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TECHNICAL SEO AUDITS

A step by step guide

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Thank you for downloading our guidebook!

A technical SEO audit helps to improve your website's health and its visibility on search engines. Audits identify potential issues and provide actionable insights that help search engine bots (crawlers) discover and index your website, as well as improving your site's speed and overall user experience (UX).

We've created a technical audit checklist to help you know exactly what to look for when reviewing your website.

Here's a step-by-step guide to conducting a comprehensive technical SEO audit:

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Crawl Your Website

Tools like **Screaming Frog**, **DeepCrawl**, or **Sitebulb** offer a useful way to scan your website to identify any issues affecting its performance (a process called 'crawling'). This gives an overview of key technical elements such as URLs, metadata, headers, images, and status codes which can impact SEO.

Crawling provides a foundation for the entire audit process and helps to identify issues that could be negatively affecting how well it is performing in search results.

Things to remember:

- **Check crawl depth:** Ensure important pages are within three clicks from the homepage

- **Identify crawl errors:** Look for any server, 404, or redirect errors that prevent search engines from accessing pages properly.

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Evaluate site structure and URL structure

When it comes to reviewing the structure of your website during a technical SEO audit, it's important to remember the users' perspective. Make sure you're considering whether your site is easy to navigate and how easily you can find specific pages. You should also consider whether visiting is an enjoyable experience for users.

So you should:

- **Ensure a logical and hierarchical site structure**

- **Use categories and subcategories where appropriate, so that pages are organised and easy to navigate.**

When reviewing the URL structure of your site, you should focus on the quality of the actual addresses of your web pages. Check for duplicate content and any URLs that aren't working properly (4XX errors) will ensure that the basic linking structure of your website is working correctly.

- **Check that URLs are SEO-friendly (addresses should be short, descriptive, and lowercase)**
- **Avoid using special characters, underscores, or overly complex URLs**
- **Look for duplicate content across multiple URLs and resolve it using canonical tags.**

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Review Indexability and Crawlability

For a website to appear in search engines, it has to be suitably indexed by search engine crawlers. These bots regularly crawl websites to determine quality and ranking potential, which has a direct impact on your overall site performance.

To ensure indexability:

- **Confirm that important pages are indexed and visible in search results. Use Google Search Console to check the "Coverage" report for any issues.**

- **Check robots.txt to ensure it's not blocking important pages from being crawled.**

- **Use XML sitemaps to guide crawlers to your main pages, keeping them up-to-date and error-free.**

Implementing canonical tags:

- **Implement canonical tags (code that tells search engines which version of a page is the main one) to avoid duplicate content issues**

- **Ensure canonical tags are self-referencing on the main URL to clarify the preferred version to search engines.**

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Conduct on-page SEO checks

It's always recommended to conduct a separate on-page SEO audit to ensure that the UX and readability of your website are high quality. When conducting a technical audit, there are a few on-page elements that you should review to ensure the basic principles are working properly.

Title tags:

- **Ensure all pages have unique, descriptive, and optimised title tags.**

- **Keep titles within 50-60 characters and include primary keywords where relevant.**

Meta descriptions:

- **Use unique meta descriptions (within 150-160 characters) to entice users and improve click-through rates.**

- **Avoid keyword stuffing but include main keywords naturally.**

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Headings (H1, H2, etc.):

- **Each page should have a single H1 tag that accurately describes the page's content.**

- **Use H2 and H3 tags as subheadings to organise content hierarchically for readability.**

Image optimisation:

- **Ensure images are optimised with descriptive alt text to improve accessibility and search engine understanding.**

- **Compress images to improve loading speed without losing quality..**

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Check for duplicate content

Duplicate content can harm your site's SEO by diluting the visibility of individual pages. You can use crawler platforms to identify duplicate content. Ensuring your site has little to no duplicate pages will help to prevent keyword cannibalisation, where multiple pages compete against each other by targeting the same keywords, reducing overall performance.

- **Consolidate similar pages or use canonical tags where necessary.**

- **Avoid publishing similar content across multiple pages.**

- **If necessary, use 301 redirects to consolidate traffic from duplicate pages.**

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Check redirects

Redirects impact both user experience and crawl efficiency, especially if they're improperly applied. Ensuring you have the right redirects setup is essential for efficient usability and crawlability of your website.

When reviewing redirects during a technical audit, you should focus on:

- **Broken Redirects: Fix any redirect loops or chains that cause inefficiency and delay page load**

- **301 vs. 302 Redirects: Use 301 (permanent redirects instead of 302 (temporary) redirects for permanent page moves to preserve SEO value**

- **HTTPS Redirects: Ensure HTTP pages redirect to their HTTPS counterparts if the site is secured with SSL**

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Improve site speed and core web vitals

Page speed and user experience are critical for both SEO and user retention. If your website is loading content too slowly, users will be more inclined to click off and move on to another site. Ensuring your site is performing at a good speed and your website's core vitals are healthy is key for effective site optimisation.

