

SEO FOUNDATIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS

The Tips and Tricks
of Search Engine Optimization



TemplateMonster

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What is This All About?

Hey there! If you're reading this book, chances are you're a novice site owner, and, obviously, you want to gen up on SEO. If that's correct, read on, and soon you'll know enough to start conquering search engines.



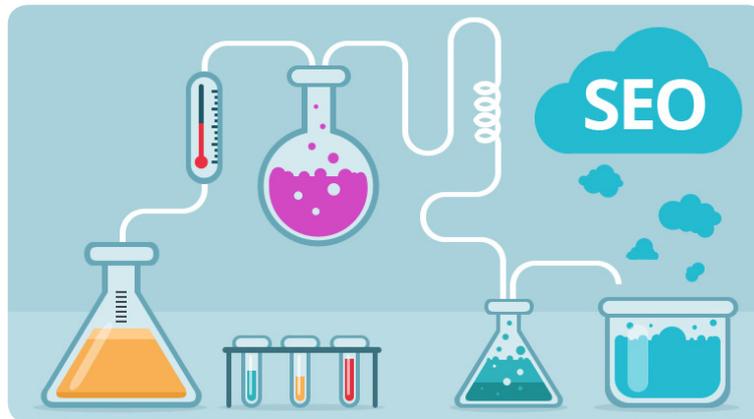
While working on this tutorial, we strived to cover every SEO-related question a beginner may want to ask. For starters, you probably wonder if search engine optimization is really that important for your business, and if you can teach yourself SEO (the short answers to these two questions are “yes” and “yes” 😊). Of course, we'll cover these (as well as other questions) in greater detail.

In case you're already familiar with the fundamentals of search engine optimization, we'll also include several useful sources with advanced tips and tricks. To find them, go to page 27. Besides, you will find lots of useful stuff while reading the guides from [Startup Hub](#). For instance, check out these SEO tips for [Wordpress](#), [PrestaShop](#), and [Joomla](#):

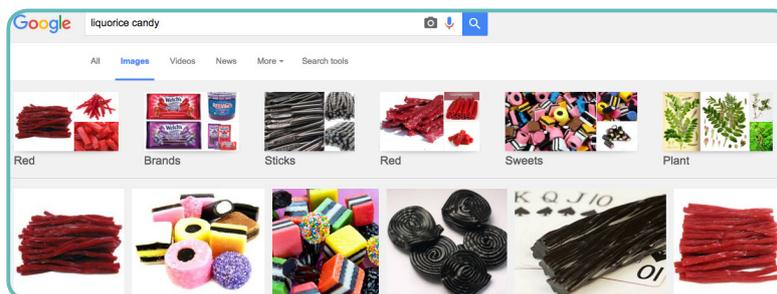


A Quick Intro to the Very Basics

It's 2016, and pretty much everyone knows that "SEO" stands for "search engine optimization". But what exactly does this mean? Moreover, why is it so important for your business? Actually, it'll make more sense if we start with the second question.



Search Engines and Candy Shops



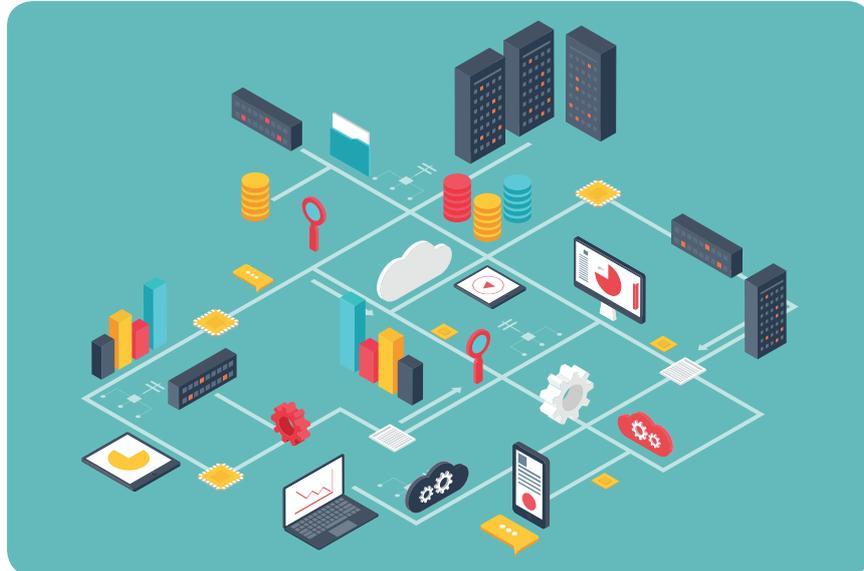
Say, you own a shop that sells craft liquorice candy. Naturally, you'd want to advertise, but how exactly are you going to do this? Given the fact that relatively few people have a taste for liquorice, any means of mass advertising (like billboards, flyers, or commercials for TV and radio) might turn out a waste of money. With a product like that, you'd want to target a specific audience of liquorice fans

