



How does SEO actually work?

What you need to know about SEO, SEA, Search Engine Marketing – and about working with an SEO agency

Let's go!

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What does SEO mean and how does it work?

SEO: the fuel your website runs on

Search engine marketing is the total of all measures for and on a website favouring its position in search engines. This in turn promotes the visibility and reach of your website, allowing you a better chance to achieve the following goals, amongst others:

- increase traffic and retention rates on your website,
- increase the profile of your brand ,
- provide information on products,
- increase sales and/or subscriptions,
- generate downloads and leads,
- prompt newsletter registrations or seminar participations,
- engage in Employer Branding,
- reveal strategic goals and milestones of your company,
- show stronger presence at relevant events such as fairs or conventions.



“These days a website without SEO optimisation is hardly able to stand up to optimized websites in search engine indices.”

Annika Theil
SEO/SEA Expert, Campaign Manager

Very little visibility without SEO: these are the reasons

When a user types in a search query, the search engine doesn't search the World Wide Web, but its own index. Just as happens in a library this represents an auto-generated index of keywords that shortens the time it takes to display results. In order to establish this index and to keep it up to date, specific software programmes, called crawlers or robots, trawl the content available on the Internet and integrate page by page into the index of their search engine.

In those search engine indices the content is arranged in a hierarchical order following specific algorithms. Whether search results display your website at the very top, further down or not at all on the first results page – in short: your ranking success! – depends on the hierarchy of the content within the index. If your website doesn't appear on the first results page users will hardly be aware of it.

→ **Good to know:** even if you provide good user-relevant content, with a bad ranking you're unable to serve the information needs of those searching for information. In terms of traffic and other targets of your website you won't reach your potential.



„Got any questions or feedback? Don't hesitate to get in touch with us!“

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Make the parameters of search engine marketing work for you

Luckily, search engine marketing offers a number of parameters allowing optimal indexation, resulting in an improved ranking success for your website.

SEO can be split into on-page and off-page.

On-page measures:

