



What are Canonical Tags and How Do I Set Them Up Properly in Sitecore?

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If your company has invested in SEO, it's likely you've heard the term "canonical tags" come up.

Implemented properly, canonical tags help guide Google toward understanding and ranking the right pages for your website.

Implemented improperly (or worse, not at all), and you may end up with Google indexing identical, duplicate pages for your website. This causes an unfortunate problem known as "index bloat," where Google indexes dozens, hundreds, or thousands of pages you don't want indexed—making it harder for customers to find the page they need.

Properly setting up your canonical tags is a SEO best practice and an important task in website content management.

Below we'll explain exactly what canonical tags are, why you need them, and the best practices to follow when adding them to your [Sitecore implementation](#).

What is a canonical tag?

A canonical tag lives in the code for individual pages on your website. A canonical tag serves a single purpose. It tells search engines which URL on your website represents the "master" version of the page.

```
<link rel="canonical" href="https://www.sitecore.com/" />
```

In other words, a canonical tag tells search engines which page they should display in the search results.

Why do you need canonical tags?

Canonical tags are important because search engines view URLs differently than humans. They see each URL on your website as distinct, even in those cases where to humans, it's obvious that the URLs represent the same page.

For example, we would clearly view both *www.example.com/home* and *example.com* as the same page, but Google would view these as distinct URLs.

Without a canonical tag, Google may index both of these pages as distinct search results. For an isolated page, this doesn't seem like such a big deal. But when you

consider the entire universe of your website—particularly if you have a very large website—the problems become evident.

Here are a few common examples where missing canonical tags cause SEO issues:

- **Ecommerce websites:** If you run an ecommerce site with multiple variations of a product and don't use canonical tags, Google may display multiple pages for the same product based on those variations. You might have different URLs like size and color, such as *example.com/dress-shirt-red* and *example.com/dress-shirt-red-medium*. Google views each of these as different URLs and will index them accordingly, so you need to add a canonical tag.
- **Multiple domains:** If you own multiple domains, you can map them to the same site in Sitecore. This not only includes distinct domains like *yourwebsite.com* and *yourotherwebsite.com*, but also *www* and *non-www* versions.
- **Aliases:** Sitecore automatically creates URLs using an organizational folder structure for your site. This is ideal for your website structure from a SEO perspective, as it makes it easy for Google to understand the various URLs and their relationship to each other, but it can result in long URLs, particularly for product variants, e.g. *yourwebsite.com/category/product-line/product-name*. If you create aliases for an item in Sitecore, such as *yourwebsite.com/product-name*, all of your aliases will be exposed to the search engines as completely different URLs. You need to add a canonical tag to the original page.
- **URL normalization:** Sitecore allows mixed case URLs. This means a capitalized version of your URL will show the same content as a lowercase URL to users (e.g. *yourwebsite.com/About-Us* vs. *yourwebsite.com/about-us*, but search engines will see these as separate pages. Add canonical tags to indicate the correct version of the page.

The risk of ignoring canonical tags

Now, you may be thinking, “Is this really so bad? If Google indexes more of my pages, doesn't that mean I have more chances to rank in the search results?”

Not quite.

When you don't use canonical tags, you force Google to wade through all of this duplicate content. As a result, it will take them longer to crawl your website, which may cause them to miss some of your more important content.

Worse, because a lot of the content appears so similar, Google may end up displaying the “wrong” page in the search results. When a visitor arrives on the page from search, it may provide them with a poor experience because it doesn't actually answer their query. Then, they'll likely leave and return back to Google to click on another page—maybe even your competitor's.

When this negative feedback loop continues again and again, Google may start ranking your site lower because it views it as irrelevant to the search query.

By properly implementing canonical tags, you can avoid this fearsome scenario. You can tell Google which URLs are the master version of a page, so it displays those URLs in the Google results.

When should you use canonical tags?

You should use canonical tags whenever you have content that is extremely similar or duplicate that lives on multiple URLs.

Good reasons to use canonical tags include:

- **You want to tell Google which page you want them to rank and display in the search results.** This means they will also recognize any backlinks you have from multiple versions of the page and consolidate that “link juice” toward the master version.
- **You manage syndicated content.** You may promote your blog articles on other websites to reach a larger audience. Adding a canonical tag to those articles helps Google find the original one on your website.
- **You want to speed up Google's crawl rate for your website.** Don't force Google to wade through tons of duplicate content, and it can crawl your freshest content faster.

Canonical tag implementation for Sitecore

Below are eight best practices for setting up canonical tags in Sitecore:

1. Identify your preferred URL for duplicate content. Your preferred URL is the canonical URL. Add a rel="canonical" link from the duplicate pages to the canonical one.
2. Add a self-referencing canonical tag on the canonical page, referencing itself as the canonical page. This may seem a bit like overkill, but Google actually recommends this practice. It's also particularly important for Sitecore websites, as this is your opportunity to normalize other versions of the URL (e.g. multi-language or capitalized) to the canonical, lowercase version.
3. Include the full URL in the canonical tag. Do not get lazy and remove the `https://www.` in your canonical tags. The entire URL should be listed.
4. If you have a multi-language Sitecore implementation, ensure your canonical URLs are specified in the desired language.
5. If you have separate *m.example.com* pages of your desktop URLs, and the canonical page is on desktop, use the link rel="alternate" tag.
6. For pages with parameters, such as product pages, tell Google to ignore dynamic parameters in [Google Search Console](#).
7. If you have similar content on multiple domains, you can also add canonical tags to let Google know which is the master version.
8. Be thoughtful about how you use aliases in Sitecore. If you're using aliases to create different names for a page, add a canonical tag. If you're using aliases to create vanity URLs (such as for a marketing campaign), set those up as redirects using the Sitecore URL Rewrite module.

Canonical tags and your Sitecore site

Canonical tags are important. Unfortunately, they can also be a bit tricky.

That's where Engagency can help. We know canonical tags inside and out. More importantly, we know how to implement them in Sitecore so they help, not hinder, your SEO. You can trust our team to implement your canonical tags correctly. We can

also set up a field for you to enter your own freeform canonical URLs in the Content Editor.

[Contact us](#) to learn more about our SEO services for Sitecore.