Virgin media

BUSINESS

SEO: THE DIY GUIDE
# FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Demand Extraordinary

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Ireland's e-commerce industry is expected to double in value to €14.1 billion in the next four years according to the PwC 2017 Total Retail Survey. The report stresses the importance for e-commerce businesses to leverage new technologies and platforms to generate valuable leads, while becoming data savvy.

While there's no denying the power of paid marketing channels such as Google AdWords, establish your organic presence and you will likely find your most profitable marketing channel.

Organic traffic refers to visits that come to your site when a user clicks on an unpaid search engine result. The key is that these visits are free. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is your means to maximising your access to and returns from this free traffic source.

Be under no illusions, advanced SEO is a full-time job. However, there are critical fundamentals that can greatly enhance your organic position and ultimately, your organic revenue. We believe you can and should implement these fundamentals yourself. To help you with this, please enjoy our DIY guide to SEO.
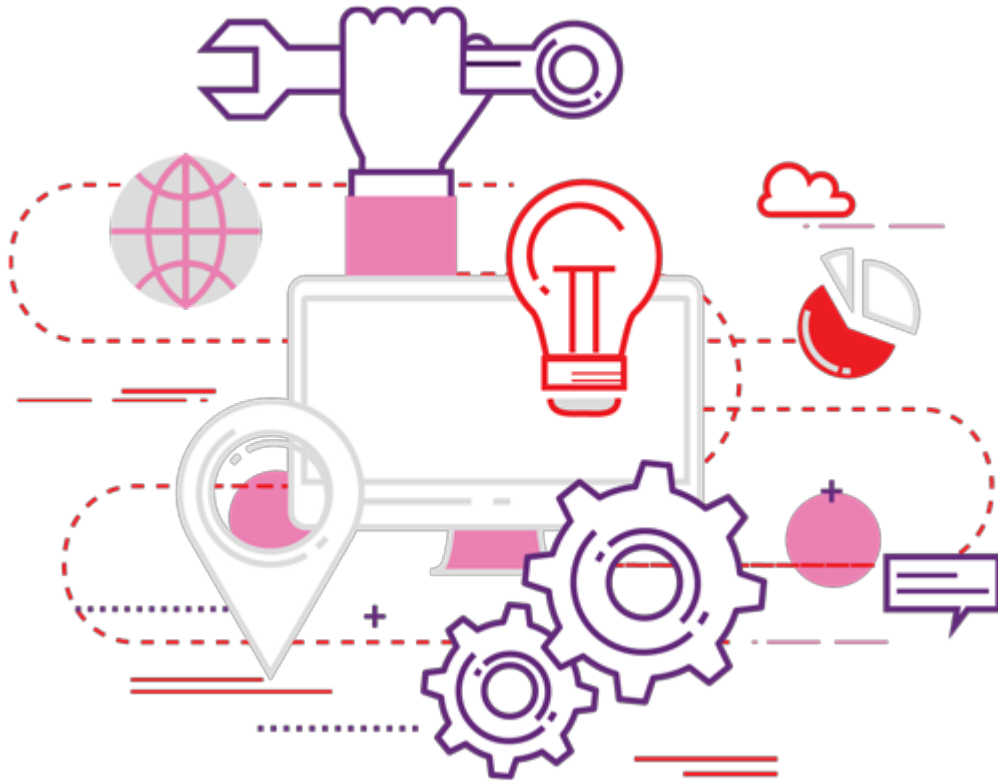
WHAT IS SEO?

Search engine optimisation (SEO) refers to the efforts required to ensure your website is discoverable by search engines and in turn, your target customers. The better optimised your website is for search engines like Google, the greater chance you have of ranking for keywords or search queries that your customers are searching for. The main goal of SEO is to increase your search visibility and your organic (free) traffic.

There are hundreds of different ranking factors that search engines, like Google, consider as part of their algorithm when deciding what results to return for a given search query. These can be grouped under three broad pillars, all of which must be nurtured for your site to become discoverable.

These are:

1.   On-Page Optimisation

2.   Technical SEO

3.   Off-Site Optimisation

Let's Start With the SERPs

If you have ever searched for something on Google, the first thing you see is Page 1 of the search engine results page (SERPs). Depending on the search term it will typically look like this:
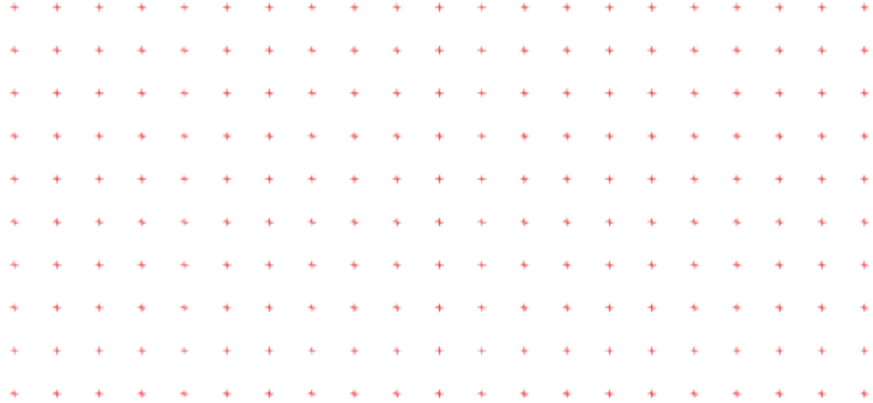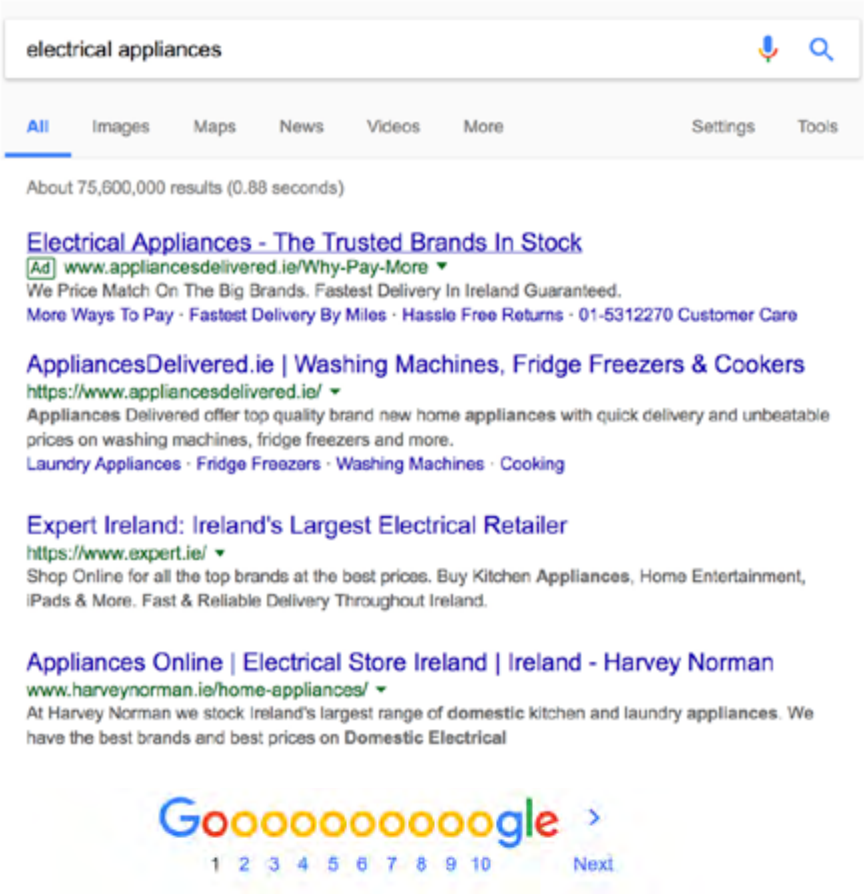
The first result is an ad (although there can be as many as four). These are paid for spaces in the results page and are discreetly marked by a little green 'Ad' symbol.

What follows are the 'organic' or non-paid search results. Each of these typically contain a page title, URL and meta description.

Look at the other information on this SERP and you'll see a search for 'electrical appliances' generated 75,600,000 results. There is plenty of competition for those valuable organic spots and it's those who practice SEO that will tend to claim them.

About 75,600,000 results (0.88 seconds)

SEO is a great way to put your hands up in the air and tell potential customers that your business exists and has a web presence among the thousands of competing pages and the competitor businesses behind them.

Goooooooooogle >
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Next
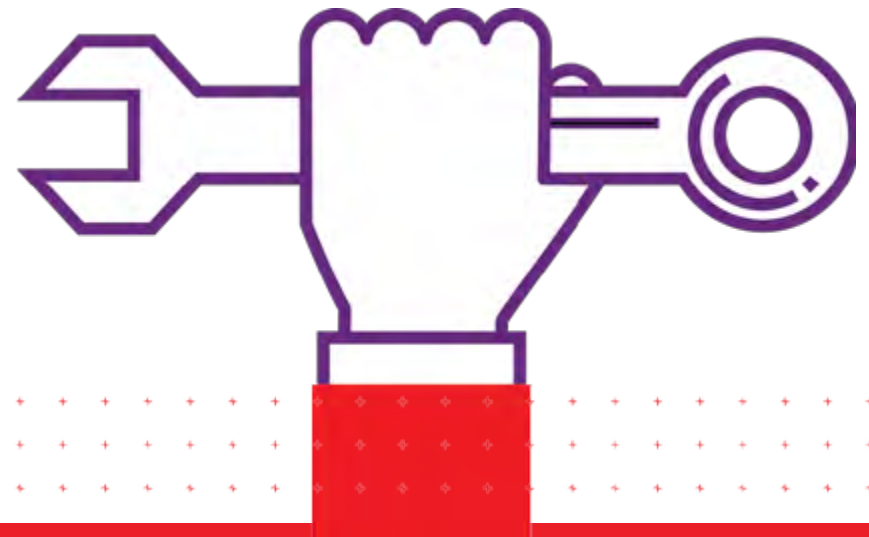
ON-PAGE OPTIMISATION

On-page optimisation refers to the best writing and content implementation practices you should follow when putting new content on your site. Once you get to know the elements of the page that Google and other search engines consider important, it's easy to get into the habit of checking them off every time you add a new page to your site.

There are two groups that you are trying to satisfy with good on-page optimisation:

1. Your human audience
2. Search Engine Crawlers

"Crawler" is a generic term for any program deployed by a search engine (such as a robot or spider) used to automatically discover and scan websites by following links from one webpage to another.

Focus On A Keyword

The searches that people make online are related to certain words or phrases. Because you want your webpage to be the answer or solution to their search query, your page needs to be built with this phrase or word in mind.

