

MAKING TOMORROW BETTER

Taking Digital Action
in the Performing Arts

**BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE
WEB PRESENCE IN 2022**

**UNDERSTANDING SEARCH ENGINE
OPTIMIZATION**

Written by Briana Doyle, Troubadours & Vagabonds
Productions, and Inga Petri, Strategic Moves

December 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that we live, work, meet and travel on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples that have cared for this land now called Canada since time immemorial.

In Hudson, Quebec, Troubadours & Vagabonds Productions is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

In Whitehorse, Yukon, Strategic Moves operates from the Traditional Territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, self-governing nations that negotiated modern treaties under the Umbrella Final Agreement between the 14 Yukon First Nations and the Governments of Canada and Yukon.

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First Impressions and Your Digital Footprint

Most first impressions of your web presence happen on a search engine results page. Even web users who know your actual URL will type that URL in the search box of a search engine, like Google. That means that how your website and how your content is represented in search results is a critical piece of your overall digital marketing process. It is the quality and relevance of the search results about your website that determine how those searching for performing arts shows, things to do, or entertainment options respond to your listing compared to content from others.

When you think about your organization's web presence, the first thing you might think of is your website, then your most active social media outposts, such as your Facebook page or Instagram account. Yet, this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the many ways people may find you and your content on the web.

Your target audience's first encounter with you online may well be a search engine results page, but it's just as possible they find you by searching for the answer to a specific question, exploring nearby locations on a map, or scrolling through a social media feed. Now that actual *answers* to many questions are displayed on the Google search results page, your audience may find the content they are looking for without visiting your website at all.

Don't assume they'll be sitting in front of a computer either. In 2021, about half of all web traffic is mobile, so they are just as likely to be scrolling through content or typing with thumbs on a smaller screen. Increasingly, your online content may also reach audiences who aren't using a keyboard or looking at a screen at all, via voice-activated digital assistants such as Siri or Alexa.



Moreover, several technical developments have dramatically altered how the web works and, what we need to consider when building a web presence in 2022. These changes include:

- Dominance of mobile devices accessing web content.
- Social media networks as dominant content platforms.
- 5G networks and their vastly increased upload and download speeds enable use of rich media like HD video, live streaming content, and within a few years online VR / AR applications will be common.
- Voice-based virtual assistants (Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant) change how users interact with the web.
- Structured data standards power the emergence of the semantic web so that Google can provides answers instead of merely displaying search results linking to websites.

Digital Continuum

The keystone of an effective web presence is your website, and to a lesser extent, the social media outposts you actively manage. Your website and social media outposts establish a presence online but to improve your visibility on the web, you must do more. Using appropriate keywords, including descriptive metadata, and adding and updating your information within linked, open directories all have an important impact on your presence online.

In short, the best way to ensure your digital footprint represents your organization in its best light is to invest the time to fully optimize your online presence for both humans and machines. That way you are able to move along the digital continuum from simply being present online to being found through search, to becoming an answer to questions through rich snippets using structured data and ultimately being discoverable.

Being Present	• Your website and social media outposts
Searching	• Search Engine Optimization (SEO) - Keywords
Answering	• Advanced SEO - Structured metadata standards
Discovering	• Linked open data directories

Most of us are used to the idea that we need to invest time and effort to create well-functioning websites and social media profiles designed to appeal to our target audiences. Some have become adapt at keyword-based, traditional search engine optimization (SEO). During the past decade search engines have been advancing significantly beyond using keywords and inbound links, but to consider contextual data provided by browser histories, linked, open data directories, and metadata (data about your data encoded within web pages or databases that provide essential information that machines use to understand the meaning of your content).

Your digital footprint is not only created by what you share online. It's also greatly affected by what others share about you, and — crucially — how machines access, interpret and correlate this content. This installment of our *Digital Playbook* focuses on how to build your web site to improve your visibility online, so that your target audiences can find you more easily. It provides practical information, approaches and tips on how to monitor and manage your digital footprint, so that you can maximize first impressions online.

As a result of the varying degrees of the digital continuum, other installments of this [Digital Playbook](#) share in-depth information about [Social Media Marketing](#), [Mastering Discoverability through the use of Structured Data and Linked, Open Directories](#) and [Designing and Producing Awesome Online Events](#) as well as designing and producing [Hybrid Events for Blended Audiences](#).

