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SEO - IMAGE BEST PRACTICES

July 2021

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HOW DO YOU OPTIMIZE IMAGES FOR SEARCH ENGINE VISIBILITY?

Just like with on-page content, images can be optimized for Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The better you optimize your photos with elements such as image titles and alternative text, the easier it will be for people to find your images and pages when doing a search. ADA compliance is another reason why image titles and alt text are so important—college and university websites should be accessible to all users. By adding alt text to your images, you'll not only help your SEO but also your compliance with federal guidelines.

+ IMAGE ALT TEXT

The **alt text** should be a more in-depth description of the image that utilizes keywords. Alt text is important from both an ADA compliance and SEO standpoint. When a screen reader hits an image on a page, it will read the alt text aloud. The alt text should be 130 characters or less, as this is the maximum amount that most screen readers will read aloud. The alt text also optimizes your images so that they can be found in search, which is why incorporating keywords is important. In HTML, this will follow "alt=".

For this image found on the home page, the alt text is, "A cyclist rides through campus. It is fall and the trees are golden, the lawn is a lush green. In the background is Old Main, a large old brick building."



The alt text is over length and does not use keywords. A more optimized alt text would be, “A student rides through the WWU campus on a bike. The background contains golden trees, green grass, and the brick building Old Main. ”

+ IMAGE SIZE

Aside from just making sure each image is accompanied by a title and an alt tag that utilizes keywords, there are other things you should do to optimize images on your website. The first thing you should do is scale your image down to reduce loading times. If you’re using a larger image size and just displaying it at a smaller pixel size, your webpage is still going to take the same amount of time it would if it were displaying the bigger size. Scaling it down will reduce its natural size to the same size that you’re displaying it at. If the natural size is too big, the image can slow down websites, which is detrimental to both SEO and user experience.

+ WHAT IMAGE FILE TYPES SHOULD YOU USE?

There are three common image file types that you should become familiar with.

The first is JPEG or .jpg. JPEGs are one of the most common image types on the web because of their small file size.

The downside is that image quality can sometimes suffer when resizing JPEGs, at least compared to PNGs.

The second type is PNG. PNGs are great because even after resizing, their quality still remains the same. They also have the best color range. The downside to these images is that they are very large files, which means that you risk slowing down your site.

Generally speaking, JPEGs are best used for photos, while PNGs are best used for charts, graphs, and other text images. However, if you have a high-resolution photo, then PNG is the way to go.

The last type is GIFs. GIFs are not as ideal as JPEGs or PNGs due to their poor color range, but their file sizes aren't overly bulky and they have the ability to be animated, which adds some extra flare.

+ SET YOUR FILE NAME

A while back, Google announced that image filenames matters for SEO. Therefore, instead of having your file names be an assortment of numbers followed by .jpg or .png, they should be named something more descriptive so that they can be optimized for search. As a general rule of thumb, making your file name your main keyword for the page the image appears on is a best practice. Take, for example, the file name of the above image.

Instead of: WWU-Fall-02short

A more ideal name would be: WWU-Campus-In-Fall

+ CAPTIONS

The caption of an image is the text that appears just below a photo. Captions aren't necessarily significant for SEO or ADA compliance, but they can create a better user experience. What's more, if you code your caption as HTML, then it will be visible to search engines, which doesn't hurt.