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A school marketer's guide to on-page SEO

↳ Learn how to tackle content optimisation like a pro.

Contents

Let's get started!

On-page SEO, it's a skill that you know as a digital marketer is invaluable to your role, but it can feel a little overwhelming — we get it.

This simple guide will help you feel like an on-page SEO pro by putting everything you need to know in simple, easy-to-understand terms.

01

What is on-page SEO?

The first thing to note about SEO is that it has three key components: **on-page, off-page**, and **technical**. Using all three, Google (and other search engines) crawl and then ranks your school website. In this guide, we're going to focus specifically on on-page SEO, as this is the type of SEO you're most likely going to encounter as a school digital marketer.

In a nutshell, **on-page SEO** (or sometimes referred to as on-site SEO) optimises various web page elements, so they rank higher in search engines.

To do this, on-page SEO looks to optimise three key elements: **content, HTML**, and **site architecture**. On-page SEO is just that — it's about optimising the elements you can see on your web page.

02

Why should schools focus on on-page SEO?

It's as simple as getting your school website in front of keen searchers! <u>By investing in on-page SEO</u>, you're ensuring that you're able to provide prospective families with the information they're looking for the moment they need it!

If searchers can't quickly <u>find your school website online</u>, this could mean trouble for your school's bottom line. For example, a family in the **decision stage** of their enrolment journey is looking for information that helps them evaluate your school. If they have to perform multiple searches just to find your website, your school misses opportunities to engage and make a positive impression.

Let's say that a prospective parent is a little higher up the funnel in the **consideration stage** of their enrolment journey. They haven't heard of your school yet and are performing broad searches to seek out suitable schools in their area that suit their needs. It's essential that your school appears in all relevant local search queries — for example, "best private schools near me" or "Catholic schools in my area." Putting the work into on-page SEO optimisation ensures that your school website pops up.

03

Key on-page SEO elements

Below, we'll cover eight essential on-page SEO elements that you can start implementing today.

- Titles
- Header tags
- Metadata
- Page URL

- Keywords
- Internal links
- Image alt-text
- Page load speed

Content elements

Content elements include everything to do with the **copy and content** on your web pages. What does this include? We're talking high-quality copy, relevant keywords, images, videos, alt text, and more! Let's take a closer look at some of these content elements that help to **create high-quality page content.**

Title

Let's start with the *most* important on-page SEO elements: page titles or title tags. Titles tell visitors (and search engines) what they can expect to find on your page. Let's dive into a few best practices for creating page titles.

- Include a keyword naturally in your title (but don't stuff it with them)
- Keep your title concise — around <u>50 to 60 characters</u> is best
- Make sure your title accurately reflects your web page content

Pro tip: Make sure your web page includes headers and titles in the correct hierarchical design order. More on this below!

Headers

Headers or body tags are HTML elements that look a little bit like this <h1>, <h2>, <h3>, etc. These elements are crucial for **organising your content** and telling search engines what part of your content is most relevant for search intent. Just like your page title, it's important to include keywords in each of your headings, keeping the most important ones in your <h1> and <h2> headers.

Pro tip: You might feel the urge to include keywords in all of your headers, but make sure you only choose keywords that relate to the specific content a reader can expect to find under that heading.

Meta descriptions

You've probably heard the term 'that's so meta,' but where does it come from? Meta descriptions are short page descriptions that appear under your title within search results. Therefore, writing a readable, engaging description with keywords can boost your web page's click-through rate.

Pro tip: Many search queries are written as questions! Writing your meta descriptions as answers to commonly asked questions improves the search experience and can improve your ranking over time.

Page URLs

Above all else, your URL should be clear, concise, and include relevant keywords. What it shouldn't have is wordiness or random numbers. Also, it's best to avoid using the current year in your URL. If you want your content to be evergreen, an outdated year in your URL is going to make that a little tricky.

