

What are the core elements of doing SEO for a real estate broker/agent website? (Part 2)

Technical & On-Page Optimization

The broad goal of content is to solve a searcher's task, but there are numerous individual elements of a webpage that benefit from technical and keyword-focused optimization. To maximize SEO for your pages:

- Ensure that your pages are crawlable and indexable by Google's web spiders. You can test this for an individual URL using Google's "[Fetch as Googlebot](#)" tool or get a health check on your entire site with Google Search Console or a third party tool like [Moz Pro](#), [Ryte](#), or [Screaming Frog](#).
- Make pages load fast - [according to Pingdom](#), abandonment rates are, on average, only 6% after 2 seconds of load time but skyrocket to 53% at 7 seconds of load time. Both Google's [page speed tools](#) and Pingdom's [website speed test](#) can help.
- Craft page titles that are descriptive, compelling, and clearly communicate the value proposition of the page content and how it will solve the searcher's task. Generally speaking, page titles and headlines (preferably using the H1 tag in HTML) should match (or nearly match) so searchers who click on a listing in the search results will see the same text atop the page. Title elements should be no longer than 60 characters. More detail about [page title optimization here](#).

1. Search engine result pages

Your title tag determines (with a few exceptions) your display title in SERPs, and is a search visitor's first experience of your site. Even if your site ranks well, a good title can be the make-or-break factor in determining whether or not someone clicks on your link.

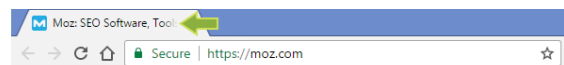
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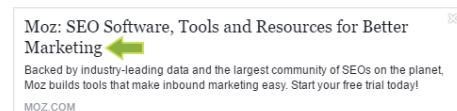
2. Web browsers

Your title tag is also displayed at the top of your web browser and acts as a placeholder, especially for people who have many browser tabs open. Unique and easily recognizable titles with important keywords near the front help ensure that people don't lose track of your content.



3. Social networks

Some external websites — especially social networks — will use your title tag to determine what to display when you share that page. Here's a screenshot from Facebook, for example:



