Search Engine Optimization Strategy and Implementation for She Matters

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This is a product-based thesis that discusses the search engine optimisation element in-depth for She Matters, a social enterprise in the Netherlands with a mission to empower companies with diverse talent and female newcomers with employment. This thesis analyses the current situation of the company's website and discusses how to improve the visibility of the website on the search engine results page, so the company can receive high-quality leads who are looking for its services.

The author of this thesis discussed the main elements of search engine optimisation (SEO): content, technical and authority as these are the elements that search engines look for when they rank a website. The focus in this thesis was purely into search engine optimisation, so bring high-quality traffic to the website, without the help of search engine marketing or social media marketing or any other paid marketing tools and techniques.

In addition to the main 4 project tasks of this project, the author provides recommendations to the company, so the company gets the most benefits from this research. It is very important to implement the strategy provided in this paper, but it is also important to prioritize some of the tasks as the following recommendations suggest.

The author got a tremendous amount of new information related to search engine optimization and it is implementation from this thesis and learned that implementing SEO elements without a clear strategy, is just wasting of time and resources. A strong plan means better results and more customer satisfaction.

Keywords
Search Engine Optimization, Search Engine Marketing, Technical SEO, On-page SEO, Off-page SEO, International SEO.

Table of contents

1 Introduction

This is a product-based thesis bachelor for the degree program in international business, specialization of Marketing. This thesis focuses on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for She Matters' website, the aim of the thesis is to boost website visibility in Search Engine Result Page (SERP). The main goal of this product-based thesis is to create an SEO strategy for the organization to gain more applicants through organic traffic, as well as gain brand awareness with the help of Search Engine Marketing. In addition to that this product will discuss and create an international SEO strategy as the organization is going to expand to the United Kingdom.

1.1 Background

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is the process and discipline of improving the quality and visibility of a website in order to increase its ranking in search engines, thereby increasing the visitor traffic. That's a simple definition, but it captures the essence of SEO. Webmasters started optimizing websites in the mid-90s, soon after search engines began cataloguing the growing number of websites that were appearing on the Internet. The term "search engine optimization" is believed to have come into use in 1997. Today, search marketing is estimated to be a 15-billion-dollar industry in the US alone, with tens of thousands of self-help entrepreneurs succeeding quite effectively as well. (David 2011, 28.)

Search Engine Optimization consists of 3 main parts. The first part is technical SEO, which is related to indexing and crawling the website, technical SEO helps search engine spiders to understand the website and what it is about. The second part is on-page SEO which analysis each page on the website individually, on-page SEO is the analyses of the content on the page, user experience, the use of keywords, tags and meta description. The third part is off-page SEO where SEO porofessionals build website authority from gaining backlinks from other authority websites in the same industry through outreach and PR.

In addition to the main 3 parts of the project, this paper discusses and creates an international SEO strategy. International SEO is the process of optimizing your website so that search engines can easily identify which countries you want to target and which languages you use for business. (MOZ, 2020.)

1.2   Project Objective

This thesis aims to create and implement an SEO strategy for She Matters a social enterprise that helps women in the Netherlands to find a job and to empower companies with talented women. The project objective is to create a search engine optimization strategy and a how-to guide to optimize the website for local and international search for She Matters.

The project tasks are divided into the main search engine optimization elements, technical, on-page and off-page SEO. The analysis will start with the technical factors related to search engine optimization, with analysing the on-page factors and finding opportunities to improve the appearance of the website on Google, then analysing the off-page elements to figure out how to make the website more popular in the eyes of Google. In addition to that, an international SEO strategy will be created and how to implement it. The thesis will also have some recommendations to the company for implementation, so the company can see faster results.

Project Objective: Search Engine Optimization strategy and implementation for She Matters.

Project Task 1. Technical SEO is to identify the technical issues on the website.

Project Task 2. On-page SEO is to analyze website content.

Project Task 3. Off-page SEO is to analyze competitors' websites and creating a strategy for link building.

Project Task 4. International-SEO is an international strategy to enter the United Kingdom from an SEO perspective.

Project Task 5. Recommendations for implementing an SEO strategy is a set of recommendation that will focuses on how to implement the overall strategy.

Table 1 below presents the theoretical framework, project management methods and outcomes for each project task.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Project Task	Theoretical Framework	Project Management Methods	Outcomes
PT 1. Technical SEO: identifying technical issues	Technical documentations	Use scripts to analyze website Technically	A full understanding of the issues on the

			website and find areas to improve
PT 2. On-page SEO: analysing website content	Meta tags and on-page factors proven methods	Software to analyze Meta tags and other factors	Find issues and areas to improve according to the keyword research
PT 3. Off-page SEO: Create a strategy for link building.	Google citation factors	Software to analyze opportunities in link building.	Find other websites to link to and to build a reputation
PT 4. International-SEO: international strategy to enter the UK from SEO perspective.	Technical and keyword research	Market research and keyword analysis in the target country.	Commissioning company's website will be visible on search engine for multiple locations.
PT 5. Recommendations for implementing an SEO strategy.	Thesis findings	finding analysing	Implementing an SEO strategy

1.3 Project Scope

Although an important part of this thesis describes On-page SEO and keyword research, however, Content Marketing will not be studied here and will be the main demarcated topic. In addition to Content Marketing, this thesis does not consider other strategies or tools that are not very related to Search Engine Optimization, Google My Business, Google Ads and Social Media Marketing are demarcated in this project. Black hat SEO tactics also demarcated in this project. Black hat SEO is a practice against search engine guidelines, used to get a site ranking higher in search results. (Padraig O'Connor 2020.)

1.4 International Aspect

The commissioning company is in the Netherlands, most of the strategies used in this thesis are designed for local business, however, the commissioning company is going to expand to London, the United Kingdome, therefore one of the project tasks is to create an international SEO strategy that will be implemented when the commissioning company starts operating in London.

1.5 Benefits

The commissioning company benefits from this project by having a complete SEO strategy, with a full analysis of its website and its competitors from the digital marketing perspective, the company also will rank better on Google for specific keywords which ultimately means more applicants to the commissioning company's offered programs. every website is unique, creating an SEO strategy is also unique for each website, therefore this thesis product adds value to the Search Engine Optimization community.

1.6 Risk and Risk Management

There is a risk that the company does not record its website data or metrics, or the company has not set up a Google Analytics account or Search Console account yet. The solution is to use a paid tool to access that data like SEMrush.

The second risk is that Google will update its algorithm while I am in the final stage of the thesis. This is something I cannot avoid, but usually, Google does not update its algorithm in a way that cancels everything that has been done before. My plan B is to be determined when the update is going to happen because it depends on the new update and what has been updated and in which stage am I with the project.

