

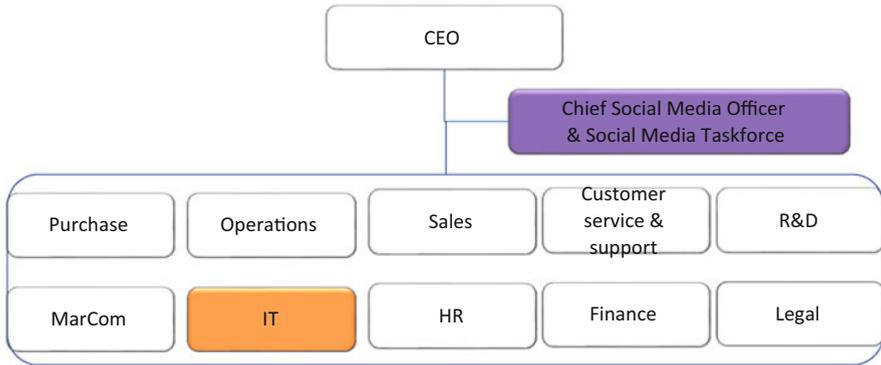
This chapter discusses how an organization can get its website, blog, or other social media pages higher on the (natural or organic) results page of search engines. This topic is highly relevant as Internet users are more likely to visit search results that are shown at the top of a results page. In order to decide which web pages appear higher on a results page, search engines typically evaluate which web pages are more relevant after applying an indexation mechanism. Such an indexation mechanism will rank web pages by means of so-called spiders. In response, web page owners can try to obtain higher ranks in search engines by applying search engine optimization (SEO) for internal improvements (e.g., on-page or on-site) and external improvements (e.g., link related). This chapter offers the reader some tips and tricks to apply SEO and to evaluate which websites, blogs, or social media pages are more SEO friendly than others.

This chapter particularly takes the perspective of the IT department and engineers to support other departments in the organization (Fig. 6.1).

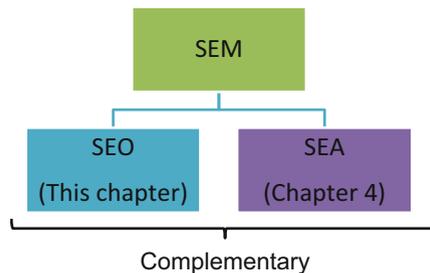
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## 6.1 Introduction to SEO (or SEM = SEO + SEA)

Today, search engines (e.g., Google™, Bing™, or Yahoo!™) help people browse the Internet and help avoid an information overload. Although a search engine emphasizes the verb “search,” its aim is to let people “find” information on the Internet. Hence, according to Nolens (2012), the term “find engine” might be more appropriate than “search engine.” As search engines are frequently used to find commercial information, most traffic to a corporate website, blog, or other social media page tends to come from search results (i.e., even rather from natural or organic search results than from sponsored or paid ads in search engines; see also Chap. 4). Moreover, the higher a web page appears on a search engine results page, the higher the probability that people will click on the link and visit that page. Hence, the topic of the present chapter deals with search engine optimization (SEO) in order to get higher page rankings in natural or organic listings.



**Fig. 6.1** The multidisciplinary approach of SEO



**Fig. 6.2** SEO being part of search engine marketing (SEM = SEO + SEA)

SEO is encompassed in a broader concept called “search engine marketing” (SEM) (Killoran 2013; Lieb 2009; Sen 2005). In particular, being part of the umbrella term “e-marketing” or “Internet marketing,” SEM covers two parts (Fig. 6.2): (1) SEA or search engine advertising, as discussed in Chap. 4, and (2) SEO, which is the topic of the present chapter. Both parts (i.e., SEA and SEO) are complementary and can be simultaneously applied by organizations. Looking at this broader perspective of SEM counts as stimulating (relevant) traffic to a website, blog, or social media profile should also involve some benefits for the organization, such as reputation management, increasing brand awareness, direct marketing, and more desired business actions (e.g., sales or subscriptions to a newsletter) (Enge et al. 2012).

SEM combines SEO with SEA to help an organization acquire customers when they are looking for the organization and its products or services. For instance, when a customer launches a search query for a keyword (e.g., “smartphone”) in a search engine, he/she is likely to get an overload of search results that deal with the keyword. Therefore, an organization can (1) apply SEO and try to get its web pages higher in the organic or natural listings of search results that are linked to keywords relevant to that organization (e.g., in the top 10) or (2) apply SEA and try to reach higher visibility by means of online ads.

**Table 6.1** The old and new way to find customers

The old way	The new way (SEM)
Customers must find the organization's contact details in a paper-based telephone directory (e.g., Yellow Pages)	Customers must find the URL to the organization's website, blog, or social media pages
Geographical location is crucial	Top 10 search results are crucial

Or as Table 6.1 explains, customers must first find the door to the organization (e.g., the address of a physical store or the link to the organization's website), before actually visiting the organization and buying its products or services. Figuratively speaking, SEM helps customers find the organization's (physical or electronic) door.

With regard to SEM, SEO focuses on the organic or natural listings on a search engine results page (SERP), while SEA deals with paid ads in search engines. This chapter elaborates on SEO, which has the potential to pay off because of the following reasons.

- When people look for information in a search engine, most of them will visit those links that appear on top of their screen (i.e., which are considered to be trusted and more relevant), without scrolling down or visiting a page that appears rather at the bottom (Lee 2005).
- The vast majority of clicks in search engines (even up to 75 %) tend to come from organic listings, whereas a minority of the clicks come from online ads.
- Some easy-to-use SEO tips and tricks with a relatively low cost of ownership can be applied to potentially obtain more clicks (Jerkovic 2010).

