The Ultimate Guide To Setting up WordPress For SEO

This guide was brought to you by Jason Chesters at http://doseoyourself.com

Are you using Wordpress for your sites? The fact is, Wordpress has become the most popular platform for creating web sites and blogs, and the great thing is.... it keeps getting better!!

As WordPress is so popular these days I thought it would be a good idea to write a post about configuring WP to give you the best SEO set up possible. If you want to have better rankings, more traffic and more subscribers to your site then you better sharpen your skills when it comes to WordPress and SEO. I have built sites in the past on WP and to be honest, I presumed all was well regarding SEO.

I thought that the default configuration would be ok, and that I didn't have to mess around with html, Css and all the rest of it! But I was wrong!

Spend 30 minutes doing this and your rankings WILL increase!!

A pretty bold statement I know!

I see it all of the time, people make great looking websites with lots of good content, they then go out and start a link building campaign, a few months later they are left disappointed that there site is nowhere to be seen in the search engines. The problem is, this skipped a very important step.....

Optimise WordPress to give yourself the best chance of ranking!!

Stop messing around! Get a Premium WordPress theme

I know there are an absolute ton of free WordPress themes available to download directly from your WordPress install, and you are probably wondering why you would waste your money paying for a theme when all of these free ones are available.

If you were wondering, a premium theme is basically a 'paid for theme'

If you are serious about your site or blog then investing in a Premium theme is something that I highly recommend, and here's why....

Did you know that most Free themes contain malicious code that can jeopardise the security of your site!!

And do you know what happens when your site is hacked and infested with malware?

It **drops off the SERP's** like a sack of s*%t

Trust me, Ive had it happen to me more than enough times, and it's no fun what so ever. All of the sites that got attacked were sites using a free theme!

Designed by a professional

Another reason why I always opt for a premium site is because they are designed by professionals who know what they are doing. Any tom, dick or harry could have developed one of the free themes!

Web standards are changing all of the time. Premium themes are more likely to keep up with the latest changes and because you have paid money for it, they are regularly updated.... unlike free themes.

Be clean and responsive

Having a responsive theme these days is a must. More and more people are using mobile devices to view websites online. It's important that your site is functional and adapts to all devices and browsers.

You know what it's like trying to access a site on your phone that is crap, and you have to zoom in a million times to see the text, then you struggle to click one of the links! Well that's because they don't have a responsive them!!

Most premium themes are now responsive and although Google says it doesn't give you a **'ranking boost'** for using a responsive design, they do give you preference on mobile devices over non responsive themes,
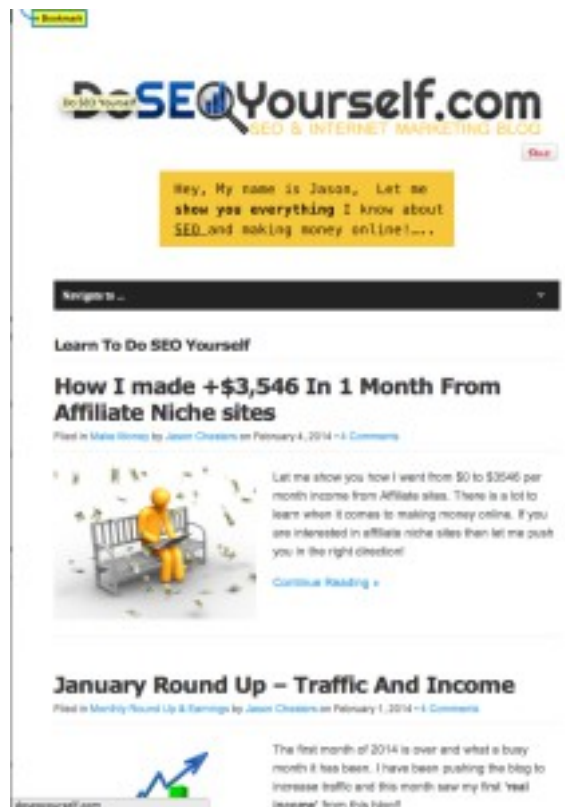
As they demote 'non friendly' sites from appearing in the searches! so technically you will get better rankings by using a responsive theme :-)

Here is what my blog looks like in a normal browser and on a mobile phone..... Look how it automatically adapts to fit the screen.

Normal Browser

I always use a reputable company like 'ThemeForest'. You can expect to pay around $50 for a good theme.

If you are not willing to pay $50 for a theme then you are obviously not serious about your site!

Not only are they beneficial for SEO purposes but they are also much easier to customise, as most of the customisable options are available within the design, therefore you don't need to change any css or coding.

URL's and Blog Permalinks

(99% of Site owners fail to do this simple task when publishing a new post, and it could be the difference in your page **having high rankings or nowhere to be seen at all)**

Even I forget to do it half of the time!!

