

Start Up Loans

The search engine optimisation (SEO) toolkit for start ups

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Search engine optimisation (SEO)

SEO is the optimisation of a website to increase the volume of traffic it receives via search engines, like Google.

Good SEO results in your website appearing more often and higher up search rankings, resulting in more traffic to your website.

And it's free!

Section 1.

A brief introduction to SEO

What is SEO?

Why does my business need SEO?



1. A brief introduction to SEO

SEO is the optimisation of your website to increase the volume of traffic it receives via search engines, like Google.

Good SEO results in your website appearing more often and higher up search rankings, resulting in more traffic to your website.

What is SEO?

Essentially, if someone is searching the web for something that relates to a product or service you sell, SEO is one way you can make sure it's your website they see in search engine results and your website they visit to buy that product or service.

SEO may be a relatively new concept and it may seem daunting because there are lots of different factors to consider but many elements of it are simple and straightforward.

SEO is about employing common sense and making your website simple and easy to use.

Make your website relevant to the products and services you provide and the search terms potential customers would use to find them, and you've made a good start to SEO.

SEO factfile

80%

of users ignore paid ads

75%

of all searches are for long-tail keywords

31,7%

the percentage of clicks the first organic result in Google receives

63,000

searches per second on Google

10x

You're 10 times more likely to get a click in the first organic result compared to tenth position

Don't worry! If you don't know what these stats mean, you will soon enough!



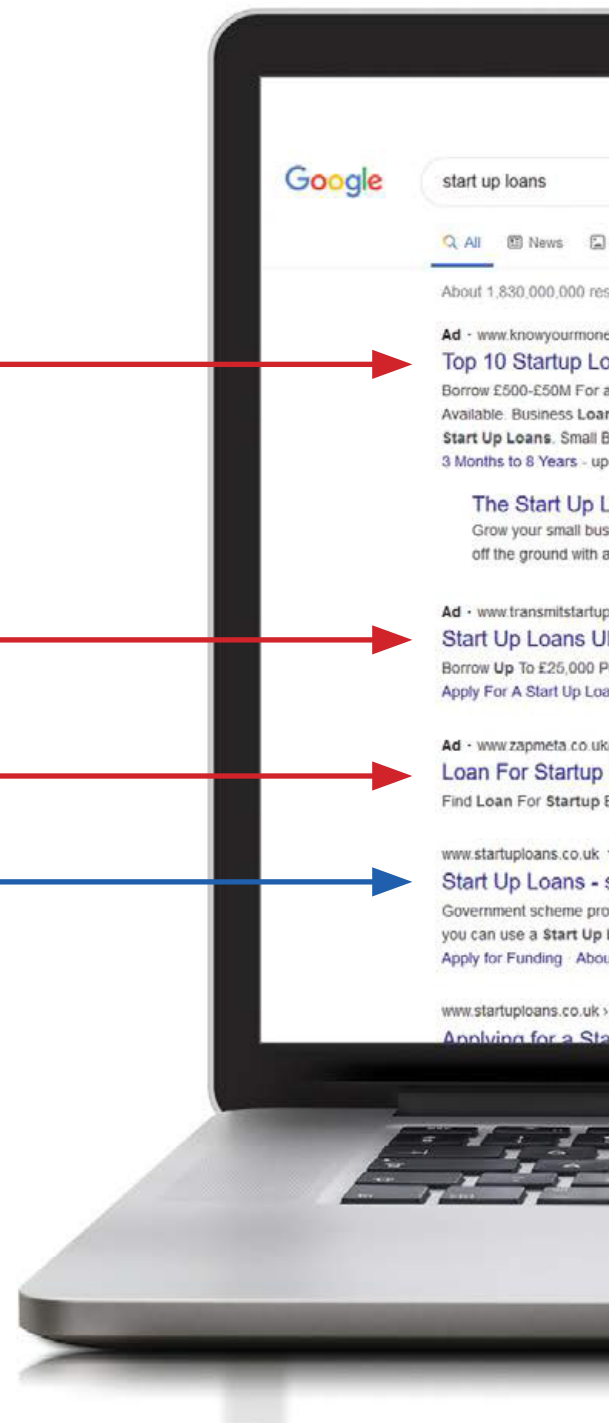
Why does my business need SEO?

Presence in search engine results pages (SERPs) can be achieved either through organic rankings (SEO) or via pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.

Paid adverts appear above and below organic search listings. On Google, users will typically see 10 organic results sandwiched between up to four paid ads at the top and bottom of the page.