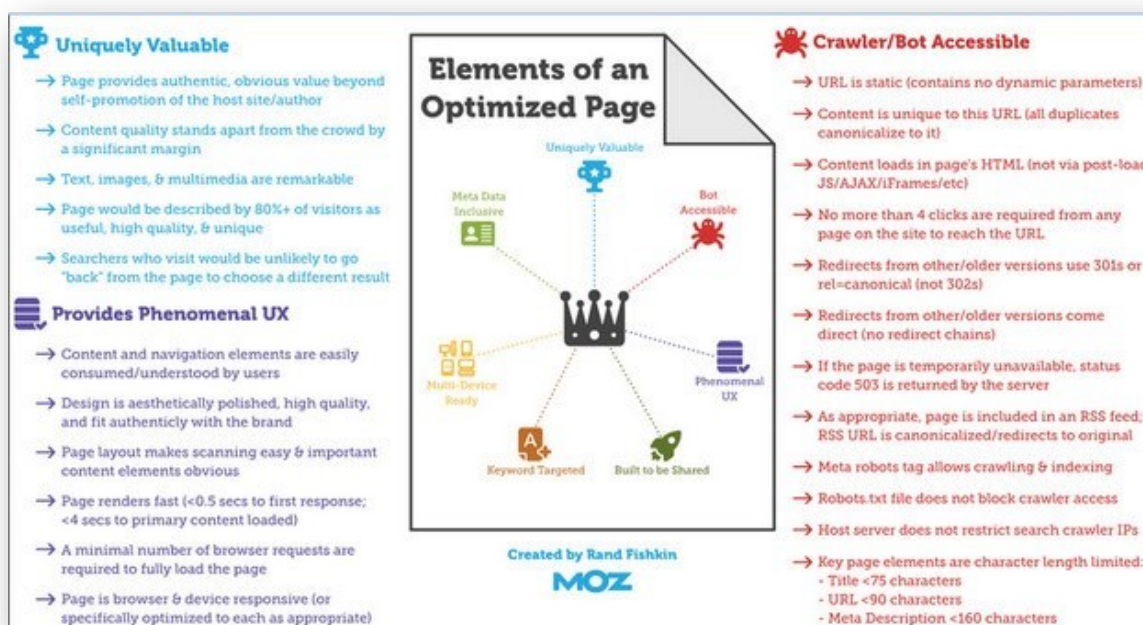
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- Headlines should generally use the H(x) tag format. As noted above, the H1 should generally match the page's title, while subsequent H(x) tags (H2, H3, H4, etc) should serve as sub-headlines and can be applied to multiple subheaders on a page. Many pages will only require an H1 or and H1 and H2. In-depth content may benefit from additional headline nesting.
- If a page's content features video, audio, or visuals, supporting text should exist in the form of transcripts, alt attributes (for images - these also help with accessibility for sight-impaired visitors using screen readers or other technology), and descriptive captions.
- When targeting a set of keywords, select a primary phrase and secondary keyword targets then ensure those terms and phrases are used intelligently in areas on the page including:
 - * At least once in the page title and H1 headline
 - * As appropriate (but at least once) in the body content
 - * In the alt attribute of at least 1 relevant, useful image/visual (if applicable)
 - * In the page's URL (if appropriate -- for example, this doesn't make sense in homepage URLs)
 - * In the meta description of the page
- Author a meta description of [up to 300 characters](#) for each page that describes the content in a way that will drive searchers to want to click your listing over others in the results (and, as per the above, employ at least your primary keyword phrase, and possibly secondary ones as well)
- Avoid keyword stuffing or unnatural repetition of keyphrases. Search engines no longer need to be bludgeoned over their algorithmic heads with keywords and can sensibly sort out when a page is effectively covering a topic.
- Related terms and phrases should be intelligently used in a page's content to help bolster relevance in the eyes of search engines and to serve searchers' queries. For example, in a page targeting the keyword phrase "Baton Rouge neighborhoods," the page's content should include the names of the city's neighborhoods, e.g. "Ashley," "Woodaire," "Zion City," "Southdowns," etc. More on [use of related topics in this video](#).
- It's generally wise to use the rel=canonical tag on webpages to prevent content duplication or ranking signal splitting between slight variants in URLs. [More on use of the rel=canonical here](#).
- When linking (internally or externally), use descriptive anchor text that clearly indicates what a user will find at the destination (e.g. don't use link text like "click here for more;" instead use link text like "more about condos for sale in Orlando here")

Easy Steps to Improve SEO for Your Website

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For more on on-page optimization, see [this visual guide](#) and/or [this video](#).



Improving User Experience

Pages that better serve searchers (and other visitors) will perform better in the search rankings. This happens because Google is able to measure searcher satisfaction through a variety of means. The simplest of these is what the search giant calls "pogo-sticking," when a searcher clicks on a result, but then clicks back to the search results, unsatisfied by the page they chose. This behavior, especially when presented as an aggregate pattern (i.e. lots of searchers with this behavior for the same result on the same query), nudges Google to make changes in their rankings.