Luckily, that's exactly where SEO comes in handy!

To reach your ideal customers, you can get a website (or an e-store) and optimize it for relevant search queries (like "buy craft liquorice candy"). If you do everything right, people will see your site every time they use Google, Bing, or some other search engine to find a nearby liquorice candy shop. Thanks to the fact that these people are intentionally looking for the products you sell, they are more likely to become your customers.

Of course, the same principle works for other kinds of products or services, as well as non-e-commerce projects.

The Workings of Search Engines



If you feel like our candy shop scenario sounds a bit idealized, you're 100% right. In real life, you will have to compete with other candy shop owners whose websites will show up on Google's search results page along with your site. Besides, you'd have to do a bit more than optimize your site for a particular set of phrases that people type into Google.

However, with the right SEO strategy you can still get a decent visibility when it comes to particular customers and particular search queries. To reach that goal, you need to understand how search engines work, and how they rank websites. A description of the four core functions of search engines is available below:

1 Scanning the Web

Have you ever wondered how search engines get the information about web pages, their content, updates, and links to other sites? To collect this data, they use programs called "spiders" or "crawlers". Crawlers scan web pages (and other online documents, like images and PDFs) and provide search engines with the data needed to create systematized "maps" of the web.

2 Storing the Data

As of today, there are more than 999,000,000 websites, which means search engines have to process tons (or, scientifically speaking, *zettabytes*) of data on a regular basis. To store the data collected and indexed by crawlers, search engine companies build server facilities all around the globe.

3 Answering Our Questions

Search engines create huge catalogs of the indexed web pages and constantly update them with new data. Every time an Internet user inputs a search query, a search engine fetches a list of web pages that contain the most relevant and comprehensive answers. Such lists take the form of search engine pages (SERP).

The order in which web pages appear on SERPs depends on the relevance of their content to a particular query, as well as other factors that relate to the quality and popularity of a website.

4 Ranking Websites

To provide high-quality answers for every query, search engines need to ensure they suggest original, relevant, and well-crafted content from trusted websites. To do this, they evaluate and rank web pages and websites based on multiple complex algorithms.

The websites optimized in accordance with these algorithms get higher rankings. As a result, they appear higher on search engine result pages and get more high-value traffic (real “potential customers”).

As of today, the algorithms applied by different search engine companies include more than 200 factors related to websites, as well their content, audience, and information structure. Search engines constantly update their ranking algorithms making them more sophisticated and harder to manipulate. The list of such factors is available from [Moz](#) and [Search Engine Land](#):



The Simple Science Behind SEO-Friendliness



If you've read the description of the search engine workings in the previous chapter, you can already tell what the concept of "SEO-friendliness" is all about. In essence, your site is SEO-friendly if the following is true:

- Search engines can easily process the structure of your website and its web pages.
- You only post non-plagiarised, high-quality content that is relevant to your customers' search queries.
- You keep your website updated in accordance with the latest changes in the search engine algorithms.

Besides, there are additional factors that companies like Google or Yahoo use to assess the quality of your website, as well as the quality of the user experience you offer.