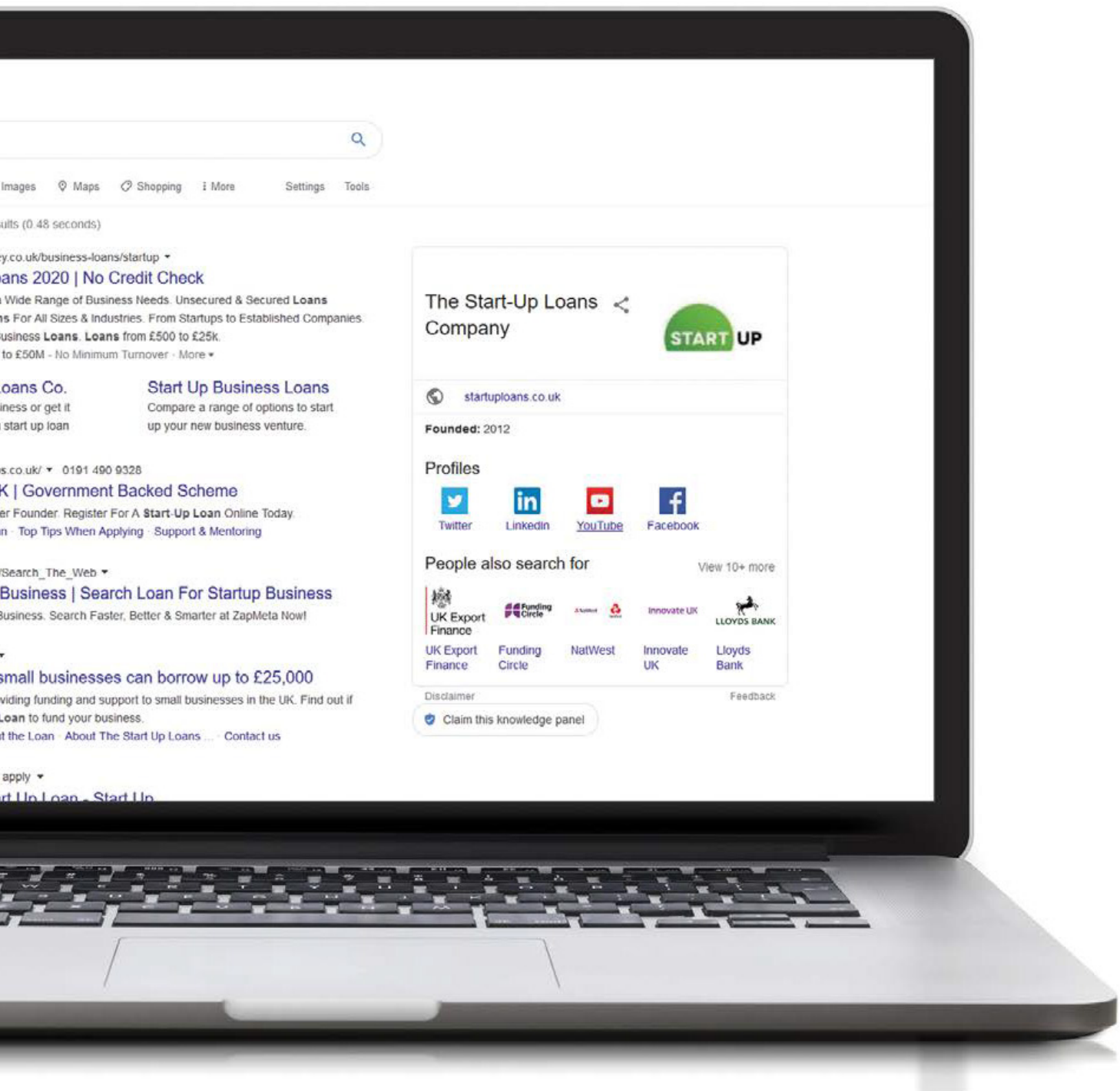
Paid search results

First organic search result



The beauty of SEO is that you don't have to pay to feature on those pages or for the traffic you get from featuring there, unlike with PPC advertising.

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Section 2.

Keywords and on-page SEO

Discovering keyword opportunities

Keywords and site structure

Selecting the right keywords

Optimising web pages with keywords



2. Keywords and on-page SEO

SEO begins with identifying specific phrases your potential customers will use to find your product or services.

Discovering keyword opportunities

This can be done through keyword research. You can then design your website to maximise its chances of appearing in SERPs for keywords that users search for most often.

In SEO, there are different types of keywords:

- Primary keywords
- Long-tail keywords

Primary keywords are shorter and more generic phrases while long-tail keywords are longer phrases containing three words or more.

When choosing keywords to target, it's best to select a mix of primary and long-tail keywords. Long-tail keywords usually have lower search volumes but are easier to rank for. They are less broad than primary keywords making them more likely to convert into clicks to your website. By targeting a combination of primary and long-tail keywords, you'll have a strong keyword strategy that includes long-term goals and short-term wins.

Google Keyword Tool

Type a keyword into Google's Keyword Tool and it will display related phrases and their average monthly search volumes. This gives a clear indication of the topics and phrases people are searching for online. It also shows which keywords generate the highest volumes of traffic and those which have less competition and are therefore easier to rank for.

Keyword Finder

Keyword Finder takes keyword research one step further by displaying a difficulty score. For your given keyword, it calculates the strength of competing websites and gives you a score out of 100 for how difficult it would be to gain top rankings in search engine results. An excellent tool for beginners. Free and paid versions are available.

