



PixelRocket

On-Page SEO Basics for WordPress



Introduction

**Search engine optimization isn't *hard*.
It's just fickle, ever-changing, complex, deep, and demanding.**

Let's begin with the mindset of search optimization. Your goal: bring Google's users to your website. Google's goal: provide the most relevant, timely, and query-serving information to their users.

So, if your information is timely, relevant, and answers users' questions, you and Google are on the *same team*.

Despite common belief, your mission is not fighting against Google's latest devilish whim, because their goal is not to thwart your marketing. Rather, your mission is to try to work within the parameters Google sets forth to make searching a better experience for their users.

Google is a business, and they aim to please. Yes, they give priority space to paying advertisers. Yes, they seem to change their minds about best practices for optimization every day. They are a business in the fast-paced, digital age, just like you.

To win this game with Google, you have to follow their rules. Those rules aren't explicitly clear on purpose. The reason: they don't want random spammers and creepy SEO-ers from the 2000s overcoming search engine results and bumming their users out. You wouldn't either.

So, what do we KNOW for sure that Google wants? Relevance. Quality. Clarity.

How do we let Google know that we have those things? We use the signals they have given us, and we improvise the rest.

This guide is a roadmap to those few signals we KNOW Google is looking for on-page. The technical, crawl-level, and off-page elements of SEO are entirely separate facets of the study, but these on-page basics will get you started.



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Audit Your Topic

Questions to consider during this first phase:

1. Is it audience-relevant and brand-relevant?
2. Is it redundant to anything already on the site?
3. Is it motivated by keyword (KW) research, social buzz, or a content gap?
Why this topic, and why now?
4. What will this page or post give to the user? Do they need it?
5. What will users do once they're finished reading this?
6. Do you have a plan to share & amplify this content elsewhere?



Example: You're a florist called FloristXYZ.

You want to make a page or post about bridal bouquets for your florist shop:

1. Is it relevant to your audience and brand?

Yes, the topic interests your audience.

2. Is it redundant to other content on your site?

You have made sure you don't already have posts or pages about this exact topic.

3. What motivates this topic?

Wedding season is coming up and spring bouquets are relevant, or your website was missing this page, and you need to add it as a service.

4. What will this content provide to your users?

This is informative for brides and wedding planners – a huge subset of your customers

5. What will users do once they've read it?

Your goal is to get brides to sign up for a consultation.

6. Do you have an amplification plan?

Share this post or page on socials, via email, or wherever else you're marketing.




Choose a Primary Keyword

Every page on the site should map 1:1 to a keyword that the site as a whole wants to rank for. None of the other pages should be trying to rank for that keyword specifically. In addition, that page shouldn't be trying to rank for 10 different distinct keywords.

For something specific like a service page, choose the keyword that best balances opportunity and volume – so you know that it's being searched frequently, and that you have a fair shot to outrank competitors.


For a generic page like “about us,” choose a keyword that you want the site to rank for in general, and then optimize the page to make sure you're driving users to your more convertible pages (home, services, contact).



■ **Example:** Your page is going to be all about the bouquets you make for brides at your flower shop. You find out that “Bridal Bouquets” has the highest search volume, and that competition is medium. So you go for it. No other page on your site should aim for this exact keyword.

Notes for posts:

- If your topic was motivated by keyword research, it should rank for the keywords you came up with that motivated the topic in the first place.
- If your post topic was motivated by social buzz or current events in the industry, choose the keyword that best balances opportunity and volume – so you know that it's being searched frequently and that you have a fair shot to outrank competitors.




■ **Example:** You want to rank for bridal bouquets and you have never written a post about this before, but it's April and wedding season is upon you. You plan a post about the X top trends for bridal bouquets.



Choose Related Keywords

Related keywords serve two purposes: **(1)** To give you more organic opportunities to rank for the primary keyword you chose above and/or **(2)** to give you a backup keyword for which you can rank.

To suit purpose **1** (better optimize for the designated keyword), the related KWs should share some overlap with the designated phrase.

