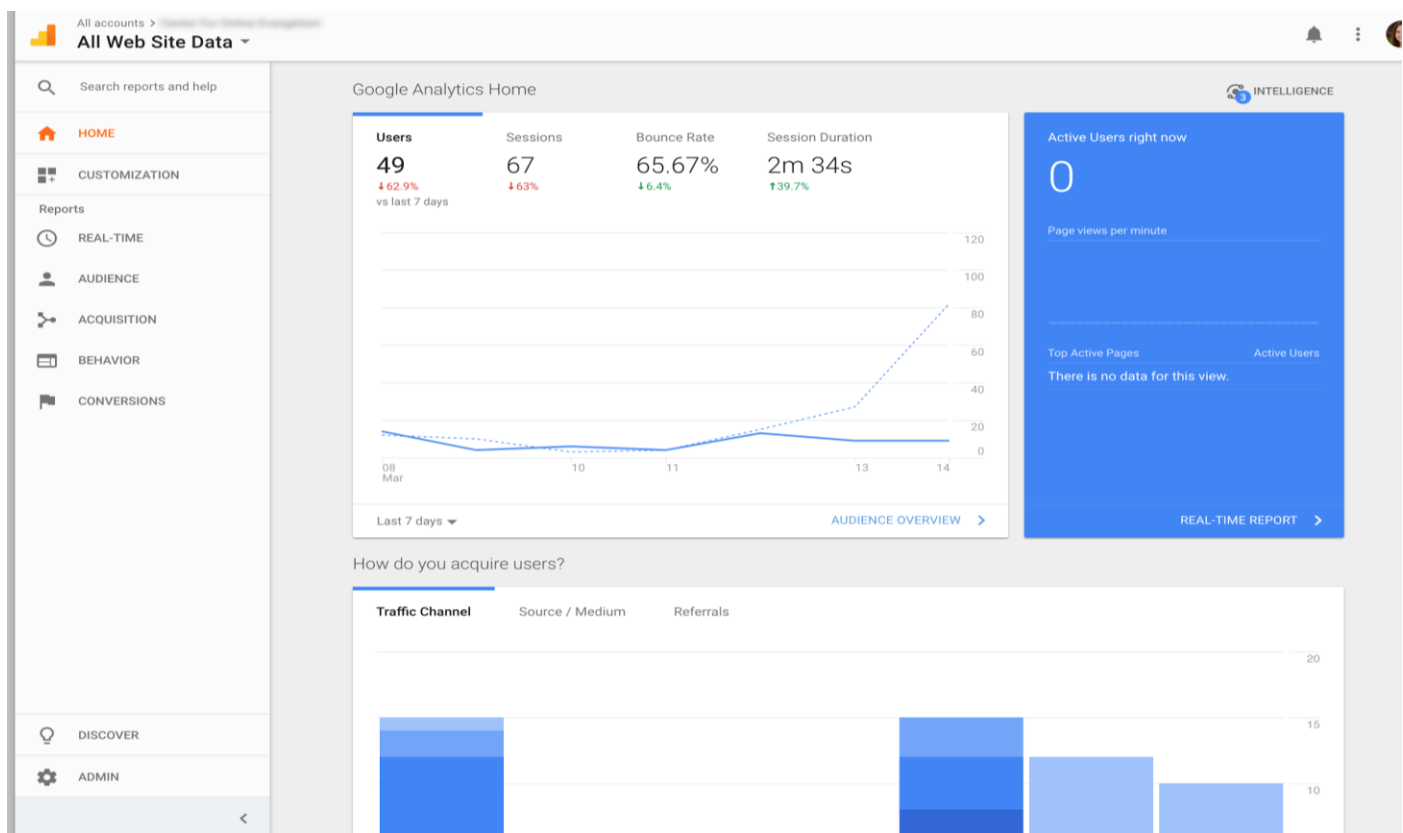
NOTE: If you just set up Google Analytics, we recommend letting it gather a month's worth of data before making in-depth analyses. Otherwise you will not have enough data to truly determine usage patterns. Usage patterns fluctuate throughout the year and around holidays. Over time, you'll become familiar with the regular patterns of visitors.

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

By selecting "28 days" in 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, regions 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.



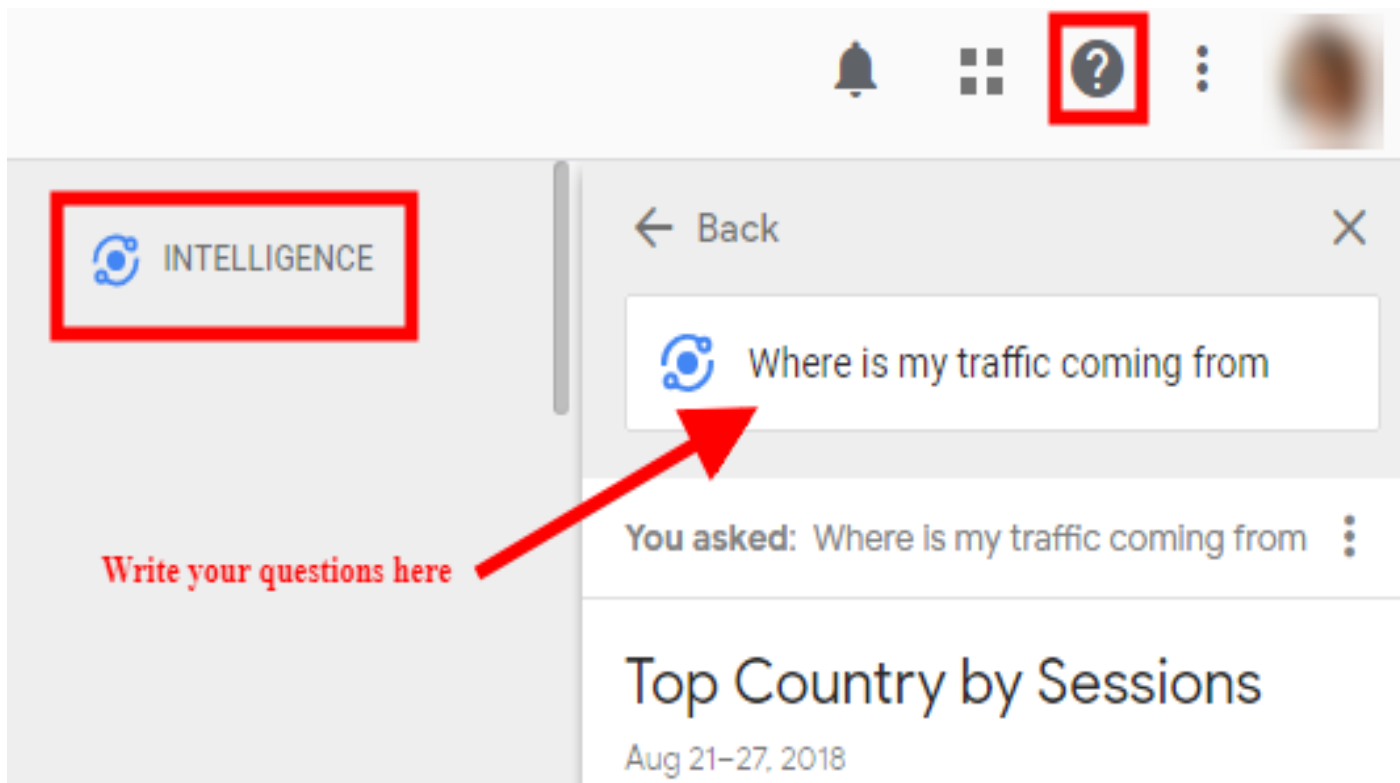
Got specific questions already?

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

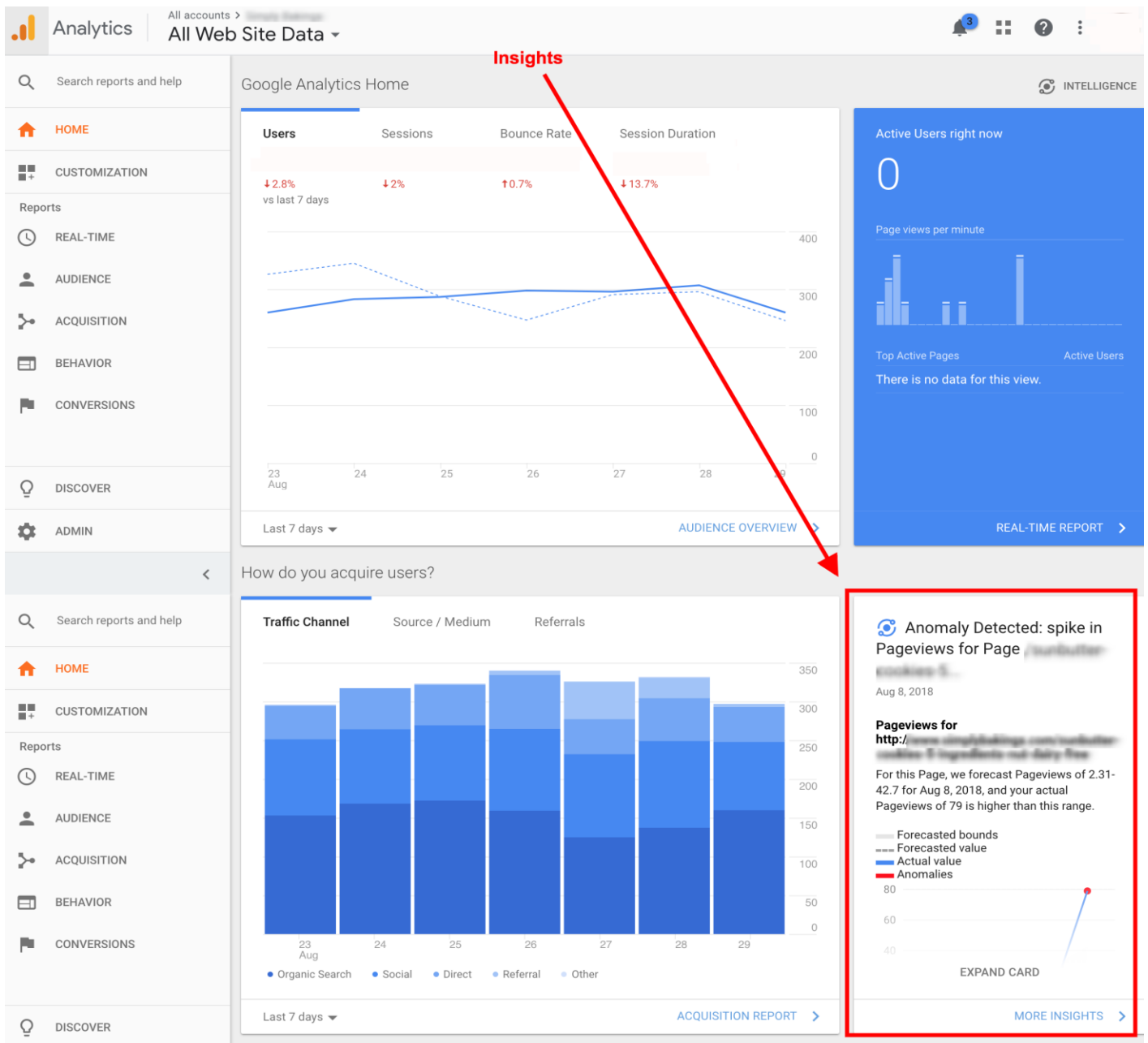
This will guide you through Google Analytics by asking [questions](#) like “Where is my traffic coming from?” or “What were my most popular pages from July 1-24?”

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 have an impact on your website. For example, it can show you that a certain landing page is getting more traffic than before or if the number of new users is dropping. The information presented here allows you to adjust accordingly.



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

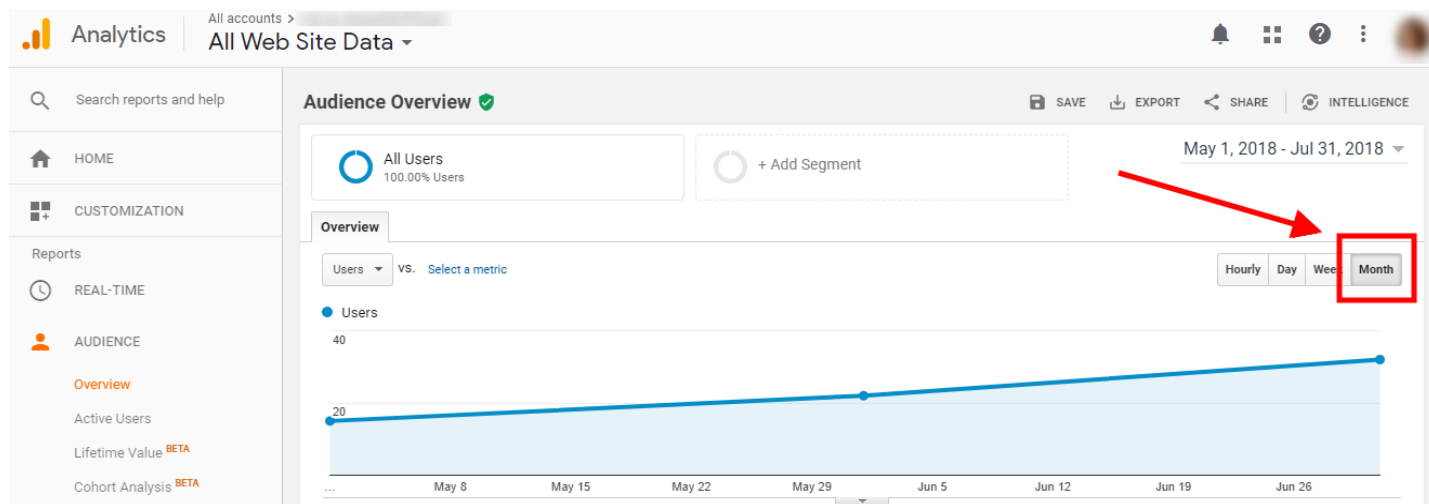


Helpful Reports

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

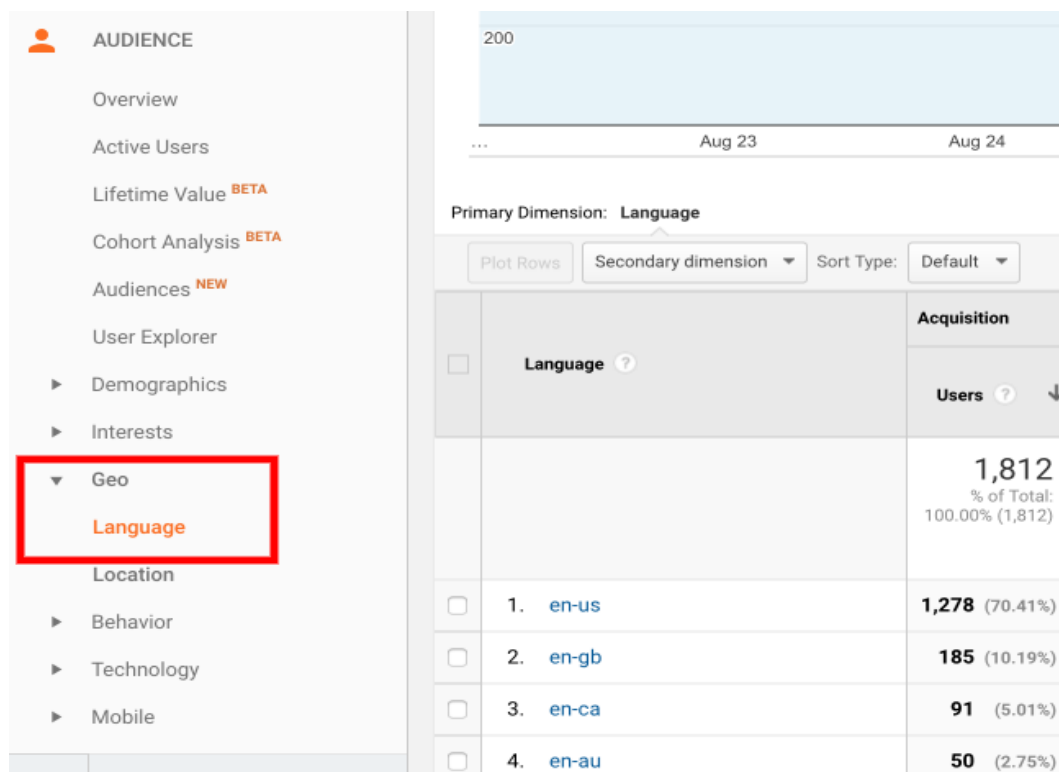
AUDIENCE—Overview (Who's visiting?)