Nonetheless, SEO is not always perceived as easy to realize, because the requirements (i.e., ranking factors) differ among search engines, change from time to time, and are rather based on guesses instead of publicly known requirements (Sen 2005). Hence, SEO requires continuous improvements with trial and error.

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## 6.2 Defining SEO

Search engine optimization (SEO) can be defined as “the art and the science of getting a website to appear prominently in organic search engine results when a search submits a query relevant to that website” (Lieb 2009: p. xiii). A broader definition is given by Jerkovic (2010) as “an aggregate of all the work necessary to produce a high volume of referral hits from search engines, web directories and other websites, with the ultimate goal of making the website popular” (p. 1).

Table 6.2 summarizes the main differences between SEO and SEA. The comparison clarifies that SEO refers to natural or organic search results. This chapter gives tips and tricks that are relatively easy to use and may possibly result in a

**Table 6.2** The difference between SEO and SEA

Search engine optimization (SEO)	Search engine advertising (SEA)
Organic (or natural) search results	Sponsored, paid online ads
Universal search (e.g., web pages, social pages, images, video, news, books, etc.)	Bidding process based on keywords
Continuous website improvements (e.g., architecture, content, links)	During a marketing campaign
Long-term impact	Short-term impact
Long-term strategy $\Rightarrow$ patience	Quick setup $\Rightarrow$ immediate results
Higher ROI and lower cost of ownership	Expensive pricing models (e.g., pay-per-view, pay-per-click, pay-per-action, etc.)

higher ROI than the more expensive pricing models for online ads (e.g., pay-per-view or pay-per-click; see Chap. 4). In particular, for applying SEO, an organization is not involved in a bidding process (or bidding war; see Chap. 4). Nonetheless, in order to profit from SEO, an organization should continuously improve its website, blog, or other social media pages in order to keep them up to date. Finally, in strong contrast to online ads, SEO has a long-term impact without being limited to the duration of a marketing campaign. This implies that an organization also needs to wait longer before seeing its SEO results (while some managers may not have the patience to wait for the results of SEO).

### 6.3 Search Engine Results Page

Different search engines exist nowadays (e.g., Google™ <https://www.google.com/>, Yahoo! <http://search.yahoo.com/>, Microsoft's Bing™ <http://www.bing.com/>, Ask Jeeves™ <http://www.ask.com/>) (Enge et al. 2012; Jerkovic 2010). Some early search engines disappeared, such as AltaVista (acquired by Yahoo!™) or MSN Search (acquired by Microsoft™ and now being part of Bing™). For more information about the history of search engines in the 1990s, see [http://www.thehistoryofseo.com/The-Industry/Short\\_History\\_of\\_Early\\_Search\\_Engines.aspx](http://www.thehistoryofseo.com/The-Industry/Short_History_of_Early_Search_Engines.aspx).

The choice for one or another search engine should, however, depend on the targeted region. For statistics about search engines and browsers per region and worldwide, see: <http://gs.statcounter.com/>. For instance, the statistics show that Google™ is the dominating search engine worldwide (with almost 90 %). On the other hand, a country such as China does not frequently use Google™.

When looking at a regular search engine results page (SERP), a clear distinction should be visible between the online ads and the organic search results. For instance, the reserved space for online ads is frequently indicated in another color and with a title such as “Ads” or “Sponsored links” in order to inform the Internet user that it concerns paid search results. Particularly, as will be explained in Chap. 11 on social media ethics, disclosure of relationship is relevant to the Internet user who might get influenced to purchase the product or service in the ad.

As shown in Fig. 6.3, the paid ads are followed by the natural or organic search results. The reason why paid ads appear first is because research has shown that the upper left corner of a website is typically the most viewed area and thus the best eye catcher for positioning paid ads (albeit more expensive; see Chap. 4). As an example, Fig. 6.4 illustrates how a search engine results page is arranged in conformance with eye-tracking research (Lee 2005).

In sum, an SERP typically consists of the following elements:

- **Search area.** An input field to insert one or more keywords (e.g., “smartphone”) and a button to launch the search query.
- **Online ads.** The search area is directly followed by the sponsored search ads, which must catch the eye (see Fig. 6.3). The ads that appear are likely to be directly or indirectly linked to the keywords of the search query. For instance, in the example of the keyword “smartphone,” targeted ads may promote particular shops to buy a smartphone or websites to review or to compare the price and features of smartphones.
- **Natural or organic search results.** The organic listings that follow the online ads may refer to similar websites as in the online ads but also to other sources of information (e.g., books, encyclopedias, or dictionaries). Organic search results may also cover images or videos that relate to the search query, as well as news items (e.g., articles that report on the keyword “smartphone”) or local search results (e.g., a geographical map with local shops).

