



MAGENTO SEO GUIDE 2017

A complete guide on how to perfect your Magento website



CONTENTS



- PREFACE3
- INTRODUCTION4
- GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS5
- CONVENTIONS.7
 - This Guide uses the following conventions:7
- FOREWORD ABOUT SITE STRUCTURE FOR SEO8
 - Search Engine OPTIMIsation and User experience.8
- TECHNICAL ON-PAGE SEO9
 - Meta titles9
 - Meta Description13
 - Heading 1 to 6 (H1 to H6).17
 - Images.18
 - Meta Keywords19
 - URLs20
 - Anchor text21
- SITE WIDE TECHNICAL SEO22
 - General Magento settings22
 - Structured data markup22
 - Javascript, AJAX and Flash23
 - Mobile Friendly website23
 - Duplicate content.24
 - SSL encryption (or HTTPS).24
 - Sitemap (XML AND HTML).24
 - Robots.txt File25

Page Speed	25
SSL encryption (or HTTPS).	24
Sitemap (XML AND HTML).	24
Robots.txt File	25
Page Speed	25
Crawl ErrorS (or 404 Pages)	26
301 Permanent Redirects	26
SEO Considerations in Expansion Phase	27
Multi-sites SEO	27
CONTENT MARKETING	29
Code-to-text ratio.	29
Social Media	29
Blogs.	29
Analyse bounce rate (and slash Dwell Time)	29
Keyword modifiers	30
ISI KEYWORDS (Latent Semantic index)	30
OFF-PAGE SEO (BASICS)	31
CONCLUSION	32
APPENDIX ON SEO TOOLS.	33
Audit	33
Must-haves	33

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PREFACE



Setting up an online store is a tremendous challenge, from acquiring new customers to satisfying existing ones. It is also a technical challenge for any individual or organisation delving into the realms of an e-commerce platform (standalone or integrated), online sales and marketing, merchandising, logistics and so and so forth.

We believe this document will help your organisation in drawing the maximum out of the Magento platform in order to acquire traffic organically (that is via non-paid ranking on Search Engines). Search Engines are today the main medium of traffic acquisition for any online store. They return non-paid results on their pages according to what content they deem being the most relevant for each and every query submitted by an online user. There is a set of elements that makes an online store more relevant than others in the eyes of a search engine. These elements tend to be more or less the same ones from one search engine to another. In this guide, we will outline the most important elements that a store owner can act upon in order to make his online store more relevant to Search Engines.

Naturally, acting upon what is called “SEO” (acronym for Search Engine Optimisation) proposes a vast array of challenges. The main challenge in our view being, designing an informative and user-friendly online store as well as a search engine friendly store. Sometimes, these two aspects collide and the store owners are then required to make a conscious decision over which aspect may prevail.

This guide is primarily intended to provide medium-sized enterprises with sufficient material to draw the maximum of the Magento platform, and specifically in the area of search engine optimisation. Therefore, this document should be considered a checklist of “must-haves” to achieve high results in search engine optimisation.

This guide will be divided into sections describing the diverse elements impacting the ranking of an online store on any Search Engine. Google being the Search Engine that draws the largest market share (67% globally and over 80% in most of the western countries - source: <https://goo.gl/99bVPu>). The best practices presented (and illustrated with pictures of **Magento 1** and 2 platforms) will therefore be mostly applicable to Google (google.com).

For more information about Search Engine Optimisation for the Chinese market :

- For Baidu (China’s leading Search Engine) see: <https://goo.gl/TSh22X>
- For Qihoo 360 (Baidu’s contender) see: <https://goo.gl/YI9IDg>

For more information about SearchEngine Optimisation for the American (USA) market:

- For Bing (Google’s contender) see: <https://goo.gl/CWfdHS>

For more information about Search Engine Optimisation for the Russian market:

- Yandex (Russian’s leading Search Engine) see: <https://goo.gl/cOF2Sr>

INTRODUCTION



Let us consider an analogy to understand your role as an online retailer and the role of Search Engines.

Let us assume that you are a shopkeeper, and that you own a grocery store. In this grocery store, you sell diverse products, anything ranging from vegetables, meat, bread, fruit to frozen food or canned food, etc.

Let us now assume that I am a potential customer. I am entering the store with the intention of buying beans. This is the first time that I am entering your store, hence I am absolutely not familiar with the layout of it. I might feel lost at first but will probably rely on a set of standard category and signage system common to most grocery stores.

This signage system will greatly reduce uncertainty and increase the likelihood of me buying the beans. Therefore, the signage can be seen in this context as the equivalent of the “categories” on your online store.

So far, I have found the department “canned food” in your store (which I assumed was the main department for the type of beans that I am looking for). I am now expecting more information guiding me along the aisle for the beans that I am looking for. I identify smaller / intermediate signage in the aisle (this can be seen as the equivalent of “subcategories” on your online store).

I have finally localised the beans in the aisle. I am now holding a tin can of beans in my hands, the price label on the rack contains the product name (“Baked Beans”), a very short description (“Baked Beans in Tomato Sauce”), the brand (“Heinz”) and the tin can volume (415 gr.).

This is the backbone of your product page. The barcode on the tin can is your HTML code, it includes all relevant information for Search Engines.

I am now headed towards the cashier with my tin can of beans, the store employee will scan the barcode on the packaging (same action executed by “Search Engines”) and transfer all information into the cash register system. Only a partial amount of information will be shown on the display (this is the equivalent of your Search Engine Results Page or “SERP”).

Your challenge, in regards to Search Engine Optimisation, is to produce relevant information about your store and its products. Furthermore, you need to make the information easily readable by the Search Engines so as to best possibly rank on the non-paid - organic - part of the search engine results page (SERP).

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1999. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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CONVENTIONS



This Guide uses the following conventions:

- Sources are referred to via shortened, clickable URLs (in italics)
- The words “Search Engines” and “Google” may be used interchangeably
- The words “website” and “online store” may be used interchangeably
- Comments are italicised

FOREWORD ABOUT SITE STRUCTURE FOR SEO



Search Engine OPTIMISATION and User experience

1. A website should be easily accessible to the Google web-crawlers, allowing them to crawl pages rapidly and understand the content of the web pages.
2. Keep the number of main categories between 2 and 7. Indeed, Google web-crawlers should be able to hastily crawl your website architecture and send the most important content for indexing. In this manner adding a profusion of categories may represent a time-consuming structure for a web-crawler, and might be detrimental to the user experience.
3. Sub-categories (nested into main categories) should also be logically organised into a hierarchical tree grouping similar/complementary content (from a visitor's perspective).
4. URL's for main categories and subcategories should follow the same logic
5. Example : <https://www.mystore.com/accessoarer/klockor>
6. Think in terms of "number of clicks away from the checkout"
7. Top Navigation Header should contain your main categories and possibly the nested sub-categories
8. Use Internal Links in a strategic manner. Internal links can help Search Engines to determine the internal hierarchy of content and help the web-crawlers to move from one area of your website to another. Thus, Search Engines can index webpages that seem relevant to a query, even if this webpage is not directly quoting the query terms entered in the query bar (see: goo.gl/f30myq)

TECHNICAL ON-PAGE SEO

The elements listed below are essential to be able to best inform Search Engines of the hierarchy of your online store. They should be present on any given page of your online store.

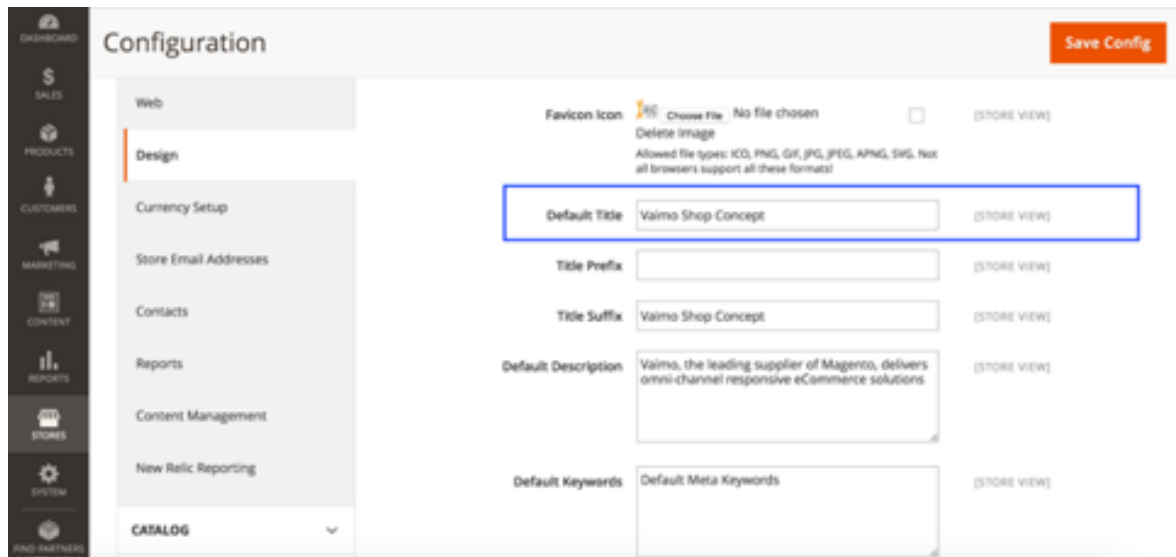
Meta titles

For Default Meta Titles : (excluding non-content pages: Start with Main Keyword - the maximum length should not exceed 60 characters).

In **Magento 1** : Under System >> Configuration >> Design >> HTML Head (See below screenshot).

