

SEO Auditing & Optimization Plan

A Comprehensive Framework for Technical, On-Page, and Off-Page SEO Improvement

Prepared as a general-purpose SEO planning template

Executive Summary

This plan outlines a structured approach to fully SEO-optimizing a website by combining an evaluation of existing content and site structure with current SEO best practices. It brings together page-level content analysis, off-page and technical review, backlink auditing, and forward-looking keyword opportunities into a single, sequenced program.

The plan is organized into a series of steps, each tied to a specific audit deliverable or workstream. Steps are designed to be worked through roughly in order, though several can run in parallel once the initial discovery phase (Steps 1–2) is complete. Two extended steps have been added beyond the original audit scope to carry the plan through implementation and long-term monitoring, since a successful SEO program does not end once recommendations are documented.

This version removes or generalizes all client-identifying details, site URLs, and links to external working documents so the plan can be used as a reusable template across engagements.

Objectives

- Identify and resolve technical and on-page SEO issues across the site
- Streamline site architecture by consolidating duplicate or thin content
- Prioritize keyword opportunities based on traffic potential, trend, and competitive positioning
- Strengthen the backlink profile while identifying and mitigating toxic or unauthorized link usage
- Establish clear roles, a realistic timeline, and measurable KPIs to track progress after implementation

Methodology & Scope

The audit combines automated site crawling, manual page-level review, keyword and competitive research, and backlink analysis. Findings are organized into a set of supporting reports — a terminology glossary, a cleaned URL inventory, current and future keyword reports, a competitor analysis, a backlinks report, a duplicate-content and internal-linking report, a best-practices reference, a metadata report, and a broken-links report — each of which feeds into one of the plan steps below.

This version of the plan describes the purpose, findings themes, and recommended actions for each report rather than linking directly to client-specific working documents so that the structure can be reused as a general template for future audits.

Plan Overview

The optimization plan proceeds through the following steps:

1. Terminology & Optimization Glossary Review
2. URL Inventory & Cleanup
3. Current Keyword Performance Review
4. Competitive Landscape Analysis
5. Backlink Audit & Toxic Link Mitigation
6. Duplicate Content & Internal Linking Opportunities
7. SEO Best Practices Implementation Reference
8. Future Keyword Opportunities
9. Metadata Completion & Optimization
10. Broken Link (404) Remediation
11. On-Page Rollout & Content Optimization (Extended)
12. Ongoing Monitoring, Reporting & Iteration (Extended)

Detailed Plan Steps

Step 1 — Terminology & Optimization Glossary Review

The plan begins with a shared glossary of terms and error codes used throughout the audit. Establishing a common vocabulary up front ensures that both the client team and the SEO team can interpret findings the same way, regardless of technical background.

This glossary covers the terminology used across every stage of the audit, including error codes that surface across many areas of the site rather than being tied to a single page or URL. Common categories include URL structuring conventions, metadata implementation standards, multi-language/hreflang preferences, and schema markup examples.

Because many of these issues are systemic rather than page-specific, resolving them typically requires a documented process (see the SEO Best Practices reference in Step 7) rather than one-off fixes. Both teams share responsibility for reviewing this glossary and applying the associated recommendations consistently across the site.

Recommended Actions:

- Distribute the glossary to all stakeholders involved in implementation
 - Flag any terms or error codes that need further clarification before work begins
 - Cross-reference glossary items against the best-practices documentation to confirm a consistent fix pattern
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Step 2 — URL Inventory & Cleanup

A detailed inventory of existing URLs directly from the client's site. The SEO team reviews this list and removes pages that should remain hidden (staging pages, admin- or login-related paths), pages that no longer function, and pages that duplicate content found elsewhere on the site.

Narrowing the inventory down to public-facing, indexable content lets the remaining optimization effort focus on pages that matter for search visibility and user experience, rather than diluting effort across noise in the site's noise map.

