On-page SEO

Getting Started:

Step One: Set up Google Analytics if it's not already in place

Step Two: Do keyword research
      1. Define a theme for each page
      2. Come up with keywords for each page: Include a variety of long, medium, and short tailed keywords and phrases

Notes:
Strive for some competitive keywords, but also make sure some are not too competitive (long tail), specific, with a goal of converting

Resources:
- Google AdWords Keyword Tool
- Wordstream
- Keyword Spy
- Ubersuggest
- MOZ keyword rank tracker difficulty tool

Step Three: Copywriting
It helps to add new content at the time of optimization.

Tips:
1. Incorporate approximately 2-4 keywords per page
2. Read your text out loud - look for overuse/underuse of keywords
3. Make sure you have plenty of calls to action
4. Write compelling text, particularly the headline
5. Focus on benefits, particularly emotional benefits for user
6. Highlight deciding factors: Price, credibility, quality, etc.

Step Four: Load content onto site

Step Five: On page optimization
1. Check for Duplicate Content. Create an action plan to eliminate any that exists. This includes duplicate Meta tags.
2. Interlink body content. Use a keyword as the anchor text and link to a relevant page. Strive to have no more than 1 link per paragraph.
3. Check to see if code is clean: Make sure all Java is in an external .js file
4. Add Header tags (H1, H2, H3). Make sure you are utilizing these and they are keyword rich and compelling.

5. Title Tags: 70 characters or less- important to be keyword rich, but avoid keyword stuffing - you can be penalized for over-optimization. Tag should be in sentence format.
6. Meta description: 160 characters or less including spaces, make it compelling and use keywords. It should be in sentence format.
7. Bold 1 instance of a keyword phrase per paragraph.
8. Optimize Images
   a. Name images with keywords when possible
   b. Write a short sentence using a keyword in the ALT tags.
9. Run Crawl Diagnostics in Moz or Raven (or other such tool) and fix issues.
10. Check if you have a Canonicalization issue. The quickest way to check is to find a tool that will tell you. You can also manually check by going to the Google search box and putting in site:www.url.com and noting how many pages are in the index. Then put in site:http://url.com and see how many pages that returns. If the two numbers are different, then you have a canonicalization issue. If you do have an issue, depending on your server type you can fix this by altering your HTACCESS file or by using rel=canonical tags. Please note that just setting the desired version for your site (with or without www) in Google Webmaster Tools is not enough. You need to address this at the site level. If you do alter your HTACCESS file, be sure you know what you are doing or ask your host to help you. If you need the code for the HTACCESS file or need to know how to use rel=canonical tag, let me know and I can give instructions.
11. Run 404 error report and correct any issues (or you can wait and see what Google Webmaster Tools reports)
12. W3C Compliance (w3c.org): Run free report and decide whether to address issues.
13. Check load time on the site with an app/plugin or within Google Webmaster Tools.
14. Make sure you don't have too many outgoing links on any given page (this often happens on product pages). For example, if you have 50 products on page, reduce, and create more pages so external linking/content ratio is closer.
15. If you have taken a hit in traffic, look at the date and then check the Panda/Penguin document and see which one caused your hit. Create an action plan on how to recover (more on this in another document).
16. If relevant implement rich snippets/HTML markup/schema.org (more on this in another document).
17. If the content doesn't include various keywords that help establish the theme of the page, you will need to add more keyword rich content. Alternatively, if the page appears keyword stuffed, you will need to tone it down.
18. Make sure your navigation is not in Flash or java. Simple text based nav is best but image nav also works (you should repeat your nav in text format at the bottom of the page).

Step Five: Webmaster Tools
1. Create account and verify site
2. Add XML sitemap (Generate sitemap using http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/)

The User Experience

One of the factors that Google uses to determine if a site should rank well is time on the site/bounce rate and click-through-rate (CTR) from the SERPs (search engine results page). While some of that is

technically off-page, the work you do to correct the issues is on-page work, so I am putting it in this section.

If you increase the user's satisfaction, your bounce rate, time on the site and CTR from the SERPs should improve.

"… Google could see how **satisfied** users were. … The best sign of their happiness was the "long click" – this occurred when someone went to a search result, ideally the top one, and did not return." -Stephen Levy from his excellent book In the Plex.

This is called **pogosticking**, or **return-to-SERP**, and if you can reduce it by keeping satisfied visitors on your site (or at least not returning to Google to look for the answer somewhere else) you should see some positive impact on your rankings.

