LDS Search Optimization Standards

Advances in Internet technology have changed the way people find answers to questions or information related to topics they are interested in. Today, Google and other search engines serve as modern-day library card catalogs. The role of a search engine is to determine what a person is looking for (search intent) and then return the most relevant results.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the art and science of making websites findable in search engine results pages (SERP) when someone's search intent matches content published online. There are standard guidelines provided by Google and tested by the SEO team and countless other SEO professionals that will help the church attract visitors who are searching for Internet content it publishes.

We view SEO as a method to spread the gospel online and encourage others to treat it as such. By being actively engaged in improving our websites for search engines, we help them (e.g., Google, Yahoo!, Bing, etc.) provide more relevant and accurate results to their customers. At the same time, we are able to introduce the honest and pure in heart to accurate and relevant truth as it relates to their search query. This document serves as a set of standard guidelines that must be followed on all church websites in an effort to effectively spread the gospel online.

Title Tag Information and Example

- The title tag is one of the most important on-page factors in regards to ranking on search engines.

  - It is visible on both the website and the search engine results page (SERP).

  - It lets both users and search engines know what your webpage (URL) is about.

- Best practice is to keep the title tag descriptive, succinct, and unique.

  - Keep the title tag's length to 65 characters or less or else it will be cut off (by ellipsis) in the SERPs and/or could be seen as "spammy" by search engines.

  - Use hyphens (-) and pipe bars (|) to separate keywords (keyword phrases).

  - Every webpage needs to have a unique title tag.

- Generally, targeting no more than three unique keywords per webpage is ideal.

  - Focusing on three root keywords avoids the practice and appearance of "keyword stuffing."

  - A webpage will still be relevant for related long-tail keywords (i.e., "Mormon radio" will be relevant for "Mormon radio station," "Mormon radio channel," etc.), even if you just focus on three.

Google

lds website

Advanced search

Search   About 11,000,000 results (0.19 seconds)

Everything

Images

Maps

Videos

News

Shopping

More

Salt Lake City, UT
Change location

Any time
Past hour
Past 24 hours
Past 2 days
Past week
Past month

Title Tag

► The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
lds.org/ - Cached
Official **site**. Online scriptures and gospel library, media contact information, online distribution center, programs and doctrinal information, events and ...

General Conference
lds.org/general-conference?...
Read, watch, listen to, search ...

Magazines
lds.org/magazine?lang=eng
Liahona. The Liahona ...

Scriptures
lds.org/scriptures?lang=eng
Read, listen to, and search the ...

Prepare a Lesson
lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?...
Old Testament · New Testament ...

Manuals
lds.org/manual?lang=eng
"Inspired instruction in the home ...

Study by Topic
lds.org/study/topics?lang=eng
Gospel Study. Scriptures ...

Search lds.org

FamilySearch.**org** — Free Family History and Genealogy Records
www.familysearch.**org**/ - Cached
Discover your family history. Explore the world's largest collection of free family trees, genealogy records and resources.

Example title tag for http://www.lds.org/churchmusic/:

<title>LDS Church Music - Mormon Hymns | Music Player - MP3 Songs</title>

− Put the most important keywords at the beginning of the title tag.

   − Search engines put more weight/value to keywords at the beginning of title tags, so put the main keyword first.

− Normally, title tags are short snippets of keywords or small phrases—not sentences.

   − Since these titles are displayed on the SERPs, they should be able to digest quickly at a glance. Normally, people don't want to read a whole sentence while in the initial search phase.

   − The keywords that you use, if searched for by a user, will be **bolded** in the SERP.

Meta Description Information and Example

− The meta description is very important for a URLs click through rate (from SERPs), as well as website usage stats and data.

   − It is not visible to users on the website (unless you view the source code), but is visible for users on the SERP.

   − This is an opportunity to go into more detail about the webpage, as well as offer a call to action and utilize a few targeted keywords.

- Best practice is to keep the description relevant (to that particular webpage), write as a sentence, and keep it unique (per webpage).

  - Keep the meta description's length to approximately 150 characters or else it will be cut off (by ellipsis) in the SERPs.

  - Shy away from excessive use of "sales" writing, but it is okay to have a relevant call to action where relevant.

  - Every webpage needs to have a unique meta description.

- Utilize at least one (and up to three) targeted keywords in the meta description from the title tag.

  - Use keyword(s) naturally; keyword variations are okay (i.e., pluralizing).

Home page meta description example for http://www.lds.org/churchmusic/:

<meta name="description" content="Our LDS church music section includes a music player and MP3 songs available for download. Visit us for LDS (Mormon) hymns and learning materials."/>

Heading <h1> Tag Information

- The first text-based attribute on the webpage should be a heading (aka an <h1> heading tag), which is basically a title/intro for the webpage's content.

    - At least utilize the main keyword in the h1 heading (in a naturally, readable manner).

    - Similar to the title tag, and if possible, put the keyword at the beginning of the h1 heading (or just have the keyword as the entire h1 heading).

    - There is no set character or word limit for h1 headings, but there are typically short (about eight words or less).

    - Do not have more than one <h1> heading per webpage, as it will devalue the webpage's on-site SEO effectiveness from search engines.
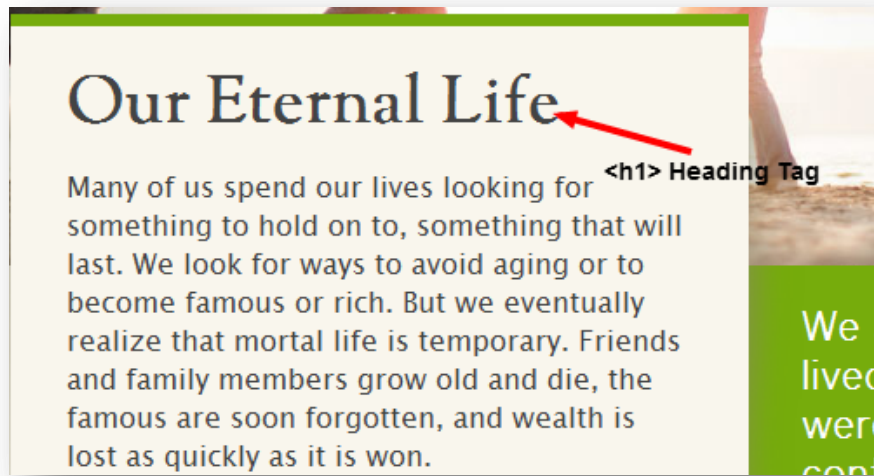
Keyword Targeting Information and Page Content (HTML Text)

Text that is visible to a user should be contained in HTML. While text contained in Flash or image files may be appealing to the eye, search engines typically cannot read/crawl the text inside those files.

