



Website Optimisation Best Practice Guide

A well-optimised website ensures that your business is visible to customers, loads quickly, and provides a seamless user experience. For small and local businesses, even basic improvements in website optimisation can have a significant impact on traffic, enquiries, and conversions.

In this guide created by Whitewall Marketing, we share helpful tips on how you can optimise your website.

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Key Terms of Website Optimisation

Beginner Terms – Foundational Concepts

- **SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)** – the practice of improving your website to make it more visible to search engines and provide a better user experience.
- **Keywords** – the words and phrases people type into Google or other search engines.
- **Meta title and meta description** – the short text that appears in search engine results for each page.
- **Alt text** – descriptions attached to images to improve accessibility and search visibility.
- **Responsive design** – a design that adapts to different screen sizes such as mobile, tablet, or desktop.
- **CTA (call to action)** – buttons or prompts that guide visitors to take an action (e.g. “buy now”).
- **Page speed** – how quickly your site loads. Faster is better for both users and rankings.
- **Analytics** – the data about your website visitors, such as where they came from and what pages they viewed.

Intermediate Terms – Foundational Concepts

- **Backlinks** – links from other websites to yours. Strong backlinks improve authority and ranking.
- **Bounce rate** – the percentage of users who leave after only viewing one page.
- **Conversion rate** – the percentage of visitors who complete a desired action (buying, signing up, etc.).
- **SSL certificate (HTTPS)** – a security certificate that ensures your site is safe and displays the padlock in browsers.
- **URL structure** – how web addresses are formatted. Clean, descriptive URLs are easier for both users and search engines.
- **Sitemap** – a file that lists your site’s pages, helping search engines index them.
- **Crawling and indexing** – how search engines discover and organise your site pages in results.
- **Internal linking** – linking between pages on your own site to guide users and help search engines understand structure.
- **Schema markup** – code that helps search engines better understand your content (e.g. reviews, products, events).

Advanced Terms – Deeper Optimisation

- **Domain authority (DA)** – a score predicting how likely your site is to rank, based on backlinks and trust signals.
- **Canonical URL** – used to show search engines which version of a page to prioritise when duplicates exist.
- **Core web vitals** – Google's set of performance metrics (loading, interactivity, visual stability) used for ranking.
- **Robots.txt** – a file that tells search engines which parts of your site they can or cannot crawl.
- **Keyword cannibalisation** – when multiple pages target the same keyword, confusing search engines.
- **Redirects (301/302)** – rules that forward visitors (and search engines) from one URL to another.
- **CTR (click-through rate)** – the percentage of people who click on your site link in search results.
- **Orphan pages** – pages that have no internal links pointing to them, making them hard for search engines to find.
- **Content delivery network (CDN)** – a network of servers that speeds up your site by storing copies closer to users.
- **Technical debt** – accumulated issues in code or design that slow down site performance and require fixes.

Core Elements of Website Optimisation

Page Speed

Fast-loading websites are essential for user retention and search engine rankings. A delay of even two to three seconds can cause visitors to leave your site before engaging. To optimise page speed:

- Compress all images before uploading using free tools such as TinyPNG or built-in website plug-ins.
- Limit the number of plug-ins and widgets installed on your website, as each adds additional load time.
- Enable caching to allow repeat visitors to load your site more quickly.
- Consider using a content delivery network (CDN), which distributes your site content across global servers for faster access.

Mobile Friendliness

Most users will access your website on a mobile device, so responsive design is crucial. To ensure mobile optimisation:

- Test your website using Google's Mobile-Friendly Test tool.
- Use a website template that automatically adjusts to different screen sizes.
- Avoid long paragraphs and ensure buttons are large enough to tap easily.
- Place key information such as your contact number or booking button in a visible position on mobile screens.
- Upload desktop and mobile versions of images when possible. Mobile images tend to be smaller and usually portrait.

Navigation and Structure

- Clear structure ensures both users and search engines can easily understand your website. To optimise navigation:
- Create a simple, top-level navigation menu with no more than five to seven items. Subcategories can sit under these items if needed.
- Use consistent page names such as "About Us," "Services," and "Contact" so that visitors immediately recognise where to click.
- Include a search bar if your website has a large amount of content.
- Implement breadcrumbs (small navigation aids) so users always know where they are within your site.
- Ensure all important pages can be reached within three clicks from the homepage.

Content Quality

Search engines prioritise websites that publish original, relevant, and helpful content. To optimise content:

- Research keywords your customers are searching for using free tools such as Google Keyword Planner or Ubersuggest, then integrate these naturally into page text and headings.
- Paid tools such as Moz, Ahrefs, and SemRush can be used to create keyword strategies and perform more in-depth keyword research.
- Use a mix of written content, images, and videos to increase engagement.
- Write short, clear paragraphs with subheadings to improve readability.
- Ensure that each page has a distinct purpose. For example, a services page should focus on explaining what you offer, while a blog page can share tips and industry insights.

Meta Titles and Descriptions

These short text snippets are displayed in search engine results and strongly influence whether users click through to your site. To optimise them:

- Keep meta titles under 60 characters and descriptions under 160 characters.
- Include your primary keyword and business name.
- Write descriptions that are clear, engaging, and accurately reflect the content of the page.
- Ensure each page has a unique meta title and description to avoid duplication.

Image Optimisation

Images enhance your website visually but, if not optimised, can slow it down. To optimise images:

- Resize images to the maximum dimensions required by your template before uploading.
- Use descriptive file names with keywords (e.g. "edinburgh-florist-roses.jpg" rather than "IMG1234.jpg").
- Add alternative text (alt text) to every image. This improves accessibility and allows search engines to understand what the image represents.
- Use next-generation image formats such as WebP where supported, as they provide higher quality with smaller file sizes.
- Upload images as a JPG instead of a PNG to cut down on size.

Security

A secure website builds trust with users and improves your ranking in search results. To optimise security:

- Ensure your website uses HTTPS rather than HTTP. Most web hosts provide free SSL certificates that can be installed easily.
- Keep your website platform, plug-ins, and themes updated to prevent vulnerabilities.
- Use secure passwords and two-factor authentication for website administrator accounts.
- Display a privacy policy if you are collecting customer data such as email addresses or booking details.

Further Support

If you require further support with optimising your website, please contact your dedicated adviser directly, or email invest@westlothian.gov.uk.

