

# SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION FOR GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

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Joe Pagano Memorial Web Analytics Lecture Series  
Tuesday, June 10, 2014



# Agenda

- What Is SEO & Why Is It Important?
- Search: Then & Now
- SEO Building Blocks for Writing Content
- Conduct Keyword Research
- Eliminate ROT
- Resources
- SEO Checklist

# WHAT IS SEO & WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

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# What Is SEO?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization.

## **Why is it important?**

We need to apply SEO practices to improve (optimize) our online content to rank/perform well in search engines.

# Web Search: The Public Finds .gov Websites via Bing, Google, Yahoo, etc.\*

The image shows a Google search interface with the query 'unclaimed money'. The search results are displayed below the search bar. A blue arrow points from the search bar to the first result, which is an advertisement for 'Unclaimed Money - You Might Have Money Waiting' from USA.gov. Below this are organic search results for 'National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators' and 'MissingMoney.com Unclaimed Property FREE SEARCH ...'. A blue box highlights the first result, and a blue box on the right contains text about traffic to .gov websites.

Google unclaimed money

Web Shopping News Videos Images More Search tools

About 8,790,000 results (0.18 seconds)

**Unclaimed Money - You Might Have Money Waiting**  
**Ad** [www.unclaimedmoneydiscovery.com/](http://www.unclaimedmoneydiscovery.com/) (877) 442-8620  
Call Now To Find Out!  
Claim Unclaimed Money - People With Money Waiting - Government Stimulus

**National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators**  
<https://www.unclaimed.org/> Lost, misplaced and abandoned property  
NAUPA consists of state officials charged with the responsibility of collecting and reuniting lost owners with their unclaimed property.  
What is Unclaimed Property - Other Sources for Unclaimed ... - NAUPA : News

**MissingMoney.com Unclaimed Property FREE SEARCH ...**  
[www.missingmoney.com/](http://www.missingmoney.com/) MissingMoney  
Free unclaimed property search for American states that are members of the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators.  
States and Provinces ... - Missing Money Search Tips - Missing Money FAQ

**Unclaimed Money from the Government | USA.gov**  
[www.usa.gov/Citizen/.../Government-Unclaimed-Money.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/.../Government-Unclaimed-Money.shtml) USA.gov  
Search for unclaimed money, such as undelivered tax refunds, bank and credit union failures, and more.

**Did you know?**  
Almost one-third of traffic to .gov websites in 2014 has come from organic search—Google (27%), Bing (3%), and Yahoo (1%).

# Site Search: Some .gov Search Results Are Powered by Bing and Google

The screenshot shows the USA.gov website with a search bar containing the word "passports". A blue arrow points from the search bar down to the first search result, which is enclosed in a blue rounded rectangle. The search results include a "Recommended by USA.gov" section with links to "Passports", "Passport Offices", and "Check Application Status". Below this are search results from the U.S. Department of State and USPS. The first result is from the U.S. Department of State, titled "U.S. Department of State - Passports" with the URL [www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html). The second result is from USPS, titled "USPS - Apply for a Passport - United States Postal Service" with the URL [www.usps.com/shop/apply-for-a-passport.htm](http://www.usps.com/shop/apply-for-a-passport.htm). The third result is from USA.gov, titled "Apply for a Passport | USA.gov" with the URL [www.usa.gov/topics/travel/international/passports.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/topics/travel/international/passports.shtml). The USA.gov result includes a list of categories: "Passports and Travel; Public Service and Volunteerism; Reference and General Government; Register to Vote and Elections; Science and Technology;".

USA.gov

Menu

All Government Only USA.gov Videos More ▾

Español

passports

Recommended by USA.gov

**Passports**

Renew a **Passport**

Apply for a **Passport**

Check Application Status

**Passport** Offices

Change or Correct **Passport**

Report Lost or Stolen **Passport**

U.S. Department of State - **Passports**

[www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html)

Learn how to apply for a U.S. **passport**, renew by mail, report a lost or stolen **passport**, and correct or change **passport** information.

USPS - Apply for a **Passport** - **United States Postal Service**

[www.usps.com/shop/apply-for-a-passport.htm](http://www.usps.com/shop/apply-for-a-passport.htm)

Select "**Passports**" from the Location **Time** dropdown box, enter a ZIP Code™ or address and select "Search". Find a Post Office that offers **passport** ...