Defining a keyword narrows the search results down, making it easier for users to find relevant content.

For example, if someone is searching the phrase 'electrical appliances Dublin' and you want to rank for this, your page should be optimised around this phrase.
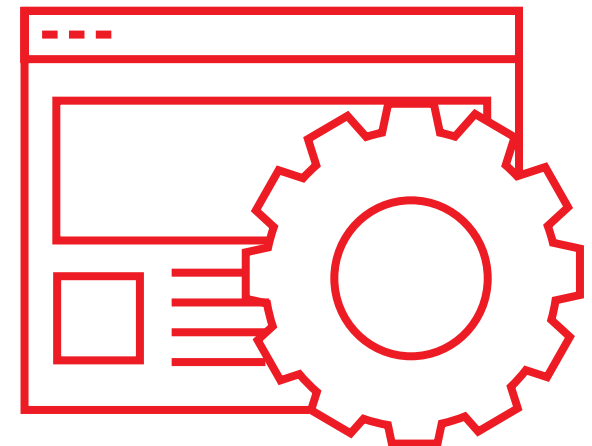
SEO Title Tag

The combination of your page title, URL and meta description in the SERPs is your shop window. Before people even come to your webpage they are greeted with the likes of the below. Straight away your title needs to be relevant to the search term and enticing to users.

Powercity | FREE Home Appliances Recycling

Try and have your keyword or keyphrase near the beginning of the SEO title.

Use the pipe symbol '|' as a clean and tidy way to break up your title. You can find that by pressing (Shift + \).

Attempt to keep your SEO title at around 60 characters to avoid a trail off like the below.

Intelligent appliances and how to buy the best for your home | Irish ...

URL Structure

When you add a new page to your website under the blog section, for example, you add a 'slug' onto the end of the URL structure that is already in place. The slug refers to the next few words that relate to your new page.

Your site might already have this in place: www.myappliancesshop.ie/blog/

/ best-washing-machines / OK Cancel
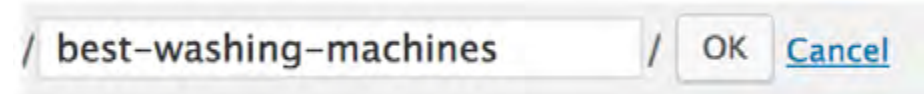
Leaving you with this at the end:
www.myappliancesshop.ie/blog/best-washing-machines.

Slug Tips

- Separate all your words with a dash (-)

- Try and have your keyword in the slug, near the start and keep all words lowercase

- Avoid using special symbols or stop words

- Your URL should be under 115 characters. That includes the whole URL and not just the new slug that you have entered

Meta Description

Human users are already intrigued by your title; all that's left to do is entice them to clickthrough with your meta description. A meta description is information, more in depth than your title, that will let users know what to expect when they visit your page.

Keep your descriptions under 150 characters to avoid a trail off (…). This shows visitors that you have intentionally put up an informative and helpful description, opposed to the randomly generated one that Google pulls for non-optimised pages.

Header Tags

By correctly using header tags in the following order H1, H2, H3, H4 all the way to H6 (if necessary) when inputting copy, you're helping crawlers navigate each page of your site easily and understand its content. Heading tags are also a great way to break up the copy on your page to make it more readable for your visitors.

Only use the H1 tag once on your page for the main title. If you are using a CMS like WordPress your title field will automatically be H1.

H2s will then be your main headings. Try and feature your keyword in at least one H2 heading. Keep your headings concise as crawlers may deem your page spam if it contains a number of headings that are more than 70 characters long.

H1 Everything You Need to Know about 2017's Best Appliances

Ever wondered where you can source the best electronics that you need for your home? Well look no further because we've done the hard sums for you.

H2 Which Appliance Should You Invest in This Year?

For many of us, the prospect of kitting out our houses with a whole host of new appliances at once is sadly not possible. Focus on a new piece that you really need like a dishwasher or a washing machine. You can't go without clean clothes.

H3 Washing Machines

In 2017 a number of top end washing machines entered the market as smart washers continue to be all the rage in Ireland. Luckily, as 'Internet of things' washers become increasingly popular, last year's premium models have dropped in price.

Optimise Images

The images that you upload to a webpage also have an impact on SEO. It's important that your files have relevant titles, relevant Alternative Text and aren't so big that they slow down the site.

Original imagery, will always trump stock imagery, but stock imagery beats no imagery at all. Try your best to source original creative assets.

When saving images on your PC prior to website upload, ensure to name them something like: 'amazing-washing-machine.jpeg' rather than 'stock_35168161651.jpg'

Keep your image sizes small. Images that take too long to load can slow your site speed which is of critical importance for SEO.

Alternative Text, or alt text is a very important detail to include when uploading images. While search engine bots are advancing all the time, they have not quite reached a point where they can accurately determine what is in an image. The alt text is your opportunity to tell them. To write a brilliant alt text, be as descriptive as possible. It might even help to imagine that you are explaining the image to someone wearing a blindfold.

Tips for Images

- Use original images

- Get WP Smush for WordPress

- Put your keyword in your image title and file name

- Use your keyword in your alt text

On-Page Copy

So after you've put all the hard work into following the on-page rules it's time to write the actual copy for the page.

When it comes to SEO, less is not necessarily more. The main body of your piece shouldn't be under 300 words and if you manage 1,000 words or more on the subject then your page is in a healthy shape.