One of the main factors that search engine use to determine your ranking is your permalink url. Now most people know about changing the default Wordpress permalink structure in the settings tab.

If you don't then here is the first thing you must do:

Click setiings > Permalinks > and change it to Post Name

Now this is pretty common knowledge for anybody who has a WordPress Blog.

Although this is **great for SEO** as it includes some of your main keywords within the url, it can also cause problems, and here's why.....

Matts Cutts (Not that I listen to everything he has to say) has revealed that it is best to use 3-5 words as the slug of your permanlink.

Now if the Title of your site happens to be between 3-5 words then great! but a lot of the time it isn't. If your title has say, 10 words in the slug then Google will devalue the importance of your words or may even see it as been spammy.

Take this for example, It's a post from my blog....

The Title of the posts is 'How I Made +$3546 In 1 Month From Affiliate Niche Sites'

Now If I don't change the permalink manually it will be set as this:

.....com/How-I-Made-+$3546-In-1-Month-From-Affiliate-Niche-Sites

That's 11 words and is pretty long. Not good is it... So what I did was shorten the slug to include only the main keywords, like this.....

> http://doseoyourself.com/make-money-affiliate-niche-sites/

Much more tidier and to the point and also fits in with Google's recommendations!!

It's really easy to change it. When editing your post, look directly underneath your Title, as you can see here....
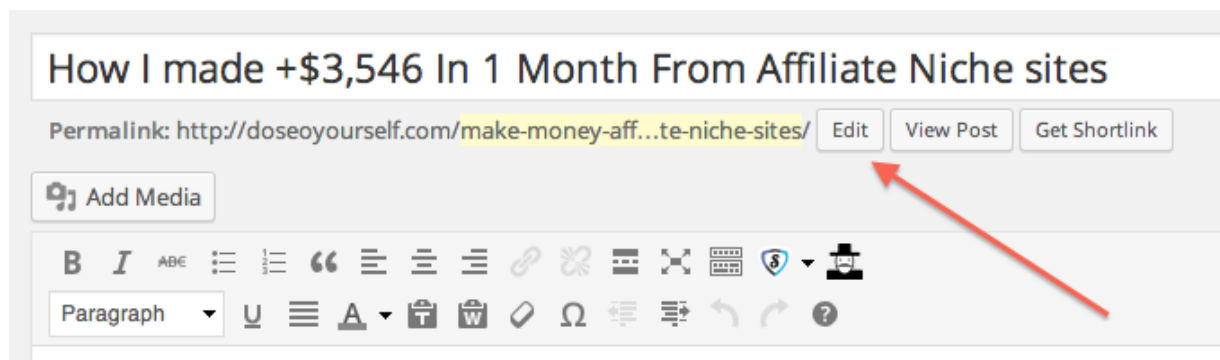
Simply click edit and change it to something more appropriate.

So next time you publish a new post, just have a think about your permalinks.

If you are using the Yoast SEO plugin, which I recommend, then they have a **handy little feature that sort of does this for you.** It's called 'stop words'.

It will automatically remove stop words from your urls, such as: 'and' 'a' 'in'

Just go to > Yoast SEO settings > Permalinks > check the 'remove stop words from slugs' box.

Permalink Settings

☐ Strip the category base (usually `/category/`) from the category URL.

☐ Enforce a trailing slash on all category and tag URL's

If you choose a permalink for your posts with `.html` , or anything else but a / on the end, this will force WordPress to add a trailing slash to non-post pages nonetheless.

☑ Remove stop words from slugs.

This helps you to create cleaner URLs by automatically removing the stopwords from them.

Warning - If your posts are already published, don't go changing the permalinks. Your original permalink are most likely already indexed and picking up link juice.

Structure Your site Properly

Site structure is the number 1 culprit, so get it right!!

There is a big problem these days with duplicate content. One of the downfalls of WordPress is that it doesn't structure your site very well. Let's think about this for a minute.

> You have a site called TheWidgetFarm.com
> You write a post about Green Widgets
> You place it in a category called 'Green Widgets'
> You use a Tag called Green Widget
> You then do the same for Blue widgets, Red widgets and orange widgets.

That's a lot of freaking widgets on your site before you have even started. Every page of your site is going to contain the word 'Widget' dozens of times before you have even begun writing your content!

You have shot yourself in the foot right from the off!!

Another big problem is that when you publish your article, WordPress will publish it about half a dozen times across your site.... which spells BIG duplicate content issues.