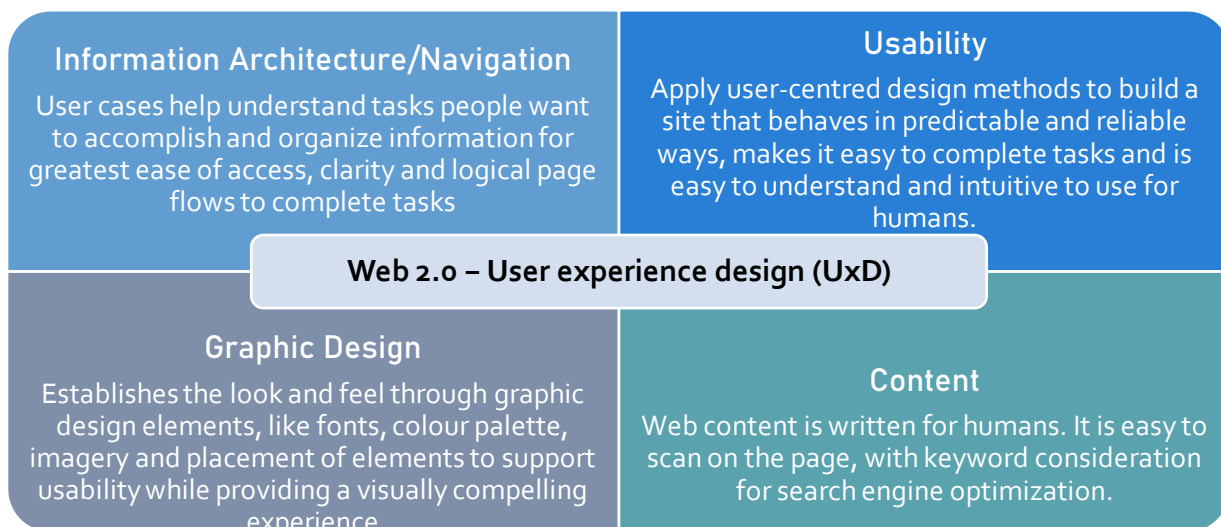
The Essential New Web Building Blocks

Web 3.0 (the semantic web) is a new kind of Internet: Search engines provide answers to questions instead of web links to keyword searches. They will provide a *complete answer* that can make visiting your web completely unnecessary. And these answers may not provide links to alternatives. Web 3.0 relies on structured, open and linked data at its heart.

But most arts organizations still have not structured their data through standardized meta-data tagging to be reliably machine-readable, i.e. read and understood by search engines.

An effective web presence today still begins with the fundamentals of the past (writing and editing quality content, producing images and videos for your website and social media optimized for traditional SEO, navigation and usability).

The fundamental user experience design methods from the old web 2.0 world still have a role in 2022:



The essential building blocks for an effective semantic website (web 3.0 site) are quite different from the considerations of the past and include [advanced SEO, structured data, and greatly improved discoverability via linked, open data directories](#).

The Past	The New Essentials (Web 3.0)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website - Social networks - Search rankings (traditional SEO) - Online Calendar of Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Databases of content - Common metadata standards to structure your data - Knowledge graphs - Linked, open data directories - Google Events, Answers from Rich Snippet, Knowledge Panels - Voice-activated search

Eight Steps to Building a Website for the Semantic Web

1. Know your Audience

Web development must focus on your audiences: Who are they? What do they want from you? What do you want from them?

Know your audience

2. Mobile-friendly, touch controlled site

Short texts, image driven (using web resolution, not high resolution), scrolling sites require a different architecture

Mobile web

3. Write texts to be spoken not only read

Writing content to be spoken requires a shift away from long, complex sentences, and toward short, meaningful text. Writing moves toward being spoken and away from being read.

Write text to be spoken by virtual assistants

4. Social media integration

Create a seamless user experience from website to social networks without dead-ends. Use social utilities on every page so users can share your content easily in their social media or connect to yours.

