

SEO Audit

Guidance

ON-PAGE	GUIDANCE
<p>Meta titles optimised/localised?</p>	<p>Meta titles are shown on SERPs and are a direct ranking factor as Google and search engines use them to determine the relevancy of the page to the searcher's query. Meta titles should be optimised around the main keyword/location a page is targeting and should incentivise users to click on a result.</p> <p>Bad Practice: "Homepage Irwin Mitchell" vs Good Practice: "Solicitors in London Irwin Mitchell - Expert London Law Firm"</p> <p>Bad Practice: "Family Law Irwin Mitchell" vs Good Practice: "Family Law Solicitors in London No-Win No-Fee Irwin Mitchell"</p> <p>Bad Practice: "Inheritance Tax Rules Changed Irwin Mitchell" vs Good Practice: "Inheritance Tax - Latest Thresholds for 2023/24 Irwin Mitchell"</p>
<p>Meta descriptions optimised/localised?</p>	<p>Meta descriptions are the snippets that display on SERPs. Whilst meta descriptions are not a direct ranking factor, they are important as they can help improve click-through rates by differentiating content from competitors, intriguing and engaging searchers and improving click-through rates. Descriptions should be a maximum of around 155 characters in length and should convey the main purpose of the page and what users are likely to encounter if they were to land on the page.</p> <p>Bad Practice: "Give our team a call on 07729433515 for advice. " vs Good Practice: "Our family solicitors in London are experts in divorce, child & financial law. Speak to the UK's largest specialist family law solicitors."</p>
<p>Header tags optimised/localised?</p>	<p>Header tags convey the main aspects of each page and should be structured in descending order by priority of keywords (i.e. from H1 to H6), with H1s containing the primary keyword target for the page. H2-H6 should have supportive keywords that are relevant to the page and often this is in the form of long-tail keywords.</p> <p>Bad Practice homepage H1: "Welcome to Irwin Mitchell" vs Good Practice homepage H1: "Expert London Law Firm"</p> <p>Bad Practice homepage H2: "Learn more about what we do" vs Good Practice homepage H2: "Experienced Specialist Solicitors and Lawyers"</p>

<p>Acceptable internal linking usage?</p>	<p>Internal linking should be present across all pages that mention other services offered (i.e. if there is a "Family Law" page that mentions "Wills & Probate" within the text, users should be able to click on "Wills & Probate" within the text and navigate to that dedicated page).</p> <p>This should be implemented for all actionable links (i.e. phone numbers, email addresses, mentions of 'Contact Us'), in addition to any relevant external links (i.e. if the page mentions "The Solicitors Regulation Authority", there should be an external link pointing to the SRA's website).</p>
<p>Alt tags on images?</p>	<p>Alt tags are a direct ranking factor for Google Images. Google is unable to understand images and requires alt text to better understand the context of the image and why they're used. Alt tags can be used to insert relevant keywords - where they make sense (without "keyword stuffing").</p> <p>Alt images are useful for niches and articles that receive traffic from Google Images as one of its primary sources. Informational searches such as "wedding reception inspiration" or e-commerce searches such as "floral navy blue carpet for bedroom" are likely to result in Google providing images at the top of SERPs, so alt images are required to rank high for these searches.</p> <p>Alt images are not as important for websites that do not target Google Images as a potential traffic source (i.e. solicitors/accountants, etc).</p>
<p>Navigation menu clear?</p>	<p>Navigation menus should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) be simple to understand;b) consider user intent;c) reflect the overall website structure;d) have internal links to all relevant/transactional pages (such as sub-service pages);e) include call-to-actions (such as "Contact" or "Get a Quote"); andf) include search functionality (if required). <p>This can be a subjective point to evaluate, however it's important to consider user journeys and assess how you would interact with a website from a target audience market's standpoint.</p>