There should also be a sufficient amount of HTML text on the page. We recommend a minimum of 200 words. Google updated their algorithms in March 2011 to target what it calls "thin content pages" or pages with little valuable content and systematically lower the ranking of such pages. Having at least 200 words will help avoid the appearance of thin content.

- Naturally include keywords within the copy.

  - Either during or after writing the copy, be sure to check that the targeted keywords for that particular webpage have been used at least once each. Good practice is to not use a particular keyword more than three times, as it will appear unnatural and spammy to search engines, as well as users.

  - It is okay to use variations of the targeted keywords as long as you use each targeted keyword once "as is." For example, if the targeted keyword is "Mormon," the copy could use "Mormon," "Mormons," and "Mormonism" and still be okay—in fact, this usage will look more natural to search engines and users.

  - It is suggested (although not uber-imperative) to **bold** one usage of each targeted keyword using a <strong> tag. Even though this practice has lost some effectiveness over the years due to abuse and manipulation, there is still some value in doing so (as it is an indicator to search engines that it is an important word and also stands out for users).

The first week of each month, the Mormon Channel Relief Society program will explore the Visiting Teaching message through quotes from the general Relief Society presidency and General Authorities. A second episode each month will feature a member of the general Relief Society presidency and other guests discussing the topic of the Visiting Teaching Message in an interview with general Relief Society board member Sharon Eubank. Join us as we explore these inspired messages.

An <h2> or <h3> could go here

To prepare for visiting teaching and to understand the purpose of the Visiting Teaching program go to the visiting teaching web page on the Relief Society website where you will find inspirational videos and instruction.

An <h2> or <h3> could go here

For more information on the Relief Society, visit the Relief Society website.

- Write in small paragraphs and structure them with subheadings (i.e., <h2> headings, <h3> headings, etc.).

  - Ensure that each paragraph is "digestible" for users, in that they are smaller chunks of text and they do not appear overwhelming to read.

  - Break up different ideas with subheadings.

  - Multiple uses of <h2> headings, <h3> headings, etc., are okay, but use good judgment on the aesthetics (for the users' sake).

  - Subheadings using keywords or their variations are encouraged, if possible. However, if the webpage has five subheadings, it is not recommended to use keywords in each instance (as it will appear spammy).

Image File Name Information and Example

Images add visual appeal to webpages and help to keep visitors engaged with our content. It is important to use images that are both relevant and high-quality to accomplish this. In addition, search engine robots use images as yet another signal to determine the topic of a webpage. When Googlebot crawls an image on your webpage, it will rely on the HTML code to determine what the image may be about. Because of this, follow the standard format for including images in church websites:

Every image used on church-owned websites should have a relevant file name and alt tag to help search engines determine what the image is about. We also recommend including the image size information in the <img> tag.

Where appropriate, keywords relevant to the image should appear close to the image itself before and after the <img> code. This will give even better signals to Google and other search engines regarding the content of the image.

Information about images on each page should be contained also in the XML sitemap. Doing so may help search engine robots find, index, and rank images on our websites quickly and more accurately.

- The file name for images is a key indicator to search engines of what the image is about.

Example file name for this image:
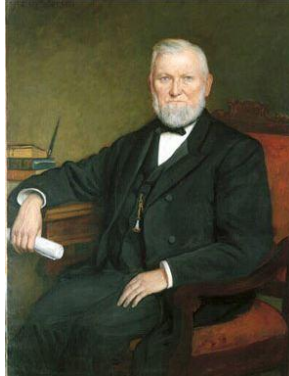
wilford-woodruff-mormon-prophet.jpg
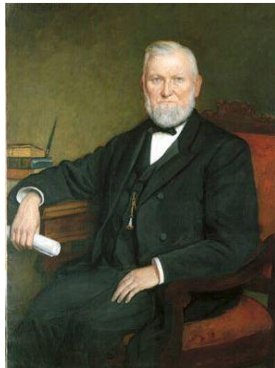
- Best practice is to keep them unique, descriptive of that particular image, and utilize a targeted keyword or variation (if possible).

    - It should be a keyword phrase that describes the image.

    - Sentences or very long file names are discouraged.

    - Separate words with hyphens (avoiding underscores).

Image Alt Tag Information and Example

Example alt image tag:

alt="Wilford Woodruff - Mormon Prophet"

- The alt image tag serves as an indicator to search engines on what the image is about and displays if the image does not load.

  - It is not visible to users unless the image does not load.

  - In addition, for users that have vision impairments and special website browsers, the alt tag will be read aloud to users.

- Best practice is to keep them unique, particular to that image, and utilize a targeted keyword or variation (if possible).

  - It should be a keyword phrase that describes the image.

  - Sentences or very long image alt tags are discouraged.

  - Can closely resemble or even be the same as the image file name.

  - If the image is only aesthetic in nature and has nothing to do with the content/text of that webpage, it is okay to leave it null (i.e., alt="").

Robots.txt Information

The robots.txt file must be placed at the domain root and will serve two purposes. First, it will help search engines avoid areas of the website that are not important to rank in search queries. Examples of these may be search directories on the website like lds.org/search. An entry to disallow "/search/" in robots.txt will suggest that search engines do not need to crawl any URLs found in that directory.

The robots.txt should be used carefully, as it is easy to make a mistake and unintentionally block or disallow important pages from search engine access.

