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Anyone with a website! From generalist to specialist, from newbie to advanced, Search Console can help you. Here are some of the reasons why a Content Creator should use the Google Search Console.

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- **A business owner who delegates.** Even if you don't think you know how to use Search Console, you should be aware of it and become familiar with the basics. You might hire your webmaster or a marketing specialist to help you set up your website with Search Console. In that case, you can work with that person to ensure you have access and control to all of the reports for your website. In addition, it's a good idea to learn all you can about how your site is performing in search results so you can make important business decisions about your site.
- **SEO specialist or marketer.** As someone focused on online marketing, Search Console will help you monitor your website traffic, optimize your ranking, and make informed decisions about the appearance of your site's search results. You can use the information in the Search Console to influence technical decisions for the website and do sophisticated marketing analysis in conjunction with other Google tools like Analytics, Google Trends, and AdWords.

- **Site Administrator.** As a site admin, you care about the healthy operation of your site. Search Console lets you easily monitor and in some cases resolve server errors, site load issues, and security issues like hacking and malware. You can also use it to ensure any site maintenance or adjustments you make happen smoothly with respect to search performance.
- **Web Developer.** If you are creating the actual markup and/or code for your site, Search Console helps you monitor and resolve common issues with markup, such as errors in structured data.
- **App Developer.** If you own an app, you want to see how mobile users find your app using Google Search. Search Console can help you integrate your app seamlessly with the website world.

Google Search Console

1. Verify as site owner (when no other site owners exist). Follow Google's site verification process by acting as site owner e.g. uploading a HTML file to your site.
2. Ask a colleague to be added (when a site owner already exists). Find out who is the site owner and ask them to grant you Google Search Console access for a website.

Bing Webmaster Tools

Bing offers a similar product to the Search Console called Bing Webmaster Tools. Follow a similar process to above.

The following text is borrowed from the Google Search Console help pages and you can find a link in the references below.

Verify your site ownership

What is verification?

Verification is the process of proving that you own the site or app that you claim to own. We need to confirm ownership because once you are verified for a site or app you have access to its private Google Search data, and can affect how Google Search crawls it.

Verification associates a specific *user* with a specific *property*. Every Search Console property requires at least one verified owner, though it can have more.



Note that you could add any site or app as a property to Search Console, but until you verify ownership of it (or an owner grants you rights on it) you can't use it in Search Console. For example, you could add www.wikipedia.org as a property to your Search Console account, but you wouldn't be able to access it until a Wikipedia developer helped you prove ownership (or a Wikipedia Search Console property owner added you as a user to the Search Console property).

Verify a website

1. Either add a new site (see link in references) or click **Manage**

Property > Verify this property on the Search Console home page next to the existing property that you want to verify.

2. Choose one of the verification methods listed below and follow the instructions. Not all verification methods are available for all properties; the verification page will list which methods are available and recommended for your site.

Verification methods include (more detail in the link in the references section):

- HTML file upload
- Domain name provider
- HTML tag
- Google Analytics tracking code
- Google tag manager container snippet
- Google sites
- Blogger

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Multiple people can add and verify a site separately, using the same or different methods. If you use the same method, just be sure that you don't overwrite any verification tokens of any other owners.

Crawlability optimization steps

- Minimise site errors
- Use redirect wisely
- Create and submit up to date XML sitemap
- Minimise duplicate content
- Check for indexed pages

Minimize site errors: Site and URL errors can restrict access to useful pages

and if too frequent, can lower the overall trust of a domain. In Google Search Console, you can find Site and URL errors under Crawl à Crawl Errors. This example shows a very high number of Not Found URL errors, so further investigations need to be made so the appropriate fixes can be put in place.

Use redirects wisely: if a URL has changed, redirects can be used to take the user or search engine to the right place and preserve the page's trust and reputation, while avoiding URL errors.