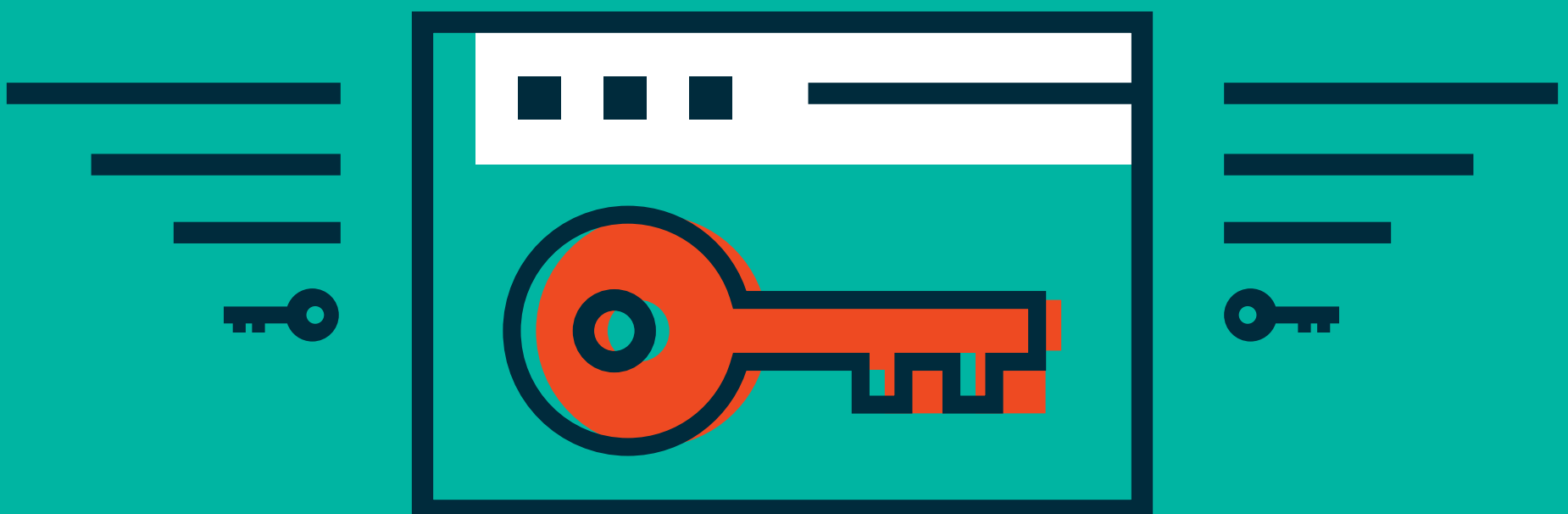


Example: If the designated keyphrase was “bridal bouquets” related keywords could be “bouquets for brides” “wedding bouquets” and “bridal flowers” – each phrase shares 1 word in common with the primary phrase.

To suit purpose **2** (give you a plan B keyword opportunity), the related KWs should be separate from the designated KW and you should test the page for both and watch what happens. This works best if a page or post is 1,000 words or longer. Example: You might want to try and “Plan B Rank” for “wedding flower trends” so a section of your post might be about other florals for bridesmaids, boutonnieres, table décor, etc.

Once you have a designated keyword/keyphrase, choose 3-4 related keywords or phrases to pepper in.

Related KWs should never be used in the SEO Title, slug, or H1. They can be used in H2-6, Meta descriptions, image alt tags, and anchor texts in secondary priority after the primary keyword.





Set Your Post Title

- This is secondary in SEO.
- You won't actually see this in SERP results if the title & meta are properly attributed.
- This is often the H1 of the page or post, for most themes or websites.
- The title's primary purpose is to attract eyeballs when posted to social, or when a user is browsing all of your posts on your site, as a post title. Page titles' primary purpose is just to help users navigate your site and know where they are.
- Its secondary purpose is to function as the H1 of the page. It should include the main keyword or keyphrase.



■ **Example of a page:** Bridal Bouquets

Example of a post: 7 Spring Trends for Photogenic Bridal Bouquets



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Polish the Slug

The slug is the portion of the page or post URL that comes after the “.com/”. Slugs will autogenerate and should be polished – especially for posts.