<p>Call-to-actions utilised?</p>	<p>Call-to-actions can take various forms, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) within the header section (particularly on mobile devices);2) within the 'hero' section;3) internal links within the content;4) blocks within the page/content; and5) blocks within the page / overlaid on the page. <p>Websites that don't utilise call-to-actions within the layout and content are less likely to result in a high number of leads and conversions, even if the website is ranking well for several of its key terms and phrases.</p>
<p>Broken images / links?</p>	<p>A broken link is a link that points to another page that doesn't exist, either because it has been A) deleted, B) moved and the link hasn't been updated, C) there's a typo in the URL or D) the wrong page is linked.</p> <p>Broken links take users to a 404 (Not Found) error page and can frustrate visitors and cause them to leave a website. They also have an SEO ramification as Google has indicated working & correct linking is a critical ranking factor, particularly for internal links. This also affects search engines' ability to crawl a website efficiently and properly, and can result in a loss of traffic.</p> <p>The same goes for broken images, however this also has an effect on website performance and the layout. Browsers will attempt to load images which do not exist (taking up resource and elongating the time it takes to load the page), whilst the layout may break if it is relying on images to structure the overall content of the website.</p>

CONTENT	GUIDANCE
<p>Page for every service?</p>	<p>Businesses often have several services, which may also include a number of sub-services. For example, an accountancy firm may offer "Business Accounting" services, which contains the sub-services of "Payroll Services", "Bookkeeping", "Statutory Accounts", "Tax Planning", etc.</p> <p>Often, websites will either have one main "Services" page, which lists all the services on one page without a dedicated page for each service, or they will have the parent service on their website as a dedicated page (i.e. "Business Accounting"), without having a dedicated page for each of the sub-services.</p> <p>Most websites require a dedicated "Services" holder page, which contain all the services offered with internal links to dedicated service pages (i.e. "Business Accounting"), and these dedicated service pages should then internally link to dedicated sub-service pages (i.e. "Payroll Services").</p>
<p>FAQs on all service pages?</p>	<p>FAQs enable businesses to deal with specific queries that customers have about the business. It's recommended to have a general FAQs page that deals with general questions about the business, industry or an overview of the services they offer, or processes that the business employs. However, it's also recommended that every service (and sub-service) page has its own set of unique & dedicated FAQs that hone in on the particulars of the service.</p> <p>This allows more helpful content to be added to these pages and also enables the utilisation of longer-tail keywords. Each FAQ should be around a paragraph long, and potentially internally link to other relevant pages/blog posts.</p>
<p>Service pages with in-depth content?</p>	<p>Having in-depth content on service pages is pivotal for effective SEO. It enhances search engine rankings by showcasing expertise, improving user experience, and targeting relevant keywords.</p> <p>In-depth content comprises detailed service descriptions, FAQs, case studies, testimonials, visual elements, and clear calls-to-action. Internal links to relevant blog posts, team members or other content and external links to authoritative websites add context and credibility.</p> <p>Ensuring content is in-depth and valuable is vital to appease Google's emphasis on helpful content. This approach not only boosts SEO but also builds trust and engagement with potential customers and increases conversion rates.</p>

