

Vertical Leap

SEO CHECKLIST FOR ECOMMERCE WEBSITES

2015

**VERTICAL
LEAP**

TECHNICAL CHECKLIST

URLS

- Make sure your brand name is in the domain name (but if it's too late, don't bother changing it).
- Avoid complicated URLs** – keep things simple and clean, just use the product name in product URLs and avoid using adding detail. Rather than “/pink-fluffy-ribbon-2x1x200-with-brown-spots-stitch-detail” use “/pink-fluffy-ribbon” instead.
- Dash spacers** - check the words in your URLs are separated by a dash and not underscore or a space. You can find out [more about simple URLs here from Google](#).
- Consistency in URLs** – make sure your URLs are consistent across all products, category pages, information pages and every other piece of content your site houses. It makes it much easier for search engines and for users to find your products.
- Independent product URLs** - If you have multiple products in multiple categories, make sure your product URLs are not dependent on a category URL. So rather than /category-one/product-a/ and /category-two/product-a/ make your product URLs independent, removing the category level altogether so you end up with a clean product URL like /product-a/. This will help prevent content duplication.
- Single URL per product** – many eCommerce websites use a URL structure that provides unique URLs for every single variation of the same product. Most of the time this is colour. We recommend using filters as opposed to individual URLs for this, for example /product-a?colour=blue rather than /product-a-blue.

Canonicalisation

- Canonicalise products** – Canonicalising is the process of marking known duplicate content and saying “Hey search engines - this URL is the ‘primary’ version of these pages!” There’s a [good explanation here](#) and [Google has written about them](#) too but if your eCommerce site uses separate URLs for colours or other product options and filters then they need canonicalising to their primary version. If using filters, for example /product-a?colour=blue then canonicalise the page back to the ‘clean’ version /product-a.
- Canonicalise category pages** – The same applies to your category pages. For example if you had /category-a?display=grid for example, then the canonical URL would be /category-a.
- Pagination canonicalisation** – This can be where confusion starts. If you have pages for categories make sure you use “rel=next/prev”. This is a way of canonicalising pages of products that tells search engines to show the first page of the pagination. However, you’ll also want to take into consideration the use of a ‘view all’ page if you have one as this is often provided by users. If that’s the case, [we recommend canonicalising to this](#).

Meta Data

- Uniqueness** – Make sure all your title tags and meta descriptions are unique. Google will flag those that are duplicated in your [Google Search Console](#) access.
- Title tag length** – Keep them under 55 characters to make sure they get properly displayed.
- Meta description length** – Keep these under 155 characters to make sure they don’t get truncated. This way your whole message will get displayed and not cut short.
- Product USPs** – What are the odds that hundreds of other online retailers are selling the same product you are? How do you make a product unique that’s widely available? Well you, your

service, your brand, your price, your delivery, your delivery threshold (to name a few) do. Make sure these are in the title tags where people can immediately see why they should buy that product from you. Use the meta description to further explain not only the product, but why they should buy it from you.

- Keywords** – Make sure you include them but don't go stuffing them in left, right and centre as this will only be detrimental to your search visibility efforts.

Imagery

- More than one product image** – Each product should have more than one image. So many eCommerce sites are simply lazy with their product images. Make your own, it's worth the effort of [finding another way to be different](#) and unique from the competition. Detail focused imagery, modelled, lifestyle, all these ideas are good ones. The more images you use, the more likely someone will buy it. [eBay states more images on their seller pages increase sales.](#)
- ALT text** – Check that each and every one of your images has logical, descriptive ALT text on them. ALT text isn't seen by a reader but acts as a descriptor if, for whatever reason, images can't be displayed. They're a good opportunity to include a keyword mention too.
- Image filename and size** – Check that your images aren't massive. They should certainly be under 500kb. Image load times are [one of the top three reasons for slow page load times](#) which do impact your average rankings and visibility. Finally, remember to change the filename from the default your camera gave it to something descriptive. This opens up the doors to lots of visibility through image search.

Internal Links

- Links to products** – Linking from other content on the website relevant to your product pages helps the internal structure of your site; search engines find your products and users find and buy your products. Check that you're making things as easy as possible for people by linking internally from relevant phrases and pages to your product pages.
- Link from products** – As well as linking to them, make sure you have useful links coming from them too. Perhaps you have some relevant blogs on using the product? Or perhaps there's an external review by a popular influencer? All these things help you sell the product but make the page more authoritative. Even linking out to other sites; providing they are reliable and contextually relevant.

Schema and structured data

Schema or structured data as it's also known is a set of instructions in code format that sit on your website and provide additional information to search engines and in turn, your users. By adding this information to your website you can increase click-through rate and possibly your visibility. We recommend:

- Specifying [your logo to display in search results](#).
- Show [searchers how to contact you](#).
- [Show potential buyers that you're engaged](#) on social media.
- Get your very own site [search box within Google's search result pages](#) to help potential buyers find products faster.
- Make sure [your brand name is being used in mobile search](#) to help increase brand visibility.

- Check that [your site's breadcrumbs are being picked up](#) by search and displayed again for easier user navigation.
- Make sure your hard-made [product videos can easily be found and displayed](#).
- Get your [products more visibility in search](#) with product mark-up. This can help increase traffic directly to the product pages and increase sales.
- Make sure [your prospects are seeing what great things current customers and buyers are saying](#) about your business and products.

Responsive Website

- Check your website's responsiveness** – You can check to see if your website is appropriately responsive [with a tool from Google](#). If you find it's not, we recommend discussing with your web team about making it responsive

Broken Links

- Check for broken links** – there are lots of free tools that can do this (including through your Google Search Console which we recommend as being the first place to direct your web team to). Broken links are bad for when search engine's crawl your site and for user experience so you need to make sure your eCommerce website has as few as possible.
- Amend broken links** – Once you've found these links you need to fix them. There are many ways to do this but we recommend having your web team look at the source of the broken link and fixing it from there.