1.7 Key Concepts

Search Engine Optimization

SEO stands for "search engine optimization." In simple terms, it means the process of improving your site to increase its visibility for relevant searches. The better visibility your pages have in search results, the more likely you are to garner attention and attract prospective and existing customers to your business. (Search Engine Land.)
Because users rarely click on links beyond the first search results page, boosting search-engine ranking has become essential to business success. With a deeper knowledge of search-engine optimization best practices, organizations can avoid unethical practices

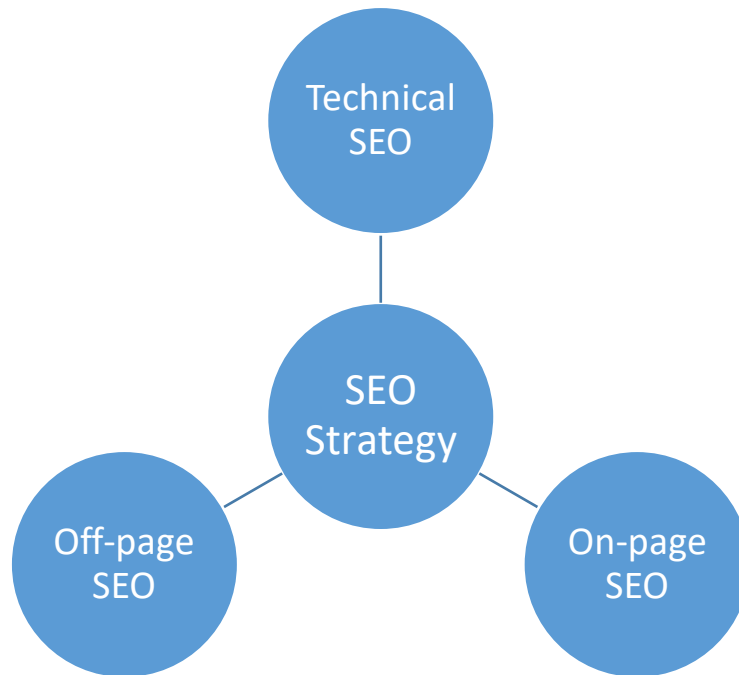and effectively monitor strategies approved by popular search engines. (Gudivada, Rao & Paris 2015, 43.)

Figure 1. The main elements of SEO

Search Engine Optimization Strategy

An SEO strategy (also referred to as "SEO approach" or "search engine optimization strategy") is the process of planning, outlining and implementing steps designed to improve search engine rankings. In other words: an SEO strategy is the process that you follow when you want to get more organic traffic. (Brian Dean 2020.)

International Search Engine Optimization Strategy

International SEO is the process of optimizing your website so that search engines can easily identify which countries you want to target and which languages you use for business. (MOZ 2020.)

Keywords in SEO

Keywords are ideas and topics that define what your content is about. In terms of SEO, they're the words and phrases that searchers enter into search engines, also called "search queries." If you boil everything on your page — all the images, video, copy, etc. — down to simple words and phrases, those are your primary keywords. (MOZ 2020.)

1.8   Case Company

She Matters Recruitment is a social enterprise with a mission to empower companies with diverse talent and female newcomers with employment. specialise in placing Engineering, Architect, Business Services and IT professionals - women who are qualified and driven to enter the labour market. (She Matters, 2021).
She Matters located in the Netherlands, the city of Rotterdam with 4 employees and volunteers. On the 6th of October 2020, She Matters foundation has received ANBI status. ANBI is the non-profit tax designation in the Netherlands issued by the Tax Office (Belastingdienst) in accordance with the general tax laws (Uitvoeringsregeling Algemene Wet Rijksbelastingen 1994). (She Matters, 2020).

The founder and CEO of She Matters, Christina Moreno realised that the company's website needs to be optimized for specific keywords, she explained that some of her customers could not find the company's website when they searched in Google for "She Matters".
The Marketing Manager in the company also explained to the CEO the importance of SEO and analytics.

1.9   Why Google?

Since 1997 when Google was launched, the company had all the attention worldwide, since then, Google has the biggest share of the market, in February 2021 Google recorded 92.05 while Bing was on 6.7 per cent of the global search market.
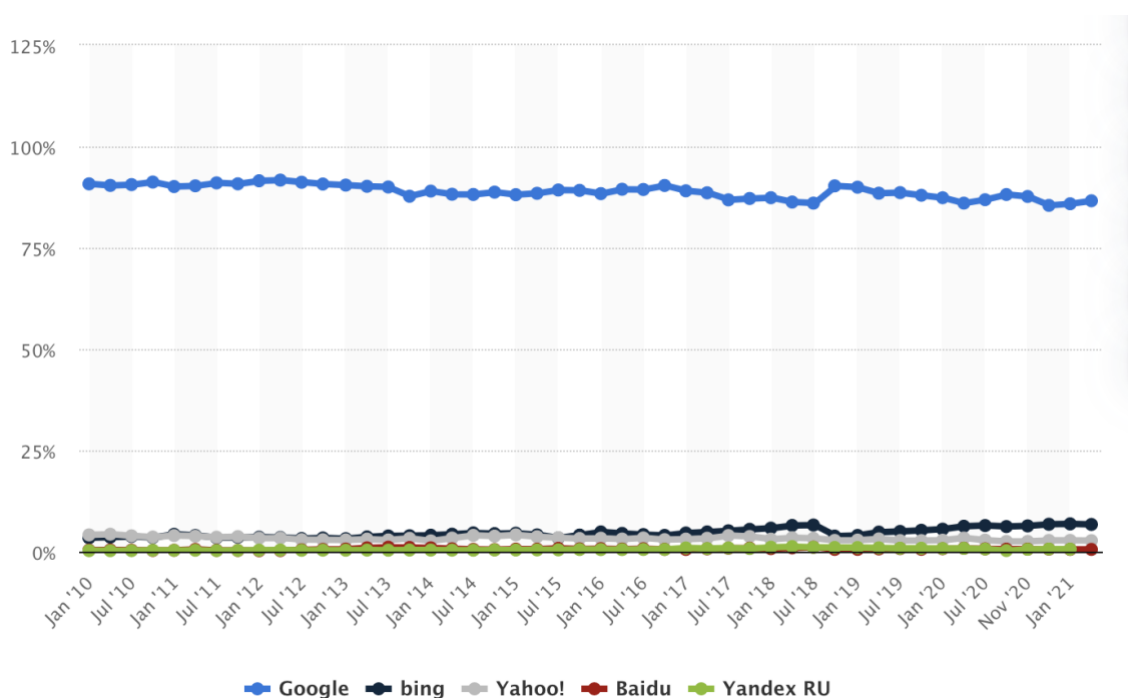

Figure 2. Search engines market share (statista, 2021)

6

Google handles 3.8 million searches per minute on average across the globe. That comes out to 228 million searches per hour, 5.6 billion searches per day, or 2 trillion searches per year! (Kenshoo, 2019).

Being in Google is not enough anymore, businesses pay thousands and thousands of euros to be on the first spot on Google when someone is searching for services related to that business. Businesses want to be on the first spot organically and paid, where organically is done by the Search Engine Optimisation techniques and paid is done with Google Ads. According to a survey conducted by Search Engine Land, 90 percent of respondents said they were likely to click on the first set of results on the search engine results page (searchenginland, 2018). The same survey also revealed that 60 per cent of mobile users were "very likely" to click on the first two or three search results they saw. This increasingly lays emphasis on the fact that organic rankings matter. (Oberlo, 2020).

