



The Implementing Google Ranking Factors in Drupal Checklist

25 Ways to Configure your Drupal Website for Optimal Search Engine Results

Is Your Drupal Website Configured for Optimal Search Engine Results?


Google's algorithms are thought to consider around 200 factors when deciding where a website will show up in its search results pages (SERP) for a particular keyword search. Those factors can determine if your website is at the top of page 1, or page 10. And let's just say that websites on page 10 don't get much traffic. Or page 2.

Fortunately Drupal is very configurable to help influence many of those factors. This checklist will help you understand how to use and configure both core Drupal and its many contributed modules and themes to optimize your site for many of those factors.


Our ongoing blog series on this topic on the [FireRoad Digital website](#) will go into much more detail on implementation aspects as we cover each factor. Be sure to continue your content strategies, social sharing and engagement and linkbuilding as important parts of your SEO program.


Proper keyword planning is a critical component of your SEO strategy, but outside the scope of this checklist. Its focus is on improving your Google ranking once you know your keywords. Drupal does have a few modules available to help you analyze the keywords in your existing website content, but they are not well maintained and can be confusing to use. 3rd party tools such as [Word Tracker](#) or Google's free [Keyword Planner](#) tool (as part of Google AdWords) are more useful.


This checklist is certainly not a comprehensive guide to improving your Google and other search engine rankings for your Drupal website, but it is a good place to start.

1.  **Clean URLs.** Out of the box, Drupal creates pages with URLs that look like this


- `mysite.com/?q=node/42`, which is decidedly not SEO-friendly. If you are seeing that style of URL, check that Clean URLs are enabled under `/admin/config/search/clean-urls`. If that option is not selectable, you may need some changes to your server configuration. Fortunately there is help at drupal.org - Configure Clean URLs


2.  **Descriptive URLs.** With Clean URLs enabled, Drupal will generate URLs for new pages in the style of `mysite.com/node/42`, which is better but still not *descriptive*, like Google (and site viewer) prefer. You can manually set the URL for each page, but a better way is to use the [PathAuto](#) module. Drupal can then automatically create more descriptive URLs, that may include the page title, category, author name, and more.

3.  **Keyword in URL.** Google likes to see your keywords all over the place, including inside the page URL itself. If you have PathAuto configured to use the page title in your URL, then you get the benefit of the keyword in both the page title and the URL- just place a keyword early (or better yet, first) in your node title field. The [Automatic Nodetitles](#) module gives you even more options to automatically set the URL.


4.  **Category in URL.** It helps Google understand your content if you put the category name into the URL of a page. Something like `mysite.com/blog/mypost`.


You can tell Drupal to automatically add categories to the URL for each content type at `admin/config/search/path/patterns`.


5.  **Unique Page Title with Keywords.** Google often uses the text in your `<title>(page title here)</title>` tag on search result pages as the title of your site, and as a link to your site. It's also what the browser displays in the title bar when on a webpage. You want your page title to be both unique across your site, and containing keywords specific to that page, and closer to the start of the page title. Drupal will set the default page title tag to “(node title) | (sitename)” everywhere by default. Put your keyword in the node title, which will put your keyword into your title tag. For more advanced use, there is the [Page Title](#) module specific for changing the default on individual pages, but you are better off using the multipurpose [Metatag](#) module (don't use both as they can conflict). You can use any Drupal *token* to automate page title text, or manually set a specific title tag for each page. Automation is a good start, but for smaller sites, you should optimize the page title for each page, and for larger sites you can optimize the pattern used to set each meta title as well as customize important pages, especially the home page. Aim for 50-55 characters total in your page title tag.

6.  **Keyword in Description.** Another important meta tag that Google reads on each page is the `<meta description="(page description here)">`. Google will often use it on search results pages as the description of that web page, and that page will rank better for a particular keyword if it's in the meta description. The Metatag module provides this field as well, defaulting to using the body summary text.


If you always provide a node summary of 150 characters or less, it might be ok to use the default - but again it is best if you optimize this field for each page.


7.  **Keyword in H1 Tag.** HTML provides *heading* tags (**h1** .. **h6**) to indicate headings in the page text, with **h1** being considered the most important. Google considers it important as well, especially if you put a keyword in an **h1** tag. This is usually done at the theme level, rather than through a module or in the body text - the theme will generally put the node title in an **h1** tag. Check that your theme does that. You can use **h2** and **h3** through your WYSIWYG for lesser keywords on that page.