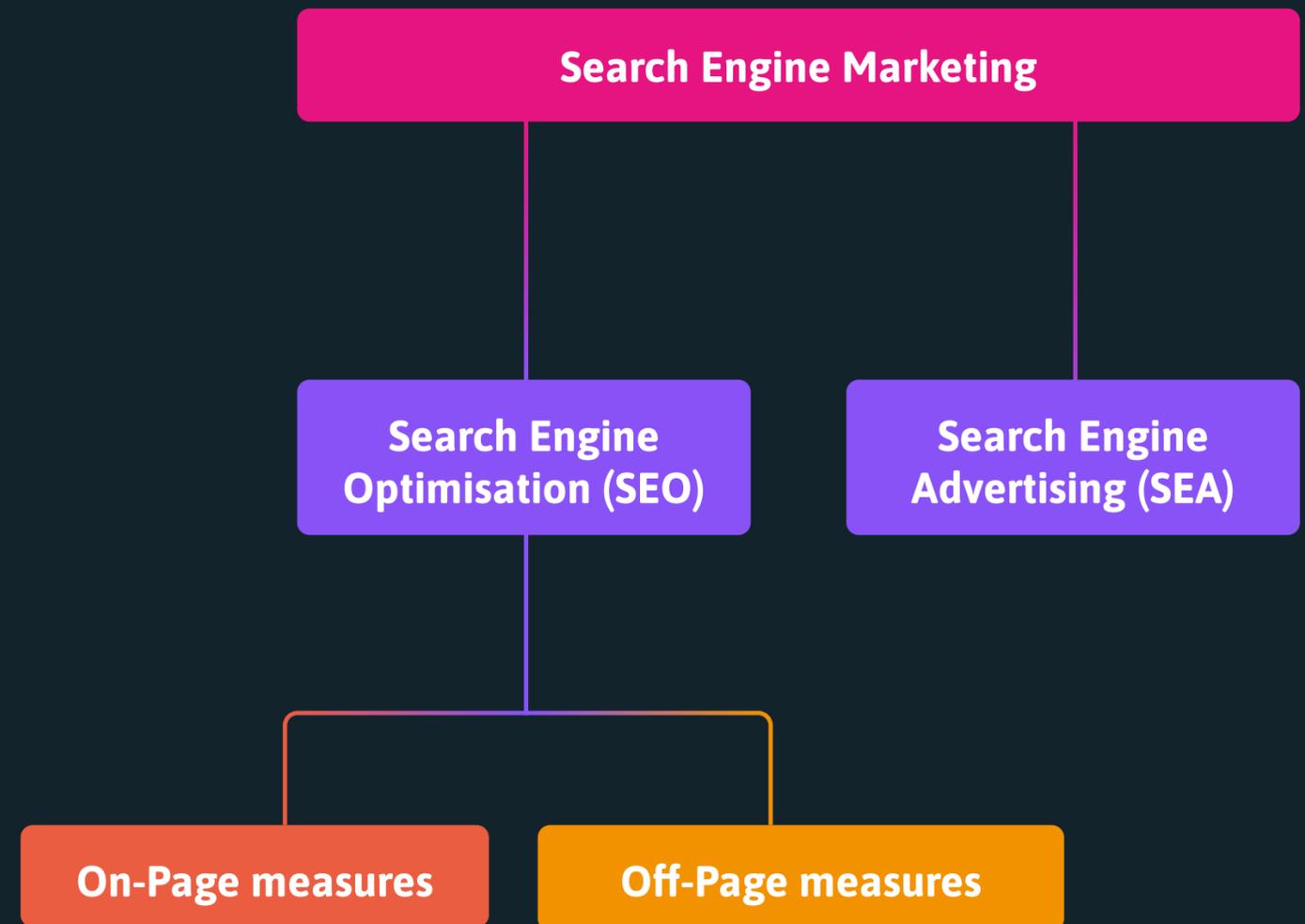
- Status quo analysis of the technical implementation
- Keyword research and recommendations
- Development of on-page recommended procedures
- Rerouting planning for relaunches
- Text analysis and optimisation
- Loading times analysis
- Observation and recommendations on user experience
- Ongoing SEO consulting on blog or content maintenance

OffPage-Maßnahmen:

- Ranking analysis and regular reporting
- Observing search engine positions over time
- Backlink analysis

→ **Our tip:** mesh your SEO and content strategy – there is no content marketing without SEO.

SEO and SEA: two central elements of search engine marketing



What does SEA mean and why is it important?

SEA (Search Engine Advertising) refers to measures for a website. SEA supports you in increasing your reach in an efficient way, and to use advertising to hone the targeting. Using a fixed budget, ads in various formats are tried out in search engines. In ads/text advertising, ads are published on search engine results pages in the publicity slots marked "Advertising".

Possible goals of a SEA Campaign:

- increasing reach
 - brand awareness
 - clicks and conversions
 - creating visibility for pages that can't (yet) be ranked organically on the basis of your keywords,
 - creating attention for topics currently of interest to your members
- **Our tip:** use your team of SEA experts to develop a SEA strategy to define the relevant goals, formats, networks and timings.



Search Engine Marketing: Areas of Application, Chances and Limitations

Keywords are essential

Choosing the right keywords, synonyms and combinations including search intent is essential for the success of SEO measures. Search engines are unable to recognise thematic connections unless relevant keywords have been integrated into the text. The rules here are:

- The text has to be relevant to the target area.
- It mustn't be too short.
- It has to follow an SEO-compatible layout – which may lead to conflicts with the design.

Technical integration of texts: just as important as their content

In addition to keywords and relevant content your text has to comply with a series of additional SEO criteria, including

- a speaking URL for the (sub) page,
- meta texts,
- a clear headline hierarchy,
- short paragraphs,
- a mobile-first optimized layout,
- added value through (moving) images and info graphics, as well as
- SEO-compatible image labelling and ALT texts with keywords.