1.10 Business Benefits of SEO

Search engine optimization is a perfect way to generate leads organically for businesses, if done correctly and maintained frequently, SEO could be a lead generation machine that brings tens, hundreds and even thousands of leads every single day depending on the size of the company, service/product provided and the competition.
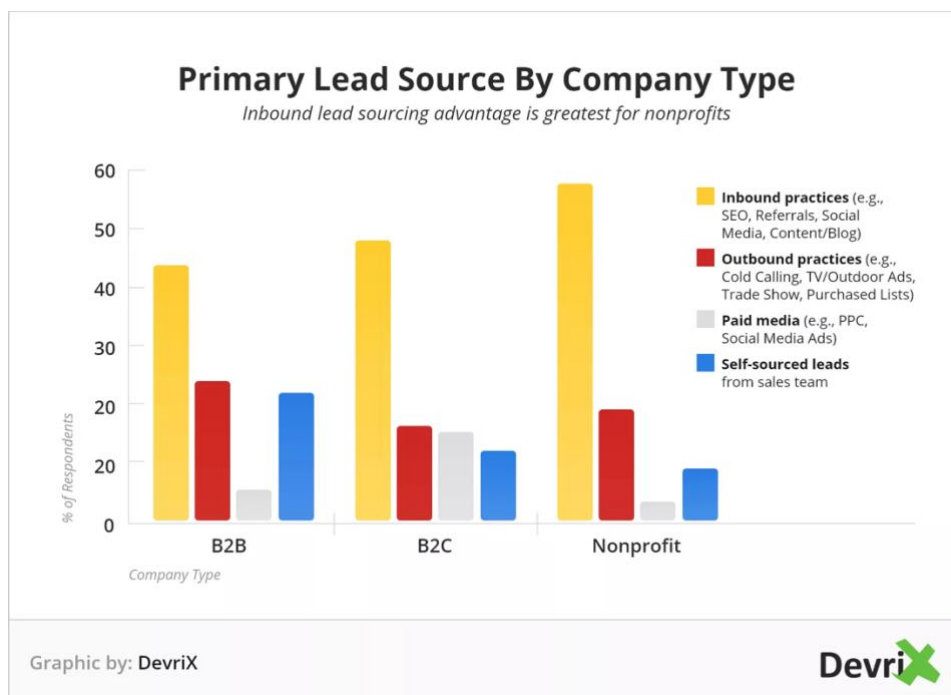

Figure 1. SEO is the primary lead source (devriX, 2019)

In addition to the main benefit as a lead generation, SEO focuses on the user experience, which means the company must improve their website on a regular basis and also cope

with the last technologies and trends. By creating a better user experience, companies shall see a higher conversion rate, as the high user experience means a high-quality website.

The Search Engine Journal reported that inbound leads can actually lower the cost of lead generation by 61% versus outbound leads. (DevriX, 2019). Compared to paid marketing, SEO is a better solution for companies that is cost effective and also bring more high qualified leads into the sales funnel. But not only that, SEO have a significant effect on customer behaviour where SEO encourage local customers to visit the company, shop, organizations or even a restaurant. For instance, a user looking for a local recruitment service, he, or she most likely will visit the top search results which he or she found on Google. The same applies to a user trying to find "The best vegetarian restaurant in Helsinki city centre", the user will choose from the top results restaurants shown on Google with the best reviews. A study done by HubSpot indicates that 81% of shoppers do online research before they go to a local store to make a purchase. (HubSpot, 2019).

Brand credibility is not an exemption when speaking about SEO benefits, being on the first, second or even on the third spot on Google when users search for specific keywords, means that the company is one of the top players in that industry. Despite the awareness that the website creates when it is always on the top results, SEO shows the audience that this website is popular and well-known in this niche and it is worth reading the material they provide, or even make a contact with the company to learn more about it and its services.

SEO is also a great way to gain more market share. As SEO increases the conversion rate, it means more and more clients are coming to the company from the SEO strategy and being on the first spot on Google. SEO conversion rate does not mean an increase in sales directly, but it means an increase in registering for a membership, or sending a contact form to learn more, or subscribing to the mailing list and other kinds of digital marketing that aim to move prospecting inside the sales funnel from level to a next level.

Although SEO and PR may seem like entirely separate marketing strategies, you can use them together to maximize the results you see from each. (crazyegg, 2021).
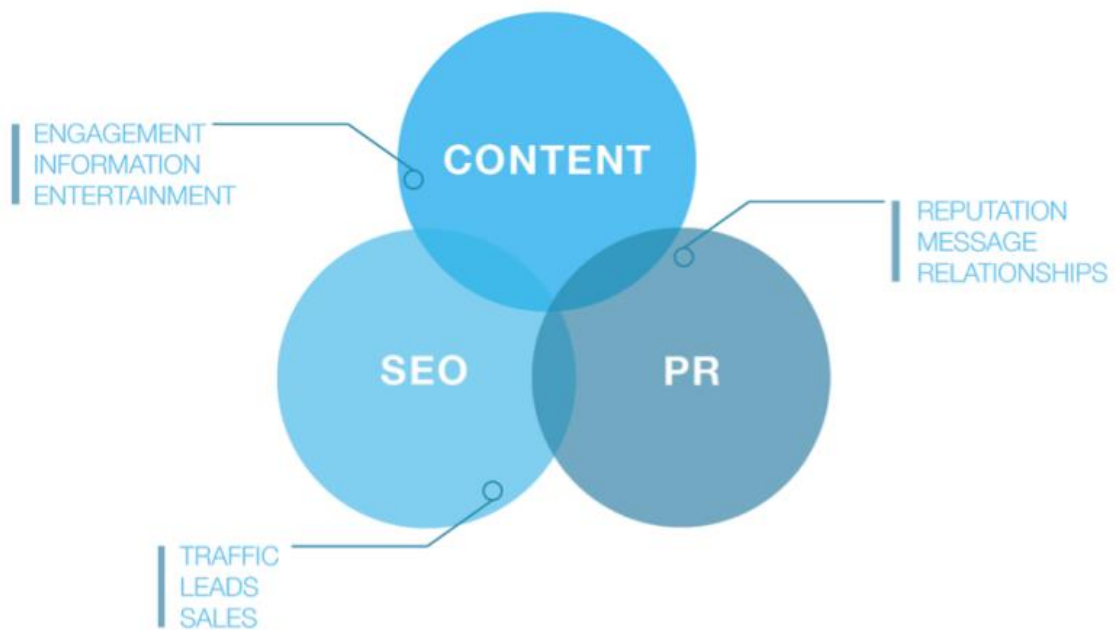
Figure 2. Relation between SEO, PR and Content (crazyegg, 2021)

1.11 Elements of SEO

In this thesis, the author discusses different elements and factors of SEO, although the SEO industry is huge and has hundreds of elements, specific elements picked especially for shematters.com, these elements are the best elements for shematters.com to gain quick authority on search engine.

Figure 5 shows the 4 main factors with the most important elements discussed in this thesis. The technical factor is the base of the website, so it is very important to start with these elements and to solve all the issues related to technical elements, then conducting keyword research and understanding the weight of keyword for the search engine is very important to build high-quality content that is written for humans and for search engines.

Elements off the website are completing the circle of the SEO locally and internationally, it is not enough to have an optimized website technically with high-quality content, sites need authority, off-page and international SEO strategy are the way to give the web site the needed authority for search engines.