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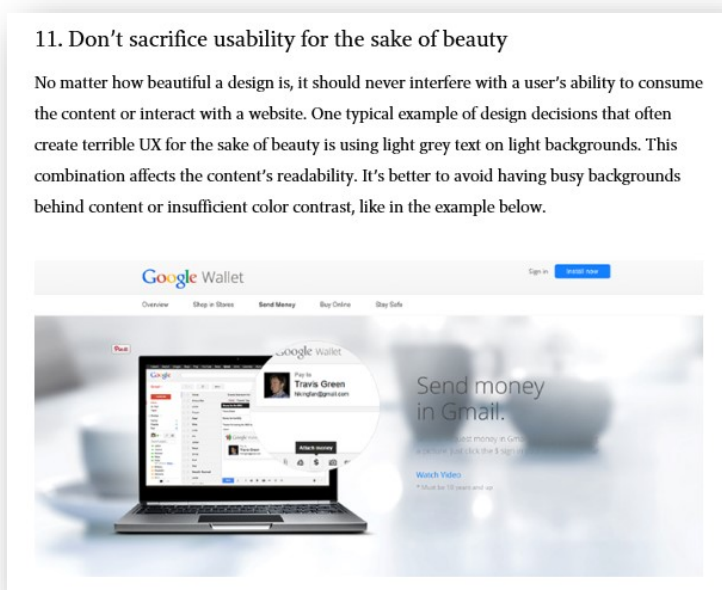
As such, anything a website can do to improve the experience a user has in their interaction can have significant, positive impacts on rankings in the short and long term. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Making the site's pages load faster
- Improving the visual look and feel of the website
- Presenting the most important information the searcher is seeking front and center when they land on the page
- Adding functionality or information that can help the searcher better solve their task
- Upgrading the quality, reliability, trustworthiness, and/or perceived authority of the site/page's content
- Branding your business/organization in such a way that searchers in your area (or to whom you're targeting content) are more likely to have a previously existing relationship of trust with you (broadcast media like TV, radio, print, outdoor, etc can impact this, which is part of why some real estate professionals have seen their Google rankings rise as their PR+advertising campaigns take off)
- Optimizing the flow of information on a page to best serve searcher's curiosity and interest in the order that they experience it (see [this video](#) for more)

For more on UX, check out Adobe's guide to [12 Do's and Don'ts of Web Design](#) as well as [this video on UX and SEO tradeoffs](#).

11. Don't sacrifice usability for the sake of beauty

No matter how beautiful a design is, it should never interfere with a user's ability to consume the content or interact with a website. One typical example of design decisions that often create terrible UX for the sake of beauty is using light grey text on light backgrounds. This combination affects the content's readability. It's better to avoid having busy backgrounds behind content or insufficient color contrast, like in the example below.



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Growing Links & Citations

A significant portion of Google's rankings in traditional (web) search results are governed by the links that point to a given site and page. More and better links from better sources can boost rankings substantively, even when other ranking signals are missing. And, conversely, when a site lacks links from other domains, it will often fall behind in the rankings even if every other ranking signal is well-optimized.

For local/map-pack results, a similar ranking preference is given to local businesses that have earned significant quantities of high quality citations. Citations for local search may not always include a link, but almost always mention the business' name, address, phone number, and possibly the website address (in some combination). These citations are most commonly found on business listing sites like Chambers of Commerce, Yelp, LinkedIn, Mapquest, and in the real estate world specifically, Zillow, ActiveRain, Realtor.com, and others. The list of potential citation sources is long, just like the list of domain that could potentially link to a website, and Google treats many of these listings as citations that impact a local business' rankings.

Growing these links and citations is a crucial part of ranking well in Google's web and local/maps results. Without good links and citations, it's unlikely you'll ever compete in the top spots, and very often (unless you're a business/website that naturally generates superb links and citations through press, PR, or viral activity -- exceptionally rare in the real estate space), this requires manual work to improve.

There are a nearly infinite number of tactics that can be pursued to earn links and citations, but a few of the best, most straightforward ones for real estate owners include:

- Seek out sources that link to or cite another business or website that ranks in the search results. You can do this through Google by entering the business' name in the search bar and browsing through multiple pages of results, seeing where that business is mentioned (or linked-to) on the web.
- A slightly more sophisticated tactic is to look for sources that mention (or link to) more than one of your search result competitors (e.g. if both "John's Real Estate" and "Mary's Realty" show up for keywords you care about, enter both names, in quotes, to the Google search bar to see pages that mention both).