Social network integration

5. Content Management System (CMS)

Build your site on a proven, open-source CMS like WordPress, Wix, FourSquare or similar. For simplicity of ongoing implementation consider a CMS that has a strong universe of widgets and SEO plug-ins that use structured data based on schema.org's standards.

Content Management System

6. SSL

Secure Socket Layer (SSL) is the standard for keep internet connections secure and safeguard data that is sent between two systems. Google favours sites in its search listings that use SSL, i.e. the URL appears as https instead of http.

SSL encryption

7. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) matters

Long-standing methods of keyword-based and basic technical SEO still apply

Search engine optimization (SEO)

8. Machine-readable structured data

Use a good CMS with structured data and SEO plug-ins, so you don't need to code meta-tags manually. Simply use the tools available to make your content machine-readable. Or hard code the necessary structured data for your important events and activities.

Machine-readable structured data

This installment of the *Digital Playbook* focusses on *Understanding Search Engine Optimization* to help readers understand and adopt new, more effective ways of building or updating your website.

Understanding Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Anyone can do this simple test: type your organization's name in any search engine's search field and take a close look at the search engine results page (SERP). Much of the content displayed about your organization tends to come from your own web presence. Search engines may use your actual content as well as content from meta tags to generate the search results listing. In addition to search results from sites you control, there are likely some links to other websites with information about you or that are optimized for keywords similar to your name.

Perhaps most important is whether the information – the blue title link, the text – that appears is accurate, the most important to encourage a web user to click on the site.

There is a lot you can do to improve the information that appears in search results for your organization:

- Maintain a search-optimized website
 - Frequently update your website with keyword-rich content
 - Implement structured data markup to generate rich snippets that search engines can use to provide answers to web users using your content
 - Follow web design best practices for accessibility
- Claim or create information for Google's Knowledge Panel about your organization through Google's Business Profile (formerly *MyBusiness*)
- Optimize your social media pages
- Claim linked, open directory profiles where possible, or create them and ensure they are current

How to optimize your listing on Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs)

When you look at your listings on a search engine results page, do you like what you see? Is it immediately clear who you are and what you do? Is the information displayed encouraging a web user to click through to your web page or to look for other results from other organizations? If your operations are local or centred on a particular region, is this clear in the search result?

Ideally every page on your website would be fully optimize. That said, this is not always practical: if you have 40 pages that's much easier than if you have 4,000 or 40,000 pages. If you have a content-rich site, triage the priority needs for improvement and invest time where you'll see the biggest return: for instance, home page, secondary landing pages, or key sections. New content should simply be conceived with these simple SEO concepts in mind, rather than be retrofitted later.

Take note: Every search engine results page is unique.

Even if two people type the exact same keywords at the exact same moment into the same search engine, the results will be different based on the user's current location, language, search history, and more. Rankings may also change from day to day as search engines tweak their algorithms and new webpages are indexed.

There are a number of ways you can influence the salience, the importance a user ascribes to your search result. This requires an understanding of how different content from your site or meta tags is used by search engines.

For instance, your title tag becomes the headline of the blue search result link. The first HTML-coded sentence of the webpage or the meta description tag become the short description displayed underneath the blue link. Your web address or url using natural language, instead of non-sensical code also helps the user feel more secure in following the link to your website.

URL and site structure

The most important aspects of successful traditional SEO are the URLs of your actual, natural language, keyword-rich domain and sub-domain pages, therefore:

- Use descriptive URLs
 - Customize page/post URLs. They should be short but contain the essential keywords to capture the content on each page
 - It is more effective to be straightforward and use plain English than clever
 - Spell out full words; don't use acronyms that are not universally known
 - Do not use numbers, like dates, titles for blog post URLs
- Each event, product, or service requires its own page
 - Optimize the content to include relevant keywords, as well as the relevant structured data

Traditional meta tags

Meta tags provide search engines with text that describes the content or purpose of the content on your site. These are not visible to users when browsing your website, but can be defined within your website's source code, or using an SEO optimization plug-in such as Yoast (for WordPress sites), or completing the fields for SEO information in Wix and other Do-It-Yourself website content management systems. Here are the most important meta tags, in order of importance, to consistently use on your site, and how these affect SEO and your SERP listing.