Above the line graph to the right, select “Month” to get a clearer average. This will give 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.



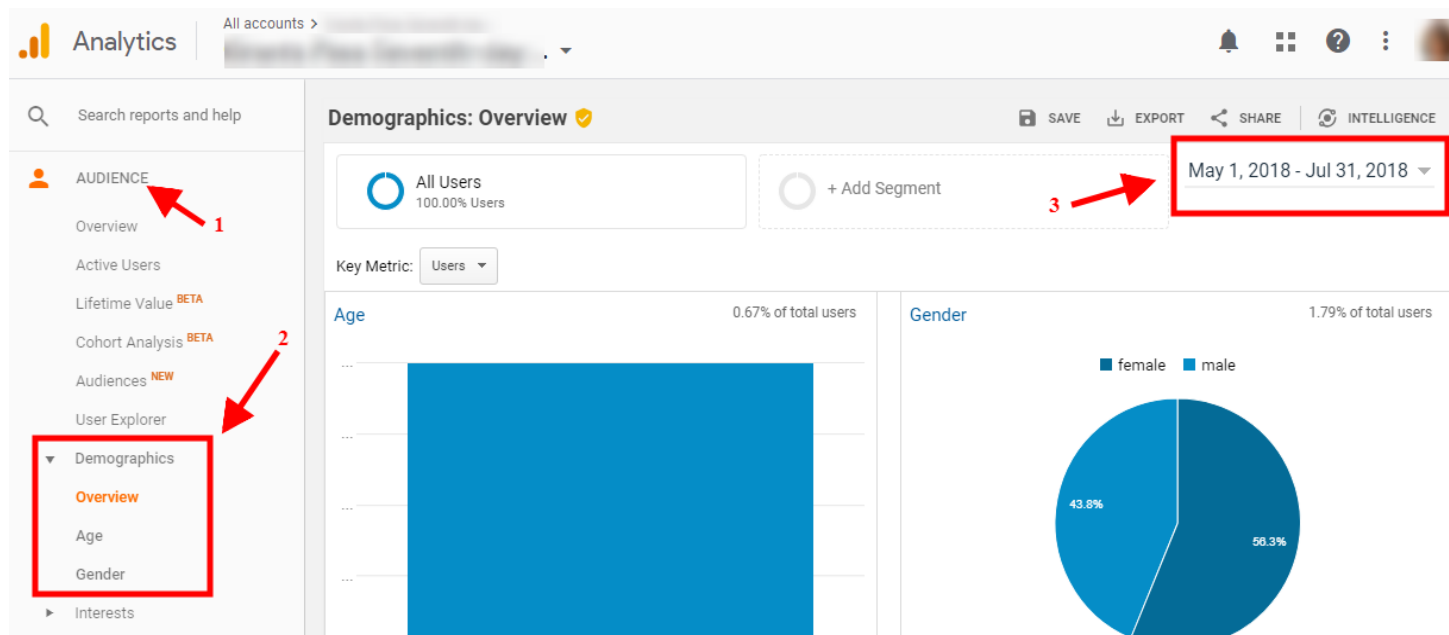
If you are a local organization that depends upon local traffic to your website, click **Geo > Location > City** to see if your target area is engaging with your site.



AUDIENCE—Demographics—Overview

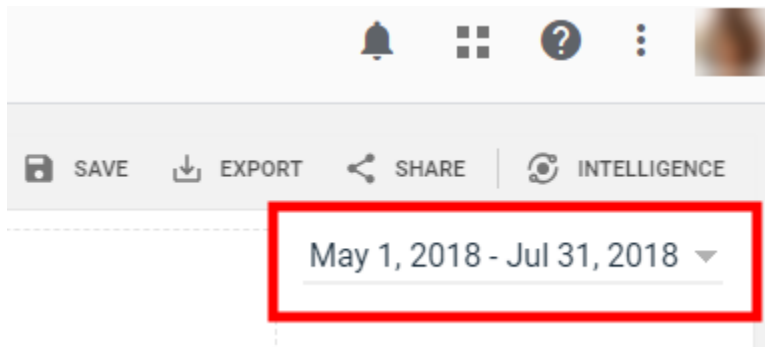
If your content is targeted to a certain age or gender, you'll want to look here. You can view the age and gender (see arrow 2) of the users who visited in the last selected timeframe.

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



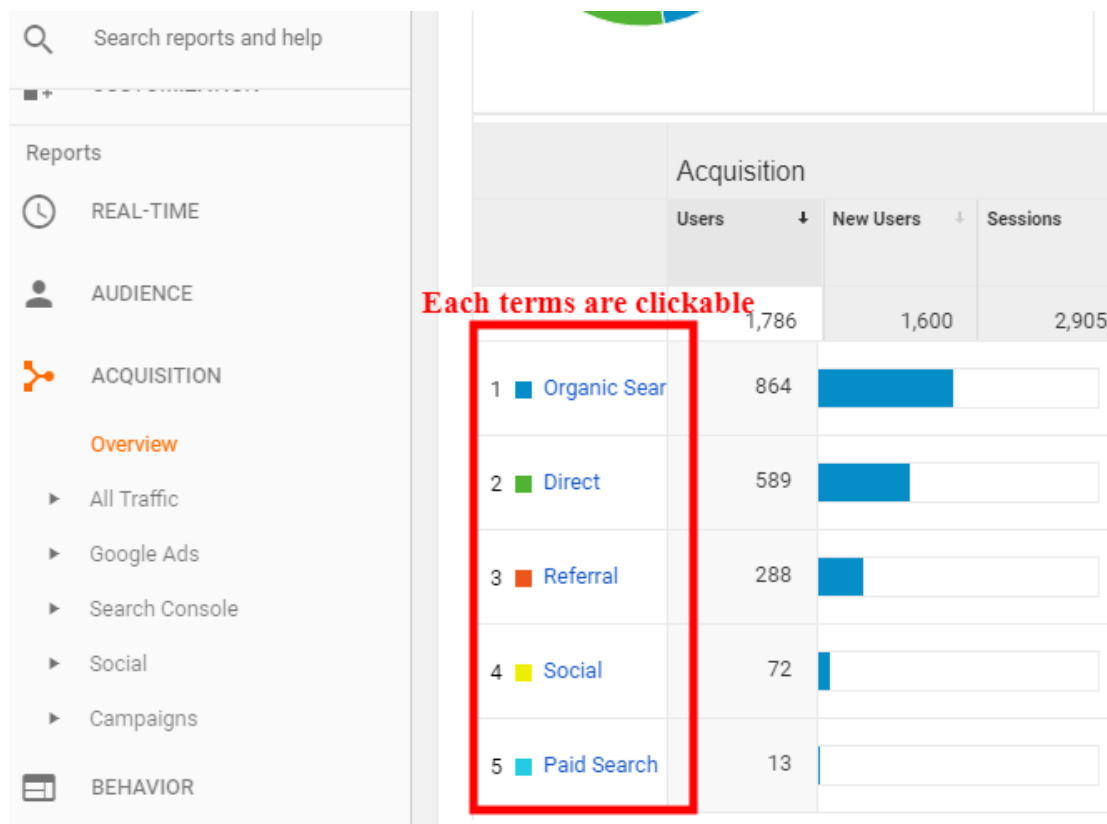
ACQUISITION—Overview (How are they getting here?)

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



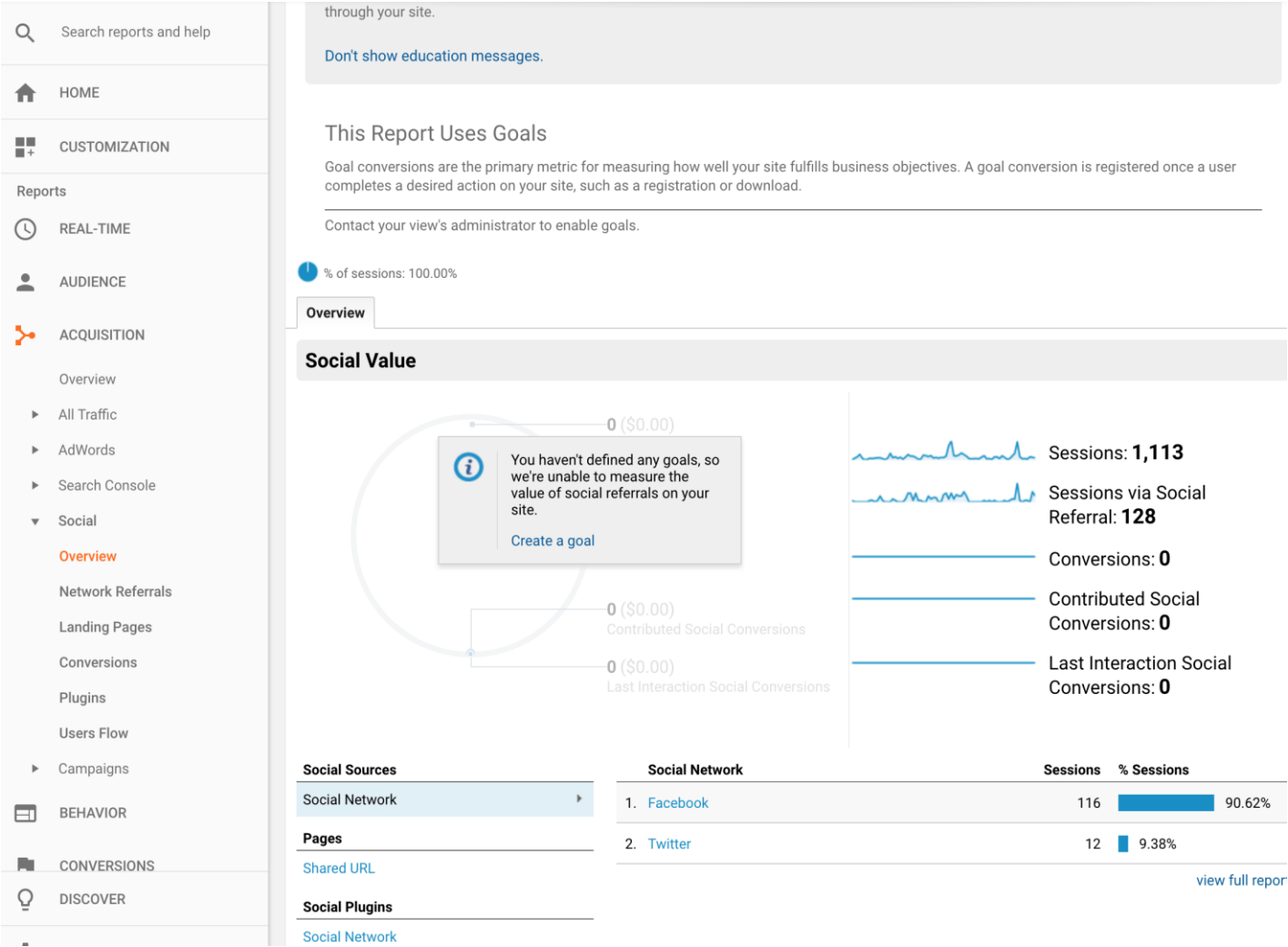
These visitors may have clicked to your site via:

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** (they clicked on a link on another site)
 - a. To find out which sites are linked to yours, you'll need to use Search Console
4. **Social** (they clicked on a link from social media)
5. **Paid Search** (they clicked on a pay-per-click ad)



ACQUISITION—Social—Overview

Scroll down in the Overview window to Social Value. Unless you’ve worked ahead, you won’t have any goals here. However, you will be able to see how many sessions have come from which social media platform. Study this data and compare it to how many posts you’ve published in the selected timeframe (3-month default).



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 are driving users to your site, depending on which URL was linked in the post.

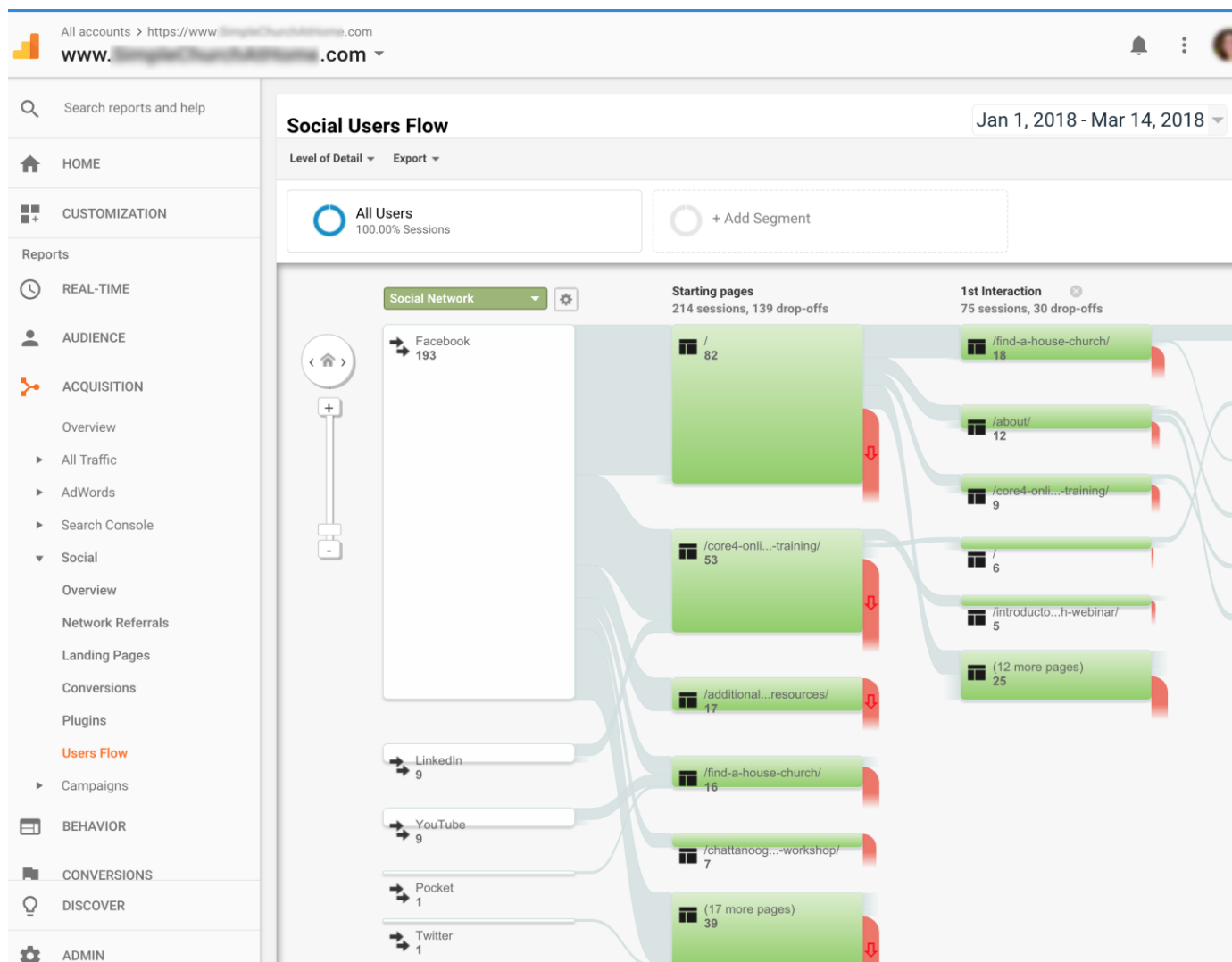
The screenshot shows the Google Analytics interface for the 'ACQUISITION' section, specifically the 'Social' category and 'Network Referrals' report. The left sidebar contains a menu with 'Social' expanded, showing 'Overview' and 'Network Referrals' (highlighted with a red box). The main content area displays a bar chart with a value of 250, a 'Primary Dimension: Social N' dropdown, and a list of social networks: 1. YouTube, 2. Pinterest, 3. Facebook, and 4. WordPress. A red arrow points to the 'Facebook' link, which is labeled 'Clickable Terms' in red text.