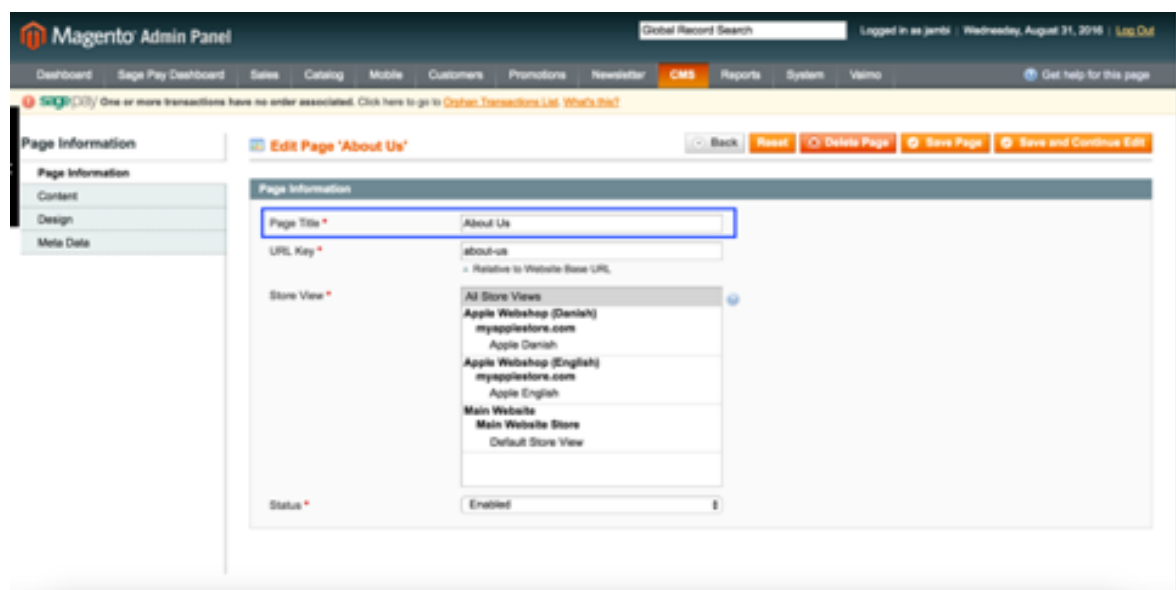


In **Magento 2** : Under System >> Configuration >> Design >> HTML Head (See below screenshot).

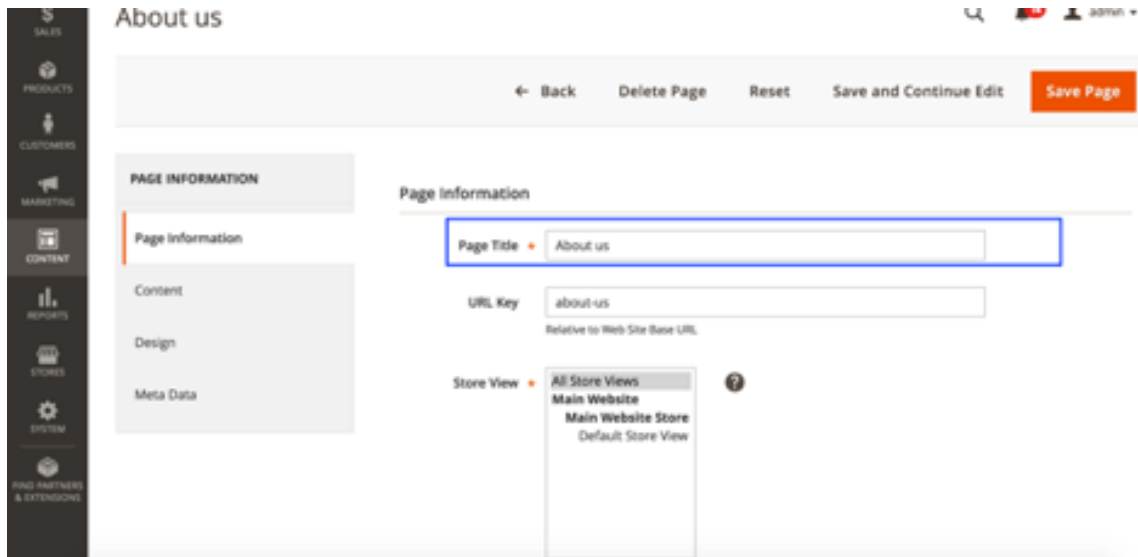


You can enter a default page title and a suffix and or prefix for page title. We recommend using suffixes and not prefixes for page title.

- For CMS Pages (Home, About Us, Contact Us, etc)
- In **Magento 1** : Go to CMS >> Pages >> Choose a page >> Under the tab: Page Information >> Enter a Page Title (see below screenshot).

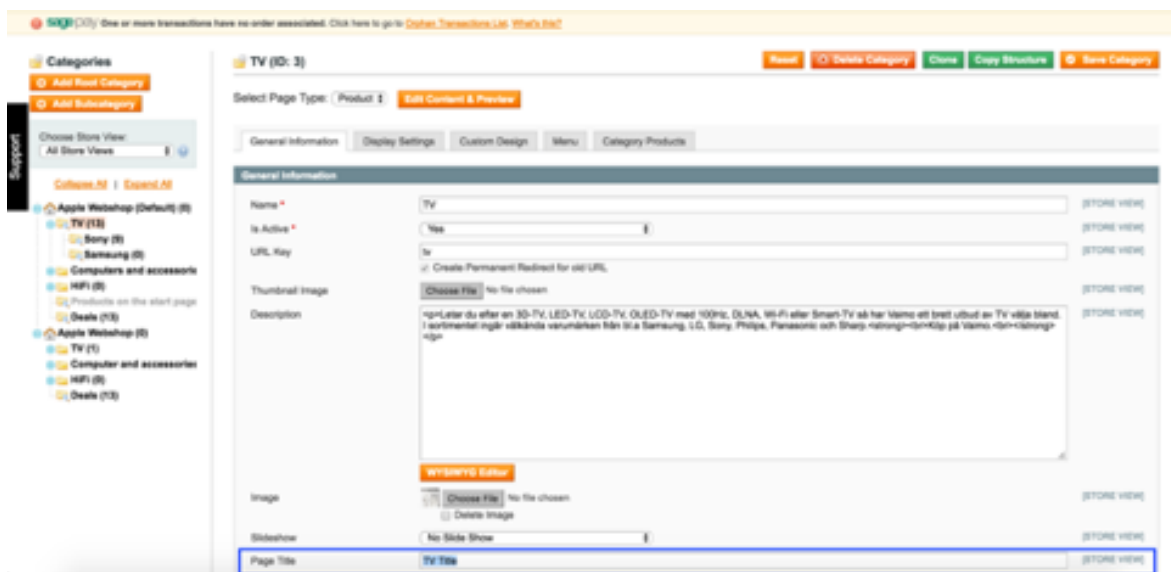


- In **Magento 2** : Under Content >> Pages >> Choose a page >> Under the tab: Page Information >> Enter a Page Title (see below screenshot).



For Category Pages :

- In **Magento 1** : Go to Catalog >> Manage Categories >> Click on a category and select the Page Title field (see below screenshot). If you leave this blank, the page title will be automatically generated from the category name.



- In **Magento 2** : Under Products >> Categories >> Click on a category and select the Page Title field (see below screenshot). If you leave this blank, the page title will be automatically generated from the category name.

The screenshot shows the Magento 2 Admin Panel interface for editing a category named 'Gear'. The left sidebar contains navigation links for Dashboard, Sales, Products, Customers, Marketing, Content, Reports, Stores, and System. The main content area has tabs for General Information, Display Settings, Custom Design, and Category Products. The 'General Information' tab is active, showing fields for Name (Gear), Is Active (Yes), URL Key (gear), Description, Image, and Page Title. The 'Page Title' field is highlighted with a blue box and contains the text 'Incredible Gear'.

For Product Pages :

- In **Magento 1** : Go to Catalog >> Manage Products >> Go to a product page and select Meta Information >> Meta Title field (see below screenshot). If you leave the field blank, the title is automatically generated from the product name.

The screenshot shows the Magento 1 Admin Panel interface for editing a product named 'Extraordinary Blanket (Standard)'. The left sidebar contains navigation links for Product Information, Meta Information, Images, Design, Gift Options, Inventory, Websites, Categories, Related Products, Up-sells, Cross-sells, Product Reviews, Product Tags, Customers Tagged Product, and Custom Options. The main content area has tabs for General, Prices, Meta Information, Images, Design, Gift Options, Inventory, Websites, Categories, Related Products, Up-sells, Cross-sells, Product Reviews, Product Tags, Customers Tagged Product, and Custom Options. The 'Meta Information' tab is active, showing fields for Meta Title, Meta Keywords, and Meta Description. The 'Meta Title' field is highlighted with a blue box and contains the text 'Extraordinary Blanket'.

- In **Magento 2** : Under Products >> Categories >> Click on a category and select the Page Title field (see below screenshot). If you leave this blank, the page title will be automatically generated from the category name.

The screenshot shows the Magento 2 admin interface for editing a product. The product name is 'Push It Messenger Bag'. The 'Search Engine Optimization' section is expanded, showing fields for 'URL Key', 'Meta Title', 'Meta Keywords', and 'Meta Description'. The 'Meta Title' field is highlighted with a blue border and contains the text 'push it messenger bag'. The 'Meta Keywords' field contains 'messenger bag, great brand, durable'. The 'Meta Description' field contains a placeholder text: 'This is where you can write a summary of the product. Best to avoid exceeding 160 characters for Search Engines.' The 'URL Key' field contains 'push-it-messenger-bag'. The 'Meta Title' field is also labeled 'STORE VIEW'.

Furthermore, each web page should have a unique “Title”. Search Engines should not have to experience confusion (over which content to retrieve and return to a user query).

