Nonprofit SEO – The Definitive Guide to Optimizing Your Content

Nonprofit organizations can face an uphill battle when it comes to being noticed online, and yet with the increasing number of donors turning to the web to give, online engagement is vital. However, many nonprofits deal with limited budgets and fierce competition from for-profit businesses and government agencies.

That’s where SEO comes in. SEO can help your nonprofit business stand out against the competition by letting you highlight the differentiators that make you unique. In our guide, we’ll break down what SEO is, why it’s important, and how you can make your content a driving force for your organization.

# Why SEO is Important

One of the biggest reasons that SEO is important for a nonprofit organization is that it’s a way to improve your rankings without having to spend a ton of money. Having SEO that targets appropriate keywords, categorizes your content correctly, and streamlines search results in your favor is an investment that can pay off for years to come.

Plus, having good SEO can help increase your online giving. According to Charity Navigator, [online giving is on the rise](https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=1360). One-time online giving increased 19%, while monthly online giving increased 40%. The best way to encourage these statistics to work in your favor is by ensuring that your website is optimized for search engines, which is what SEO is.

Essentially, making sure your website’s SEO health is strong, both on and off the page, puts your nonprofit in front of as many people as possible. The majority of searchers don’t click beyond the first page of results, so SEO is a vital tool for getting your message out there and getting your nonprofit’s needs met – whether that’s raising awareness, finding volunteers, or fundraising.

# On-Point On-Page SEO

On-page SEO is one of the best tools a nonprofit has for boosting their search engine placement. It refers to the basic optimization tactics, like using the best keywords for your copy, optimizing your meta description, ensuring you have alt-tags, and more. Something as simple as having a good meta title and description that uses your target keyword can have a profound impact on how search engines rank and index your content.

However, on-page SEO also considers things like your content structure, your page performance, and the quality of your copy. While you used to be able to just cram keywords into your website – a process known as “keyword stuffing” – and see your rankings rise, now keyword placement and appropriateness is key.

Using a tool like [Moz’s On-Page Grader](https://analytics.moz.com/pro/research/page-grader) to determine if your on-page SEO is correct can help point out where you might be lacking in this area, and give you ideas on where to improve. You can also work with a team like 919 to make sure that you’re using the best possible keywords for your content.

# Page Speed

Page speed has become a big part of [Google’s ranking factor](https://developers.google.com/web/updates/2018/07/search-ads-speed) for websites. While this might not seem important, the simple fact is that websites that take longer than three seconds to load are often abandoned. And as more and more users browse the web primarily or exclusively from mobile devices, it’s more important than ever to be sure that your website is mobile-optimized and loads quickly no matter where a user is accessing it from.

Tools like Google’s [Page Speed Insights](https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/) can help you make sure you’re doing everything you can to keep your site loading quickly. Make sure to check often so that you don’t get penalized and dropped in rankings due to slow-loading pages.

# Create Great Content

It seems like such an easy thing to say, right? “Create great content.” But what *is* great content? How can you be sure the content on your page is great? And why is it so important to have great content? The internet has made content sharing incredibly easy, but that also means that your content faces stiff competition. Creating content that’s focused and that differentiates itself from similar businesses, blogs, or organizations is key.

Google likes to see that the content you’re providing is easily accessible to your site visitors. That means users shouldn’t have to dig through menus or blocks of text to find the information they’re looking for. And it also means that your content should be focused on your target audience, their needs, and what your organization is trying to do. Don’t be afraid to get specific.

Let’s talk about some of the ways that you can really focus your content on your specific message and set yourself apart from the crowd.

## Do Original Research – Or Reframe Existing Research

Earlier, we mentioned that off-page SEO is important; doing research or creating a new, fully-formed piece of content incorporating existing resources can be a way to help with off-page SEO by generating inbound links. If your writing is an eye-opener, people will be inclined to link to you.

If you don’t have the time or manpower to create a new piece of research, finding existing resources that talk about a topic and putting them together to create a cohesive collection of information about that topic can really help with inbound linking. Just make sure to properly cite all your sources!

## Target Keywords That Matter

Keywords and phrases are a cornerstone of SEO, but sometimes it can be a challenge to know exactly what to use for your nonprofit. To figure out what keywords are best, you need to know what you’re looking for as an organization – and what you want people to find when they come to you.

However, finding the best keywords for your business can be challenging even if you know exactly who you’re trying to target and what you want them to get from your website. Sometimes, the keywords sound great, but simply aren’t what people are searching for. And sometimes your keywords won’t take advantage of all the opportunities available to drive people to your website.

Often, it’s best to find someone who specializes in keyword identification and implementation to be sure you’re using the best keywords for your specific organization. [919 Insights](https://919marketing.com/franchise-marketing-analytics/) can help solve this problem by taking the guesswork out of keywords and making sure your content is optimized for your visitors.

## Make Your Content Easy to Find

Having a website that is clear, easily navigable, and simple to use is one of the simplest and best ways to ensure that users stay on your pages. The longer people stay on your site, the more likely it is that they’ll become a consumer of your product or a donator to your cause.

Your navigation should also target your most highly-valuable keywords. For example, if you’re a nonprofit focused on accessible, clean water, one of your navigation links could read “Why clean water matters,” or “the importance of accessible water.” Building out your navigation and your information architecture is all about identifying which pieces of content your visitors are most likely to need and making sure it’s easy to find.