XML Sitemap Information and Example Code

A valued resource for search engines, XML sitemaps allow crawlers to quickly access and find content on websites. It also can help provide information about images and video contained on each URL. While an XML sitemap is not required for a page to rank in Google or other search engines, it helps with indexing content located deeper in the website for search engine queries that tend to be specific and unique. We refer to these keywords as "long-tail" key phrases. Here is an example* of the code:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
 <URLset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9"
  xmlns:image="http://www.google.com/schemas/sitemap-image/1.1">
 <URL>
  <loc>http://example.com/sample.html</loc>
  <image:image>
    <image:loc>http://example.com/image.jpg</image:loc>
  </image:image>
 </URL>
</URLset>
```
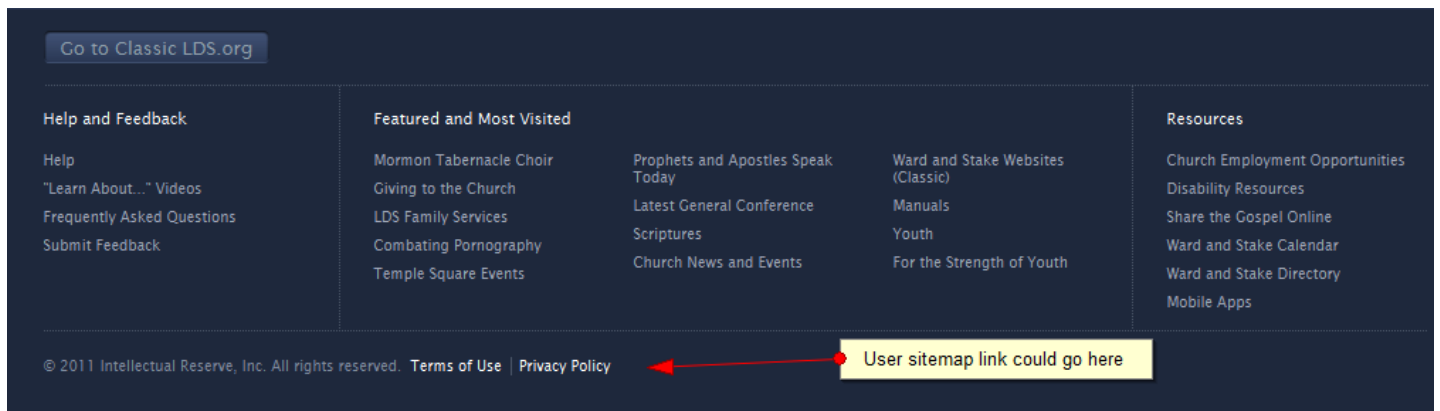
(*Example from Official Google Webmaster Central Blog)

Visit http://www.sitemaps.org/protocol.php and see other examples and learn what each tag means.

There is a maximum limit of 50,000 URLs entered per sitemap. Therefore, it may be necessary to use a sitemap-index.xml file to show search engine robots the locations of multiple sitemap.xml files.

User Sitemap Example Placement

For example, the link to the user sitemap could go in the footer:

Duplicate Content

"Duplicate content is content that appears on the Internet in more than one place (URL). This is a problem because when there are more than one piece of identical content on the Internet, it is difficult for search engines to decide which version is more relevant to a given search query. To provide the best search experience, search engines will rarely show multiple, duplicate pieces of content and thus, are forced to choose which version is most likely to be the original (or best)." - SEOmoz

URL Canonicalization

Some of the most common problems encountered in SEO are duplicate content issues created when a webpage file has multiple URL's which are not redirected to the canonical or preferred URL. Each webpage should have only one "canonical" version of the URL. For example, while LDS.org only has one English homepage (HTML source code file), users can access it using several different URLs listed below:

http://lds.org

http://www.lds.org

http://www.lds.org?lang=eng

http://lds.org/?lang=eng

All websites must use a 301 status to redirect the browser address window, users, and search engines to the preferred URL format. As in the example above, all of the varying URL's will result in the browser redirecting to http://lds.org/?lang=eng. This is the "canonical" URL which is visible in the address field of the browser window. Failure to do this correctly will result in a dilution of backlink equity and could prevent the website from ranking as highly as it should for targeted key phrases.

Internally, we have seen improvements in search engine performance with both lds.org and mormon.org after they have implemented a 301 redirect strategy to redirect all URLs to the non-www versions. It is important to address all of the elements of the URL address and choose the preferred URL format. For example, determine whether all URLs should end in a trailing slash "/" or only the folders should end with the trailing slash. Also determine which webpages should use https and which should only use http.

All pages should also contain a canonical URL tag in the <head> section of the HTML code. This will help the major search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo!, and Bing) to control indexing of duplicate content and will assist in ranking the correct search engine friendly URLs. For example, the page http://mormon.org/book-of-mormon/ should contain this tag in the <head> section:

<link rel="canonical" href="http://mormon.org/book-of-mormon/"/>

This way if another website links to the page incorrectly, using http://mormon.org/book-of-mormon or www.mormon.org/book-of-mormon, the search engines will know that the correct URL includes a trailing slash. So any trust or authority that is attributed to that link will flow to the correct "canonical" version of the URL.

In some cases it is appropriate and necessary to publish the same website content or article on multiple URLs. We see this most often in the case of providing documents formatted for printing. While the articles are identical, it is necessary for users to be able to print them. Care should be taken in determining which URL is the "canonical" or main URL for these content pages. And each page should contain the appropriate rel=canonical tag pointing to the preferred version. Doing so

will tell search engines to attribute any link equity (PageRank, Trust, Authority) to the preferred document while still providing the version formatted for printing to users.

In the case of duplicate articles or content published in multiple sections of the website (such as a General Conference address published in the General-Conference, Ensign, and Liahona sections) please contact the Web Promotion team for consulting. The team can provide guidance in determining which document versions should be the "canonical" versions.

301 Redirect Suggestions

We recommend using a 301 (permanent) redirect so that the newer page will be the URL ranking in search engines. Likewise, any other duplicate pages on Domain.org should either be redirected or have a rel=canonical tag added in the header of the html code for the duplicate pages.

Removing Webpages and Content Permanently

Often times, we wish to remove pages of content from our websites. Doing so may result in a bad user experience and negative impacts to search engine rankings unless the URL is redirected. When removing

a webpage document, it is always best to do so using a 301 (permanent) redirect. This will help to pass any accumulated link equity to a different page to preserve search engine rankings. It will also redirect visitors who click on old links that may still exist on third-party websites to the new location of the content or similar alternative content.

Removing Webpages from Search Engines

In some cases there may be a need to remove content from a search engine, but not from the website. Examples may be old versions of manuals, pamphlets, etc. that don't need to be found in search engines, but should still be accessible to users who may have bookmarked the old documents for historical reference or other reasons.

In this case, use a meta robots tag. Here is an example of how to use this tag in a way that will allow webmasters to remove the pages from search engine results without losing any link authority that may be passed through links on the page:

<META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX, FOLLOW">

This tag will tell search engine robots not to index the page in their results. However, it also tells the search engine robot to still crawl links to the page and those found on the page. This will continue the flow of link equity throughout the website.

Effective Language Selection Options

If the occasion arises, we recommend providing the language selection options via a separate HTML page located at http://Domain.org/en/languages/ (or translated at http://Domain.org/es/idiomas/) so that every page on Domain.org does not include extra links to a foreign language translation of the home page.