Apply for a **Passport** | **USA.gov**

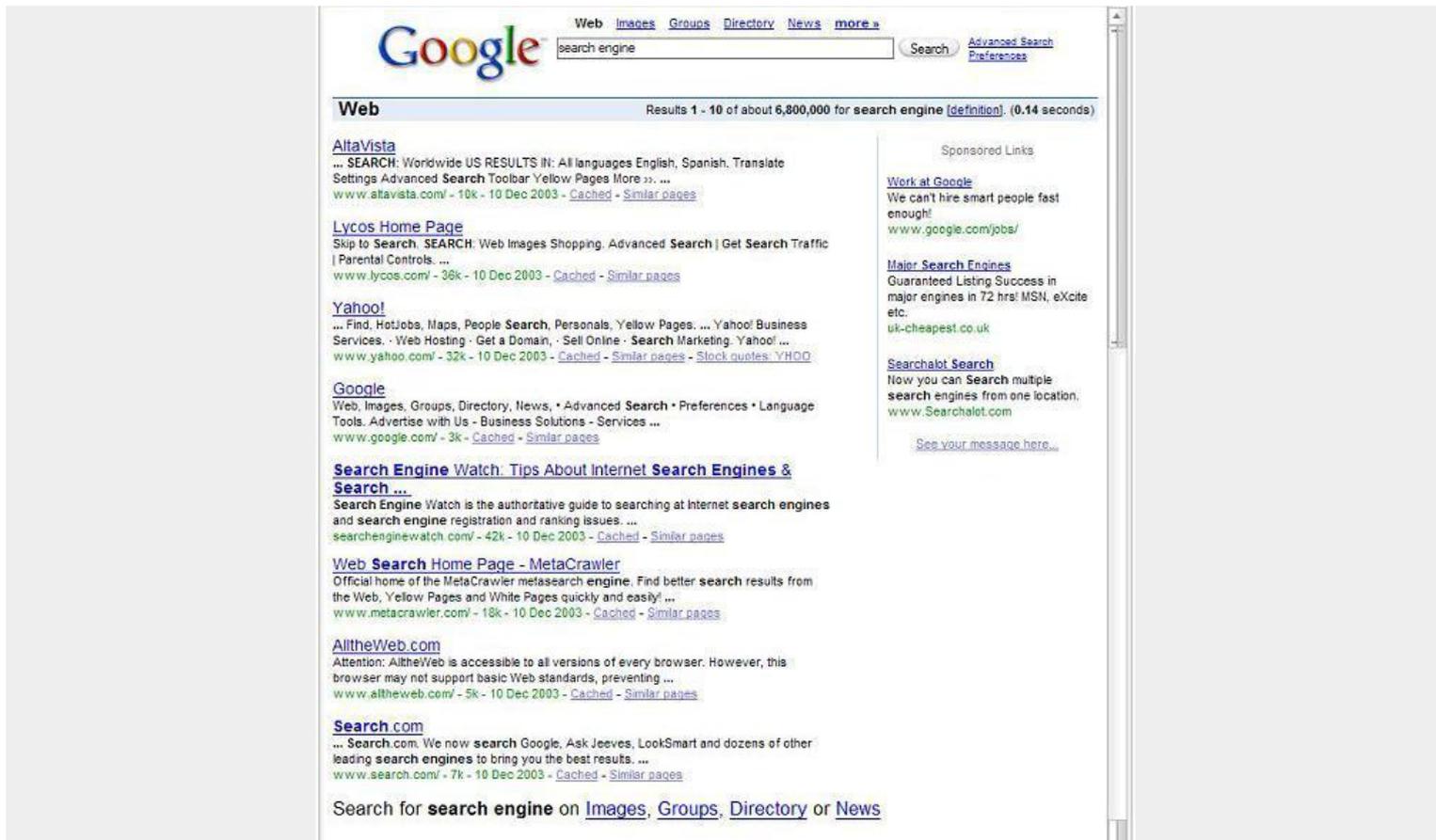
[www.usa.gov/topics/travel/international/passports.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/topics/travel/international/passports.shtml)

**Passports** and Travel; Public Service and Volunteerism; Reference and General Government; Register to Vote and Elections; Science and Technology;

# SEARCH: THEN & NOW

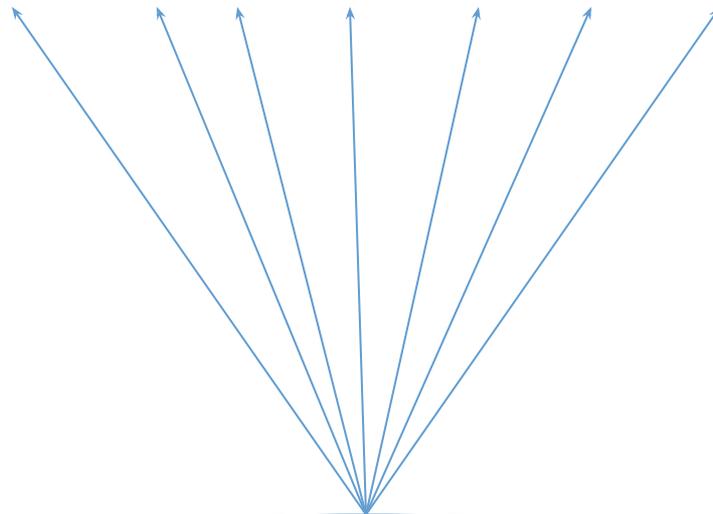
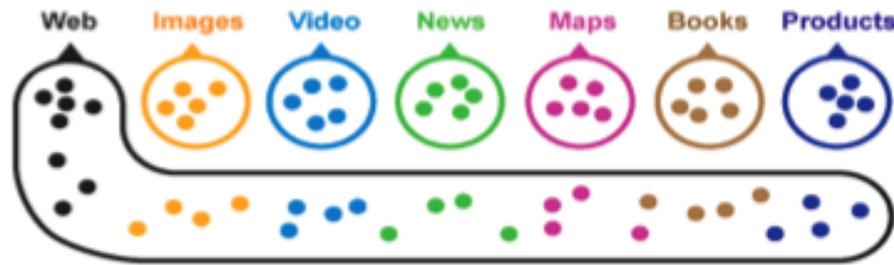
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# A List of Links: Google in 2004



