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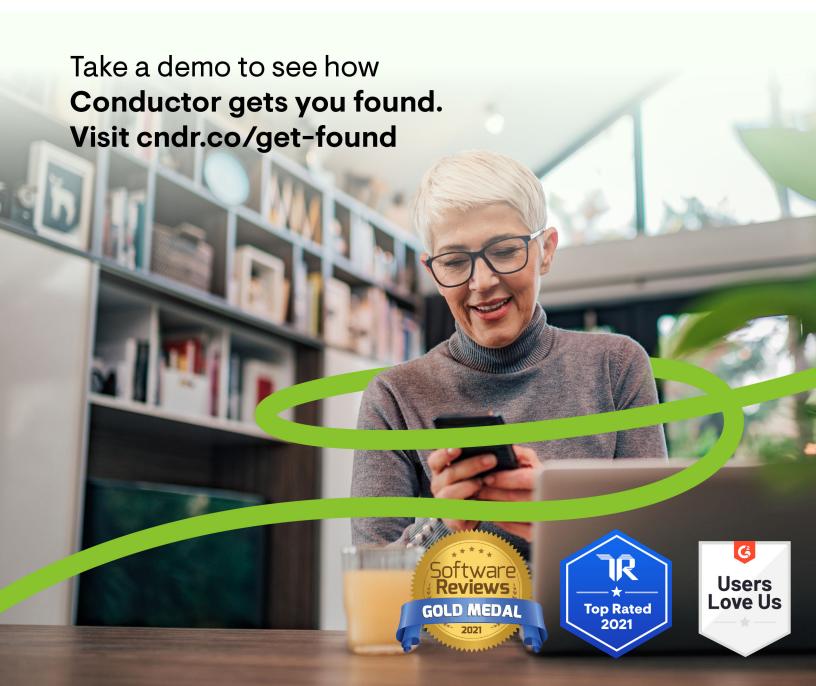# UX&SEO

Enhancing Online Discoverability And User Experience With A Combined Approach

By Loren Baker

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Contents

Introduction

User experience design and search engine optimization are two distinct disciplines. Even so, you'll find that they are functions of one another – and if you want your content to outrank tough competitors, you need the power of UX and SEO together.

They are so tightly intertwined that there isn't a point at which one ends and the other begins. You need a UX mindset to do SEO well and to optimize content so it can be discovered in relevant search results.

Loren Baker
Founder,
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Every fulfilled search is good UX at work; it's a result that meets the searcher's expectations and specific needs at that moment.

But how exactly do UX and SEO work together, and why is it important to consider both in your web development and digital marketing strategies?

You can access Search Engine Journal's top resources on UX and SEO through this quick reference guide – and learn how to maximize their shared power.

You'll learn which UX factors matter most in your SEO strategy and the optimizations you plan to prioritize in the months ahead.

We'll dispel common UX and SEO myths around bounce rate, pogo sticking, and other user behavior metrics so you can move past the hype and focus on what really matters.

Throughout this pocket guide, you'll find links to in-depth resources authored by our internal team and network of industry expert contributors, so you can choose to take best practices from here and dig into those articles where you'd like to learn more.

If you run into any questions, tweet the SEJ team @sejournal or submit your specific question to Ask An SEO, a weekly column where expert contributors respond directly to reader questions.

Let's go!

SEO + UX = Searcher Experience Nirvana

Listen up: UX is part of the SEO pro's overall responsibility.

UX has such an impact on SEO because Google is all about delivering searchers the best possible experience.

If you're creating top-quality, original content, this is great news for you. It means that you and Google have a shared goal: getting the best resource in front of the most relevant audience.

That best resource just happens to be yours.

Google also wants to see that searchers it sends to your site have a good experience on the page.

Note: This doesn't mean that Google uses data about user behavior in rankings. As you'll see in this ebook, Google shies away from data that leaves questions and focuses on actual metrics that they know impact experience. These examples illustrate why:

- When a user "bounces," you have no idea **why** they left the page.
- Loading speed is a solid metric that doesn't leave an open-ended question.

Head on over to the UX & SEO Myths section for more details.

One of the keys to success in SEO is striking the right balance between pleasing the search engines and the users.

You can use all the right keywords and schema markup – you can even attract a lot of high-quality links. But if actual humans have a subpar experience on your page, why would Google want to keep sending people to it?

Read More: Why Having A User-First Approach To SEO Is Important By Jesse McDonald

Google's algorithms are proprietary, and much of what they measure and evaluate is a closely guarded secret.