- Remove small words and numbers as much as possible
- Include the designated keyword
- Do not duplicate slugs. If you have two pages with the same slug, the second one will default to /slug-1, then /slug-2.
- Google **hates** those little dash-number modifiers. It's a lack of clarity and organization. Plus, it signals that you have tried to optimize multiple pages for the same KW!



■ **Example:** 7 Spring Trends for Photogenic Bridal Bouquets should be .com/spring-trends-bridal-bouquets

- Google will skip over the number 7 and the word for (they're just dead weight)
- Photogenic is a modifier for human eyes – not useful for search unless it was part of your keyphrase for some reason
- bridal-bouquets would be an acceptable page slug, but your post slug should be more specific, because you may write more posts about the same topic in other seasons.




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Pick Some Heading

- Think of your page or post as an old college outline – they should function in a taxonomy where H2s are all subheadings of the main topic (H1), H3s are the next most narrow subheading within an H2, and H4s-6s further narrow the topic in each section, if needed. H4s-6s should only be used when necessary, and rarely for a post under 750 words.
- Plan these with relevance in mind first. Use them to separate the page or post into common sense chunks that help readers navigate.
- Secondly, H2s & H3s should use related keywords as you've designated them, if you've designated them. If not, they should aim for relevance to the primary keyword, but not in a forced way.



■ **Example:** H1: is the post title. Your related keywords were “bouquets for brides” “wedding bouquets” and “bridal flowers” so your H2s could be:
H2: A guide to planning bouquets for brides
H2: X celebrity wedding bouquets to inspire you
H2: The bridal flowers everyone will be choosing this spring

These are (presumably) sensible ways to organize the post's content for users, but they also give you opportunities to snatch those other keywords you wanted.

If you added H3s to this post, they would filter into each of these categories. Under the third section, you might secure that “plan B keyword” from above with an H3 like “Wedding flower trends to leave behind in 2019” – it's relevant to the section for human eyes, and Google might snag you up for this secondary KW if competition is low, or if the content is potent.

<H1>


<H2>

<H3>



Optimize the Copy

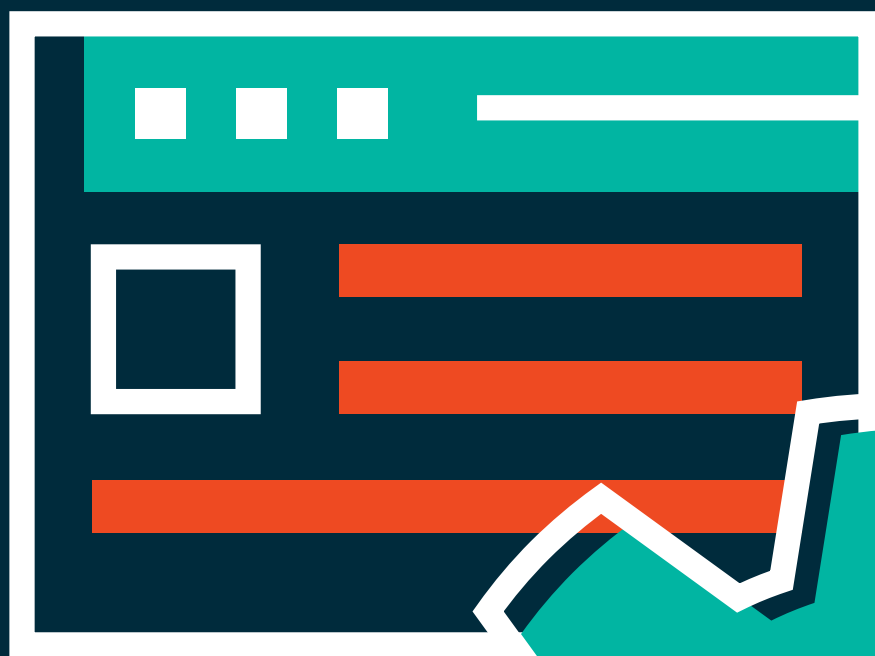
Rule one is to adhere to brand guidelines and voice, editorial guidelines, and grammar best practices. It should be useful, organized, well-written, and audience-relevant before anything else because that's what the client should want. Further, Google is a business who is serving those same readers, and that's what they want to see, too.