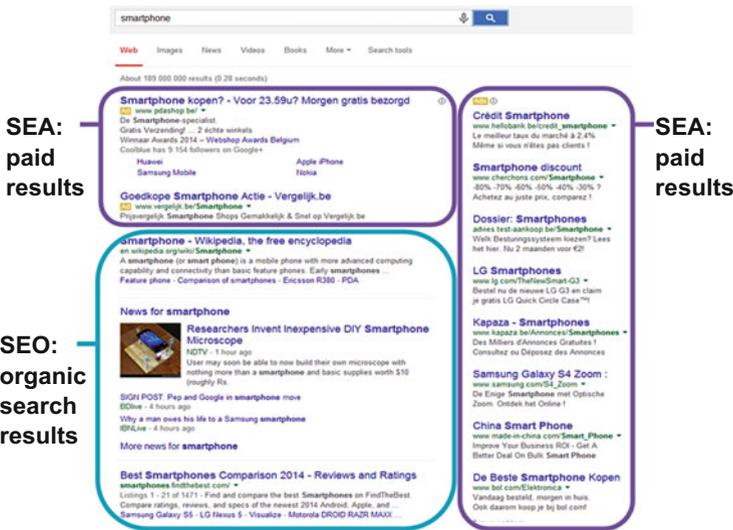
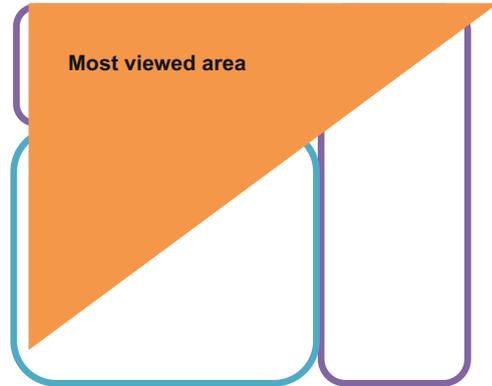


Fig. 6.3 Typical areas for SEO and SEA on a search engine results page. (Google™ and the Google™ logo are registered trademarks of Google™ Inc., used with permission)

**Fig. 6.4** The most viewed area on a web page, based on Lee (2005)



## 6.4 Indexation Mechanism

Each search engine has its own business model for selling space for online ads (i.e., related to SEA; see Sect. 4.1.3 on pricing models), as well as for their natural search queries (i.e., related to SEO). To facilitate the natural or organic search process, a search engine will assign a ranking to web pages by following a specific indexation mechanism. This ranking process can be influenced by SEO, i.e., by adapting web pages to the assumed requirements of one or more indexation mechanisms in order to obtain higher page rankings.

However, the indexation mechanisms of specific search engines are not fully known, differ from search engine to search engine, and may also regularly change for the same search engine (Bailyn 2014; Lieb 2009; Sen 2005). Hence, an organization can try to focus on the indexation mechanism of one or only a few search engines and this with continuous efforts. For instance, given Google™'s dominating role (see Sect. 6.3), an organization can decide to focus on the indexation mechanism of this search engine (which also comprises requirements of other search engines to some degree) and rather buy ads on other search engines (Olaja and Sherman 2011). Section 6.5 illustrates some general tips and tricks to start with.

The indexation mechanisms of search engines are a strong motivation in favor of SEO, as studies have shown that organic or natural website traffic is significantly higher for websites with higher rankings (Enge et al. 2012; Keane and Smyth 2008). For instance, SMEs with relatively unknown brands can generally profit from SEO's lower cost of ownership (i.e., compared to online ads), albeit only in the long term.

The following steps illustrate how a search engine typically works. A search engine considers the Internet as a web of links, i.e., with web pages linked to each other as a spider's web. At regular times, the so-called spiders of search engines crawl over the web (i.e., WWW). For instance, when a new web page is created or an existing page modified, a "spider" should first find it and crawl over that page.

Particularly, it will skim the page's text, image descriptions, metadata, page titles, and URL. It will also follow links and count the incoming and outgoing links. Next, the keywords linked to that page will be indexed (i.e., added to a database) and the frequency of words will be analyzed. Afterwards, based on this information, the web page will be weighed and ranked in comparison with other web pages. Thus, a "spider" refers to "a program or automated script that (...) navigates from URL to URL by following links on the pages of the websites that they visit" (Lieb 2009: p. 2). By doing so, it applies the indexation mechanism of a specific search engine and browses the Internet to look for the most popular web pages, resulting in a page ranking (i.e., similar to a score out of 10). Hence, metaphorically speaking, a "spider" crawls over the web in search for content and can also be called a "robot," "bot," or "crawler" (Lieb 2009; Jerkovic 2010). Finally, when a particular search query is launched, the search engine will only rely on the identified index (i.e., similar to a database with information of all web pages that have been visited by its "spiders") in order to show relevant organic search results in a faster way.

In particular, more than 200 ranking factors or parameters (i.e., mostly related to trust and relevance) can determine the ranking in a search engine's natural search algorithm (e.g., trust of the host domain, link popularity, on-page keyword usage, click-through data or traffic, registration and hosting data, etc.) (Killoran 2013). For more examples of ranking factors, see: <http://moz.com/search-ranking-factors>. SEO tries to take these parameters into account in order to obtain a higher organic page ranking (i.e., a score out of 10).

Nonetheless, a search engine can also "punish" websites that are too optimized in terms of SEO (e.g., which have an extensive use of keywords or which have incoming links of low quality, such as links from gambling sites or adult-oriented sites). The latter is called an "over-optimization penalty," and the SEO efforts will not result in a higher page ranking. Instead, web pages can even get a worse placement on SERPs or be banned from SERPs for a period of time. SEO penalties can also be used to "punish" the use of "black hat" SEO techniques (or "search engine index spamming"), if discovered. "Black hat" SEO techniques are considered as unethical attempts to get a higher page ranking or manipulations that violate the search engine requirements. Particularly, they contrast to the ethical "white hat" SEO techniques (Bailyn 2014; Killoran 2013; Malaga 2005). Examples of "black hat" SEO techniques are hidden content on web pages, a duplication of content (i.e., canonicalization), stuffing pages with keywords irrelevant to the page's content, selling or buying incoming links (i.e., link farming), page hijacks redirecting to malicious websites, "cloaking" (i.e., showing different contents to search engines than to humans), "bowling" (i.e., manipulating the competitors' search engine results, e.g., by manipulating the quality of their incoming links), etc. On the contrary, Sect. 6.5 focuses on "white hat" SEO techniques.