Page Load Speed

- Check page load times** – How quickly your pages load impacts your visibility in search. There are [lots of studies performed on this](#) and you need to make sure your eCommerce website loads as quickly as possible. Use [tools that are available](#) to do this - Google also [provides a tool to check page speed](#) times. Action the recommendations from these tools and continue to monitor to improve it.

Name, Address and Phone Number

- On every page** – Make sure your name, address and phone number are included on every page of the site. It's very important to make sure your NAP (Name, Address and Phone Number) are accurate wherever your brand is mentioned including across your site. Google goes looking for this information and uses it as a 'flag' matching up brand information where it finds it. This is good for you and your business.

CONTENT CHECKLIST

Keyword Usage

- Keyword overuse** – Don't go to town on stuffing in those keywords. Check that you're not repeating yourself and read aloud blocks of text. Do they sound unnatural? Are there particular words that are being repeated that make what you're reading sound unnatural or manipulated?
- Keyword placement** – Remember to check keywords and phrases are included in the important places. These are page title tag, page meta description, in the copy of the page, image ALT text and heading tag.

Product Pages

- Unique not manufacturer** – Never use the manufacturer's description of the product. You'll be joining the band known as 'the majority' if you do so. Be unique, reflect your brand's culture in the way you speak online to personalise the buying experience.
- As much information as possible** – Don't just include the basics; provide as much information as you can on the product. Think about what the customer cares about and what they'll really want to know beyond on the obvious. Look at your competitors' product content and ask yourself "what questions do I have that they don't answer?"

- Include USPs** – As well as your product having USPs you as an online retailer also have USPs – remember to include and emphasise these. You should be answering the question “why should I buy this product from you and not your competitor?” Don’t just rely on price, there are many other reasons buyers will purchase from an online store.
- Focus on delivery** – Delivery is one of the most important aspects of the online shopping experience and there’s clear evidence that [competition on getting products to consumers](#) quickly is getting hotter and hotter. Do you offer free delivery? Next-day fulfilment? What else makes your delivery service special of unique?
- Content** – Don’t do what everyone else does. Include more imagery, more perspectives of the product, create your own imagery, make videos, demo the products and anything else you can think of to make what you offer stand out from everyone else.
- Upsell** – Upselling your products can also be a great revenue generator. It’s not news that upselling can be [20 times more effective](#) than cross-selling online. Make sure you’re integrating this into your product page offering.
- Cross-sell** – Have you included cross-sell opportunities? What products may go well with your product? Amazon reports that [up to 35% of their revenue](#) comes from cross-selling products.
- Social signals** – Make sure that users and customers can share your product pages. Provide a way for them to spread the word through their own channels by including them on the product pages.
- Product reviews** – Don’t forget to check you can receive product reviews on the page, display them and mark them up with [review structured data](#). This will help click-through, [help increase purchases and get you more visibility](#).

Category Pages

- Have copy** – Don't leave your category pages hanging without copy. Copy provides context and information not only to search engines but users too. It offers somewhere to reinforce your USPs, tell the user what you have on offer and many other useful items.
- Symbology** – Use symbology to improve the user experience. Are there products with free delivery? Perhaps there are products with discounts available or special offers? Make sure you make these obvious to the user.
- Filtering options** – Make sure you have a strong, user-friendly filtering capability. There are SEO obligations to filtering however having them available in the first place is a requirement. There are various ways to filter your products within a category page depending on your CMS or shopping platform.

Information Pages

- Unique content** – Make sure your information pages are also unique. Copying and pasting standard terms and conditions from another website may seem like a good idea, but it's easy to accidentally copy across inaccurate information. Plus, although it may seem like an insignificant page compared to the money-makers, these pages can still cause duplicate content.
- Basic on-page optimisation** – Make sure these pages aren't missed in terms of basic on-page SEO practices. Make sure the title tags are unique, meta descriptions are unique, the page uses heading tags and good formatting.
- Law and legalities** – Make sure you're up to scratch on the law. Check your website clearly displays an address and contact details, maintains correct legalities on [returns and refunds](#), [distance selling regulations](#), [data protection](#) and of course the [EU laws](#).

OFF PAGE OPTIMISATION CHECKLIST

Promotion

- Check local listings** – Research what your local council offers in terms of online business listings, check good quality local business directories and make sure your name, address and telephone number (NAP) are all equal and match across every mention of your brand and location.
- Email subscription** – Check that you have a way for potential customers to stay in the loop on what you have to offer by using email subscription and doing a regular newsletter or email. This will gradually build up a database of contacts for you to push out offers, updates and new products.
- Create a blog** – Having a blog where you can interact with potential customers, build a repertoire with them and share news is an excellent way to promote your online store. Regularly updating it with useful, practical information that educates and entertains will gain you a loyal following over time.
- Paid advertising** – From pushing products, to sales and brand awareness, experimenting with paid advertising can really help your eCommerce store get promoted and get traction. This is especially true for new businesses or those expanding into new markets.
- Use social media** – Promote your news, blog articles, offers, discounts and new products through the various social media channels. This provides another touch point and another avenue from which to gain visibility, build authority and generate revenue. Engaging with people on social media also shows you're active and not stagnant, in turn generating good trust signals which will help your sales and long-term visibility in search engines.

Need help with your eCommerce SEO?

- If you're not getting the results you want from your SEO, contact our experts on 0845 123 2753 or info@vertical-leap.uk. We've been working with eCommerce companies for 15 years so you'll be in safe hands.