<p>Blog posts implemented?</p>	<p>Every website should have a blog section as it allows the targeting of users at different stages of their buying journey (awareness, consideration, decision). Blog posts enable targeting specific user queries and questions and longer-tail keywords, which have better conversion rates.</p> <p>Blog posts should be categorised into the relevant services / sub-services a business offers and should be going after top, middle and bottom of the funnel topics within each service.</p> <p>Blog pages should A) link between each other in the form of clusters; B) link to the main service page [and vice-versa]; C) have clickable call-to-actions within the content; D) have a contact form at the bottom of the content; and E) have an author listed with information about why they're a trusted voice.</p>
<p>About Us Page present & detailed?</p>	<p>Search engines look for an "About Us" page on a website to evaluate a website's credibility and relevance for search terms and is one of the ways in which Google assesses a website's E-E-A-T credentials.</p> <p>This page should contain A) all the vital information about the business; B) a meet the team section; C) key USPs and reasons they should be trusted; D) a quote from the owner; E) a section listing social media channels; F) a section listing testimonials; G) a timeline of the business history, etc.</p>
<p>Contact Us page present?</p>	<p>Every "Contact Us" page should be easy to navigate to and include different ways in which users can get in touch with the business. This includes a telephone number (for every relevant department, if applicable), an email address (for every relevant department, if applicable), physical address (if applicable), opening hours (if applicable) and a contact form.</p> <p>It's crucial to ensure the contact form appears above the fold for users and is the first element they see on the page, as this is the primary method most users use to get in touch with a business.</p> <p>It's also good practice to include a Google Maps embed of the business' physical location (if applicable), which is linked to the business' Google Business Profile.</p>

<p>Meet the Team section present?</p>	<p>Businesses that have multiple staff members should list these members in a "Meet the Team" section on the website. This is particularly important for websites that are within the YMYL (your money, your life) niche, but applies to all websites as this is a method that can be used to demonstrate E-E-A-T principles.</p> <p>If a business has multiple services where there is a dedicated team that handles the relevant service (i.e. a solicitors' firm will have solicitors specialising in Family Law, Litigation, Conveyancing, etc), each service page should have its own relevant "Meet the Team" section.</p>
<p>Individual staff profiles present?</p>	<p>In addition to having a "Meet the Team" section that lists the staff members, there should also be dedicated staff member profiles that are linked via the section. These staff member profiles should contain an image, a small bio, job title, contact information, specialisms (i.e "Family Law"), and external links to their LinkedIn (if applicable). In addition, any blog posts relating to their specialisms should be internally linked at the bottom of the profile.</p> <p>These profiles can be marked up with Person Schema, which enables Google to associate real-world individuals with the profiles, and therefore the business, helping build credibility and also demonstrating experience, expertise and trustworthiness.</p>
<p>Duplicate content found?</p>	<p>Each page on a website should have dedicated & unique content that is not "cannibalising" another page (i.e. competing for the same keywords). Some content duplication is expected among similar pages, such as location pages, however the ratio of duplicate and page-relevant content is important to bear in mind.</p> <p>Duplicate content is typically a greater issue where the content has been lifted from an external website. This is something that is largely prevalent on blog posts, where businesses will often take news articles or insights from other websites and place it directly on their own blog section without paraphrasing or adding any further information. Even if credit is given to the external website, Google is unlikely to consider this page to rank and will deem this practice to be spam, and therefore impact rankings for other pages on the website too.</p>
<p>Testimonials found?</p>	<p>Testimonials and reviews are important to showcase during customers' buying journeys. They are also important to highlight the credibility and trustworthiness of the business to search engines.</p> <p>Websites should have a dedicated testimonials/reviews section (where applicable) and also add these reviews to transactional pages (such as service pages) as this enables better conversion rates and provides trust signals to both users and Google.</p>

<p>Case studies found?</p>	<p>Case studies are vital in demonstrating the business' experience (E-E-A-T) to search engines and users. As with testimonials, these should be placed on a dedicated page, in addition to being added on all relevant pages on the website (such as service pages or location pages). Case studies should contain information around the background, the process, the solution and the outcome achieved.</p> <p>This is particularly important for businesses within certain sectors, such as home improvement, as users will look to see evidence of the work the business is capable of delivering.</p>
<p>Location pages found?</p>	<p>Location pages are useful to micro-target specific areas the business wishes to target. There is a balance to be struck here - as location pages should only be created for locations where the business has sufficient differentiating content (such as testimonials, reviews, location-specific FAQs) and there is a credible reason to have a page for that area (i.e. they have a physical location/branch in the area).</p> <p>Excessive location pages with similar content can be regarded as spam, and therefore this should not be recommended for websites that already have these implemented.</p> <p>An example of where location pages should certainly be implemented is a multi-branch estate agents firm. If the firm has a branch in Epsom, Ascot and Virginia Water, there should be a page dedicated for each of these branches and aligned with metadata along the lines of "Estate Agents in [location] Sales & Lettings Business Name"</p>