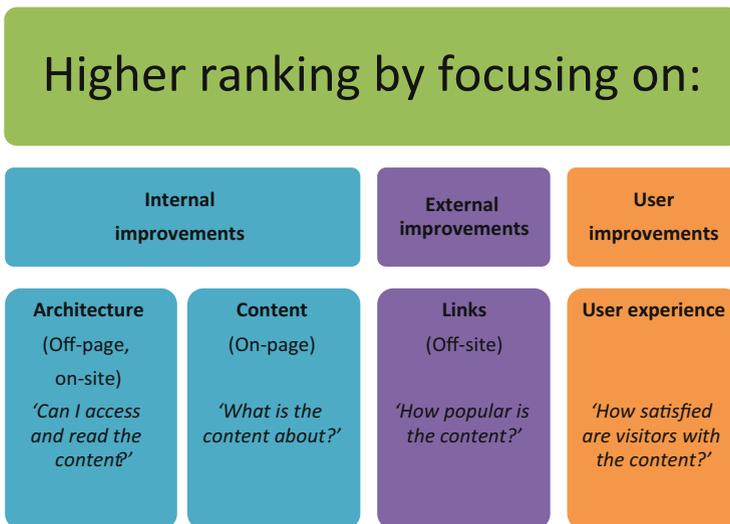
An advantage of search engines is that they are characterized by a high coverage (i.e., reaching many people, similar to mass communication) and a high precision (i.e., reaching people fast and in a personalized way, similar to niche communication and direct marketing) (Nolens 2012). On the other hand, an implication and possible critique on the business model of search engines relates to the real power

they have nowadays (Keane and Smyth 2008). Particularly, many people browse the Internet by primarily using search engines and tend to browse only the highly ranked web pages. Consequently, organizations are seemingly forced to follow what search engines find important (in terms of ranking factors in the indexation mechanisms), in order to get higher page rankings and thus to appear higher in those search queries that are related to the keywords of an organization's website, blog, or other social media pages. Moreover, the power of search engines is not limited to SEO and covers SEM as a whole. The more Internet users launch search queries, the more power search engines also have during the bidding process of SEA.

## 6.5 Tips and Tricks for SEO

The chapter continues with tips and tricks on how a website, blog, or other social media pages can potentially reach a higher ranking in search engines and this with a relatively low cost of ownership (i.e., compared to online ads). The SEO literature typically classifies SEO tips and tricks in different categories or pillars (Jerkovic 2010; Nolens 2012; Shepard 2013) (Fig. 6.5):

- Internal (off-page or on-site) improvements can relate to the architecture of a website, blog, or social media page.
- Internal (on-page) improvements can relate to the online content of a website, blog, or social media page.
- External (off-site) improvements can relate to the external links to a website, blog, or social media page.



**Fig. 6.5** Tips and tricks for SEO

- Improvements can relate to how Internet users experience a website, blog, or social media page.

Subsequently, a selection of tips and tricks is illustrated per SEO category, without intending to be comprehensive.

### 6.5.1 Off-Page or On-Site SEO Improvements

The first category of SEO tips and tricks deals with the architecture of a website and determines who can access and read the content, as summarized in Fig. 6.6 (Bailyn 2014; Jerkovic 2010; Nolens 2012; Seomoz 2010).

- **Tip 1—Readable URLs with keywords.** URLs (i.e., website addresses) should have a meaningful understanding for humans. Particularly, URLs should:
  - **Tip 1.1 Contain meaningful keywords that are understandable for humans instead of computer language**
  - **Tip 1.2 Contain hyphens (rather than underscores) between the keywords to increase readability**
  - **Tip 1.3 Be translated into different languages**

With regard to this factor, an SEO-unfriendly example would be a URL such as `http://www.title.com/article/SB10014241278530518069748.html`, because it contains computer language that remains unreadable for humans. On the other hand, a better example would be `http://www.title.com/article/`

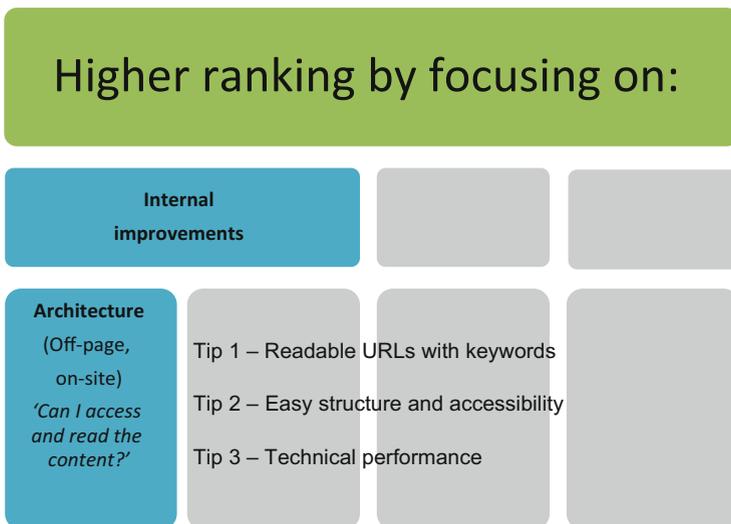


Fig. 6.6 Tips and tricks for off-page or on-site SEO improvements

**article-title-is-shown-here.html**, which uses meaningful keywords with hyphens in between. Some examples related to Ghent University are:

- <http://www.feb.ugent.be/nl/subtopics.asp?mainID=30&catID=304> This example concerns a Dutch web page (indicated by “nl”) with Dutch acronyms (e.g., “feb” and “ugent”). However, since the link contains English keywords (e.g., “subtopic”) and computer language (e.g., “asp?mainID=30&catID=304”), it is rather SEO unfriendly. It would be better to have keywords with hyphens in between, which are translated into the language of the web content, for example: <http://www.feb.ugent.be/nl/informatie-over-doctoraten>.