500 words is a hard minimum. 800 is a sweet spot. 1,000+ is fine for pages or posts that have a lot of important sub-sections to address.

If you're creeping to 2,000 words or above, consider breaking these out into a series or into a dropdown of more content. The only way to keep readers' attention for a great length is if the post's information is really useful. For instance, a 4,000 word post on how to audit an entire site for SEO acts as a user manual that can be read, re-read, and referenced again and again.

Keyword density is mostly irrelevant. To make sure you aren't stuffing, only use the designated keyword where instructed here and where it naturally falls into the copy. Don't write with SEO in mind whatsoever.





Plan Links & Anchors

Internal and external links have their advantages and should be used in combination. Internal links redirect readers to other pages and articles on your site, thus keeping them viewing your content for longer. While external links direct traffic away from your post, they offer a sleek way to integrate citations into your posts.

- There should be between 2 and 4 internal links on each page or post
- There should be between 1 and 3 external links on each post
- External links aren't as relevant or necessary on pages unless citation is necessary
- Your anchor text is the clickable text for each link within the copy or used on a clickable button
- Use your related keywords as anchors, or parts of anchors, where appropriate – it's also okay to have links that don't have keywords in the anchor.
- At least one link should be the designated next stop for readers of that page or post.





Design Your Click Path for Conversion

There are two points to conversion: **(1)** The site very likely wants to push users toward a final purchase, consultation, or end-goal. **(2)** Bounce rate and time on page matter. They matter for likelihood of conversion, and they are rank factors.

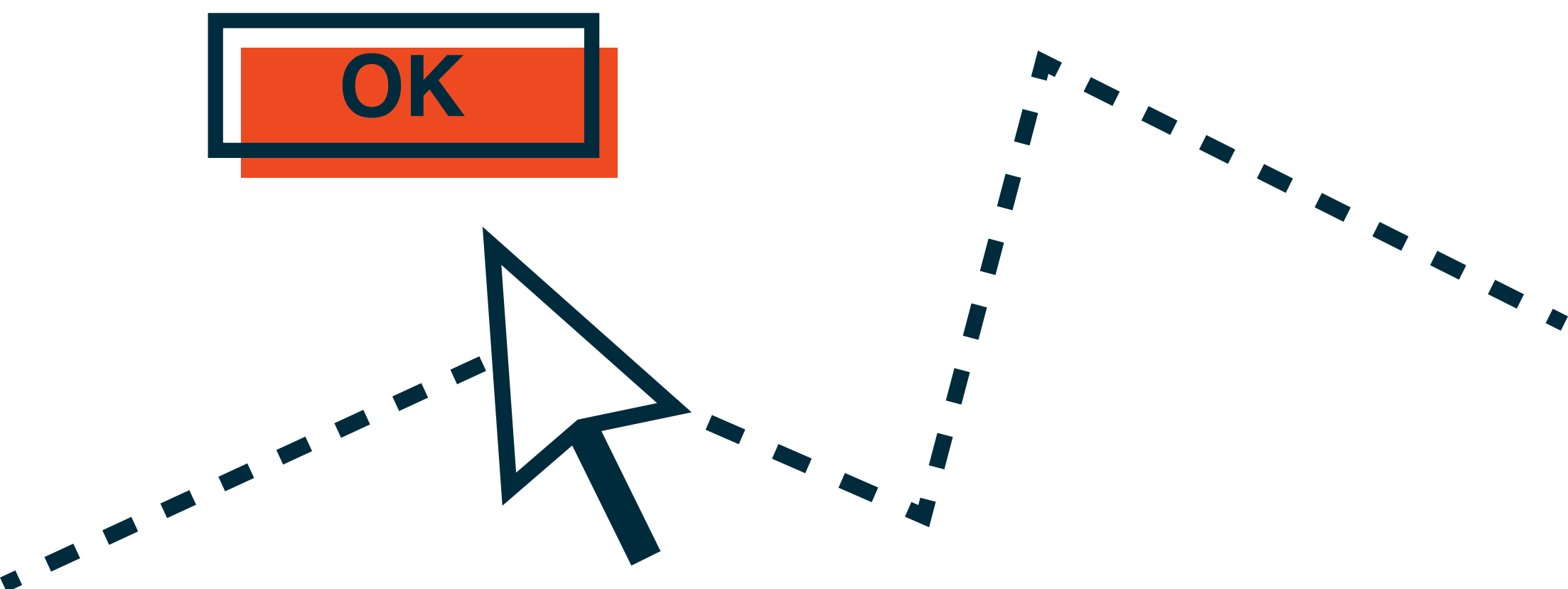
You are the crossing guard on your own site, so you decide where users go. They won't all follow your directions (damn Jaywalkers!) but there should always be somewhere to go and it should be what makes sense for your users as well as what suits your goal.