TECHNICAL	GUIDANCE
<p>Robots.txt file</p>	<p>A robots.txt file is a text file placed on a website's server to instruct search engines on which parts of the site should be crawled or ignored. It's important because it helps control how search engines index a website, preventing them from indexing sensitive or irrelevant content, which can improve a site's SEO.</p> <p>Best practices for robots.txt files include placing it in the website's root (i.e. https://domain.com/robots.txt), using specific directives to allow or disallow certain user-agents (crawlers), and including a reference to the sitemap file. Linking a sitemap in your robots.txt file is a best practice for SEO, as it streamlines the indexing process and guides crawlers to the pages listed within the sitemap for efficient crawling.</p>
<p>Sitemap.xml file</p>	<p>A sitemap.xml file is a structured document that lists all the important pages and content on a website in an XML format. It serves as a roadmap for search engine crawlers, helping them discover and index web pages more efficiently. This file is important because it ensures that search engines can access and understand the full extent of a website's content.</p> <p>Best practices for a sitemap.xml file include including all vital pages, ensuring there are no pages unintended for ranking included within the file and ensuring it is up-to-date with the latest content on the site. WordPress will often include tag, author category pages within the sitemap, in addition to 'thank you' pages, which are not intended for ranking, and we ordinarily recommend the removal of these from the sitemap.</p> <p>Sitemap files can usually be found on the following paths for the majority of websites (or via the footer): https://domain.com/sitemap.xml, https://domain.com/sitemap_index.xml OR https://domain.com/wp-sitemap.xml</p>
<p>URL structures</p>	<p>URLs should be SEO-friendly, which largely means they should be concise, contain the main keyword for the page, and be readable. URLs should also reflect the structure of the website and be 'layered' into sub-folders, where applicable, to make sure each page is organised into a folder or main parent page. Hyphens should be used rather than underscores, as this can be misconstrued by search engines, whilst stop words such as "and", "for", "of" need not be used unless needed for clarity.</p> <p>Bad Practice: "/family-law/" vs Good Practice: "/services/family-law/" Bad Practice: "/solicitors-for-individuals-and-businesses-around-birmingham-and-the-uk" vs Good Practice: "/birmingham-solicitors/"</p>

	<p>Bad Practice: "?page=23829" vs Good Practice: "/category/page/" Bad Practice: "/Top_5_Financial_Tips_for_Small_Business_Owners.php" vs Good Practice: "top-5-financial-tips-small-business-owners"</p>
<p>Schema mark-up</p>	<p>Schema is code on a webpage that communicates the key aspects of the business & its services in a format that is easily digestible by search engines and helps establish rankings as Google better understands the website and how it compares to its competitors, leading to better rankings. Schema is an indirect ranking factor but is an important part of the SEO jigsaw.</p> <p>Some common examples of Schema include: LocalBusiness, Service, Person, AggregateRating, FAQPage, Breadcrumbs, Product, Article, Video and Event. However there are several others and not every Schema type will be applicable.</p>
<p>Favicon visible on SERPs?</p>	<p>Including a favicon in a website is important for SEO as it enhances user experience and brand recognition. Favicons are small icons that appears in the browser tab when someone visits a website and this displays on the SERPs. It may seem minor, but it contributes to a professional appearance and helps users quickly identify a website among multiple open tabs or when researching websites and recognising sites they've previously clicked on. This can reduce bounce rates and increase the likelihood of users returning to the site due to brand recognition.</p> <p>A favicon is typically a small, simplified version of the business' logo or a unique symbol associated with the brand, and it should be consistent with the overall branding for maximum effectiveness.</p>
<p>Website SSL working?</p>	<p>Ensuring that SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) is working on a website is crucial for SEO and user trust and is a confirmed ranking factor. SSL encrypts data between the user's browser and the website, indicating a secure connection, as denoted by the "https" in the URL and a padlock icon.</p> <p>This security is essential as search engines prioritise secure websites in their rankings. Additionally, visitors are more likely to engage with and trust sites with SSL. Users may also receive a "this website could be deceptive" warning on sites without an SSL certificate.</p> <p>It's important to ensure all internal links on the website point to the "https" version and only the "https" version is accessible. You can test this by going to an inner page of any website and changing "https" to "http" to see whether the website automatically redirects you to the correct version. It's ideal to test this on an inner page as homepages will often redirect, whilst inner pages sometimes will not due to incorrect server-side configuration.</p>