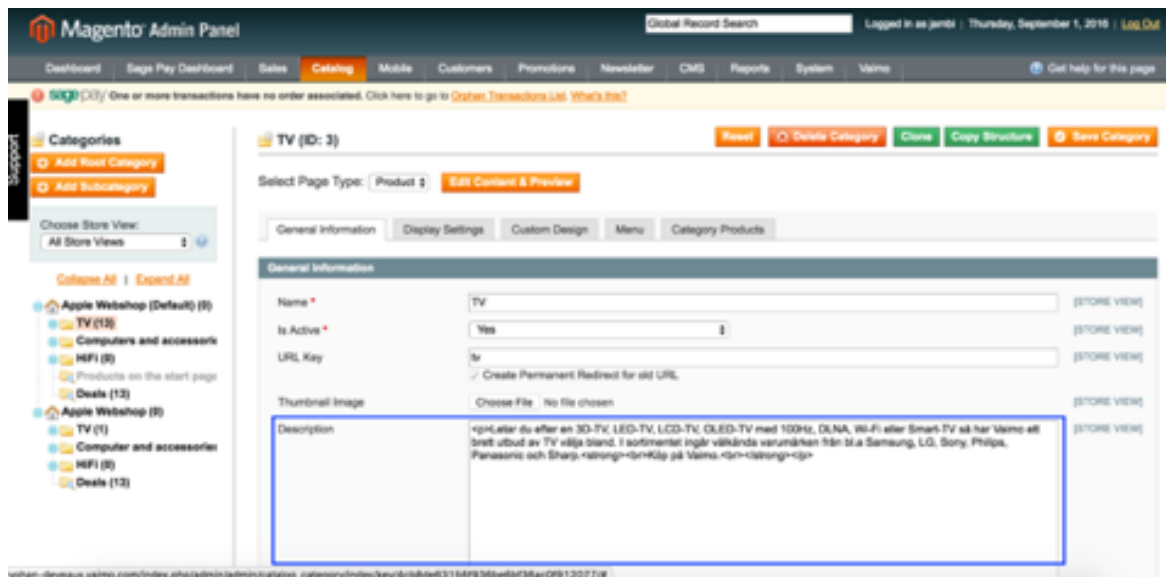
Meta Description

It is used for the description of the page listed in the search results. In order to maximise relevance and positively impact Click-through-Rate (or “CTR”), the keywords used in the description should be informative and well-researched, the maximum length should not exceed 160 characters (see: <https://goo.gl/czCylv>). An important tool in this keyword research is the official “Adwords Keyword planner tool” (see: <http://goo.gl/tfj47J>). This tool can be used to identify the best converting keywords for any item sold on your website.

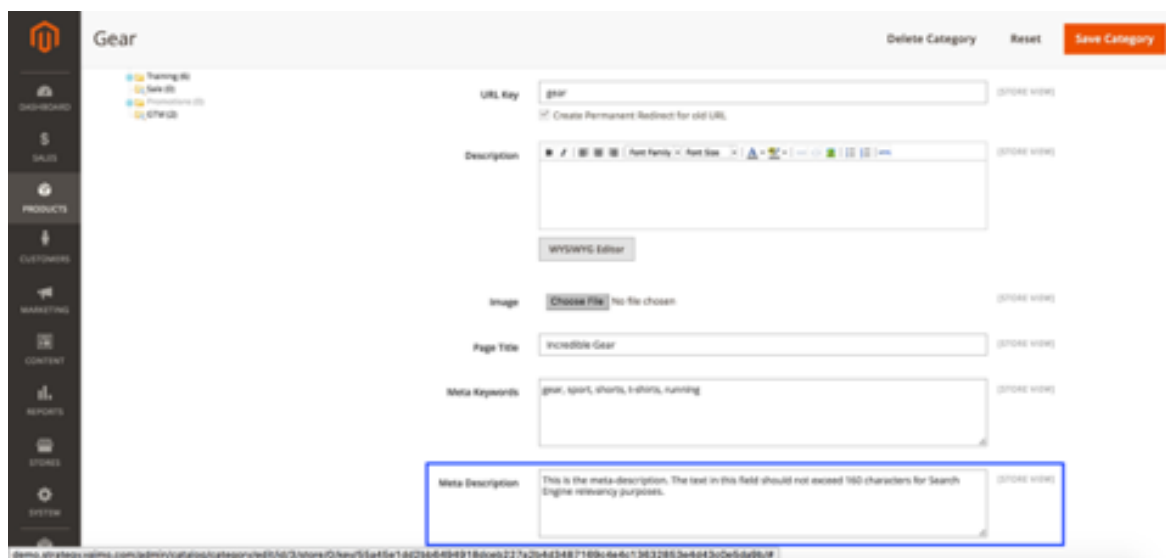
Meta description can be added manually in Magento in different places depending on the type of page.

For Category Pages :

- In **Magento 1** : Go to Catalog >> Manage Categories >> Select the respective Category and specify the Meta Description (see below screenshot).

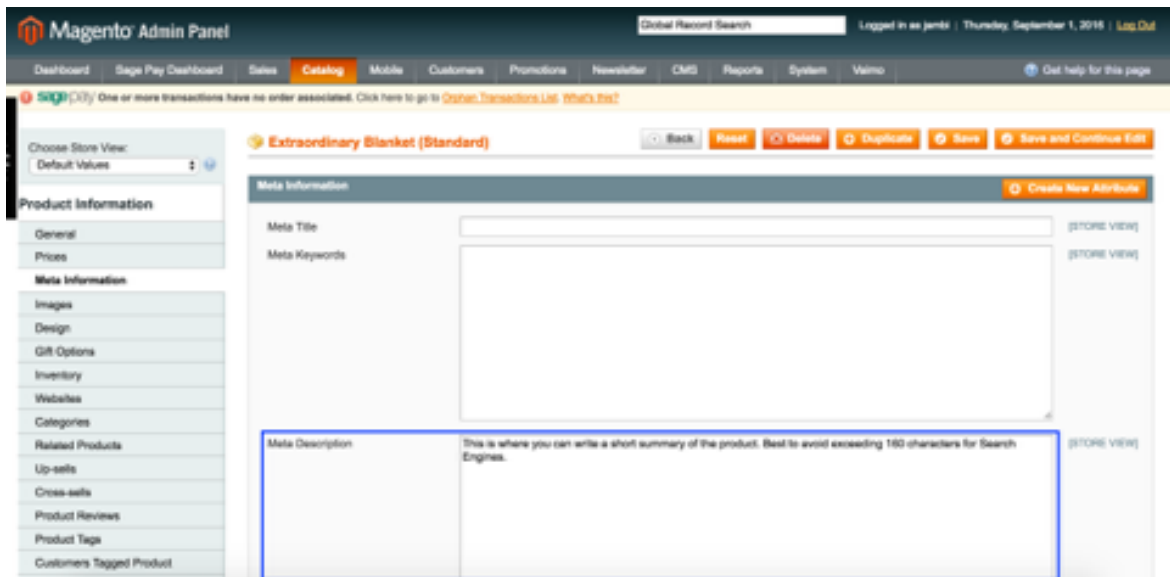


- In **Magento 2** : Under Product >> Categories >> Select the respective Category and specify the Meta Description (see screenshot on following page).

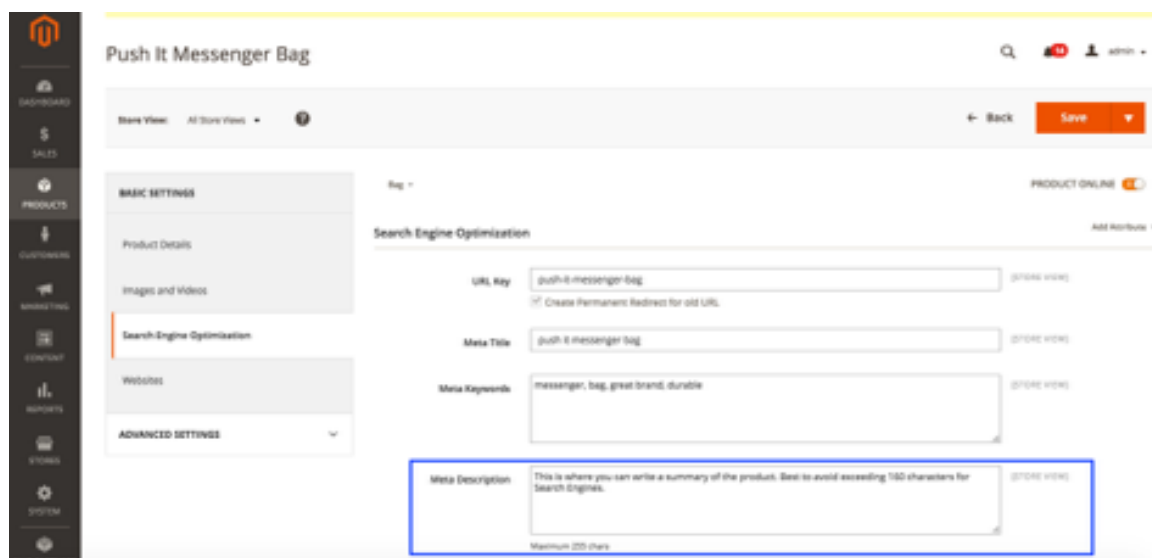


For Product Pages :

- In **Magento 1** : Go to Catalog >> Manage Categories >> Select the respective Product and specify the Meta Description in the Meta Info Tab. (see below screenshot).

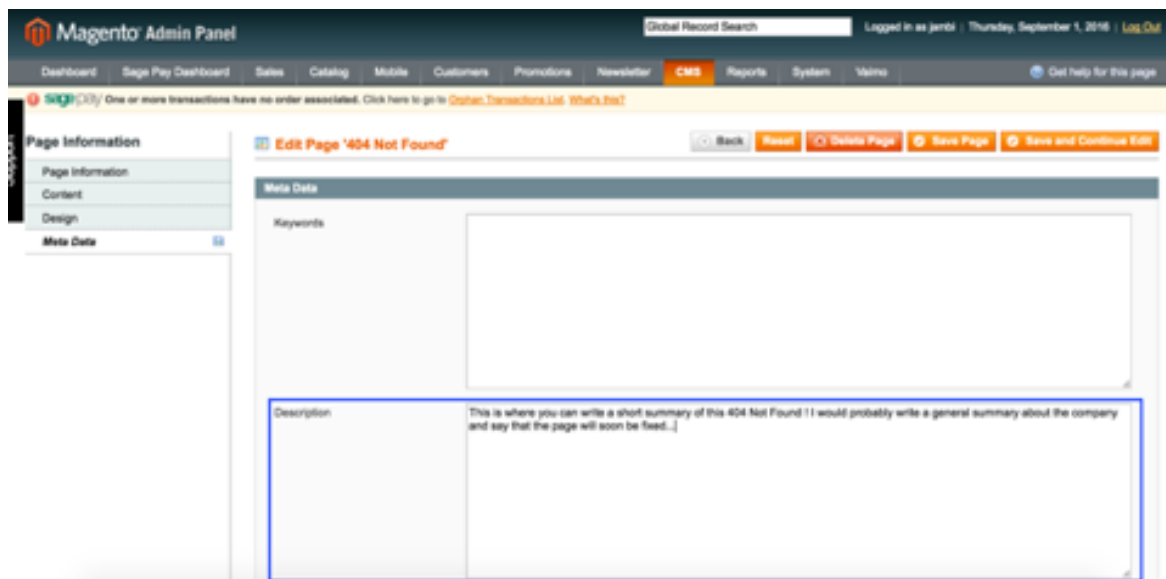


- In **Magento 2** : Under Products >> Catalog >> Click on a product and specify the Meta Description in the Search Engine Optimisation tab. (see screenshot on the following page).