Let's assume your content on this page or post was good enough to keep a user engaged to the end, where do they go next? If you give them a dead end, they will have to recalibrate to motivate their next move on your site. Many will leave. If you give them a logical next step, and set the link in a convenient place, they can take it or leave it.

Ideally, each page or post has links for people who want to act (convert), links for people who need more info/explanation (nurturing), and links for people who didn't quite find what they wanted when they clicked on that page or post.

The bottom of the page or post is a non-negotiable CTA spot. Additional CTA spots can be built in where it's sensible.

Also – consider click-depth. If you're creating a new page, is there a place for it in the navigation? If not, how will users get there (linked to from where?) Users should not have to click more than twice from the home page to arrive at any page on the entire site – don't bury content.





Boost Your Images

Images increase your blog's the performance not only because they entertain readers, but also because they contribute to bring traffic to your site with many SEO tricks. Every page or post should have at least one image, and ideally more like 2-4.

Use Your Own Images

Original images will outperform stock images. If stock is the only option, edits and crops can help. The more purposeful an image is, the better it will be for your SEO and for your users. Goes without saying: All images must be either open source / CC0, owned by you, or licensed and kept up. DMCA violations are not just sketchy for SEO, they are a compliance issue, and can even be illegal.

SEO Features


In WordPress, Images have a few components which map to their HTML rendering: URL, Title, Caption, Alt Text, Description.

The URL is where the image lives and is driven by the file name. It is important to save files with keywords (or at least relevance) in mind. No image should be saved as 123abc.jpg

If you can save the most relevant images for the post/page with specifics that would be better. This will help you find it in the library later, and will also serve in the URL for the image – optimizing it better. Knowing what you have already saved other images as, and having these organized, is a best practice.


The image title doesn't matter for SEO. It is useful to copy the image filename into the title box as well to help you internally organize your images and find things.

The caption doesn't necessarily matter for SEO. If you edit the caption for an image, it will appear underneath or beside the image on the front end, where users can read it. This is not necessary for pretty stock images or icons but is a good practice for images that actually help drive infoshare on the page or post. Captions are a good way for someone to skim your content and can help you add keywords for Google to crawl. Think of captions as utterly optional.



Alt attributes are NOT optional unless an image is for decoration only – every relevant image must have one. There are three reasons. **(1)** For visually impaired users, the alt attribute can be “read” on the page and audibly expressed to the user. **(2)** If your image doesn’t render for any reason, the text will come up in its place, which is helpful to avoid confusion. **(3)** This is the best way for Google’s bots to determine what the image is of, and therefore, to rank it in Google Images.

The best practice for Alt attributes, then, is to do two things: **(1)** honestly and clearly express what the image includes and **(2)** use a keyword or related keyword where possible.



Example: Bride holding traditional bridal bouquet with pink and white roses, baby’s breath, eucalyptus leaves.

This alt attribute will help Google index the image, express its contents to users & crawlers, and optimize your page a little further for your intended KW.

The image description is an underrated gem that SEOs rarely use anymore. The text you enter here will show up on the attachment page for the image. If a user clicks the image to open it further, it will take them to an attachment page and the description text you designate will be there, too.

This could be a great place for you to redirect your user back to where you want them to be, give them more information, or optimize this URL for additional keywords. For basic SEO, this isn’t necessary – but it could be a strategy to expand your reach.

There are technical optimizations for images – compression, sizing, etc. – that can vastly improve site-wide SEO. This is developer-level stuff but good to know.