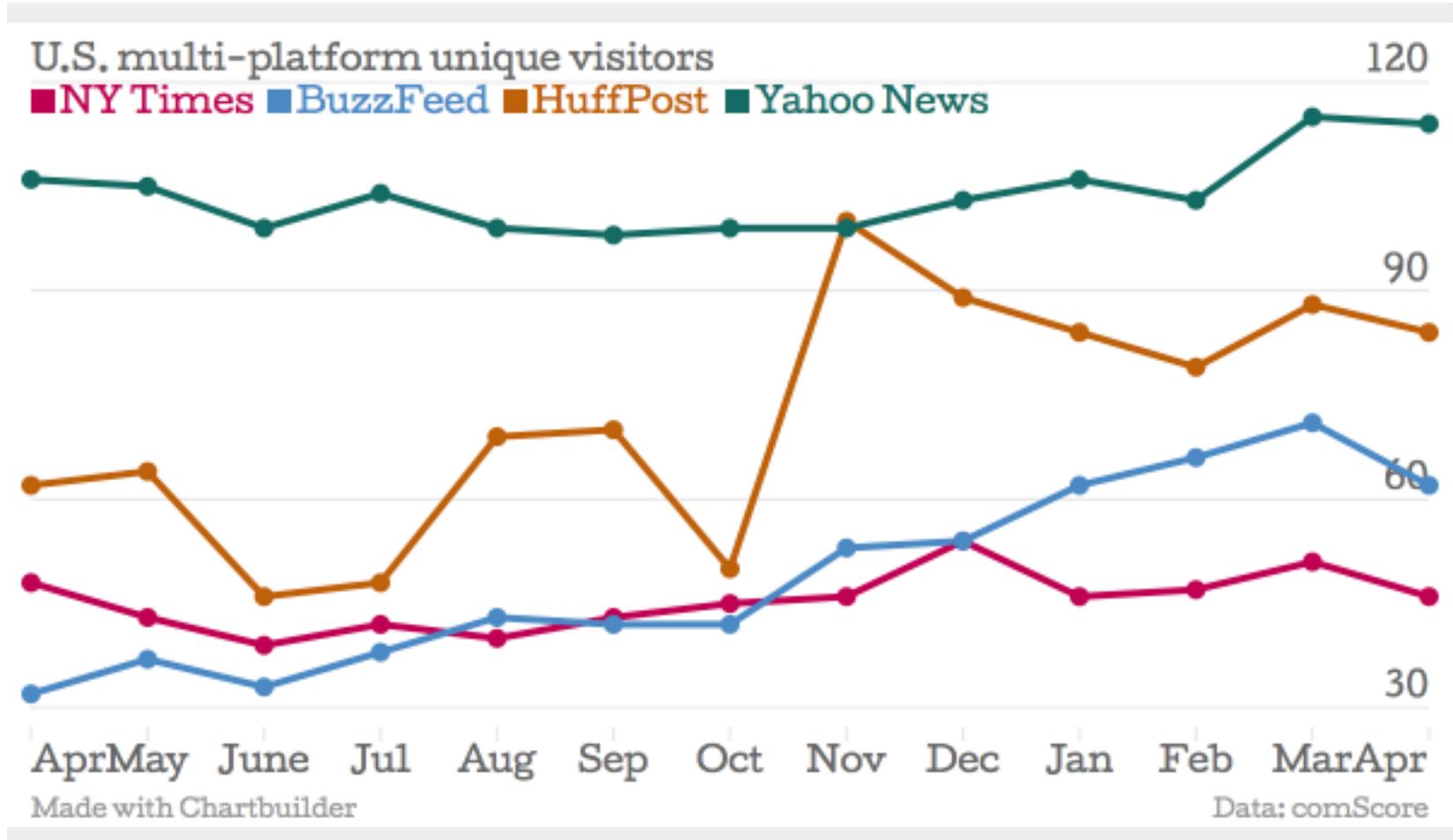
**Compare that to today: news, shopping, places, in-depth articles, maps, knowledge graphs, images, videos, and more!**