Almost all search engines work the same way, with small differences, for instant Google examines the keyword context as well as the keywords themselves, Bing focuses more on the precise keyword(s). The greatest difference, however, is the fact that Bing puts a larger emphasis on social media than Google. A website with strong social signals majorly

affects a website's ranking in Bing. The more likes, shares, recommendations, etc. your website has on a social media platform, the better. (nozakconsulting, 2021).
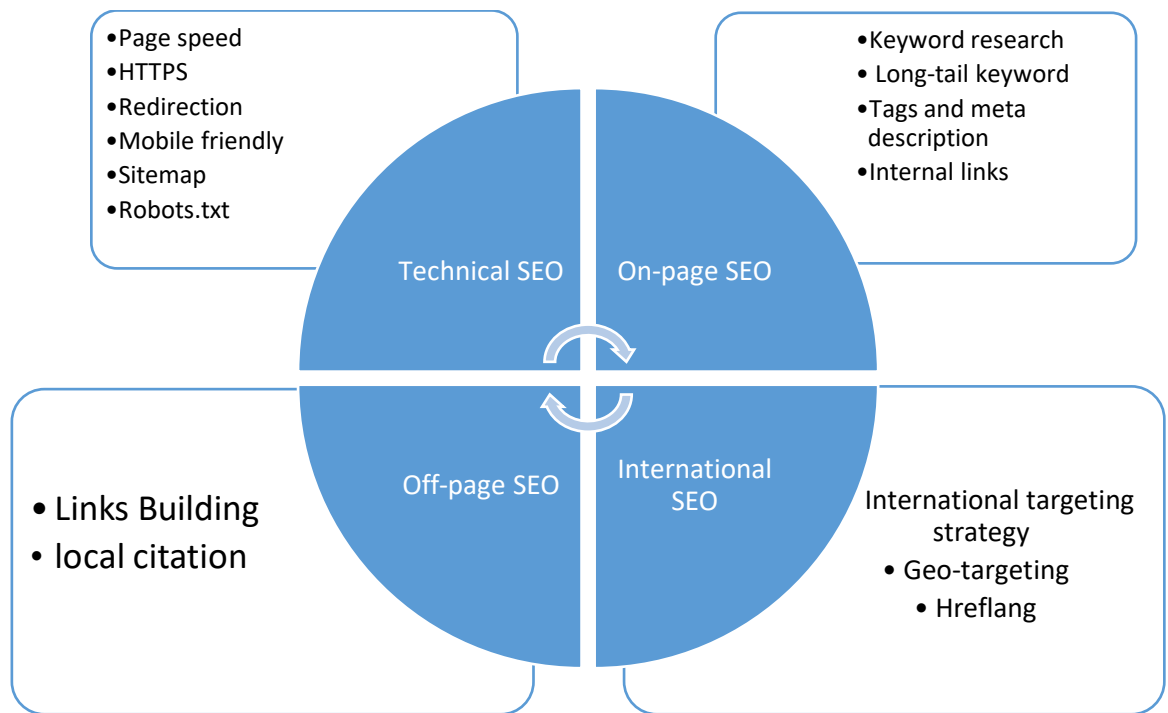

Figure 3. Factors and elements discussed in this thesis.

2   Technical SEO

Technical SEO is the process of ensuring that a website meets the technical requirements of modern search engines with the goal of improved organic rankings. Important elements of Technical SEO include crawling, indexing, rendering, and website architecture. (Brian Dean, 2020).

2.1   Page Speed

Page speed is an important technical SEO factor that search engine's bots usually look at, Google for example announced in April 2010 that site speed is now a new signal in their search ranking algorithm (Google Developers, 2010). Research was done by Moz.com the leader company in the SEO industry shows that most of the websites that rank on the first page of Google has good page speed.
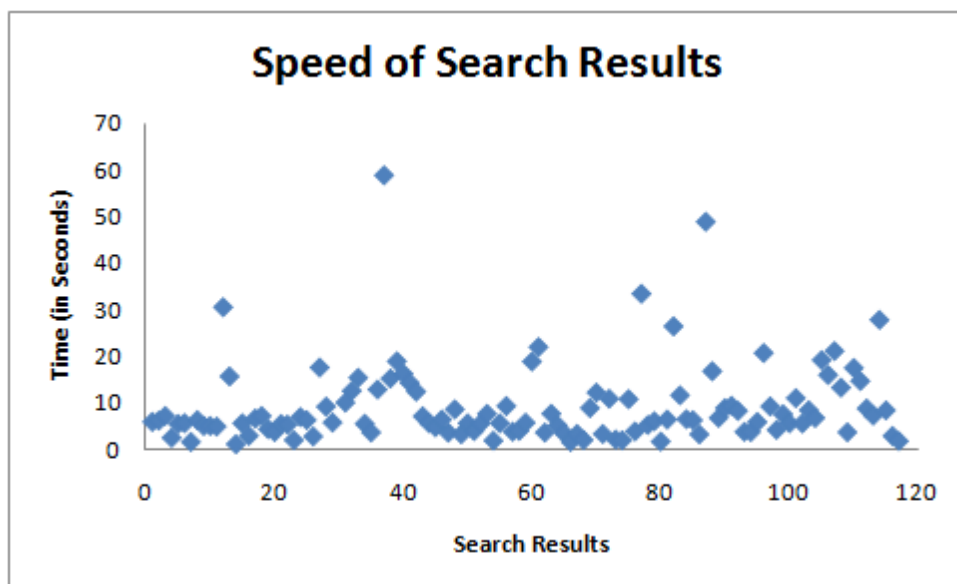
Figure 4. Speed of Search Results

Page speed means the amount of time that a web page takes till its fully loaded, page speed determined by looking at different factors, for example, the hosted server, the structure of the website, the design of the webpage, CSS and JavaScript, Image's size on the webpage.

To measure site's speed performance, search engines usually provide free tools to test the speed, Google for example provide a free tool to test site speed through their developer's website, however this tool has a bad reputation among the SEO community,

Turbo Web's manager, which is a company specialized in WordPress speed optimization says: "It's a tool designed to test whether your website has implemented all good practices when it comes to speed optimization. It doesn't even do that too well" (Turbo Web, 2018).

SEO professional use different tools to determine the real speed of the website from the point of view of search engine's bot and from a human point of view, they use gtmetrics.com and Webpagetest.org.

2.2 HTTPS

HTTPS stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure, it is the next version of HTTP, which is a protocol used to transfer data between a browser and a website, the HTTPS version of the protocol is encrypted, which means that the security level is higher when sending data, such as personal information, bank details … etc.

The security protocol is a must for every website, but it is highly recommended for eCommerce and online shops, where users need to send their personal information or purchase online.

On August 6, 2014, Google announced that they will give preference to secure sites using the HTTPS protocol, they also mentioned that sites having the HTTPS protocol will have a "lightweight" ranking boost.

2.3 Redirection

A redirect is a method SEOs use to send users and search engines to a specific URL from the one they requested initially. There are three types of redirections that are widely used: The 301 Permanently and the 302 Temporarily, and the Meta Refresh.

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect that gives the redirected page full connection equity (ranking power). To send any user to the secured version of the website, a 301 redirect from the HTTP to the HTTPS version should be done properly.