For CMS Pages :

- In **Magento 1** : Go to CMS >> Manage Pages >> Select the respective page and specify the Meta Description in the Meta Data Tab (see below screenshot).



- In **Magento 2** : Under Content >> Pages >> Select the respective page and specify the Meta Description in the Meta Data Tab (see screenshot on the following page).

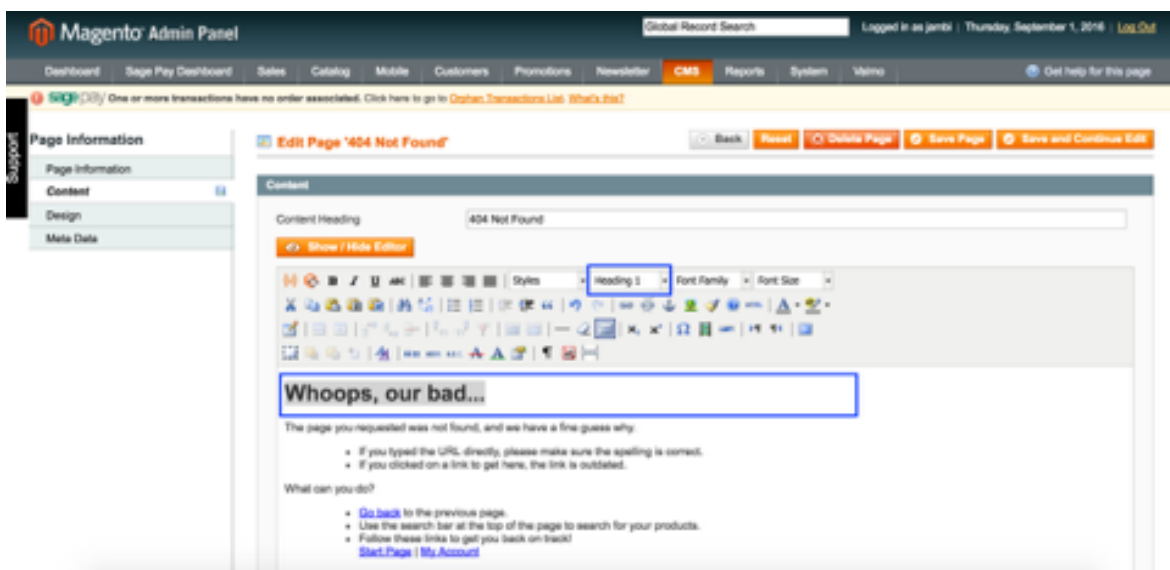


Heading 1 to 6 (H1 to H6)

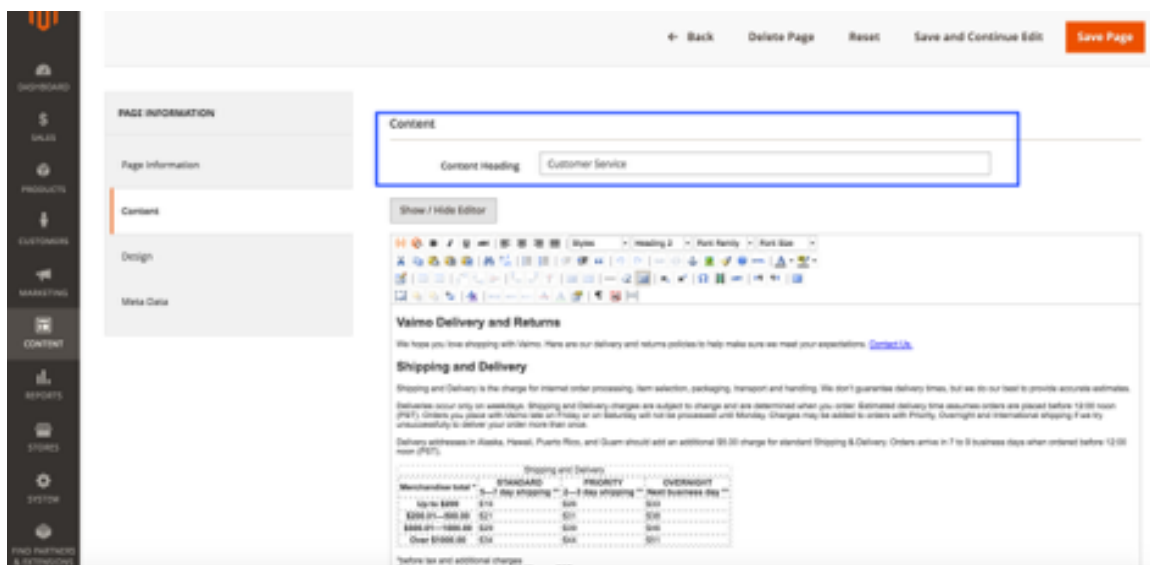
Heading 1 (or H1) is the most important component of the HTML structure of a page after the Page Title. Each web page should contain a unique H1 including your main keywords.

This is the component that communicates to Search Engines that the content of a page is starting. The most important keywords of the content following should be included in the H1.

- In Magento, the Heading 1 (or H1) is automatically generated from the category or product name. However, you should make sure that your homepage and other CMS pages have text that is formatted as H1 and is visible.
- In **Magento 1** : You can set this in CMS >> Manage Pages >> Select any page>> Go to the Content Tab and specify the Content Heading (see below screenshot).

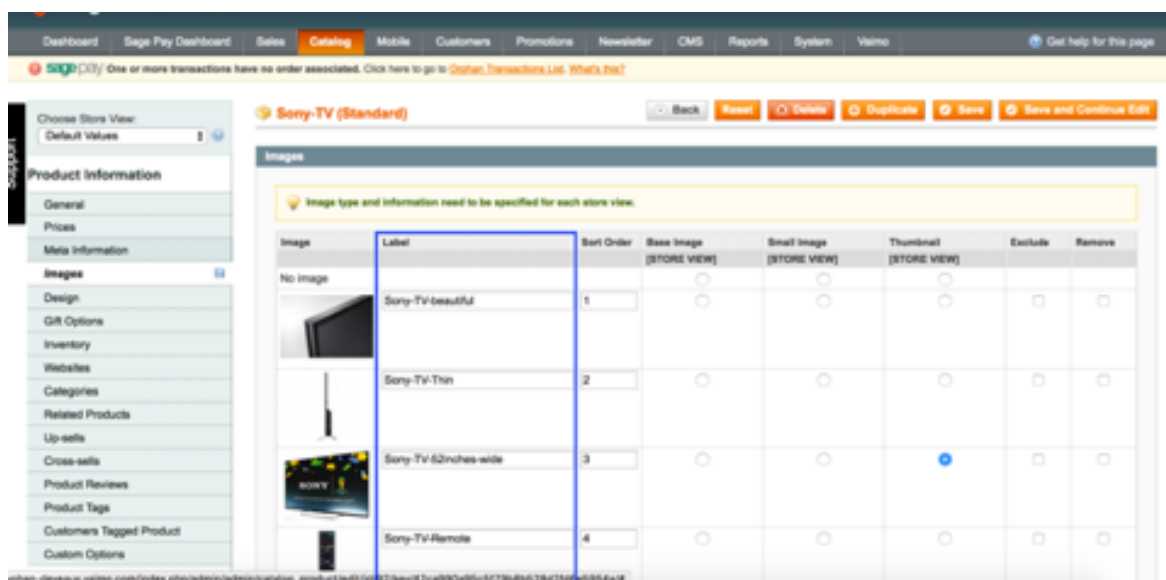


- In **Magento 2** : Under Content >> Pages >> Select any page >> Go to the Content Tab and specify the Content Heading (see below screenshot).

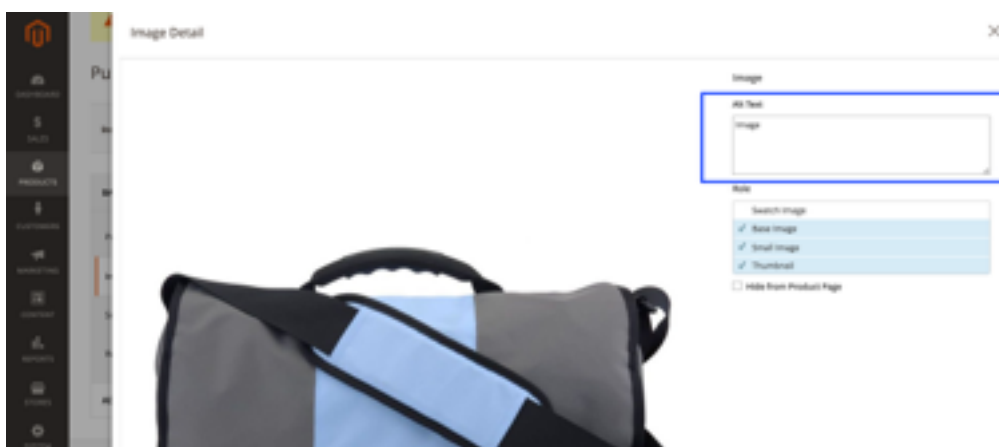


Images

- Add multiple images per SKU / Item (Base Image / Small Image / Thumbnail Image): Images may help in reducing “Bounce Rate”, increase “Time on Site” and provide Search Engines with a different type of crawlable content (see point 6 below). Google is reportedly working on an Optical Character Recognition Software. It only takes a stretch of thought to imagine that they might integrate into their Search Engine in the near future (source: <https://goo.gl/PHKSnm>)
- Alt Text and Alt Titles for Images (HTML): These elements should contain a descriptive text per image (Search Engines web-web-crawlers cannot “read” the content of an image, a practical way to describe an image is via the use of “text”. This text can help Search Engines web-web-crawlers retrieve an image highly relevant to a user query (example for “Red Leather Jacket” via Google Image Search see: <https://goo.gl/1cjVvQ>).
- In **Magento 1** : To specify ALT text, go to Catalog>>Manage Products>>Open the respective product, go to the Images Tab and specify the ALT Tag in the Label. (see below screenshot).