Answer the Public

Answer the Public is excellent for discovering long-tail keywords. It takes your keyword and prefaces it with prepositions like "how", "with", "near", "like" and provides a huge list of relevant phrases that users search for regularly.

Keywords and site structure

For example if you sell running shoes, you can find out which type of running shoes people search for most often. According to the Google Keyword tool, many people are interested in these types of running shoes:

Keyword	Monthly search volume
Lightweight running shoes	590
Stability running shoes	1.300
Barefoot running shoes	2.400
Waterproof running shoes	1.300

Knowing that lots of people search for the above types of running shoes, it would be wise to create separate pages for each of them.

Note that if a page on your site were to rank for “lightweight running shoes”, it’s likely to rank for variant keywords such as “lightweight shoes for running” which means your page will rank for more search terms and could get more traffic as a result.’

Selecting the right keywords

You should prioritise your target keywords based on the following factors:

- **Search volumes:** Are enough people searching for the keywords to make it worthwhile to target?
- **Conversions:** Is it a 'buyer' keyword that is likely to trigger conversions? Or is it somebody simply searching for information? Keywords with higher conversion potential should be prioritised.
- **Competition:** How strong are the websites currently on the first page of SERPs? Keyword finders can be used to gauge keyword difficulty levels.
- **Relevance:** Are users likely to stay on your website after clicking your search result listing? Going after irrelevant terms because they have high search volume will not be beneficial.



Optimise a webpage for your keywords

Once you've selected your target keyword(s), your content must be optimised correctly. Your keyword must appear in certain page elements so search engines can understand what your page is about.

An optimised page will contain the following:

Keyword in title tag

Title tags are used in SERPs to display preview snippets of the webpage they link to. They're an important aspect of SEO. The closer your keyword is to the start of your title tag, the more weight it will hold with search engines. It's also the first thing a user sees in SERPs. If the title of the page is relevant to their search term, and appealing, they're more likely to click on your search result.

Keyword in the URL

Keyword-rich URLs tend to rank better in search engines. You should avoid ugly URLs.

Keyword in header tags

Header tags are pieces of HTML code that indicate what a webpage is about. They're hierarchical and typically run from a <h1> (the most important) to <h5> (much less important). It's vital you include your keyword in your <h1> tag, and you can do this either within the HTML code or more easily through your website's content management system.

Keyword in image alt text

If your webpage contains an image, you should assign it alt text (alternative text) which defines the nature or content of the image. You should say what you see when defining alt text. If it's a picture of a running shoe on a table, call it that. This will look as follows in your site's HTML code:

```

```

Keyword in first 100 words

The target keyword should appear within the first 100 words of the page.



Section 3.

Content creation

The importance of content

Landing pages

Infographics and visuals

Content creation – the golden rules

SHOP.

LOOK
SHARP



3. Content creation

Once you've determined the keywords you're going to target, you need to start thinking about content. Adding content to your website allows you to start ranking for those all important keywords – so how can you use content to drive traffic to your website?

The importance of content

Popular content options for your website:

- Blog
- How to guides
- Articles
- Infographics
- Related news
- Product and landing pages

Launch a company blog

Blogs are a great platform for content and an effective way of driving traffic to your website, as long as each blog you publish targets keywords relevant to your product or services.

Long-tail keywords are perfect for blog posts. They can even provide the title and subject!

For example: the long-tail keyword ‘How to choose the right running shoes’ offers a great blog post topic along with the chance to promote running shoes within your content.

Product and landing pages

A product or landing page is any page where a visitor could ‘arrive’ into your website. Most websites will have a number of different product and landing pages.

In the case of a shoe shop, SEO landing pages could run into the thousands and include:

- The homepage (optimised for ‘Online Shoe Shop’ or ‘Buy Shoes Online’)
- Category pages (e.g. an ‘ankle boots’ page and a ‘running shoes’ page)
- Sub-category pages (e.g. ‘black ankle boots’)
- Brand pages (e.g. ‘Faith Shoes,’ or ‘Women’s Skechers’)
- Product pages (e.g. ‘Faith ankle boot in black with chelsea heel’)

Similar to your blog, product and landing pages provide the perfect opportunity to map your site for primary and long-tail keywords.

The objective is for a user to find your site by searching for a certain keyword or search query.



Infographics and visuals

If you have access to a designer, you may want to talk to them about designing a visual graphic or infographic to feature on your site. Infographics allow you to display factual, often dry information in an easy-to-digest way by incorporating design elements and reducing word count.

Let's use the example of our shoe shop

You may want to create an infographic that explains how to choose the right running shoe. If someone is looking for advice on picking out a running shoe, it shows that they might be in the market to make a purchase soon.

So although they're only researching at this stage, if you can bring them to your site and provide them with high-quality information, you put yourself in the running to win them as a customer when they come to make that purchase.

A quick look on AnswerThePublic.com will show whether or not "how to choose the right running shoes" is a search that someone has made. From there, you may decide to do some keyword research around the queries about choosing running shoes using the keyword tools.

You can quickly see how a clever content creation strategy can improve your website's search ranking, online visibility and conversion rate.