Measure, act... then measure again

SEO is no switch to simply throw. In fact, SEO measures require

- expertise for the analysis of your website data,
- strategic thinking,
- know-how for selecting the keywords and setting up your website along SEO lines,
- an adequate time frame

Before deciding on measures you need to always ensure a good grasp of the status quo of the website (e.g. on-page), to rectify errors and create an optimised base for indexing. Measuring and retrospective assessment are absolutely essential for the success of the measures you take.

- **Our tip:** Establish an iterative mindset to create a productive circuit of measuring, acting, measuring and improving.
- **Your benefit:** data-based, constantly improved SEO provides mid- to long-term success with excellent potential to result in a high Return on Investment (ROI).

Synergies between SEO, SEA and Social-Media Marketing

Use the booster effect of SEA. Not only do you create more attention for your website, there is also a connection between SEA activities and the ranking of your website. Placing SEA ads involves the following steps:

- developing a strategy,
- keyword research,
- set-up,
- iterative monitoring and optimisation,
- reporting.

Use the relevant social media to place social signals on your website. This involves organic Social Media Marketing and paid-media ads.

→ **Our tip:** involve experts in your content marketing. Expert authors (EAT) ensure credibility, strengthen your skillset, and depending on their profile level work as multipliers, EAT can be considered for long-form content on your website and for citations in social media.

This is what you may expect from your SEO agency

An SEO service may involve the following steps:

- support in defining goals and target groups
- advising on SEO strategies and the suitable marketing mix for funnel marketing
- supervision of launch and relaunch
- data-based analysis
- on-page analysis and status quo survey
- performance analyses
- joint development of an SEO and keyword strategy
- keyword research and assessment
- training the editorial team
- SEO content optimisation
- quality management
- action plans
- reporting and monitoring

→ **Good to know:** while SEO-related plug-ins are useful tools, they don't replace real human SEO services.

SEO-Best practices

A number of SEO action steps may place you in situations where you have to take decisions, through conflicts with design requirements for instance, or if there are unrealistic expectations. Let us explain the best course of action here.

Design versus SEO

A page can only ever be as good as its texts and technical set-up. However, that often clashes with design ambitions: it's rare to be able to place a lot of text in a modern design heavily reliant on moving images. The tension between web design and SEO is as old as SEO itself.

→ **Our unequivocal recommendation:** only that which is present on a page, whether in the source text or at content level can point search engines to topics to be used for indexing the site. Make sure that the less space there is for text, the more concise the phrasing needs to be. To have no text at all is not an option.

Linking the technical and content aspects

Content is good. Truly excellent content is better. When updating content make sure most of all to provide your pages with unique meta information. Keep to established standards and avoid images sizes above 400 KB.

→ **There is a saying amongst us SEOs:** a webpage doesn't have to be pretty in order to achieve high rankings. And that's true. However, isn't it a lot nicer if your website is pretty **and** successful?

Your website – a living creature

You feed your website with content, images and information. You observe its behaviour and its performance in situations of competition, correcting certain behavioural patterns to exploit its full potential. You learn how to deal with your webpage and how to look after it. In doing so you acquire skills that after a short time will become near-automatic.

→ **Our tip:** regard your website as a living creature and optimize its performance by recognising unused potential and turning it into performance growth.

Unite good ideas and good keywords

Any subject is only as concise and promising as its keyword research. Any assessment has to start here. Don't get us wrong: by wanting to publish good content you've already taken a great step on the path to a sterling performance. Now all you need is to actively steer this potential, for instance by choosing the right keywords and combinations, and by finding the suitable mix of generic and specific keywords. This shouldn't come at the expense of your editorial team's creativity: give ideas a chance that haven't (yet) generated any search volume, and observe how this unusual and/or very specific content is performing.