There are three main types of redirects:

1. 301, "Moved Permanently"—recommended for SEO. A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect which passes between 90-99% of link juice (ranking power) to the redirected page. 301 refers to the HTTP status code for this type of redirect. In most instances, the 301 redirect is the best method for implementing redirects on a website.
2. 302, "Found" or "Moved Temporarily". Some of Google's employees have indicated that there are cases where 301s and 302s may be treated similarly, but our evidence suggests that the safest way to ensure search engines and browsers of all kinds give full credit is to use a 301 when permanently redirecting URLs.
3. Meta Refresh. Meta refreshes are a type of redirect executed on the page level rather than the server level. They are usually slower, and not a recommended SEO technique. They are most commonly associated with a five-second countdown with the text "If you are not redirected in five seconds, click here." Meta refreshes do pass some link juice but are not recommended as an SEO tactic due to poor usability and the loss of link juice passed.

The most recommended redirect is the 301 redirect as this is thought to pass the most amount of reputation.

The majority of Content Management Systems (CMSs) allow non-technical people to implement redirects. WordPress is a popular CMS and the simplest way to create a redirect is by installing a redirect plugin. For some CMSs, you may need to get help from a technical person to help implement redirects.

1. Create your sitemap:

The most commonly used sitemap is the XML sitemap. This is designed for search engines, rather than people, and is one file that contains a collection of all of your web pages. While search engines predominately crawl web pages by following links from one web page to another, they also use XML sitemap for discovering pages. Most CMSs will automatically create an XML sitemap but you need to make sure this has been enabled.

If one exists, you can often find your XML sitemap at www.yourdomain.com/sitemap.xml

2. Submit your sitemap to Google:

There are two different ways to make your sitemap available to Google:

1. Submit your XML sitemap via Google Search Console –

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/sitemap-list>

2. Insert the following line anywhere in your robots.txt file, specifying the path to your sitemap: Sitemap: http://example.com/sitemap_location.xml. Be very careful when making changes to the robots.txt file and always check with an

expert if you are unsure as you can accidentally de-index useful pages. Once you have submitted your XML sitemap to Google, you'll be updated on how many of the submitted pages have been indexed. Your goal is to get all your useful pages indexed and aim for 95%+ of all pages. The example screenshot only has 12% of the submitted pages indexed which is not good and would need further investigation.

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While a small amount of duplicate content is ok, search engines prefer unique content and may choose to not index content that it considers duplicate.

Duplicate content can be identified through:

- 1.HTML improvements in Google Search Console where duplicate pages will be highlighted if they exist.
- 2.Copying an extract of text found (e.g. 10 words or so) in a web page and pasting it in quotes into a search engine. If multiple pages are shown in a search engine, this may be a sign of duplicate content. For each web page checked, you can repeat this process three times.

If you want to view what a webpage looked like the last time Google visited it and also when it happened, you can check Google's cache of the page and this is the version stored in its index.

How to get to a cached link:

1)In a web browser, do a Google search for the page you want to find (you can paste the URL into Google). In the Google SERP, click the green down arrow to the right of the site's URL and then click Cached.

2)In Chrome, copy the URL path you wish to check. Then type into the address

bar cache:www.url-you-wish-to-check.com e.g. cache:https://www.facebook.com

If a 404 page is returned from the cache command, it means the page has not been cached and it's not in Google's index. If you see a version of the page, this is what is used in the index and the date and time of when it was last cached will be displayed. This means that when you make changes to the content of web pages, it can take time for Google to update its index.

You'll remember earlier that technical optimization or technical SEO is primarily about making your website free of errors, easy to crawl and easy to index. Compared to on-page optimization and off-page optimization, technical optimization plays a smaller role in keyword rankings but we will now look at three technical factors that matter:

- **Site speed:** it was quite rare back at the time, but back in 2010, Google officially announced a ranking factor for SEO. It was for Site Speed and it was rare because ranking factors were mainly kept a secret. Although, as it is only a slight ranking factor, improving site speed is more likely to be noticeable in your bottom line in helping improve conversions and sales, rather than SEO. That said, if web pages are noticeably slow, this could have a significantly negative effect on both conversions and SEO.
- **Mobile-friendliness:** with the use of mobile overtaking desktop, this ranking factor has become more important than ever.
- **HTTPs:** this means making your pages more secure.