# Digital Strategy & Open Data Policy Are Good for SEO\*

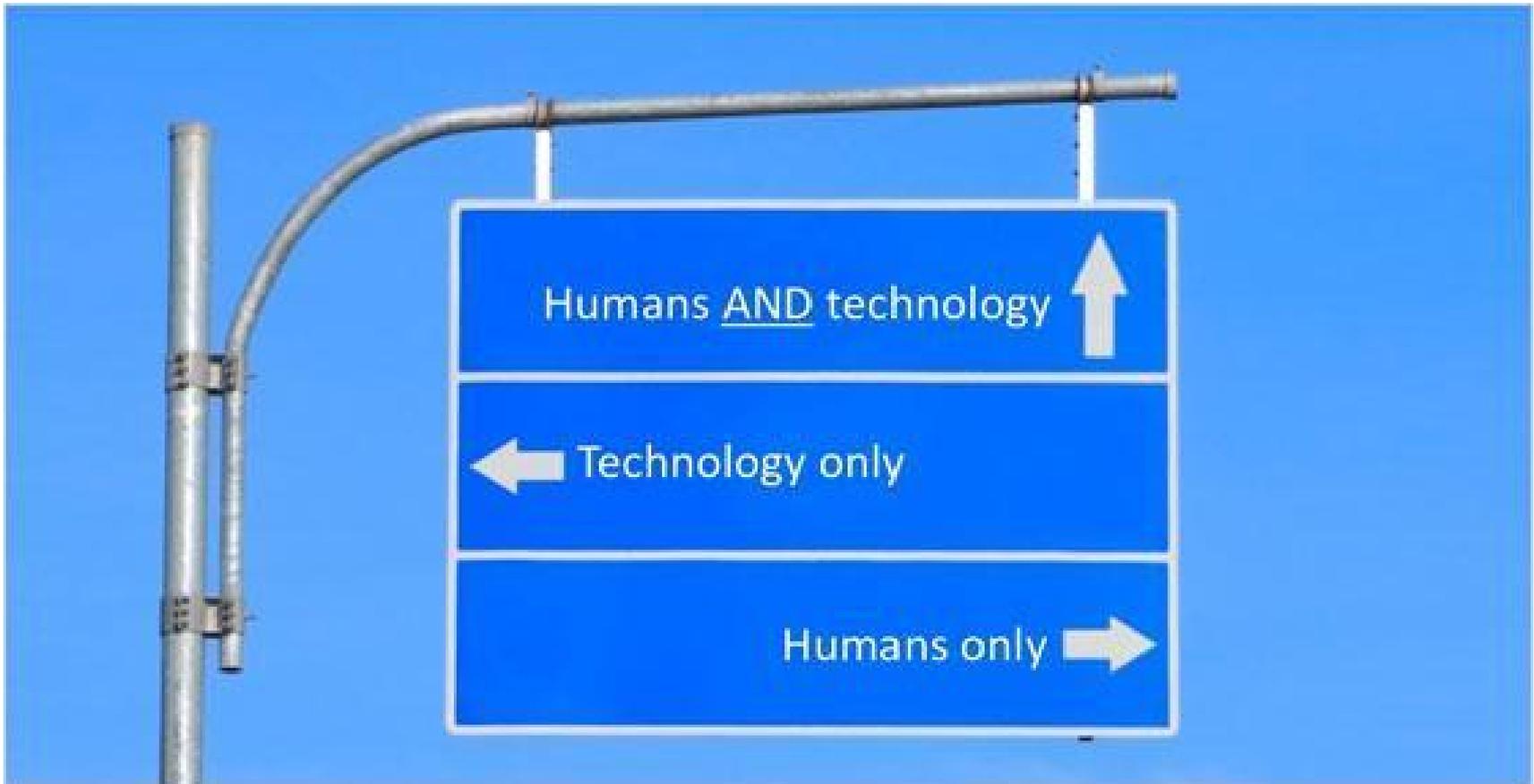


\* Plus, plain language and accessibility, too.

# Content Isn't Always King. SEO Sometimes Rules.



# Create “Readable” Content for Both Humans & Technology



Source: <http://marketingland.com/designing-user-experience-ux-technology-user-76736>