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

ACQUISITION—Social—Users Flow

This journey map starts 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.

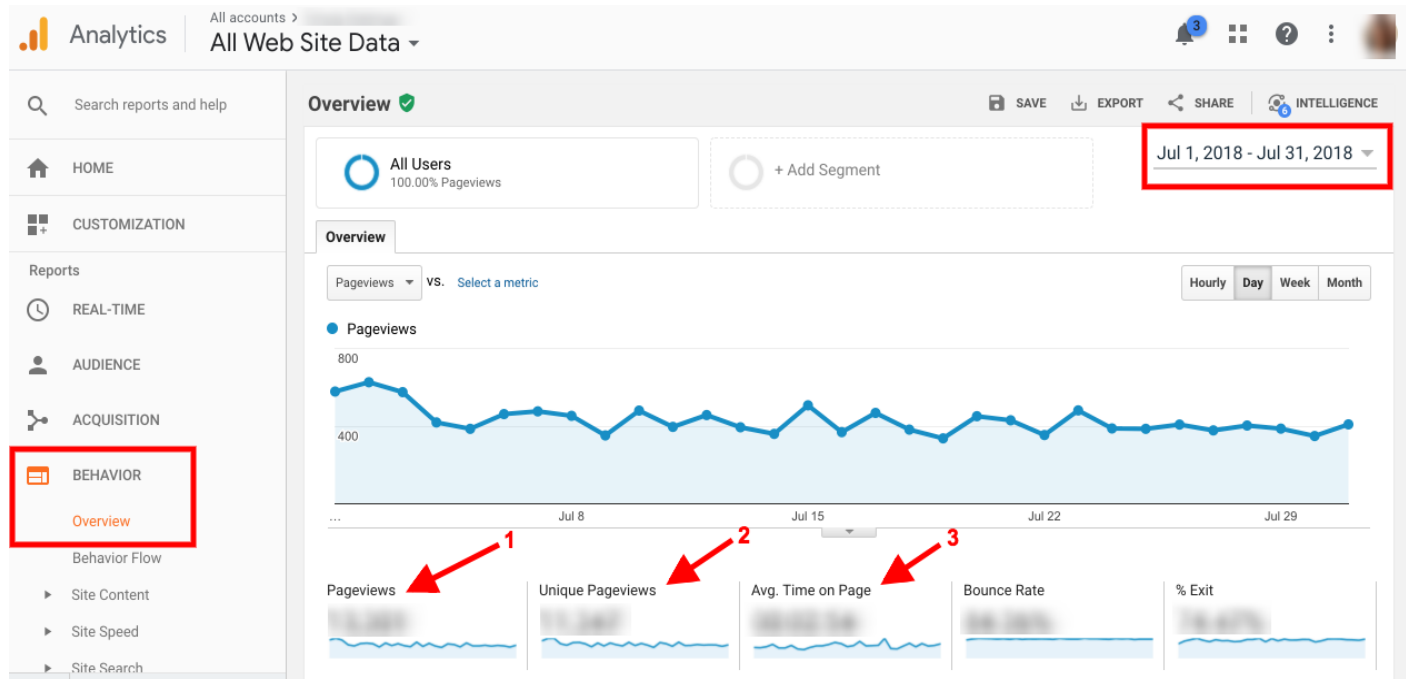
If you hover over the Starting Pages or Interactions, you'll see a pie chart representation of how many users kept navigating your site, and how many dropped off at this point. Use this data to review your site content and determine if users are finding what they need or getting frustrated/bored and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



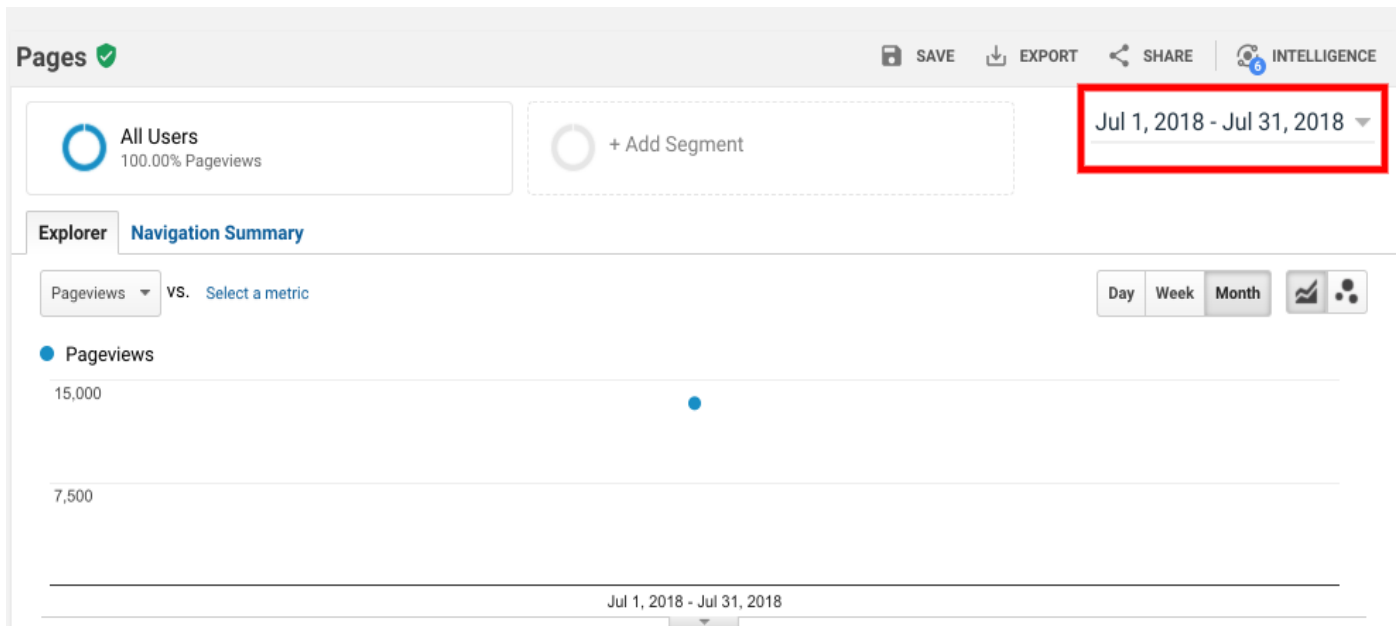
BEHAVIOR—Overview (What are they doing?)

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



The **Site Content** section describes how visitors engage with pages on your website. For example, under **ALL PAGES** you can see your top pages and how many views they receive, average time on page, plus which type of page is most popular—helping you 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).



Analytics | All accounts > All Web Site Data

Primary dimension: Page | Page time | Other

Plot Rows | Secondary dimension | Sort Type: Default

Search reports and help

HOME

CUSTOMIZATION

Reports

REAL-TIME

AUDIENCE

ACQUISITION

BEHAVIOR

Overview

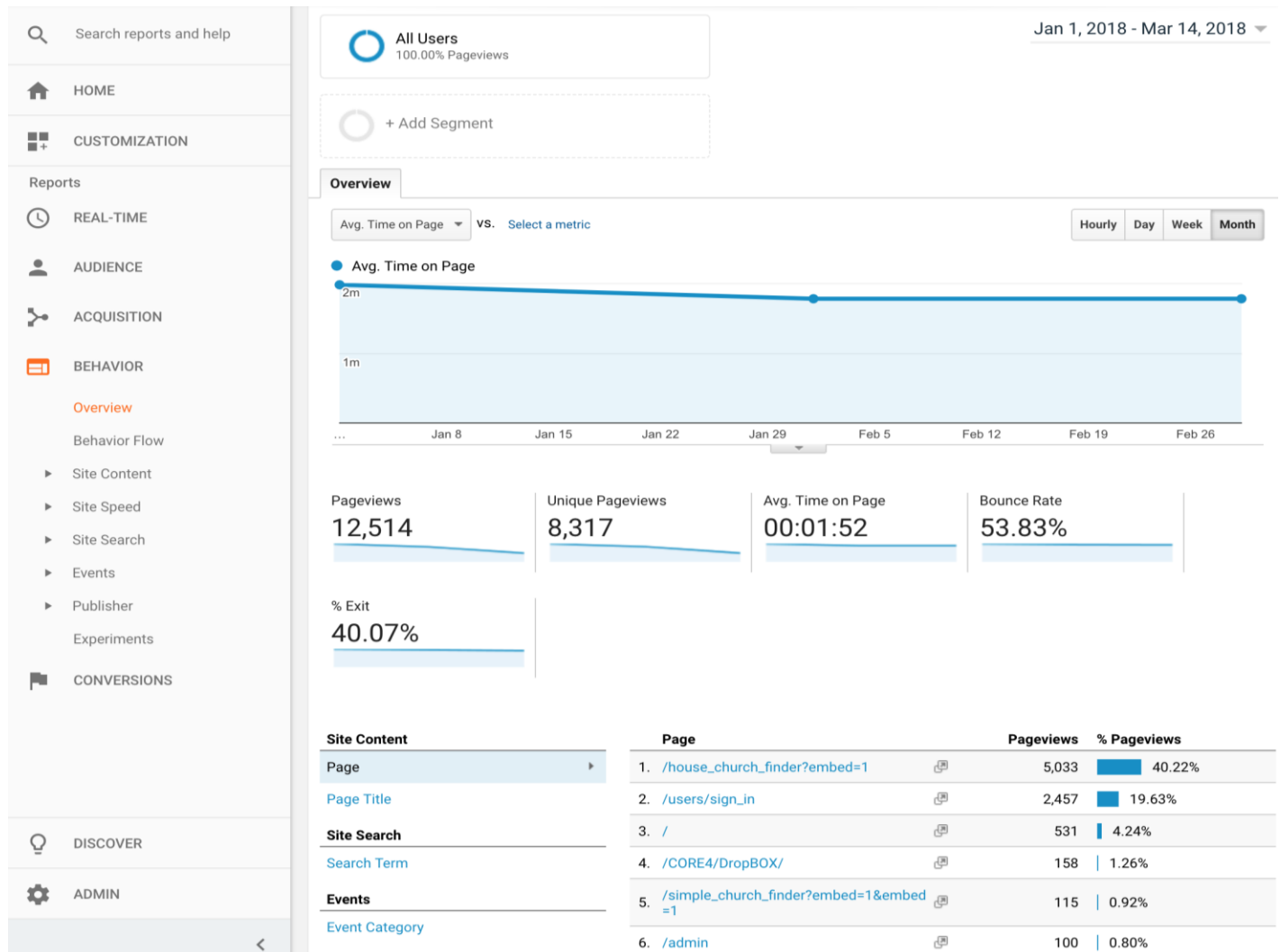
Behavior Flow

Site Content

All Pages

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

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.



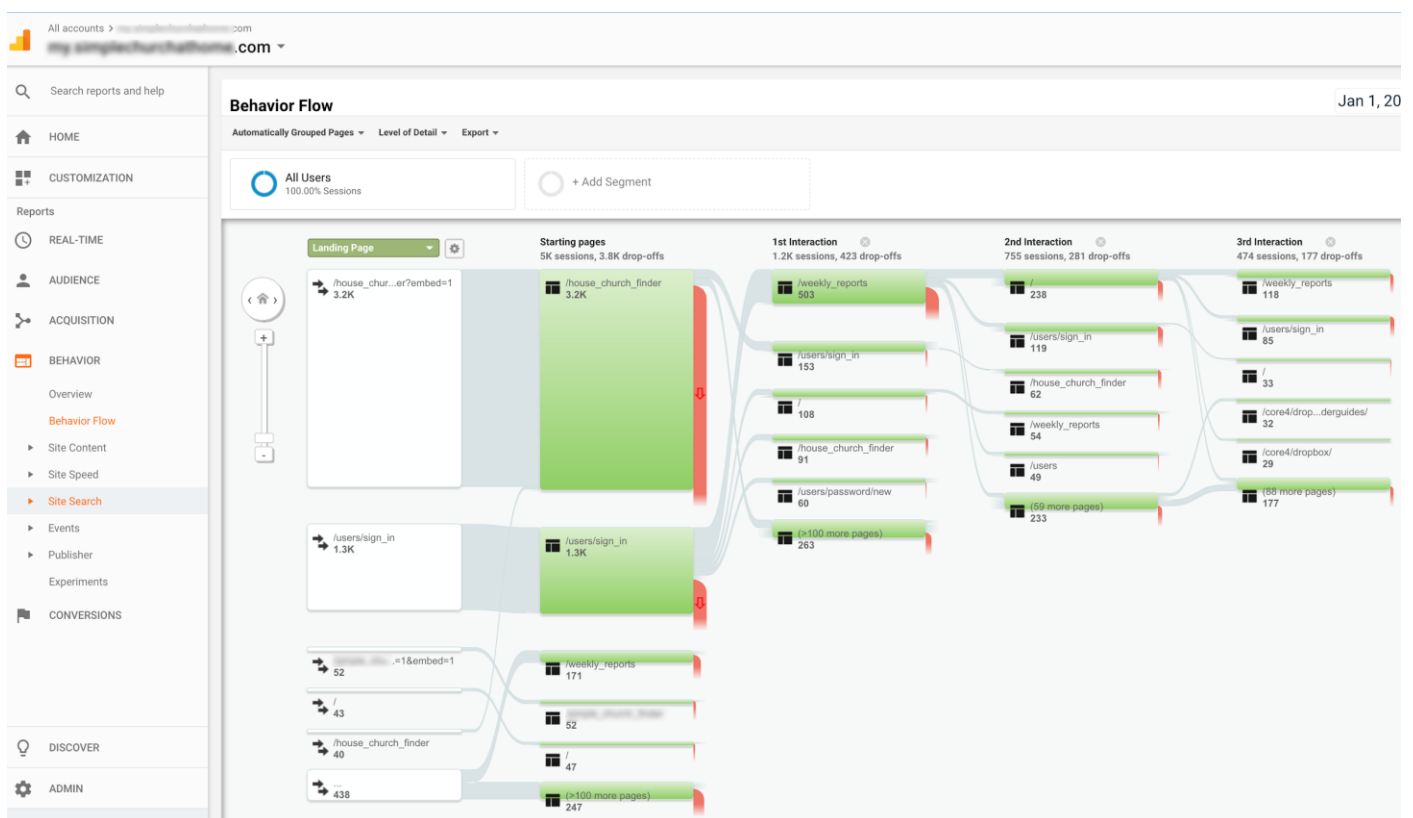
BEHAVIOR—Behavior Flow (Where are they going?)