But we have learned much more about what Google wants to see regarding user experience in recent years. These priorities include:

- Page content loading quickly and fully.
- Content behaving as a user would expect and not shifting or jumping around on the page.
- Visitors can enjoy the content without being bombarded with intrusive ads.

📖 **Recommended Reading:**

User Experience-Based Google Algorithm Updates: A Timeline By Lemuel Park

Google identifies the core user experience needs as loading, interactivity, and visual stability.

These are the basis of Core Web Vitals, the metrics by which Google measures user experience.

Speaking of which, Core Web Vitals caused quite a stir when they first came out.

If you'd like to dig in and expand your understanding of these concepts, don't miss:

- Google's Top 3 Metrics For Evaluating User Experience By Matt Southern
- Core Web Vitals Ranking Factor Is More Than A Tie Breaker By Roger Montti
- Why Do Core Web Vitals Scores Always Change? By Roger Montti
- Core Web Vitals: A Complete Guide (Ebook)

6 Steps To UX Success:
A Checklist For Optimizing Your Site

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Wondering if everything is in place for your website optimization plan? Hoping you've checked all of the boxes on your newest digital investment?

We know a lot of work goes into launching a new website or updating the UX of an old one. This list helps you easily identify UX needs that will help you optimize a website that results in more engagement and conversions!

- ☐ Is my site useful? Can users find what they are looking for after landing on my site?

- ☐ Is my site accessible? Can users access my site from different screens without issues?

- ☐ Is my site usable? Can users easily navigate my website, increasing their chances of returning?

- ☐ Is my site desirable? Are users aesthetically pleased with the design of my website?

- ☐ Is my site findable? Can users navigate my site with three clicks or less to find what they're looking for?

- ☐ Is my site credible? Is the information provided on my website from trusted sources, forming stronger brand trust ties with my users?

Creating and optimizing a website that ticks the boxes above will result in more engagement and time spent on-site.

Source: [The UX (And SEO) Honeycomb](#)

Developing A Site Built For Optimal UX & SEO

Ideally, this symbiotic relationship between your UX and SEO teams kicks off right at the beginning of any new site build or major site update/redesign.

Understanding what each part of the team is planning – and why – is essential in creating a collaborative environment.

SEO relies heavily on web development, particularly in larger organizations and enterprise sites, to implement their recommended updates and optimizations.

However, the dev team may not give these requests the priority the SEO team would like if they don't understand the impact on UX.

Similarly, UX designers and developers may later regret decisions made without the input of the SEO team. Site modifications that interfere with crawling, indexing, and ranking can have devastating consequences for online visibility, site traffic, and revenue conversions.

So, that's your baseline: establishing a shared vision right from day one that has your SEO pros, UX designers, and dev team pulling in the same direction. They need access to the same data and resources and to understand the rationale for the team's actions.

From there, this multidisciplinary team must work together to map out the searcher-to-site-visitor-to-customer journey. Ultimately, that will guide site architecture and navigation, conversion optimization, and all other manners of development and design decisions throughout the project.

📖 **Recommended Reading:**

- [7 Tips For Building An SEO + User-Experience-Minded Main Navigation](#)
  By Josh McCoy
- [Web Design Practices That Frustrate SEO Pros](#) By Kim Krause Berg
- [Top 7 SEO Benefits Of Responsive Web Design](#) By Alex Valencia

Designing web experiences and interactions that meet customers' needs and support maximum online visibility in search has become more complex, as the methods by which consumers engage with content have changed.

The funnel has imploded; there's no longer a linear path from discovery to consideration to conversion and loyalty.

Today, prospects may discover you in any number of ways, such as:

- Using a search engine on a desktop.
- Typing a query into a search engine on a mobile device while on the go.
- Speaking a query into a mobile device or voice assistant in the home or workplace.
- Requesting a specific type of business in a vehicle's GPS.
- Browsing on social media.

Those are just a few examples. And once an algorithm has determined that it understands the consumer's need and intent, the delivery of single or multiple results can look very different depending on the device, location, and other factors.

Your customer may hear the result read aloud via a voice assistant or accessibility device.

The top three-to-five options might be presented on a map, with all kinds of information to consider as they weigh these against one another.

They may be offered a single search result as the ideal solution, "click to call" or "click for directions" as the next logical step.

Capturing these prospects where and whenever that point of discovery occurs is essential. Then you can drive them to a logical next step on your site that delivers on their need and intent.