Meta tag	What it does
Title tag	Appears on the web browser tab and as page name in search results, as well as within the link preview when the URL is shared on social media sites like Facebook. It is the most important meta tag because it influences search rankings.
Description tag	Provides search engines with a summary of the content on the page to display within search results (can be up to about 155 characters). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a unique description for each page; do not use the same description throughout your website • This snippet may be displayed on SERPs, and a well-written description may improve click-through rates, which is a factor in search rankings. • Keywords within this description do not affect search rankings directly. Focus on accuracy and relevance, not merely keyword optimization for this text.

Meta tag	What it does
	<p>Note: if the meta description you wrote does not appear to match the content on the page or seems overly self-promotional, Google may select the first HTML sentence on the web page, or Google may generate its own description for you.</p>
<p>Image ALT text</p>	<p>Describes what an image is about. Important to define for all non-decorative images on your site (i.e. any image that conveys meaning). Alt text should be brief, descriptive, keyword-rich and factual, not promotional.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps search engines index images properly • Important for accessibility for visually impaired people using screen readers to browse the web • Will appear on your website in place of the image if it fails to load
<p>Heading tags</p>	<p>Indicates which text is the main headline, and which are various levels of subheadings. Headlines and subheads describe what the following content is about, so you should be sure to use relevant keywords within this text. The h1 tag is of particular importance to ensure keyword-rich, relevant main headings.</p>
<p>Canonical tag</p>	<p>When a website has several URLs with the same content, for instance your site may have a page with or without the <u>www.</u> prefix, so search engines can get confused about what the authoritative page is. Google determines which page it considers authoritative as best it can. To help search engines recognize the authoritative source reliably, you can identify the master page using the canonical tag, thus identifying it without ambiguity.</p>
<p>Robot.txt file</p>	<p>Tells search engines what to do with your page:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • index/noindex – This tells search engines whether to show your page in search results or not. • follow/nofollow – This tells search engines what to do with links on your pages: whether they should trust and “follow” your links to the next page or not. Social media sites and forums often use nofollow links to limit spam and unethical SEO tactics.
<p>Keyword tags</p>	<p>When search engines cannot read your page, for example because it uses primarily rich media content instead of HTML text, they may evaluate keyword tags, in addition to the description tag, to glean what the page is about. Keywords are not as important for SEO as they used to be and are no longer used in ranking algorithms.</p>

Technical SEO

Several technical attributes also affect your search engine rankings:

- Fast load time: avoid heavy images and auto-play videos unless you are certain your users all have super-fast internet
- SSL (secure socket layer) encryption
- A sitemap.xml and robot.txt file (used to ensure that search engines index your site correctly)

In addition to simply Googling your site and seeing how your content displays, you can also use SEO tools to evaluate your presence. There are many available, often free of charge. Three we use quite often:

- <https://seositecheckup.com>
- <https://technicalseo.com>
- <https://search.google.com/search-console/about>

Structured data plug-ins and other ways to enhance discoverability of your content online are discussed in other installments of this Digital Playbook, [Mastering Discoverability through the use of Structured Data and Linked, Open Directories](#).

Create one web page for each event or product

When arts organizations or festivals create web pages that list multiple shows simply using HTML without effective traditional and advanced SEO, search engines and other data crawlers and scrapers are less likely to effectively index your page.

Further, with the popularity of mobile devices and the preference of mobile web users toward scrolling content, Single Page Applications (SPA) have become more common. A Single Page Application is a website that loads all of the resources required on the first page load, and then dynamically refreshes content as the web user interacts with the site without ever making full page request. These Single Page Applications are more difficult for search engines to index because they can contain many different pieces of information, so they are typically not used when search visibility is prioritized.

There are several other challenges with loading an entire website as a single page, from tracking web history to analytics to internally linking and backlinking. Workarounds are both labour-intensive (such as creating an actual HTML version of the site), unreliable (if the content between the mirror HTML site and SPA appears too different for a search engine it might be penalized instead of listed), and fraught with maintenance challenges (such as maintaining current content on multiple versions of a website).

The problem with a single calendar listing page

For a search engine or web crawler, a simple calendar listings approach makes it difficult to index the page effectively for each event presented on it. Simply put, most of the information on the page is not relevant to one artist, or one show. Similarly, the title tag and the description tag – some of the most important pieces of meta data a search engine takes into account when ranking your web page – are likely generic and broad, rather than keyword-rich and specific.