Recommended Actions:

- Export a full URL list from the CMS and crawling tool
 - Categorize each URL as keep, redirect, noindex, or remove
 - Confirm removed/hidden pages are properly excluded from the sitemap and robots.txt where appropriate
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Step 3 — Current Keyword Performance Review

The site may already rank for many keywords, but ranking alone does not guarantee valuable traffic. In many audits, only a small fraction of ranking keywords deliver predictable, month-over-month traffic, and a large share of the remainder tend to be URL-like fragments or brand-name variants that provide limited strategic value.

This step involves identifying which existing keywords drive consistent traffic, which may trend upward over the next several months, and which pages—even if not part of the original URL inventory—represent opportunities worth preserving rather than discarding.

Recommended Actions:

- Segment current keywords by traffic volume, trend, and relevance to business goals
 - Identify branded vs. non-branded keyword performance
 - Flag any high-potential pages outside the original URL list for inclusion in future planning
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Step 4 — Competitive Landscape Analysis

Search engines group sites into competitive sets based on content, keyword overlap, and audience signals. This step documents the organizations that search engines currently associate with the client's site —some of which may be expected, while others may be poor strategic matches.

Through consistent keyword usage and adherence to best practices, the goal is to shift this grouping over time so that the client's site is positioned alongside more relevant, higher-value competitors, improving overall competitiveness within its intended market space.

Recommended Actions:

- Document current and desired competitive groupings
 - Analyze top-performing competitor pages for structure, keyword targeting, and content depth.
 - Identify content or technical gaps relative to stronger competitors.
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Step 5 — Backlink Audit & Toxic Link Mitigation

This step catalogs external sites linking to the client's content. Some of these links point to general homepage content, while others reference specific images or PDF assets—sometimes redirecting traffic and value away from the client's own site.

The audit identifies domains with elevated toxicity scores. It outlines a plan to disavow those links, along with recommendations to turn off hotlinking at the web-host level so outside sites can no longer freely use the client's media assets for their own benefit. Each entry in the underlying report includes the referring site, the specific page and asset being used, the content type, and both toxicity and domain authority scores.

Recommended Actions:

- Compile and prioritize the list of toxic or low-value referring domains
 - Submit a disavow file to the relevant search engine webmaster tools
 - Implement hotlink protection at the server/CDN level
 - Track referring domain quality over time as a leading indicator of authority health
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Step 6 — Duplicate Content & Internal Linking Opportunities

This step flags situations where content could be penalized for being duplicative, as well as opportunities where valuable pages lack internal links.

The first focus area is duplicate content: pages that closely mirror or exactly repeat content found elsewhere on the site. This issue often resolves naturally as content is condensed and consolidated, but it remains important to track against the criteria search engines use to flag duplication.

The second focus area is internal linking: pages that receive decent traffic but rarely get internal links. Link to these pages more often from relevant, high-traffic pages so search engines recognize their value and give them a fair chance to rank.

Recommended Actions:

- Build a duplicate-content tracking list and assign consolidation or canonicalization actions.
 - Identify underlinked but high-value pages.
 - Add contextual internal links from high-authority pages to underlinked pages.
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Step 7 — SEO Best Practices Implementation Reference

A dedicated best-practices reference outlines the key steps for producing a well-optimized page, and should be reviewed before implementing any recommended keywords. It defines common SEO terminology and explains how each concept maps to the client's specific content management platform.

In addition to keyword implementation guidance, this reference includes practical tips for naming documents, images, and other searchable assets so that they contribute positively to search visibility rather than being overlooked or misclassified.

Recommended Actions:

- Review the best-practices reference with all content contributors
- Apply file-naming and asset-labeling conventions going forward
- Use the reference as the standard checklist for all future page optimizations

Step 8 — Future Keyword Opportunities

Accurate keyword data is essential to building successful, optimized pages, but identifying the right keywords page by page can be time-consuming. Several factors are weighed for each page during this step:

- What specifically needs optimizing on this page?
- What could further enhance the existing content — video, imagery, structured data?
- Is the opportunity primarily code-level optimization or content-level optimization?
- Does the page have the proper heading and content structure to support target keywords?