The 301 redirect is the best approach to redirect a user or a search engine bot to a better version of the website, while a 302 redirect could be used for testing without losing the authority and the power that page has.
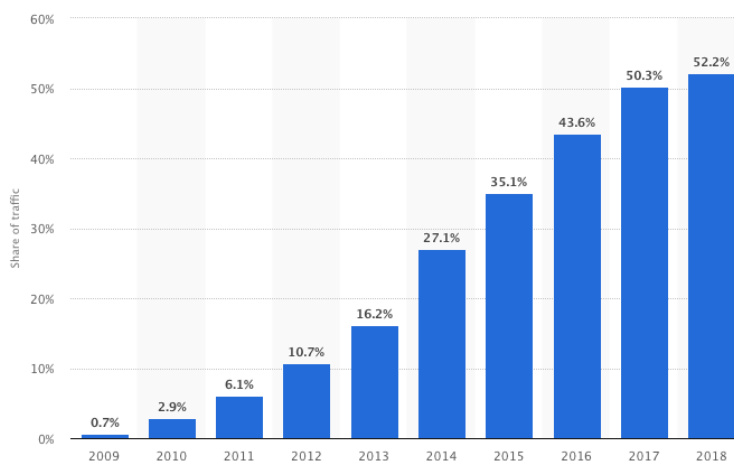
Figure 5. 301 and 302 redirections (Satendra Kashyap. 2019)

2.4 Mobile Friendly

Google has prioritized mobile page load speed as a primary parameter when assessing a website's search result ranking since July 2018. If the mobile version of the website is sluggish or unresponsive, Google will low rank that specific website and the website will see a significant drop in the overall ranking.

In 2018, more than half the glob had accessed the internet with their mobile devices. Due to the strong growth of the smartphone market in recent years, this is no surprise, especially as mobile internet often provides a more viable online connection in regions that lack the infrastructure and money for traditional and more expensive landline connections. (bluewaveconcepts.com, 2018).

Figure 6. Global mobile users' percentage (Statista, 2018)

2.5 Sitemap

Sitemaps designed by webmasters are not only presenting the main usage flows for users, but also organizing the hierarchical concept of the website. However, websites seldom provide sitemap pages to facilitate users to browse pages easily. Even provided, these sitemaps are not for machine-understanding, although few websites provide sitemaps with the XML format. (Shian-Hua, Kuan-Pak & Chun-Ming 2010, 3944.)

Search engines look for the sitemap along with the robot.txt file to understand the structure of the website, and to find pages on the website to index it. Sitemaps should also be submitted to Google via Google Search Console.
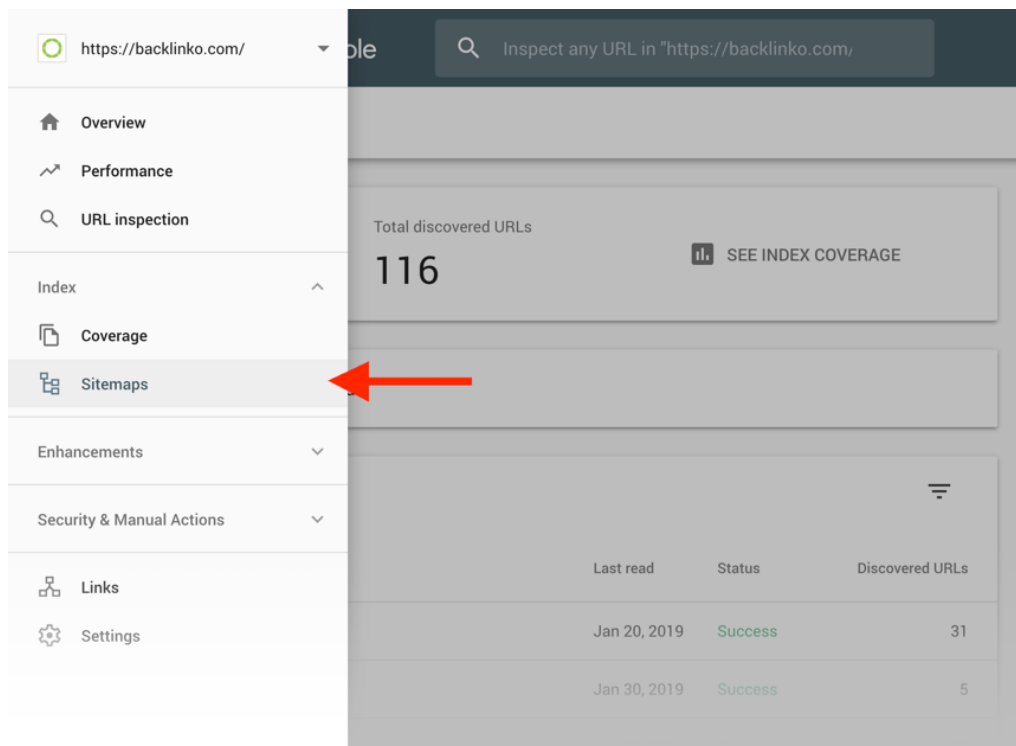

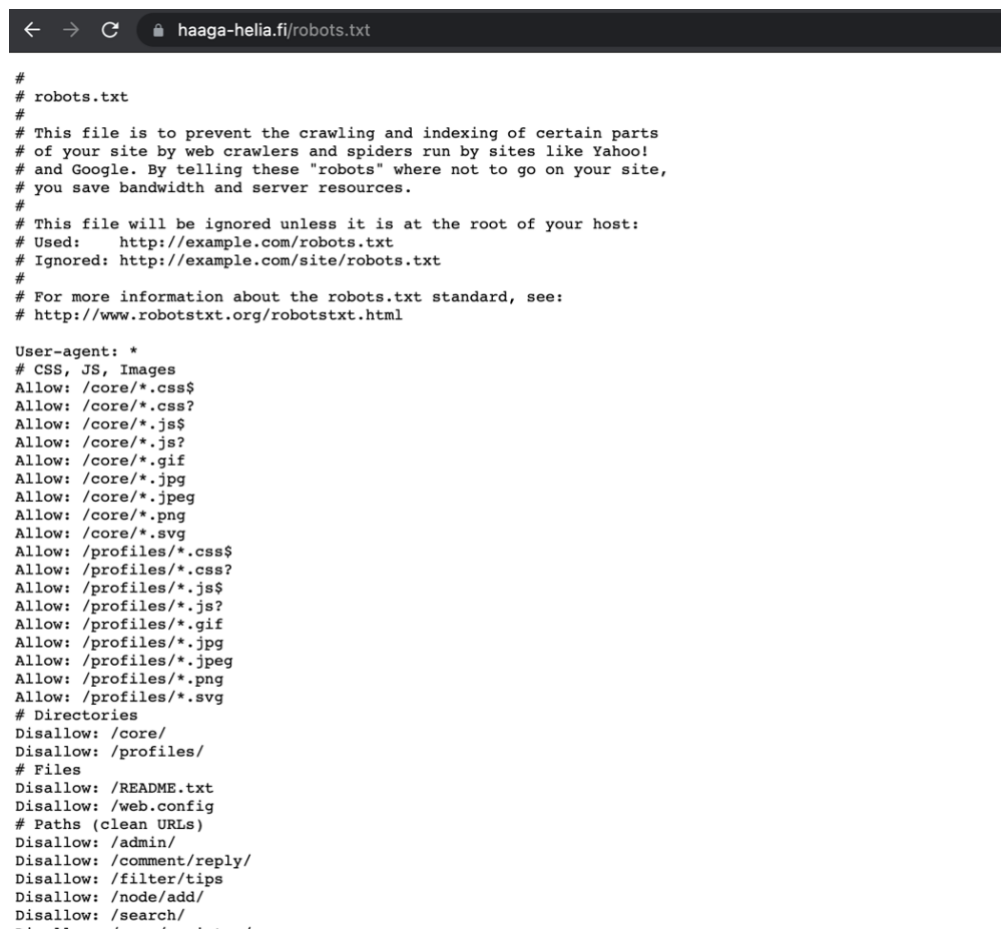Figure 7. Submit sitemap to Google Search Console (backlinko, 2021)

2.6 Robots.txt

A robots.txt file tells search engine crawlers which pages or files the crawler can or can't request from your site. This is used mainly to avoid overloading your site with requests; it is not a mechanism for keeping a web page out of Google. (Google search central, 2021).

