

A guide for non-techie WordPress and Elementor Users



THE SECRET BEHIND SEO



Search Engine Optimisation

When you have a ministry or business website, you have a huge advantage over others that don't. Through your website, a wider number of people can find, know, and then partner with you. The core function of any site is to be seen. You might not realize it, but once made live and linked to, every website page is automatically saved into an enormous database called the index. Every search engine has its own index. A bit like the "Matrix" an index is a digital world where the HTML version of website pages are listed and recorded. And once in the index, it's possible for any website page to appear in that search engine result.

THE SECRET BEHIND SEO

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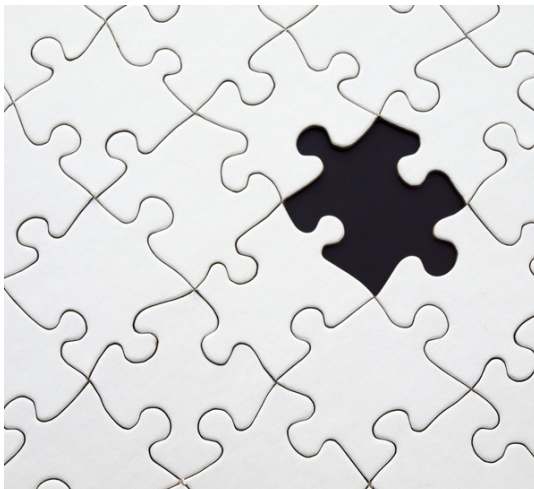
PEERING BEHIND GOOGLE

"Without a doubt, Google is the most dominating search engine we have. But it's not alone. There are others like DuckDuckGo, Bing, Dogpile, Yippy and Yahoo. Due to the sheer plethora of site pages out there, all search engines will list their findings in an order. And to specify this order, they will employ an algorithm.



THE GOOGLE ALGORITHM

"What you might not know is that the search engine algorithms are kept secret. And more than that, they often get tweaked and changed. Undisclosed and ever evolving - this is where the field of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) comes in. If you can match up your webpage to the criteria of the search engines algorithm, you can stand out from the multitude and be seen first. And when competition is extreme, that's a highly sought-after place to be. This is why we have companies dedicated to working on SEO alone, and why some companies might cut-out the middle man altogether and pay Google direct to be listed high.



AND THE POINT OF IT ALL

But despite this, the core principles behind Search Engines are not so changeable or hidden. The purpose of any search engine is to help people find what they are looking for. And it does this by following the links from one site to another. The more a page has been linked to from pages outside your site's domain - the more relevant and important that page is assumed to be. And although smothering your site with links might look like the way to go - the Google algorithm is much cleverer than that:

**"To organize the world's information and make it
universally accessible and useful."**

— Google's mission statement

If you want to know the heart behind Google's algorithm - it's to organise, make accessible and be useful. So, if you are not in the position to hire an SEO company to help you, or you're not in the position to invest in your Google ranking financially - there are some tweaks you can do that will help your website get listed well. And you won't need to go down unethical and manipulative means of which there are many. All you need to do is get organised, be accessible and be useful. It's as simple as that.

SEO TIP 1: GET ORGANISED

HAVE A KICK-ASS STRUCTURE

A good site structure helps people - and search engines - to understand your site. We need structure to navigate through the masses - and to help us to find the things we are actually looking for. Kick-ass in this case does not mean complicated or extensive. If you check out website heat maps that reveal how much of a website or page people take in, you'd be shocked at how little. Time is precious - so a structure that makes sense, is clear and simple to navigate through, can make all the difference. After all, a search engine will need to be able to crawl through your site to index it well. And one way of checking whether a search engine can crawl through your site (sometimes called spidering) is through Quix SEO check. <https://www.quixapp.com/seo/> Just enter your URL and check your results.

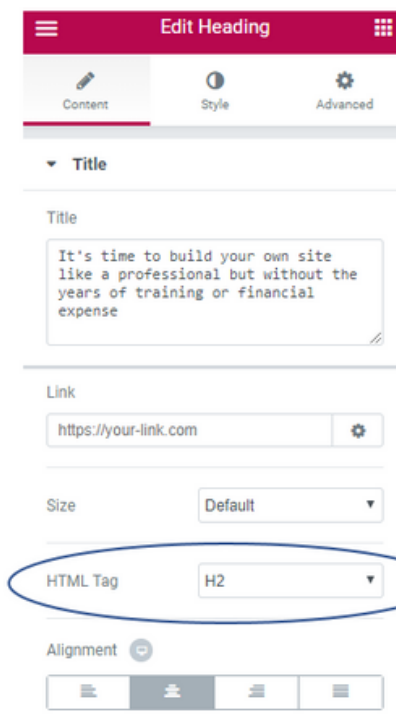


Indexation check

● This page can be indexed.