→ **Our tip:** make sure to train and accompany your editorial team in this. Turn keywords into a part of your creative process. They should enter the content in a natural and relevant way. Keyword research is a part of content strategy and content marketing. We'll help you in taking the step towards improving performance in a conscious, informed and planned manner!

Data-based analysis and monitoring

Generating clicks and visits is gratifying. Beyond that it is helpful to also know what retains visitors on our websites, what interests and fascinates them. This is a good base for you to keep developing your content.

→ **Our tip:** find breaks for content reviews and analysis, learn from user behaviour and adjust your marketing measures using the iteration method. This allows you to identify chances and to identify errors early enough to counter them.

Managing expectations: SEO means sowing and reaping

SEO represents a mid- and long term investment with a high ROI if measures are executed, observed and processed correctly. In-house this often means clarifying this when discussing the issue with other stakeholders: in contrast to paid measures, SEO measures don't show an immediately visible effect but pay off only in the long run.

→ **Our tip:** allow the right agency to get your back. Depending on the project a few months in you'll already start seeing an upswing in your visibility. With SEO in particular, quality and realistic expectations take centre stage.



Think in interdisciplinary terms

You'll need a large range of skills to make your content marketing shine. These include:

- a broad-minded team for text, visual design and video, producing good content
 - know-how in researching and using keywords so that the content doesn't read stilted, yet contains everything that search engines need to classify it properly
 - know-how on technical SEO to ensure optimised content is flawlessly integrated, marked and ranked
 - Specialised expertise on design and technical implementation of the website to provide it with an optimised page structure. This is the supreme SEO discipline.
- **Our tip:** be convincing – with content that is reliable and informative as well as produced by authors who have made a name for themselves in their field of expertise.

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If it's digital, then go Rheindigital. We're happy to advise you on your website project, whether to accompany the SEO for a launch or relaunch, content marketing and optimisation or to provide knowledge transfer to your editorial team.



Frequent SEO mistakes

Those starting out in search engine optimizing and marketing will often come across wrong or outdated assumptions. Let's set the record straight here:

“The most important keywords are those the customer reckons to be the most important.”

Yes and no. Customers are much deeper inside the subject than their target groups, which can make them a little “blinded by detail” sometimes. Keywords that they deem to be important often reflect exclusively the view of an expert, to the detriment of a more generic perspective. However, the question “What is somebody looking for who finds me?” is an indispensable part of keyword research.

“SEO is something to do alongside other stuff.”

No, SEO is a discipline of its own, requiring time, care and technical skills. Which is why pitches have to include explicit figures on SEO.

“We’ve been doing SEO for two weeks now, how is it I’m not ranked number one yet?”

SEO is a long-term marketing tool. It takes months, if not years of targeted measures to occupy the top positions based on generic relevant keywords.

“SEO doesn’t involve much more than placing invisible keywords on the page?”

This misinformation stems from the early days of SEO where white keywords were placed on a white background, and Google understood that items had to be filed in the relevant place. Today this procedure is not only NOT recommended, but is in fact penalized.

“I’ve heard of PageRank, is that the same thing as SEO?”

For a long time PageRank existed as an assessment criterium, an internal ranking system. This algorithm hasn't been used for a good while now.

“The agency I used to work with said they would get me up to no. 1 in two weeks.”

The SEO industry in particular has its share of black sheep that will make these claims. SEO is a long-term strategy and not done and dusted over the course of a couple of weeks.

“SEO texts always make awful reading.”

“SEO texts” often has negative connotations as many agencies favour texts that contain many keywords but sound stilted and artificial. We would advise to choose high-quality editorial content that is researched based on data and optimized for search engines and the customers' specific strategic goals.

“SEO is like throwing a switch.”

If you're talking about an SEO-compatible mindset then this might be true – after the relevant training and first positive experiences. These result in rethinking towards user relevance, keywords and text structure. However, developing, implementing, observing and improving an SEO-/SEA strategy is time-intensive and will only pay off in the mid-term. It's not a switch to be simply thrown, but a process.