Content creation golden rules

- All online content should have a goal and meet the needs of your audience.
- Decide which pages you want to rank for each keyword. There's no point creating six different pages that target the same keyword.
- Optimise each individual page for a particular keyword or subject – e.g. men's shoes, women's shoes, all children's shoes.
- Regularly update and refresh your online content. Scheduling weekly blog posts can be a great way of keeping your online content fresh and relevant.



Section 4.

On-site foundations

Indexing and crawling

Site structure

Internal linking

Site speed



4. On-site foundations

Another vital part of SEO is getting the on-site foundations of your website right. When we say “on-site” we refer to factors on your website itself, which is something called technical SEO.

On-site optimisation is very much the tidying up phase of your website from a technical and structural perspective and making sure search engines can actually find it! To explain this further, we'll break the process into four key areas.

Four key areas of on-site optimisation

These factors may need the input of your web developer but it's important that these elements are in place because they are critical to your SEO success:

- Indexing and crawling
- Site structure
- Internal linking
- Site speed.

Indexing and crawling

This is all about making sure your site can actually be crawled and indexed by search engines. Or, in other words, that search engines can access your website, can navigate around your website and can add your website's

pages to its index of the web. In order to do this there are three key elements to address:

- Search engines begin by looking for a 'robots.txt' file for your website. This file tells the search engines which pages they should exclude in their review (crawl) and indexing. Read more about creating a robots.txt file at <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6062608>
- In order to tell search engines which pages they should include in their crawling and indexing, you will need to create an XML sitemap. You can read more about creating an XML sitemap at <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/156184%0D>
- You will need to verify your website and upload your XML sitemap to your robots.txt file or via Google Search Console. You can learn more about this process at https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9008080?visit_id=637394115931490402-4207669607&rd=1

Mobile-first indexing

On July 1 2019, Google went mobile-first with its indexing. But what does that mean for you and your business?

Before mobile-first indexing, Google would crawl and index the desktop version of your website. Now, Google looks at your mobile site first.

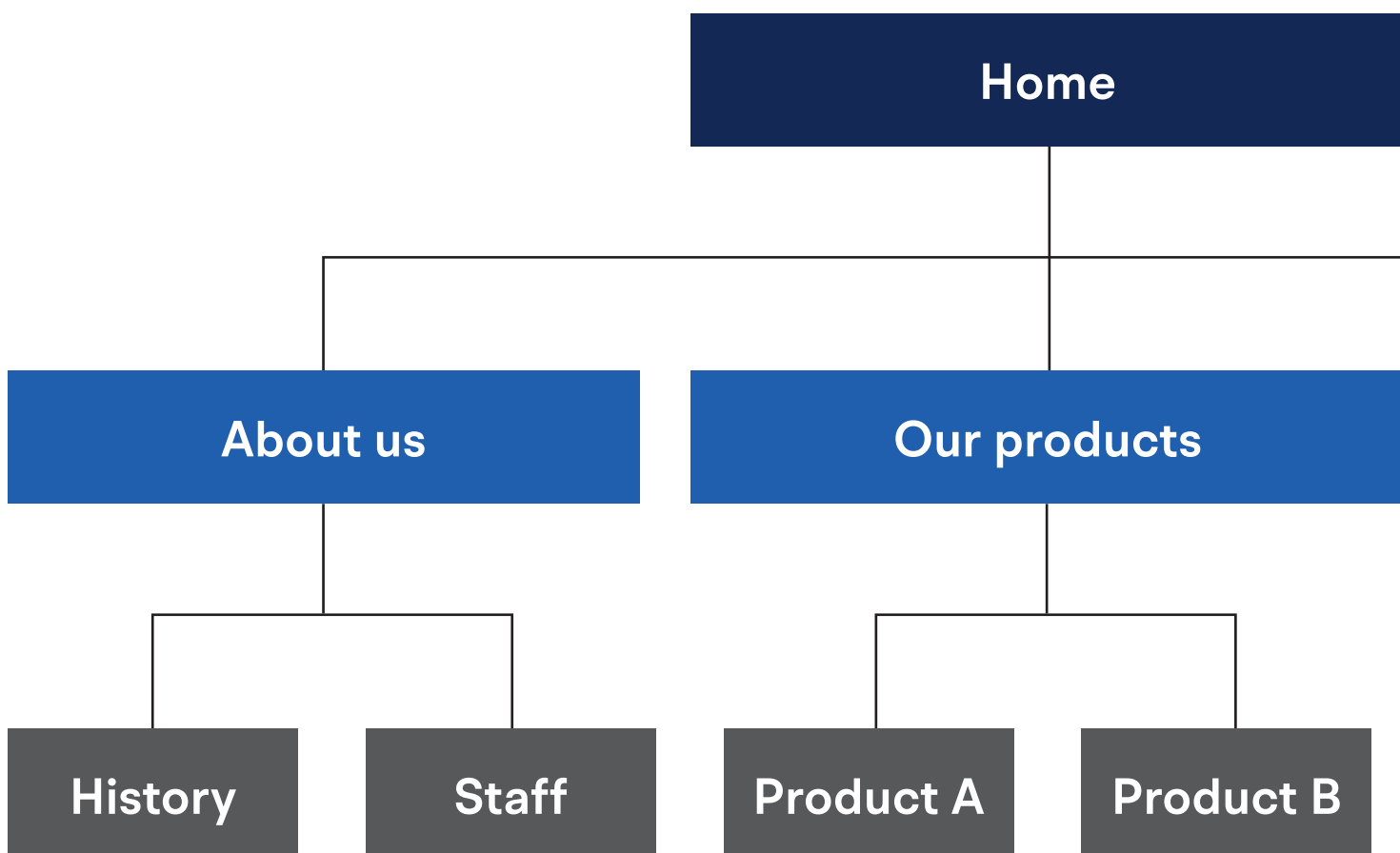
That means that when you're building a website, designing content and thinking about navigation for your site, you