- <http://www.ugent.be/en/teaching/studying/languageofinstruction> The next example concerns an English web page (indicated by “en”) and the keywords are translated into the language of the web content (e.g., “teaching” and “studying”). The URL is free of computer language, which is also positive. Nevertheless, the keyword “languageofinstruction” is presented as a single word without hyphens, which is more difficult to read than “language-of-instruction.”

- <http://www.uct.ugent.be/en/open-program/continuing-education-language-teachers>

This final example is SEO friendly in the sense that it shows no computer language, and the keywords are in the same language as the web content and contain hyphens. As such, this URL is a good example of the first SEO tip.

- **Tip 2—Easy structure and accessibility.** The second tip emphasizes that when spiders crawl the web, they usually do not fill out forms or wait for the possible results. Hence:

- **Tip 2.1 It is better to have simple page constructions (i.e., without dropdowns or input fields).** Instead of dropdowns or input fields, an alternative would be to list all options with links, radio buttons, or checkboxes (or to mention all options somewhere on the website).

- **Tip 2.2 Use words with internal links (i.e., internal link building as alternative paths to the different pages of a website and an overview of web pages in a sitemap).** Spiders can click on links to other web pages of the same website. This technique is frequently used by Wikipedia™ and is one reason why this online encyclopedia usually appears very high on an SERP (see, e.g., <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smartphone>). Other reasons why Wikipedia™ is SEO friendly will follow in the subsequent tips and tricks.

- **Tip 2.3 Adopt mobile technologies.** The need for an easy structure and high accessibility also counts for websites on mobile devices (e.g., tablets or smartphones). Hence, it is advisable to offer a mobile alternative, e.g., with a larger letter size, easiness to navigate by means of finger gestures, etc.

- **Tip 3—Technical performance.** An organization should pay attention to the technical performance of its website, blog, or other social media pages, because of two main reasons. First, when SEO spiders visit a website (e.g., once a week), the links must work. Secondly, people dislike “slow” websites, i.e., which take a lot of time to load. Hence, if a corporate website or web page fails to load or if

the load time is too long, potential buyers tend to switch to a competitor’s website and search engines will not find the web pages. Particularly, website visits are usually short (e.g., a few minutes per website and even a few seconds per page), while visitors who stay longer are potential buyers. Therefore:

- **Tip 3.1 Remove olds links** (i.e., links that are missing, lost, or broken) after modifying or updating the web content.
- **Tip 3.2 Skip (large) pictures to speed up slow websites.**
- **Tip 3.3 Regularly measure the speed and popularity of a website**, e.g., by using rank websites such as the Compete Rank (<https://www.compete.com/>) and the Alexa Rank (<http://www.alexa.com/>). For instance, to check the speed and popularity of Wikipedia™, see: <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/wikipedia.org>. Such rank websites can give information about the rank of other websites, their bounce rate, daily page views per visitor, daily time on site, audience demographics and geography, top keywords from search engines, etc. This information gives relevant input to the organization’s SEO efforts and alarms the organization when action is needed.

### 6.5.2 On-Page SEO Improvements

Figure 6.7 illustrates the second category of SEO tips and tricks, which relates to the content or what a particular website is about (Bailyn 2014; Jerkovic 2010; Nolens 2012; Seomoz 2010).

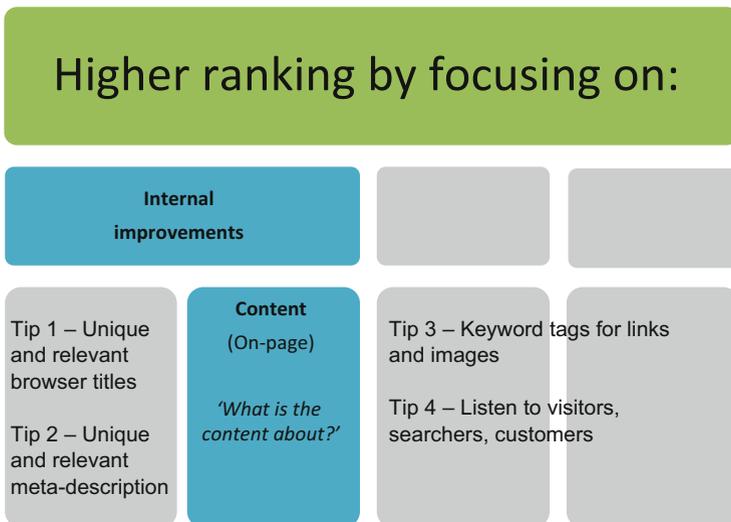


Fig. 6.7 Tips and tricks for on-page SEO improvements



**Fig. 6.8** An example of a unique and relevant browser title. (Google™ and the Google™ logo are registered trademarks of Google™ Inc., used with permission)