📖 **Recommended Reading:**

- How To Improve SEO With User Experience Factors By Roger Montti
- Tips For Leveraging The Power Of Voice Search Optimization By Brian Frederick
- How To Optimize For Voice Search: 6 SEO Strategies For Success By Alex Barysevich

There's one other critical factor in designing and developing a well-optimized website: **Accessibility**.

If your site isn't compliant with the latest accessibility standards, you may not only be excluding valuable customers from your business but also violating the law.

Here are a few resources from SEJ's preeminent accessibility standards contributor, Kim Krause Berg:

- Build A Solid Foundation For SEO With Web Accessibility Requirements
- Practical Tips For Accessibility, Search & Human Experience Design
- Web Accessibility For The Human Experience: When We Can Help

SEO & UX: How To Bring This Mindset To Your Company Daily

By Diana Martins   SPONSORED BY ⊜ rockcontent

SEO and UX are two great pieces that work best together.

Let's discover how your company can solve these two interdepartmental puzzles and work together to boost results, conversions, and profits.

1. Leverage The Similarities & Differences Between SEO & UX

SEO drives traffic by connecting users with answers and relevant webpages to their queries.

But it needs **UX's** focus to ensure that information on a website is well-organized, presented clearly, and accessible.

SEO is how you attract users to your site. UX is how well you treat users once they arrive.

Informing these two departments of campaigns, projects, and goals can overlap to help drive more conversions.

2. Algorithm Changes: Put The User At The Center Of Website Updates

All website stakeholders must understand how algorithm changes impact a website's performance.

The trend of recent Google algorithm updates shows us that user intent is the primary driving force behind its changes, such as the Page Experience Update in February 2022.

User intent, or a user's needs, drives UX, which provides a container or home for content driven by SEO.

Both teams should unite to focus on:

- Constantly optimizing content by user intent.
- Constantly optimizing page layout by user intent.

3. Work Together & Ensure Your Site Meets Core Web Vitals Standards

SEO teams know the ins and outs of Google's algorithm changes.

UX teams know the ins and outs of visual elements regarding conversions.

The highest number of conversions will come from working together.

SEO teams should educate UX teams about technical page optimization to ensure that key visual changes don't impact rankings or core web vitals.

UX teams should educate SEO teams about creating content that supports engaging, user-friendly page experiences.

Read More: 7 Tips For Building SEO + UX–Minded Navigation By Josh McCoy

4. Business Bonus: Include SEO Data In Every Stage Of Decision-Making

Performance data is vital to improving any marketing strategy.

SEO data can help programmers and designers understand where users drop out of the buyer's journey.

SEO data on user intent can help ecommerce teams determine high-traffic categories or high-conversion navigation language, helping to convert a potential shopper faster.

Working together this way takes the guesswork out of site optimization.

At the end of the day, SEO is always about experience.

UX And Technical SEO Audits: What To Check For

Errors on your site are both technical and UX issues.

The larger your website, the more common these errors can become – so run regular technical site audits to ensure and maintain a user-friendly experience.

A variety of tools exist that help audit sites for technical and UX issues. Check in with your visual design and accessibility options, too.

Read More: SEO-Friendly UX: Make Your Site Run Like Clockwork

When you're evaluating a site with a tool or assessing design, look out for issues like these:

Accessibility Checklist

Web accessibility means ensuring everyone can access a website's content, regardless of ability.

And it's more than just a good practice – it's the law.

The Department of Justice has declared websites fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The accessibility barriers outlined in the ADA's website guidelines include:

- **Poor color contrast or using color alone** to provide information.
- **Lack of built-in keyboard navigation.**
- **Videos without captions** and/or **images without alt text.**
- **Inaccessible online forms.**
- **Flashing lights** of blinking bright elements.

Technical Errors Checklist

Most tools will flag errors automatically for you. Here are some of the more critical errors you should look out for when going through a report.

- **Indexing issues:** If you're having problems getting your pages to appear in SERPs, there's a good chance you have an indexing problem. The most common cause of indexing issues is in your site map – it's likely outdated or doesn't work, or you don't have one.

- **Robots.txt:** The purpose of this file is to tell search spiders what they can and can't crawl on your site. Typos and syntax errors in your robots.txt can also trip up crawlers. Check whether you have inadvertently disallowed directories you want search engines to index.

- **Broken code:** Whether broken links, missing image files, or missing closing tags, errors in your code can be big problems. Check your anchor tags, images, and links. Better yet, use a code validation tool to check for errors.