Webmasters use the robots.txt files to prevent specific pages from showing on the search engine results page, for example, a common digital marketing approach is to redirect the user to a "Thank-you" page after downloading a pdf or after subscribing to the mail list, webmasters do not want the "Thank-you" page to appear on the search engine results page, it should only appear to users who take a specific action.

To apply this, webmasters use the Disallow function inside the robots.txt file, they use the following simple code: Disallow: /thank-you. When a crawler sees the "Disallow" function, it will not index the page, and it will not appear on the search engine results page (SERP).

In the following example, Haaga Helia does not want the crawlers to show /core/ and /frofiles/ in the SERP, also the /admin/ which is the admin dashboard to access the website.


```
←  →  C        haaga-helia.fi/robots.txt

#
# robots.txt
#
# This file is to prevent the crawling and indexing of certain parts
# of your site by web crawlers and spiders run by sites like Yahoo!
# and Google. By telling these "robots" where not to go on your site,
# you save bandwidth and server resources.
#
# This file will be ignored unless it is at the root of your host:
# Used:     http://example.com/robots.txt
# Ignored: http://example.com/site/robots.txt
#
# For more information about the robots.txt standard, see:
# http://www.robotstxt.org/robotstxt.html

User-agent: *
# CSS, JS, Images
Allow: /core/*.css$
Allow: /core/*.css?
Allow: /core/*.js$
Allow: /core/*.js?
Allow: /core/*.gif
Allow: /core/*.jpg
Allow: /core/*.jpeg
Allow: /core/*.png
Allow: /core/*.svg
Allow: /profiles/*.css$
Allow: /profiles/*.css?
Allow: /profiles/*.js$
Allow: /profiles/*.js?
Allow: /profiles/*.gif
Allow: /profiles/*.jpg
Allow: /profiles/*.jpeg
Allow: /profiles/*.png
Allow: /profiles/*.svg
# Directories
Disallow: /core/
Disallow: /profiles/
# Files
Disallow: /README.txt
Disallow: /web.config
# Paths (clean URLs)
Disallow: /admin/
Disallow: /comment/reply/
Disallow: /filter/tips
Disallow: /node/add/
Disallow: /search/
```

Figure 8. Haaga Helia UAS robots.txt file (Haaga-helia.fi, 2021)

3 On-page SEO

On-page SEO is the practice of optimizing individual web pages in order to rank higher and earn more relevant traffic in search engines. On-page refers to both the content and HTML source code of a page that can be optimized, as opposed to off-page SEO which refers to links and other external signals. (MOZ, 2021).

In on-page SEO we analyze website content and optimize it for specific keywords, we also create SEO-friendly URLs in addition to optimizing the meta tags and internal linking.

3.1 Keyword Research

A keyword is the fundamental of the search engine optimization industry. From one single keyword webmasters can understand what exactly website visitors are looking for. A keyword analysis gives us insights in customer behaviour and trends.

SEO professionals conduct keyword research at the beginning of any SEO project, to understand what the trends for that specific niche are, the search volume of that keyword to be able to predict a per cent of new clients could be brought throw SEO, and to have an idea who are the main competitors to that specific business.

There are tons of tools that help SEOs to conduct keyword research, one of the most famous tools is SEMrush. This tool provides very useful data for SEOs, for example, it provides the monthly search volume, the trend of the keyword, keyword difficulty to compete with other websites in the same niche and cost per click (CPC) when using Google Ads campaign.

She Matters provides companies with diverse talents and female newcomers with employment, one of the main keywords to attract newcomers to visit she matters website is "work in Netherlands". When searching for that specific keyword in SEMrush, we also have related keywords that potential newcomers are looking for, we can use these keywords in the website's content.

Figure 9. Keyword research with SEMrush

To rank higher in the SERP, She Matters' team should start to write specific content for their potential clients both B2B clients and B2C. The content should be around topics and keywords which people search on Google, keywords like recruitment service, find a job, recruitment, what is a recruiter do, best recruitment service in Rotterdam, how to find a job in Netherlands as a newcomer, job for expat in The Netherlands.

Figure 10. Keywords to write content about

3.2 Long-tail Keywords

Long-tail keywords are the main (long) keywords that describe the core of the business and are the keywords that bring potential clients to the website. These keywords usually target potential customers who are in the decision and action stage in the sales funnel.

Keywords with a long-tail term are perfect to bring more potential clients, and to convert more potentials into buyers, because long-tail keywords are more specific, however, they are less popular than 1 keyword.

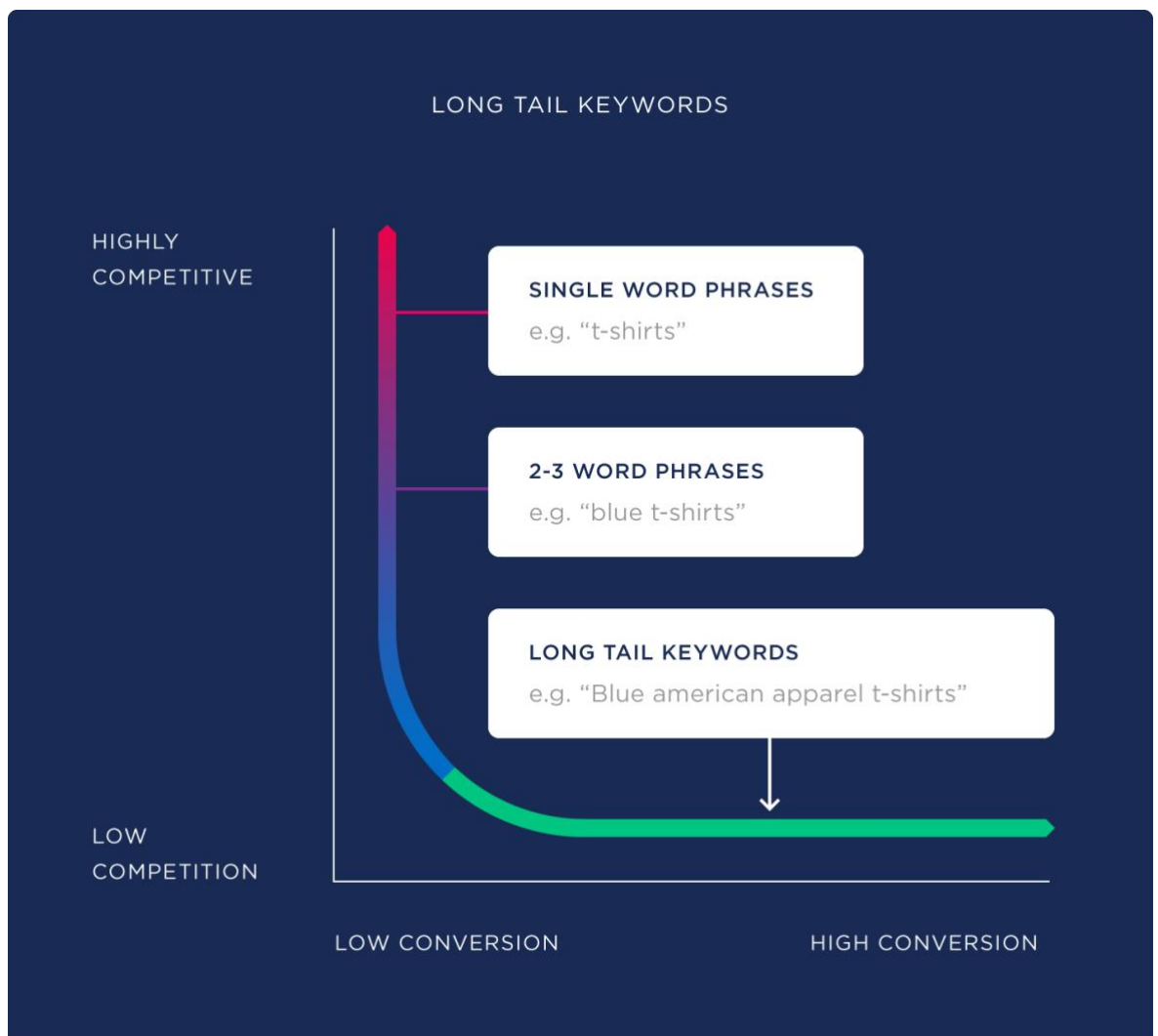Figure 11. long-tail keyword conversion (backlinko, 2021)