When building or updating a website there are a few things to know:

- Google doesn't rank your website as whole. Instead, Google indexes each page on your site. If everything is on one page, it's much harder for Google to understand what that page is about.

- The use of frequently searched keywords within your text can enhance the ranking of your event page in search results or in Google Event Finder.
- Search engines require one authoritative (canonical) master page with all the event information in order to properly index your information. This will impact whether and how Google displays your event in an Answer Box or in Google Event Finder.
- When you use tags, from descriptive and structured data meta tags to style tags that are used to identify levels of headings and body text, Google understands your content better. In short, words in a headline are more important than words in body text. This requires using your website's style sheet, instead of manually adjusting fonts; this mirrors the styles in Word processing software.

How one web page for each event benefits you

Web searches lead to the most relevant pages on the web based on the keywords searched. When all the relevant content about a show is put on its own web page, website owners can provide a richer, more compelling and specific experience to the human user. Headlines and body text are specific to the artist or show, boosting credibility with the search engine. We can also code each single event page in order to optimize it for search. For instance, the artist's name or show title can be used in the web address, title tag and description tag.

Adding your town, event date, and start time also helps search engines surface your specific events (i.e., What's on in Calgary tonight; versus Matt Anderson tour). Provide this factual information as plainly as possible, separated out on different lines (not within sentences or a paragraph). Use consistent date and time formats across all your event pages.

Automated scraping of web content is also facilitated when each event has its own web page with factual information in a consistent format as described above.

Writing for people *and* coding for search engines

One way to get search engine optimization right is to turn the content creation process on its head and to think of SEO from the earliest stage of conception of a web site, or a web page. That means you'll write the site for people and you'll construct the site's code for search engines.

Before you write new or revise existing content on each of your web pages or blog posts, define a focus keyword or key phrase. Choose a word or phrase that accurately describes what the content is about; and use words that match those your audience would use when searching for this content. Use your most important keywords, rather than many variants, in headings and body text. In practical term, this approach means that instead of starting by writing the text the human users will see, the content owner drafts the text for each event page's web address (URL), as well as its title and description tag and any heading level 1 headlines first. These important pieces of information for SEO should be provided by the content owner and not left up to a web programmer.

Focus on Common and Clear Keywords

To undertake keyword research, the Google's Adwords engine is a good source of information about the frequency of searches using a specific set of keywords. A number of other keyword tools exist online that can provide some insight into frequency of use as well as key competitors for the keywords you are most interested in. Remember that your location can be an important aspect of keyword-rich tags as well.

In the performing arts, it is important to highlight relevant and specific keywords in meta tags and the event content, such as:

- Location (town, province)
- Main category (performing arts, arts, entertainment)
- Genre (Music, Theatre, Dance, Play, Show, Performance)
- Subgenre (if relevant, e.g. blues, jazz, ballet, break dance)
- Artists (band name, play title, known parts of show, like Shakespeare or famous actors)

Once keywords are established and the overall tags are written, it is a matter of preparing the text and information for the human user while continually checking that the texts match the SEO requirements.

Scan-able text

Long, wordy sentences are hard for many to read and easily understand. For people with cognitive or learning disabilities, non-native speakers, aging-related conditions, or someone who's tired or feeling unwell, dense, run-on text is a barrier to understanding and taking action. Using common, clear words is better for all readers, as well as search.

To make your content easier to read and understand:

- Write how you speak
- Ensure text is easy to scan
 - Keep paragraphs short
 - Use descriptive headings
- Use an online tool such as <https://hemingwayapp.com/> or the readability tool within Yoast for SEO to improve the clarity of your writing

Accessibility

The Web is much more visual than it used to be, thanks to faster and more reliable Internet, and the widespread proliferation of devices and mobile apps that make it easy to produce and share photos and videos. Visual content tends to be more popular with many audiences than text-heavy updates, but pretty pictures without descriptive text (captions, description tags) can make this content all but invisible to people with special needs using assistive technology — as well as search engines.

Some of the visitors to your website may be people with visual impairments, ranging from colour-blindness to low vision or complete blindness. Others may have hearing loss, limited movement, or cognitive or learning disabilities.