Another visual journey map shows you which pages users encounter first when they visit your website (listed as the Landing Page). It 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 the first, second, and third 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, or make a purchase, it may mean:

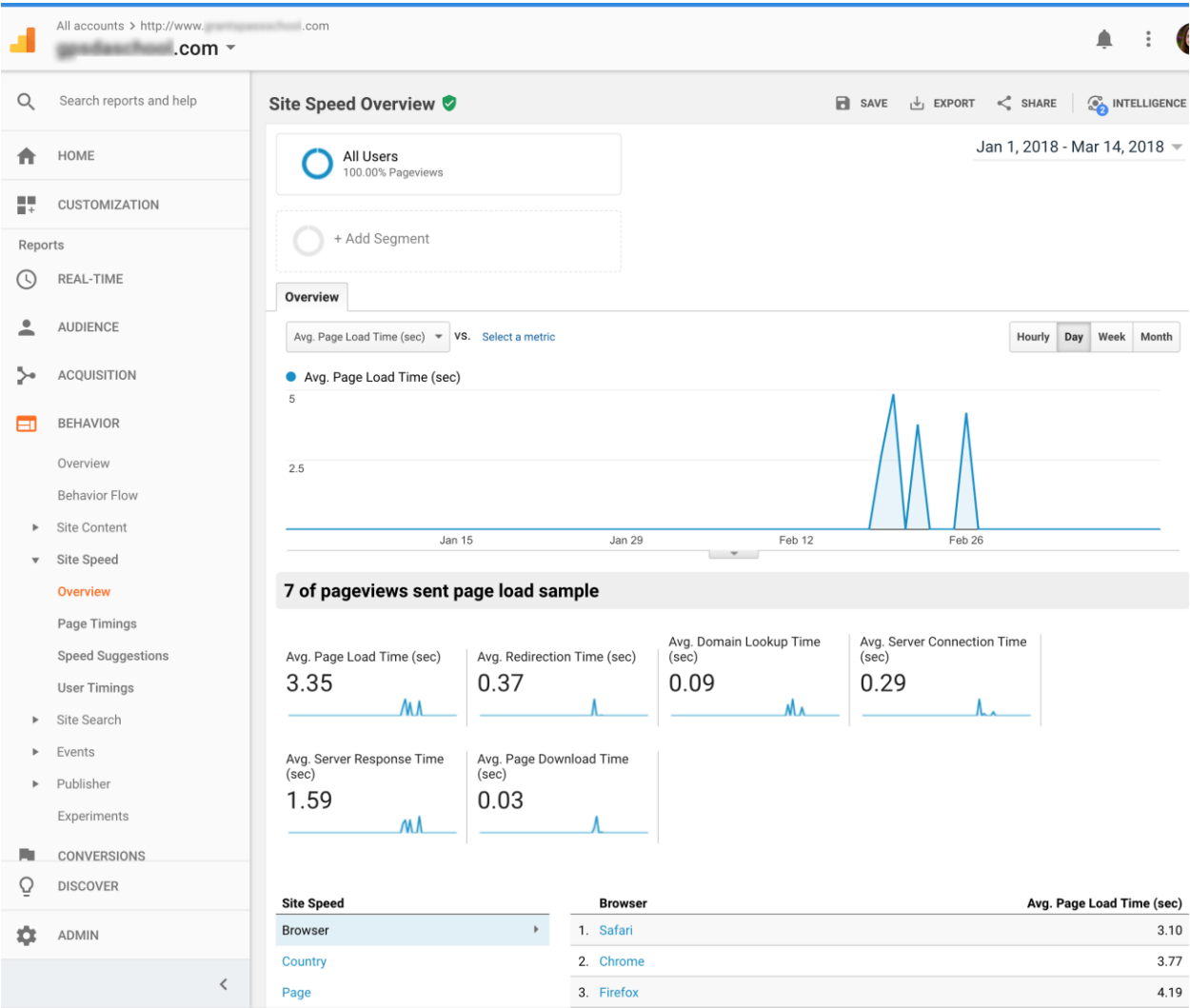
- Your content needs clearer calls to action.
- Your content needs more persuasive language to encourage them to keep reading.
- Users are finding the info they want before reaching the page.
- Users are deciding not to buy/read/download.



BEHAVIOR—Site Speed—Overview

Select “Month” at the top right over the graph. Remember, you’re shooting for a page load time of under two 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 pages may be slow and affecting the average site load time.

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

These Google Analytics 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 any “roadblocks” that might be inhibiting users from completing a desired action.

It will also help you plan your future content by revealing 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.

Additional Resources:

- [A Guide to the Standard Reports in Google Analytics: Audience Reports](#)
- [How to Get Actionable Data from Google Analytics in 10 Minutes](#)
(Setting goals and measuring data against your website goals)
- [Google Analytics: Overview & Set-up](#)
- [Web Tracking + Introduction to Google Analytics \(downloadable PowerPoint\)](#)

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 of Googlebot discovering new and updated pages to add to the Google Index.

Google Index: In order for your site's contents to be included in the Google's search results, 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.

Internal links: Links on one page on your website that links to another page on your website to provide reference information, guide the user through the intended content journey, or to lead them to action. Being strategic with internal linking provides different types of users with the proper pathways for 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 (hyper-text markup language).

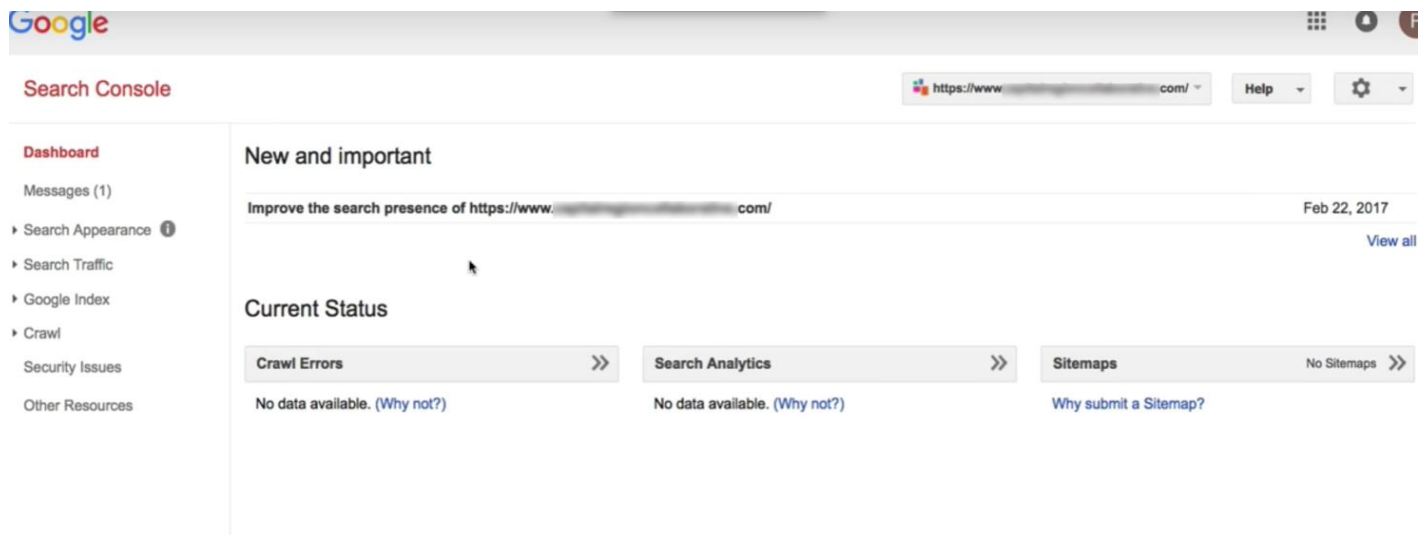
Search Console Home—Your Properties. (Are You Verified?)

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 [the section on setting up search console](#) 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 three sections 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)

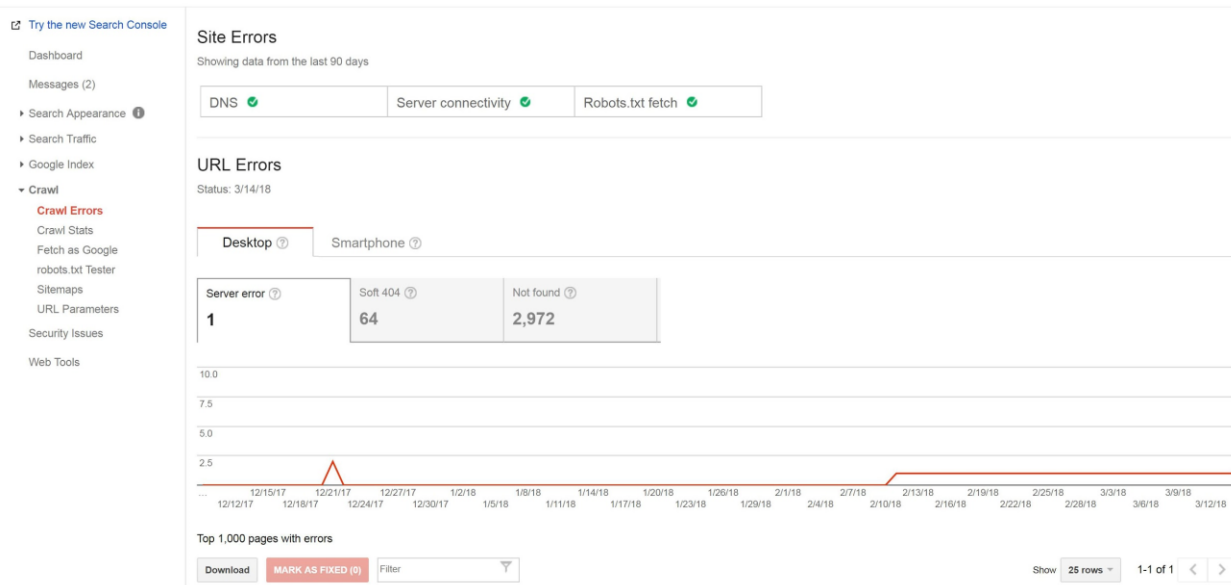
If you have any crawl errors, you can click on **Crawl > Crawl Errors** in the left side menu to learn more about what's causing these errors.

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 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:

[What is a WordPress Sitemap](#) or [How to Create a WordPress Sitemap](#).

At the top right you'll see the red "Add/Test Sitemap" button. Clicking 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 and some other CMSs), 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-through-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**.

<input checked="" type="radio"/> Queries No filter ▾	<input type="radio"/> Pages No filter ▾	<input type="radio"/> Countries No filter ▾	<input type="radio"/> Devices No filter ▾	<input type="radio"/> Search Type Web ▾	<input type="radio"/> Dates 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 between how you *wanted* people to find you and how they *actually* ended up finding you, you might want to adjust your content to include different 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 commonly used in the site, or are they using other search terms that we 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.

Search Console

https://www.wagnermeters.com/ Help Settings

Try the new Search Console

Dashboard

Messages (2)

Search Appearance

Search Traffic

Search Analytics

Links to Your Site

Internal Links

Manual Actions

International Targeting

Mobile Usability

Google Index

Crawl

Security Issues

Web Tools

Links to Your Site

Total links
14,606

Who links the most

pagedebate.com	4,457
bsmmag.com	1,235
prospeclab.com	847
t2170reports.com	365
yellowpages.com	344
More »	

Your most linked content

https://www.wagnermeters.com/	2,979
/concrete-moisture/	1,240
/top-40-woodworking-tools/	522
/warning-signs-on-wood-floors/	399
/stairmaster/	369
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. 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:

- [A Complete Guide to the Google Search Console](#)
- [An Insider's Guide to Using Google's Search Console to Fix Your Site](#)
- [Google Support's introduction to Search Console](#)

Intro to Keyword Research and Content Strategy



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

Content—the *right* [content](#)—is what internet users are searching for. Many are ultimately looking for products, services, locations, restaurant recommendations, etc., but the reason they trust the internet to help them is because they can find *content* that educates them along the way. People want content that guides them toward making the best decisions; content that answers their questions.

A blog post could convince someone to join a gym, or a Yelp review might convince a couple to try a new restaurant. Some are googling symptoms before taking their child to the ER or searching 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 thousand and one ways to consume content. Optimizing your content for search engines helps you focus 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 core of SEO copywriting: writing persuasive content based on search engine optimization principles. It removes most of the guesswork when figuring out which topics (related to your organization) make the most sense to cover in your content marketing. Whether writing titles and headlines or naming resources or products, it bridges the gap between your hunches, the data, and what information people actually need.

Keyword research uses search query data from Google and other search engines to determine what kind of content interests people. 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. Finding keywords that have a high search volume, but a lower rate of competition, is the sweet spot for your SEO content strategy. Writing about *those topics* improves the chances of your content being 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.

Familiarity with your audience allows you to feature relevant 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. However, they’re harder to rank in Google search results without further specificity.

Let’s say it’s a burgeoning trend to create Pathfinder blogs. The 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 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 Experience prep
- Pathfinder Oshkosh fundraising ideas

These are considered **long-tail keywords**, or keyphrases. Long-tail keywords are low volume and highly-focused search queries that **tend to convert visitors to engaged readers/followers exceptionally well**.

You can also start brainstorming possible blog posts for these subtopics and long-tail keywords:

- How to teach knot-tying to Pathfinders
- Make your Pathfinder Investiture fun and memorable
- Top 10 activities for Pathfinder campouts
- Tips for teaching Pathfinders with disabilities
- Preparing your Pathfinders for Pathfinder Bible Experience
- 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](#), the summary of a web page:

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

<https://austinet.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 Treets Bakery

www.sweettreetsbakery.com/ ▼

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

To make your blog or organization's website specific to your area, mention which cities are involved, and make sure to list the address of your church or location. You could even list well-known areas nearby that members visit or volunteer. For security reasons, we do recommend caution regarding how much location information is shared online about Pathfinder and other underage group activities.

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 yourself 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? Review their comments on posts.

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. There are lots of positive comments on those posts. Therefore, another topic would be more effective in making your blog stand out in search results.

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 "how to teach the hunter's bend knot."








This is an excellent example of how research and testing can help shape meaningful content creation and allow you to create 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 completely free options for keyword research, where you’ll be able to find similar data. These free keyword tools also show related keywords or phrases, which can be helpful for coming up with good content ideas. Overall, you’ll get a general idea what people are searching for, enabling you to 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 renowned 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 industry standard tool by which keyword research has been 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](#) allows ten free searches a day. This tool provides similar data to those already described, but is known for helping you find patterns, and for its filters that allow you to customize how you want results displayed. One such filter shows User Intent in five 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 content creators anywhere in the world.

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

[Soovle](#) is a customizable engine that unites the suggestion phrases from all the major providers (Google, Bing, Amazon, Answers.com, Yahoo, Wikipedia, Youtube) in one place. This tool can be [a major help for search and content creation inspiration](#).

YouTube has its own keyword research tools: [vidIQ](#) and [TubeBuddy](#). Ubersuggest also has an option to look on YouTube.

5) Additional 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 are only relevant for those investing in 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.

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

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

Competition - This number represents a ratio of the how frequently a term is searched for, 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 pay to display ads on top of search results pages or on 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) - In regard to paid ads, this is how much it would cost the advertiser each time someone clicked on their ad that contained this keyword.

Click-through Rate (CTR) - In digital advertising, this represents the ratio of users who click on a link compared to the total users who view the ad, or the page on which the ad appears.

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 e-commerce or content marketing to thrive, AND it operates within a competitive industry, such as health, you would 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 \$1,000.00/month). Keyword Planner can also help you get a closer look at the search behavior of certain demographics.

[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 gives 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 keyword tools like these, many come with a free trial period, enabling you to test how useful a particular tool might be for your organization.

7) Creating content from keyword research

Once you've utilized these tactics and tools to determine which topics are popular and which content opportunities exist, it's time to use this knowledge 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 is ranked higher in search results.

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

This is good news! This means that the organizational methods you learned for writing essays and research papers in school will now pay off in a practical way. Begin by writing an introduction to 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. For good example of this, visit sdadata.org/seo. From a visitor perspective this help with navigation within a specific topic. Be careful not to take this concept to the extreme, creating a confusing maze of short pages.

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 having a stronger influence on search engine ranking than individual words or phrases, the algorithm 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. [Click here](#) for tips on how to write conversationally.

Here are some tips for 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 some common mistakes people make when trying to determine 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 over multiple blog posts. Remember to keep your posts between 600-1,500 words (in most cases) for digestibility. 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 or comment section to submit questions about the topic.

Content organization techniques that may help you include outlines, topic trees, bubble graphs, etc. Using this as your foundation for content creation helps you determine topical goals, objectives, and key takeaways. Plus, it makes the whole writing process easier.

