SEO Quick Fixes:
Part 2- *Feed The GOOG*

The second of a four part series designed to help the average website manager learn and apply some important fixes that are guaranteed to help any website's ranking.

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In the 1ˢᵗ installment we discussed the initial website cleanup process and the basic steps to take with your site to get everything in order. In this segment we take a look at some of the important things you need to address with the search engines so that they properly index your site.

WWW or Not WWW?

Let me boil this down to the basics for you. Duplicate Content. Search engines hate it and when they see it they start dumping it. You can read any number of articles on this with a simple search. One of the simplest versions of duplicate content is how you designate your website, with a www or without. Use of the www creates a URL address distinctly different from that of a URL without www. You need to pick one version and stick to it. Here's how.

Step 1. Every page on your site can be interpreted either way so you need to select your preference and identify that preference on every page in the Head section. You add the following tag to identify the preferred version.

```
<link rel="canonical" href="http://www.example.com/samplepage.htm"/>
```

You can also use this to identify the preferred version of pages with very similar or identical content. Read more about canonicals in Google Webmaster Tools (GWT).

Step 2. You will want to specify this in GWT and in Bing...More on this later in the article.

Google Analytics

Don't be afraid….it won't bite. In fact, Google Analytics is one very helpful friend to have when figuring out what is wrong or right with your website. Best of all, it's free. I want you to go to Google Analytics and sign up if you don't already have a Google account. Depending on your situation you may want to establish a separate account just for use with things like GA, WMT and BING.

Once inside GA you can go through the brief tutorial and then establish your website, being sure to use the preferred version – www or non www. Then generate the code which you then add to your website pages. Same piece of code goes on every page you want to track. If you don't have the ability to set this up yourself you can simply send it to your webmaster and he/they/she can add it to every page in a matter of a few minutes. It will take a week or a few weeks before you begin to really see stats being generated. The more traffic you have the sooner this happens. Don't be discouraged.

Once you start to have a steady stream of stats you can begin poking around to learn what is what. For some people this is like poking their head down the rabbit hole, once you get a taste you want more and more. Others find the whole experience so unnerving that they block it from their memory and try to live without the stats. That is not what I recommend. For those of you in this second batch, take heart, there are just a few places you really NEED to pay attention to. You can read numerous articles about these so I won't belabor them here. Ready?

Device Type – Tells you who your audience is and how to present to them

Page Views – Are visitors finding your site interesting? Or leaving after one page? 1 is bad, 3.5 is average, more is good.

On Site Time – 5 seconds or 5 minutes? Less means your page will drop in the rankings, more means it will rise.

Bounce Rate - % of visitors who leave your site without going past the page they landed on. You want this % low.

Top Visited Pages – What are people coming to you for? What do they want? Overlook pages like index/home.

Top Keywords – You can still do some keyword research by seeing what searches you were most found by.

Sitemap

There are three types of sitemaps. 1) the type most people are familiar with is the visible one which is often included with a website as a master index of sorts. This is designed for

the website user to view and can be an effective tool with large websites although a search function will be as good if not better job.

The other two types are intended just for search engines. These are known as sitemap.xml or a urllist.txt. You can easily check to see if you have either one installed by adding those two files to the domain name, one at a time.

 Ex: www.mysite.com/urllist.txt.

If you don't see it come up, you likely don't have it. Even if it does come up it may be out of date. Check with your webmaster to make sure that all your pages are listed on one of these two maps and being submitted to the search engines.

Tip: While you are at it, ask if there is a robots.txt file and if the sitemap is listed on there. It should be. The robots.txt file is the first stop for any search-bot crawling your site and it tells them not only what to ignore on the site but where to find your site map so it doesn't miss anything.

Tip: If you are creating things on your own the easiest way to create a sitemap is with a urllist.txt file. Check out an example of one at ProClassWebDesign.com/urllist.txt. Also…be sure to use a URL which reflects the preferred version of your site.

Google Webmaster Tools area has more information about sitemaps.