- **Tip 1—Unique and relevant browser titles.** This SEO factor emphasizes the need for meaningful website names and keywords. Hence:
  - **Tip 1.1. Use the keywords of Internet users in the URL and repeat them in the content of the web page and in the meta-description (see next tip).** This tip continues to explain why Wikipedia™ is a top search result for many keywords. For instance, Fig. 6.8 starts by showing the most relevant keyword (e.g., “smartphone”) and frequently repeats that word in the content.
  - **Tip 1.2. It is good to start with content-specific terms as “head” keywords (e.g., “Samsung™ Galaxy S4”) and end with generic terms as “tail keywords” (e.g., “smartphone”).** For instance, if an Internet user searches for a specific term, he/she will rather be interested in content-specific websites than websites with only generic keywords. However, in an example such as “Smartphones: Samsung™, BlackBerry™, and Palm™ smartphone reviews,” the generic keyword precedes the specific brand names as this web page rather provides an overview of brands instead of being limited to one specific brand.
  - **Tip 1.3. Also PDF files can be given unique and relevant titles.**
  - **Tip 1.4. Use short titles (e.g., maximum eight words).** Otherwise, titles might become too long to be fully shown on an SERP. Consider, for instance, a rather SEO-unfriendly example such as “An information-flow tracking system for real-time . . .” The example does not seem to start with a relevant keyword (e.g., “smartphone”) and the Internet user will probably not see the full browser title in a search engine. Hence, such a browser title is less likely to appear in the top 10 of search results in a search engine.
- **Tip 2—Unique and relevant meta-description.** Besides the browser title, also the meta-description counts. This tip can be translated as follows.
  - **Tip 2.1. Add a description to be shown under the URL in the search results.** As shown in Fig. 6.8, an SERP usually supplements the URL and the browser title with a short description (or snippet). This meta-description differs from the first sentences of the actual web content, as its aims to get traffic to a particular web page and thus needs to be short, well thought, and attractive. As an illustration, Table 6.3 shows how a header with a meta-description and keywords looks like in an HTML format (i.e., a computer language to mark text so that it can be seen on the Internet). It concerns a line of code with specific areas for the browser title, meta-description, and meta-keywords.

**Table 6.3** An example of a meta-description in HTML format

```

<html>
<head>
<title>Smartphones: Samsung™, Blackberry™, and iPhone™
smartphone reviews</title>
<meta name="description" content="Interested in the latest
smartphones such as the Blackberry™, iPhone™, Palm™ Pre or
HTC™ Touch? Our smartphone coverage includes software
downloads, news, ..."/>
<meta name="keywords" content="smartphone, Samsung™,
Blackberry™, iPhone™, Palm™, HTC™, review, cell phone,
PDA, organizer, email, hybrid"/>
</head>
</html>

```

- **Tip 2.2. Find ideal keywords.** An organization should find keywords with (1) high volume (i.e., used in many search queries), (2) low competition (i.e., used less by other websites), and (3) high value (i.e., leading to a high number of conversions). (1) The volume of keywords can be derived from the bidding process of online ads (see Chap. 4), which is available by ad server vendors (e.g., by Google™ AdWords, <http://adwords.google.com>). (2) Unfortunately, other websites are also likely to use high-volume keywords, resulting in more competitions among websites. Therefore, a balance should be found between the so-called popular keywords and keywords that are used less by other websites. For instance, an organization can choose for less-competitive “tail” keywords. To get information about competition, an organization can verify which websites in its domain are highly ranked on different SERPs or it can use a keyword difficulty tool. Thus, low competition means that the web pages in the top 10 of SERPs are weaker in terms of SEO than the corporate web pages and this for particular keywords. (3) Finally, high-value keywords can lead to website visitors who are more likely to make conversions to business actions (e.g., actually buying a product or service or subscribing to a newsletter). This can be monitored, as discussed in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5 (e.g., by Google™ Analytics, <http://www.google.com/analytics/>).
- **Tip 3—Keyword tags for links and images.**
  - **Tip 3.1. Add an alternative text or keywords to be shown when a website visitor scrolls over links and images.** For instance, a graph related to smartphones may display the keywords “smartphone-comparison.”
- **Tip 4—Listen to visitors, searchers, and customers.**
  - **Tip 4.1. Ask open questions to derive keywords and feedback.** It is important to regularly ask open questions in order to gain more information about the customers and this without making assumptions (e.g., “Why do you visit this website?”).

- **Tip 4.2. Consider singular and plural mistakes** (e.g., “smartphone” versus “smartphones”).
- **Tip 4.3. Reuse keywords in trends.** Monitoring tools are another way to listen to people in order to find keywords. For instance, Google™ Trends (<http://www.google.com/trends/>) may show the search interest over time for a specific search term (e.g., “smartphone”) in order to indicate the degree to which people are using a particular keyword in a search engine. It may also show regional interests in order to refine keywords depending on the targeted region. For instance, a keyword such as “smartphone” might be more frequently used in Europe and America than in Asia or might be frequently combined with other keywords, such as “Samsung™,” “Android,” or “Nokia™.”

We remind the reader that SEO tips and tricks may change over time. For instance, a few years ago, it was still worthwhile to consider misspellings in keywords. For instance, if an Internet user tends to write the organization’s brand or product names incorrectly, then he/she will probably write the same spelling mistakes when searching for information in a search engine (e.g., “bluetooth” versus “bleuetooth” versus “bluethoot”). Hence, an organization could add those spelling mistakes as keywords for the website to be found when spelling mistakes are made in a search query. However, nowadays, optimizing a website for misspellings will rather have a negative impact on its ranking (AudienceBloom 2014; Lockard 2014; Nichols 2014).

Another example concerns the use of keywords in the meta-description. While meta-keywords initially had a large and direct impact on web ranking, they now have a more indirect role to play (see, e.g., Sect. 6.5.4 on user experience). One of the main reasons was misuse, e.g., an abundant use of irrelevant meta-keywords or copying meta-keywords of competitors (Google Webmasters 2009b).