should think about how it works on mobile devices first, as opposed to the traditional model of adapting your desktop site for mobile devices.

Site structure

It's important to ensure that your website has a logical structure and that search engines and users can access all parts of it. In other words, it's vital to make sure your website has a sensible, hierarchical structure and navigation.

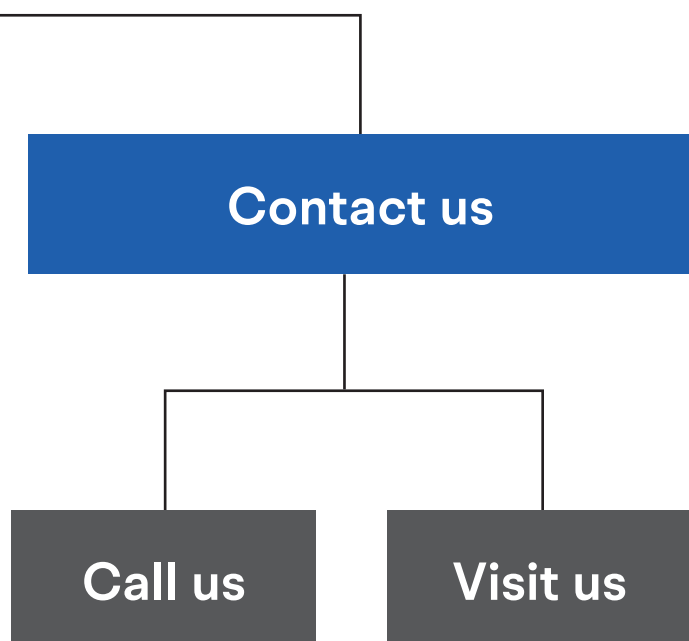
For example, if you have a shoe shop it would make sense to have your homepage at the top or front of your website. Beneath that homepage you'll have



your category pages and below that, you'll have your subcategory and product pages.

This creates a hierarchy of pages and allows users and search engines to follow a logical path from your homepage to your products.

Try not to have too many layers or make your website too deep. This makes it harder for search engines and users to make it through your website, which is an issue if your most relevant pages sit towards the bottom of those hierarchies.





Internal linking

Internal links can help a user navigate between various pages on your website, without leaving it.

Think about your site's structure and follow the hierarchy you've used there to help you organise your internal links.

Basically, use common sense. If it's relevant to link from one page to another, do it, if it's not, don't.

For example, from your homepage you'll want users and search engines to reach your product pages, so it's important you link to them from the homepage.

Similarly, if a user is reading a guide about buying stability running shoes, you should link through to a product page where users can buy stability running shoes because it's

fair to assume that users reading about buying stability running shoes are in the market to make a purchase.

Don't think about links as one-way streets through your site. Users need to be able to navigate backwards too.

Test out your links

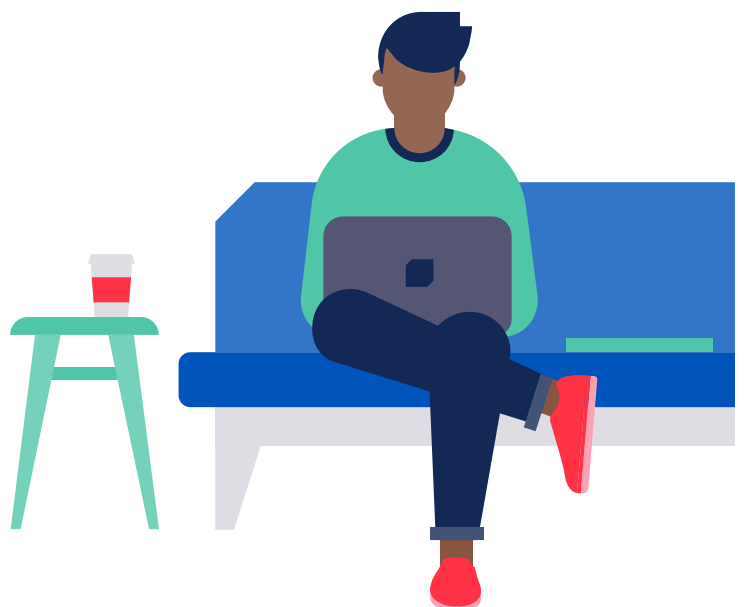
Go to your homepage (or another site if you don't have one yet) and see how easy it is to get from the homepage to the About Us page. From there, see if you can get to a product page.

