

Technical SEO Issues & How to Fix Them

As a content marketer, you're likely already on top of your on-page SEO. Use this checklist to ensure you're maximizing your SEO potential and not being held back by less-obvious technical SEO issues.

TECHNICAL SEO ISSUE	DESCRIPTION	HOW TO FIX IT
XML SITEMAP ISSUES	An XML sitemap is a file that lives in your root domain that should serve as a map to your website URLs to search crawlers. There are a few things that can go wrong with sitemaps, such as not containing all URLs, formatting/structure issues, improper linking from Robots.txt file, 404/access issues and more.	Work with your tech team to ensure the sitemap is properly formatted, is reflective of the URLs and hierarchy of your website, is being submitted regularly to search engines, and loads properly and consistently. If your XML sitemap isn't working properly, you risk indexation issues. Very large sites should also consider splitting up their sitemaps by category.
ROBOTS.TXT FILE ISSUES	A robots.txt file is a file that lives in your root domain which specifies what folders (if any) should be disallowed from indexation. It's a way of specifying which folders search engines should not crawl and index (for instance, post-login content or media folders). Importantly, the robots file also specifies the XML sitemap URL. Common issues include Robots.txt load errors (such as a 503 error) which impact search engines' ability to access the file. Or, more commonly, the Robot.txt disallows files which should be allowed, and vice versa.	Work with your tech team to ensure your robots.txt file is consistently accessible to search engines, is allowing/disallowing the right directories, and contains the correct sitemap URL.
PAGE SPEED	Page load time is how fast your page loads, and it has become a very important ranking factor on both mobile and desktop. If you have slow page speed, your rankings and engagement will likely be impacted. You can test your page speed with Google PageSpeed Insights .	Work with your development team to mitigate issues which are causing slow page speed. Common causes include excessive CSS/JavaScript, text compression issues, large image files, slow server response time, and more.
MOBILE FRIENDLINESS	Mobile friendliness is an important ranking factor that quantifies how optimized your site is for mobile. Test your content's mobile friendliness with Google's Mobile-Friendly Test .	Work with your development team to mitigate issues that are impacting mobile friendliness. Common causes include slow mobile page speed, blocked image, CSS and JavaScript files, mobile 404s, and clickable elements that are too close to each other.

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404 ERRORS	A page that returns a 404 status code means that the server cannot find the requested page. In other words, it's a dead end. It's critical for site health to crawl your site regularly for 404 errors and fix them.	Start by identifying internal and external 404s on your site. From there, either update the link so it points to the correct (non-404) URL or redirect the 404 page by using a 301 permanent redirect.
REDIRECT CHAINS	Although 301 redirects are a best practice for 404 errors, redirecting to a redirected URL creates a 'redirect chain,' which negatively impacts SEO.	Redirect URLs straight to the target URL rather than an intermediary URL.
ORPHAN PAGES	An orphan page is a page that is live but not linked to from any other page on your site.	Fix orphan pages by including them in your navigational hierarchy and linking to them internally from other relevant pages.
KEYWORD CANNIBALIZATION	Keyword cannibalization refers to having multiple pieces of content on your site which target and are ranking for the same keywords. Search engine best practices dictate that you should have only a single piece of content targeting a given keyword. Cannibalizing your keywords could result in lower rankings across the board.	You'll want to strategically combine and redirect cannibalized content. First, identify the piece of content with the most SEO value (i.e. the highest performing). Then 301 redirect the 'cannibalized' pages to the highest-value page (and combine content from these pages prior to redirecting, if it makes sense for the content). Alternately, you can differentiate the content to target separate topics & keywords.
DUPLICATE CONTENT	Having the same body content, meta descriptions, browser titles, and H1s across multiple pages signals to Google that your content is duplicative, which it sees as lower quality. It won't know which version of the content to rank, resulting in lower rankings overall.	Ensure that content is original across all pages. For content that is templated (for instance, e-commerce pages with the same content on it for different product variations), you can use rel canonicals to signal to Google the primary version of the content.
BROWSER TITLES TOO LONG/SHORT	If your browser title (aka title tag) is longer than Google's recommended limit of 60 characters (including spaces), expect to see your rankings for that page drop. Title tags carry a lot of SEO value, as they are the first thing users see in a search.	This is a very common issue that can have a significantly negative impact. The good news is it's an easy issue to fix. Simply adjust your title tag to be under the limit (and don't forget to optimize for keywords). If you have a large number of pages facing this issue, work with your technical team to do a bulk implementation.

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META DESCRIPTIONS TOO LONG/SHORT	Your meta description should fall between 80-155 characters in order to abide by Google's length requirements. If it's too long, it will appear truncated in search results, which Google sees as a negative user experience.	Similar to browser titles, this issue can be easily fixed by rewriting meta descriptions so that they are under 155 characters.
URL PARAMETERS (CAUSING DUPLICATE CONTENT ISSUES)	URL parameters are often added to the end of a URL due to website filters, tracking, and more. Unless you take preventative measures, these URLs will be crawled and indexed, which can cause search engines to interpret it as duplicate content.	Make sure rel canonicals are in place on parameter URLs to point towards the original URL, or block the parameter URLs using the robots.txt file.
REL CANONICAL ERRORS	If you have very similar or duplicate content on your site, using the rel canonical tag is important to avoid being dinged by search engines.	Identify which URLs are being seen as duplicate content by running a crawl, and insert the URL version you want to drive SEO value to in the rel canonical tag on the duplicated pages.
BROKEN IMAGES	If an image on a site does not load, it's known as a broken image. In addition to creating a negative user experience, this can also negatively impact SEO.	There are a few factors that may cause images to "break"—the most likely being that the image no longer exists on that file path. Work with your web team to ensure that your images are located in the correct file.
HTTPS SECURITY/ REDIRECT ISSUES	HTTPS is a more secure protocol than HTTP and is also an important ranking signal. Not having HTTPS is a technical SEO issue itself, however, converted websites can also face issues relating to the HTTP version of their site not redirecting properly to the HTTPS version.	Make sure you install an SSL certificate if you've just migrated your site from HTTP. Additionally, ensure that rel canonicals are properly in place between the HTTP and HTTPS versions of your content, and that the HTTPS URLs are reflected in your sitemap.
HREFLANG ISSUES	Hreflang attribute tells search engines what language your content uses and specifies the geographic region. This is particularly important for international sites in which there are multiple versions of content in different languages. Inaccuracies within the tags can cause search engines to serve the wrong versions of your content.	Ensure all hreflang tags match the language and intended region across your site.