Search engines tend to spend a predetermined amount of time and bandwidth crawling and indexing websites. We refer to this allotment as "crawl budget" and it is largely determined based on the authority and importance of the website in question as determined by size (number of pages) and quality/quantity of backlinks. For example, Domain.org most likely has a larger crawl budget than a smaller website such as itsaboutlove.org. By providing these language links on every page, search engine spiders such as Googlebot are likely spending much of the crawl budget on these links.

There is also a dilution of link authority (PageRank or "link juice") flowing through the links on Domain.org as these links exist on every page. Search engines attribute a certain amount of page authority (PageRank) to every page on the Internet. This authority can then be passed along to other pages via a hyperlink. The amount of authority passed through each link on the page is distributed amongst the links on the page. Therefore, the authority passed by each individual link dilutes as more links to a page are added.

404 Page Information

When Googlebot crawls a hyperlink on the Internet to a page that does not exist, the response code generated is "404." Websites which have a substantial amount of "404 pages" tend to be less useful to actual website visitors. Google (and other search engines) prefer to rank quality websites higher in search results. Having a significant amount of 404 error pages can negatively impact a website's ability to rank for many relevant search terms.

We should note that some of the 404 URLs may not be valid URLs. This is most often caused when a third-party website links to our content incorrectly (i.e., with a misspelling somewhere in the URL). There is no action required on these types of 404 errors. The sampling pictured seem to be valid URLs that are resulting in a 404 error.

Where possible, 404 errors should be resolved with a 301 (permanent) redirect either to a new location of the content or to an alternate, but related page. In the event a related page cannot be found, the error page should be redirected to the home page.

Information Architecture and Internal Linking

In order for search engines to locate, crawl, and index a page, it is critical that we present them with a navigable hyperlink trail to those pages.

If there are URLs that are not navigable from the home page, the value from the home page will not be able to pass to the URLs that are "on an island."

The following graphic helps illustrate additional benefit of having URLs linking from the home page:
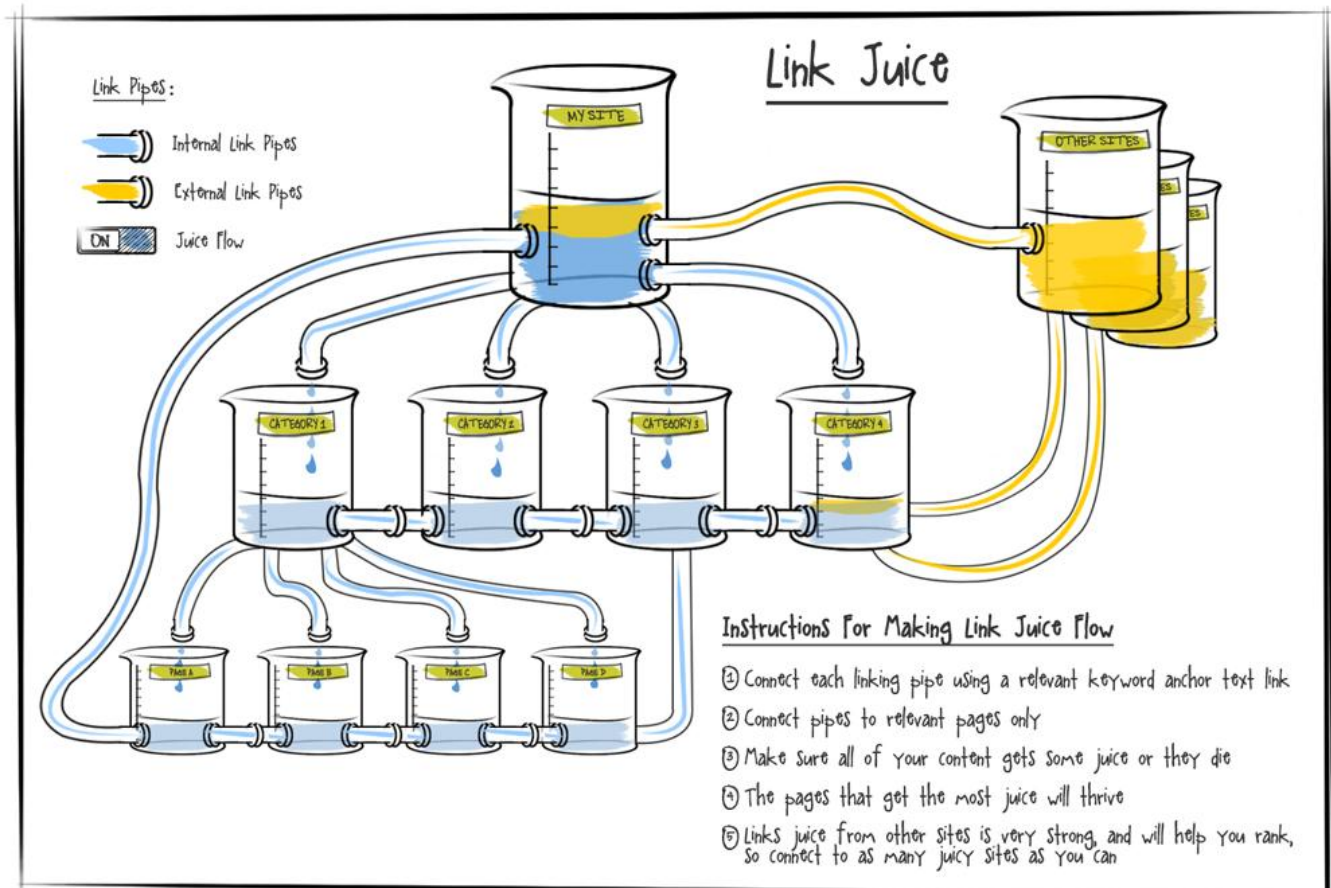
Internal links are those that link to another page within the same website. For example, an internal link is created when an article in The Ensign links to a scripture reference, since both pages exist on the same domain (LDS.org).

Internal links are another way that search engine robots find, index, and rank webpages. Internal links, including menu-style navigational links, should be contained in HTML code. This is the easiest link code for search engines to crawl. Menu dropdown lists that are executed with JavaScript are not advised. Often times the search engine robot will not execute the JavaScript, opting to crawl the HTML links on the page instead.

When creating an internal link be sure to use anchor text that is relevant to the page being linked to. For example, if I wanted to link to the topical page located at http://lds.org/topic/bible I would create the link in HTML like this to use the words "The Holy Bible" as anchor text:

The Holy Bible

Website Architecture (Navigation)

Search engine robots crawl through a website via HTML links. While we know some of the more advanced bots like Googlebot can execute JavaScript, we also know that HTML links are more accessible and preferred by even these bots. While JavaScript menus may be great for user interaction and visual appeal, it is recommended that the main navigation menu for all sites be available in HTML code accessible to search engines and users who have JavaScript disabled in their browser. In cases where usability demands menu navigation executed with JavaScript, the JavaScript should be written in such a way that the links and content are contained in the HTML on one layer and the JavaScript manages interactivity on a behavioral layer. The JQuery Library is useful in creating SEO and user friendly navigation. A great example of how this is done can be seen in practice at http://www.northerntool.com.

Also, webpages should not contain excessive links. If the required amount of links on a particular page approaches 100, careful consideration should be taken to minimize the amount. Consult the Web Promotion team for case by case suggestions.

Video Optimization

Church published videos have a potential to rank in YouTube search results and also in regular search engine results such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing. Much of the criteria for ranking videos in search (either YouTube or Google) is based on popularity signals such as views, comments, playlist inclusions, number of embeds on other websites, etc. However there are some basic SEO factors that need to be included in order to improve probability of a high rank.

The video title should be search engine friendly. It should contain keywords that users will likely use to search for the content of the video. Similar to a webpage title, the targeted keyword should be first words in the video title. The video description should include relevant keywords in the first sentence. The description should include a link to a relevant Church owned or sponsored webpage address. Video tags should be populated using relevant keywords.

All videos for public consumption should be easily shareable on the Internet. Allow users the option to share the video on popular social network sites such as Facebook. Also, allow users to embed publicly accessible videos on their own websites and blogs. You may be able to include a link to a related page on a Church website within the embed code. When a third party site embeds your video, they will also be linking to a Church owned or sponsored website.

Online Integration and Influence

Keyword Value and Effectiveness

Metric #1: Keywords within the important on-page elements on top 10 webpages are driving traffic

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: The top 10 webpages that have received the most natural traffic during the past six months will be audited against their mapped keyword plan to determine how much usage the keywords have in important on-page elements. Each webpage has an opportunity for four points for each important element: title tag, <h1> heading, image alt tag, and body content. Score is determined by collective score of all 10 pages on whether at least three of the top five relevant keyword phrases, based off of search volume, are used.

- Description: In this evaluation, the search optimization team will audit top categorical pages to compare against identified targeted keywords and determine if these terms are utilized in important on-page elements. The on-page elements evaluated are: title tag, <h1> heading, image alt tag, and at least once within body content (text).

Metric #2: Are the keywords that top pages are optimized for driving desired outcomes (conversions)? (As measured by percentage of keywords per number of webpages.)