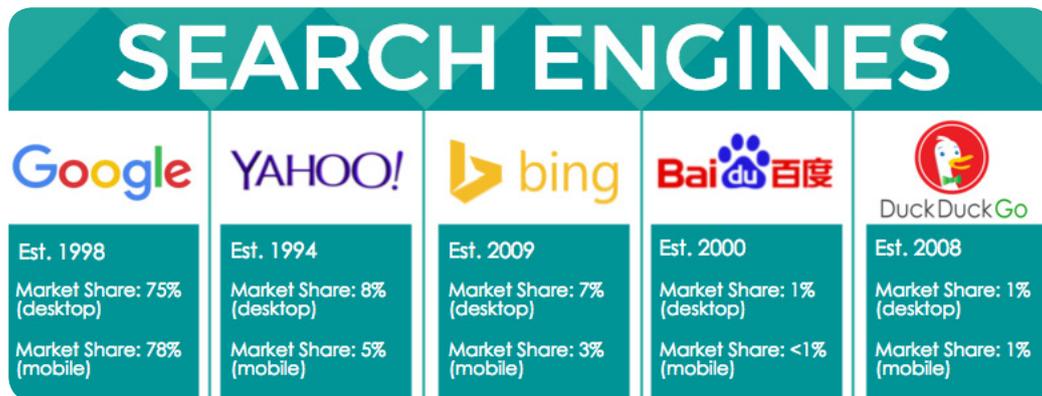
- Your visitors don't bounce off immediately after landing on your site from search engine result pages.
- There are links from third-party websites and blogs that lead to your site. The popularity of these sites also affects your search engine rankings
- Your site loads fast, uses responsive mobile-friendly design, and provides awesome user experience.

The more SEO-friendly your site is, the better it ranks and the more customers you get. While it certainly takes an experienced SEO professional to handle large projects, smaller sites are a lot easier to optimize. The fundamentals of SEO outlined further will help you get started with search engine optimization for your own website.

Search Engines Comparison

You probably know that Google is the key player in the search engine market. But what about other brands?

While most optimization tactics that work for Google will work for other major search engines as well, you might wonder if it makes sense to prioritize customers that land on your site from Bing or, say, DuckDuckGo. To get a general picture, have a look at the comparison of the market shares of several well-known search engines:



You can always get updates on the state of the search engine market from Search Engine Land, Moz, Search Engine Journal, or similar resources. In fact, the chart above is based on a report from Search Engine Land 📊. Naturally, you can also use Google Analytics to see how a particular search engine works for your site. However, with a 99% probability, Google will be the primary tool that your visitors use to find your site, so we'll focus on this search engine.

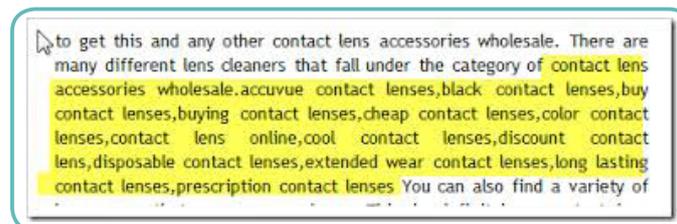
Keywords and Keyword Research



Keywords are the phrases that people type in the search bar of their browsers when looking for something particular on the Internet. To optimize for such phrases, you can use them in various parts of your website. This includes the following:

- you text content (product descriptions, blog posts, marketing texts, etc);
- the URLs of your web pages (the “address” that you can see in the address bar of your browser);
- the <alt> tags used for images;
- title and meta description elements in the HTML code of your page (don't worry, we'll detail on these a bit later).

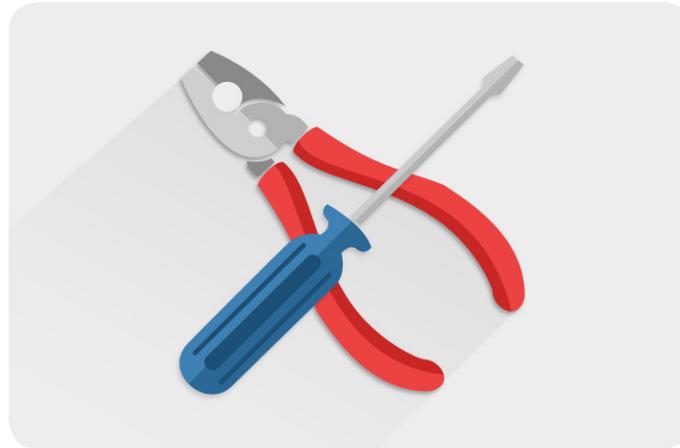
In the past, SEO specialists were notorious for overstuffing texts with keywords. Even a couple of years ago it wasn't uncommon to see something like this:



Thank goodness, those dark times of SEO are long gone. The keyword-related SEO techniques became subtler thanks to the fact that search engine algorithms got extremely sophisticated. This means **you no longer have to cram your web pages with dozens of weird-looking phrases** – instead, you should strive for a natural feel when working on your content.

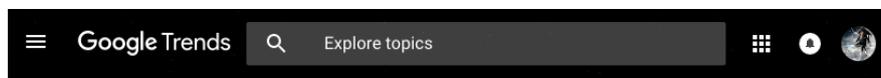
This also means you need to invest more time and effort into keyword research if you want your website (and your business) to succeed. Ideally, you should build a huge list of keywords associated with your business or product and sieve out the ones that are less likely to bring you customers. Read on to learn about the SEO tips, as well as the tools that can help you do this.

Keyword Tools



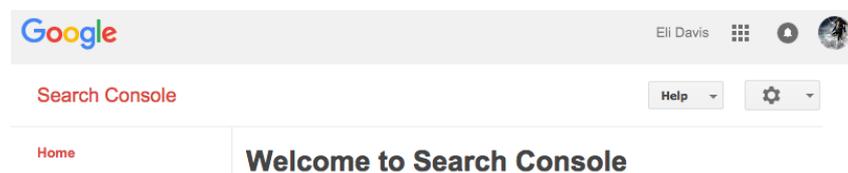
Almost every keyword research implies assessing the traffic volume behind every particular search query. Another thing that you'll need to familiarize yourself with is grouping related keywords. Here are the popular online tools that you will use when analyzing the search queries and keywords:

Google Trends



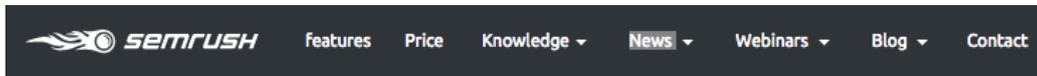
Google Trends can help you monitor the search volume associated with a given keyword. In other words, you can see how many people use a particular phrase to search for products, services, or content. Ideally, you need to aim for the keywords that are popular, yet aren't too general and/or overused by your competitors.

Google Search Console



Formerly known as Google Webmaster Tools (GWT), Google Search Console provides you with all kinds of data related to the search traffic that comes to your website. This tool provides you with insights into what queries work better for your business and helps you identify various SEO-related problems that your website might have. You can get a detailed beginner-friendly review of [Search Console from Moz](#) or directly from [Google](#).

SEMrush



SEMrush is a competitor analysis service that provides you with insights into the keyword strategies used by other businesses in your niche. To learn more about this online tool, have a look at this [quick video tutorial](#) created by the SEMrush team. The video is less than three minutes long, and it provides a great introduction to all the basic concepts.

SEO Review Tools



The keyword suggestion service from [seoreviewtools.com](#) is great for anyone seeking to build a primary list of keywords. The service automatically suggests trending keyword variations that you can use for your SEO campaign. Moreover, it lets you target search phrases by location and incorporates the basic results from Google Trends.

Buzzsumo



Use Buzzsumo to research trending topics and content formats that get the most social shares. Besides, you can use this tool to see how many people repost your content or [to generate content ideas](#) for your future posts. The basic functionality of Buzzsumo is available for free, but there's also a paid version of the service for more in-depth research.

Keywords-Related Tips from SEO Experts



Let's get back to our candy shop example. What keywords would you choose to target people with a taste for craft liquorice candy? As a shop owner, you have to come up with something specific and relevant if you want to get the right users. Here are several recommendations from [SEO experts](#) to help you get started:

1 Focus on the Purchase-Oriented Keywords

Make sure the search terms that you optimize for reflect the actual needs of your customers. For instance, "liquorice candy" and other general phrases imply recipes, Wikipedia-style articles, and other stuff that isn't directly tied to our shop. For this reason, it's wiser to aim for the queries that include words like "buy", "purchase", "order", etc.