8.  **No Duplicate Content.** Remember before we had PathAuto running, Drupal would create URLs such as `/node/42`, but now it's more like `/blog/mypost` ? Well, the `/node/42` is still a valid URL and doesn't go away - Drupal will show the same page if you put it into your browser, which Google could consider to be the dreaded *duplicate content* offense. The module [Global Redirect](#) will take care of that - as well as not cause a URL with an extra trailing slash (e.g. `/blog/mypost/`) to be considered yet another duplicate page. No configuration need- just install and enable.

9.  **Alt Text in Images.** Short for "alternative text", the **alt** attribute provides textual information to the browser and screen readers about the nature of an image, which it can use if the image cannot be shown. Search engines also use this information to catalog images, such as at [images.google.com](#). When editing a Drupal node with an image as a separate field, you should see a field next to the image labeled **Alternative Text**. If not, edit the Content Type to add the alt field for that image field. If using an


inline image in a multi-line text field, your image manager module of choice should also have a method of entering the alt text. Always fill in this field.


10.  XML Sitemap. Google does a good job of finding its way around your website, but an XML Sitemap can help it find all your content, as well as understand the relative importance of each page and how often its updated. The module [XML Sitemap](#) does the work for you. You also need to make a configuration change in all content types you want to be included in the XML Sitemap, and tell the module to automatically submit them to Google and/or Bing. You can check that Google is correctly receiving your XML Sitemap in [Webmaster Tools](#). More in our [XML Sitemap blog post](#).


11.  Social Sharing. If lots of people are sharing your content on social media sites, Google considers that to be an endorsement that your content quality is good. So make it easy for users of your website to share your great content with sharing buttons. Many Drupal modules add share buttons to your content - [AddThis](#), [Easy Social](#), [Service Links](#), [ShareBar](#), and others, and some show the number of shares on each button.

12.  Page Loading Speed. Users just won't wait more than a few seconds for your web page to load, and while Google will wait longer, it will penalize your site if it does. Hosting your site on a fast, Drupal-centric platform such as [Panttheon](#) is the best and easiest option, with built-in server-side caching and fast servers. The Drupal [Boost](#) module is also an option for certain types of sites, and just making sure you have enabled Drupal-side caching for anonymous users and CSS and Javascript aggregation helps (`admin/config/development/performance`). Using Image Styles


(`admin/config/media/image-styles`) can automatically reduce the size of your images so they load faster. You can test your site loading speed with Google Analytics under **Behavior >> Site Speed**.


13.  Semantic data. Google, Bing and Yahoo have all agreed on a common set of *schemas* for structured data markup on webpages, to help better understand the meaning of web content. Tagging your content as an “event”, “product”, “scholarly article”, or scores of others listed on schema.org is becoming one of the most important aspects of on-page SEO- the recent Google Hummingbird algorithm update rewards sites with semantic markup. Use the Drupal schema.org module to add this capability to your website, then set content types to automatically set their terms. Use Google Webmaster Tools to test how Google sees your semantic markup.


14.  Responsive Design. Also being rewarded in the latest Google search algorithms are sites that automatically adapt to any device used to view its pages. Desktops, tablets, smartphones should each get their own view of your website, optimized for that device’s capabilities. It all starts with a Drupal base theme, such as [Bootstrap](#) and then into the main theme of your site, and then maybe even little extras like [Responsive Tables](#) and Responsive Images, which is still a [work in progress](#).


15.  Open Graph. Ever notice that when you post links from some sites to Facebook, the resulting picture and text are perfect, but from other sites there is just a random picture (or no picture) and random text? The first site correctly implemented


Open Graph and is filling in the Description and Picture fields on all sharable content, so that Facebook knows what to use when you post a link. If you are already using the [Metatag](#) module mentioned earlier, then you just need to enable the **Metatag:OpenGraph** submodule that comes with it. You can use the defaults, or customize text and photo for certain pages, under the **Meta tags >> OpenGraph** section of all content nodes.


16.  Site Verification. Google thinks more highly of your website if you have verified your ownership of it, and it is necessary to use utilities such as Google WebmasterTools. The Drupal module [Site Verification](#) makes this process easy, letting you set up verifications for all major search engines, using a META tag or a verification file. Just install the module and go to **admin/config/search/verifications**. Learn more at our [Verify your Drupal Site](#) blog post.