One of the best tactics to use long-tail keywords is to answer potential customers' questions. People use Google every day to know more about things and to find answers for their questions, in this case, potential clients are going to write 3-4 keywords to find answers, these keywords usually start with a question word (what, why, how …etc).

3.3 Tags and Meta Description

The title tag, h1 heading and meta description fields in pages are important. Also using image Alt text is important for sites SEO visibility. Other good places for keywords are meta description, meta title tags, navigation anchor text, navigation anchor title tags, headings, h1-h4 tags, content text, bolded and italic text, internal links in content, image filename, image alt text, image title tag, video filename, video title. (Enge et al 2015: 307-310)

The right length for Title tag is 70 characters and for meta description 155 characters for Google. (google.com/webmasters, 2016).

The meta description is an HTML attribute that provides a brief summary of a web page. Search engines such as Google often display the meta description in search results, which can influence click-through rates.

The meta description can be placed on the header of the page, with two main things, the meta name and the content. For instance: <head> <meta name="description" content="A meta description can be placed here, search engines will mainly look here to learn more about the page content."></head>

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en-GB">
  <head>
    <meta charset="UTF-8">
    <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1">
    <link rel="profile" href="http://gmpg.org/xfn/11">
    <link rel="pingback" href="https://www.shematters.nl/xmlrpc.php">