Don't fall into a trap of keyword stuffing. This is when you overuse your target keyword in the copy. It's not necessary for your rankings and here's why.

Google uses what's called Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI) when crawling a website, scanning your copy not just for the keyword but for keywords that are commonly related to it.

LSI Graph is a handy tool that can help you identify latent semantic keywords related to your target keyword. Not all of these will be relevant to the content you're writing so use your best judgement when making your selection and use these as appropriate in your body text, H2s and meta description. The box on the right is an example of related words for the term 'electrical appliances'.

- electrical appliances list
- examples of electrical appliances
- electrical appliances and their uses
- appliance meaning
- household electrical appliances
- electrical appliances information
- home appliances list with price
- home appliances list of product
- list of electrical devices
- kitchen appliances list with pictures
- list of kitchen appliances for new house
- types of electrical appliances
- electrical appliances definition
- what is home appliances
- electrical devices and their uses
- electrical appliances used at home
- household equipment and their uses
- appliance examples
- appliance definition examples

Power of the Blog

A great way to boost your site's search visibility is to have a blog. Search engines are constantly scanning for content that is well-written, original, relevant and up-to-date and a blog post can tick all these boxes.

A blog also allows you to create internal links between your site's pages with ease, allowing crawlers to better scan your site.

A blog post is also a creative way for trying to catch the traffic around a long-tail keyword/keyphrase; a keyword that is made up of three or more words.

If for example, you are searching for 'washing machines Dublin' this is a very generic search term that will yield lots of results. It's likely an appliance store would have their main product pages optimised for these broad search terms.

A long-tail phrase might be 'Internet of things washing machines Dublin'. It's not practical to optimise product pages on your site to answer these search queries, but a topical blog post around smart household technology could bring users in and then link them to your e-commerce store.

Outbound Links

Don't be afraid to link out to other reputable websites. Crediting your sources or connecting your readers to further helpful information creates a positive experience for your users, and what's good for your users is good for search engines.

Crawl Your Site

Be sure to follow these guidelines as you create new pages on your site. But what about changes to pages that you've previously created on your site? Screaming Frog is a very handy, free tool to add to your kit. It allows you to perform a crawl of your site and identify issues such as pages missing H tags, overly long meta descriptions, missing alt text on images and much more. Once you perform a crawl, you can export the data to an excel spreadsheet and tick off your progress as you correct the issues on each page. You can crawl up to 500 pages on your website for free.

TECHNICAL SEO

The on-page elements of SEO that are covered in Section 1 carry a lot more weight for your website when everything on the technical side of things is running smoothly.

Imagine for a moment, a yacht. The on-page elements represent the sails and the ropes above water. Now imagine the technical elements of SEO are everything below the water line: the hull and the cabin. So you could have your sails blowing, and your knots tied correctly, but if there's a hole in the bottom of your boat you're not going to get very far.

Technical SEO lays a solid foundation that gives your content the best chance to rank for relevant keywords and phrases.
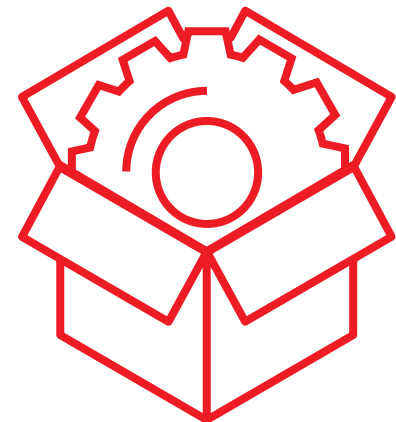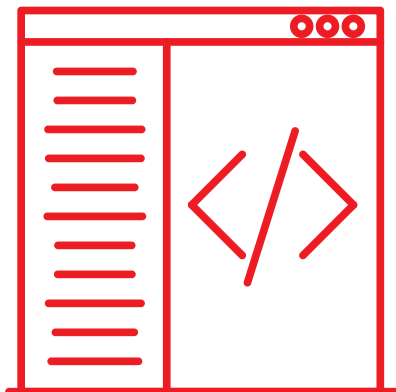
Get Started With Google Search Console

Google Search Console (previously Google Webmaster Tools) is a free web service by Google that allows website operators to see if Google has any difficulty indexing their websites.

Once you have verified your website, you can use Google Search Console to:

- Make sure that Google can access your content

- Submit new content for crawling and remove content you don't want shown in search results

- Create and monitor content that delivers visually engaging search results

- Resolve malware or spam issues so your site stays clean

- Find out what queries caused your site to appear in search results and which ones brought in traffic informing you how to optimise your content accordingly

- Find out which sites are linking to your website

- Find out if your sites are performing better on mobile or desktop

Say Hi to HTTPs

Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) is the secure version of HTTP, the protocol over which data is sent between your browser and the website that you are connected to. You will know if a site is https or not by looking at the start of the URL in the browser bar.

Why Migrate to HTTPS?

Having HTTPS is essential now that Google have added it as a ranking factor.

Not only does the secure lock appear on the URL, reassuring users who are about to enter their payment information, but in 2017 Google will begin displaying "not secure" messages on sites that don't have this standard.