### 6.5.3 Off-Site or External SEO Improvements

Figure 6.9 gives an overview of the third category of SEO tips and tricks, which determines how popular the content of a website is based on links from other external websites (i.e., external link building, with external links being known as backlinks, inbound links, or referral links) (Bailyn 2014; Jerkovic 2010; Nolens 2012; Seomoz 2010).

However, a distinction should be made between normal links (i.e., “dofollow” links) and “nofollow” links. The latter are links that will not be followed by SEO spiders because of a specific attribute or tag in their source code. Consequently, they have no impact on a website’s ranking (i.e., not on the site that shows the link nor on the linked site). The concept of “nofollow” links is especially introduced for potentially untrusted content, paid links, and crawl prioritization (i.e., as SEO spiders cannot register as a member). For instance, a webmaster who cannot control the trustworthiness or relevance of links added to their website may consider using



**Fig. 6.9** Tips and tricks for off-site or external SEO improvements

“nofollow” links, which is often the case in social media comments or blog comments made by other users (and thus to prevent that those websites will be punished by a search engine) (Google Webmasters 2013). For instance, Wikipedia™ uses “nofollow” for its external links (Google Webmasters 2009b).

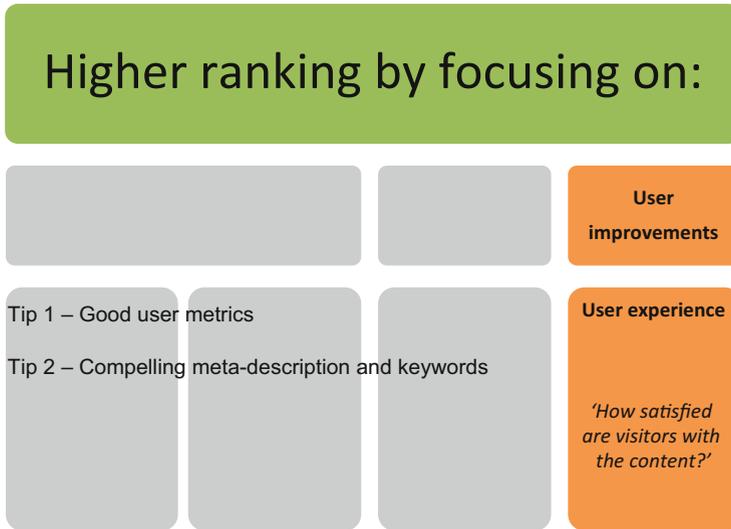
- **Tip 1—Relevant incoming links and deep links.** External links matter to search engines, because what other trusted web pages tell about an organization is considered to be more important than what the organization tells about itself.
  - **Tip 1.1. Referring websites.** An organization can attempt to attract incoming links from other related websites. As discussed in Sect. 6.5.1 on off-page or on-site SEO improvements, the reputation and rank of specific websites can be verified on rank websites, e.g., <http://www.alexacom/>. Such websites also mention how many other websites have links to a particular website. For instance, millions of external websites have links to Wikipedia™ (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>).
  - **Tip 1.2. Use social media to link to your website.** Also social media profiles can be used to include links to an organization’s website. As such, an organization can benefit from the fact that social media are easy to share and can easily contain external links to websites. For instance, the URL to the corporate website can be mentioned on the organization’s Facebook™ page or its LinkedIn™ page. Links to a web page can also be mentioned in a blog post or in a certain topic on a forum. Further on, the organization can share relevant Pinterest™ pictures with links to the corporate website for more information. Other tips for “social media optimization” are regularly posting new content and stimulating links to other social media pages (e.g., posting

slides on Slideshare™ or a video on YouTube™ and then sharing, tweeting, or blogging about it). Nonetheless, we remind the reader that links on social media (and especially those in blog comments) are often made “nofollow” and will thus not impact on a site’s ranking.

- **Tip 2—Website submission to search engines and website directories.** This tip advises an organization to submit its web content to directories (e.g., Google™, <http://www.Google.be/submityourcontent/>), which can help optimize the website, blog, or social media pages (e.g., to submit a URL for inclusion in a search engine’s indexation mechanism or to label the structured web content in order to increase its visibility).
- **Tip 3—Measure, manage, and improve.** The final tip recalls the high importance of monitoring tools (e.g., Google™ Analytics, <http://www.google.com/analytics/>; see Chap. 3 on a social media strategy and Chap. 5 on social CRM). Monitoring tools can provide information about a website, such as the number of site visits and page visits, the number of pages per visit, the average duration per visit, the percentage of new visits, and the bounce rate (i.e., which refers to how many people leave a website without browsing the content). In other words, a monitoring tool can uncover some weaknesses about a website which the website owner should try to improve. As an example, a high bounce rate may reveal that the keywords are not appropriately determined, while a high click-through rate may give evidence of the website’s relevance for certain search queries. In addition to the monitoring tools, Google™ offers “Google Webmaster Tools” for webmasters to check the organic performance of their websites (<https://support.google.com/webmasters/?hl=en#topic=4558844>). For instance, if critical website problems arise, Google™ will notify the corresponding webmaster by means of this tool.