Although you can structure your site any way you like, the ideal format tends to be hierarchical like a pyramid (or book) with the most generic all-encompassing information at the top (front cover), which then subdivides into categories/topics (chapters) and branches into more specific sub-categories and more specialised information (pages). And going further within a page, properly structured headings and subheadings can really help your SEO too.

At mitsgriffin we love to use the Elementor Page Builder to build our WordPress pages because non-techies can later take over the development and expansion of their site. Through the Title widget editor you can specify your heading type through the HTML Tag:



The HTML tags <h1> to <h6> are used to define different headings. <h1> defines the most important and <h6> the least and often they will display a little like this:

<h1> Heading 1

<h2> Heading 2

<h3> Heading 3

<h4> Heading 4

<h5> Heading 5

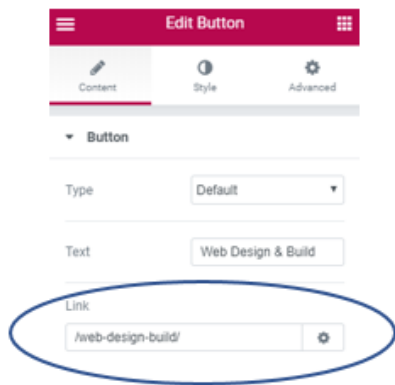
<h6> Heading 6

— HTML Title Tags

SEO TIP 1: GET ORGANISED

GET LINKED UP

Blocks of structural elements are nothing unless they are connected. This is where internal and external links can really help. Not only do search engines rely on links, movement through your website will too. Although links can be placed anywhere – through menus, buttons, call-to-actions, specified URLs behind text or graphics – they will all take you from one webpage to another.



When you are taken to another place within one site, the link is internal. Here people should be able to navigate to your most important pages directly from your homepage and move with a theme from one blog post to another.

To create links in Elementor, you will need to state the page URL that you would like to link to by specifying the final distinguishing part of your page URL or permalink:

If you select the icon at the end your link options will be displayed:

- ☒ Open in new window
- ☐ Add nofollow

Selecting "open in new window" the linked page in a new window. Selecting the "Add nofollow" option to links will stop the search engine from spidering the linked to page (essentially hiding the next page from search engine view).

And there are more advanced tools too that can help. When you have two pages that have the same content (perhaps you have decided to have two different URLs but their content is 95% identical) you can use canonical links so Google will know which page out of the two to display. This allows for a duplicated page to link to the main page without mangling your sites structure. And if there tends to be a typical path people need to take when exploring your site, designers can harness breadcrumbs, forming a breadcrumb pathway in website code.

External links will branch to and from external webpages. Here you will need to specify the entire URL:

Link to

Of course, you can link to any external page that you like, but it won't mean you get linked back. A great way to gain more external links that point to your site, is to foster collaboration or to create content for another site that can then point to yours.

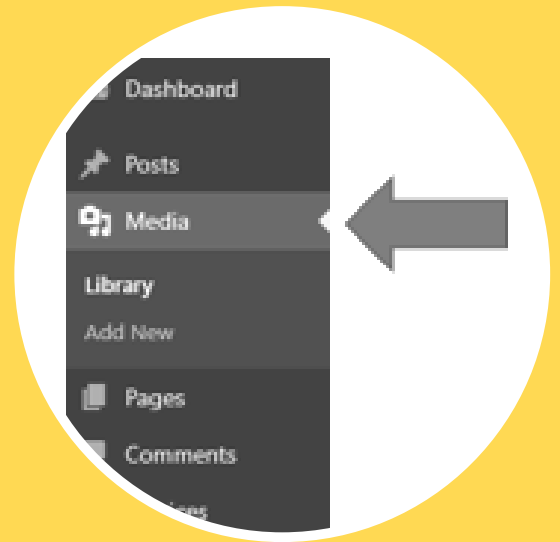
SEO TIP 2: BE ACCESSIBLE

You might not realise this but accessibility is a legal requirement for all UK/EU websites. This means that anybody on any device, should be able to access the bulk of your information.