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

Learn more:

- [SEO Basics: What is Keyword Research?](#) (Yoast)
- [How to Find Long Tail Keywords](#) (Backlinko)
- [Ultimate Guide: Your Content Marketing Keyword Strategy](#) (Curata)
- [Keyword Research for SEO—The Ultimate Guide](#) (Yoast)
- [How to Understand Searcher Intent and Use it to Boost SEO Rankings](#) (SearchEngineLand)
- [How to do Keyword Research the Smart Way: Targeting Interest and Intent](#) (Neil Patel)
- [How to Dominate Keyword Research in Just 30 Minutes a Day](#) (Neil Patel)
- [How to Use the Keyword Planner Tool Effectively](#) (Google Ads)

Intro to Content Marketing



Creating, Optimizing, and Distributing Content to Engage Your Audience and Improve SEO

If you've been following [this series](#) and applying the techniques and tools we've covered, you've [researched keywords](#) to get an understanding of what topics are relevant to your target audience and match their search behavior. You've looked at what could be considered competition and found opportunities in a few niche topics that relate to your ministry. Ideally, you've made topic outlines and are ready to start creating!

While we've mentioned 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, and to entertain—all for the ultimate purpose of attracting and nurturing a loyal audience that promotes your organization's cause or buys your products.

Furthermore, content marketing is effective because it allows brands to build awareness and even recruit a following *before trying to sell a product or soliciting an action!* **The currency of content marketing is ACT—Authority, Credibility, and Trustworthiness** (though we should also add "Empathy" to this list, especially when dealing with spiritual topics and life lessons).

Once your messaging is established, focus on the delivery. **Use multiple forms of content** to maximize your organization's ability to get picked up by Google's search algorithms, as well as further engage your audience. Keep in mind that certain forms of content will perform better with some audiences than others. By diversifying your content creation strategy, you optimize your reach and increase your ability to have an impact across a variety of demographics.

Here are the four major components that work together in a comprehensive content creation [process](#):

Strategy - purpose, goals, topics to cover, niche opportunities to target, outlining topic coverage, means of distribution, measurement, and analysis.

Copy - the words within the content. What messages are being conveyed through this content to your audience? How can the language best reflect the culture of the medium and the target audience so that the desired meaning can be best understood? Remember, good communication is when we speak so that our intended audience can not only hear our message, but understand its intended meaning or purpose.

Imagery - the pictures, videos, icons, and graphics. What's your visual theme? What emotional response or mood are you trying to evoke? What perception(s) will your audience develop of your brand based on the images you utilize?

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 the following elements will fit into the above four-part template.

Most Popular Types of Online Content

Text

The written word is foundational for any type of content, and, therefore, this is where we must begin. Ideas are written down first—whether in the form of notes, scripts, or outlines—before they’re turned into anything else. In addition, written content almost always accompanies and supports the other content types. Consequently, when you set your content marketing goals, you’ll want 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*. Writing for digital environments is much more straightforward, casual, conversational, and concise.

The most common forms of written content online are:

- **Website copy**, as in, the text found throughout your organization’s or ministry’s website. A thorough outline or bubble diagram is a must for planning out website content. Each page should have a clear purpose made obvious in the headline and introductory sentences. Typically, you’ll start with writing copy for the following standard pages: home, about, service, and contact us. 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, documenting their parenting journey, etc. Now blogs are used both individually and commercially to engage in conversation and as a means to inform (or persuade) readers.

Many blogs have inspired the formation of online communities, especially if they prominently link to their corresponding social media profiles, such as: Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Many commercial websites also leverage blogs to build or grow a community around brand values. [If an organization’s blog contains useful or thought-provoking information, and is properly promoted](#), it can skyrocket online influence—and often conversions (taking a desired action).

- **Landing pages**, or a stand-alone page dedicated to one important message, campaign, and/or call-to-action. It's more than just a page where users perchance "land" after a search. Landing pages are where visitors are directed via a website link, social media post, paid advertising campaign, email button, etc. for the purpose of taking a specific action. For example, a landing page is where a visitor goes to learn about a specific campaign or product and is designed to encourage them to get involved or sign-up for a special offer. The call-to-action would ask them to enter an 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 should be to gather email addresses and other contact information for your marketing list. With the right promotional strategy, landing pages are valuable tools for growing your digital influence.

Landing pages can also help your organization increase registrations, sign-ups, downloads, purchases, etc. When applicable, build in "buzz" words that create a sense of urgency or exclusivity that urge visitors to take action or that make them feel special.

- **Email content.** [Email marketing](#) is still a key player when it comes to optimizing the effect of your digital influence. While this content is not indexed by search engines, it serves a vital function in nurturing the relationship your brand builds with its audience—helping to grow an actively engaged digital following across multiple mediums and platforms, which does boost your SEO.

However, to generate impact, your audience must first open your email. Strategically written subject lines are meant to convince the reader to *open* your email. And once they do, the email content should be written as concisely and in as straightforward a manner as possible, as you only have a matter of seconds to engage the reader.

Most email content is in the form of e-newsletters that serve as a vehicle to keep subscribers apprised on news, product information, new content, sales or promotions, etc. Emails may serve as notifications of new blog posts, or sometimes email campaigns can be an educational series in and of themselves.

Think about what you get in your inbox. Do you subscribe to a retailer's newsletter for updates on 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. Whatever type of email you receive, understand that careful thought went into how that content was presented. Email content is intentionally designed to keep readers engaged and feeling special, so they don't wander down to the footer to click "unsubscribe."

- **Case studies.** This content features customer (or member/participant) stories and testimonies 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 to be the "great discovery" that helps people succeed and find a happy ending to their story. Within that story you can highlight how your product works, what your service provides that others 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.** 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 to do about them. Readers are persuaded of the software company's 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.** While they are still long-form content, eBooks are 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 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**—they aren't all silly cat pictures. Many organizations assign their best writers to engage with 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 of mouth." It's the central hub of online conversations, and—if they want to have their posts read, liked, and shared—social media writers need to write in the world-of-mouth 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](#) (the intro blurb that shows underneath the page title and link), and ALT tags. All of these are priorities for SEO copywriters, as the content found in these areas can make a big difference in which webpages get clicked on and ranked in search results.
- [Microcontent, or "scannable web copy"](#) refers to headlines, subtitles, subheaders, lists, pull quotes, sidebars, meta descriptions, calls-to-action, etc. [These are very important](#), and it's 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, especially for those ([about 16% of web users](#)) that prefer to read content, and it's also highly valuable for making the content of the recording indexable for search engines.
- **Checklists**, as they can stand alone as their own type of post. They can appeal to hurried readers who love 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

[One-third](#) of *all online activity* is spent watching video. This isn't surprising. People have always been visual creatures, and online video continues to be a popular way to consume content—[for all ages!](#)

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 offer two different options for content consumption, it also adds a perception of depth and authority to the story.

Video content is particularly ideal for educational content, especially “how-to” tutorials. Demonstrations, interviews, time-lapses...some things are just better presented via 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.

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 always acceptable, regardless of platform. [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 to your content that could show up in search results—especially if you're live often!

About 1,640,000 results (0.48 seconds)

Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church | Located at 7700 Carroll Ave ...

www.sligochurch.org/ ▼

Welcome to **Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church** where we are a multi-ethnic, family oriented, loving congregation who strives to glorify God in everything we do ...

WebTV

Welcome to Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church where we are ...

Sligo VBS

Welcome to Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church where we are ...

Our Staff | Sligo Seventh-day ...

Welcome to Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church where we are ...

Sligo Seventh-day Adventist ...

Bible Study, 7700 Carroll Ave | Takoma, MD 20912 ...

Events

High School Student? Busy Parent? M.I.N.D.S. seeks to provide a ...

Bulletin

Sligo Bulletin for May 5th, 2018 | First and Second Service ...

[More results from sligochurch.org »](#)

Sligo Church - Home | Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com> > Places > Takoma Park, Maryland > Religious Center ▼

★★★★★ Rating: 4.7 - 51 votes

Sligo Church, Takoma Park, MD. 1385 likes · 65 talking about this · 2769 were here. Celebrating over 100 years of service to our community. Located on...

Videos



5:00

When We All Get to Heaven by the Sligo SDA Church

Hester Griffin
[YouTube](#) - Jul 18, 2009



The Church At Worship on Livestream

[Livestream](#) - Nov 19, 2016



1:32

Pastor Charles Tapp message to Sligo Church

PRP Email
[Vimeo](#) - Nov 19, 2008

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 [Lifesize](#). Participants are typically invited to webinars and provided with a private link.

While the webinar itself would not be indexed by search engines, its power to engage audiences boosts SEO through lead generation and by 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

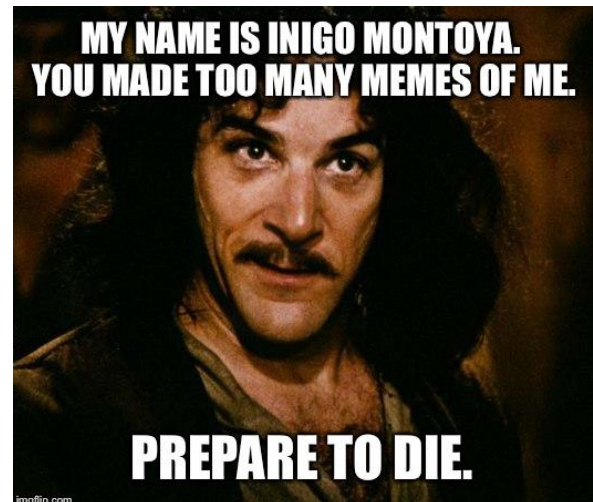
While the right pictures can elicit emotion, the right designs can inspire action and highlight strategic details. Careful planning is necessary to make sure the chosen images indeed emphasize the intended emotion, that it's clear what's happening in the picture, and that it looks genuine, as opposed 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](#), [pexels](#), [unsplash](#) and [free-images.com](#). [Click here](#) for more free or low-cost stock photography and design resources.

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 (approx. 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 250 kilobytes 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 and overlaid with block text, that use an adaptable but repeated theme to say something funny, inspiring, or even to evoke sadness or outrage. A fitting meme every now and then can boost engagement on your blog or social media content—but be careful not to overuse them.



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 acts as text that can be read by screen readers to tell visually-impaired 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) and include short and straightforward text to accompany the imagery—making complicated information easier to understand.

If you’re short a graphic designer, some [free tools](#) like [Canva](#) can help you create simple infographics, adding a splash of color to your page, post, or feed, as well as informing and engaging your audience in a creative way.

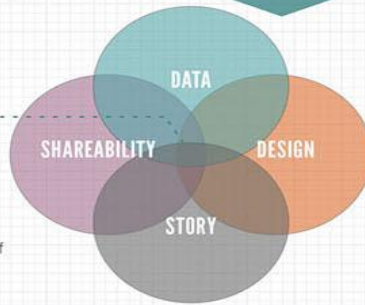
As the above infographic explains, infographics don’t just make your page more pleasant to look at—people actually *google for infographics* on certain topics. They’re also shared frequently on social media.

THE SUPER ULTRA MEGA META

INFOGRAPHIC ABOUT INFOGRAPHICS

WHAT MAKES AN INFOGRAPHIC

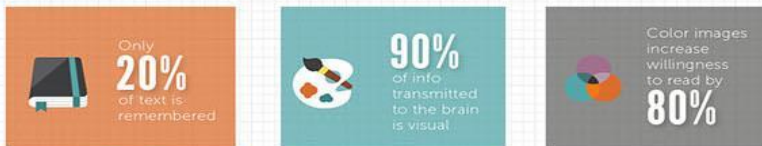
Infographics are a great way for your brand to prove thought leadership and insight supported by data. They also have the ability to be repurposed in a number of ways by being broken into smaller chunks that can live across multiple channels.



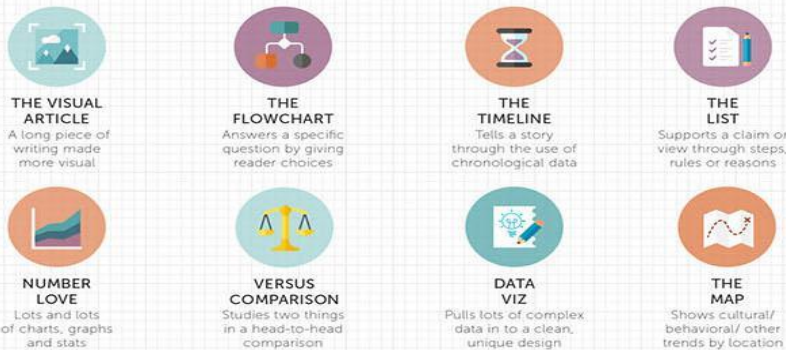
THE LIFE OF AN INFOGRAPHIC



DID YOU KNOW?

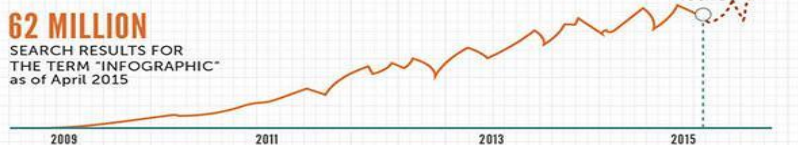


8 COMMON TYPES OF INFOGRAPHICS



SEARCHES FOR "INFOGRAPHIC"

ACCORDING TO GOOGLE TRENDS



SOURCES:
B2C Content Marketing 2015 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends; CMI
Google Trends
Why Do Infographics Make Great Marketing Tools; Unbounce.com

one spot™
www.onespot.com

Podcasts

Audio content can include interviews, sermons, vocal essays, monologues, presentations, seminars, etc. Podcasts can be featured on your website or uploaded to iTunes so users can subscribe (even if you're already hosting through a provider such as [SoundCloud](#), [Blubrry](#), [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.

Having 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 various character quizzes on Facebook or Twitter, which are highly shareable because, to the audience, it feels like they're sharing information about *them*, not about the organization that designed the quiz.

Interactive content that strives to be more helpful or practical might be assessment-type quizzes, calculators, interactive graphs or charts, or polls and surveys. They can also help you with demographic info-gathering 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 type of content can be important for supporting what Google refers to as an organization's E-A-T (Expertise, Authority, Trustworthiness), 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.

Beginning Content Strategy Worksheet

Filling out this structural worksheet can guide your brainstorming process and help you solidify your content strategy.

- 1. Which topics do you wish to cover in-depth for your content marketing?**
- 2. What goals and objectives do you have for your content marketing?**
- 3. What keywords relate to your topic? (brainstorm below)**
- 4. Run your topic and keyword ideas through a keyword research tool. What kinds of results do you find?**
- 5. Are the terms you thought would be popular showing high search volume?**
- 6. Which keywords show the most favorable ratio of search volume to competition?**

- 7. Using what you've determined from your keyword research, what is the "big rock" or main topic that will guide your content development?**
- 8. Are there a few substantial subtopics that can branch out from your "big rock" topic?**
- 9. Create a "topic tree" or bubble diagram to outline your content's topical progression.**
- 10. What possible article titles come to mind? (brainstorm below)**
- 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 and/or a publishing schedule, complete with guidelines for visual content, and describe the places and forms it will be published in.**

How to Write for Online Audiences



Even the best writers must adapt their style for online writing.

Classically-trained writers may write articles, academic papers, journalistic pieces, or even books. Professors tend to encourage their students to describe things colorfully and thoroughly, to fill the page with rich wording, to emanate cleverness, and demonstrate elevated thinking.

While learning the rules and best practices of academic or journalistic writing creates a solid educational foundation, online writing requires a completely different style and approach to get the point across as quickly, clearly, and effectively as possible.

At first, writing for an online audience may feel too simple. After all, this type of writing is more casual and straight-forward. However, years of research proves its effectiveness in the digital space.

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 later in this section.

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](#))

Here are nine objectives to keep in mind when writing online content:

1) Remember the four primary purposes for online writing (content marketing).

Effective online writing should achieve four primary goals. This is especially true for content marketing, which requires a consistent production of content for distribution to attract, engage, and nurture an audience.

The four purposes are:

- **To inform** your readers about a topic of interest to them, providing new information—or old information—with a unique twist, new application, or original perspective. Aimed at providing value, this type of content makes the reader feel like they've become more knowledgeable because of engaging with your content.