# If I Was a Crawler ...

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t">rulemaking agenda</a> in conjunction with a broader initiative led by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to publish a Unified Agenda of Regulatory and
Deregulatory Actions across the federal government. Portions of the Unified Agenda are published in the Federal Register, and the full set of materials is also <a
href="http://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaMain">available</a>.</p>
153 <p>Under the Regulatory Flexibility Act, federal agencies are required to publish regulatory agendas twice a year. We've been <a
href="/blog/category/rulemaking/">doing this for a couple of years now</a> by voluntarily participating in the Unified Agenda. Our regulatory agenda includes
rulemaking actions in the following stages: pre-rule, proposed rule, final rule, long term actions, and completed actions.</p>
154 <h3>Mortgages</h3>
155 <p>Our agenda includes a number of rulemakings mandated by the Dodd-Frank Act. For example, we recently <a href="/newsroom/cfpb-takes-steps-to-improve-information-
about-access-to-credit-in-the-mortgage-market/">convened a small business review (SBREFA) panel</a> to discuss potential amendments to the Home Mortgage Disclosure
Act, some of which were mandated by Section 1094 of the Dodd-Frank Act. We're also focusing intensely on <a href="/regulatory-implementation/tila-respa/">supporting
the implementation process</a> for our recent rulemaking to implement a Dodd-Frank Act directive to consolidate and streamline federal mortgage disclosures required
under the Truth in Lending Act and Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act. We're also continuing work with stakeholders to address questions that have arisen with
regard to the 2013 mortgage rules, including issuing additional clarifications and amendments as warranted.</p>
156 <h3>Defining larger participants</h3>
157 <p>We're also continuing rulemakings to implement our supervisory program for certain nonbank entities by defining "larger participants" in various markets for
consumer financial products and services. For example, we're developing a proposal to identify "larger participants" in the market for auto lending. We've previously
defined larger participants in the consumer debt collection, credit reporting, and student loan servicing markets and are now in the process of finalizing a rule
defining larger participants in the international money transfer market.</p>
158 <h3>Debt collection</h3>
159 <p>We've been doing research and outreach to assess issues in various other markets for consumer financial products and services over many months. In November 2013,
<a href="/newsroom/cfpb-considers-debt-collection-rules/">we issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking</a> seeking comment, data, and information from the
public about debt collection, which is the single biggest source of complaints to the federal government. We received more than 23,000 comments in response to the
notice, and in our <a href="/reports/fair-debt-collection-practices-act-annual-report/">2014 annual report on Fair Debt Collection Practices Act</a>, reported that we
received more than 30,000 consumer complaints in this area.</p>
160 <h3>Payday loans and prepaid cards</h3>
161 <p>We're researching and considering whether rulemaking is warranted in the areas of payday and deposit advance products, as well as consumer overdraft products. <a
href="/blog/live-from-nashville/">We held a field hearing in March 2014 in Nashville, Tennessee</a>, and also <a href="/reports/cfpb-data-points-payday-
lending/">released a report that analyzed payday lending</a> and found that four out of five payday loans are rolled over or renewed within 14 days. We're also
expecting to build on an <a href="/pressreleases/consumer-financial-protection-bureau-considers-rules-on-prepaid-cards/">Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking</a>
that we published in 2012 concerning prepaid cards by issuing a proposed rule to strengthen federal consumer protections for these products. We've been <a
href="/blog/prepaid-cards-help-design-a-new-disclosure/">testing potential disclosures</a> that we may propose to be used on the packaging of prepaid cards.</p>
162 <h3>Privacy disclosures</h3>
163 <p>We're returning to a topic that had been raised as part of an earlier initiative to seek comment on ways to streamline and modernize regulations that we had
inherited from other agencies. Specifically, we are expecting to issue a proposal regarding the notices that consumers receive each year from their financial
institutions to explain the companies' information sharing practices. A number of commenters had suggested that eliminating the annual privacy notices where there has
been no change in policies would reduce unwanted paperwork for consumers and unnecessary regulatory burdens, at least where a financial institution limits the sharing
of information with third parties.</p>
164 <p>We're continuing research, analysis, and outreach on a number of other consumer financial services markets, and will update our next semi-annual agenda to reflect
the results of further prioritization and planning.</p>
165 </div>
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Compare:

view-source:<http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Government-Unclaimed-Money.shtml>

# SEO BUILDING BLOCKS FOR WRITING CONTENT

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# What Are 4 Things I Should Do When Writing Content?

*Search engines place weight on keywords according to where they are used.*

## **1. Put primary keywords in the:**

- URL,
- First words of the page <title>,
- Meta description, which is readable, plain language, and inspires clickthrus,
- Headline, which is tagged as an <H1>,
- Body (at least two times or more),
- Link titles, and
- Alt text in images.

# Writing Content (cont'd)

**2. Put secondary keywords in the above, when appropriate, plus the secondary <H2>, <H3>, etc. headings.**

**3. Keep key page elements short:**

- Title < 75 characters with spaces.
- URL < 90 characters with hyphens.
- Meta description < 160 characters with spaces.

**4. Link to authoritative sites, and avoid broken links.**

Q1. What's the best URL for a blog post published about summer food safety?

- A. [www.usa.gov/blogs/201406.html](http://www.usa.gov/blogs/201406.html)
- B. [www.usa.gov/keep/events/summervacations/](http://www.usa.gov/keep/events/summervacations/)
- C. [www.usa.gov/health/food-safety-tips.html](http://www.usa.gov/health/food-safety-tips.html)
- D. [www.usa.gov/health/foodsafetytips.html](http://www.usa.gov/health/foodsafetytips.html)

## Q2. What's the best page title?

- A. USA.gov | Food Safety Tips
- B. Food Safety Tips | USA.gov
- C. Holiday Food Safety Tips for a Healthy Fourth of July and to Avoid Food Poisoning During a Picnic | USA.gov
- D. Check Your Food and Don't Leave It Out Too Long: Food Safety Tips | USA.gov

*Websites like Upworthy, whose core product is content, re-write headlines (and so title tags) up to 25 times to test their success across search and social.*

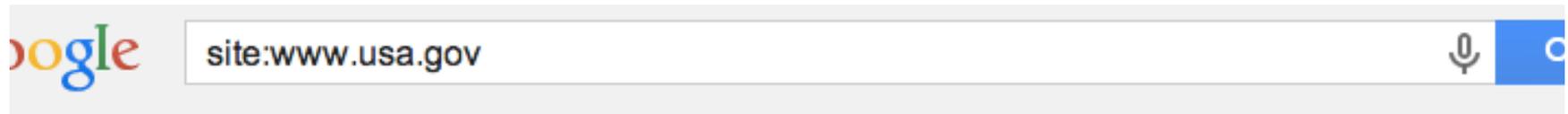
## Q3. What's the best meta description?