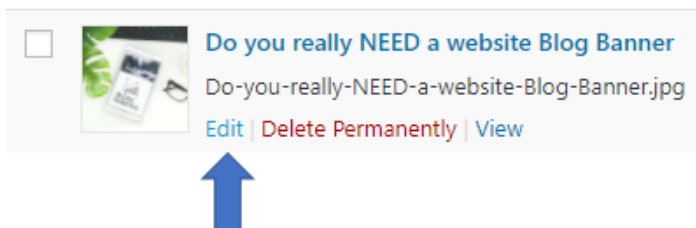
DON'T DISCRIMINATE

Because websites are so visual, it can be easy to overlook the fact that they still need to be accessible to even those who cannot see. To help, it's important to go through your website media and make certain the alternative text "Alt text" option is filled in for every graphic/audio/video. This not only enables screen-readers for the visually impaired to "read" your graphics, but it will improve your SEO ranking too. And should for any reason your graphic fail to load, this alternative text will be displayed instead.

To do this in WordPress select the Media menu from your WordPress Dashboard



Then select the media you want to edit through its edit button:



The edit window will open where you can fill in its caption (the title/explanation that is presented typically below the graphic), alternative text - ALT text (the description of the graphic that will be presented in place of the graphic) and its description:

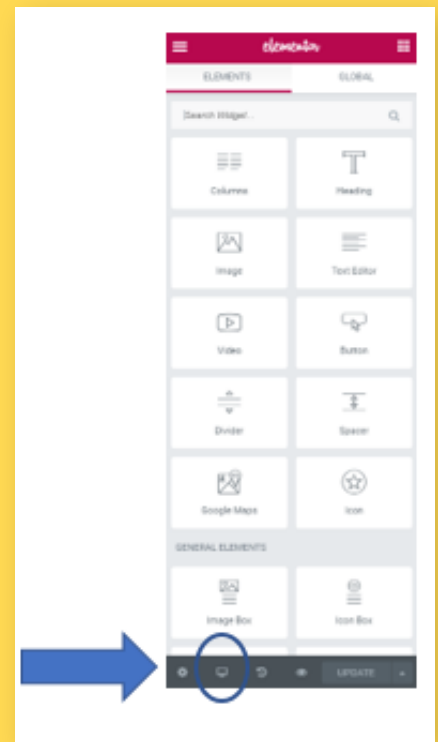


SEO TIP 2: BE ACCESSIBLE

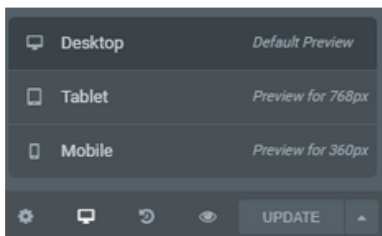
BE RESPONSIVE

All websites worth their salt will be responsive. This means your content can be easily viewed from any device – whether a desktop, tablet or smartphone. In the past PC desktops were the dominant technology, but in the digital age we are currently in, it's the smartphone and tablet technologies that rank first. If your site has been designed for a desktop and struggles to fit on a mobile, it will frustrate your users and affect directly your sites accessibility.

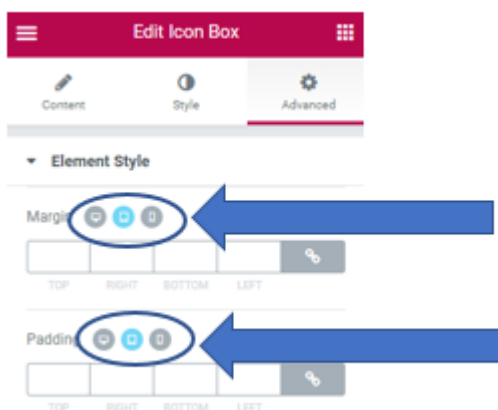
Even though it's unusual for a modern-day website not to be responsive, you still might need to tweak your graphics/text even when it is. Through Elementor you can check and tweak the responsiveness of your site. When you edit your page with the Elementor plugin installed and activated, the Elementor dashboard will be shown, and at the bottom will be a desktop icon whereby you can check your sites responsiveness:



When you click on that desktop icon the menu system will open out:



You can then view your site and in the Elementor editor, tweak different element aspects for desktop, tablet and mobile:



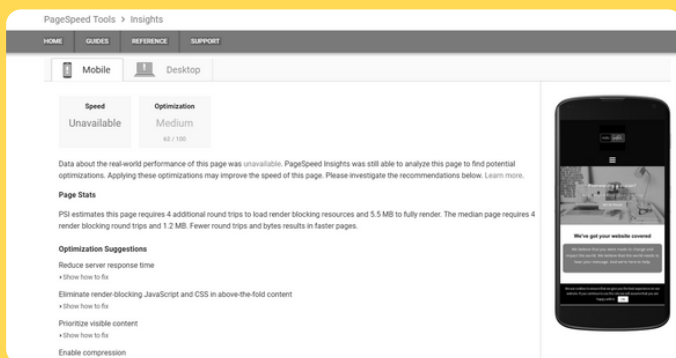
SEO TIP 2: BE ACCESSIBLE

BE FAST

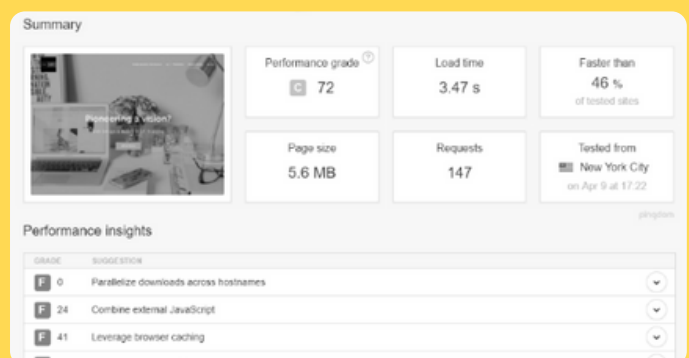
When a site takes a long time to load, people can get frustrated and impatient and this can indirectly affect your accessibility. However, site loading times are highly influenced by your hosting company and the hosting plan you have subscribed to. Without a doubt, basic hosting plans will yield a much slower site loading time. Just by upgrading your hosting package you can significantly improve your sites loading times.

Even if you are on a basic hosting plan and your site is extremely slow, you can significantly improve it by compressing your file sizes and specifically your graphic files and videos. Other techniques include reducing the amount of CSS and JS files that are loaded and if your hosting permits, compressing your entire site using Gzip.

To check your sites speed, check out Google Page Speed Insights (<https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights>). And Pingdom Tools (<https://tools.pingdom.com/>)



— Google Page Speed Insights



— Pingdom Tools

BE WORKING

As well as being frustrating, broken pages are an SEO hazard too. Although often out of mind, broken pages do become more likely as a site develops and expands. To encourage viewer retention, some sites create a custom made 404 page that might make you grin instead of frown. Others harness redirects - where instead of being taking to a page with the 404 error and oops message, you are redirected (often called a 301 redirect) to a working page instead. Typically this might be the sites Home Page or for clever redirects, a related page or the actual page renamed.

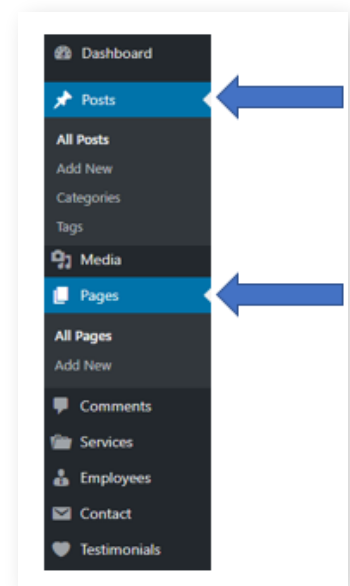
SEO TIP 3: BE USEFUL

In essence the better your site is at giving people what they are looking for, the better your SEO ranking. When people can't find what they are looking for they will hit the back button and bounce (bounce back) to the search engine to look elsewhere. A great tool for checking your sites bounce rate is through Google Analytics <https://analytics.google.com/> A bounce rate below 20% tends to indicate a problem with how the analytics has been setup but a bounce rate between 20-40% is considered excellent. Most websites though have a bounce rate of 40-60% and rates that are much higher are a bad sign that your website is failing you. If your site has a consistently high bounce rate, it will automatically be ranked lower in the search. But if you do have a high bounce rate, there are a few things that can help to dramatically improve it.