If there's good internal linking, that should be easy to do and if it isn't, you might want to think about reviewing your internal links.

Example – online shoe store

On a product page, where you can buy running shoes, you may see a link that says something like: 'Looking for expert running advice? Check out our Essential Running Guide for Men'

This is an example of an internal link. It's designed to make the website sticky and keep you on it, engaging with content and increasing the chances of you making Home a purchase.



Site speed

The speed of your website – the speed at which it loads for users – is an important factor of on-site SEO. The longer it takes to load, the lower you're likely to rank in search engines.

That means it's important to monitor site speed and do what you can to make your website load faster.

7 ways to increase your site speed:

- Compress images, CSS, HTML and JavaScript files
- Optimise (or Minify) your code
- Reduce the number of redirects
- Speed up your server response times
- Reduce HTTP requests
- Reduce time to first byte (when your site first starts loading)
- Enable browser caching

The above isn't an exhaustive list and we know some of these examples are quite techy. But if you're serious about SEO, it's worth asking a developer to support with any technical SEO you carry out.

On the plus side, there are lots of SEO optimisation plugins available across some of the most popular content management systems (CMS), like Wordpress, which can do the hard work for you.



Section 5.

Backlinks

What are backlinks?

Types of backlinks (the good and the bad)

Link-building tactics



5. Backlinks

Backlinks are links from other websites to your company's website.

What are backlinks?

Links to your site from another site are basically an endorsement of what you're doing. They're good!

And in the eyes of search engines, the more links pointing to your site, the better or more useful your site is and the more likely they are to rank it highly.

Types of backlinks (the good and the bad)

Unfortunately, not all links are equal and not all links are good. In fact some can harm your site, which is why it's important to monitor your backlink profile and make sure it's healthy.

Editorial

The best type of link you can receive is a natural editorial link. This is where one website links to yours because it is a useful resource for their users. That's why well known, authoritative websites receive lots of editorial links because their content is useful and reliable.

Unfortunately, editorial links are some of the hardest to get.

How to get editorial links: Outreach is the process of sending relevant content to different websites in the hope that they link back to you.

The more relevant and useful your content is, the more likely it is that other websites will link to your content.

Non-editorial

These are generally low quality and sometimes harmful. Types of links that fall into this category include:

- Non-moderated web directories
- Press releases with optimised anchor text
- Advertorials
- Forum signatures
- User profile pages
- Article directories
- Link exchanges

For more detail on the types of links you should avoid, have a read through **Google's Quality Guidelines**

Link-building tactics

To build a healthy link profile, consider using the following tactics:

Guest posting

This involves approaching webmasters and bloggers and asking if you can contribute an article to their site. You would then include a link back to your own site within the article.

Guest posting must be approached with caution, as many bloggers have low-quality guidelines and will only publish guest posts if they are compensated with money. This has led to many people buying links en masse in order to gain high search rankings. For this reason, Google has cracked down on this form of link building. Paying for links is against Google's guidelines and is not recommended.

When seeking guest post opportunities, be sure to look for sites with strict quality guidelines that are highly relevant to your industry.

Content-based link building

The aim of content link building is to create a shareable piece of content which appeals to other websites and their audiences, in the hope that they'll provide a link back to you.

Successful link building content comes in different formats. But whether it's a video, an infographic or a how-to guide, what they all have in common is that they're unique, eye-catching pieces that are too good not to link to.

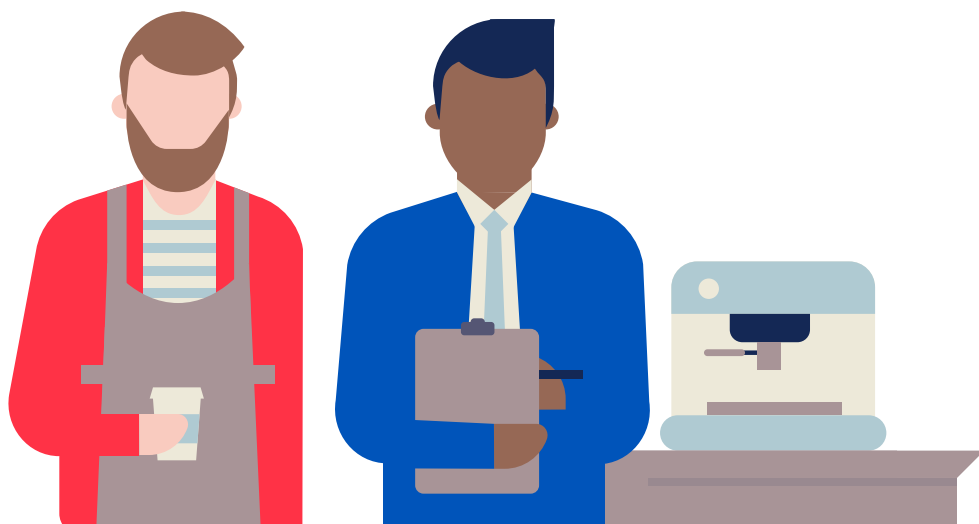
Talk to relevant websites and bloggers and find out what content they want and when they want it. Create the content they want, send it to them and encourage them to share it.