Tools to use for reviewing & improving core web vitals:

- **Google PageSpeed Insights or Lighthouse: Check your site's performance and get actionable insights**
- **Google's Web.dev: For detailed core web vitals metrics.**

Things to optimise for better core web vitals:
- Largest contentful paint (LCP): This metric refers to how fast the main content on a web page loads. Aim for under 2.5 seconds. You can improve the LCP by optimising images, CSS, and server response times
- First input delay (FID): Measures your user's first impression of your site's interactivity and responsiveness. Aim for less than 100 ms. Minimise JavaScript and improve server responsiveness
- Cumulative layout shift (CLS): This metric calculates the different shifting of elements while pages are being downloaded or rendered. Keep layout shifts minimal by setting dimensions for media and using stable design elements.

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Enhance mobile usability

Because smartphones are now the main way most people access the internet, mobile SEO should be a priority for all modern websites. With mobile-first indexing, mobile usability is paramount for SEO. You can use Google's Mobile-Friendly Test to assess your mobile site, or simply view your website on a mobile device and test the user functionality.

Key steps for auditing mobile functionalities:

- **Ensure all content is accessible on mobile (no blocking elements like buttons or pop-ups)**

- **Use responsive design to maintain a consistent experience across devices**

- **Check for clickable elements and legible font sizes.**

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Review internal linking

Internal linking helps distribute link equity across your site and enhances navigation. Not only does strong internal linking help users find their way around your website, but it also enables crawl-bots to find and review your site much more efficiently.

Internal linking review process:

- **Ensure all major pages have internal links pointing to them.**

- **Use descriptive anchor text to signal the content of the linked pages.**

- **Avoid orphan pages (pages with no internal links) and excessive linking (keep internal links on each page reasonable)**

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Analyse backlink profile

A healthy backlink profile improves your domain's authority and ranking potential, making your site more visible to crawl bots and potential site users. Strong backlinks also help to establish a more trustworthy and knowledgeable impression for your website.

- **Use tools like Ahrefs, Moz, SEMrush to review the current backlinks on your website**

- **Assess the quantity and quality of backlinks your website has. Focus on acquiring high-authority, relevant backlinks**

- **Disavow any harmful or spammy backlinks that could negatively impact SEO**

- **Ensure a natural distribution of branded, generic, and exact match anchor text**

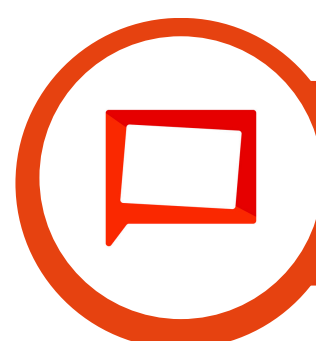**Need A Hand? Get In Touch**

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Check for security concerns

Security is an increasingly important SEO factor as users (and search engines) prioritise secure sites when it comes to building trustworthiness on a website. Ensuring that the minimum security elements are maintained also makes potential customers feel at ease.

Checklist for security elements:

- **SSL Certificate: Ensure all pages are served via HTTPS**

- **Malware and Spam: Regularly monitor the site for malware or spammy links, particularly within comment sections or community forums on your website**

- **Security Headers: Implement security headers like Content Security Policy (CSP) and X-Content-Type-Options to prevent attacks.**

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Analyse use experience (UX)

User experience impacts SEO metrics such as bounce rate, time on page, and conversions. Having a positive UX is key for improving customer retention and increasing the amount of time users spend on your website. If customers have a negative user experience, they will most likely move on to an alternative website.

Steps to reviewing user experience:

- **Reduce pop-ups: Minimise intrusive pop-ups that disrupt user experience**

- **Improve navigation: Make it easy for users to navigate by keeping menus simple and organised**

- **Optimise for accessibility: Ensure the site meets accessibility standards, including alternative text for images and keyboard-friendly navigation.**

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Create post-audit KPI's

After the audit, establish specific KPIs to monitor ongoing SEO health. This will help to benchmark the current state of the site and how it is impacting organic traffic and will make future comparisons much more accurate and useful.

Organic KPIs to consider:

- **Organic traffic: Track changes in organic sessions to see the impact of SEO improvements**

- **Engagement rate: How many users are actively engaging with your website content?**

- **Page load speed: Ensure Core Web Vitals are continuously optimised**

- **Organic CTR: Review the site's organic click-through rate (CTR) to assess the success rate of new visitors seeing and clicking through to your website**

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Document audit findings and action plan

Once you've gathered all audit findings, create a document summarising the issues, their severity, and specific actions to address each one. Prioritise issues based on their potential impact on SEO.

- **Work through the priority audit findings, either implement the fixes yourself or you may need to instruct a web-development team for technical or coding changes to be made.**

- **Once fixes have been made, review progress with a new audit crawl to check that everything is working properly.**

- **Conduct a technical audit every six months to a year, to prevent a build-up of issues that could be prohibiting your site from performing well.**

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Conducting a technical SEO audit is an ongoing process rather than a one-time activity. By regularly reviewing and updating the site's technical health, you ensure that your website remains competitive, compliant with search engine guidelines, and optimised for user experience.

For more information about technical SEO audits, get in touch with the Carrington team today.

Whether you need guidance, advice or auditing services, our SEO team will be happy to help.

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