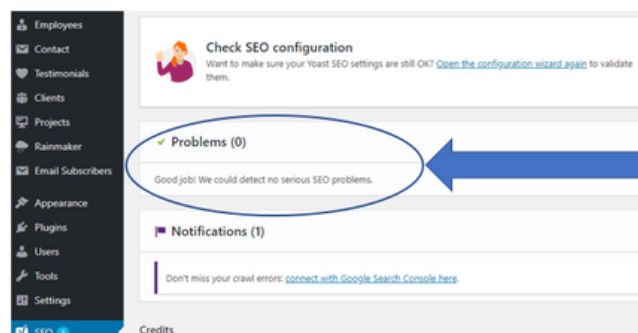
BE RELEVANT

The first step is to seriously consider what your content will be. Perhaps the most important requirement is to be relevant. As Google spiders your text it will index relevant words. So, any important words should be intentionally selected and placed in the most strategic parts of your site. Our most important words can be emphasised through page titles, page descriptions and page keywords.

Page titles inform users and search engines what the page is about. Titles should be clear and relevant, especially as the title of the page will directly be listed by engines. Likewise, page descriptions (sometimes referred to as meta-tags or meta-descriptions) will get displayed next, and although they won't be used directly for page rankings they do help users get a speedy overview or introductory snippet of your page.

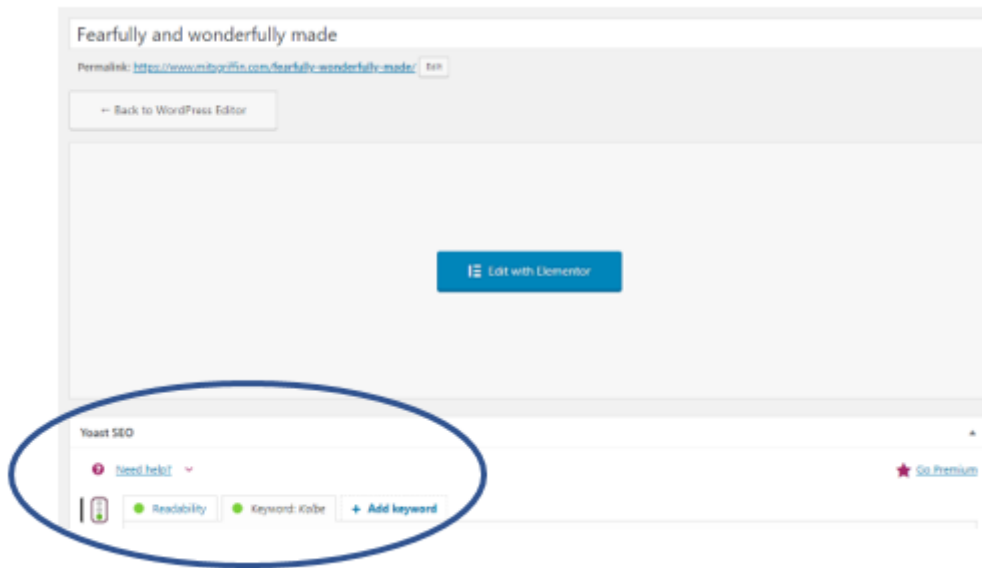


A tool that we love at mitsgriffin.com to help with our WordPress website is the plugin Yoast SEO. To analyse your SEO, install and activate Yoast SEO. From your main WordPress dashboard you can then select the SEO menu for an overview of your site SEO.