Moving a website to HTTPS requires the assistance of your web developer. Depending on the size of your website the job could take anywhere from a day to few weeks.
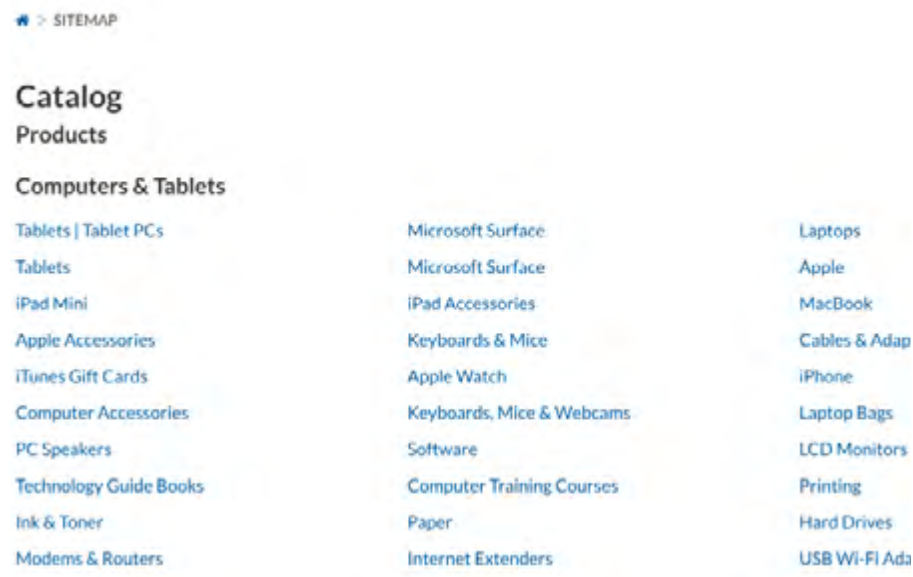
Submit A Sitemap

Adding a HTML sitemap to your website gives users the opportunity to unfold your site and see how the different webpages are connected.

The sitemap is good for human users, but you can also submit an XML sitemap for search engine crawlers as it provides an easy way to check for internal linking in a website.

Here is what a HTML sitemap of a website might look like on an electrical retailer's website.

# How to Make a Sitemap

There are a number of online tools that can help you make a sitemap after your site is already up and running. You can find the best sitemap generator that's compatible with your website's format here: https://code.google.com/archive/p/sitemap-generators/wikis/SitemapGenerators.wiki/

You can submit your sitemap via your Google Search Console as seen in the image below.

Set Up Google My Business

Setting up Google My Business is a must for your SEO gameplan. It is this that dictates whether your business will claim the space on the right hand side of the SERPs (the Knowledge Panel) when someone searches for your business by name. With SERP space at a premium, owning this piece of real estate when someone searches for your brand is a must.
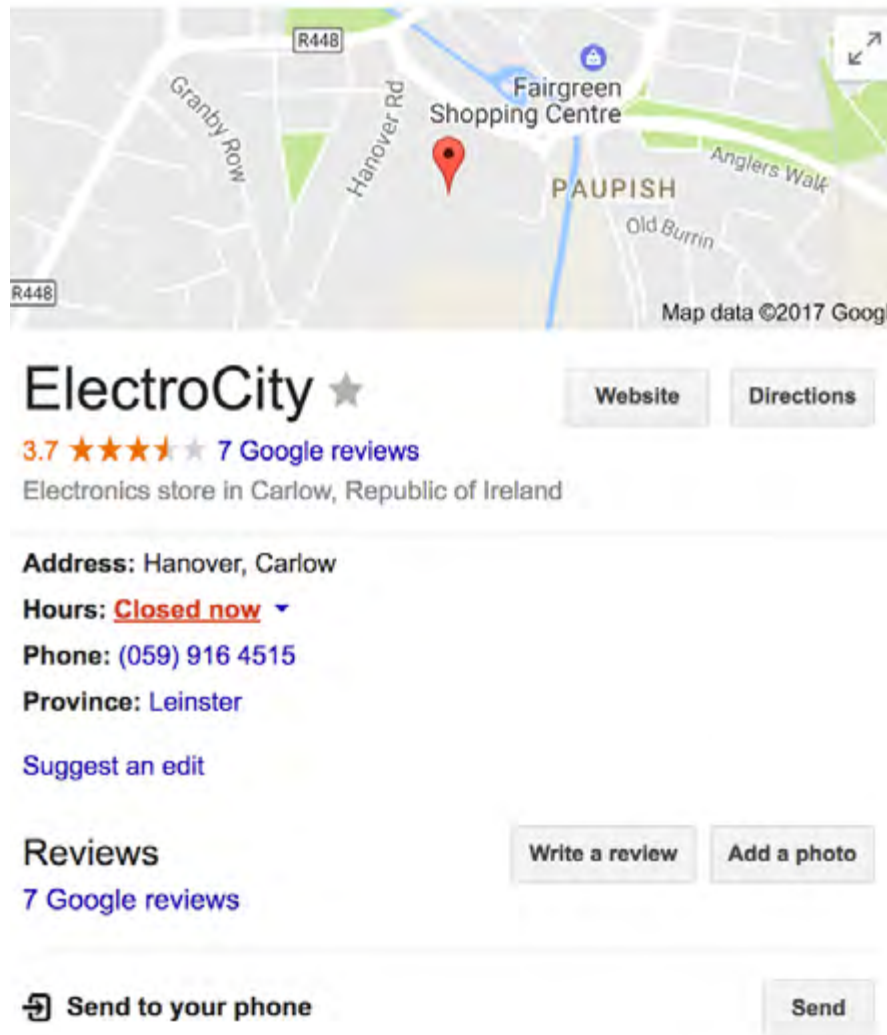
You can do this through your Google account here: https://www.google.co.uk/business/go/befound.html

Once you register your address, you will receive a pin code by post to verify the business. Once this is done, you will have your Google My Business presence in the Knowledge Panel and your business will appear in Google Maps. Registering the business will also automatically create a Google Plus account.