Using the example above with Green Widgets... Wordpress will publish your article on:

Your actual article page   thewidgetfarm.com/Green-widgets
Your home page (If using a blog roll)   thewidgetfarm.com/
Your 'Green Widgets' category   thewidgetfarm.com/category/green-widgets
Your 'green' Tag page thewidgetfarm.com/tag/green

Your 'Widget' tag page thewidgetfarm.com/tag/widget

Your 'green Widget' thewidgetfarm.com/tag/green-widget

This is at least 6 duplicate articles that Word Press has just published on your site. Do this with your other 'Widgets' and your site is full of duplicate content, which Google does not like!!

How to clean this Sh*t up and avoid it from happening again

Luckily, there are a few simple things that we can do to prevent this happening.

First off you want to 'No-Index' your Categories and Tags..... In fact, just delete them nuisance tags altogether, we don't need them!!

Here's how to no-index them...

You can use a plugin called '[Robots meta](#)', but rather than downloading that you may as well download the 'Yoast for SEO' or 'All In One' plugin which I am going to come on to shortly.

This plugin will allow us to 'no-index' certain folders and pages and it's also great for SEO!!

Just go to the main settings page and find this box

Noindex Settings

Default to NOINDEX:
- [ ] Posts
- [ ] Media
- [ ] Contact Forms
- [ ] Pages
- [ ] Action Boxes
- [ ] Social Lockers

Default to NOFOLLOW:
- [ ] Posts
- [ ] Media
- [ ] Contact Forms
- [ ] Pages
- [ ] Action Boxes
- [ ] Social Lockers

- [x] Use noindex for Categories:
- [x] Use noindex for Date Archives:
- [x] Use noindex for Author Archives:
- [x] Use noindex for Tag Archives:
- [ ] Use noindex for the Search page:

As I have done here, make sure that you check the boxes:

> Use 'noindex' for categories
> Use 'noindex' for Author Archives
> Use 'noindex' for tag archives

To check if Google has indexed your categories and tag pages do this simple search:

Google   site:yourdomain.com

This will then show you all of the pages of your site that are indexed. Just go through them and make sure there are no /categories.. and /tags

Don't use your keyword in your category

Something I see a lot is people using their main keyword in the category. So if the title of the post is 'Red widgets', they will put it in a category called 'Red Widgets'.

You **should not** be using your sites main keyword! It will only cause over optimisation problems.

Just call your category 'red' or even something different.

Remove recent posts widget

A lot of people like to use the 'Recent' posts widget. This is where it displays your recent posts in the widget sidebar which is placed on every page of your site.

The problem with this is that it is just stuffing our site with more keywords. If your last 5 posts are 'blue widgets', green widgets', 'yellow widgets', 'purple widgets' and orange widgets' then you have just added the word 'widgets' another 5 times to every page of your site.

You are putting your self at risk of 'over optimisation' penalties.

Lets not forget, you've probably already got them listed in your main menu anyway!!

Interlinking to other pages of your site is actually a good thing, but instead of using sidebar widgets you should add links within your content.

Use Canonical url's

Latest versions of Wordpress automatically feature canonical url's but you should always check the box in Yoast or 'All in One SEO'

Basically this helps to direct the search engine robots to the correct link to index, because if you think about it, your site can have many variations.......

> http://domain.com
> http://domain.com/
> http://www.domain.com
> http://www.domain.com/

Its sort of a way to redirect these pages to one specific page and is a great way of eliminating self duplicate content. Rand Fishkin actually described it as '*The most important advancement in SEO practices since sitemaps*' in this [MOZ post](#)

So make sure that you have canonical url's checked :-)

Optimise your post/page titles and descriptions

One of the defining aspects of ranking your site is the title and description of your posts. You must carefully include your keywords so that it is natural and not over the top.

Stuffing to many keywords into your titles and description is a big no no.

I like to keep it at 1 for my title and 1 in the description.

Yoast has a handy feature where you can enter your Focus keyword when editing a post, and it will check to see if you have it included in your url, title, heading, content and meta description.

It also gives you the option of entering your page title and meta description. This is good if you want to optimise your page title to target keywords in the search engines.

Most of the time I make my page title the same as my heading!!

Yoast WordPress Title and Meta's

Ok, so lets take a look at the first tab in Yoast SEO, which is the titles and meta section. As a general rule, here is how I set it up:

Yoast WordPress SEO: Titles & Metas

General | Home | Post Types | Taxonomies | Other

Title settings

☐ Force rewrite titles

WordPress SEO has auto-detected whether it needs to force rewrite the titles for your pages, if you think it's wrong and you know what you're doing, you can change the setting here.

Sitewide `meta` settings

☑ Noindex subpages of archives

If you want to prevent /page/2/ and further of any archive to show up in the search results, enable this.

☐ Use `meta` keywords tag?

I don't know why you'd want to use meta keywords, but if you want to, check this box.

☑ Add `noodp` meta robots tag sitewide

Prevents search engines from using the DMOZ description for pages from this site in the search results.

☑ Add `noydir` meta robots tag sitewide

Prevents search engines from using the Yahoo! directory description for pages from this site in the search results.