#### 6.5.4 SEO Improvements Related to User Experience

Besides the three traditional SEO categories, a rising fourth category focuses on user experience (Fig. 6.10). The tips and tricks in this fourth SEO category are less easy to use (compared to the other categories), because user experience can only be manipulated to a minor extent. In particular, search engines are likely to rank pages higher if visitors are satisfied with the content (Shepard 2013; Google Webmasters 2009b). User experience or satisfaction is hard to measure, but search engines can rely on their own data. For instance, data may concern user metrics as previously discussed (e.g., the bounce rate, the average time spent per visitor, the click-through rate; see also Chaps. 3 and 4). Also other data can be tracked by a search engine. One example is called “search pogo sticking,” i.e., the degree to which an Internet user reaches a website by using a search query and returns to the search results in order to visit another website in the same search query or to refine the search query and try again. Pogo sticking thus measures the (dis)satisfaction of users after visiting a particular website (i.e., based on “mining” log files; see also Chap. 8 on predictive mining). In other words, are Internet users generally satisfied with the



**Fig. 6.10** Tips and tricks for SEO improvements related to user experience

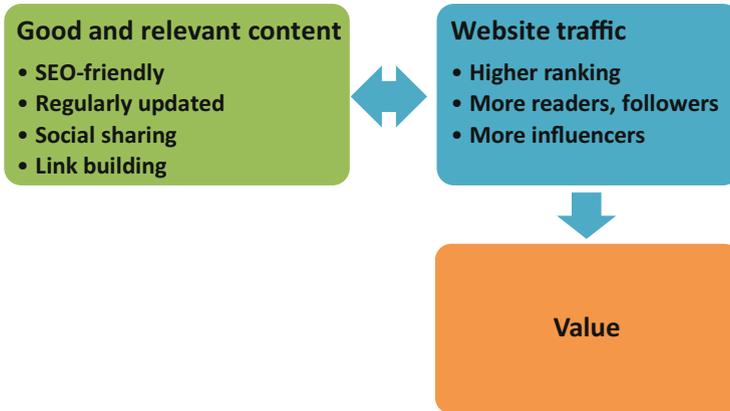
information found on a website, or do they still require other websites to find the information relevant to them?

- **Tip 1—Good user metrics.** Even if a website is optimized internally and externally (i.e., the previous SEO categories), it will not obtain a high ranking if its user metrics are poor. Hence, we remind the reader that monitoring is of paramount importance. Also some proactive initiatives can be taken, such as:
  - **Tip 1.1. Conduct user satisfaction surveys.** Ask website visitors how satisfied they are with the website, and look for suggestions for improvement.
  - **Tip 1.2. Empathy.** Answer the questions that website visitors might have, use intuitive layouts, link to relevant sources, update regularly so website visitors will return, etc.
- **Tip 2—Compelling meta-description and keywords.** As explained for on-page SEO improvements (Sect. 6.5.2), search engines frequently reuse the meta-description as the search result snippet. Hence, well-defined meta-descriptions help increase the click-through rate (and possibly the conversion rate) from search results to a website, which can indirectly result in a better ranking.

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## 6.6 Takeaways

To conclude the chapter, this section first looks at the takeaways for search engine marketing (SEM) in general and zooms in on search engine optimization (SEO) afterwards.



**Fig. 6.11** The value-enabling effect of SEO

SEM is frequently used by organizations to acquire customers online during a certain period of time. Still, it is a never-ending story that requires continuous improvements. On the one hand, it can operate by means of paid online advertisements (SEA; see Chap. 4). On the other hand, it tries to stimulate natural or organic website traffic by means of SEO. Hence, through paid and/or organic efforts, SEM intends to bring more people to an organization’s website, blog, or other social media pages. Both SEA and SEO are thus important to SEM, namely, SEO rather on the longer run (i.e., similar to investments impacting an organization’s sustainable growth) and SEA on the shorter run (i.e., allowing personalized or contextual ads within the duration of a campaign). Since SEM aims at reaching an organization’s business objectives, the results and ROI of SEM efforts should be carefully monitored and measured.

Regarding SEO, this chapter provided the reader with an overview tips and tricks that an organization can apply relatively easily to get its website, blog, or other social media pages higher in a search engine’s listing of free search results (e.g., in search engines such as Google™, Bing™, or Yahoo!™).

As explained in Fig. 6.11, SEO inherently starts with good and relevant content online that is regularly updated. This means that the success of SEO strongly depends on content that people are likely to share or to follow. When supplementing good and relevant content with SEO tips and tricks, higher rankings in search engines are more likely to be reached, resulting in more readers, followers, and influencers. In turn, more website traffic may stimulate an organization to provide even better content. In sum, the value-enabling effect of SEO is about creating such a virtuous cycle.

## 6.7 Self-Test

- What does the abbreviation SEO stand for?
  - How would you define the concept?
  - How does it relate to SEM and SEA?
- Do you think SEO and SEA can pay off in terms of ROI?
- What does the abbreviation SERP stand for? How would you define the concept?
- How would you describe the advantages and disadvantages of search engines?
- What do you think is the real power of search engines today?
- Do you know what is meant by an SEO spider?
- Can you explain why some SEO techniques can be considered as ethically incorrect? Do you know the difference between “white hat” and “black hat” SEO? Can you give examples?
- Can you explain the different tips and tricks for SEO?
- Look for URLs of websites that you frequently visit, and evaluate them in terms of SEO. Which ones are most SEO friendly?
- Can you explain why Wikipedia™ is frequently a top search result on SERPs?
- Do you know the difference between “dofollow” and “nofollow” links? Why is it useful?
- Can you explain pogo sticking?
- Are you able to conduct an SEO audit of an existing website?
- How does SEO relate to the previous chapters?
- If an organization asks your advice about e-marketing, what would you suggest? SEA or SEO? Or does it depend on some circumstances (e.g., organization size, organization sector, budget, etc.)?

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