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If conversions are occurring = 10 points. If conversions have increased over last six months = 20 points.

- Description: In this evaluation, the web promotion team will audit the top keywords referring visits to key pages under the domain (typically the top 10 to 20 terms) to see whether these keywords are resulting in desired outcomes (i.e., conversions). If conversions are occurring, this will indicate keywords are effectively serving their purpose.

Metric #3: Branded keywords vs. non-branded keywords ratio

- Potential Value: 20

- Score: Non-branded keyword traffic is greater than branded keyword traffic over last six months.

- Description: As part of the mission to continually increase our audience reach, it is important to ensure that non-branded traffic is consistently higher than branded traffic. As long as non-branded exceeds the amount of branded traffic achieved this score is 100%. If it is lower, it is 0%. Branded keyword list will derive from the website's top 100 keywords that receive traffic. Examples of branded and non-branded keywords:

  Branded = terms unique to the organization (i.e., Deseret, Joseph Smith, Mormon, Abinadi, Relief Society, LDS, Kolob, Thummim, etc.)

  Non-branded = terms relevant across all religions (i.e., Jesus Christ, Bible, baptism, scriptures, etc.)

Metric #4: Slope of linear trend line of referring keywords

- Potential Value: 10

- Score: Score: Three months of increase over the past six months = 5 points. Six months of increase = 10 points. Downward slope = zero points.

- Description: As an indicator that your website is continuing to improve in its audience reach, the web promotion team will evaluate the most recent six months to determine whether the number of keywords driving traffic to the domain via organic traffic has increased, has flat-lined, or has decreased. A website that leverages content well will consistently improve in keyword relevance and reach.

Current Ranking for Top 50 Keywords

Metric: Percentage of target keywords in "traffic zone" in the Conductor Searchlight tool

- Potential Value: 100

- Score: Percentage of targeted keywords within "traffic zone."

- Description: With the use of Conductor Searchlight, the web promotion team will evaluate the current positions of all targeted keywords that are within "traffic zones." The percentage of keywords within the traffic zone is the total percent given as a score in this metric.

Internal Linking and "Link Equity" Flow

Metric #1: The percentage of total webpages with consistent universal navigation

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: Total number of webpages containing universal navigation divided against the total number of webpages overall.

- Description: A website that is initially created with usability in mind will ensure that the universal navigation is consistent site-wide. This provides a coherent and recognizable experience for the user, as well as a valid way for web crawlers to access and filter content into an index properly.

  (Lead capture and paid advertising pages may at times strip out universal navigation to focus the user on one sole purpose. In these cases, these webpages will be excluded without detriment to overall SEO score.)

Metric #2: Inclusion of priority webpages within the universal navigation

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: List of priority webpages from product manager (website owner) matches the list of priority webpages from the web promotion team. If yes, 100%. Minus five points per inconsistency.

- Description: As part of this evaluation, your web promotion representative will work with the website product manager to determine which webpages should be considered "priority webpages" (top URLs) on the domain. These top URLs will be audited to determine which are and which are not included in the universal navigation. As a best practice, any webpage that is vital for both message and user should be placed at a forefront of website navigation.

Metric #3: Comprehensive user sitemap (HTML) of "priority webpages"

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: The percentage of priority webpages contained in user sitemap compared to the total amount of priority webpages on the website.

- Description: For both a user and web crawler, an HTML version of the website sitemap should be created and published within the domain. The web promotion team will evaluate the user sitemap to determine its comprehensiveness.

Metric #4: Search engine standard hyperlink protocol

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: The percentage of links that use the traditional "href" coding compared to other methods (i.e., JavaScript, AJAX, etc.).

- Description: Using a website crawler, the web promotion team will evaluate the code of each webpage to determine how often links are used that are not traditionally accessible to search engines (by using JavaScript or AJAX). Links that are not created with traditional "href" coding will deter crawlers' ability to find, evaluate, and rank webpages behind the link.

Cross-Site Linking

Metric #1: The number of church-owned domains within the top 100 referrers during past six months

- Potential Value: 50

- Score: Six or more church-owned domain referrers during past six months = 100% (50 points)

  - Five referrers = 84% (42 points)

  - Four referrers = 68% (34 points)

  - Three referrers = 52% (26 points)

  - Two referrers = 36% (18 points)

  - One referrer = 20% (10 points)

  - Zero referrers = 0% (0 points)

- Description: As part of a family of high-value websites, it is crucial that each website works with others to ensure they are integrated (in relevant areas) as an additional reference and relevant authority. As part of this evaluation, the web promotion team will compare the number of church-owned domains referring traffic to your website within the top 100 referrers. This number will be compared to the average across other church websites to determine if improvement is necessary.

Metric #2: The number of perceived missed opportunities for cross-site linking between another church-owned domain

- Potential Value: 50

- Score: Each perceived missed opportunity will equate to a five-point decrease on the potential value.

- Description: The web promotion team will evaluate each church-owned website for additional opportunities where a cross-site link is applicable. Any missed opportunities will be noted and detailed.

Social Media Sharing Capabilities for Visitors

Metric #1: Implementation of social sharing for three major social networks on the website

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: As Internet activities become more social, a vital element both SEO and audience engagement is social integration for your website. Placing social sharing and communication opportunities strategically within element of your websites content will improve its ability to reach new visitors. This first point of evaluation is to determine if the website employs a social sharing option for at least three major social networks (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Google+, or Pinterest).

Metric #2: The website employs social sharing in highly shareable segments of the website (i.e., blog posts, articles, graphics, videos, etc.)