2 Watch for Your Competitors

Use SEMrush or similar tools to find out what keyword strategies work for your competitors. Similar companies tend to optimize for the same search queries, which means it would be wise to see if there is a great deal of competition for a given search query. This way you'll be able to forecast the likelihood of success, as well as how much time it takes to optimize for a given keyword.

3 Create Keyword Groups

As a rule, you'd want to place multiple keywords on every web page. According to [Cyrus Shepard](#) from Moz, a good way to group keywords implies using close synonyms, as well as related phrases. To collect such related phrases, use the keyword suggestion tool from [seoreviewtools.com](#).

4 Assess the Value of Every Keyword

At this point, you're probably asking yourself if there is a way of knowing if a particular keyword can actually bring you customers. As a matter of fact, there is – if you can afford to buy a sample [Google AdWords](#) campaign.

To estimate the value of a particular keyword, use it for an AdWords ad that links to a landing page built around the same keyword. As soon as the ad gets more than 200 clicks, use Google Analytics to calculate how many people made a purchase after having clicked on it. If the number is good enough for you, optimising for the same word will definitely prove a worthy idea.

5 Prioritize Long-Tail Keywords

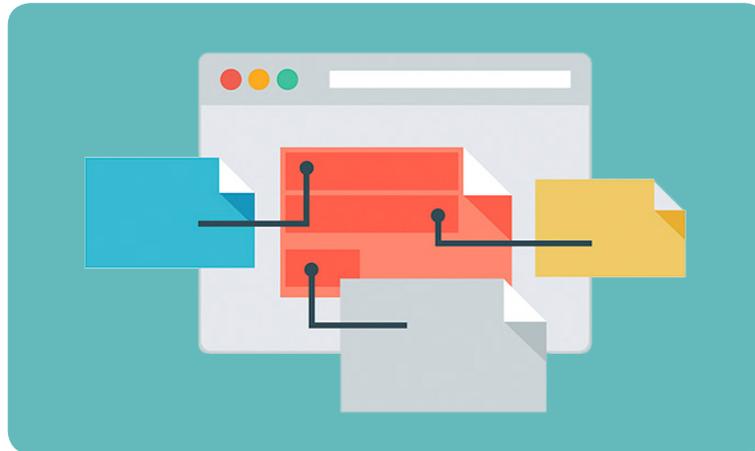
“Long tail” is more than just a buzzword that SEO specialists have been crazy about lately. In a nutshell, long tail keywords are longer phrases that correspond to a more specific purchase intent. For instance, if your shop is located in Portland, optimizing for something like “buy craft liquorice candy in Portland” is the way to go.

6 Think Like a Customer

Just like in the case of other activities related to digital marketing, your success with SEO depends on your ability to build [buyer personas](#). Learning about your audience's interests, values, and lifestyle will prove useful when you start searching for the right keywords. For instance, you may discover that most of your customers prefer the “licorice” spelling variant when working on your buyer personas. As you can expect, this will influence your choice of keywords.

