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SEO Foundations: The Starter Guide

A practical, jargon-free introduction to Search Engine Optimisation for founders, marketers, and small business owners who want organic traffic that compounds for years.

Most SEO advice online is written for SEO professionals, by SEO professionals. This guide is different. It explains exactly what SEO is, what actually moves the needle in 2026, and what you can do this week to start ranking higher , without buying a single tool or hiring a single specialist.

What you'll learn: what SEO actually is and why it matters, the three pillars of modern SEO, how to research keywords, on-page essentials, technical SEO basics, link building, and how to measure real results , all without jargon.

What SEO Actually Is

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the practice of making your website more visible in search results , primarily Google. When done well, SEO brings you free, qualified traffic from people who are already searching for what you offer.

Unlike paid advertising, which stops working the moment you stop paying, SEO compounds. A well-optimised page published today can drive qualified leads for years with little ongoing maintenance. That's the magic , and the reason every serious business invests in it.

Three things SEO is not

- It is not a one-time fix. SEO is an ongoing practice, not a project.
- It is not magic, hacks, or tricks. Real SEO is methodical, evidence-based work.
- It is not separate from your website. SEO has to be built into how the site is designed, written, and engineered.

The Three Pillars of Modern SEO

Every successful SEO strategy rests on three pillars. Neglect any one of them and the whole thing collapses.

Pillar 1 , On-Page SEO

Everything you control on your actual pages: content, headings, internal links, page speed, and metadata. Without strong on-page SEO, no amount of external work will help you rank.

Pillar 2 , Technical SEO

How your website is built underneath: site speed, mobile responsiveness, structured data, indexing, and crawlability. Technical issues quietly kill rankings, even on great content.

Pillar 3 , Off-Page SEO

Everything that happens beyond your site: backlinks from other reputable websites, brand mentions, and overall authority. Search engines use these signals to decide whether the wider web actually trusts you.

Keyword Research , Where SEO Starts

Keyword research is simply figuring out what your audience is actually typing into Google , and writing content that answers exactly those questions.

The four types of search intent

- **Informational** , 'how to write a marketing plan' (someone wants to learn)
- **Navigational** , 'syvera studio' (someone is looking for a specific brand)
- **Commercial** , 'best CRM for small business' (someone is researching before buying)
- **Transactional** , 'buy ergonomic office chair' (someone is ready to buy)

Different intents need different page types. Informational queries need blog posts and guides. Transactional queries need product or service pages with clear calls to action.

Free keyword research tools to start with

- Google Search Console , shows you what you already rank for
- Google Keyword Planner , free, official Google keyword data
- Google autocomplete , type a phrase and see what Google suggests
- People Also Ask , the question box on Google results pages

On-Page SEO Essentials

Once you know what to target, here's how to actually structure every page so it has the best chance to rank.

	Each page targets one primary keyword (plus 2-3 related variations)
	Title tag includes the primary keyword and stays under 60 characters
	Meta description is compelling and under 160 characters
	Each page has exactly one H1, with subheadings using H2 and H3
	Primary keyword appears in the first 100 words naturally
	Content is comprehensive , long enough to fully answer the search query
	Images have descriptive filenames and alt text
	Internal links connect to related, relevant pages on your site
	URL is short, readable, and includes the primary keyword

Technical SEO Basics

You don't need to be a developer to handle technical SEO well, but you do need to know what to check.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Your site uses HTTPS (the padlock icon in browsers)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Your site loads in under 3 seconds on mobile
<input type="checkbox"/>	Core Web Vitals pass on pagespeed.web.dev
<input type="checkbox"/>	Your site has an XML sitemap at <code>/sitemap.xml</code>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Your robots.txt allows search engines to crawl your important pages
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mobile-responsive design works on every screen size
<input type="checkbox"/>	Structured data (schema markup) is added for key page types
<input type="checkbox"/>	No duplicate content issues (use canonical tags where needed)
<input type="checkbox"/>	404 errors and broken links are checked and fixed regularly

Content That Actually Ranks

Google's number one job is to surface content that genuinely helps the searcher. The more your content does that, the higher you rank.

Google's E-E-A-T framework

Google evaluates content based on Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trust. The more your content demonstrates all four, the better it performs.

- **Experience** , show first-hand knowledge of the topic
- **Expertise** , demonstrate real knowledge through depth and accuracy
- **Authority** , be recognised as a credible source in your space
- **Trust** , have a professional, transparent, accurate website

Link Building , The Right Way

Backlinks remain one of the strongest ranking signals. But the rules have completely changed , quality matters infinitely more than quantity.

Ways to earn quality backlinks

- Create original research, data, or insights worth citing
- Guest post on reputable industry websites
- Get featured in industry round-ups and 'best of' lists
- Partner with non-competing businesses for cross-promotion
- Get listed in respected industry directories
- Be a source for journalists through platforms like HARO

Avoid at all costs: buying links, link exchanges, private blog networks (PBNs), or any 'fast track' link building service. Google's algorithms catch these reliably, and the penalties take months or years to recover from.

Measuring SEO Success

If you can't measure it, you can't improve it. Track the right things from day one.

Five metrics that matter

- **Organic traffic** , total visitors arriving from search engines
- **Keyword rankings** , where you appear for target search terms
- **Click-through rate** , the percentage of searchers who actually click
- **Conversions from organic** , the only metric that actually matters
- **Backlink profile growth** , quality links earned over time

Free tools to track all of this

- Google Search Console (impressions, clicks, rankings)
- Google Analytics 4 (traffic, conversions, behaviour)
- Microsoft Clarity (heatmaps and session recordings)

READY TO RANK?

SEO compounds. The earlier you start, the bigger the long-term return.

SEO is one of the highest-ROI investments any business can make , but only if it's done right from the foundations. If you'd like a partner who builds SEO into every project from day one, we'd love to help.

Want SEO that actually works?

Book a free 30-minute SEO strategy call. We'll audit your current state and map your fastest path to organic growth.

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