Even if only a small percentage of your website users are people who have special needs, by designing your website to be accessible to them, you will improve everyone's user experience. Plus, some best practices for improving accessibility, such as including descriptive text alongside visual content, are also best practices for search optimization.

Here is a brief summary of some of the most important principles to consider for accessible and inclusive web design for both people and search engines:

Balance long form writing and imagery or video content

Some people prefer to get information by reading it on a screen, while others prefer to look at an infographic, watch a video or animation, or listen to a podcast. By presenting important content in several formats, you not only make it easier for people to access it in the way they prefer (to read, watch, or listen) but you also make it possible for people with visual, hearing, sensory, or cognitive impairments to access your content.

It may not be possible or practical for your organization to produce every piece of content in multiple formats, but there are a few simple and practical ways you can provide alternatives. For example:

- Ensure all meaningful images (i.e., that are not just decorative) have descriptive keyword-rich information in the Image ALT tag and/or captions
- Include transcripts or text summaries of the content of audio-only content like speeches or podcasts
- Provide infographics or animations to illustrate complex topics, along with descriptive text and the description meta tag
- Upload captions or turn on automated captions, if available, for video content

Meaningfully represent diversity and showcase inclusion

Do the photos and content on your website represent the full spectrum of people you serve? If not, it may be worthwhile to invest in some new photography or illustrations that mirror the diversity of your audience in terms of age, race, gender, family structures, physical ability, and/or culture. While this is an editorial consideration, not necessarily an accessibility issue, it is important for inclusivity.

Universal web accessibility standards

W3C Accessibility Guidelines are the universal standard for web accessibility. They go far beyond the simple principles outlined here and are an important reference for any organization that prioritizes inclusivity. At the time this document was published, these guidelines were currently being revised. The draft guidelines are visible here: <https://www.w3.org/TR/wcag-3.0/>.

The previous version is here: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22>.

There is also a quick reference guide here: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref>.

Content drives linking strategy

Rather than merely optimizing single pages for keywords, SEO experts now often recommend [optimizing for topic clusters \(SEM Rush\)](#). This is done by:

1. Identifying the topics (keywords) you wish to rank for
2. Writing an in-depth “pillar post” for each topic that summarizes key points
3. Creating clusters of shorter posts that go into more detail about the topic, and ensure they link internally to and from the pillar page

Linking topic clusters to pillar pages optimizes for SEO by improving your authority on a particular topic. It also allows you to rank for more specific keywords, as each “cluster” post can focus on a specific topic or answer to a specific question.

Back links

Along with internally linking content on your own website, another key SEO focus is to generate links from other websites to your own. In the case of the performing arts that can be as simple as asking the artists you present and their agents and managers to link to the events listing on your website.

The more high-quality back links point to your site, the higher the importance search engines attribute to your site as literally the hub of a web of websites.

Good design drives user experience and usability

The colours and fonts used on your website are not just design choices. They also play an essential functional role that can greatly help or harm a person’s ability to read and interact with your website.

Tips:

- A high contrast ratio between text and the background will make your website easier to read (black on white is better than light grey on white)
- Make headings visually distinct from body text (use contrasting colour, larger font)
 - Minimize featured body text (colour, bold, underline, italics); they make reading harder
 - Hyperlinks should be visually distinct from body text (contrasting colour and/or underlined)
- Ensure your website design allows users with assistive technology to resize text up to 200 percent without breaking the layout or hiding content
- Avoid using images in place of words; search engines can't read text within images.
- If your website includes audio or video elements, provide clear controls to allow the user to turn it off and on, adjust the volume, replay, etc. Most users prefer not to audio automatically play when the page loads, especially if they are visiting your website at work or another place where the sound would bother others.

Google Knowledge Panel

Google's proprietary Knowledge Graph powers its answers and other search results in response to searches by web users. Much of the information displayed is drawn from linked, open data directories, as well as your organization's web presence. This information can be displayed in an answer box or in the knowledge panel on the right-hand side of the Google search results page. If you have already populated information about you or your organization in Wikidata or in other knowledge bases, chances are Google already uses it in a knowledge panel that you can claim. This process is simple:

1. Search for yourself or the organization you represent and find its knowledge panel, usually on the right-hand side of the search results page.
2. Scroll to find Claim this Business Profile and follow the steps
3. Review the displayed information about features granted after verification.
4. Sign in to one of the official sites or profiles to verify that you're an authorized representative of an entity on Google.