For each page, this step identifies the best target keyword(s) and a brief rationale for that choice, along with potential backlink opportunities and a rival analysis that may surface gaps such as insufficient content depth, missing video, or content that has become bloated relative to competitors.

This report is one of the most impactful deliverables in the overall plan. Treat it as a priority, as it directly informs the timeline for improving rankings. Once new keywords are implemented, notify the SEO team so keyword tracking can begin and post-implementation growth can be measured accurately.

Recommended Actions:

- Assign target keyword(s) to every page in the current inventory
- Prioritize implementation by traffic potential and effort required
- Notify the SEO team immediately after each batch of keyword updates goes live

Step 9 — Metadata Completion & Optimization

This step reviews all in-scope pages and identifies those with missing or incomplete meta titles and descriptions. Gaps here typically result in an inconsistent off-page search experience — including inaccurate auto-generated descriptions in search results and inconsistent character counts across pages.

Because meta descriptions influence how a page appears in search results and can affect click-through rate, incorporate target keywords where natural. Further implementation guidance is available in the SEO Best Practices reference described in Step 7.

Recommended Actions:

- Audit all pages for missing or duplicate titles and meta descriptions
- Write unique, keyword-informed titles and descriptions within recommended character limits

- Spot-check search result appearance after publishing changes
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Step 10 — Broken Link (404) Remediation

This step captures all items on the site that return a 404 status or are otherwise broken. Broken links contribute to a site's overall domain health score and can reduce how trustworthy the site appears to search engines.

An accumulation of broken links can also reduce visibility, since search engines can't build a complete, accurate map of the site's pages, downloadable files, and other assets. Addressing these issues promptly protects both crawlability and user experience.

Recommended Actions:

- Fix or redirect all identified broken internal links
 - Reach out to external sites where feasible to correct broken inbound links
 - Re-crawl the site after remediation to confirm resolution
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Step 11 — On-Page Rollout & Content Optimization (Extended)

With technical, keyword, and metadata groundwork complete, this extended step focuses on rolling recommendations out across the site in a structured, prioritized sequence rather than all at once. Pages are grouped into batches based on traffic potential, effort required, and business priority.

Each batch includes updated on-page copy where warranted, header structure improvements, image alt text, internal linking additions, and schema markup where applicable (such as organization, article, FAQ, or product schema depending on page type).

Recommended Actions:

- Group pages into implementation batches by priority tier
 - Apply on-page copy, heading, and schema updates per batch
 - QA each batch against the best-practices checklist before publishing
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Step 12 — Ongoing Monitoring, Reporting & Iteration (Extended)

SEO is not a one-time project; it requires ongoing measurement and refinement. This extended step establishes a recurring cadence for tracking the KPIs defined later in this plan and adjusting strategy based on real performance data.

Monthly reporting focuses on operational metrics — rankings, traffic, indexing status, and technical health — while quarterly reviews step back to reassess keyword strategy, competitive positioning, and content roadmap priorities in light of the most recent data.

Recommended Actions:

- Set up rank tracking for all priority target keywords
 - Publish a monthly performance report covering traffic, rankings, and technical health
 - Hold a quarterly strategy review to reprioritize the roadmap based on results
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Proposed Timeline

The phases below map the twelve plan steps into a realistic delivery sequence. Actual durations will vary depending on site size, resourcing, and how quickly the client team can action recommendations.