Analyze your data in Google Analytics to find out which pages have the highest exit rate and bounce rate and least time on the page. Look at improving those pages to get visitors to stick longer.

Videos

Videos are a great way to get exposure in the engines and engage visitors. Once you've created a video and loaded it to YouTube, you can embed it in your site. Then you can implement video snippets.

Video snippets generally require creating a [video XML sitemap](#) and adding [schema.org video markup](#).

Tip: Both schema.org and XML sitemaps allow you to define the video thumbnail that appears in search results. As the thumbnail highly influences clicks, choose wisely.

Mobile SEO

If your website isn't configured properly for smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices, it probably results in lower Google search results for mobile queries. Google confirms that smartphone errors may result in lower mobile rankings.

What is a smartphone error?

- Redirecting visitors to the wrong mobile URL
- Embedding a video that doesn't play on a particular phone (Flash video on an iPhone, for example)
- Pop-ups that aren't easily closed on mobile
- Buttons or fonts that are too small on a mobile device

Google recommends making your site responsive but even if you can't, a good mobile experience is imperative.

Updating your site with fresh content

Websites that never add new content or let their pages go stale can see a decrease in rankings and exposure.

Adding fresh content doesn't guarantee a rankings boost, but for certain types of queries it definitely helps. Google scores freshness in different ways, which may include:

- Inception date
- The amount (%) your content changes
- How often you update your content
- How many new pages you create over time
- Changes to important content (homepage text) vs. unimportant content (footer links)

Off Page Optimization

Local Listings

If your business has a physical address, add your site Google, Bing and Yahoo Maps/Places/Local. Claim the listing, verify it via phone or post card and then optimize the profile. The more reviews you can build, the better.

Check out any reputable and high quality industry directories and consider those.

Ensure you have a presence on:

- Yelp
- Foursquare
- Facebook
- Superpages
- Infogroup
- Localeze
- CitySearch
- Best Of the Web
- HotFrog
- eLocal

Links: Quality

Google is going to continue its trend of cracking down on links and getting more aggressive with penalties.

There is a lot you can do to encourage natural links without resorting to old school tactics that will get you in trouble.

Link building is going to become more networking oriented. You can always send out an email notifying your network about your new content, as long as the decision of whether to link or not is ultimately up to them.

Some things to consider when trying to attract links:

Diversity (meaning links from a variety of sources) is important. If all of your links are coming from your network or the same websites over and over, you could be in trouble. You need to be actively promoting your content, enough to grow a real audience. When you do this, link diversity tends to take care of itself.

For sites that already have a lot of low quality links out there (I would suggest an audit to find this out, especially if you've ever used a link building service), you have a difficult choice ahead of you if your site has not already been hit with a Penguin penalty. Do you engage in a link-cleaning program because you fear the future algorithm update may strike your site, or do you do nothing and wait?

I suggest attempting to remove the most egregious links and engaging in a wider campaign if more than 40% of your links are of low quality.

Even if you are not under a penalty, log your link cleanup efforts meticulously or use a service like rmoov.com. If you are hit with a manual penalty in the future, this log can help to demonstrate that you've already made efforts toward fixing things and may speed up the reconsideration process.

Anchor text can be a problem. If all the links to you contain the same anchor text, Google won't be happy. And the past will be held against you. Google shows little interest in grandfathering old links, so be certain to include anchor text as part of your link spam analysis.

Links: Paid

Do not purchase links in hopes of better rankings.

Social: Connections & Interactions

Social media is a ranking factor and one that will continue to become more important.

Social media metrics such as Facebook likes and shares or Twitter mentions and retweets have a high correlation with authority, which impacts high rankings.

Country & Locality

International and local optimization are important and have been for years now. There are plenty of ways to optimize for international/local results, for example: proper use of subdomains or country code top-level domains, tagging pages with language codes and registering geographic targets in Google Webmaster tools, as well as registering businesses in Google+ and Bing Places for Businesses. Do not ignore these. You should also geo-tag your site.

If you are getting links from sites related to the geographic locations you're targeting, your website is more likely to break into local rankings for those places.

Summary

At the end of the day, everything boils down to quality, authority and trust. As search engines find new ways to collect data and become better at evaluating the data they already have, it makes a lot of sense that the algorithm will shift to more difficult to measure signals that are more telling (like visitor location and author trust).

For the last three years, we have been seeing, thanks to Panda and Penguin, the search engines really enforce their policies and guidelines. Search engine optimization is no longer about technical tricks designed to outwit Google and Bing. It is about building an audience, earning trust, and publishing genuinely useful information that people want to consume.