

Free guide: Increase your school's rankings in Google

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Executive summary

The purpose of this guide is to serve as an explanation of how to improve the search rankings for your school in Google and other search engines. The online environment is becoming increasingly competitive for all organisations, which is why it is essential for schools to actively improve the rankings of their website. This is the concept of SEO (search engine optimisation).

Why high rankings in Google are important

This guide provides some practical ways to increase your search rankings in Google. As competition constantly increases, it is pivotal to appear as one of the first organic listings in Google for your specific keywords, preferably in position 1. On average, the first three organic listings have more than a 50% click-through rate, therefore, high rankings are crucial to driving traffic to your school's website.

This will not only help to drive new prospects to your school's website but will also make it easier for stakeholders like children, parents and local authorities to find information about your school, courses, events, etc. Strengthening the relationship in this way is beneficial for all parties and with a few tips you could soon reap the benefits of optimising your website with SEO.

Identification of keywords

Before you commence with any SEO, you need to identify the keywords that you want to target. The first step would be to imagine and perhaps also brainstorm with colleagues, what generic terms people would type into Google to find your school. For example, if you are a primary school in Leeds, people would type in something along the lines of "primary school Leeds". However, as Leeds is still a large area, you may want to narrow down the searches and optimise geographically. For example as a primary school in Moortown, Leeds, you should optimise for "primary school Moortown" or "primary school Moortown Leeds". As well as other variations of these keyword phrases such as "Moortown primary school Leeds", "Leeds primary school Moortown" and so on.

Once you have selected a set of keywords and/or keyword phrases that you think you should target, you should then use [Google Adwords keyword tool](#) to find out what the search volume is for each of these

terms. Looking at the search volume will help you to identify whether the terms that you have selected are actually being search for. It will also help you to prioritise your relevant keywords - the higher the search volume, the higher the priority!

The image below includes a few pointers on how to use the Google Adwords tool and the things that you should be looking for.

Keyword Tool

Include terms (0) ?

Exclude terms (0) ?

Match Types ?

- Broad
- [Exact] **Make sure to click (only 'Exact')**
- "Phrase"

Find keywords

Based on one or more of the following:

Word or phrase: primary school moortown leeds **Type in your keyword or phrase here**

Website: www.google.com/page.html

Category: Apparel

Only show ideas closely related to my search terms ?

Advanced Options and Filters **Select UK (or your relevant country) and English (relevant language)**

Locations and languages: United Kingdom

All Languages: English

Show Ideas and Statistics for: Desktop and laptop devices

Filter ideas: Local Monthly Searches

Search **Sign in with your AdWords login information to see the full set of ideas for this search.**

These are the search results. As you can see there is no search volume for "primary school moortown leeds" so you would not want to optimise for that phrase, but other variations are suggested as well. "Moortown primary school" has a search volume of 390 per month and low competition in organisations optimising for it, so you would want to optimise for this phrase.

| Keyword | Competition | Global Monthly Searches ? | Local Monthly Searches ? |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| [primary school moortown leeds] v | - | - | - |
| Keyword ideas (100) | | | |
| [moortown primary school] v | Low | 390 | |
| [moortown primary school leeds] v | Low | | 16 |

Increasing the authority of your website

The more authority given to your site by Google, the higher it will rank in Google. There are two fundamental aspects to increasing your website's authority; on-site optimisation and off-site optimisation.

On-site optimisation:

Page copy

Firstly, you need to ensure that the keywords you chose earlier are mentioned within the copy on your website pages. As well as targeting the ones that you identified with high search volumes, you also need to target variations of them. For example, if you wanted to target 'Primary school Leeds' you'll also need to target terms like 'Leeds primary school' etc. The reason for this is that Google 'crawls' the content on your website to see how relevant it is to the search term. The more you're mentioning the term within your copy, the easier it is for Google to see that your website is relevant to that search term. Please note that search engines can only read text. Therefore, if you have your school name and location in an image, the search engine will not be able to collect this information