- In **Magento 2** : To specify ALT text, go to Products >>Catalog >> Edit a product, go to the Images and Videos Tab >> Click on an uploaded picture >> Specify the Alt text in the corresponding field. (see below screenshot).

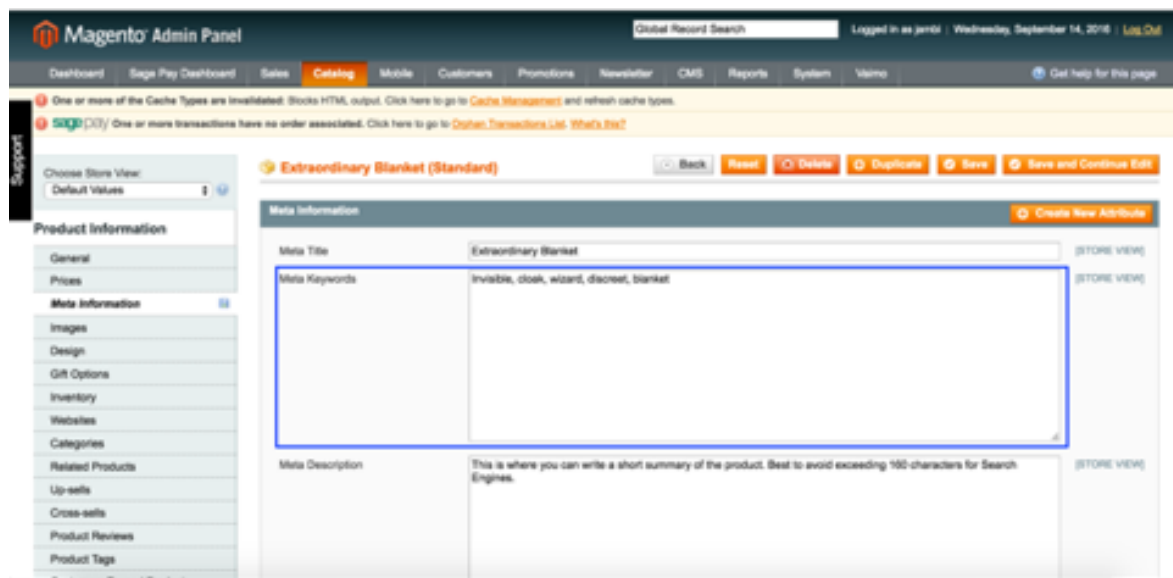


Meta Keywords

Google has withdrawn meta-keywords as a potential ranking factor from its algorithm over the past years (this element was being misused by many users with the aim of ranking higher on SERP). Nevertheless, up to 5 meta-keywords can be referenced per web-page as they still seem to be viewed as a potential ranking factor for relevancy by algorithms of other Search Engines (for instance: Bing, Yahoo etc.).

Therefore it can be important for the meta-keywords to be filled to rank higher on other Search Engines than Google.

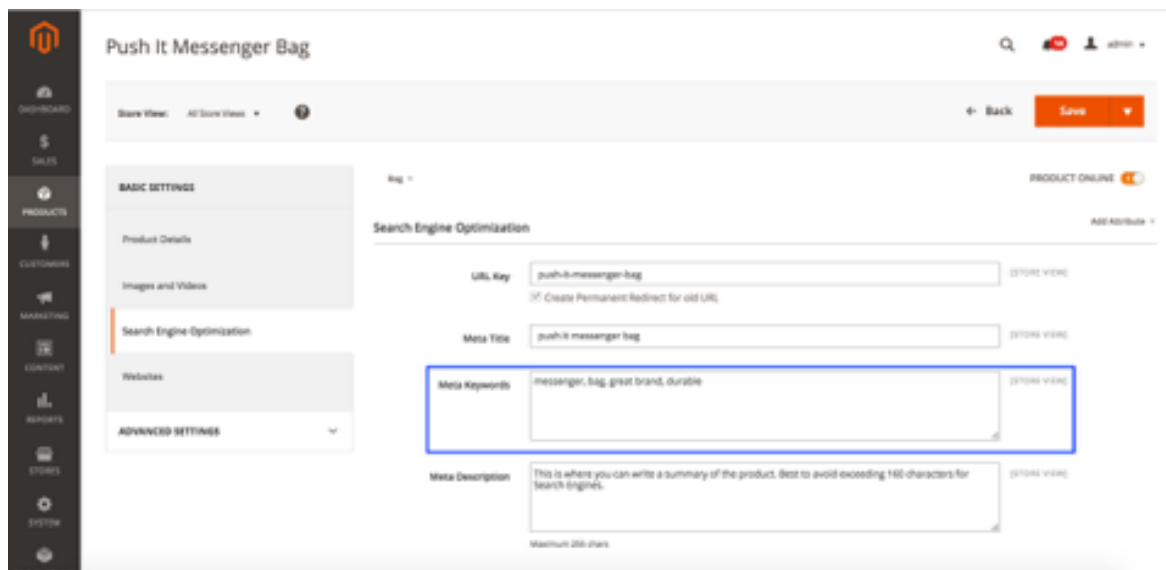
- In **Magento 1** : Meta keywords can be specified in Magento in different places depending on the page
- For Category Pages : Go to Catalog >> Manage Categories >> Select the respective Category and specify the Meta-keywords
- For CMS Pages : Go to CMS >> Manage Pages >> Select the respective page and specify the Keywords in the Meta Data Tab.
- Default meta-keywords : They can apply to all pages, Go to System >> Configuration >> Design >> HTML Head >> Default keyword.
- For Product Pages : Go to Catalog >> Manage Products >> Select the respective Product and specify the Meta-keywords in the Meta Info Tab. (See below screenshot).



In **Magento 2** : Meta keywords can be specified in Magento in different places depending on the page

- For Category Pages : Go to Products >> Categories >> Select any Category and specify the Meta-keywords
- For CMS Pages : Go to Content >> Pages >> Edit any page >> Specify the Keywords in the Meta Data Tab.

- Default meta-keywords : They can apply to all pages, Go to System >> Configuration >> Design >> HTML Head >> Default keywords.
- For Product Pages : Go to Products >> Catalog >> Select any Product and specify the Meta-keywords in the Search Engine Optimization Tab. (See screenshot on the following page).



URLs

Assuming that you use a logical hierarchical structure for your website, the URLs used by each product page should be descriptive and easy to query for a search engine user.

Magento automatically creates search engine friendly URLs per default. These URLs can be changed in the platform by the business owner.

In **Magento 1** : You can control that the URLs produced by Magento are search engine friendly under System >> Configuration >> General >> Web >> Search Engine Optimisation >> Use Web Server Rewrites = "Yes"

In **Magento 2** : You can control that the URLs produced by Magento are search engine friendly under System >> Configuration >> General >> Web >> Search Engine Optimisation >> Use Web Server Rewrites = "Yes"

A web-crawler will typically record the content of a URL from left to right : <https://www.mystore.com/accessories/watches>

The "https" protocol indicates to the web-crawler that an SSL Encryption is used on this website. The domain name for this URL is www.mystore.com , the path is /accessories/watches. The web-crawler breaks down the URL in 3 pieces of information to record its content in an index.

Whenever creating a new product in Magento, the platform will append the path to the product directly after the domain name (example: www.mystore.com/kort-poncho) if the setting is not modified in the admin panel.

In **Magento 1** : You can control or modify the setting for Categories in the path to product under System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> Catalog >> Search Engine Optimisations >> Use Categories Path for Product URLs = "No" (to keep the product name as path right

after domain name, as explained above) or “Yes” (if you prefer to have the category in the path to the product, beware that conflicts may arise due to the recurrence of a product in multiple categories).

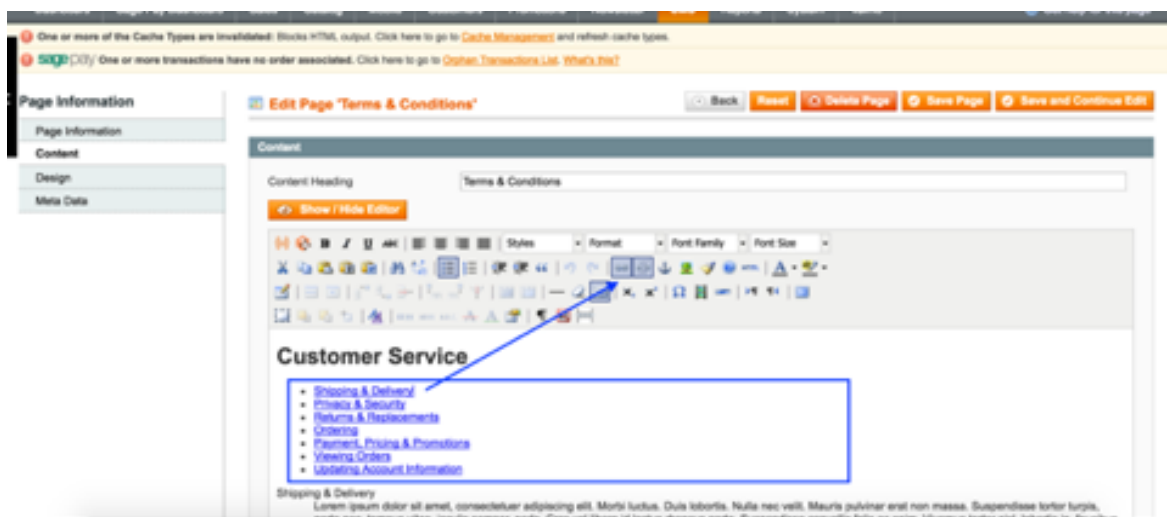
In **Magento 2** : Same path as above applies to **Magento 2**.