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: Certain areas of a website are better-suited for social sharing than others. Typically, areas that utilize content as a way to inform, entertain, and educate are prime locations for social sharing options. The web promotion team will assess these areas of the website to determine if each is using an effective social sharing integration.

Metric #3: The social sharing options require only one click to complete the action

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: Studies have shown that if users are required to click more than once to share an item or complete (what should be) a quick action on the website, the intended action may be abandoned. To prevent possible abandonment, the web promotion team will evaluate how the social sharing option is implemented on the website. If more than one click is required to share an element, then recommendations will be given for the sharing option.

Contribution to Success of Local Search Results

Metric #1: The name, address, and phone number (NAP) of local listings exactly match their respective Google-Plus Local profiles

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: If possible, inspection of all locations (up to 30 max), and give a percentage score of matching profiles vs. non-matching profiles.

- Description: It is important that the address, location name, and phone number (NAP) for each location profile exactly matches the way it is displayed on the website to avoid any possible confusion for search engines, as well

as users. For example, "North" can be abbreviated with an "N." or "Street" with "St.," and either usage is fine, as long as we are consistent across all instances of NAP on the Internet.

Metric #2: Google-Plus Local profiles are verified with the Google search engine

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: Having 100% of listings verified = perfect score of 40. Having 50% of listings verified = score of 20.

- Description: It is important that we verify ownership of each location listing so that we can optimize the listing properly, fix any mistakes (like phone numbers or hours of operation), and gain access to analytics data that search engines only make available to verified owners. With this data, we can see what search queries are being used to find the listing and website, how many clicks the listing is receiving, how many times users request directions to the location, and more.

Metric #3: Google-Plus Local profiles have been optimized for relevancy and keywords

- Potential Value: 20

- Score: A percentage score of optimized vs. non-optimized. "Optimized" means that the listing has been optimized by someone on the web promotion team or by someone as directed by the web promotion team. All locations will be verified (30 max).

- Description: Using proper category placement, user-friendly descriptions, and other optimization techniques greatly increases our opportunity to appear in search for relevant keyword terms that nearby users may be using to find us. If a profile is left un-optimized, we may miss out on appearing at all for users that are looking for something we can help them with (including directions, services, contact information, etc.).

Video Optimization Strategy

Metric #1: Verification of a video sitemap (if applicable to website)

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%. Applicable = has video(s) that should rank in search results. Watch for separate video sitemaps, normal XML sitemaps, and mRSS feeds.

- Description: A video sitemap is an opportunity to list every video on the website that we want search engines to know about and to serve within search results. Not having a video sitemap present would mean that search engines will have to try to find the videos on their own, possibly resulting in some videos being skipped or overlooked entirely by search engines.

Metric #2: The video sitemap is in Google Webmaster Tools and validates correctly

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%. If there are video sitemap errors in Google Webmaster Tools, give a score matching the percentage of correct video listings in the sitemap.

- Description: Verifying a video sitemap in Google Webmaster Tools helps the search engine to find every video listed in the sitemap, as well as increase our chances of having our videos appear in search results.

Metric #3: Videos exist on YouTube or other relevant video hubs (i.e., Vimeo, Daily Motion, etc.); videos that match the applicable description for inclusion in a video sitemap

- Potential Value: 10

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: Cross-posting videos on other video hubs (especially YouTube) increases the chances of seeing our videos appear in search results.

Metric #4: Brightcove videos follow video style guide

- Potential Value: 20

- Score: Percentage of videos that are relevant to style guide (spot check of random 10 videos): 10/10 = score of 20, 9/10 = score of 18, etc.

- Description: We highly recommend adhering to the Brightcove video style guide to ensure that videos are following best practices, as well as providing the video(s) the opportunity to appear in search—this will help spread your message or otherwise accomplish your department goals.

Metric #5: Well-optimized videos on YouTube

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: Well-optimized = relevant title with descriptors, link to page (with http://), descriptions that use relevant descriptors, relevant tags (not too many), proper category placement. (Spot check of random 10 videos.) Pass/fail per video with 1.5 points per video.

- Description: We will spot check several of the website's videos to make sure they are following video optimization best practices, such as using relevant titles and descriptions, including keyword-rich information where appropriate, and using categories and tags appropriately. Optimizing your videos on YouTube will help them to rank for searches on YouTube and search engines for relevant keywords.

Input Fields for SEO Elements

Metric #1: Ability for content producers to write unique title tags for each webpage

- Potential Value: 35

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: At times, the CMS of a website will automatically populate the title tags for webpages (i.e., with the name of the page). As the title tag is one of the most important on-site factors for keyword relevancy, it is vital for the CMS to have the option to update this content.

Metric #2: Ability for content producers to write unique meta descriptions for each webpage

- Potential Value: 25

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: Sometimes, the CMS of a website will automatically populate the meta description for webpages (i.e., with the title tag content). As the meta description is important for click-through rates, it is vital for the CMS to have the option to update this content.

Metric #3: Ability to update image file names and image alt tags for each webpage

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: Images that have already been uploaded through the CMS should have an option to update/change alt tags, whether to incorporate a better description or to optimize with a keyword phrase.

Metric #4: Ability for content producers to create and/or update URL structure

- Potential Value: 10