Cover Your Bases on the Google Suite

Although Google Plus might be one of the less popular social networks out there, it's still part of the Google Suite of applications and does play a part in boosting your site's search visibility.

If you think about it, having a Google Search Console, a Google My Business panel and a G+ account gives your site good representation across a variety of Google's products, which can't hurt your discoverability.

Keep Site Speed in Mind

Numerous studies by Searchmetrics have shown that there is a high correlation between sites that load quickly and sites that rank highly. Ignore your site speed at your peril.

Here are some ways you can reduce any delays in your load speed:

- Reduce video embeds

- Use Caching (Caching allows the browser to store information from a webpage, so it doesn't have to load everything from scratch every time a visitor comes to your page)

- Keep your theme or templates simple

- Optimise your images, (alt text, use as small image sizes as possible, proper titles)

- Optimise for mobile browsers as search engines like Google are putting mobile first. You can perform a mobile friendly test of your website here

Other Technical Housekeeping

Once you're happy that you've got the technical SEO aspects covered up until this point, there are a few things under your website's bonnet that could be helpful to get to grips with.

Robots.txt

Robots.txt is a text file that is part of your website structure that lets Google know if its crawlers should ignore certain pages when scanning your site or scan all as normal.

Why would you want Google to ignore certain pages? Besides a number of technical reasons, the simple answer is to make sure the wrong pages don't rank in search pages.

These pages might be customer portals, staff login pages or any other pages that don't provide helpful information or generate leads on the site.

Sometimes your newly built website might not have this set up correctly. Here is an example of how the code in a robots.txt file would be set up to give different sets of instructions to the crawlers.

Allow full access

```
User-agent: *
Disallow:
```

Block full access

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /
```

Block one folder

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /folder/
```