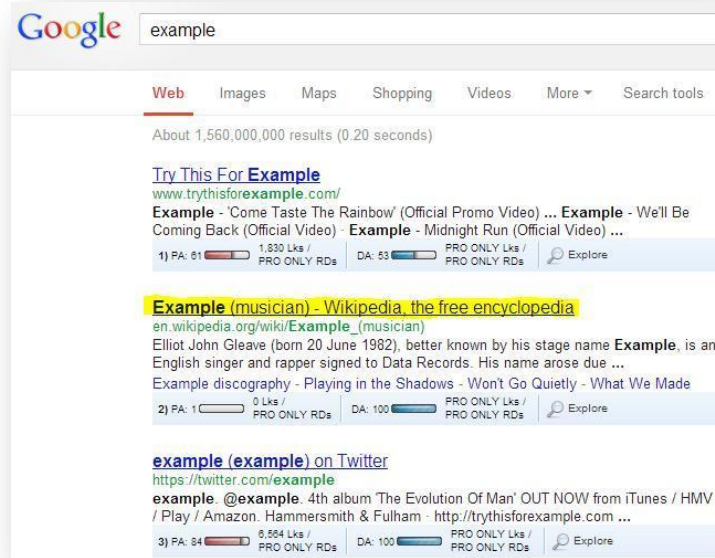
You also need to ensure that your website is easy to navigate. Important pages on your website need to be close to the homepage. For example, if a visitor arrives at your homepage, they should be only one click away from an important page such as the events page, the school news page or anything that your visitors consider to be of high value.

In addition, keeping your content relevant and stakeholders up to date is important. Although this will not directly improve your ranking in Google, updating your website often is a good indication to good that your site is one of good quality. What's more, recent government legislation has actually made it a requirement for a schools website to be up to date. Please see our additional DfE guide for more details.

http://www.webanywhere.co.uk/sites/default/files/guide_to_new_rules_for_school_websites.pdf

Title tags

A title tag is what you see when you type something into a search engine, in Google for example it's the line that appears in blue.



Title tags are an essential part of SEO as they tell the search engine what your page is about. These tags have a substantial influence on your rankings. You should always use the keyword you are optimising for at the beginning of the title tag followed by your school name and perhaps the location. An example could look as follows:

School events Leeds - Primary school Moortown

or

Primary school Leeds - 'Your school name and location'

Keep in mind that the title tag needs to be unique for the different pages on your website, so don't have one title tag that you use for all pages as this will confuse the search engine and will be disadvantageous for your SEO efforts.

Title tags are easy to update, many Content Management Systems (CMS) such as School Jotter have easy to find sections where these tags can be created and/or edited.

Meta description (on-site optimisation)

A meta description appears below the title tag and should be used to inform your audience what your site is about.



The meta description does not have a great impact on your ranking in Google but it is very important for the Click Through Rate (CTR). Google presents a variety of websites for a particular search query and it is up to the searcher to identify which one they believe to be the most relevant to their search. The purpose of the meta description is to convince and encourage the search to click through to your site.

If, for example, the search query is 'Primary school Moortown' you should have the words 'Primary school Moortown' within the meta description. Not only will this show the searcher that your website is very relevant to their search, Google will also display the key words in bold, helping to make your site more prominent. Due to the match of the search query in the title tag and the meta description, your site should be more appealing to the searcher.

The meta description should be used to explain to a visitor in a nutshell what they will find when clicking on your site. This could include certificates, excellences, number of pupils, values, ethos, or anything else that you think would convince a potential visitor to click through to your website. Keep in mind that the meta description should be 160 characters as this is the length that Google will display (as can be seen in the image above, if the description is too long Google does not display everything, there is a break in the sentence, recognisable by "...").

Off-site optimisation:

Link building

Links are a crucial component in increasing your school's rankings in Google. There are two types of links, inbound and outbound links. Inbound links are placed on other people's websites and point their readers to your website. Outbound links on the other hand are on your website and point your readers to other websites. The inbound links are very important for search engines, as high quality sites (e.g.

governmental websites, or online newspaper sites) that link to your own website suggest to search engines that your site is of high quality. Having high quality links to your site will have a positive impact on your rankings.