17.  HTTP Secure. Don't you feel safer surfing the web and buying products online when you see that little lock icon and "https://" in your browser? Google thinks it is generally a good idea for every website to be more secure, and has recently been rewarding those sites that run in HTTP Secure mode. The process can be complex and requires obtaining an X.509 certificate and configuration changes to your web server. The Drupal module [Secure Pages](#) can also be of use, especially when you need to support both http and https modes. There are cost and speed issues to consider when using HTTP Secure mode.

18.  Google Analytics. Google provides a free tool to give website owners hundreds of data points about their site activity. Your overall traffic, favorite pages, even demographic data about your visitors is available. All you need to do is signup for a free account with Google, then place a small amount of code on every page. Drupal makes this easy, with the robust and full-featured [Google Analytics](#) module. Once enabled, you just put the Web Property ID Google gives you ("UA-xxxxxxx-x") into the module configuration page at `admin/config/system/googleanalytics`. It's also a good idea to configure the module to only track anonymous users (so you don't muddle the data with activity by yourself or staff at your company) and enable **Site Search** and **DoubleClick** data so you receive data on internal searches and demographics.

19.  Content Length. Quick- how long should a post be ? Tough question, and variety is always good, but in general, research says that content with 2000-2500 words rank the best. Two Drupal modules can help you, although they both count characters rather than words. The [Maxlength](#) module lets you set a hard limit on the number of characters that can be entered in a field (with a live counter) and the [Soft Length Limit](#) shows the character limit, but doesn't enforce it. The average length of an English word is 5 characters, so with a little math you can set an appropriate character maximum for your various content types. And make sure to use your target keywords 2-3 times in the content body, preferably once in the first 100 words, but no more. Google has come to frown on "keyword stuffing."

20.  Formatted and “Broken-up” Text. Written content that is broken-up with larger headlines, occasional bold text, bullet points and numbered lists, indented text, pictures, etc. is easier to read than a long stream of plain text, and Google knows that. If you are skilled with [Markdown](#), then the [Markdown filter](#) module makes it easy to enter content that way. For most people though, a WYSIWYG (what you see if what you get) editor that allows visual editing like Microsoft Word or Apple Pages is best. Drupal has many options for such editors, including [CKEditor](#), [WYSIWYG](#), and [many more](#). The [Media module](#) is useful for adding multimedia pieces to your content. The [YouTube Field](#) module provides a lightweight alternative for just embedding YouTube videos.

21.  Broken Links. Google scans your site for any broken links within your site that would cause a **404 Page Not Found** error. Google Webmaster Tools will even give you a list of any it has found. The [Link checker](#) module can help find broken links. The [Pathologic](#) module can help correct links. The [Redirect](#) module will automatically create redirected URLs when you change a node title and the resulting URL is changed. And if all else fails, the [Search 404](#) module will perform a search of your content based on the failed URL and display the results to the user.

22.  Incoming Links. Drupal has a few methods of tracking links pointing to your website (also known as *backlinks*), although in general you are better off using an external service such as [Moz](#) or [ahrefs](#), or even Google Analytics. If you have the core Statistics module enabled, then look at the **Top Referrers** under **Reports**. It isn't always

a good idea to have the Statistics modules running on busy sites though, so try the lightweight [Google Analytics Referrer](#) module - just create a block that only an admin can see for a list of referrers for all pages.

23. ✓ Profanity. Yes, Google may actually penalize you for having curse words in your content. Depending on your site's purpose, your users may not like it either. Filter them out easily with the [Phonetic Word Filter](#) module.

24. ✓ Comments. People commenting about your content on your site (often) means you are successfully engaging website viewers. Or, they could be just spamming you with links to buy cheap purses. The core Comment module allows you to add threaded commenting to content nodes, but you need to be vigilant at either monitoring for and deleting spam comments, or using moderation, which slows down engagement. Modules like [Mollom](#) can help, although add overhead. A good option is to use an external commenting system like [Disqus](#) or [Livefyre](#).

25. ✓ Valid HTML. Google (and your browser) like your web pages to be made up of clean, valid HTML markup. In general Drupal creates good HTML, but it's important to make sure your contrib and custom Drupal modules and theme does too. The [HTML Purifier](#) module will not only check your pages for W3C's standards compliance, but provide some security protection against malware as well. The [W3C Validator](#) Drupal module can also help you display fully valid pages to Google and the world.

So there are 25 ways to improve your Drupal website search rankings. Comments or questions - hit us up on **fireroaddigital.com** !