Anchor text

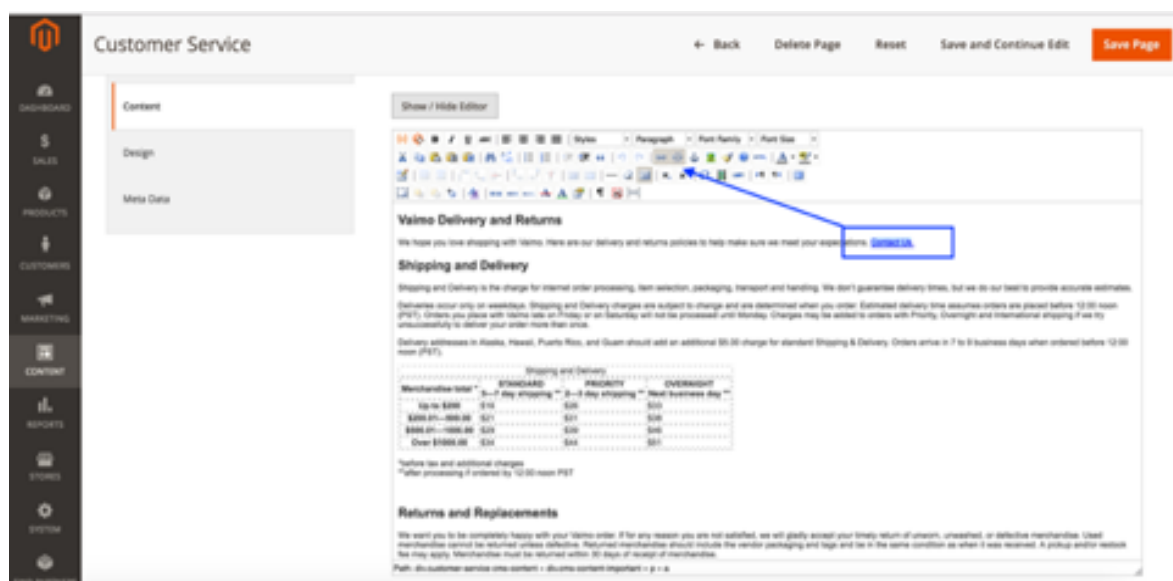
An anchor text is the user visible text on an hyperlink. Make use of specific text on internal links, descriptive of the target content. Since the “Penguin” update of its algorithm in 2014, Google has put increasing emphasis on content and penalises sites that duplicate content on anchor texts (as part of its overall algorithm update).

For CMS Pages :

- In **Magento 1** : Go to CMS >> Manage Pages >> Select the respective page and specify the anchor links in the Content Tab. (See below screenshot).



- In **Magento 2** : Under Content >> Pages >> Select a CMS page >> Specify the anchor links in the Content tab (see below screenshot).



SITE WIDE TECHNICAL SEO

General Magento settings

Few modifications in Magento settings can help to place you ahead of the curve compared to your competitors. Let us go through some of these (below):

Structured data markup

<http://schema.org/> offers a variety of data tagging options (Markup). The tagging in the HTML code enables the business owner to pass on bits of information from product pages directly onto Search Engines (information such as brand, product name, price, review ratings, availability etc.). This markup improves "Click-Through Rates" and can even be used by Google Shopping / Merchant Center). For further details see: goo.gl/2plv8y

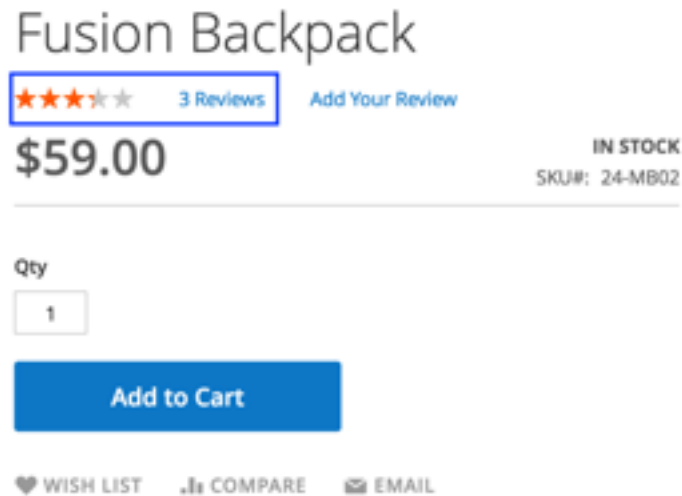
On **Magento 1** : Vaimo might need to implement the Rich Snippets in the template of the online store (dependent on the recency of the template / store)

On **Magento 2** : Natively supported by the Vaimo templates.

Example of schema.org code for product reviews :

```
<h1 class="page-title" >
    <span class="base" data-ui-id="page-title-wrapper" itemprop="name">Fusion Backpack</span> </h1>
</div>
<div class="product-reviews-summary" itemprop="aggregateRating" itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/AggregateRating">
    <div class="rating-summary">
        <span class="label"><span>Rating:</span></span>
        <div class="rating-result" title="67%">
            <span style="width:67%"><span><span itemprop="ratingValue">67</span>% of <span itemprop="bestRating">100</span></span></span></div>
        </div>
    </div>
    <div class="reviews-actions">
        <a class="action view" href="http://demo.strategy.vaimo.com/fusion-backpack.html#reviews"><span itemprop="reviewCount">3</span>&nbsp;<span>Reviews</span></a>
        <a class="action add" href="http://demo.strategy.vaimo.com/fusion-backpack.html#review-form">Add Your Review</a>
    </div>
```

Corresponding to the following picture of the product reviews on **Magento 2** (see screenshot on the following product review).



Javascript, AJAX and Flash

Search Engines have a hard time crawling websites that do not appear to be based on HTML format. Since JavaScript and AJAX may change the content and the appearance of a website without changing the URL structure of the page nor its HTML content, Search Engines prove to be completely oblivious to this technology. The same applies to Flash as Search Engines cannot correctly guess the content encapsulated in this technology.

Nevertheless, the type of content triggered by JavaScript and Ajax is seldom the type of content that needs to be indexed by Search Engines. Therefore, these technologies do not oppose much problems when it comes to direct SEO performance. However, they might impact site performance and loading time, hence indirectly impacting the SEO performance of your online store (site speed being an indicator of relevance for Search Engines).

In other words: Avoid overloading your online store with unnecessary technology effects.

Mobile Friendly website

Since late April 2015, Google has started to positively weight mobile friendly websites into its algorithm. In other words having a mobile friendly website (resizable according to device) is now a component of the ranking factor (for further details see: goo.gl/qN6EyV).

Duplicate content

Several similar or identical pages on the online store can lead to confusion from a search engine's perspective. One of the most common mistakes is that you can access the site both with prefix www. and without. They are then perceived by Search Engines as being two identical websites with two different URLs.

In **Magento 1** : Go to System >> Configuration >> General >> Web >> URL options >> Auto-redirect to base URL >> Set to : Yes (301 Moved Permanently).

In **Magento 2** : Under System >> Configuration >> General >> Web >> URL options >> Auto-redirect to base URL >> Set to : Yes (301 Moved Permanently).

Another common mistake is to forget about that dynamic URLs (filtered category for instance) can be indexed by Google. One way of passing all or part of the LinkJuice to the main "unfiltered" category is via the use of canonical URL (see: <http://goo.gl/uLE7gv>).

In **Magento 1** : Part of the canonical URLs can be configured from the admin panel. This can be found under System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> Catalog >> Search Engine Optimisations >> Use Canonical Link Meta Tag For Categories = Yes (the same setting applies for Use Canonical Link Meta Tag For Products).

In **Magento 2** : Part of the canonical URLs can be configured from the admin panel. This can be found under System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> Catalog >> Search Engine Optimisations >> Use Canonical Link Meta Tag For Categories = Yes (the same setting applies for Use Canonical Link Meta Tag For Products).

- Vaimo can ensure that this technical implementation is correctly completed

SSL encryption (or HTTPS)

Since August 2014, Google is now giving preference (in its algorithm) to secure sites, which means that adding Secure Socket Layer encryption at domain level would provide a lightweight ranking boost (source: goo.gl/NJjKmt).

It is up to the online store manager to choose whether to invest in such encryption or not. Vaimo strongly advises its customers to acquire a SSL certificate.

- Vaimo can ensure that this technical implementation is correctly completed

Sitemap (XML AND HTML)

A sitemap is (as indicated) a map of your website describing to Search Engines the detailed multi-tiered or tree architecture of your website (the inner structure of it). This helps web-crawlers to index your website (effortlessly) on a regular basis.

In Magento: A Google Sitemap can be created under Catalog > Google Sitemap

A Magento tree like sitemap (xml and html) can also be created.

In **Magento 1** : Go to System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> Catalog >> Sitemap >> Use Tree Like Category Sitemap = "Yes"

In **Magento 2** : Go to System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> XML Sitemap >> Use Tree Like Category Sitemap = "Yes"

Vaimo can ensure that this technical implementation is correctly completed.

SEO Tip : Vaimo recommends to integrate out-of-stock products into the sitemap of your site. This will ensure that all of your products appear on the SERP. Nevertheless, the out-of-stock products should be refilled at regular intervals so as to avoid visitors' frustration and decrease bounce rate.

Products to be discontinued from the catalog should be subject to 301 Permanent redirects (see related section below) and directing at similar products whenever possible (they are still indexed by Search Engines and are the subject of outbound links). The above measure ensures a controlled level of crawl error (or 404 pages) and bounce rate for your site.

Robots.txt File

Such a file is present at root level of your website to restrict access to content that is not to be indexed (CSS files for instance). This file points the web-crawlers to the sitemap (XML).