- **To educate** your readers with answers to their questions or methods to solve their problems. This can demonstrate authority while also providing a service 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, white papers, handbooks, reports, etc. to provide your audience with educational content.
- **To entertain** people who are searching for something lighthearted to pass the time or need a pick-me-up. This type of content can even inform or educate in a fun way, but without demanding too much brainpower. Entertaining content is often viewed while on a commute (when the reader is not the driver!), in waiting rooms, between classes, on breaks at work, while waiting for something to start, or on the couch, winding down after a long day. Here you’ll want to utilize forms of content such as quizzes, games, polls, short videos, memes, or humorous writing.
- **To inspire** your readers to take an action such as changing a habit, sharing a post, buying your product, supporting your cause, or donating. Inspiring content targets emotions, stirring up feelings of agitation, whether positive (excited, emboldened) or negative (angry, shocked). However, this type of content must be used carefully. Emotional content performs poorly if the reader perceives it to be overblown or insincere. Always strive to be realistic and authentic. When possible, first test your content on a smaller audience before scaling up the reach of your articles or posts.

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, and write just like you would speak.

You wouldn’t waste time on 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 and how it could benefit them in particular. The number one reason people share content online is because they feel it will improve the lives of others. As digital evangelists, our goal should be to create sharable content, and the Church should be the leader in creating content that benefits the lives of others.

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

The great part of writing targeted online content is that, as long as you’re clear about your topic, your demographic will *already be interested in what you’re writing about!* After all, they have searched for content similar to yours and decided your page is worth visiting.

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*. Ask yourself: what will the reader get from my content that they can't get from someone else?

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

Think about that conversation with a friend. Have you ever been in a conversation where your counterpart struggled to get to the point?

They're over-explaining the peripheral details, giving too many examples or metaphors, or trying to come up with language that softens the blow of an edgy idea or uncomfortable topic instead of outright saying what they mean.

You'd quickly realize how much time is being wasted and you'll wish you had asked someone else to begin with!

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 by 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 and without being manipulative or sensational.

4) Move your reader to action.

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

Sometimes, when we think of advertising copy or sales copy, we think about those spammy e-mail subject lines that over-promise and over-guarantee, or we cringe at clickbait headlines for

videos or blog posts. Then there are those overzealous sales letters that come in the mail to try to get you to subscribe to magazines or buy retirement plans.

Well, if 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/core values 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?

When we're personally invested in the subject of our writing, we can get lost in the details. Remember that 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, and soda."

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, it lowers 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.

Now if we frame this in the context of ministry, your product is your message, which may be hope, wholeness, health, lifestyle, truth that answers their deepest longing, answers to their physical/spiritual needs, sound advice, and more.

Calls-to-action (CTA)

Once you've "sold" the product by connecting with your readers' needs, it's time to tell them to buy it! In the context of ministry, this may mean subscribing to your newsletter, registering for a seminar or health clinic, coming to an event, or joining a small group dedicated to a particular topic.

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. It doesn't have to be overly clever or cute; it just needs to make sense. Here are the most common calls to action that appear online:

- Order now!
- Download here.
- Watch this video.
- Join today!
- Donate to [insert organization name] & get a free travel mug!
- Listen now!
- Register now and get a free [insert item]!
- 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) Tell stories.

If these principles of writing for digital environments sound rather formulaic, that's because they are. Effective writing is both a science and an art. Yes, wordsmithing is a creative process, but copywriting is a science backed by research. These elements of copywriting have been market-tested and are proven to work.

However, a great way to add creativity to the elements of this formula is through storytelling. People can't help but be interested in stories. As humans, 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 a specific problem. Maybe they tried several things until finally discovering what really worked.

Where can you find real stories? As a ministry, you might already have them. Think of the people you've served. Think of the events you've held. Think of the testimonies they have shared with you. How does their journey reflect a common need within your audience?

Going deeper, what analogies or metaphors can you draw from what you do? Can it be related to everyday life concerns? How does your ministry offer practical solutions?

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

6) Know the difference between content writing and 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 elements of writing overlap and work together, and both occupy vital roles in the digital marketing process.

There are many increasingly 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, persuading them to stick around and eventually take action.

Learn more about copywriting for SEO:

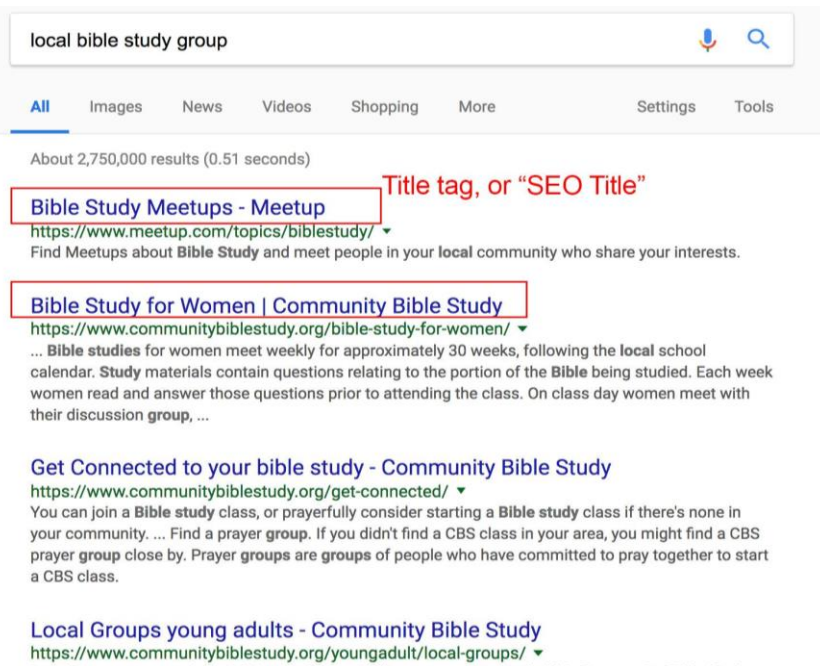
- [Free Copywriting Worksheets!](#) (Copyhackers)
- [The Ultimate Guide to No-Pain Copywriting](#) (Copyhackers)
- [How to Write for Social Media, A Comprehensive Guide](#) (Digital Evangelism, North American Division)
- [Is Your Website Content Written Conversationally?](#) (Digital Evangelism, North American Division)
- [A Simple Guide for Content Creation That Drives Traffic](#) (Scripted)
- [How to Create Amazing Articles Even If You Suck at Writing](#) (Neil Patel)
- [How Are Your Readers Reading?](#) (Center for Online Evangelism/Anne Wylie)
- [Why Your Readers Aren't Reading, and How to Get Them To](#) (Center for Online Evangelism)
- [Stock Your Writer's Toolkit for 2018](#) (Center for Online Evangelism)
- [Steal These Insider Secrets to Get Your Content Noticed](#) (Center for Online Evangelism)
- [10 Common Online Copywriting Mistakes](#) (eConsultancy)
- [10 Copywriting Tips You Think You Know](#) (Conversion Sciences)
- [SEO Clickbait: How to Write Headlines Everyone Loves](#) (Neil Patel)
- [595 Power Words That Will Instantly Make You a Better Writer](#) (Jon Morrow)
- [4 Reasons People Stop Reading Before the End of a Page](#) (Copyblogger/Nick Usborne)
- [The 35 Headline Formulas of John Caples](#) (Lars Lofgren)
- [6 Ways Writers Can Master SEO Best Practices in 2018](#) (Forbes)

7) Consider 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 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.

Editing your page title in HTML code 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.

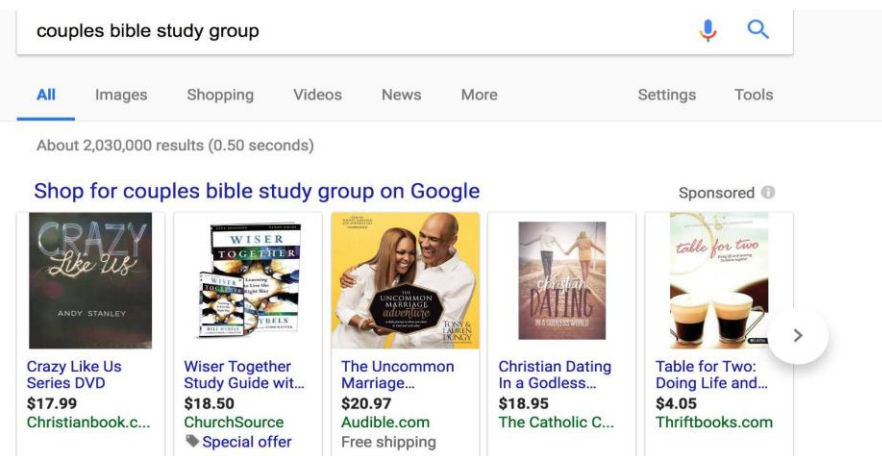
NOTE: If you already have significant traffic coming to your page with your current page title, even if it's not optimized for the intended keyword, you might want to check your analytics before changing it. If visitors that come in through that page are staying on your site and clicking, downloading, buying, etc., you may want to consider keeping it the same, 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 approximately 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.

Your meta description can be as long 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 [raised the number](#) of permitted characters as of December 2017. It was changed again in the spring of 2018, then later adjusted to the current recommendation of 200 characters. In light of this apparent state of flux, aim to keep meta tags as short as possible while including the necessary information.



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 meta description.

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 will note redundant meta descriptions as an SEO error.

H1 Tags / Headers / Headings

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

Include some keywords in your headers, pinpoint a benefit your content offers, and give brief hints at what the content covers.

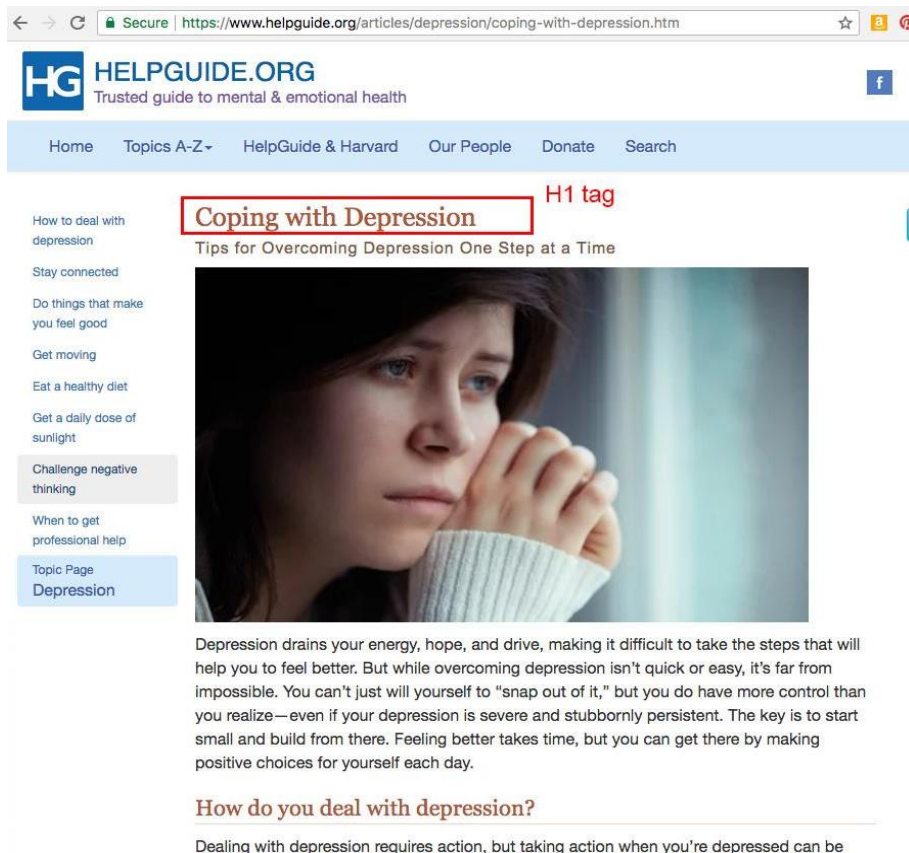
For example:

“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 the example below, “Coping with Depression” is the H1 tag, demonstrating how a keyword should be 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.

A screenshot of the HelpGuide.org website. The browser address bar shows the URL https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/coping-with-depression.htm. The website header includes the HG logo, the text 'HELPGUIDE.ORG', and the tagline 'Trusted guide to mental & emotional health'. A navigation bar contains links for Home, Topics A-Z, HelpGuide & Harvard, Our People, Donate, and Search. On the left sidebar, there are several links: '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 large image of a woman looking thoughtful is displayed. Below the image, the text reads: '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 this text is a subhead 'How do you deal with depression?' and a paragraph starting with '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 HTML code, or by selecting “Headline” or “H1” or a similar option from your content management platform in the “Style” section.

This will typically make the text larger and bolded, or 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 skimmable, content managers 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 enhance readability.

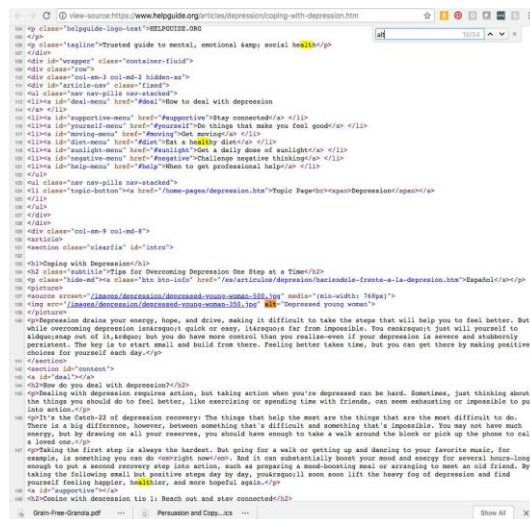
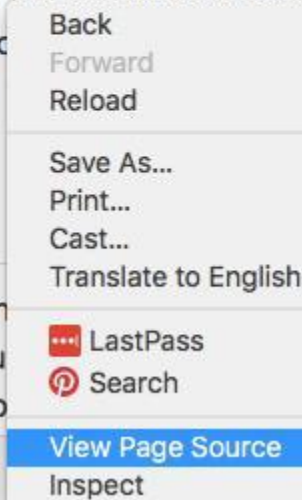
If you can't get into your content management platform at the moment and want to check how a certain paragraph is designated, right click on the page and select "View Page Source" to view the HTML code. You can also highlight the area, right click, and select "Inspect."



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 contr
severe and stubbo
ter takes time, but

ssion?

, but taking action
re things you shou
exhausting or impo



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 understand the content of the image, Google relies on ALT tags to determine what the picture is and how well it relates to the topic of the page, which impacts your ranking.

Additionally, ALT tags 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, construct a two-to-three-word description of the image and include a relevant 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; projecting voice for sermons.”

Don't make it too long, and make sure not to “keyword stuff” the ALT tag, an old [“black-hat”](#) SEO practice that Google will not favor and possibly penalize. 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 instant quick or easy, it's never far from impossible. You can't expect just will 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, enticing direct seekers to click on your site as they comb through search results to find relevant information.

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 combination of “what,” “why,” and “how” by introducing the topic and foreshadowing what the content will offer seekers or how it will help them.
- **ALT text** helps Google know that images relate to the subject matter, indicating a more complete page, AND also helps visually impaired people understand what your page is about and what the images are, as they can be read by screen readers.

8) Know how to use 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, and events 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.

It is more frustrating to go to a website with out-of-date information than to go to a website with no time sensitive information at all. 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 regardless of when they read it.

For general website copy, this include:

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

Special care should be taken when creating this copy so it will stay relevant for as long as possible with minimal upkeep.

When it comes to content marketing such as publishing content regularly on a blog, social media, email, etc., you must churn out new, helpful content to stay fresh and up-to-date. However, that doesn't mean that each piece of content must be time-sensitive. You can cultivate them to be evergreen as well as timely.

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, they can link back to the an evergreen blog post that covers a topic thoroughly and that you periodically update as information changes.

To help your posts, pages, and articles stay evergreen in SERPs (search engine results pages), 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, removing the date altogether 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 with the date of the service (i.e., "Teaching Your Kids to Pray" vs. "Sermon 4-25-17 on Prayer"). Note that you can still show the date in the subtitle or descriptions, as members often search by date, but the title should be presented like a headline.