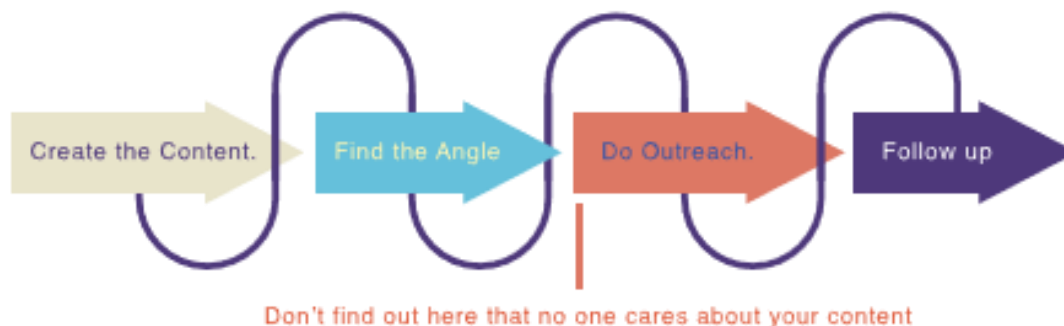
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- Perform Google searches that seek out potential listing sources in your region using keywords like:
 - * Cityname + directory
 - * Cityname + “local businesses”
 - * Cityname + “local resources”
 - * Cityname + “add your business”
 - * Cityname + “list your company”
 - * Cityname + “business listings”
- Use link tools like [Moz](#), [Ahrefs](#), [SEMRush](#), or [Majestic](#) -- these software programs maintain large-scale indices of links on the web and can be used to mine for competitive opportunities in numerous ways.

For more on citation growth tactics, see [this resource on how to get citations for a local business, building citations like an agency](#), this [list of citation sources for real estate businesses](#), and this [citations by category directory](#).

For more on link building tactics, check out [link building posts from the Moz blog](#), this [list of link building options from PointBlankSEO](#), and this [guide to link building tactics](#).



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More Detail on Links that Google Will Count

There are a multitude of ways to present a link that visitors and web browsers can see, but that Google may not count in their rankings. For the purposes of providing a true citation that will help an original lister gain benefit, it is strongly recommended that the links employed by NAR member sites use strictly HTML links.

An HTML link looks like this in the page's source code:

```
<a href="https://www.nar.realtor">National Association of Realtors</a>
```

And in the browser, it will render as a link with "National Association of Realtors. Google will see that link and know that the page its on is passing the weight of a link and the associated anchor text to the www.nar.realtor website and page.

But many other types of links may not render as clearly or be picked up as easily by Google's crawlers. For example:

- Links that include the *rel="nofollow"* directive in the code will be ignored by Google (this is a protocol that websites can use for their comments section or other open areas where users can leave links and content that the editorial creators don't necessarily endorse)
- Links that are created via a script (like Javascript) that relies on external calls that Google can't see and therefore won't show to their crawler
- Links that use plug-ins like Flash, Java applets, or other media
- Links that use redirects to pages on their own domain with messages like "you're leaving this site"

There are a wide variety of links that Google may not cleanly pick up and read, which is why, for the purposes of passing value back to the original listing source, it's strongly recommended that text-based, HTML links that do not use the nofollow directive are employed. If you're worried that a type of link may not be counted, you can check it using [Google's Fetch and Render Tool](#) (note that you'll need to be logged in to your Google Search Console account and have the site you're checking verified with Google).

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More Detail on Rel Canonical vs. Links

Rel="canonical" is a very powerful and potentially risky directive that Google will interpret to mean:

- A) that one page is a copy of another
- B) that the copy should not rank separately in Google's index
- C) that the original (to which the rel="canonical" is pointing) should receive all of the ranking signals of the copy

This can be a useful tool when creating multiple version of the same page, for example a print-friendly version and a web browser version (as the New York Times does) or when posting the same content to multiple websites (as, for example, the site Medium.com allows its users to do). But if the NAR were to require this of all pages that copy an original listing, it would mean that many sites and pages would no longer have the opportunity to show in Google's results at all.

Additionally, there's risk that if Google stops trusting a site's use of rel="canonical," because, for example, Google doesn't think those pages are near-copies of each other, or believes searchers would benefit from having both in the listings, the protocol may not have the intended, beneficial impact for the original listing source. If Google sees widespread usage across many real estate sites its algorithms don't recognize as duplicates, the passing of ranking signals may not happen.

It's strongly recommended by Google that rel="canonical" only be used on pages that are exact or very near duplicates of one another.