“SEO is just text.”

No. Content forms a large part of the whole. SEO involves many different activities, including:

- analysis (on-page and rankings)
- monitoring
- image optimisation
- marking up and tags
- optimisation of loading times
- expert authors (EAT) principles
- mobile optimisation

“SEO? That’s all a rip-off.”

No. SEO as part of online marketing enjoys some of the highest ROI in the business. A fair number of black sheep do exist, but the professional measures of SEO are permitted and are not penalised by Google, as long as they serve the optimisation of quality and relevance of the page.

“SEO is not necessary.”

Today, there is no marketing mix that can afford to ignore SEO really. If you run one or several websites you should deploy SEO measures.

“My regular competitors are also my SEO competitors.”

Yes and no. An overlap is possible, but the competitors vying with your company for the same positions in the search result lists are not always the same as those in real life.

“For SEO I’ll write the keywords into the source text.”

In the past people would work with what was known as meta keywords to provide the search engines directly with indicators as to which words might be indexed. Today meta keywords are largely ignored.

“The more keywords on my page, the better.”

The primary idea here isn’t about the number or density of the keywords, but their quality, meaning and topical relevance. Qualified keyword research and selection are the be-all-and-end-all of SEO and mustn’t be neglected.

“Positions on page 2 of the Google results aren’t bad either.”

True, as it could be a lot worse. However, there is a saying among SEO folks that “page 2 is where we hide dead bodies”, as nobody looks further than page 2. This saying refers to the fact that those looking for information and users of search engines rarely look beyond the first ten results – which is where in most cases they’ll find the answers to the questions that made them start researching.

“My website is done, and for the time being it’s going to stay like this.”

There is a saying amongst us online marketers: a website is never finished. This also applies to content and SEO: we recommend an iterative mindset: publish content, observe rankings, draw conclusions, test additional approaches, publish, observe ... This means that work on a website is never complete. It grows and flourishes with our input, as if it were a living being almost.

@ Any questions left to answer? [Do get in touch!](#)

Our SEO checklist for you

SEO is a very individual proposition and highly dependent on your strategic goal and focus. There are a few tips however that we can give you here, to set you on your way:



Do you feel this is still all a bit double Dutch? Or not in-depth enough actually? Would you like to know what other aspects you have to watch out for in terms of SEO? We'll gladly advise you on everything and anything to do with SEO, SEA and data-driven marketing.

 Area of Application	To-Dos	
Keyword research: indispensable for editorial website content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Define your SEO strategy goal ✓ Choose keywords with the suitable search intent and sufficient search volume ✓ Create a mix of generic and specific keywords 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make sure relevant keywords are spread to a natural distribution pattern ✓ Write up good meta and ALT texts as well as captions ✓ Monitor success ✓ Adjust measures if needed
File names: sounds fiddly but this is essential!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The file names contain relevant keywords. ✓ These reflect the thematic link. ✓ They are written to a uniform standard. ✓ The file names contain no special characters apart from separators, and no umlauts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Modern file formats were chosen. ✓ Navigational and URL structures are speaking [ones] and filed accordingly. ✓ With multilingual websites: use separate file names for each language..
Mark-up: the must-haves at backend level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Outgoing links are marked nofollow. ✓ ALT and Title attributes are being managed. ✓ Images have been given information on width and height. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Containers are not only <div>. ✓ Robot information in the source text are meaningful.
On-page SEO: a selection of the most important to-dos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Robots.txt and, if applicable access files are properly managed. ✓ Canonical tags follow a logical structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Title and meta descriptions were chosen to be relevant and unique.flegt.
Accompanying launch and relaunch: how to ensure success for your refresh project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There is a page hierarchy with associated strategic goals. ✓ You have a re-routing plan in place. ✓ You have identified risks and decided on to-dos. ✓ You have defined standards and a quality management strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You have briefed the project partners. ✓ You have made a start on funnel marketing measures.



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