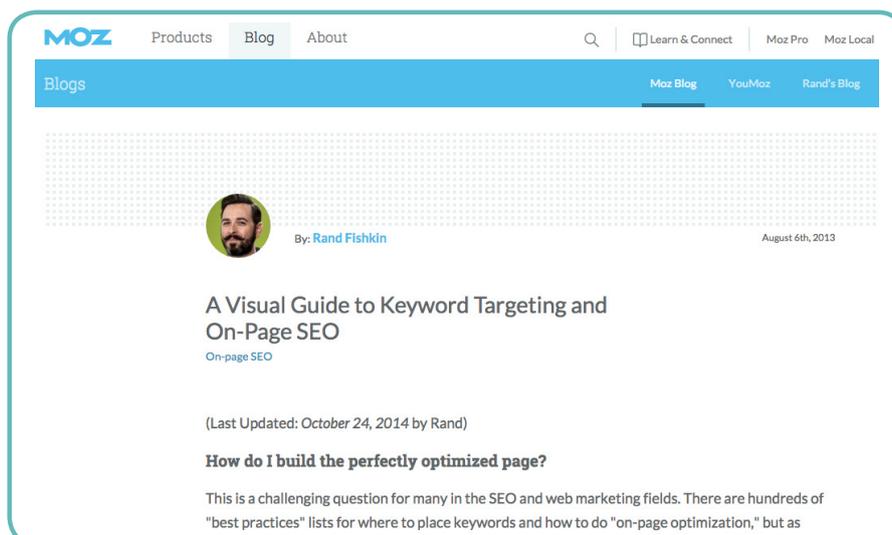
On-Page SEO

In the beginning of the previous chapter, we talked about the parts of a web page where you can place your keywords. Let's go into detail about that.



Title and Meta Description Elements

We'll start with the two pieces of content, that your clients stumble across on a search engine results page before clicking on a link that leads to your site. These pieces of content are the SEO-friendly text that you use for <title> and <meta> tags in your HTML. While this may sound too techy, these two elements are easy to work with. To make things simpler, we'll use a real-life example:



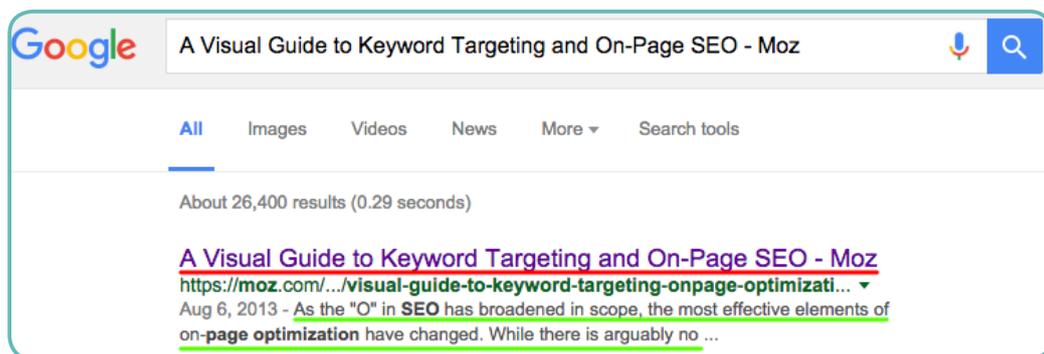
Open [this link](#) in your browser. As you can see, it is a post on moz.com entitled "A Visual Guide to Keyword Targeting and On-Page SEO". Right click on the post and select "View Page Source" in the context menu. This way, you will open the HTML code of the page in a new browser tab. Have a look at it. What you need to focus on are the lines number 5 and 7:

```

1 <!DOCTYPE html>
2 <!--[if lt IE 9]> <html class="oldie"> <![endif]-->
3 <!--[if gt IE 10]><!--> <html> <!--<![endif]-->
4 <head>
5 <title>A Visual Guide to Keyword Targeting and On-Page SEO - Moz</title>
6 <link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml" title="RSS 2.0"
  href="http://feedpress.me/mozblog" />
7 <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1" /> <meta
  name="description" content="As the &quot;O&quot; in SEO has broadened in scope, the
  most effective elements of on-page optimization have changed. While there is arguably
  no &quot;perfectly optimized page,&quot; this update to a 2009 post provides a
  comprehensive guide to steer you in the right direction." />
8
9 <link rel="canonical" href="https://moz.com/blog/visual-guide-to-keyword-targeting-
  onpage-optimization" />

```

Now, copy the text between <title> and </title> tags on line 5, paste it into Google, and hit Enter. You'll see a search engine result page that looks like this:



See how the title of the first search result from Google is identical to the text between <title> and </title> tags in the HTML? Now compare the description (marked green in the image above) with the content of the second <meta> tag on line 7:

```

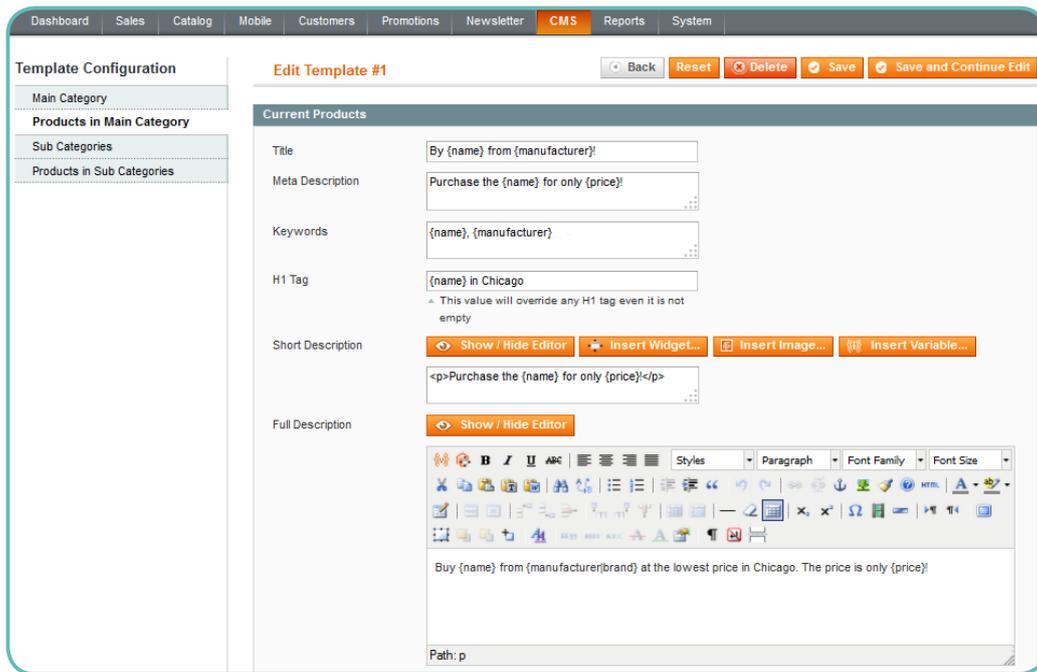
7 <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1" /> <meta
  name="description" content="As the &quot;O&quot; in SEO has broadened in scope, the
  most effective elements of on-page optimization have changed. While there is arguably
  no &quot;perfectly optimized page,&quot; this update to a 2009 post provides a
  comprehensive guide to steer you in the right direction." />

```

As you can observe, Google uses Title and Meta elements to form a description of your webpage for its search engine results page. Be sure, other search engines follow the same route. Now, you probably want to know where these texts come from. The answer is pretty simple: you are the one who's going to provide them.

There are multiple ways to edit the texts for Title and Meta elements. Ultimately, you could hard code them with an HTML editor, but nobody does that in real life. In the brave new world of today, people use CMSs (like [WordPress](#)) and e-commerce platforms (like [Magento](#)) to create websites. Both of these tools allow you to edit <title> and <meta> tags without touching a line of code.

Here's an example of Magento admin panel for editing Title and Meta Description:



Optimization of Title and Meta Description



It takes a bit of practice to master the optimization of titles and meta descriptions. Below are some of the most essential tips that you absolutely need to use:

Begin with Primary Keywords

Search engines learn about your web page from title and meta description, so including your main keyword into both texts is a sound decision. A rule of thumb is to place your primary keywords closer to the beginning of the sentences (however, this is not obligatory).

Consider the Number of Characters

Google truncates the texts that are too long, so don't get carried away with the length of your titles and descriptions. Keep your titles *50-60 characters* long or, at least, try to mention everything essential within that span. As for descriptions, *150-160 characters* seems like an optimum.

Make Them Reader-Friendly

Keep in mind that the texts in Title and Meta Descriptions are the first two things that many people learn about your website. If you don't do your best to write engaging texts for the most important pages, you'll miss out on hundreds of potential customers. Read [this post from Neil Patel](#) to get actionable tips on writing Meta Descriptions.

Don't Overuse Keywords

In the recent years, search engines have become really serious about people trying to manipulate their algorithms. Today, aggressive use of keywords will impact your rankings in a negative way, so you should never resort to keyword stuffing or other shady technique

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