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

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** ("Joe Smith, Pathfinder Leader for 40 Years, 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 for creating evergreen content:

- [Tips for Improving Your Church's Digital Curb Appeal](#) (Digital Evangelism, North American Division)
- [Qualities of a Good Website](#) (Digital Evangelism, North American Division)
- [Evergreen Livestreams: 4 Ways to Turn Livestreams into Great Video Content](#) (Digital Evangelism, North American Division)
- [How to Research and Create Evergreen Content](#) (BuzzSumo)
- [9 Evergreen Content Formats for Long-term Success](#) (Content Marketing Institute)
- [How to Plan and Create Evergreen Content for SEO](#) (SearchEngineWatch)

9) Find ways of repurposing content.

We've covered the different types 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 *and* when it comes to repurposing content. Instead of creating a different piece of content for each platform you publish to, you can repurpose one core content piece to work across a variety of channels. How can you make one blog post explode into ten different pieces of shareable content?

Take this short article for example:

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

- 1) **Publish blog post on your website:** "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** (emails sent automatically to a mailing list based on specific rules/or subscriber behavior at defined intervals) that focuses even more in-depth on each of the five sandwich slicing methods.
- 6) Host a **webinar** about the five 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 five 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 third slicing method that your virtual protégés are having a tough time with.

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

Furthermore, the same topic repurposed into ten different forms (example above) can create a bigger splash as it makes its online debut. This strategy creates 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.

Using Map & Directory Listings to Improve Local SEO— a MUST for Churches, Schools, and Brick-and-Mortar Ministries



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

Effective “local SEO” helps people find you geographically *when they search for you or your services*. Google [reports](#) that more than one-third of mobile searches are “local-related.” The first step in spearheading local SEO is to verify and optimize your online map and directory listings.

Today, most people find businesses by typing keywords or search terms into mobile map applications. Others might do this on their desktop computers at work or 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 “Thai food,” “gas station,” or “Adventist church.”

This map data also shows up in Google’s search results when someone searches for a location-specific business. For example, if someone types in “church in Springfield,” the map data will show up to the right of the search results, or above the results on a mobile screen. Map data is highly regarded by both Google and its users. This is an essential part of search engine visibility and ranking for your organization.

What are map listings?

You probably already use Apple maps, Google Maps, MapQuest, or other map apps to determine your location and direct you to relevant listings close to you. It’s how we find hair salons, grocery stores, the highest-rated vegan 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 are the most relevant.

[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, or ministry 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 from public information sources).

Academy is a Seventh-day
Adventist co-educational high school
located at Fourth and
is located midway between
25 miles south of
[Wikipedia](#)
Address: 39 Rd,
Phone: 6
[Suggest an edit](#) · [Own this business?](#)

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

Search results for "victoria adventist church" (About 392,000 results (0.62 seconds)).

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 ...

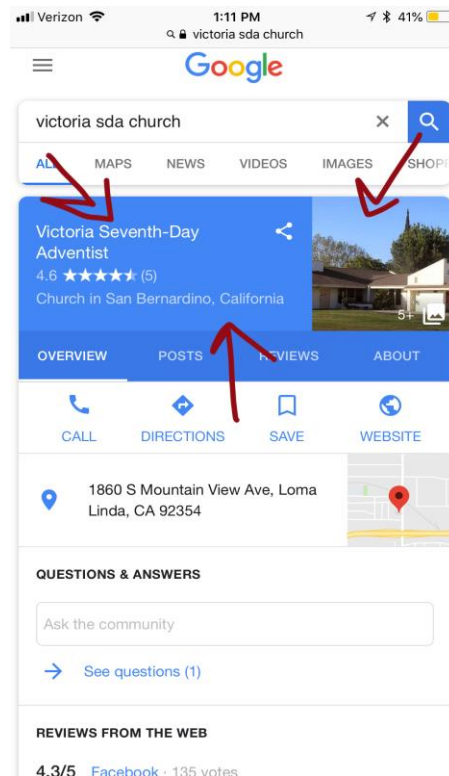
Victoria Seventh Day Adventist® Church Victoria BC: Home
<https://www.churchinvictoria.org/>
Victoria SDA Church, a Seventh-day Adventist church in Victoria, BC. Looking for a church to join? Visit your local Seventh-day Adventist church in Victoria, BC and see how you and your family fit in to the Christian 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 Kossovian. Phone: 250-383-1510. Email: info@vicsda.ca. Website: www.churchinvictoria.org. Maps: Google (Español) (Português) (Français) (Lat/Lon) - Bing - Yahoo (Maps may not show correct location).

Victoria Seventh-Day Adventist ★
4.6 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 5 Google reviews
Church in San Bernardino, California
[Website](#) [Directions](#)
Address: 1860 S Mountain View Ave, Loma Linda, CA 92354
Phone: (909) 796-7869
[Suggest an edit](#)
Know this place? [Answer quick questions](#)
Questions & answers
[See all questions \(1\)](#) [Ask a question](#)
Reviews from the web
4.3/5 [Facebook](#) · 135 votes

Desktop view: Listing to the right of search results



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.

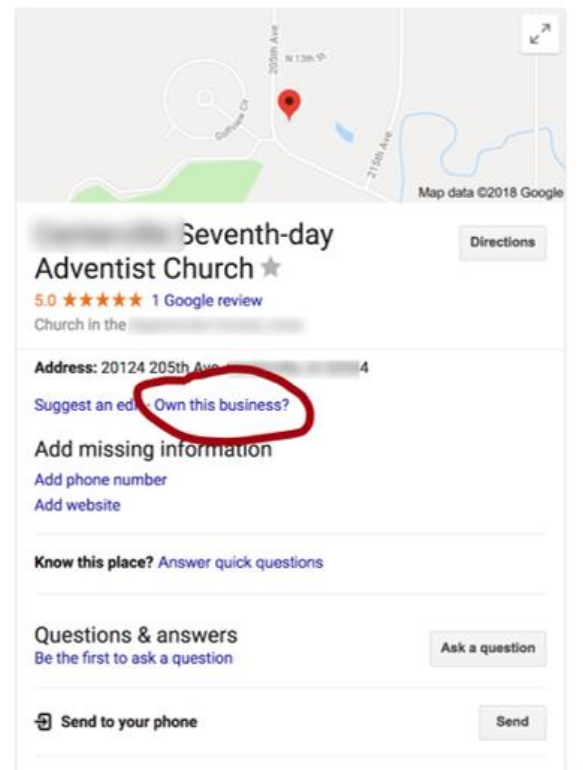
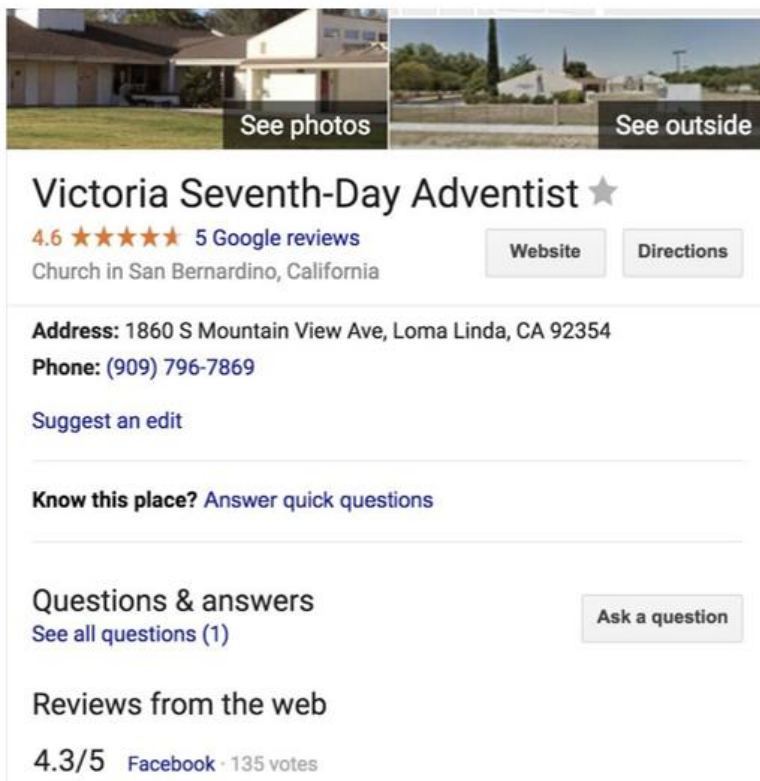
Note: If you find duplicate listings for your organization, there are more steps you'll need to complete, and the process may become complicated. Before making any changes, you'll need to determine which one is the original. Find out more [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

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 claim your organization before someone else, such as an imposter, does.



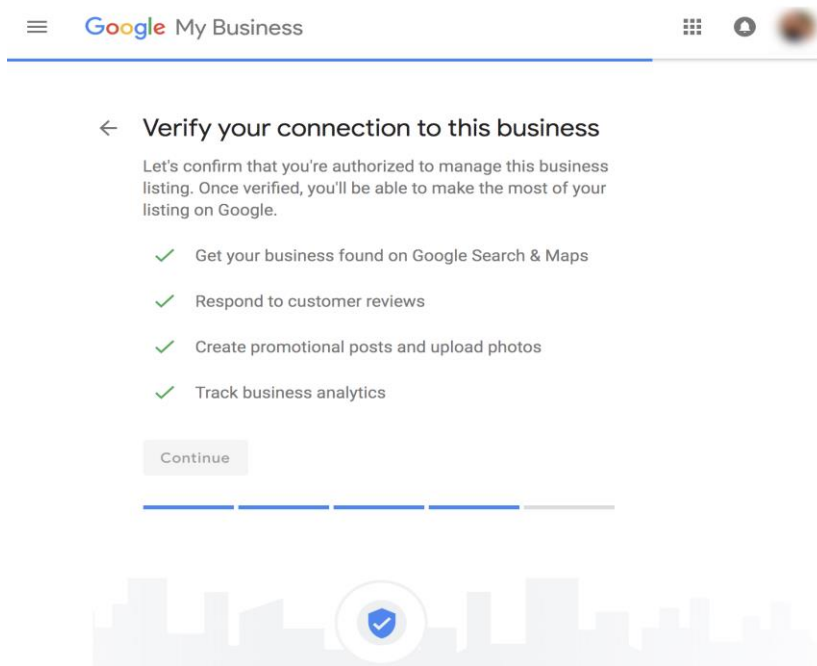
How do I claim or create my organization's Google map listing?

Whether you're claiming a listing or creating a new one, you'll use "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 taking the following steps.*

1. To **claim** an existing 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, 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?** Pay attention to this 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 choose a category that best matches the services you offer, such as “church,” “educational institution,” “service-based ministry,” “administrative office,” etc. Select the best-matching category from the drop-down list.
- c. **Information.** It’s important to list the **phone number** for your organization that you want the public to know and use. Make sure this same phone number is consistently displayed throughout your web presence (website, social media, directory listings such as Yelp or YP.com, etc.).

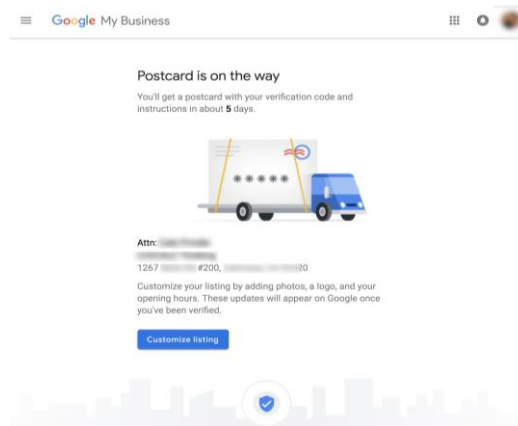
For your **website**, enter the URL to the home page of your organization’s website—not a parent organization. If you work at one location of a larger entity, use the website specific to the “franchise” for which you are setting up the listing.



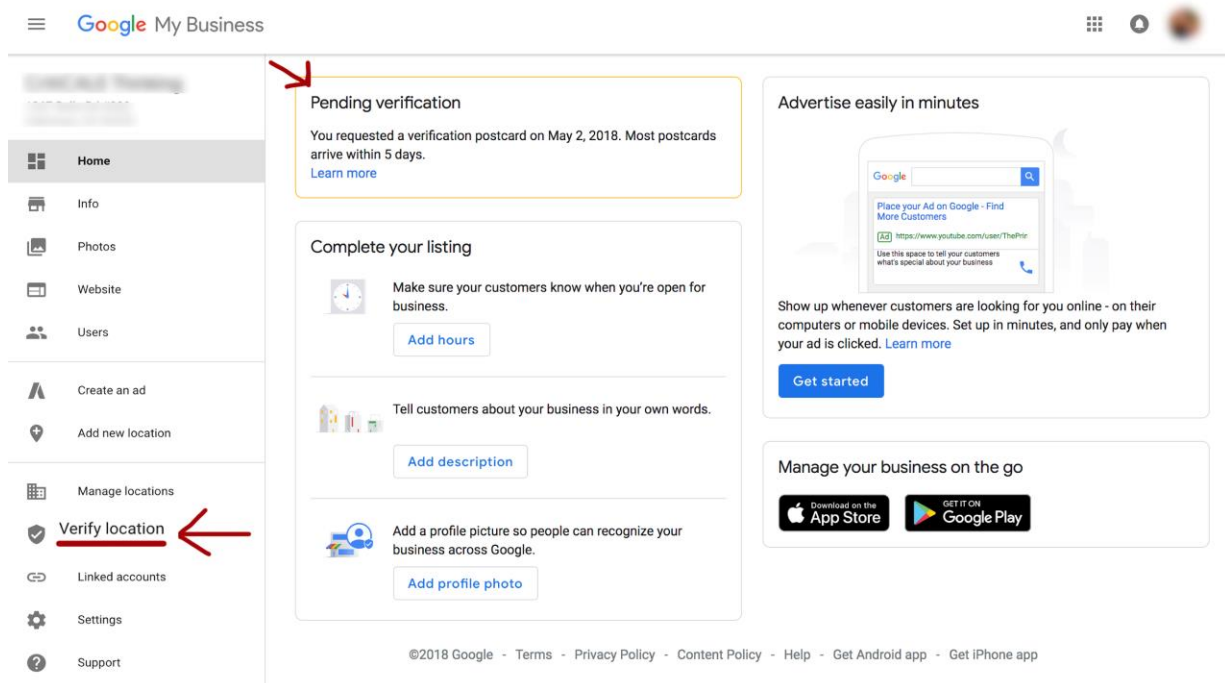
- d. **Verify your connection to this business.** Google wants to ensure accuracy by sending you a code via the phone number or address you entered. This is how Google confirms that each of its listings contain legitimate information, keeping fake listings, imposters, and advertisers at bay.

Note: Google does offer 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 are:

- i. Issues with a proper mail receptacle at your address
- ii. The phone number is not currently monitored. Wait to verify during office hours, or when someone can be present by the phone. It takes less than a minute for the call to come in after submitting the request to verify.



- e. The recommended method of verification is to request a **postcard** be sent to your organization's address with a **code enclosed**. When you receive that postcard, you'll need to enter the code in your Google My Business account.
 - i. Alternately, you can also choose to verify your business via phone call or text.
 - ii. You'll see the **"Pending verification"** box at the top of your dashboard screen until your account is verified.
- f. Upon receiving the code (postcard, call, text), you'll go back to business.google.com and log in to your dashboard. Click on **"Verify Location"** in the left menu column and a screen where you can enter the code will appear.



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 occasionally unavoidable, Google uses this information to display **“Open Now”** or **“Closed”** or **“Opens tomorrow at 9 a.m.”** when someone comes across your featured box listing in search results. They’re likely to see that piece of information before reading about your business. It’s also wise to list holiday hours (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 day-to-day. When people come across your listing, they may ask: “What’s in it for me?”, or “Why should I care?” or “Why should I go here instead of X?” You can preemptively answer their questions in your description content, encouraging them to visit you instead of another organization!
 - c. For a **profile picture**, it is usually best to use your organization’s logo. However, if your organization is based on an individual figurehead, the picture can be of that person. Remember you also have a “cover image” to use, which is larger, as well as spots for additional photos to help showcase the environment, culture, and experience that a visitor can expect at your organization.
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, and on websites of sister or parent organizations. You’ll enter this information in the **“Info”** section from your Google My Business dashboard’s left menu column.
 - a. Since your Google My Business map listing is a directory entry linked to a heavily-used search engine, you want this listing to be the standard for NAP information. **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 set up this function within the **Messaging** section in the left menu of the dashboard. This is especially popular with mobile search users.