- A. Food safety, food poisoning, e. coli, safe foods, salmonella, listeria
- B. Tips for keeping food safe and preventing food poisoning at your holiday picnic.
- C. Food Safety Tips
- D. None. Don't include a meta description.

## Q4. What's the best link?

- A. Find [nutrition and weight loss resources](#)
- B. [Click here](#) to find nutrition and weight loss resources
- C. Find nutrition and weight loss [resources](#)
- D. [Find](#) nutrition and weight loss resources

# How Would You Improve This?



**Web** Images News Shopping Maps More ▾ Search tools

About 3,150 results (0.31 seconds)

Google promotion

## Try Google Webmaster Tools

[www.google.com/webmasters/](http://www.google.com/webmasters/)

Do you own **www.usa.gov**? Get indexing and ranking data from Google.

## USA.gov: The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal

[www.usa.gov/](http://www.usa.gov/) ▾ [USA.gov](#) ▾

USA.gov: Home page of the U.S. Government's Official Web Portal for all government transactions, services, and information. It provides direct online access to ...

## GobiernoUSA.gov: página principal del portal oficial del ...

[www.usa.gov/gobiernousa/](http://www.usa.gov/gobiernousa/) ▾ [Translate this page USA.gov](#) ▾

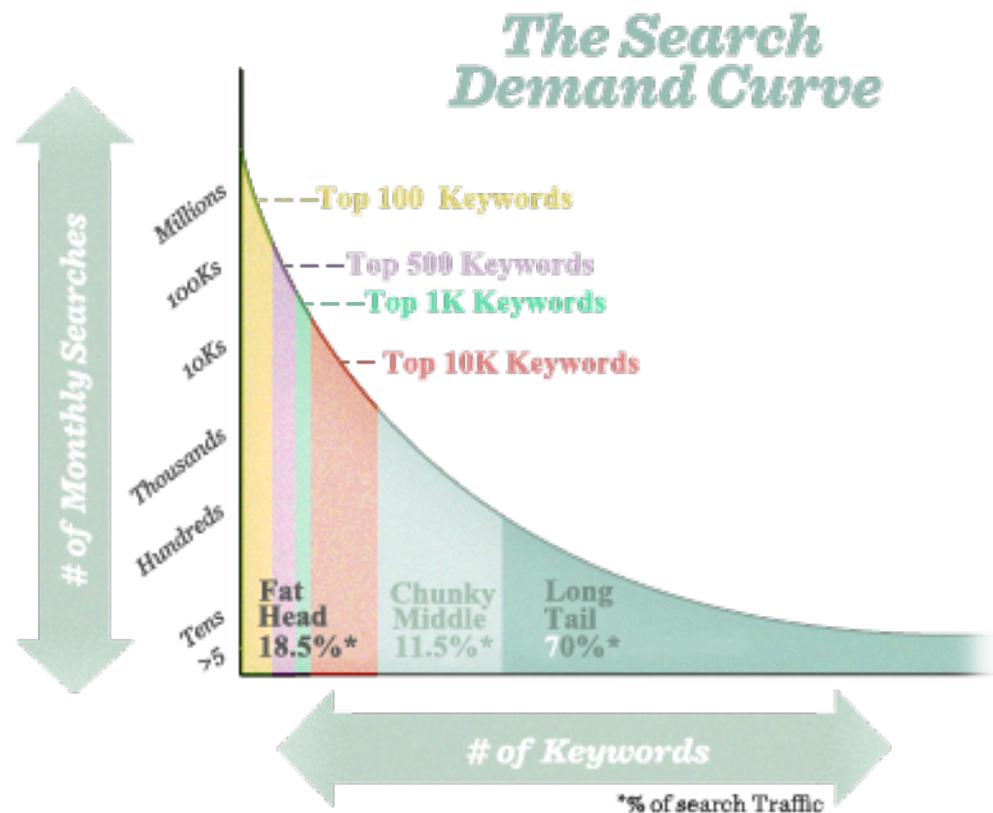
Página principal de GobiernoUSA.gov, el portal oficial del Gobierno de los EE.UU. en español.

# CONDUCT KEYWORD RESEARCH

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# The Long Tail of Search

- Focus on the top tasks (head of external and internal search terms).
- Don't forget the long tail queries.
  - There's less competition.
  - Longer-tail queries are more likely to convert.



Source: <http://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo/keyword-research>

# What's In Our Toolkit?

- **Google Analytics (and [Digital Analytics Program](#))**
  - What search terms are driving visitors from Google to .gov sites
  - Example: What variants of unclaimed money are [driving the public from Google to USA.gov's unclaimed money page](#)?
- **Site search analytics**
  - What search terms visitors are using once they're on a .gov site
  - Example: What variants of unclaimed money are searchers using [on USA.gov](#)?

# Toolkit (cont'd.)

- **Dictionaries and thesauri**

- Dust 'em off for ideas for synonyms
- Example: What are some synonyms for funds?
- So, target unclaimed stocks?