Register

You now need to register your website with both Google and Bing. It's easy.
Do a quick search for Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Toolbox. This is where you will register the site.

In Google follow the simple directions to Add A Site. This should be very easy. You will need to verify your authority to add the site in different ways depending on whether it is Google or Bing.

Google – Verify using the option which references your Google Analytics account. (You set that up already, right?)

Bing – You will likely verify by adding a piece of code to the head section of your home page. Be sure to go back into the Bing page and click the Verify Now button. If you don't – it won't.

Google Webmaster Tools

Important steps:
Claim both versions of your website, the www AND the not www. You need to claim BOTH versions before you can tell Google which one you prefer. This is because they are viewed as two different websites, remember?

Now you can select the Preferred version. They move this every so often so look around for it. Try Account Settings or Tools and look for Preferred Version.

You can also select the Country you want to focus on. This is not so important unless you want the site to appear primarily in an overseas search.

Then click on the account name so as to open the screen and you will see a link for Sitemaps. Click that to submit the sitemap you created earlier.

Check Indexing in Google WMT

Now that you are set up in WMT you should give it a couple of days to crawl the site.

Then pop back into the WMT area and start browsing the menu. You will find all sorts of helpful tips and reports on what is right and wrong with your site. Way more is there then we can cover in this article so look to the Help feature to learn more.
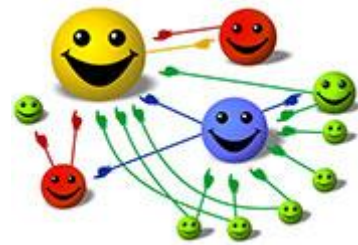
A couple of things to watch for would be too few pages being indexed. You submit a site map with 30 pages and only 5 get indexed. This can happen and indicates something you should certainly look into.

You might have blocked parts of the site in the robots.txt file, have a **robots="nofollow"** tag in the page head, be dealing with a duplicate content issue or have redirect issues. Your webmaster should be able to help you dive into it a bit but, know that you will be paying for their time, unless it is something they flubbed on.

Check Links to Your Pages

Use a tool like Google Analytics, WMT or Open Site Explorer to identify pages with a large number of in-bound links. Be sure that these pages are still active and current. If not, update, redirect or reinstall so as to recapture those links. They are worth a lot and you do not want to lose them because of an oversight.

Duplicate Elements

As you browse through Google WMT you want to watch for any warnings about problems with Titles, Descriptions, Duplicate content, crawl issues, etc. As you find WMT warnings, read up on them and what to do about them. I understand this may well be new territory for you and there may be some resistance to learning new things, however, this stuff is important, it isn't rocket science, and as you play with it you will find it isn't so bad. And, once it is sorted out, a quarterly review may be all you need.

Value of your Inbound Links

The higher the value of the website linking to yours the better for your site's ranking. There are a few tips to these links that one should keep in mind. Too many "Backlinks" originating from keywords, aka "anchor text" and you can start losing credibility with the search engines. Therefore, I suggest that you create a report of all the links pointing to your site, what the Pagerank(quality) for those sites is and what the point of origination is. Try a program like: whitespark.ca, opensiteexplorer.org, MajesticSEO.com or AHREFS.com. Most of these have a free or trial version which will do a lot and leave you in awe.

Then, determine which the High Authority/Value sites are and which are of lesser quality. Excessive keyword anchor text can create a bad "link profile". You want to save rich anchor text for high authority links. Therefore….High quality - request they change the anchor text to a keyword or slightly off-brand term. Lower quality, have them use the domain name as a link and switch away from keyword anchor text. This will put the powerful links in the powerful position and the lesser quality ones in a safer, less prominent format. …..Yes, this has your head swirling…it's OK. Just do what you can.

BTW – If you find a bunch of questionable links when you do this report. You may want to look at them further. If there is no reason they should be linking to you then they may be "toxic" and could be causing you a penalty action. This is a whole other topic and you will need a pro to help you out.

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