There is so much more you can do with Google My Business, but this foundation of information will provide a strong starting point for your local search engine optimization.

Apple Maps, Bing, MapQuest, and others

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.

- **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/>
- **Bing Places** is also similar to Google My Business, and you can get started at <https://www.bingplaces.com/>. Alexa queries commonly refer to information from Bing searches.
- Yes, there are still **MapQuest** users out there! Learn more about setting up your listing: <https://business.mapquest.com/products/business-listing/>.
- You don't have to stop here. There are countless directory sites that can be valuable to your organization. Some are niche demographic directories, sorting results based 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, and find answers to commonly asked questions. You can also [contact us directly](#) with your local SEO questions!

How can online directory listings boost my search visibility?

Directory listings, or citations, are external websites dedicated to compiling directory information, that 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 when someone searches for your organization, 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 specifically 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

- [Google My Business](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Apple Maps](#) (iPhone maps)
- [Bingplaces.com](#)
- [Foursquare.com](#)
- [Mapquest.com](#)
- [Yelp.com](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Yellowpages.com](#)
- [Yellowbook.com](#)
- [Superpages.com](#)
- [Manta.com](#) allows you to set up a free listing but also has a paid option that helps you manage and optimize your listing. The paid option also lets you manage *all* your directory listings, connecting you to hundreds of directory sites.

School Directories

Note: *you may have to contact your school's administrator to make any changes.*

- [Niche](#)
- [Great Schools](#) Note: other education-related directory sites can pull information from your Great Schools listing.
- [Private School Review](#)
- [Adventist Education](#)
- [Adventist Directories](#)

Church Directories

Note: *you may have to contact the church pastor, secretary, or webmaster to make any changes.*

- [Adventist Directories](#)
- [eAdventist.org](#)
- [Adventist Yearbook](#)

Optimizing your directory listings

TO DO FIRST: Google your organization, looking through the first few pages of search results. Are you already listed on some of the directories we've described already? 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 (just like Google maps):

1. Your organization's NAP (Name, Address, Phone Number) 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 that include reviews

Many directory sites also offer the opportunity for users to review your organization. While that can sound scary, remember that even if you don't claim your directory listings, people can still review you—and you won't be able to respond to those reviews or directly manage your reputation until you claim your organization's listing.

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 listing improve your visibility in search engine results, 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, and 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. **Be sure to check your page frequently and respond to as many reviews as you can, both positive and negative.**

WARNING: NEVER ask for reviews! To maintain a review platform where customers are in control, [Yelp is adamant](#) that if they [detect](#) any details that make a review seem solicited (or even encouraged), they can remove the review or make your organization rank lower in their search algorithm.

How to respond to negative (and positive!) Yelp reviews

There's always the chance of receiving 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 can actually *improve* your public 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 there's opportunity, make it right with the person (refund their money, talk to them over the phone, offer them a free gift, etc.) 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—arguing 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. If it feels right, invite them to return.
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

reviewer's 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. Others can see your public offer, which positions your organization as one that truly cares about those it serves.

Additionally, if a review is poorly written or includes name-calling, many 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?

One simple way to encourage positive reviews is to let your audience know that *you are on Yelp*. You may have seen businesses with posters on their windows that simply 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, especially if you list some of your favorite reviews on your website next to the icons.

For more information about navigating and responding to reviews, download our "[Response Assessment Infographic](#)," or visit "[How to Respond to Negative \(and Positive!\) Online Reviews](#)."

For more information on maximizing your Yelp potential, check out these articles from Yelp.com:

- [Responding to Negative Yelp Reviews](#)
- [Yelp Cracks Down on Review Solicitation](#)
- [Yelp's Guidelines for Responding to Reviews](#)

Learn more about maximizing your local SEO efforts:

- [“Top 50 Local Citation Sites for USA, UK, Canada & Australia”](#) (BrightLocal)
- [“How to Create Content to Support Local SEO and Rock the Rankings”](#) (SearchEngineLand)
- [“How to Optimize Google My Business and Leverage it for More Sales”](#) (Neil Patel)
- [“Best Local SEO Tools & Software”](#) (LocalSEOGuide)
- [“Local SEO: The Ultimate Guide to Ranking Your Business”](#) (The Hoth)
- [“A Complete Local SEO Checklist”](#) (SearchEngineJournal)
- [“How to Get Started with Local SEO”](#) (SearchEngineWatch)
- [“Optimize Your Nonprofit Organization’s Yelp Page”](#) (Center for Online Evangelism)

Offsite SEO—Optimizing Your Entire Web Presence (Backlinking)



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
- News articles about the organization
- One or more online directory listings, such as Yelp, YellowPages.com, etc.
- The organization's YouTube channel
- And more...

Appearing in several search listings means that an organization has a prominent web presence. In other words, the organization's brand exists beyond the confines of its own official website and material.

To maintain a credible, influential online presence, it pays to expand your SEO strategy beyond your own website.

Any link to your website from a page, file, site, profile, social media account, etc., that is not part of your website itself, is referred to as a **backlink**.

When backlinks are legitimate, Google regards them as evidence of your influence and credibility, which ultimately benefits your ranking in search engine results, making your organization much easier to find. However, in the recent past, creating a bunch of spammy backlinks was a common "black-hat" SEO trick that organizations used to improve their SEO. Then Google refined its algorithms to better interpret natural language and develop a clearer understanding of search behavior, effectively shutting down these fake backlinks.

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.

Be warned, fake backlinks will now get your website penalized in search results. This means seekers will have a harder time finding you. *If your organization has made this mistake, specific work must be done to remedy the situation.* 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 must be considered useful enough and respected enough for another website to link back to your site.

You'll notice that this SEO guide is full of backlinks to websites and articles we feel are worthwhile in your pursuit of this knowledge. To earn these backlinks, those businesses continually created high-quality content and presented it in a way that we feel is helpful or relevant to our target audience: you, the reader.

Backlinking is a prolific topic within the SEO community forums and blogs, but we recommend saving it as one of the final considerations in your SEO strategy. If you're focused on building quality content, adhering to SEO best practices, and developing a digital strategy for content distribution, you should end up earning backlinks organically over time. Therefore, it wouldn't need to be an early item on your SEO to-do list.

That being said, here are some off-site strategies you can use to bolster your backlinks through various brand-building best practices. Consistent activity, conversation, and promotion of quality content can pay off in a big way.

Off-Site Touch Points:

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 engagement is high, Google is more likely to take notice.](#)

NOTE: Even if you don't foresee much activity happening with certain demographics native to particular platforms, it's a good idea to set up an official account (reserve your handle) on major social channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. This way, no one can create a profile using your organization's name and brand, and cause confusion among your audience.

One way to set up an evergreen social media account requiring little 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 needed to be mentioned separately from other social media platforms. As the popularity of Pinterest continues to grow, 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, Bible verses, healthy recipes, crafts, church holiday decor, youth events, and more could be very popular on Pinterest boards.

[Learn more about creating “pinnable” content.](#)

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 on local SEO set up.](#)

Review sites

Similarly, review sites such as Yelp can show up as search results listings, so you’ll want to carefully manage your accounts and reputation. Refer back to [section VIII on local SEO](#) for advice on filling out your profile as well as responding to both positive and negative reviews.

External Publishings

Google no longer puts much weight on guest posts or publishing articles in online magazines. However, this type of backlinking can still be great for brand-building and establishing E-A-T (Expertise, Authority, Trustworthiness). In the long run, these efforts do support your SEO progress.

An illustration on a solid blue background. On the left is a large computer monitor with a dark grey bezel. The screen is white and features a blue icon of a magnifying glass with a sunburst effect, positioned over a small blue bar chart. Below the monitor is a stylized keyboard with blue and grey keys. To the right of the monitor is a tablet or smaller screen, also with a dark grey bezel. It displays a blue bar chart at the top and a list of items below, each represented by a blue dot followed by two horizontal grey lines.

Keep Up SEO Efforts so Your Hard Work Doesn't Go to Waste.

Since Google considers performance over time an indicator of your website's quality, inconsistent SEO efforts can hinder your long-term results.

What's more, the internet itself is an [ever-evolving](#), [always-competing](#), market-driven medium that must regularly reinvent itself. In order to have a successful search engine optimization strategy, your organization must plan to adapt its methods with changing technologies.

Here are some tips for 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 or mission, 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?
- Closely monitor and maintain your Google Analytics! If you see a sudden drop off in organic search traffic, this is a strong indication that your organization needs to adapt to changes in Google's algorithm. Often companies don't realize there has been an important change until fluctuations in website traffic are revealed in their analytics data.
- Keep up with respected SEO resources and focus your attention on articles written in the last six months. These means being intentional about carving out time for regular research and self-education.
- Keep up with this guide! This is a "living document," and we will update this SEO guide as needed. Pay close attention to the version numbers.

Before Diving In—Beware! 9 SEO Myths That Refuse to Die

KNOW THE
FACTS

Before going full throttle on SEO implementation, it's important to set expectations and develop a clear understanding of what is needed. To be successful, you must approach SEO strategically and be very intentional about developing a long-term plan to maintain best practices.

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 how Google continually seeks to improve its process *based on* people's changing behavior. What worked yesterday may not work next month.

What's more, businesses tried to cheat the system and developed many SEO techniques now considered "black hat." **These practices are now heavily frowned upon *and* will get your site penalized by Google, causing your ranking to plummet which can be challenging and expensive to recover from.** Unfortunately, these "black hat" techniques still circulate online, and are often advertised as tips and strategies. It's important to know what these techniques are to avoid being misled.

To safeguard your SEO efforts for your organization, we've compiled the top 9 SEO myths that persist today, and what you should do instead.

Myth #1: "Get a sweet SEO setup, then relax and enjoy great traffic and engagement."

SEO work is [never done](#). Just as a business requires ongoing management in order to adapt to market changes, to implement customer feedback, or to update technologies to stay competitive, SEO is an continually evolving process. While setting up a strong SEO foundation is essential, know that investing a lot of time and/or money in this area doesn't mean you can set it and forget it.

As part of your overall SEO grand strategy, include a plan for ongoing SEO that will enable your organization to constantly grow, adapt, measure, learn, and grow some more.

Myth #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 guarantee a high ranking—fast. Lofty promises in a short time are a major red flag. No one, not even Google, can guarantee rankings.

Also, ranking for what? For which keywords? And which specific page of your website? Beware of vague qualifiers.

There are numerous factors involved in search engine ranking. If your organization is in a competitive niche, it can take years of consistent work to rank on page one of Google search results. A solid SEO strategy takes time and patience.

SEO is a long game, but it's worth it because of the potential for eternal good. Knowing that millions of people are actively searching for spiritual answers online, yet *not* being led to Adventist websites and resources, how can we pass up this incredible opportunity?

Like any marketing approach, search engine optimization requires a long-term, flexible strategy that allows for measuring, testing, and adapting over time. Throughout this process, your organization can grow in authority and engagement, maintain relevance, and reach more people every day.

If you do receive a solicitation offering vague and unrealistic SEO results, we recommend politely declining. No one from Google will call your organization, and no one can promise specific 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.

Myth #3: "SEO is for the IT department. Let them handle it."

The internet is a media channel, just like radio or TV. However, this medium has surpassed all others in popularity, accessibility, and potential for outreach and mission work. A marketing and ministerial approach is needed to tap into its potential, not necessarily technical knowledge.

The foundation for effective online outreach follows the principles of advertising and marketing, but through a ministerial lens. Implementation of inspiring online content requires careful study of what works and doesn't work and research to understand the needs of the consumer (or to the seeker). For an organization to use the internet for content marketing and outreach, you'll need someone willing to spearhead corporate digital marketing and content creation with the goal of ministry. An IT department's goal is to ensure that an organization's computers and network are functioning efficiently, so the organization can accomplish its mission. Since many church organizations requires employees to wear many hats, it is very possible that the SEO strategy duties could fall to an IT employee, but it requires an additional set of communication and marketing skills than might be needed in traditional IT professional roles. Investment in a dedicated digital marketing strategist is wonderful, but in cases where personnel are called to do double (or triple!) duty, make sure they are empowered, encouraged, and equipped to prioritize SEO strategy.

While some organizations do have web developers categorized as IT, SEO also extends well beyond web development. Developers typically take their SEO cues from the content strategists and SEO specialists.

While this is a new “department” for our ministries to factor in, the outreach potential makes it necessary as the Church begins to prioritize technology for the gospel. Combining up-to-date marketing strategies and professionals with forward-thinking, media-savvy pastors and evangelists would magnifying our impact exponentially.

Myth #4: “Don’t worry about all the technical SEO stuff. Just create good content.”

Creating good content is a must, but without intentional promotion or a strong SEO foundation, that good content and the effort it takes to create 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 slight adjustments to coding or plugins that can make a significant difference to rankings, as well as fix undetected website errors that may be harming Google’s ability to crawl your site. These adjustments do require some technical knowledge to address, but the information and instructions you need can often be a mere Google search away.

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. If your organization doesn’t have the budget for an SEO specialist, then it’s even more important to dedicate time to research and self-education in order to stay up to date on your SEO management.

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. So if you can’t hire a company or specialists, develop a team internally that can focus on different SEO needs.

Myth #5: “It’s all about using lots of keywords that get traffic.”

Since keyword research is so foundational when developing an SEO strategy, some less-experienced businesses or individuals think they can make shortcuts by using repeated words. As mentioned before, “keyword stuffing” is now considered “black hat” SEO that attempts to cheat the system. Google will not prioritize keyword-stuffed content in its rankings, and your site may even get penalized, causing it to not show up in search results at all.

However, including keywords in natural moderation is still a valuable practice. 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.

Myth #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 on the market, but if it’s not optimized to be found in searches, who’s going to see it? Unfortunately, this “if you build it, they will come” mentality has greatly limited our ability to get our messages of hope and wholeness in front of the very people seeking it online.

Displaying your website on your signage, print materials, and emails is an important part of a comprehensive communications and branding strategy. However, this practice will usually not result in traffic to your website beyond those who are already connected with your organization. In other words, your audience will not grow without an SEO strategy. Being strategic allows you to reach a variety of new target audiences who find your content relevant to their needs, interests, core values, and desires. It can even allow you to grow your volunteer and donor base. Simply put, SEO strategies allow you to share your website and message with the world. As entities of the Church, this is our great commission.

Myth #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 don’t let that intimidate you. A strong foundation that follows best practices allows your organization to weather these changes and adapt more gradually. Organizations that monitor alternations daily are typically trying to game the system with shortcuts or downright “black hat” SEO techniques.

Google uses the daily influx of data it receives to update its methods and deepen its understanding of how people use its 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. Think less foundational, more behavioral.

Myth #8: “We just need lots of clicks. Lots of traffic. The rest will fall into place.”

Even if thousands of people click on your website from search results, Google pays close attention to how long they stay on your website. If they’re clicking the back button in the first few seconds they land on your page, that tells Google that your content was not relevant for that search query—you were not what they were looking for.

[The focus is not just getting traffic](#) but getting the *right kind* of traffic—people who are actually interested in your content already. Those people who are asking the questions your website is answering.

This is 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. People respond better to high-quality, relevant content instead of sensationalist headlines with keyword-stuffed content.

Myth #9: "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.

1. **"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.
2. **"How do you measure success?"**
3. **"Tell me about your past projects. What have you been able to accomplish for your clients?"**
4. **"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 can't afford high-quality SEO professionals.
5. **"How will you be demonstrating your monthly progress?"**
6. **"What are some 'easy wins' you see for our organization right now?"**
7. **"Tell us what kind of ROI we can expect."**
8. **"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 their answers to these questions.