From an on-page SEO perspective, it can also tell crawlers that your content is outdated and, therefore, less relevant than another web page. Changing your URL isn't recommended, but if you have to do it, be sure to add a proper redirect to avoid 404 errors and keep the SEO value of your old page.

Pro tip: Use your content management system to check the maximum suggested character limit on page URLs.

Keywords

Before creating any new piece of content, your first stop should be keyword research to choose relevant topics. Keyword research helps you **identify the most popular search terms** surrounding your content topics, allowing you to see what ranking opportunities are available in terms of search volume and difficulty.

You might be wondering if you're choosing the right keywords for your content. You can search for terms in Google or use handing tools like Google Keyword Planner, SEMRush, or Ahrefs. For an in-depth guide on performing keyword research, read our post: 3 keyword research tools you should be using. Choosing one or two keywords will help search engines identify your content relevant to a search query.

Pro tip: Some keywords might be very competitive and hard to instantly appear in top search results, so if you're starting out it's often helpful to start with long-tail keywords.

Internal links

You might have heard of a backlink; this is where a URL within your content points to another page on another website. On the other hand, internal linking points to another page on the same website domain. As you might have noticed throughout this guide, we've included a few internal links of our own to share relevant content related to this topic. So, why are internal links important for on-page SEO?

Let's hear it from Google itself:

> **"Some pages are known because Google has already crawled them before. Other pages are discovered when Google follows a link from a known page to a new page."**

Linking from **Page A** to **Page B** shows search engines the relationship between the content on your pages. From a user perspective, it also helps them easily navigate between your pages to continue reading relevant information about a topic.

Pro tip: Think about how you'll include links when planning any new piece of content or layout changes to your web page. Links don't just help with search results, but they'll also encourage visitors to discover more relevant content and stay on your website longer.

Image alt-text

Google delivers many image-based results, which is why image alt-text is so important! Essentially, alt-text is SEO for your images — it tells Google what your images are about. It's also a great way to add an extra layer of accessibility for users. There are a couple of best practices to think about when adding alt-text to your images:

- Keep it concise - less than 125 characters is ideal.
- Write descriptive and specific text.
- Don't keyword stuff, but feel free to add one here.

Pro tip: *Test your alt-text by thinking about how a potential visitor might search for images related to your school. For example, you might name an image of your school's music facilities as " Mayford College music centre" instead of just "music hall".*

Page load speed

Slow page load speed is a blind spot for many school websites and a key contributor to high bounce rates. Google's PageSpeed Insights tool will help you check your page load speed by plugging in your webpage URL.

A few factors can contribute to page load speeds lagging, but some of the most common are that your **images or videos are too large**. You might be wondering if it matters if your page is a little slow to load, the answer is yes! Besides the fact that slow page load speed is a poor user experience, Google also penalises web pages with poor page load speed in search results.

Pro tip: *Check your load speed regularly! Any new content updates or images might be slowing your site down and not be picked up unless doing a page load speed test.*

04

Sign up for an SEO crawl service

Subscribing to a regular SEO crawler service like Mozpro or semRUSH is an easy way to highlight and spot any changes to your SEO performance. You can either set up automated or do manual crawls that will highlight SEO optimisation options for your site at your chosen frequency.

Pro tip: Many SEO crawl services also include free keyword performance tools, allowing you to load your chosen keywords and monitor how they move up and down search rankings over time.

05

A quick on-page SEO checklist:

The next time you're writing content for your school's website or blog, be sure to review our handy checklist below to make sure it's optimised for SEO!

☐ Write a concise title that includes relevant and well-researched keywords

☐ Keep your page URL short and avoid adding dates

☐ Write a meta description that's engaging and includes keywords

☐ Use proper header and body tags to structure your digital content

☐ Include relevant internal links to related pieces of content on your website

☐ Write clear and descriptive alt-text for all of your images

☐ Check your page load speed to see if you can optimise any elements

☐ Sign up for an SEO crawl service

There you go — you're now ready to tackle on-page SEO at your school!

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