- **Page loading speed:** If your website doesn't load quickly, you're not serving a good user experience. Streamline your loading process by minimizing assets and merging code. Optimize images and use good compression software. Make sure you have good server hosting.

- **Optimize for mobile users:** In 2016, [mobile search surpassed desktop](#) for the first time. Since then, it has only widened the gap. As a result, Google now prioritizes mobile-friendly sites. Make sure all your content is in a supported format, and your design is responsive.

Google Analytics Checklist

You can use GA data to discover where you could improve UX to get more granular. You can also discover particularly engaging pages.

Dive into your site's Google Analytics and look at things like:

- **Time on page (User engagement in GA4):** This will give you insights into what content on your website is the most engaging.

- **Exit pages (Exit rate in GA4):** This will help you identify what pages are causing visitors to exit your website. It's a great way to find pages where you could improve organization, content, and CTAs. For example, an exit page with a high time on the page could indicate that users like the content, but are unsure where to go next. Because this rate takes multiple page sessions into account, it helps identify issues with specific goals on your website.

- **Pages per session and scroll depth:** These metrics indicate how engaging visitors find your content. They probably value what you're offering if they're reading through long articles or visiting several pages. (Learn how to replicate pages/screens per session in GA4.)

UX Best Practices And Myths

Let's end the ebook by pulling back to a more general overview.

Consider these UX best practices when you're implementing website updates, and you'll be on a good path. Then check in with the myths to make sure you're not letting misunderstanding guide your decisions.

The best practices and myths sections are excerpts from Brian Frederick's article about UX.

UX Best Practices

Keep It Simple, Search Engine Optimizer (KISSEO)

UX design should be intuitive and easy to navigate. Try to help users find what they're looking for in as few clicks as possible.

Take A Mobile-First Approach

More people search the web using a mobile device rather than a desktop, meaning your site should be designed primarily for them.

Don't neglect your desktop site, but make sure you're focused on responsiveness to ensure good experiences and better rankings.

Make It Fast

No one will wait around on a site that takes forever to load.

Test your page speed regularly to ensure you're not lagging and fix issues like unnecessary scripts, images that are not optimized, and redirects.

Keep A Clear Structure

Page layout should be user-friendly, with relevant information (like what the user is searching for) prominently displayed.

Header hierarchies make your content more scannable and help web crawlers better understand the page's content.

Use Language Your Audience Responds To

Every industry, hobby, or organization has its own vocabulary.

But even more than vocabulary, with voice search on the rise, it has become more important than ever to use natural language in your text.

Stick With It

UX best practices are constantly evolving, just like SEO approaches.

Understand that this is an ongoing process, and what works today may not work in the future.

UX & SEO Myths

There's a lot of misinformation out there about how UX impacts SEO.

Let's take a look at some of these.

Bounce Rate

Internet users are a fickle bunch.

Users will navigate away from your page for all sorts of reasons. A UX issue is one reason. But they also might have simply misclicked.

Or they might have landed looking for something specific and then found it. That's good UX! If they then leave without interacting, it would be silly to penalize you for that.

So, does a high bounce rate necessarily mean you have a bad user experience?

No.

Does it impact rankings?

No.

Google has been very clear on this: Bounce rate is [not factored into rankings](#).

Bounce rate will become more useful in GA4 as the inverse of [engagement rate](#). The added time factor makes it more helpful, but exit pages are likely still more informative.

Pogo-Sticking

It has often been claimed that pogo-sticking – which refers to the practice of rapidly switching back and forth between webpages and search results – is a bad indication.

However, [Google's John Mueller](#) has stated this is not a signal to the search engine about your site's quality. There are all sorts of other reasons a user might pogo-stick that don't have to do with your UX.

Everything Needs An Image

Some people will tell you that every webpage should have an image, no matter what – even if it's a stock photo that looks completely out of place. They say this breaks up the text and gives search engine spiders more information.

That's false.

While it's good to use images, low-quality or unrelated images won't help your UX or SEO efforts as much as organizing your information clearly. Too many images, or images that are too large, can even negatively affect UX by increasing load times.

We Hope You Had A Great Experience Using This Ebook

'Cause we had a great time writing it!

Thank you for reading **UX & SEO: Enhancing Online Discoverability And User Experience With A Combined Approach.**

If you have any feedback to share about this ebook, reach out to the editorial team at editor@searchenginejournal.com.

And if you have any further questions, you can always Ask An SEO! Our SEO experts answer a new user question each week, so go ahead and get in touch.

Until next time,

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