Having easily navigable content also helps with your page speed, which means it’s important for SEO purposes. 919 Insights can help make sure your content is well-organized on your website and accessible for your target audience.

## Take Advantage of .edu and .gov Links

While there’s dispute as to whether or not .edu and .gov links are truly magical in the SEO world, there’s no doubt that these links often carry the age and authority that Google loves. Getting a school or government website to link to your organization can often provide a huge boost in the authority ranking of your own website, which in turn can have a positive impact on your search engine ranking.

Some ways to take advantage of these links include:

* Commenting on a blog or article related to your nonprofit – this can get your name in front of the school or government entity you’re trying to work with and encourage a back-and-forth to establish trust and rapport. Just make sure not to link-spam!
* Giving these organizations something of value – creating a scholarship, volunteer opportunity for students, or partnership opportunity for government organizations can encourage the type of off-site backlinking that you’re looking for. Better yet, if you do create a scholarship or volunteer opportunity, connect it directly to the school you’re trying to partner with. For example, if you’re a nonprofit that’s working with homeless youth, try tying your opportunity to a social work or teaching department at the school.
* Reaching out to .edu and .gov bloggers – there aren’t many bloggers in the .edu and .gov spaces, which means that they can be a rare and wonderful resource to take advantage of. If your nonprofit has a great connecting value or purpose with a school or government organization with a blog, consider contacting them to do a guest blog swap. Both of you get the boosted advantage of working with an outside organization, a helpful connection, and some great inbound links.

Remember, nonprofits have a huge advantage over for-profit corporations and organizations when it comes to connecting with .edu and .gov links. It’s often good PR for a school or government entity to connect with a nonprofit and support a charitable goal, so don’t be afraid to network and make those connections!

## Right Content, Right Time

The right content shapes your brand, which means it’s crucial that you’re getting that content into the hands of your target audience when it’s going to have the most impact. If your nonprofit has periods of the year that are busier, then you need to be ramping up your content production leading up to that time.

For example, Toys for Tots is busiest around Christmas, but you start seeing and hearing about them in September or October. They make sure to get their message out there early and often, so that when the final push comes (the end of November and through December) they have plenty of inbound links, sponsored posts, and easy-to-find ways to donate and participate.

If you’re a nonprofit that collects school supplies to help children who otherwise wouldn’t have access, you’d likely want to start writing articles about how important it is to be fully equipped to get the most out of learning in May or June, and look at partnering with parent blogs and local primary and secondary schools for a summer donation drive. Maybe you create a Facebook event for August and spend the summer months promoting that event. Then, on the first day of school, you’re handing backpacks full of supplies to kids that need them, because you took the time to get your message and information into the hands of those who would be most receptive.

The point is that having your content be targeted to your needs and objectives and appropriately timed for maximum audience engagement can be the difference between a successful and unsuccessful year. No matter what your nonprofit’s needs, goals, or objectives are, creating an effective, organized content schedule that takes into account the peaks and valleys of your organization’s busy times is another important step on the path to success.

# Mobilize Your Supporters

The best spokesperson for your nonprofit organization is a supporter that’s happy with the work that you do. Their genuine enthusiasm for your cause can be infectious, and that’s why it’s important to build strong relationships with them. Networking with your supporters can be something as simple as asking them to refer you to their friends and family, or it can include setting up an advocate program for your supporters and encouraging them to partner with you.

Another great way to both network with your supporters and improve your focus as an organization is to invite their feedback, whether through direct calls or through encouraging reviews on your social media. By being open to constructive feedback, you’re letting people know that you care about your goals and about being the best you can be, and that in itself is a way to generate more support.

However you choose to mobilize your supporters, know that they’re going to be a great source of references, inbound links, and authority building. You want to become a thought leader in your space, an expert on your cause; your supporters can push you to that height. Donors are giving more, but are also doing more research than ever, making sure that the causes and organizations they’re donating to are worth it. Let your support network help you convince others that your cause is just.

# Domain Trustworthiness

Finally, let’s talk about something that is all-too-often overlooked when it comes to optimizing your search engine ranking and building trust for your nonprofit: Domain Authority. In short, Domain Authority is the measure of how trustworthy your domain is, and includes a lot of factors – from how long your domain has existed to how many inbound links you have (and what the quality of those links are).

Having a single domain that holds all the content your nonprofit has to offer and keeping that single domain updated is much more effective at building Domain Authority than having a bunch of different domains tied to your nonprofit business name. If you have multiple domains, it’s a lot harder to build that authority and trustworthiness, which means it’s a lot harder to improve that aspect of your search engine ranking.

For example:

* Mynonprofit.com is your main domain.
  + Mynonprofit.com/[location] can be the structure for your different locations, instead of creating a new website like mynonprofit[location].com.
  + If your nonprofit offers multiple benefits, like housing discounts and food support for example, you could create a structure like mydomain.com/foodsupport and mydomain.com/housingassistance instead of having something like mydomainfoodsupport.com or mydomainhousingassistance.com.

Housing all of your links under one “roof,” so to speak (your main domain) makes it a lot easier for your website to be indexed, kept up-to-date, and linked to. It’s also a lot easier to plan, oversee, and upload content when it’s all in a central location – you don’t have to manage a bunch of different websites, just one website with different pages.

We know that SEO can seem overwhelming, especially if you’re an organization with limited staff, budget, or time. That’s why we recommend taking advantage of groups and tools like [919 Insights](https://919marketing.com/franchise-marketing-analytics/) to help streamline the process and make sure you’re getting the best results possible.