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: In order for the URL structure of the website to be SEO-friendly (i.e., using hyphens to separate words, descriptive, not incorporating code, etc.), the CMS will need to allow for changing individual URLs.

Metric #5: Ability for content producers to write unique <h1> heading tags

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: Many times, the CMS of a website will automatically populate the <h1> heading for webpages (i.e., with the title tag content or page name). As the <h1> heading is a great place to describe a webpage for users and an extra spot to implement a keyword phrase, it is recommended to have CMS ability to update this content.

SEO Tips and Helps Near SEO Input Fields

Metric #1: Verification of tips/helps near all SEO input fields within CMS

- – Potential Value: 75

- – Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- – Description: Whether it is a pop-up that displays when a user hovers over an input field or a static display box next to the input field, having some basic SEO tips/helps will be very useful for content publishers. Items such as title tag character length and meta description format should be included.

Metric #2: Verification that the tips/helps utilize the recommendations and best practices from the fundamental SEO website analysis

- – Potential Value: 25

- – Score: If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- – Description: In the fundamental SEO website analysis (score card), section #4 titled "SEO Definitions and Descriptions" included information and examples for each SEO element, such as keeping the title tag character length at 65 or less. Each SEO tip/help should incorporate this best practice information. Assistance and/or creation of SEO tips/helps from a web promotion team member are also accepted for full credit.

Scoring for External Popularity and Activity

Backlink Profile Analysis

Metric #1: Number of linking root domains

- – Potential Value: 40

- – Score: 0 to 500 links = 10

  - – 501 - 1,000 link = 20

  - – 1,001 - 10,000 links = 30

  - – 10,001 - 50,000 links = 35

  - – 50,001+ links = 40

- – Description: Linking root domains (LRDs) refer to the number of websites that link back to your website at least one time. Search engines factor this number when determining ranking position.

Metric #2: Anchor text diversity

- Potential Value: 25

- Score: Full credit will be given if no single keyword term is used more than 10% of the time and branded anchor text instances exist. If a target keyword is used as anchor text between 10 and 20% of the time, half credit is given. No credit will be given when a target keyword is used more than 20% of the time as anchor text. Anchor text distribution measured by Majestic SEO.

- Description: Anchor text for backlinks should be well diversified. Backlink profiles which feature a high concentration of similar anchor text links may be considered a violation of Google's terms of service.

Metric #3: SEOmoz MozTrust

- Potential Value: 20

- Score: Full credit is given to MozTrust values greater than 6.0. Seventy-five percent credit will be given if MozTrust is between 4 and 6. MozTrust values between 3 and 4 receive half credit. No credit is given where MozTrust is lower than 3.0

- Description: MozTrust is an aggregated measure of the trustworthiness of a domain based on the trust of third party websites which link to it. MozTrust has been shown to be correlated with higher search engine rankings.

Metric #4: Average page authority of top 100 webpages

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: Average 'Page Authority' (PA) measured by Open Site Explorer (SEOmoz) should be greater than 40. Average PA value between 30 and 40 gets 75% credit. Values between 20 and 30 get half credit. No credit given where average PA is lower than 20.

- Description: 'Page Authority' is a measure of the quality of backlinks and has the highest correlation in regards to rankings on search engines.

Link Building Strategy and Effectiveness

Metric #1: Embeddable content exists on website (i.e., videos, infographics, images, widgets, badges, etc.)

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If such content exists on the website, with embed code included for ease of using the content, full credit will be given. Half credit is given if the content exists, but does not contain proper embed code. No credit is given if such content doesn't exist.

- Description: Embeddable content is any item that can be shared via embedding into third-party websites. When a third-party website embeds our content, they should cite our website as the source with a link. Providing an HTML embed code allows this to happen more effortlessly for users.

Metric #2: Existing content strategy or plan that includes consideration for link acquisition

- Potential Value: 30

- Score: If such a plan or process exists, full credit will be given. This is a pass/fail portion of the overall score. Either a plan to leverage content exists, or it does not.

- Description: The website's content strategy should include consideration and a process for promoting its content to other website owners/editors. An example of a content plan that includes consideration for link acquisition would be a defined process for notifying bloggers of resources, images, widgets, etc., that may be used freely.

Metric #3: Link reclamation

- Potential Value: 25

- Score: No credit will be given if average PA of all 404's is greater than 20. Half credit for values between 10 and 20. Full credit if average page authority for all 404's is less than 10. This can be determined either solely using the Open Site Explorer's top pages report or by exporting errors from Screaming Frog and then using Mozscape API to report on 'Page Authority' for each URL.

- Description: URLs which result in a 404 page error should be redirected to another relevant page URL on the website. Priority should be given to 404 URLs which have a Page Authority (Mozscape) of greater than one. So the average Page Authority of all 404 errors should be low.

Metric #4: Existence of list for possible link or brand mention resources

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: Twenty resources minimum for full credit with a plan to achieve links/mentions from the list. Existence of list will yield five points.

- Description: Brand resources are third-party individuals or organizations which we can leverage to share or otherwise feature church content. Examples of a brand resource can include bloggers, members with websites, news organizations (friendly to the church), and so forth.

Social Media Strategy for SEO

Metric #1: Official Google-Plus, Facebook, and Twitter profiles (pages) are established

- Potential Value: 60

- Score: Each social media page is worth 20 points.. Extra credit will be given for a Pinterest page.

- Description: Social media properties help to displace negative content and increase community involvement, awareness, and traffic to church websites. Currently, the three most effective social media platforms in relation to SEO are Google-Plus, Facebook, and Twitter. Pinterest is growing and can work well for imaged-focused websites.

Metric #2: Google-Plus Authorship is enabled on the website

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: If the website contains "authored content" by individuals, proper Google Authorship should be present to get full credit.