<p>Acceptable website speed?</p>	<p>Website speed is paramount for SEO success as it directly impacts user experience and affects search engine rankings. A slow website can lead to high bounce rates, lower user engagement, and decreased conversion rates, all of which can negatively affect overall SEO performance and ROI.</p> <p>Core Web Vitals are a set of metrics that Google uses to judge website speed and tools such as GT Metrix and PageSpeed Insights will give you an insight into how adherent a website is with regards to these metrics.</p> <p>Usual culprits include images that are large in size, heavy usage of JavaScript code and the prioritisation of code on the page. Websites that use page builders such as Elementor and Divi on WordPress often have these issues. Whilst our SEO work can improve some of these metrics, often a website rebuild is recommended, particularly for websites that are built with bad architecture on the whole, rather than specific, easily fixable issues.</p>
<p>Key pages crawlable/indexable?</p>	<p>Pages that are intended for ranking (i.e. the homepage, service pages, location pages, about us page, etc) should be crawlable and indexable for search engines. These pages should A) be included in the sitemap; B) have no directives within the robots.txt file that stops them from being crawled; and C) have no "<meta name='robots' content='noindex'>" tag attached within the source code.</p> <p>If the above is all in order, it's worth ensuring the content on the pages itself is readable by Google. For example, car dealership websites will often display a product grid of all the cars they have in stock. These are often listed via an integration they have with their stock management system, and are inputted on the page via JavaScript. Google is often unable or is hindered in crawling these pages as the content is added to the page after it has loaded. To ensure this isn't a problem, it's recommended to view the source code and search for the title of the listing you suspect is being input via JavaScript. If there is no mention of it within the source code, it's likely Google is unable to render or find this content.</p>

OFF-PAGE	GUIDANCE
<p>GBP listing present?</p>	<p>Having a Google Business Profile listing is crucial from a local SEO perspective as it enhances a business's online visibility, particularly in local search results. When potential customers search for services or products in a specific location, Google often displays relevant local businesses, complete with contact information, reviews, and directions within the Local Map Pack.</p> <p>A well-optimised Google Business Profile can significantly boost the chances of appearing for these local search results, driving more targeted organic traffic to a website. It also fosters trust by providing essential business details, including service details and customer reviews, making it an integral part of a comprehensive SEO strategy for local businesses.</p> <p>If a business has a brick-and-mortar location, we recommend the creation of a Google Business Profile listing for each of its locations.</p>
<p>Name & website URL correct?</p>	<p>The name of the Google Business Profile should be in line with the name presented on the website and within the Schema mark-up implemented. Most websites will have the most basic form of Schema mark-up (Organization) as this comes out of the box on SEO plugins utilised on platforms such as WordPress. However, it's important to make sure the mark-up and the Google Business Profile contain the correct name to ensure Google recognises both as the same entity.</p> <p>A common issue noted at times is a Google Business Profile including "Ltd." or "Limited" as part of its GBP listing name, but not having this anywhere on the website. Similarly, if a website's Schema and mentions of itself throughout the content is "Dolans Windows and Doors" but the GBP listing is "Dolan's Windows & Doors", this is seen as two different names.</p> <p>The URL of the website should also be consistent & correct on the GBP listing. Common issues include the website starting with the "https://www" prefix, but the listing containing the "http://" prefix as it was created before the website moved to https or the www version, and vice-versa. Businesses that have merged or have built a new website on a new domain will also have these inconsistencies.</p>
<p>Phone number correct?</p>	<p>As above, the phone number listed on the GBP listing(s) and throughout the website should be consistent.</p>