Clean up the `<head>`

☐ Hide RSD Links
☐ Hide WLW Manifest Links
☐ Hide Shortlink for posts
☑ Hide RSS Links

Most of the default setting in Yoast are correct and you do not need to do much configuration at all.

Edit your font size in editor

This won't apply to everybody, depending on what kind of theme you are using, but if your 'body txt' appears quit small, then you really should increase the size because I have a strong feeling that Google gives relevance to sites that are easy to read!

In fact, When I did my case study on '[Why has my site lost rankings - solved'](#) I came across this theory when analysing my competitors.

I discovered that all of the sites on page 1 were using a font of at least 12, most going for 14, and their content was split into many short paragraphs each with different headings. The end result..... A very easy to read site!!

So how do you change this? Simple

>In your dashboard click > Appearance > Editor

It's usually the first page that shows up. Style.css

now you want to locate the bit that says something like this....

body (

font-size 10px;

Now simply change the font size to what ever you like :-)

As I said before, most themes won't require this, but if you think your text is a tad small, then it's worth making it larger!!

XML Sitemaps

Creating a sitemap is important, because it gives Google a clear picture of the structure of your site and allows their bots to go crawling through it. Although it doesn't have an affect on your rankings, it certainly helps to get your pages indexed.

Luckily It's really simple to create a sitemap with WordPress.

You can either use the built in function of Yoast:
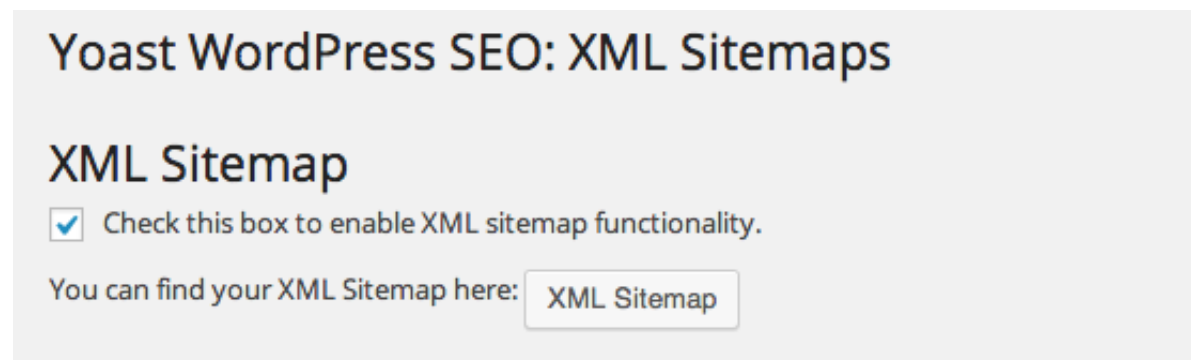
Or download the 'Google xml sitemaps' plugin.

Once you have enabled sitemaps you should go to your Webmaster tools and submit the sitemap. Although Google will actually pick up your sitemap naturally, it's still a good idea to submit it your self.

Clean up your code

As your site grows you will gather more and more javascript and css in your template files. What you need to do is move the javascripts and css to external files so that your templates stay clean!

This will help with SEO because your users will be able to cache those files on first load as well as the search engines being able to crawl them easier.

There are some plugins that help to clear up bulky Javascripts, in fact there is one called 'Head cleaner' which will un-clutter all of the crap that ends up in your head file. You can also use this plugin to group your javascript and css files

This will help to speed up your site a little..... which brings me nicely on to the topic of speed.

Speed up your site

User experience is becoming an ever more important factor with Google, and one of the most important factors is site speed. Not only does it enhance your SEO possibilities, it also helps your site to make more money!!

Firstly, you can check your site speed at: Pingdom.

Here is a quick screenshot of my blogs speed:

As you can see! My blog DoSEOyourself.com is faster than 88% of all tested websites!!

Pretty awesome ay!!

The first thing you should do is too update all of your WordPress plugins and keep your version of WP updated. If you have any plugins that are deactivated because you no longer use them.... get rid of them!

Move to a faster host - I moved my site from a shitty Hostgator plan to WPEngine and the difference in speed was amazing. So it definitely worth investing in better hosting.

Optimise your images - There is a plugin called Smush.it, this does a great job of compressing the size of your images so that they load faster!

Set up a CDN - This also helps speed up your site. Im not going to bore you with how it all works, but basically it is a Content Delivery Network which deliver cached statistics from geographic locations. This make your site load faster from any location.

So that pretty much wraps things up, I hope you enjoyed this no BS guide, now it's time to take action so do yourself a favour and make sure you give yourself the best chance of ranking your site by optimising your WordPress for SEO

Check out more great posts like this at http://doseoyourself.com