  - HTML5 compliant rel=author tags should be used to link authored content to the authors. If a website does not contain "authored content," it should utilize the HTML5 compliant rel=publisher tag on the home page for full credit. If no HTML5 compliant author/publisher tags are present, no credit is given.

- Description: Google uses advanced formulas for identifying individual subject matter experts on the Internet. Studies have shown that authored content, properly marked up, ranks better and drives more clicks from Google than non-authored content or content that is not properly marked.

International Strategy

Metric #1: Use of ccTLD for geo-targeting

- Potential Value: 45

- Score: Full credit given if internationally targeted websites utilize a ccTLD such as .mx, .de, .it, etc.

  - If a standard TLD such as .org is used and the website targets international audiences only, the geo-targeting may be set in Google Webmaster Central for full credit. If geo-targeted pages are contained on a subdomain which does not use a ccTLD, half credit will be given. Where no geo-targeting exists, no credit will be given.

- Description: Country-coded top-level domains (ccTLDs) are used to geo-target websites to a specific geographic region or country. Examples of ccTLDs include .mx, .de, .org.mx, etc. Foreign search engines prefer to rank websites targeted for their specific country.

Metric #2: Effective multi-language strategy

- Potential Value: 40

- Score: Translated content should be contained in subfolders of the root domain and URLs should be translated into the appropriate language for full credit. Half credit will be given if content is translated and URLs are not.

- Description: It is possible to target multiple languages in one country (i.e., English and French in Canada; English and Spanish in the U.S.; etc.). Websites should segment content of different languages using subfolders, which is Google's preferred method.

Metric #3: Foreign language URLs included in XML sitemaps

- Potential Value: 15

- Score: All foreign language URLs should be included in the XML sitemaps for full credit. If yes, 100%. If no, 0%.

- Description: XML sitemaps are used to notify search engines of important URLs on a website. Therefore, all translated content should be included in an XML sitemap.

Conversion Optimization Analysis

We will conduct a conversion rate optimization (CRO) analysis to determine if the website is achieving conversions (i.e., a desired action from website users) at an optimum rate, as well as introduce ideas to increase the rates.

Review Key Metrics (KPIs) and Website Goals

The web promotion team will present possible KPIs and goals for the website to achieve, as well as review and assist any existing key metrics from the website product manager. We will help optimize the website and make suggestions in order to reach website goals.

Visitor Type Intentions and Audience Analysis

Every website should have a distinct and clear purpose for users. An analysis will be conducted to determine the website's current audience and suggestions will be given to either enhance audience reach or pivot or target a different audience.

Create (or Fine-Tune) Conversion Tunnel

Your website should have a "conversion tunnel" in which it leads users through specific steps and ends with a conversion (final specific action). If it does not have a conversion tunnel, we will help create one for your website. If it does have a conversion tunnel, we will analyze each step and determine how to keep more users in the funnel to end with a conversion.

A/B Testing Opportunities and Execution

Each website should have opportunities to conduct A/B testing in order to provide its users with the best experience possible. The web promotion team will analyze the website and determine which actions/features of the website are worth conducting A/B testing on and help execute.

Trust Signals

Various online studies have shown that trust signals, such as certifications, help to increase conversions (as users feel more at ease with their interaction with the website). The web promotion team will assess which trust signals are possible and where they should be displayed on the website.

User Experience and Website Functionality

Using Adobe Discover, the web promotion team will help set up 'virtual focus groups' and/or 'fallout reports' in order to get more in-depth and concrete data surrounding user experience and if website functionality is hindering users' engagement with the website.

Consistent Theme and Aesthetics

The web promotion team will help determine which areas of your website can be and/or should be consistent with other church-owned websites, including theme, aesthetics, functionality, etc.

Mobile Websites and Responsive Design

Each church-owned website should have an existing mobile-friendly design or a responsive design. The web promotion team will determine if the website's mobile experience is current on industry best practices, as well as offer suggestions on possible user experience improvements.

Website Potential vs. Actual

Backlink Volume Potential vs. Actual

Using search engine optimization tools such as SEOmoz's Open Site Explorer or Majestic SEO's backlink history, the web promotion team will analyze current backlink volume numbers and patterns and provide projections to the website's potential for market share.

Keyword Reach Potential vs. Actual

Utilizing various search engine optimization tools and data sets, the web promotion team will determine the current keyword reach your website currently has and compare that to its keyword reach potential (if the website were to employee a large majority of online marketing best practices).

Visitor Potential vs. Actual

By using tools such as Conductor Searchlight, Advanced Web Ranking, etc., the web promotion team will analyze the current visitor reach for your website and compare that to its potential (if the website were to employee a large majority of online marketing best practices).

Conversion Potential vs. Actual

The web promotion team will use Adobe SiteCatalyst and Discover, as well as other search engine optimization tools, to analyze your website's current conversion rate(s) and compare those numbers to what the website could be potentially achieving (if the website were to employee a large majority of online marketing best practices).

Expanded SEO CMS

In-Context Links with Tag (Keyword) Recommendations

The CMS for your website would be greatly enhanced with in-context links with keyword recommendations. This feature would help content producers optimize their message while crafting any type of text.

External Reconnaissance

Competitor and Anti-Church Analysis

The web promotion team will conduct fundamental and intermediate SEO website analysis (score cards) for your website's top three competitors (which will most likely include anti-church websites). These analyses should provide more information about how your website can improve and displace competitors on the Internet.

Reputation Management Strategy

In conjunction with the competitor analysis (see above), the web promotion team will help devise a reputation management strategy for your website to help ensure that it will appear high in search results for its "core" keyword phrases.