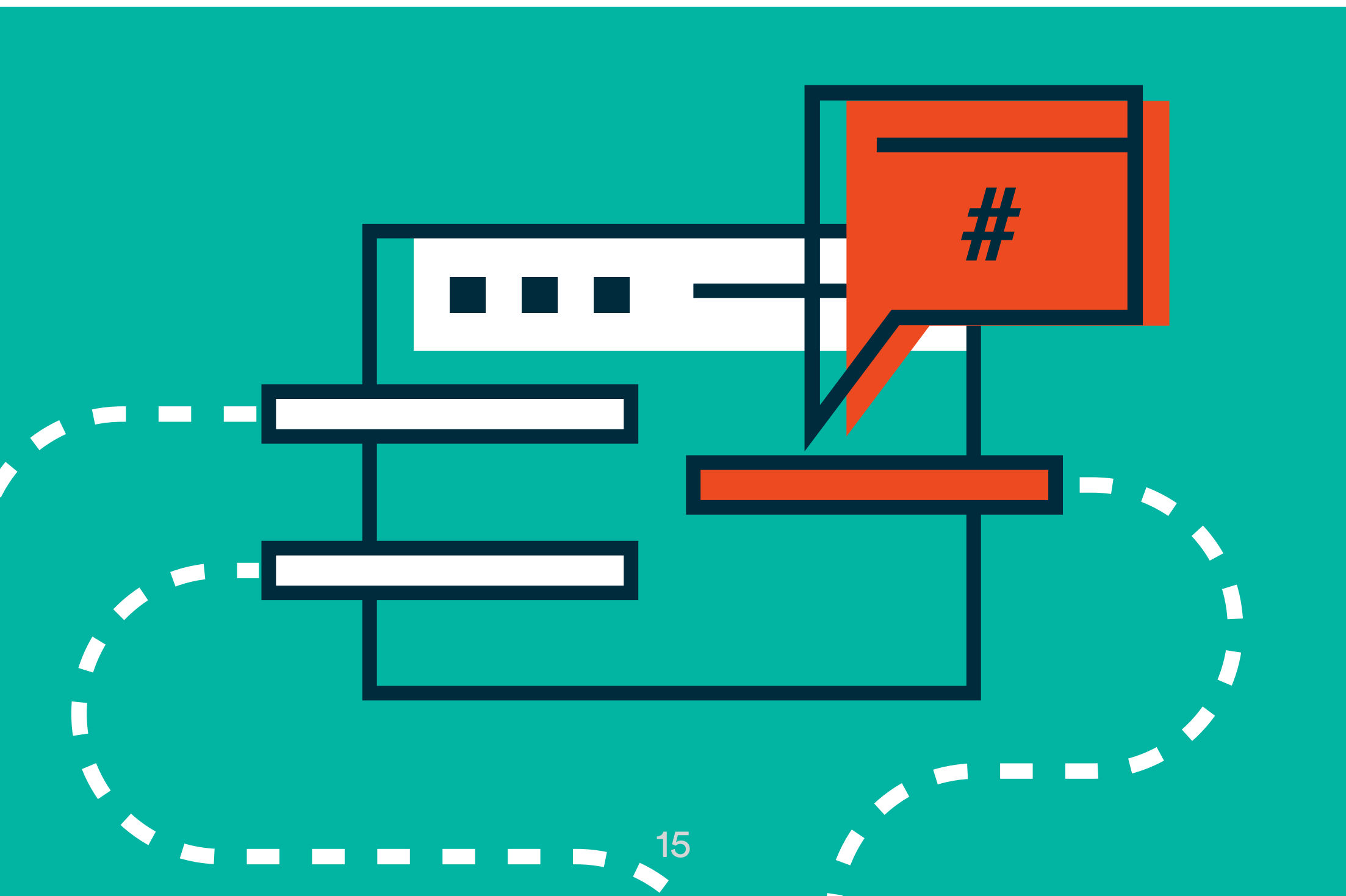
Assign Cats & Tags (for posts only)

Categories are your table of contents; tags function as an index. These are not SEO drivers. They do, however, help add navigability to your blog posts in general.