For more information, visit: <https://support.google.com/knowledgepanel>

Google Business Profile

Verifying that you are the owner of your own Google Business Profile (formerly MyBusiness), a free service, enables a series of important functionalities that come to bear on how Google displays information about your organization:

- Add photos
- Add offers, tickets to events
- Add updates or news
- Add events
- Direct messaging
- Reviews, and the ability to respond to reviews both positive and negative
- Add opening hours, and days closed
- Integrate your contact information and offer one click access to call or visit your website
- Integrated with Maps so it can provide directions to your address with one click.
- Access to user statistics
- Description of your organization (the Google default line cannot be deleted); this is an additional statement Google displays.

Google Maps

If your arts organization has a brick-and-mortar presence or operates within a specific region, take the time to assess and improve your listing on Google Maps. To make changes to your Google Maps listing, you must claim your Business Profile account.

Google ranks businesses on Google Maps based on three factors: distance, relevance, and prominence. You can't change where you are located, but you can improve your visibility by updating your Business Profile with detailed and accurate information about your business, which will improve relevance in search results. Posting updates about your business on a regular basis, responding to customer reviews, and adding high-quality photos can all improve your visibility in local search.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Web Presence

Building an effective web presence is important, but how will you know when you've achieved this aim? That's where measurement comes in.

The old adage applies: What gets measured gets managed. Focus on a few key metrics that are important indicators of success and establish a regular schedule – weekly, monthly, quarterly – to track your progress.

Begin by looking at your strategic objectives as an organization. Not all these objectives may be linked to your web presence, but for those that do:

- 1. Identify at least three and no more than 10 measurable key performance indicators (KPIs)** that will indicate whether you're making progress on your strategic goals. Some common KPIs include:
 - Audience metrics: number of users, new vs. returning visitors, or recency and frequency of visits
 - Acquisition metrics: volume of traffic from organic search, social media, or other sources
 - User behaviour: traffic to specific pages, bounce rate, or number of pages viewed per visitor
 - Engagement metrics: volume of shares, comments, or reactions to links shared on social media, or volume of social media mentions of your brand
- 2. Establish benchmarks.** For each KPI, record where you stand right now. If possible, you may also want to include some data from recent history (for example, average pageviews last year or the volume of traffic to your website from Facebook over the past six months)
- 3. Decide how often you will gather and record data** on these KPIs. For some metrics, it may be reasonable to check in monthly or quarterly, and for others, weekly or even daily.

Tip: It's not just the numbers that matter, it's the story they tell.

If views, engagements, and clicks are high, but sales are low, for example, you may want to make sure your shopping cart process is functioning properly, and your pricing is in line with audience expectations.

Measuring and reporting on KPIs can take some time, so limit how many KPIs you actively track. Focus on those which provide meaningful feedback. On an annual basis (or more frequently, depending on the needs of your organization), sit down with your team to review web metrics and discuss your goals online.

For example, if your goal is to raise more money from donors, perhaps you want to create a campaign to increase traffic to the web page where people can make a donation or test some new copy or layout to try and get a higher percentage of people who land on that page to donate.

If your goal is to reach younger audiences, perhaps you might invest time and resources in marketing your organization on Instagram or TikTok. To measure the success of this strategy, you could choose to measure engagement on these platforms, traffic from these sites, the number of people who say they heard about your event through these channels on an audience feedback form, or even have a volunteer count heads to tally the ratio of grey-haired audience members at your events over a period of time to see if there is any change.

Monitor What Others Say About You

Your digital footprint is not only affected by what you share, but by what others share about you. It's a good practice to monitor the content and data being shared about you by others online. While you may not always be able to control what is said or shared, you will be less likely to be caught by surprise — and you may have more opportunity to correct misinformation or mitigate potential concerns.