Resource pages

Many websites contain links or resource pages where they link to recommended websites. If your website is relevant enough, you may be able to convince the webmaster to add it to his/her list. This is a way of searching for resources pages by returning a list of website pages which are relevant for the keyword you searched for and contain the word 'links' in the URL.

Unlinked brand mentions

Sometimes it is common for other websites to write about your brand without including a link to your website. Writing to the webmaster and asking them to include a link to your site will often be successful. Mention.com and Google Alerts are good tools for finding out where your site has been mentioned.



Section 6.

Off-page tips for your business

Google My Business

Securing your company's social media handles



6. Off-page tips for your business

As well as on-site and on-page SEO, there are off-page tactics you can employ to increase the amount of organic traffic your site gets.

Google My Business

Create a 'My Business' profile on Google so that people can easily find a description, reviews and your company contact information. 'Google My Business' (<https://www.google.com/business/>) is essentially an online listings directory and you can set up a profile for free.

Securing your company's social media handles

You've optimised your site for keywords, you've signed up to Google's My Business service, now it's time to get set up on social media – if you haven't already.

Want to learn more about Social Media for your start up? Download our guide now

There are lots of resources on the internet to help you get a better understanding of SEO, including resources from Google, Moz, Search Engine Land and the Search Engine Journal:

- **Google Digital Garage**
- **Google Search Console Course**

- **Search Engine Land**
- **Moz Blog**
- **Search Engine Watch**
- **Search Engine Journal**
- **The Sem Post**
- **Whiteboard Friday**



Success stories

“ We are so proud of our product, and it’s been amazing to see it being sold nationwide. None of this would have been possible without the support and advice we received from Start Up Loans. ”