Categories should be finite and function as the top 5-10 subjects your blog ever addresses. This is often the main way someone will explore more posts within your blog. Ideally, you have these planned out before you ever start writing blog content and they become the buckets your content will fall into.

Tags can be as infinite as you like, but keep in mind – tagging your post with every random topic or subject it covers isn't necessarily useful for any reason. The only use for a tag is to show users other posts with that same tag (like a hashtag on Twitter or Instagram).

The only rules for setting these per post is to consider what is useful to the user as they read and explore your content. 1-2 categories is a good rule of thumb per post, and tags are your best judgment.





Optimize Your SEO Title

Your SEO Title is arguably the most important item you can optimize on a page or post as it is both a Google signal and a human signal.

You should never let Yoast or any other plugin default your title – it won't be crawled properly, nor will it be optimized as well as you would do for yourself.

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- The proper structure for an SEO Title is as follows:
Description of the page/post [bar separator] Brand Name

The description portion should ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS include your designated primary keyword. No exceptions, ever. The closer this keyword/phrase is to the beginning of the title, the more potent your optimization will be.

Remember, this title is human-facing and should be clear and enticing for clickers. It does not have to match the page/post title and arguably shouldn't. It's better that they serve their separate purposes. The title should also be 50-60 characters long. If it's longer, Yoast will signal to you, SERPs won't display the whole thing, your users won't get to read the whole thing in a SERP, Google will be mad, and you will disappoint your family.

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- **Example of a page:**
Bridal Bouquets for Every Taste & Budget | FloristXYZ
 - **Example of a post:**
Bridal Bouquets: Top Trends for Spring 2019 | FloristXYZ
- 



Optimize Your Meta Description


Your meta description isn't really an SEO modifier, but without one – your page isn't truly optimized. The primary purpose of the description is to signal to searchers that your page answers to what they're looking for, and better than the other results on the SERP.

You should never let Yoast or any other plugin default your description – it won't be optimized as well as you would do for yourself.

The meta description should include your primary keyword and/or related keywords in a way that is sensible and enticing for users. Use of the primary keyword is smart and preferred but not dire.

Remember, this meta description is also human-facing and should be clear and enticing for clickers. Why should they trust you over the other rankers on this SERP?

The meta description length is to be around 155 characters. This increased from December 2017-May 2018, so if you wrote longer descriptions (up to 300 characters) during this period, you will need to go back and shorten yours. The current best practice is back to normal at 155 characters. Exceeding this will cause Google to cut you off mid-sentence which isn't going to dock your rank, but might lack clarity or even professionalism, in the eyes of users.



Example: Bridal bouquets are the most noted floral detail of a wedding. Explore these trends to dream up your perfect wedding bouquet. Contact FloristXYZ to design it!



Now what?

You have new content on your site and that's great. How do you get the word out? Leaving it to sit and waiting for Google to see your work is a waste of your time.