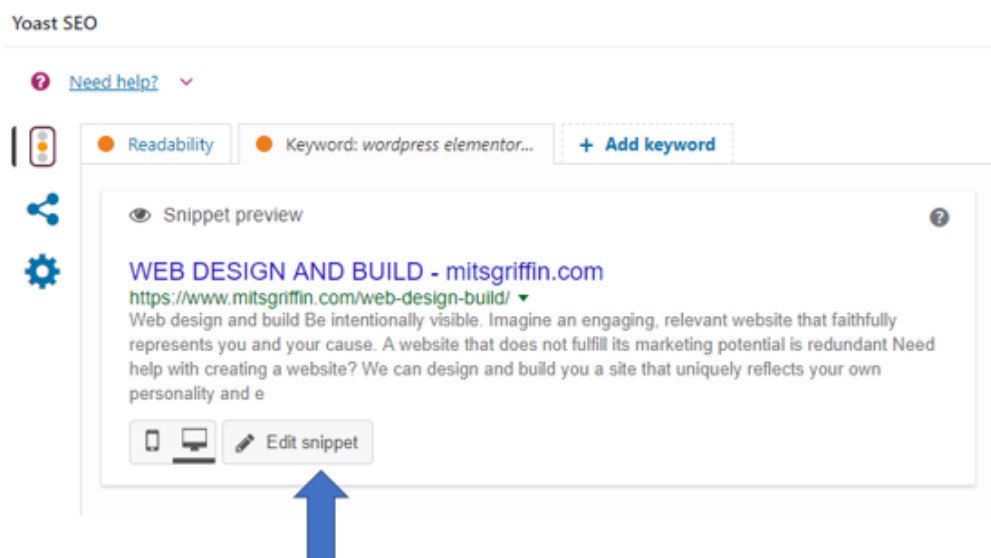


SEO TIP 3: BE USEFUL

To analyse your post/page SEO, you can select the Posts/Pages menu (depending on which one you are going to work on) from your WordPress Dashboard. All your sites posts/pages will be listed and you can then access a specific post or page. To check out a post/pages SEO, select "Edit" under the Title that you want to work on. Your edit box will open up and underneath the main editor and you will notice Yoast SEO with tabs concerning Readability and Keyword (and +Add keyword for the pro edition):

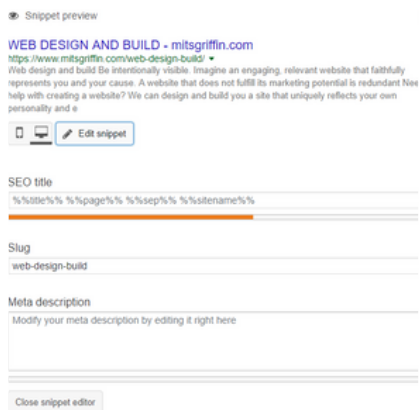


With the Yoast SEO plugin it's simple to edit your title and description. Select the Yoast SEO Keyword tab and a snippet preview of how your page will be displayed by Google will be given. To edit your page title and description just click on "Edit snippet":



SEO TIP 3: BE USEFUL

An edit box will open up where you can change your text. The SEO title by default will be your page title, the Slug is the URL that distinguishes that page from others and by default will be the final distinguishing text from your permalink, and the Meta description will be your page description which by default will be the starting text from your page:



USE FOCUS KEYWORDS

Unlike page titles and descriptions, page keywords are the fuel that trigger the search in the first place. They are the search terms – the solutions people are looking for and keyword research is a huge area of SEO research.

You will need to know what people are searching for (keyword research) and whether your site/page is capable of ranking for it (keyword competition). Specifying a focus keyword doesn't mean finding just one word – but the searching terms that you would like your site/page to rank for. After all, it's not often we do a google search on a single word. Don't use terms that are too broad (unfocused or competitive) or too specialized (that not many people will use). And don't use words that have a bad connotation. Every page should have a different focus keyword otherwise you might end up self-competing.

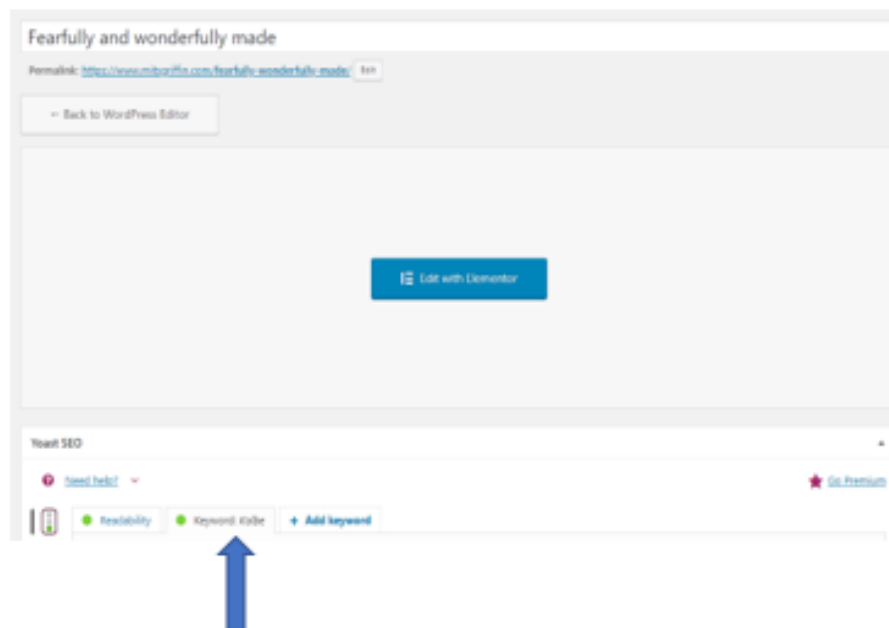
When competition is great, long-tail keywords can help. These typically comprise 3-7 words and are more specific. The keyword "Web Design" will have huge competition but "York WordPress Design" has less and they can work brilliantly for pages that are placed deeper within your site.