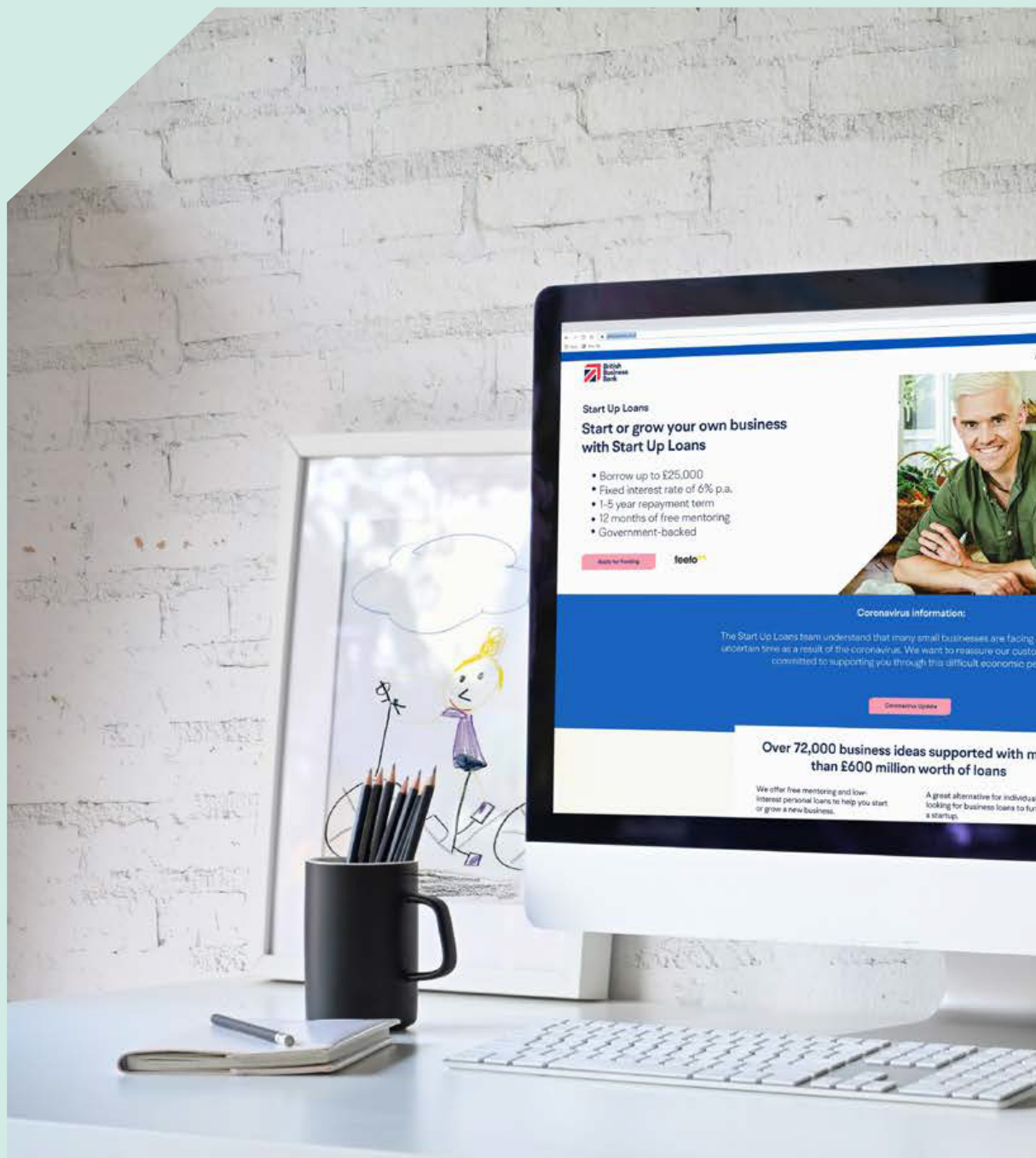


Craig Rose
Managing Director,
Seaweed & Co



Other free toolkits

We've created free toolkits, covering some of the most important topics for start ups like yours, including:

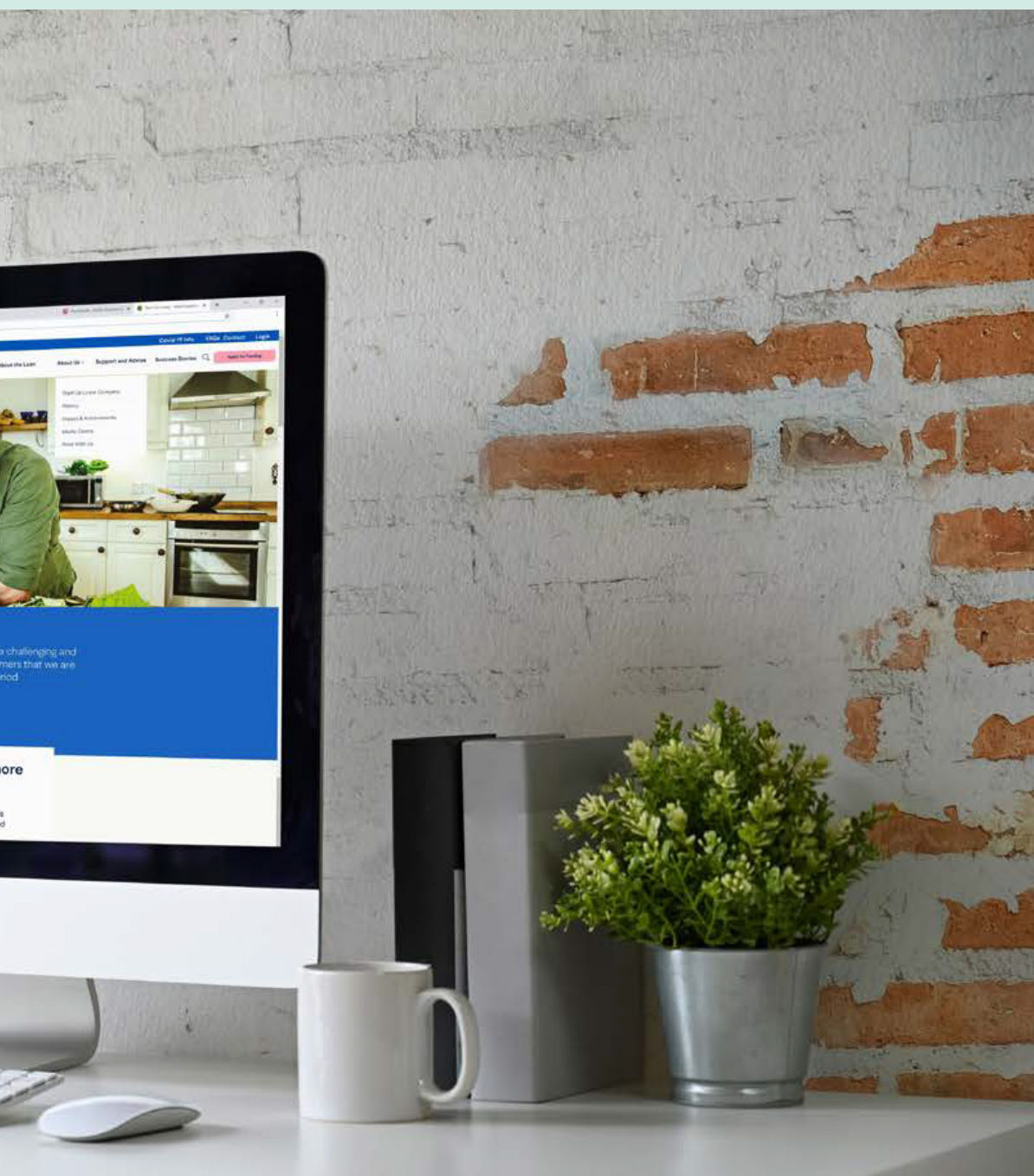


The essential guide to starting a business

Social media toolkit

PR toolkit

Marketing toolkit



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