In **Magento 1** : This needs to be implemented by Vaimo

In **Magento 2** : This can be altered from the administration panel of Magento

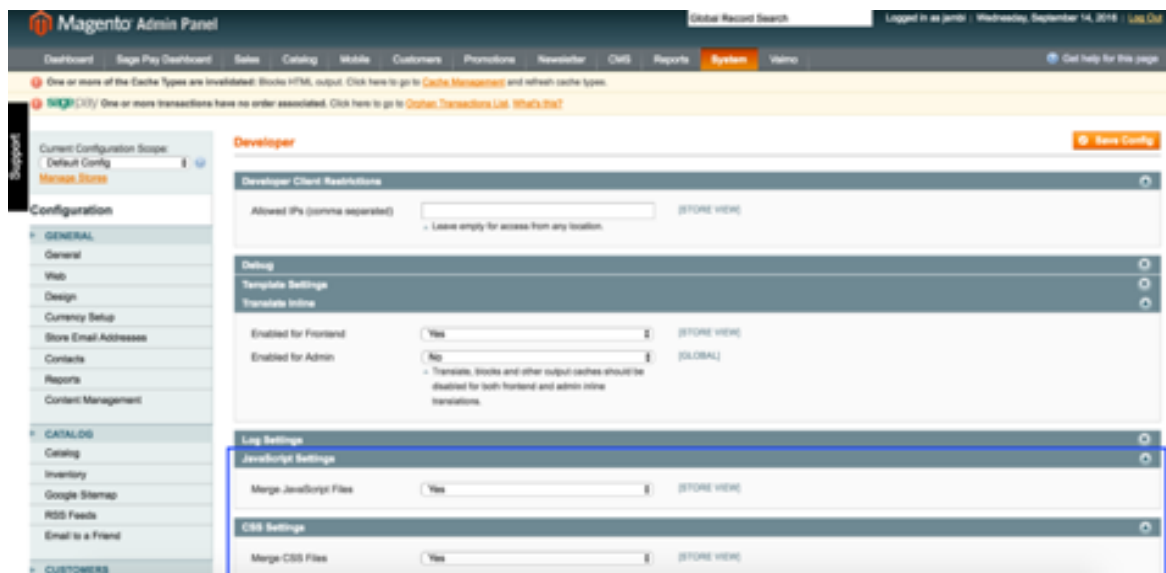
Go to System >> Configuration >> General >> Design >> Search Engine Robots

Nevertheless, we recommend to leave the implementation of such file to Vaimo as we best know which parts to include and exclude from such a file.

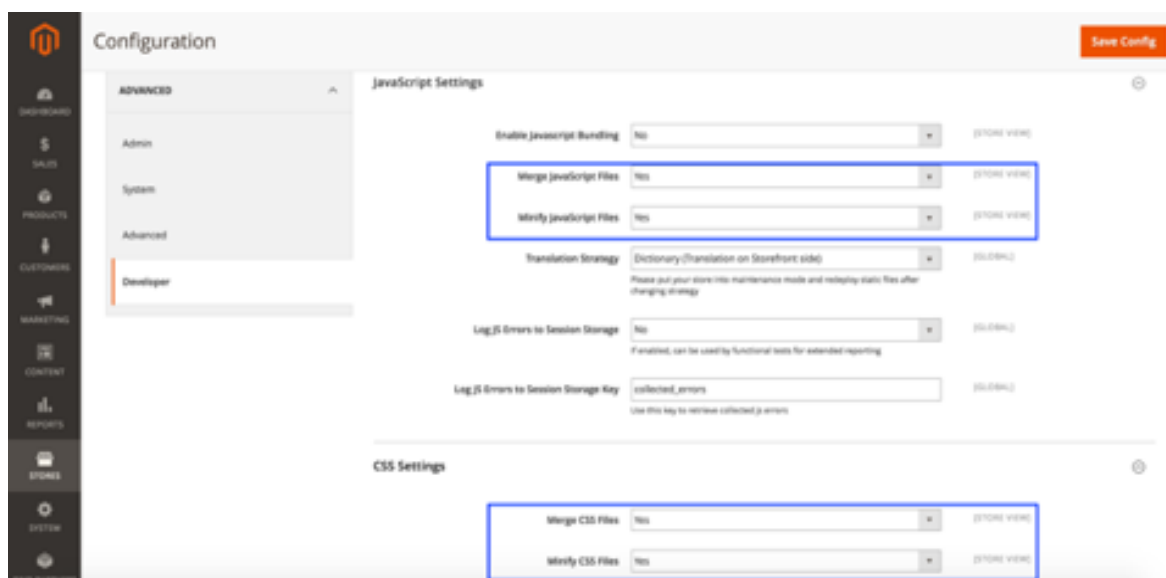
Page Speed

Google has officially announced that it uses Page download speed as a ranking factor in its algorithm (source: <https://goo.gl/0lu8xq>). In order to decrease Page load time, the online store manager can choose to merge Javascript and CSS files to gain performance (the downside being occasional instability).

In **Magento 1**: Go to System >> Configuration >> Advanced >> Developer (see below screenshot).



In **Magento 1**: Go to System >> Configuration >> Advanced >> Developer (see below screenshot).



Crawl Errors (or 404 Pages)

Submitting your sitemap (XML) to Google's link directory for index via "Google Search Console" (source: <https://goo.gl/YxFzpV>) will help web-crawlers to index new pages, identify the 404 pages and help you to fix them. We also recommend to insert links to your most visited categories on your 404 page in an effort to increase relevance for the visitor and reduce the bounce rate for this page.

301 Permanent Redirects

A 301 permanent redirect is aimed at redirecting visitors who landed on an outdated (unused) URL to a new URL. Web-crawlers will follow the redirect to the new page and index it as having the “freshest / most relevant” content. Creating 301 permanent redirects is also the best method to pass on SEO ranking juice to other URLs (see: LinkJuice in Glossary). A 301 permanent redirect can be configured for url paths (www.mystore.com/shoes where / shoes is the path) or for entire domain names.

In **Magento 1** : for individual URL paths this can be enabled under System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> Search Engine Optimisations >> Create Permanent redirect for URLs if URL Key Changed = “Yes”

In **Magento 2** : for individual URL paths this can be enabled under System >> Configuration >> Catalog >> Search Engine Optimisations >> Create Permanent redirect for URLs if URL Key Changed = “Yes”

The configuration of 301 permanent redirect for domain names being a rather complex task, Vaimo can ensure that this technical implementation is correctly completed.

SEO Considerations in Expansion Phase

Whenever looking at expanding your presence into new countries, you will be faced with a choice to make regarding the three methods of geo-targeting:

- ccTLDs (Country code top level domains): my.store.se
- Subdomains: se.mystore.com
- Subfolders: mystore.com/se/

In the below part, we will look into the diverse aspects of the decision-making:

Cost : covers the cost of maintaining the set-up (from 1 to 5 : 1 for “Expensive” and 5 for “Affordable”)

Resources : covers the level of internal and/or external help in configuring and implementing the set-up (from 1 for “Intensive” to 5 for “Almost no resources required”)

SEO Performance : covers the overall SEO benefit of the set-up (from 1 to 5 : 1 for “Limited” and 5 for High)

Ecommerce Performance : translates into CTR, Conversion Rate and Average Order Value (from 1 to 5 : 1 for “Poor” and 5 for “High”)

	Cost	Resources	SEO Performance	eCommerce Performance
ccTLDs	1	1	4	5
Subdomains	3	2	3	1
Subfolders	4	4	5	3

- ccTLDs: Country code top level domains can be expensive and do not benefit from the domain authority of the main (initial) store. Nevertheless, the long-term benefit of the commerce performance of such set-up is undeniable. It conveys trustworthiness and appears geo-localised to visitors.
- Subdomains: Can be expensive and cumbersome to set up. Furthermore they are perceived by Search Engines as different domain names than the main (initial) store. Nevertheless, it can be interesting to configure such set up if the goal is to clearly separate entities within an organisation.
- Subfolders: Can be resource intensive to set up at first. Nevertheless this set up can be a great short-term solution as they are relatively inexpensive options (no need to buy a top level domain name) and benefit from the domain authority of the main (initial) store. The use of hreflang tags (source: <https://goo.gl/FSF0PK>) in the HTML code can be critical for indexing in such a case. Geotargeting can also be achieved via Google Search Console (source: <https://goo.gl/p1hilz>).

Multi-sites SEO

In the case of multi-sites either sharing the same language or different languages, hreflang tags can be added to point the web-crawlers to index the online store URLs for its corresponding Search Engine version. For instance: vaimo.se and all its Urls should primarily be indexed by google.se, the same applies to each of the sites. This indicates to Search Engines that the online store directed at the Swedish audience (in English) shall not be confused with the online store directed at the English audience (in English). If the tags are missing the web-crawlers might get confused and return URLs to the wrong shop.

Example below:

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-gb" href="http://www.vaimo.se/" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="x-default" href="http://www.vaimo.com/" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-gb" href="http://www.vaimo.co.uk/" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="fr-fr" href="http://www.vaimo.fr/" />
```

CONTENT MARKETING

The most recent updates in the Google PageRank algorithm have put an increasing emphasis on rich and relevant content. Google sees content has being one of predominant ranking factors in its algorithm. This has led many online store owners to re-think the way they act upon SEO. For the first time, in November 2015, Google released its internal official "Search Quality Rating Guidelines" (see updated PDF from March 2016, here: <http://goo.gl/pHIWKH>)

Code-to-text ratio

The copy (actual text) of any page on your website should contain a minimum of 500 words. A count closer to 1000 words is highly recommended (this will both benefit to your bounce rate and increase your searchability for Google).

This code-to-text ratio is not a ranking factor in itself but is a strong enabler for crawlers, as crawlers like to gather content, and deem an imbalance in this ratio as being a sign of badly optimised page. The web-crawler will interpret such imbalance as an attempt to create multiple pages on a topic, stuffed with keywords with the clear aim of flooding search engines results page with content from one site solely (source: <http://goo.gl/CVgKO6>)

Social Media

According to Matt Cutts ("Head of Google Webspam Team" at Google) "Google does NOT use signals from social media for search ranking" (source: Q&A with Matt Cutts <https://goo.gl/K7XMpS>). The "difficulty of establishing identity" constitutes the main reason behind Google's decision to not incorporate social media as a ranking factor.

Nevertheless, shareable and popular content is synonym of higher page authority (PA) and increase number of backlinks (a domain authority booster, source:), which ultimately leads to higher ranking. Therefore, popular content on social media indirectly leads to higher ranking

Blogs

An online blog is merely defined as a digital personal journal, and is therefore a fantastic opportunity for an ecommerce website to engage in a more personal relationship with its customers and potential customers. It is also a perfect format to shape content centred around long-tailed keywords.

Nonetheless, try to avoid what is called keyword cannibalisation, that is, the tendency to create multiple pages based on a very similar topic and terminology. Google might treat the latter as duplicate content (or Black Hat SEO techniques) aimed at boosting the online store on SERP for relevant queries.

Analyse bounce rate (and slash Dwell Time)

Search Engines are now able to calculate what they call the “dwell time” (or avg. time from click on a link on the SERP to the landing page, and back to the SERP - also known as “long clicks vs. short clicks”). The dwell time is a form of feedback mechanism for Search Engines, helping them to demote or promote a link on the SERP well after that the PageRank algorithm has attributed a “spot” to the link on the SERP.

It can be seen as a way for the Search Engine to self-learn from its algorithm mistakes and eventually correct them on an on-going basis. (More on this concept here: <https://goo.gl/8Z562s>).

In concrete terms, Search Engines are able to evaluate the quality of the landing pages that they rank on the SERP. Imagine that your website might get a very high Click-Through Rate (CTR) for certain landing pages but experiences a very high bounce rate on these, this behaviour might ultimately lead to Search Engines demoting your link (slightly) on the SERP.

Keyword Modifiers

Keyword modifiers are words that can be interchangeably used in keyword phrases. These words are often popular in search queries, along main target keywords. These words include general adjectives, positives, comparatives, superlatives, question words, color and style attributes etc. (source: <https://goo.gl/ywpJGZ>)

Keyword modifiers are a great way of diversifying content, titles, anchor texts (for internal links) and palliate to reuse of keywords on related web pages (so as to avoid duplicate content from a search engine’s standpoint).

LSI KEYWORDS (Latent Semantic index)

LSI keywords are words semantically related to your main keyword(s), in other words these are synonyms related to the title of the page. Using LSI keywords in your Meta Description or General Product Description, will yield a better ranking on the SERP. Nonetheless, the area where LSI keywords should primarily be used is wherever long content needs to be displayed, hence the relevance of such keywords in Blogs and General Product Description. LSI keywords match the need for web-crawlers to be fed with quality content and index it as such.

An example of tool generating LSI keywords: <http://lsigraph.com/>

OFF-PAGE SEO (BASICS)

In the previous section, we laid a strong emphasis on the actions that an online store manager could implement in order for products from its online store to be correctly indexed and highly ranked by Search Engines.

In this short section, we will evoke Off-Page SEO. Off-Page SEO primarily regards the tactics used to get inbound links from other websites to your website. As this part is not core of Vaimo's expertise, we will introduce (below) some of the elements impacting this aspect of SEO. For further work on Off-Page SEO strategy, we will direct you to some of our partners and external resources.

In the same manner as for On-Page SEO, there are a number of factors (not all known) that influence and help the Google ranking algorithm "PageRank" in determining relevance of a page in relation to a user query.

For instance, these factors can be (non-exhaustive list):

- Number of linking domains and the quantity of links from each domain

The number of links is still a very critical ranking factor, nevertheless this is to be contrasted with the quality of the domain (see below). It is still better to get links from many domains than many links from one domain (from a Search Engines' standpoint).

- Domain Authority of the linking domains

Strength of a domain (and relative importance of it) in its market. Inbound Links from highly authoritative websites signal to Search Engines that your website is of great quality and should be ranked as such. For instance: if you manage an online store selling Fashion & Apparel, you should try to get links from highly authoritative domains in this field (high-profile bloggers, online magazines etc.)

- Domain registration length

The longer a domain name has been registered the more trustworthy it is in the eyes of the Search Engines' algorithm.

- Domain history

If you inherit a domain name, try to make sure that no Search Engine penalty is linked to it, as a penalty is bound to the domain name.

- Country TLD (stands for "Top Level Domain") extension (.co.uk , .se , .fr etc.)

A top level domain per site can help you achieve better ranking on SERP.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the preface of this guide, setting up an online store is a tremendous challenge. Reading through this guide, you might now feel overwhelmed by the amount of work to put into making your website search engine friendly. It becomes even more overwhelming when you realise that this is only one part of the success in e-commerce. Other aspects need to be factored in (Merchandising, Online Marketing, Retention efforts, Logistics, Conversion Rate Optimisation etc.) so as to reach success as an online retailer.

Fortunately for you, putting work into Search Engine Optimisation does not need to be an overnight task, instead it can be planned according to available time and impact on SERP.

In this guide, we are merely pointing at the most important success factors in making your site relevant and worthy of being highly ranked by Search Engines. Rest assured that our goal at Vaimo is to help you succeed as an online retailer, hence we hope that we can assist you in the near future in regards to SEO questions and other aspects of e-commerce.

APPENDIX ON SEO TOOLS

Audit

Free Tools :

- Varvy: See: <https://varvy.com/> - General Audit Tool covering most aspects of a site optimisation to achieve higher ranking on SERP.
- Moz Free Tools : See: <https://moz.com/tools> - Information about Domain Authority / Page Authority / Links / Meta Tags for any website etc.
- SEOptimer : See: <http://www.seoptimer.com/> - Identifies elements to improve in areas such as, On-page SEO, Performance, Mobile-friendliness, Social link building, Security protocols, technology used etc.
- GTmetrix: See: <https://gtmetrix.com/> - Identifies technical elements to improve your website performance (more specifically related to Page Speed performance).
- SEO browser (simple mode): See : <http://seo-browser.com/> - A tool that displays results of your website's content like a web-crawler sees it (enables quick gains in crawlability).

Obviously, there are multiple comprehensive paid plans (of the above services) but the free tools will guarantee that you start planning for optimisation.

Must-haves

Structural Tools to measure the SEO effort over time (non-exhaustive list):

- Google Search Console: See: <https://goo.gl/cLqfQH> : provides information about clicks from Google, critical errors identified by web-crawlers, test whether Google we-crawlers understand the content present on your website.
- Google Analytics: See: <https://goo.gl/aldLzy> : Web analytics tool providing information about traffic sources, one of which being the Organic Search results derived from Google.
- Nota Bene: Both tools can be linked together to give a holistic view of Search queries to Website behaviour to Conversion patterns.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Algorithm : Program derived from a calculation to return relevant results to a search query.

Anchor Text : The user visible text on a link.

Black hat SEO : Aggressive use of SEO techniques that focus entirely on Search Engines and not human users of a website.

Bounce Rate : It represents the percentage of sessions who enter an online store and leave it without viewing any other page.

CTR (or Click-Through-Rate) : It represents the ratio of users who click on a specific link to the number of total users who view a page.

Conversion Rate : Percentage of users who complete a desired goal on the online store.

(Web) Crawler (spider) : a program that moves through the web via the links and reports the links available to the Search Engines via the Indexers.

Data Feed (of Products): A mechanism to update a recipient with selected data.

Domain Authority (DA) : Measures the relative strength of a domain (in its market)

Google Merchant Center: A service that presents users of a Search Engine with products matching their queries. This service presents pictures of products relevant to a user query. Online stores can create product feeds in Magento to populate the Google Merchant Center. Google Merchant Center is subject to product listing ads and auction / bids through AdWords.

Google Search Console (formerly Google Webmaster Tools): An interface where one can monitor clicks to the online store from Google as a Search Engine. One can also get alerts for critical errors and issues. Last but not least, it is a interface that enables the testing of the content indexed by Google (and see if it is understood as it should by the Search Engine).

Google Shopping : A Service providing users allowing users to search for specific products, get product recommendations and price comparisons between diverse stores. Online stores can create product feeds in Magento to populate the Google Shopping service.

HTML (or Hypertext Markup Language) : It is the standard markup language for creating web pages and web applications (source: Wikipedia).

Index : A database of links and words that Search Engines can query.

Landing page : A web page onto which the user lands (from somewhere external to the online store).

Latent Semantic Index (LSI) keywords : Words semantically related to your main keyword(s), in other words these are synonyms related to the title of the page

Link Building Strategy : The strategy upon which the quantity and quality of external links pointing at your online store will be determined. This strategy is highly dependent on partnerships with websites that leverage higher ranking potential than others.

LinkJuice : A term used to define the relative power of a link (either internal or external) can give to another web page. (source: <https://goo.gl/BTwhCa>)

Long tail keywords : Longer and more specific keyword phrases that visitors are more likely to use when they're closer in their purchase process.

Search Engines (Web) : Search engines crawl the web for content to index. The content indexed is thereafter displayed as a response to a user query. Search Engines try to display results as relevant as possible to the user by the use of proprietary algorithms. See even "How do Search Engines find your web pages and index them (See : [How Search Works goo.gl/WwJv9d](https://goo.gl/WwJv9d)).

SEO (or Search Engine Optimization) : Tactics used to grow visibility in Organic (non-paid) search engine results to user queries.

SERP (or Search Engine Results Page)

SSL (Secured Socket Layer) : A standard security technology allowing transfer of sensitive information between a server and a client. This standard security technology is subject to a protocol. The site-wide presence of such protocol is used as a ranking signal by Search Engines ("https" format in the URL of a website indicates that the protocol corresponds to SSL).

Page Authority (PA) : Measures the relative strength of a page (compared to the rest of the website it belongs to)

PageRank : Google uses a ranking algorithm called the PageRank (see: <https://goo.gl/sJQ1gf>), this algorithm is composed of about 200 variables and assigns a value between 0 and 1. These variables are constantly reviewed with around 500 to 600 modifications per year.

Short Tail Keywords : More generic keywords used by users when they begin their purchase process.

Sitemap : It is a file saved at the root directory of the site on the site's server. This file helps search engine spiders to efficiently crawl the structure of the site and help users to find something specific on the site.

SKU (or Stock Keeping Unit) : It represents a unique identifier for products and services (in Inventory Management).

URL (Uniform Resource Locator): More commonly known as a web address displayed in the address bar of most web browsers.

301 Permanent Redirect (Status Code): The process of directing users who intended to view a page "A" to a page "B". This can be done for a variety of reasons, the most common one being that page "A" is no longer up to date (but has been indexed by Search Engines for a long time and therefore ranks well on SERPs).

404 (Status Code) : The requested page is not available. This can happen for a variety of reasons, the main one remains the indexing by Search Engines of a CMS page recently deactivated. This page continues to be available to visitors via its URL but is not supposed to be available for viewing.