Tools that might help include: Google Autocomplete, Google AdWords Keyword planner, Yoast Suggests, Google Trends and Moz Keyword Explorer.

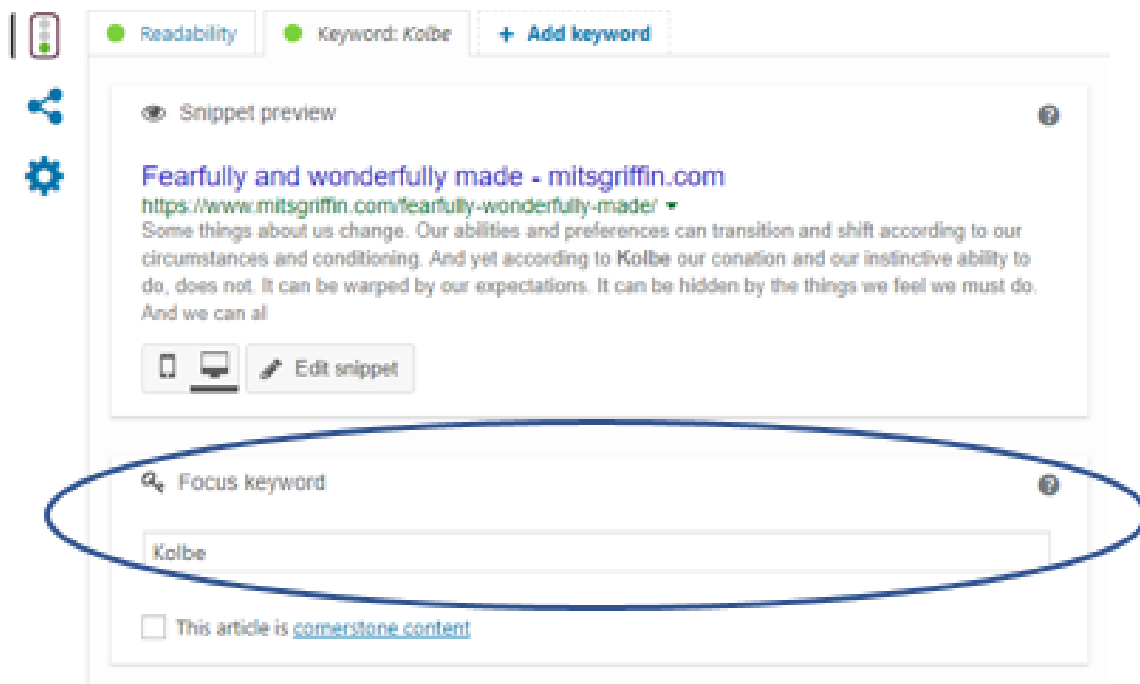
When you have settled on a keyword/long-tail there are three places where you can incorporate it – in your page title, in your website source code and in the text content on your page. Putting a keyword into your Post/Page Title and content is self-explanatory and a rough guide that might be helpful is to mention your keywords/phrases/search terms three times per page or in 1-2% of your text. But don't go crazy. Reading through a list of keywords isn't much fun.

SEO TIP 3: BE USEFUL

With the Yoast SEO plugin it's simple to incorporate your keyword into your site's code without being a techie. Select your post/page from your WordPress dashboard and scroll down to Yoast SEO. Then select the Keyword tab:



You'll find a section with a space to enter in your Focus keyword. Fill in that space and your keyword will be incorporated into your sites code:



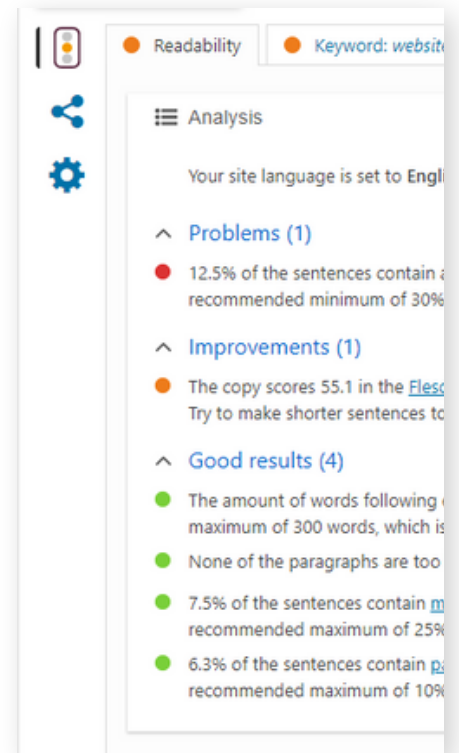
SEO TIP 3: BE USEFUL

BE READABLE

The text on your website is hugely important. It will not only incorporate substance but style. This deals with the art of copywriting - and copywriting is no mean feat. Companies will pay thousands for this - because words matter and finding the right ones can be tricky. Copywriting is the art of representing your mission or company using words that will create the greatest connection with your audience. With whatever text you have, great readability can significantly improve your SEO.

But not everybody is a grammar expert or has a flair for writing but Yoast SEO can help here too. If you select the Yoast SEO Readability tab, Yoast will list its suggestions that can improve the grammar and flow of reading for your page. Red points will highlight potential problems, amber will suggest improvements and green will list any good work. Here's an example listing all three.

Using this diagnostic information, you can then edit your post/page's basic readability, improving it and your pages SEO.



NOT ALL CONTENT IS EQUAL



When a vast amount of information is presented, remember that not all content is created equal. Some will be more important than others.

Out of all your sites pages, your most important ones will be your homepage (which introduces your company) and landing pages (which helps any stranger to take the next step and work with you). These pages will need a clear message on who you are, what you are about and how you can help. For this you need great taglines and slogans and an awareness of branding. And although your home and landing pages will be your most significant, there will be others that stand out from the rest too.

Cornerstone content is content that is considered most important. Identifying which pages are cornerstone pages can play a significant role in any SEO strategy. With Yoast SEO this is really simple to do. Select your post/page for editing and select the Yoast SEO Keyword tab. Under the space for your focus keyword you will find a tick box where you can just tick if this content is cornerstone.



SEO TIP 4: DON'T STOP

Like a hairdresser cutting a person's hair, as time goes on and things grow, the original cut will need tidying. SEO is like that. You might not realise this but the more changes you make to your site, the more often the search engine index will need to update your information.

UPDATE YOUR CONTENT

One SEO strategy anybody can employ is to keep updating your content. After all, out-of-date information can be worse than no information. And because companies, markets and culture are constantly evolving, it will be something you ought to tweak every now and then anyway.



CREATE NEW CONTENT

Another approach is to keep creating content. You might not consider yourself a blogger, but blogs and newsletters are a great way of keeping site content fresh and relevant (especially when the bulk of your company information might be more static). Blogs enable your website to be pointed to from other platforms too (like social media/email). The more active and linked your site is, the better for your SEO. Although it's not an exact science, don't be afraid to write longer articles that show greater knowledge and therefore authority. In the past 300 words was considered the norm, but recently articles between 1000-2000 words have shown greatest engagement and don't be shy to mention your keyword or search term unassumingly 3 to 6 times if you can. Don't go mad though – reading through keywords isn't half as fun as reading actual content!

FINALLY: REMEMBER WHAT MATTERS MOST

Although there are so many SEO techniques and strategies out there, remember what matters most - the people who are searching for an answer and who need help. So do harness all the SEO knowledge and strategies that you have - but more than that - never forget that a useful, relevant and engaging site is what search engines are looking for the most. And that's the secret to SEO

SEO CHECKLIST

Google's mission statement: "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

GET ORGANISED



Be structured

- ✓ Categories & subcategories
- ✓ Headings & subheadings



Get linked up

- ✓ Internal & external
- ✓ Menus, buttons, CTA, URLs

BE ACCESSIBLE



Don't discriminate

- ✓ Alt text



Be responsive

- ✓ Desktop/Tablet/mobile



Be fast

- ✓ Hosting plan
- ✓ File size

BE USEFUL



Be relevant

- ✓ Bounce rate
- ✓ Title & meta tags
- ✓ Focus keyword



Be readable

- ✓ Substance & style
- ✓ Copywriting



Not all content is equal

- ✓ Branding
- ✓ Taglines
- ✓ Cornerstone

DON'T STOP



Keep your content fresh

- ✓ Update content
- ✓ Create new content - Blog