Here are a few simple and free ways you can keep tabs on what's being said about you online without spending all day scrolling through socials and search results:

Monitor Google Business reviews (and other relevant websites)

If your organization has a brick-and-mortar presence, you likely have a Google Business Profile that displays on Google Maps and in search results. You can "claim" your profile, so you can edit the details of your listing. This also gives you the ability to monitor and respond to reviews left about your organization. While it may not be fun to read critical reviews, a tactful response can positively affect how other people react to a bad review. If Tripadvisor, Yelp, or other similar sites are popular where you are located, make sure to claim and monitor those listings too.

"Watch" relevant Wikipedia and Wikidata pages

If you have a Wikipedia or Wikidata page (or a listing on another important open directory), create an account and toggle the "[watchlist](#)" feature for the pages that are relevant to your organization. This will allow you to keep track of changes made to the page.

Important: It is generally not acceptable to modify your own Wikipedia pages, unless there is defamation or another serious error. Instead, you can leave a comment on the discussion page connected to the entry and wait for someone else to make the correction. See [Wikipedia's conflict of interest policy](#) for more detail on this.

Set up Google Alerts

Visit <https://www.google.ca/alerts> to set up keyword alerts on your name or any other important phrases you want to monitor. When there are new media mentions, blog posts, or other content published about you online, you'll be notified. You can choose whether to get an email right away, or a roundup of links on a less frequent basis. You can also use this to see what other organizations or competitors are up to, or even just to get ideas for content to share in your email newsletter or socials.

Maintain good cyber hygiene protocols

It goes without saying that you can't have an effective web presence if your website is taken down by hackers or you end up locked out of your social accounts when the person in charge gets sick or leaves your organization. A few basic cyber hygiene tips go a long way: change passwords frequently and don't reuse them on multiple sites, make sure at least two trusted people have access to all your online profiles, use multi-factor authentication when you can, and back up important files regularly.

Summary

Your web presence includes not only the content of the websites and profiles you actively manage, but also the information about you shared by other people and organizations, as well as the data machines extract and share from these sources.

To build an effective web presence in 2022 requires not only mastering the art of creating engaging and meaningful experiences for your target audiences online, but also providing machine-readable data to search engines to correctly interpret its meaning.

To improve the visibility of your organization online, these four concepts are crucial to understand and act on:

- **Presence:** The content and information on your website and social profiles
- **Search:** Using relevant keywords and following traditional SEO best practices online
- **Answers:** Incorporating structured data within your website to provide additional context to search engines
- **Discoverability:** Monitoring and updating information in open linked directories online

Other installments of this [Digital Playbook](#) share in-depth information about [Social Media Marketing](#), [Mastering Discoverability through the use of Structured Data and Linked, Open Directories](#) and [Designing and Producing Awesome Online Events](#) as well as [Hybrid Events](#).

Write your site for humans, but code it to be machine-readable. Understand that many web users will never visit your site because they will receive the answers they want on Google directly.

Write for people

1. Use your most important keywords, rather than many variants, in headings and body text
2. Be authentic and trustworthy
3. Use concise sentences that are clear and to the point
4. Avoid many run-on sentences with complex sentence structure
5. Use transition words to achieve a natural read
6. Use images to illustrate key messages
7. Provide useful links and identify them clearly

Construct for search engines

1. Heed the power of the url – use words not acronyms
 - Keyword-rich domain and page urls
2. Each event, product, service requires its own page with relevant keywords
3. Create the most important traditional Meta tags
 - title tag: appears in the web browser tab as well as a page name in search results
 - description tag: a summary of the content of the specific page

- keyword tag: when search engines cannot read your page, e.g. due to rich media content, they may evaluate your keyword tag
- 4. Create "image ALT" keyword-rich tags for each image on your site (this is also a good accessibility guideline)
- 5. Use heading styles like h1, h2 in the body text to help search engines understand the content of the page and paragraphs
- 6. Implement schema.org structured data for all important information and especially all of your events

Technical SEO

Google especially also looks for other attributes to rank your web pages highly:

- Fast load times, so avoid heavy images and auto-play videos unless you know your site's users all have fast internet connections
- Use SSL (secure socket layer) encryption
- Know what your sitemap.xml and robot.txt files say, i.e. ensure that search engines can index your site
- Internal links within your website
- Backlinks from other credible websites