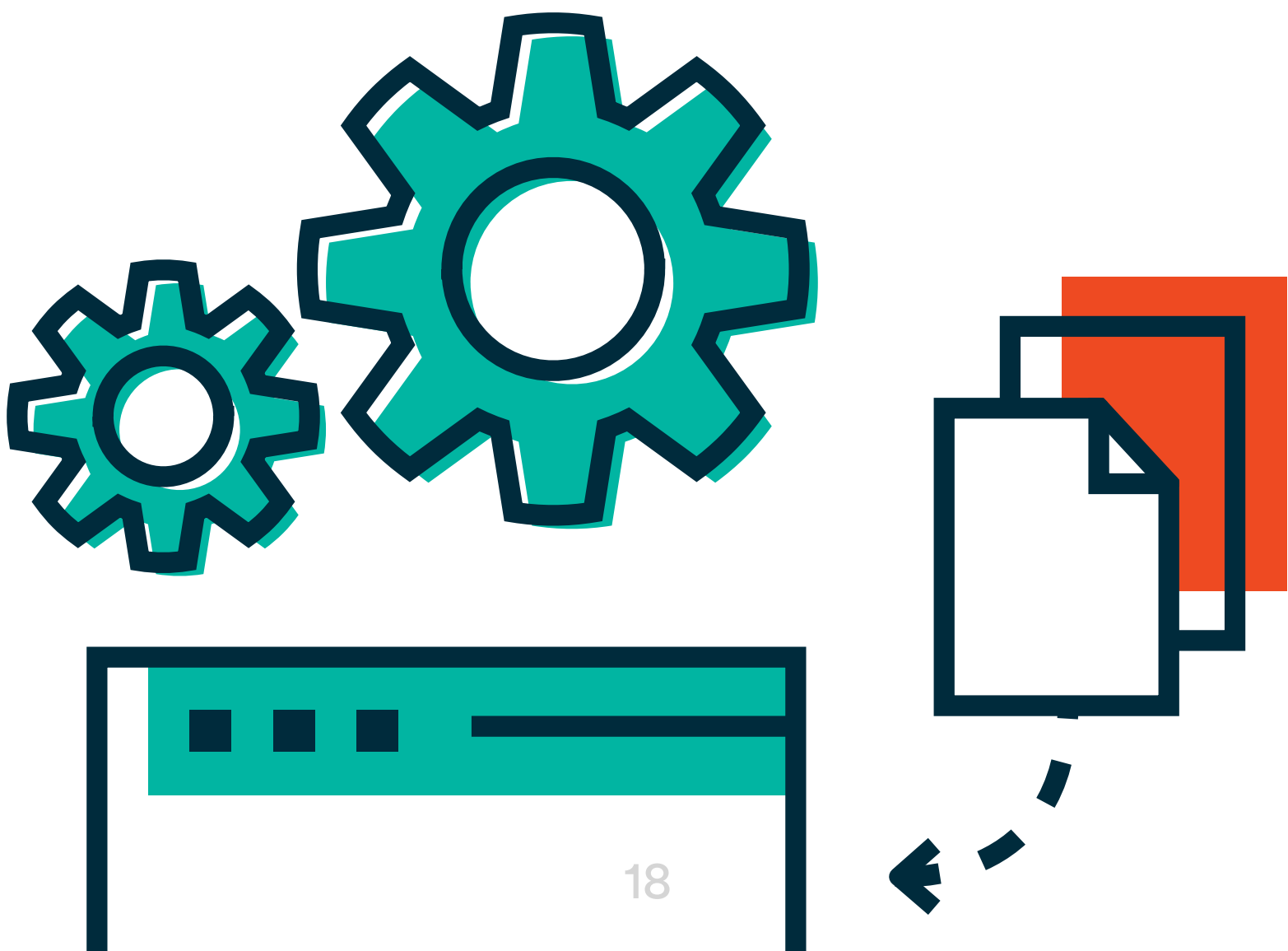
You can use a tool to monitor the performance of your site against the keywords you're tracking or you can track manually.

For pages: Find 3+ places on your site that could benefit from a link TO your new page. Add it to the navigation. Make a social post about your services and send users there. Write an email all about your bridal bouquets and send it out to your bridal segment of your email subscribers.

For a blog post: Follow the same steps as above, and definitely share on socials, pin on Pinterest if that's appropriate you're your audience, make a video to match it and share that out, rework the intro and share on Medium – put it out there.



Every time content is created, there should be a plan for amplification, or what was the point?



Top Takeaways

- Google does what they want. They always will. We have to learn to swerve. That's why SEO is a marketable skill, why people have made entire careers around SEO, and why it isn't going anywhere.
- We can play the game and actually join forces with Google by making our content relevant, timely, and signaled well to be crawled.
- If we put the right flags in the right places, Google will see us and they will rank us, and we both go home happy.
- Always put your users first, because that's what Google wants you to do. Make sure your site is readable, navigable, and helpful for your users. Make sure you're only putting out content to serve your users, not your reputation.
- Be agile. This stuff will change again. This guide is a self-destructing document and it will expire. There are no SEO absolutes and 90% of what you read out there about SEO is either actual bullshit, outdated, better suited for a different industry, or is a total guess. Let that sink in and start using your common sense, your own testing, and a large dose of hope to drive your own SEO best practices.

■ All those SEO experts you following are really just experts at being flexible and willing to swerve.





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