We will now look at each of these factors in more detail.

Albeit a slight ranking factor, site speed offers additional benefits for conversions/sales, rather than SEO alone. Independent studies by Kiss Metrics and Google suggest a page should load in 2 seconds or less. If a page takes much longer than two seconds it has a bad impact on user experience and could leave the user frustrated and not want to continue using the website. In a later slide, we'll look at Pingdom which helps diagnose areas of a web page that can be improved for speed such as making larger images smaller, compressing text and files, and minimizing the total numbers of requests being made.

Often a technical person or web developer is required to make improvements on site speed.

Google offer a tool called PageSpeed Insights that grades a web page in how well optimized it is for page speed on both desktop and mobile. It also gives suggestions in areas where improvements can be made.

Google also offers a dedicated mobile page speed testing tool: Think With Google. This goes more in-depth and may indicate that mobile site speed may become a more important ranking factor in the future. Google mentions that "70% of cellular network connections globally will occur at 3G or slower speeds through 2020", so it's key to get a fast loading site under such conditions, so bear that in mind for your current and future web builds.

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Pingdom is an independent tool that also grades how well a web page is optimized for site speed. It has the added benefit of providing a page speed loading time.

Google's Maile Ohye, states that "2 seconds is the threshold for e-commerce website acceptability. At Google, we aim for under a half-second. Half a second is fast, to put it in layman terms, it's close to a blink, while two seconds is shorter than one breath". Bear in mind, while this advice is still relevant, it was provided in 2010 but the general consensus is that these are still sensible targets to aim for, especially with the rise in mobiles and tablets that often rely on phone data signals.

Google announced mobile-friendliness as a significant ranking factor back in 2015. Although feedback from the SEO industry suggested its initial impact was relatively small, the announcement suggests it will become a stronger ranking factor in the future. This is enhanced further with Google's plans to prioritize its index for mobile over desktop in the future.

Responsive web design is the most common way of making a website mobile-friendly. It works by making your web pages look good on all devices (desktops, tablets, and phones). Responsive web design uses HTML and CSS to resize, shrink or enlarge content to make it look good on any screen.

If you wish to test whether a website is mobile-friendly, the best way is through the Mobile Usability report in Google Search Console. Here you will be able to check if it is and if not, what areas and pages need improving. This requires a verification process to see the data. If you do not have such access or wish to quickly check one URL at a time, you can use Google's mobile-friendly test tool which will provide similar information but on one URL at a time.

- Google announced HTTPS as a ranking factor back in 2014 albeit, a very slight ranking factor.
- HTTPS was primarily used to protect pages that collected information like contact us or a shopping cart page. Recently, there has been a shift where ALL pages have HTTPS as this gives all pages a slight ranking boost.
- Implementing HTTPS from HTTP requires careful redirect planning
- Moving to HTTPS requires an SSL certificate

Adding HTTPS to your site makes your webpages more secure. To do this you need to include an SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) certificate which traditionally is something you need to buy, although in recent years you can do it for free e.g. through Let's Encrypt.

When adding HTTPS (from HTTP), you are changing the URL that search engines need to index. It is critically important that you redirect the old HTTP URL to the new HTTPS URL and this should be done through a 301 redirect.

Action Point

PS: I know you might agree with some of the points that I have raised in this article. You might not agree with some of the issues raised. Let me know your views about the topic discussed. We will appreciate it if you could drop your comment. Thanks in anticipation.

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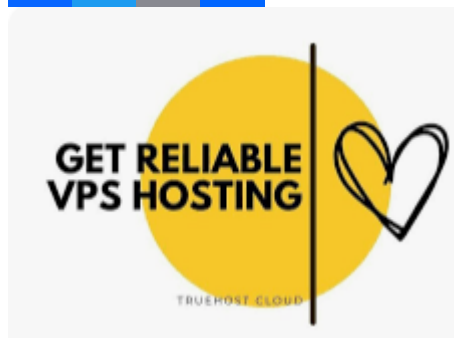
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