Block one file

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /file.html
```
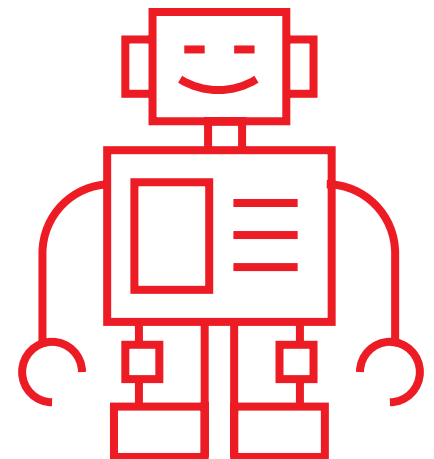
Perform a Google Guidelines Health Check

A quick and easy way to see if your site has any issues that are negatively impacting your site's technical SEO is to use Varvy.com. Once you enter your website address you can see if your site is ticking all the right boxes at once and identify specific errors easily.
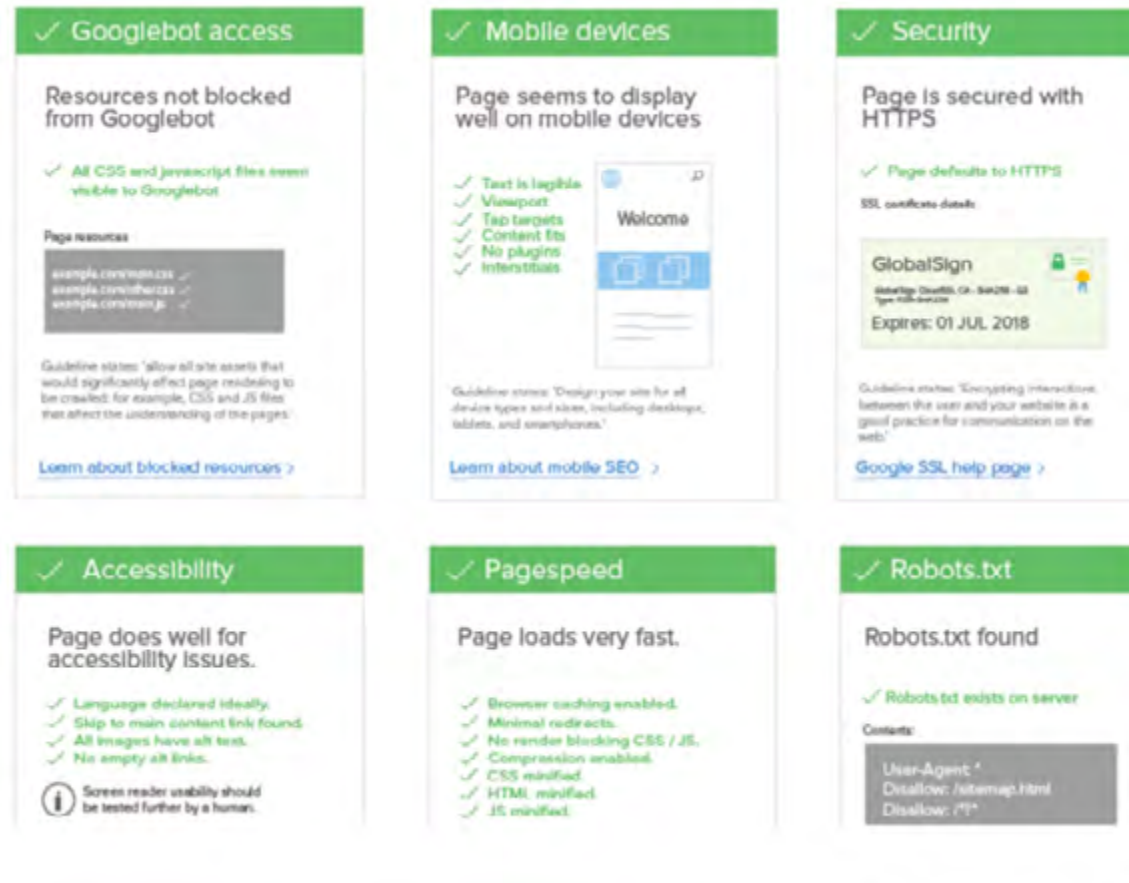
LINKS AND OUTREACH

Now that your site content and technical features are optimised, the final piece of the SEO puzzle is your site's link profile.

In other words, is your website showing signs of authority by having other relevant and reputable websites linking to it? These 'backlinks' have always been, and continue to be hugely important for your site's ability to rank well.

A common way to judge the reputation of a website is to check its Domain Authority (DA). DA is a score (on a 100-point scale) developed by Moz that predicts how well a website will rank on search engines. A site's DA can grow over time, like a lifelong reputation. A backlink from a high DA website to your own is a strong indicator of your own authority on a topic. For instance, bbc.co.uk, a news site which is trusted the world over has a very high DA of 95. A backlink from a site like this would be powerful for your backlink profile.
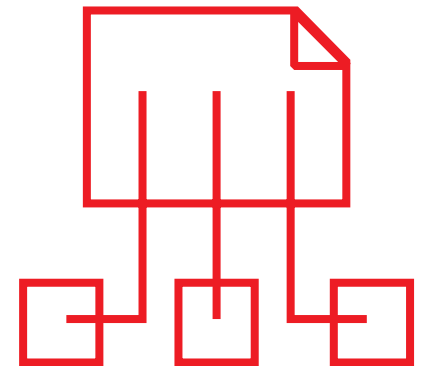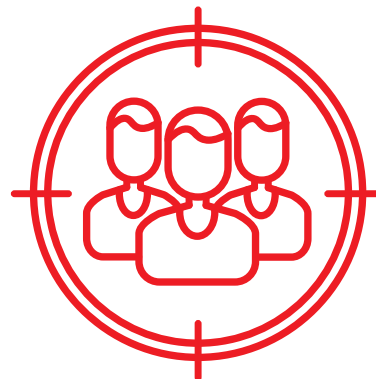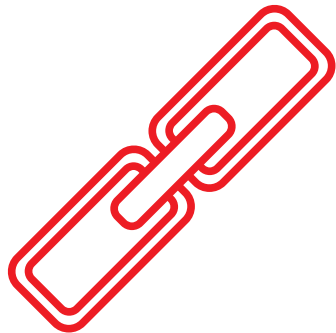
How Links Work

Search engines use links to crawl the web. Crawlers will flow from links between the internal individual pages on your website and they will crawl the links between different websites.

Search engines use links to discover when new webpages have been created and to help determine how well a page should rank in their results.

How Do Search Engines Look at Links?

According to Moz, when it comes to assessing the quality of your back-links, search engines look at the following:

- The trustworthiness of the linking domain

- The popularity of the linking page

- The relevancy of the content between the linking page and your target page

- The anchor text used in the link

- The number of domains that link to your target page

- The amount of variations that are used as anchor text to links to your target page

- The ownership relationship between the linking domain and your target domain

Anchor text is the clickable text of a link. E.g. 'best washing machines' is the anchor text in the sentence below:

Do your research on the best washing machines available in Ireland

Your Link Building Strategy

SEOs constantly work to get new links connecting to their sites that are from sources of high authority.

They also work to remove spammy links from untrustworthy sources to help sites maintain a healthy backlink profile, as these could potentially reduce DA.

How Do I Get Links?

The best way to secure high quality links is by creating strong content that sources will naturally want to connect their readership to.

Of course, the reality for most of us is not that simple. The chances are, to earn links to your site you will have to put in some work to get them. Here's some simple ways you can get started:

- Set up a Google Alert for your company name. Any time your business is mentioned across the web, contact the webmaster, thank them, and ask them nicely to include a link.

- Do you sponsor any events? Ensure you get a link from their website to yours as part of the deal.

- Consider writing a piece of guest content, not for your own site but for a relevant, external site. As part of the deal, agree that you may include a link to your site.

- Is your company 'remarkable' in some way? Your story may be suited to a Wikipedia page, where you may include a link.

Follow Vs. Nofollow Links

A handy thing to know when you are acquiring links from other sources is the difference between follow and nofollow links.

Follow links are links that Google bots and humans can follow. The bot reaches the links and then continues onto the next page, bringing some value from the source site.

Nofollow links do not allow search engine bots to follow the link. That means if the website owner is linking back to you with Nofollow attributes, it does not pass on value from the source site. Only humans will be able to follow the links.

In HTML, the two different links are written like this:

Do follow link:

Google

Nofollow link:

Google

Nofollow links primarily belong in

- Paid links such as advertorials

- Comments in blog posts (a common source of spammy links)

- Forums

While they may not pass any SEO link value, nofollow links are still valuable in that they can still refer highly relevant traffic to your site and are another means of promoting your brand across the web.

SECTION 4

HELPFUL TOOLS

Take the hassle out of managing your own SEO when you use these free and easy to use tools.

Google Analytics and Google Tag Manager

Google Analytics is an intuitive and free measurement platform that gives you insight into all of your webpages. It all starts with a line of code that you put in the header of your website that will let you install a container of Google tags, that will give you visibility in your analytics Dashboard.

See how long users spend on your page, your most popular pages and what pages are converting.

Get started with Google Analytics.

SEOMOFO Snippet Optimiser

Use this snippet optimiser to visualise how your webpage's information will appear in the Google SERPs.

Get started here with the SEOMOFO Snippet Optimiser.

Varvy

Visit Varvy.com to give any URL a technical SEO health check.

LSI Graph