Here, the keyword research that you did in the beginning comes into play again. When you get a link from another site it is preferable when the link is on a phrase that contains the keyword that you are optimising for. It has to be kept in mind though that Google only likes natural looking link profiles. This means that if all the links pointing to your site use the exact same keyword, it will look unnatural as, if different people (on different websites) would link naturally to you, they would not use the exact same phrase but variations of it.

You can actively build links by contacting relevant websites and asking them to include a link that points to your site - this is called link building. This has to be carried out with great care though, as you need to make sure the keywords you use vary. What's more, the websites that link to you should always be relevant and of high quality.

You need to ensure that the page on your site that you want these websites to link to, also includes the key word. For example, if you are optimising for 'primary school Moortown' you need to make sure that the page you're like to includes that exact phrase. Also, make sure that you don't only point links to your homepage, you need to link to numerous key pages.

Building your link profile

The best way to start your link profile is by asking other site owners that you already know to add a link to your school website - only if it is a quality site and if it is relevant to you. Also, investigate if you can get a link from other websites that might be interested in linking to your page, e.g. local authorities. If you have partner schools, try and get a partnership link from them.

The following is a selection of link types that you might want to try to obtain:

- Partnership links – another business/institution or site that you cooperate with
- Blog links – bloggers (e.g. parents or education bloggers) that link to your site
- Existing mentions – it is likely that your school is mentioned on other sites but is there also an optimised link?

However, no matter what type of link you have, you always need to make sure that all your links are ethical. This means that the links that you obtain are natural and genuine. Simply placing a link to your school anywhere on the web will not increase your rankings, in fact, it is likely to harm your link building efforts. Google does not like to be poorly manipulated and recognises automatically if links are unnaturally placed somewhere on the web e.g. on low quality websites, irrelevant websites etc. Furthermore, avoid paying for links as this is not ethical link building and will do more harm than good.

Research tools to use

As mentioned before, one research tool that will be good to use is the Google Adwords tool. This will help you to identify the keywords that you should be targeting. Of course there is a variety of other research tools experts use, either for free or for a subscription fee, however these are not necessary to carry out basic SEO. Research tools are there to support SEO efforts, there is no tool that actually improves your rankings!

Websites to target

The importance of targeting only targetting 'high quality and relevant websites' has been mentioned throughout this document. So, how do you know which is a high quality website and which is relevant? Consider the following things, does the website you have in mind cover the same or similar topics as you do, for example is it about schools, education, learning, teaching, etc.? If so, then most likely it is a relevant page. For SEO, relevancy means that both sites belong to the same or at least similar categories (for example, a link with no relevance would be having a link to your school on a local food delivery service website).

Determining whether a website is of high quality is a bit more difficult. A popular indicator is the Page Rank of a website, Google ranks pages between 0 and 10. The Page Rank tool can be downloaded for free on the Internet. Using the Page Rank as sole indication can be problematic though as it is only an indication and not a safe way to determine the quality of a site.

In addition to the Page Rank, consider things like how many advertisements are on the page, what is the topic of the website (and do they actually cover the topics they intend to), is there a real person or

organisation behind the site or is it a site that is setup to make money? If it's a blog question whether it's a community engaging with the site and its content?

The above are just a few of the questions you need to answer for yourself in order to determine the quality of a website. Normally, a good way to assess a site if you do not have the experience, is to use common sense. If a site does not seem genuine and doesn't host relevant and interesting content then often it isn't a high quality site.

Conclusion

As you can see, there are many different angles and practices for SEO. Lots of hints, tips, guides and explanations are available on the web regarding how to improve your site's rankings. However, please be aware, as always on the web you need to find the right sources. With the right technique and effort you can improve your search rankings, but it is not the easiest task if you are not familiar with these practices. We suggest seeking out expert help and advice on the subject wherever possible or to directly incorporate it when using Webanywhere's services.

About Webanywhere

Since 2003, we've provided website services and e-learning solutions to help schools communicate, collaborate and promote themselves online.

As a provider of websites, learning platforms, design services and e-learning content, we're also recognised by leading organisations. We're an approved supplier to the UK Government Procurement Service, a Moodle partner, a Mahara partner and a Google Apps Authorised Reseller.

For more information on Webanywhere or to get the latest education news, advice and tips via email, please get in touch.

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