- **Google Trends**

- View by topic, or compare two or more keywords
- Example: What are the top & rising queries on the topic of unclaimed, mislaid, and abandoned property?
- So, work with NAUPA to publish the list of state URLs (vs. having them “hidden” behind map on NAUPA’s site?)

- **Google AdWords Keyword Planner plus others like Wordtracker**

- Ideas for related keywords based on search volume & competition
- Example: What are some higher volume, but low competition keywords that could be targeted?
- So, target office of unclaimed funds?

# Check Out the Competition

- Who are our “competitors” (other agencies, nonprofits, businesses, scammers, others)? Do they vary by topic?
- Do we have (or want) a competitive advantage for any keywords?
- Where do our competitors stack up against the keywords for each topic?
- Research competitors in tools like [Alexa](#), which also has topic-based segments like [Unclaimed Money](#).

# Content Isn't Always King

**Think back to the *NYT* vs. *Huffington Post* ...**

- How do you plan to repackage the content you've written?
- Personalize it?
- Promote it online?

# ELIMINATE ROT

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ROT (redundant, outdated, trivial) content hurts SEO

# Example 1: Redundant Content

The image shows a screenshot of a Yahoo! search results page for the query "contact congress". The search bar at the top contains the text "contact congress" and a "Search" button. The page layout includes a navigation bar with links to Home, Mail, News, Sports, Finance, Weather, Games, Groups, Answers, Screen, Flickr, Mobile, and More. On the left side, there is a vertical menu with categories: Web, Images, Video, Shopping, Maps, More, Anytime, Past day, Past week, and Past month. The main search results area displays several entries:

- An advertisement for "Internet Advocacy | thesoftedge.com" with the URL [www.thesoftedge.com](http://www.thesoftedge.com) and the text "Mobilize your Advocates with our Affordable Solutions".
- A result titled "Contacting the Congress: A Citizen's Congressional Directory" from [www.contactingthecongress.org](http://www.contactingthecongress.org), described as a "very up-to-date citizen's congressional directory for the 113th Congress". It lists states: Florida, Ohio, Texas, California, Washington, and Pennsylvania.
- A result titled "Contact Elected Officials | USA.gov" from [www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml), described as a tool to "Locate e-mail and mailing addresses, phone numbers, and more for your local, state, and federal officials." This result is highlighted with a blue rounded rectangle.
- A result titled "Find Your Representative - House.gov - The United States ..." from [www.house.gov/representatives/find](http://www.house.gov/representatives/find), described as a service to "match your ZIP code to your congressional district, with links to your member's website and contact page."
- A result titled "Find and contact your Congress members by phone, email or fax ..." from [www.congressmerge.com/onlinedb](http://www.congressmerge.com/onlinedb), described as a "free tool to find the email address, phone number and contact information for your Congressman, including Senators and Representatives."
- A result titled "Contact the U.S. Congress and the White House | USA.gov" from [www.usa.gov/Contact/US-Congress.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Contact/US-Congress.shtml), described as a tool to "Find contact information for your representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, and the President and Vice President." This result is also highlighted with a blue rounded rectangle.

On the right side of the page, there are two sections:

- "See more ads for:" with a list of related search terms: [contact congress](#), [contact congress members](#), [contact us congress members](#), [congress contact number](#), [federal congress representative](#), and [contact](#).
- "Ads" section with two advertisements:
  - "Congress E Mail Addresses - Get Answers Faster at Ask.com." from Ask.com, with the text "Try It Now!"
  - "Congress Contact" from [congresscontact.buyerpricer.com](http://congresscontact.buyerpricer.com), with the text "Looking for Congress Contact Information Database Info? Get Results."
  - "Call Congress Now" from [www.call-center-tech.com](http://www.call-center-tech.com), with the text "Technology helps mobilize your members to call their congressman."

A large blue arrow points from the search bar area down to the "Contact Elected Officials | USA.gov" result, and another blue arrow points from the "Contacting the Congress" result down to the "Contact Elected Officials" result, indicating a flow or relationship between these results.

# How Can We Improve This?

## 1. Find all similar pages on USA.gov. Some ways to find them:

- **Site: param** = contact+elected+officials+site:usa.gov
- **Link: param** = link:www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml
- **Related param** = related:www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml
- Other ways?

## 2. Consolidate the content, and remove the redundant pages.

- Decide which one(s) to keep. Delete the others.
- Place **301 redirects** on deleted pages to redirect users to the new page.

## 3. Optimize the remaining page for SEO.

- Conduct keyword research. Add Obama instead of simply “the President”?
- Repackage, personalize, and promote it.

# Example 2: Outdated Content



oasis gsa



Images Videos

## Acuvue Oasys Contacts

Take 25% Off with Coupon: 25SHOPPER

Take Extra 25% Off + Free Shipping. Enter Coupon 25SHOPPER & Save Now!