Phase	Focus Area	Estimated Duration	Key Activities
Phase 1: Discovery & Technical Audit	Foundation	Weeks 1–3	Full site crawl, terminology/glossary review, URL inventory and cleanup, duplicate content identification
Phase 2: Keyword & Competitive Research	Strategy	Weeks 3–5	Current keyword performance review, competitor benchmarking, future keyword opportunity mapping
Phase 3: Off-Page & Authority Review	Trust & Authority	Weeks 5–7	Backlink audit, toxic link identification and disavow planning, hotlinking mitigation
Phase 4: On-Page Optimization	Implementation	Weeks 7–10	Metadata updates, internal linking improvements, best-practices implementation, content optimization
Phase 5: Cleanup & Quality Assurance	Stabilization	Weeks 10–11	404 and broken link remediation, schema implementation, quality assurance review
Phase 6: Monitoring & Reporting	Ongoing	Week 12+	Rank tracking setup, monthly performance reporting, quarterly strategy review

Roles & Responsibilities

Successful execution depends on clear ownership between the client team and the SEO team. The table below summarizes primary responsibility for each major workflow.

Responsibility	Client Team	SEO Team
Provide access to analytics, Search Console, and CMS	✓	
Conduct technical crawl and audit.		✓
Review and approve glossary/terminology recommendations.	✓	✓
Implement metadata and on-page content changes	✓ (with guidance)	✓ (recommendations)
Execute backlink disavow requests		✓
Configure hotlinking protections on the web host	✓	✓ (guidance)
Monitor keyword rankings and organic traffic		✓
Approve final keyword targeting per page.	✓	✓ (recommendations)
Provide monthly/quarterly reporting		✓

Key Performance Indicators & Reporting

Track progress against this plan using the following KPIs, sourced from analytics, search console, rank tracking, and backlink audit tooling.

KPI	Baseline Source	Target Direction	Reporting Frequency
Organic search traffic (sessions)	Analytics platform	Increase	Monthly
Keyword rankings (target keyword set)	Rank tracking tool	Increase/improve position	Monthly
Number of indexed pages	Search console	Stabilize/optimize	Monthly
Backlink toxicity score	Backlink audit tool	Decrease	Quarterly
Referring domains (quality)	Backlink audit tool	Increase	Quarterly
Pages with complete metadata	Metadata audit	Increase to 100%	Monthly
404 / broken link count	Crawl report	Decrease to near zero	Monthly
Duplicate content instances	Crawl report	Decrease	Quarterly
Organic conversion rate	Analytics platform	Increase	Monthly

Tools & Resources

The following tool categories support the workstreams described in this plan. Specific vendor selection can vary by engagement:

- Web analytics platform (e.g., traffic, conversion, and behavior reporting)
- Search console/webmaster tools for indexing and crawl-error monitoring
- Site crawling and technical audit tool for identifying broken links, duplicate content, and metadata gaps
- Backlink analysis tool for referring domain quality, toxicity scoring, and disavow file preparation
- Rank tracking tool for monitoring keyword position over time
- Keyword research tool for identifying search volume, trend, and competitive difficulty

Appendix A: Glossary of Common SEO Terms

Term	Definition
Canonical Tag	An HTML element that tells search engines which version of a duplicate or similar page to index.
Crawl Budget	The number of pages a search engine will crawl on a site within a given time frame.
Disavow	A request submitted to a search engine asking it to ignore specific low-quality or toxic backlinks when assessing a site.
Domain Authority	A third-party score estimating how likely a website is to rank in search results, based on link profile and other factors.
Hotlinking	When an external site links directly to an image or file hosted on another site, using its bandwidth without hosting a copy.
Metadata	Page-level information such as the title tag and meta description that summarizes a page's content for search engines and users.
Schema Markup	Structured data added to a page's code that helps search engines understand its content and can enable rich search results.
Thin/Duplicate Content	Content that offers little unique value or closely mirrors content found elsewhere on the same site.
Toxic Score	A measure of how likely a referring domain is to harm a site's search performance if left unaddressed.
404 Error	A status code returned when a requested page cannot be found, typically due to a broken or outdated link.

Next Steps

1. Confirm access to analytics, search console, and CMS for the SEO team
2. Review and sign off on the terminology glossary and best-practices reference
3. Approve the proposed timeline and reporting cadence
4. Begin Phase 1 discovery and technical audit work