<p>Address correct?</p>	<p>As above, the physical address on the GBP listing(s) and throughout the website should be consistent, including the way it is spelt/typed out (i.e. the GBP listing may show as "Pollard Street" but the website may list the address as "Pollard Strt").</p>
<p>Business category correct?</p>	<p>Every Google Business Profile listing can have multiple categories, with one primary category displayed below the name of the listing. This is an important self-reported feature and is a way to ensure Google displays the listing for relevant searches. Whilst it's useful to have multiple GBP categories shown, the primary category is particularly important to ensure the business shows for the correct keywords.</p> <p>For instance, Google may prefer to show businesses with the primary category of "Retirement home" higher in the Local Map Pack for the keyword "care home", however if a business' listing's primary category is listed as "Nursing home" or "Assisted living residence", it is unlikely the business will show higher in the results.</p> <p>"GMBspy" and "GMB Everywhere" are two Google Chrome extensions that show you this category information.</p>
<p>Services listed?</p>	<p>Businesses can add 'Services' as part of its Google Business Profile listing. This is only eligible for service-based businesses, such as salons, spas, fitness centres or professional services. Some business categories do not allow the addition of services. However, for websites that meet the criteria, it is recommended to add the services offered by the business within the GBP listing to ensure users and Google knows what the business caters to.</p> <p>Services are displayed under a "Services" tab when clicking through to the GBP listing on Google Maps. If none of the other listings contain the "Services" tab, it's likely the category of businesses are not eligible to display Services.</p> <p>However, as an example, for fitness spas, the services listed could include: 'Beauty Treatments', 'Facials', 'Manicures', 'Massages', 'Skin Treatments'. The addition of these services would ensure Google considers your website for search terms such as "massage near me", even if the GBP listing is for an all-round spa rather than a specialist massage parlour.</p>

<p>Updates/posts visible?</p>	<p>GBP listings should have regular posts and updates added to the profile to showcase latest developments, promote any sales, specials, events, news, offers or blog posts on the website. Users - and Google - prefer listings that are 'active' and have regular activity.</p> <p>GBP listings that have not made a post for over 6 months will not display a "Latest updates" section or "Updates" tab within the GBP listing. If that is the case, it's recommended to make sure there is a GBP content/updates plan in place.</p>
<p>Reviews on par with competitors?</p>	<p>Whilst this is not something directly controllable within our SEO campaigns, we encourage all businesses to gather as many reviews from their previous and existing customer base. Listings that have less than 5 reviews generally perform far worse than listings with greater than this number, although this is a generic guide and depending on the niche & competitiveness, this figure could be far greater. Listings that are below 4* also perform worse and therefore we recommend businesses to focus on improving these ratings as it may also have a negative effect on wider organic results (outside of the Local Map Pack & Google Maps).</p>
<p>Every review replied to?</p>	<p>Responding to every Google Business Profile review demonstrates active engagement and customer care. Google considers businesses that interact with their customers more favourably, potentially leading to improved search rankings. Moreover, responding to reviews, especially negative ones, presents an opportunity to address concerns publicly, showcasing the business' commitment to customer satisfaction. Positive interactions with customers can encourage more reviews, leading to increased online visibility and trust, both of which are essential for SEO success.</p> <p>As with gaining reviews, this is not directly controllable within our SEO campaigns but we do encourage clients to reply to every review upon the commencement of any SEO campaign.</p>