VisionDirect.com

Sponsored link

oops

## Gsa Oasis

We apologize for the inconvenience... The link or location you used does not exist or has changed. To find what you're looking for, please try the following:

 [gsa.gov](https://www.gsa.gov)

## Gsa - Oasis

Contract Number: GS-35F-0528R: Period Covered By Contract: 28 April 2005 to 27 April 2015: Special Item No. 132-51, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

 [oasissystems.com](https://www.oasissystems.com)

## OASIS: What You Need to Know About GSA's Plan to Reduce ...

**GSA's** One Acquisition Solutions for Integrated Services (**OASIS**) program is a contract vehicle for complex professional services. It represents **GSA's** solution to reducing contract proliferation and duplication across government.

 [gsablogs.gsa.gov](https://gsablogs.gsa.gov)

# How Can We Improve This?

## **This page no longer exists. So:**

- Return a **404** (Not Found) or **301** (Permanently redirected) status. Tip: You can check a page's status on sites like <http://httpstatus.io>.
- Update your **XML sitemap**.
- Tell search engines the page no longer exists via their **webmaster tools**.

## **Note that, if the page does exist, it isn't outdated. But, it is still unwanted. Your options change:**

- Password protect the page, or folder.
- Use a **robots.txt** file to block crawlers' access to the page.
- Use a **noindex meta tag** to prevent content from appearing in search results.

# RESOURCES

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# Webmaster Tools

- [Bing Webmaster Tools](#)
- [Google Webmaster Tools](#)

## A Few (of Many) SEO Resources

- [Bing's Collection of SEO-related documents](#)
- [Google's SEO Starter Guide](#) & [How Search Works](#)
- [Moz's The Beginner's Guide to SEO](#)
- [Search Engine Land's Guide to SEO](#)

# PART 2: SEO CHECKLIST

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# Overview: SEO Checklist

1. Searchers can find your web pages on commercial search engines.
2. Searchers can find your site's pages at your preferred domain.
3. Searchers see unique, descriptive titles & snippets for your web pages.
4. You have an account for both Bing and Google webmaster tools.
5. Your site has a robots.txt file.
6. Your site has an XML sitemap.
7. Your site's web pages load quickly.
8. Headings are tagged as <H1>, <H2>, etc.
9. Images have alt text for their captions.
10. Your site doesn't have "link rot."

# SEO Checklist: Tips and Questions

1. **Searchers can find your web pages on commercial search engines.**

***Tip:** Search for site:agency.gov on various search engines like Bing (Yahoo) DuckDuckGo, and Google.*

Page through the results. Do you expect fewer or more results? Do you like what you see? What looks good? What would you like to change?

2. **Searchers can find your site's pages at your preferred domain.**

***Tip:** Type both www.agency.gov and agency.gov in your browser's address bar. Can you use both to access your site's homepage? Does the non-preferred one redirect to the other, preferred one?*

# Checklist (cont'd)

3. Searchers see unique, descriptive titles (<title>) & snippets (<meta description>) for each of your web pages.

***Tip 1:** Search for site:agency.gov, site.subfolder.agency.gov, site:agency.gov/folder, and other patterns on various search engines.*

Page through the results. Can you distinguish among pages? Do the titles differ from the snippets? Are any too short or long?

***Tip 2:** Download a tool (like [Screaming Frog](#) or other [SEO tools](#)) that analyzes your site.*

Page through the tool's report. Are any pages missing titles or meta descriptions? How long are they?

# Checklist (cont'd)

4. **You have an account for both Bing and Google webmaster tools.**

*Tip: If you don't have an account, sign up at [Bing Webmaster Tools](#) and [Google Webmaster Tools](#). If you do have an account, sign in and see if there are any new messages waiting for you.*

5. **Your site has a robots.txt file.**

*Tip: Check [agency.gov/robots.txt](#) to see if you have a file.*

Does it disallow access to any folders it shouldn't block? Does it allow access to any folders it should be blocking?

6. **Your site has an XML sitemap.**

*Tip: Check [agency.gov/sitemap.xml](#) to see if you have a file.*

Does it accurately reflect your site's content and update schedule?

# Checklist (cont'd)

7. **Your site's web pages load quickly.**

*Tip: Install a tool like [Google's Page Speed Tools](#) or [Yahoo's Yslow](#) to test them.*

Does your page load in under one second?

8. **Headings are tagged as <H1>, <H2>, etc.**

*Tip: Install a tool like the [Wave Toolbar](#) for Firefox. Then, use it to view your page as an "Outline."*

*Are headings tagged? Are they in the correct hierarchy, starting with H1?*

9. **Images have alt text for their captions.**

*Tip: Use the Wave Toolbar to view your page's "Structure / Order." Confirm alt tags are present on images and use good SEO-rich keywords.*

# Checklist (cont'd)

10. **Your site doesn't have "link rot". That is, you don't have many (or any) broken links to either internal or external resources.**

***Tip :** Download a tool (like [Screaming Frog](#) or other [SEO tools](#)) that analyzes your site. Or, use an online link checker like [Broken Link Checker](#).*

Page through the tool's report. Find broken links and fix them.

# Contact

**Ammie Farraj Feijoo**

[ammie.farrajfeijoo@gsa.gov](mailto:ammie.farrajfeijoo@gsa.gov)

**DigitalGov Search Team**

E: [search@support.digitalgov.gov](mailto:search@support.digitalgov.gov)

P: 202-505-5315

<http://search.digitalgov.gov>