Use this tool to help generate words that are closely related to your keyword or keyphrase without having to lug out the thesaurus.

Get started with LSI Graph.

Screaming Frog

Download Screaming Frog and take the burden out of going through your pages one by one, looking for missing SEO elements. This tool lets you crawl up to 500 pages of your website for free in the trial version.

Get started with Screaming Frog.

Smush Plugin for Wordpress

Use Smush to minimise every single one of your images and cut out any unnecessary data without slowing down your site. You can also set a max width and height and large images will scale down as they are being compressed.

Get started with Smush.

Yoast

Yoast is a WordPress plugin that lets you arrange an SEO-friendly snippet, while scoring the SEO of a blog page.

Get started with Yoast.

SECTION 5
GLOSSARY

Alt Text	The descriptive text associated with an image that informs search engines what the image actually is.
Anchor Text	The visible and clickable text in a link that often contains keywords relevant to the landing page it is linking to.
Backlinks	Backlinks are incoming links to a webpage from an external source.
Caching	Caching is when browsers temporarily store recent information about a webpage so search results can be generated more quickly next time.
Crawlers	Also called bots or spiders, these are automated programmes that search engines send out to scan webpages so that they can be indexed.
Domain Authority	A score on a 100-point scale developed by Moz that predicts how well a website will rank on search engines.
Google Algorithm	Google's formula for assessing webpages based on a broad range of factors and calculating how the page should rank in its SERPs.
Google My Business	A free tool for businesses, brands and organisations, allowing them to manage their online presence across the Google suite including Search and Maps.
Google Plus	A social networking service from Google.
Google Search Console	Google Search Console (previously Google Webmaster Tools) is a free web service by Google for webmasters allowing them to check their webpages are being indexed and optimise the visibility of their websites.
Header Tags	The tags that distinguish the different headings of on-page copy. They run from H1-H6 and in HTML, carry weight in terms of SEO.
HTTPS	Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) is the secure version of HTTP, the protocol over which data is sent between your browser and the website that you are connected to.
Keyword	In SEO, a keyword is a particular word or phrase that is the main focus of a webpage's contents.
Keyword Stuffing	The discouraged practice of overusing a particular keyword in such a way that it could be considered spammy.
Link Juice	The 'power' or authority that a link from a website can carry over to another page.
Long-tail keywords	Long-tail keywords are longer and more specific keyword phrases that web users are more likely to use when they're searching for the exact product they want to buy and are closer to the moment of purchase.

Latent Semantic Indexing	Latent semantic indexing (LSI) is a system used by search engines whereby they crawl a webpage and identify and collate the most common words and phrases. This system means that search engines no longer rely so heavily on 'the keyword' to understand what a page is about, but make an assessment based on all of the words together on the page.
LSI Keywords (LSI)	LSI keywords are keywords that are semantically related to your primary keyword.
Meta Description	The meta description tag in HTML is the 160 character snippet used to summarise a webpage's content. It is displayed in SERPs under the SEO title.
Nofollow Link	Nofollow links do not allow search engine crawlers to follow the link from site A to site B, meaning they do not pass link juice from one page to another.
On-Page SEO	On-page SEO is the process of optimising individual webpages in order to rank better in search and attract more relevant, organic traffic.
Optimise	Implement and adjust your content with the ultimate goal of satisfying users, search engine crawlers and ranking higher in SERPs.
Organic Traffic	Organic traffic refers to visits that come to your site when a user clicks on an unpaid search engine result.
Outreach	Efforts similar to PR that have the primary mission of generating backlinks for your website and mentions of your business.
Ranking Factors	The criteria for the evaluation of webpages used to determine ranking positions in the SERPs. These include technical, off-site and on-page aspects. It is believed that well over 200 ranking factors exist.
robots.txt	A recommended file on your website that gives search engine crawlers instructions on how to scan and index your website.
SERPs	Search engine result pages.
Site Speed	The speed at which a website loads; an important ranking factor.
Sitemap (HTML)	A page on your site that shows how the different pages on your site link together. This is made wth human users in mind.
Sitemap (XML)	An XML sitemap is a file that displays important information to search engines, allowing them to crawl the site more efficiently.
Slug	The slug is made up of the words which appear between the last sub-folder and the final forward slash of the URL. E.g. www.yourwebsite.ie/blog/neat-descriptive-slug/.
Smush	This is an image compression tool for Wordpress sites that allows users to optimise images on their site for SEO purposes.

Technical SEO	Technical SEO refers to any efforts you undertake on your site to improve SEO that don't involve on-page copy or link outreach.
Title Tag	A title tag is an HTML element that specifies the title of a webpage and displays it in the SERPs and on the top of the browser page.
URL	Uniform Resource Locator: the address of a page on the web.