    <meta name='robots' content='noindex, follow' />

<!-- This site is optimized with the Yoast SEO plugin v16.2 - https://yoast.com/wordpress/plugins/seo/ -->
    <title>She Matters Recruitment</title>
    <meta name="description" content="Social enterprise recruitment agency with a mission to empower companies with diverse talent, and female newcomers with employment." />
    <meta property="og:locale" content="en_GB" />
    <meta property="og:type" content="website" />
    <meta property="og:title" content="She Matters Recruitment" />
    <meta property="og:description" content="Social enterprise recruitment agency with a mission to empower companies with diverse talent, and female newcomers with employmen
    <meta property="og:url" content="http://www.shematters.nl/" />
    <meta property="og:site_name" content="She Matters Recruitment" />
    <meta property="article:modified_time" content="2020-09-25T19:30:42+00:00" />
    <meta name="twitter:card" content="summary" />
    <script type="application/ld+json" class="yoast-schema-graph">{"@context":"https://schema.org","@graph":[{"@type":"WebSite","@id":"https://www.shematters.nl/#website","ur
<!-- / Yoast SEO plugin. -->
```

Figure 12. HTML code from shematters.nl with the meta description and content

3.4 Internal Links

Internal Links are hyperlinks that point at (target) the same domain as the domain that the link exists on (source). In layman's terms, an internal link is one that points to another page on the same website. (Moz.com, 2021).

Google use a bot to crawl a website, this bot goes very deep into the website, and it follows links that point to other related pages, it starts with the main page on the website

which also called the home page, then it starts from there following all links inside that page, when it moves to the 2ed level of pages, it also follows the links deeper and goes to the 3rd level of pages … etc. Google bot has the ability to understand the relation between the 2 linked pages, that is why SEOs see internal linking opportunity when there is relativity between two pages. For instance, She Matters has a page where they explain their Lotus Flower Program, their main service, in their services page which targets companies, they mentioned the program, and here is a perfect place to connect the two pages together to give a signal to search bots that the Lotus Flower Program page is indeed the page that should appear in search engine results page when someone is searching for "Lotus Flower Program".

Google crawls websites by following internal and external connections. This bot visits a website's homepage, begins rendering the article, and clicks on the first post. Google will figure out the association between websites, blogs, and other material by following links. In this way, Google will figure out which sites on your blog are for the same thing.
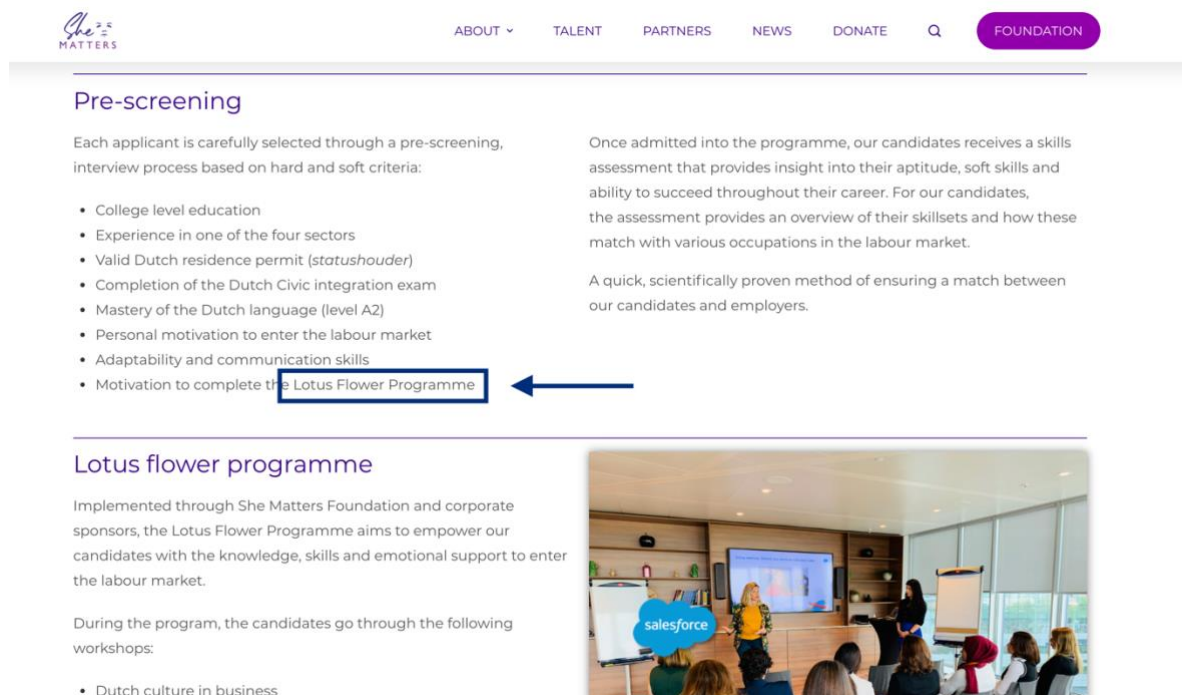

Figure 13. Perfect place to connect Lotus Flower Programme through internal linking.

4 Off-page SEO

Off-page SEO includes activities done off of a website in an effort to increase the site's search engine rankings. Common off-page SEO actions include building backlinks, encouraging branded searches, and increasing engagement and shares on social media. In other words: off-page SEO is all the stuff that you do off of your site to get Google and other search engines to see your website as trustworthy and authoritative. (Brian Dean, 2020).

4.1 Links Building

Link building is the practice of building one-way hyperlinks (also known as "backlinks") to a website with the goal of improving search engine visibility. Common link building strategies include content marketing, building useful tools, email outreach, broken link building and public relations. (backlinko, 2021).

Backlines from high-quality websites boost the rank of the website, but only backlinks from different websites are not enough. Google always mention the word "Relevant" in their products and services, and that also applies to backlinks, so backlinks from non-relevant websites most likely will not affect the rank of the website.

Google's Search Quality Rater Guidelines put a great deal of importance on the concept of E-A-T — an acronym for expert, authoritative, and trustworthy. Sites that don't display these characteristics tend to be seen as lower-quality in the eyes of the engines, while those that do are subsequently rewarded. E-A-T is becoming more and more important as search evolves and increases the importance of solving for user intent. (moz.com, 2021).
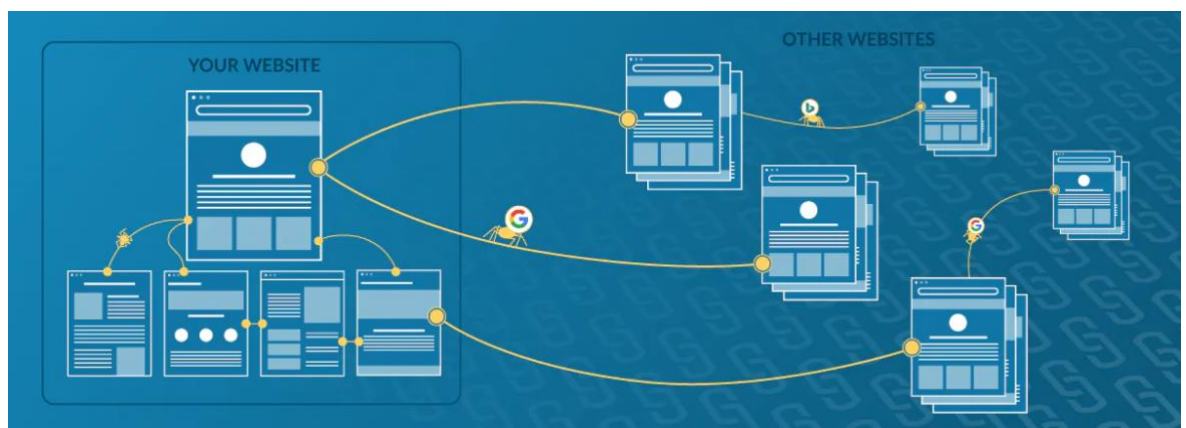

Figure 14. How backlinks work (moz.com, 2021)

Links from other websites do not only help with ranking, but also, they are very useful from a marketing perspective. To gain backlinks we need outreach to other relative websites where they have similar content to our website. The main goal of the outreach is to build links, but also to build relationships with other websites owners and influencers, these relationships can become valuable for all parties in the future.

In addition to build a relationship from link building, backlinks can be a great source of the traffic to our website, which means an increase in the number of leads, especially if the backlink is from a high-relevant website. People who saw a link pointing out to our website in a website that they recognize, will immediately trust our website.

Backlinks also help with branding of the business, backlinks from popular websites, give our website the authority in our niche, especially when backlinks point out a piece of high-quality content.

4.1.1 Backlinks' Opportunities

To find high-quality backlinks, we need to look to other websites that match the E-A-T (expert, authoritative, and trustworthy) rule, news websites are also a great resource to get high-quality backlinks, but with a news website, a PR specialist needed.

Referring Domains by Authority Score *i*

Widget Scope: Root Domain

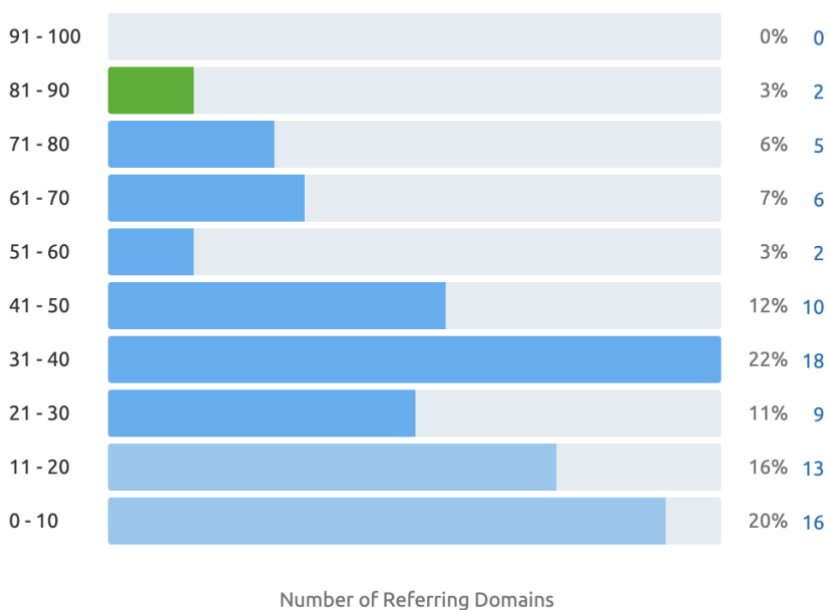| Authority Score	%	Number of Referring Domains
91 - 100	0%	0
81 - 90	3%	2
71 - 80	6%	5
61 - 70	7%	6
51 - 60	3%	2
41 - 50	12%	10
31 - 40	22%	18
21 - 30	11%	9
11 - 20	16%	13
0 - 10	20%	16

Number of Referring Domains

Figure 15. shematters.nl referring domains by authority report

Before sending outreach, emails and start building relationships with other websites, we need to define what websites we are going to target in our link building campaign. Many tools provide an easy-to-use way of finding relative websites, these tools usually looking for websites that have many keywords in common (relative) with a high-quality score (expert). The best tool that provides full insights on link building Is Ahrefs, but SEMrush also provides great information on prospects to target.

Figure 16. Domain prospects for shematters.nl backlinks campaign

4.2 Local Citation

A local citation is any online mention of the name, address, and phone number of a local business. Citations can occur on local business directories, on websites and apps, and on social platforms. Citations help Internet users to discover local businesses and can also impact local search engine rankings. (Moz.com, 2021).

Implementing the right citation locally and geographically can help the website to rank better on Google maps. Local businesses that have a digital marketing plan, always ensure to have the right citation at the right time.

The main goal of citation is to ensure that Google bots find correct data about shematters.nl around the web, there for the name, address, and phone number (NAP)

should be the same in every place. Search engines and especially Google look very carefully for the NAP information, and the search engine could favour one site from another if a site has NAP information, but the other website does not.
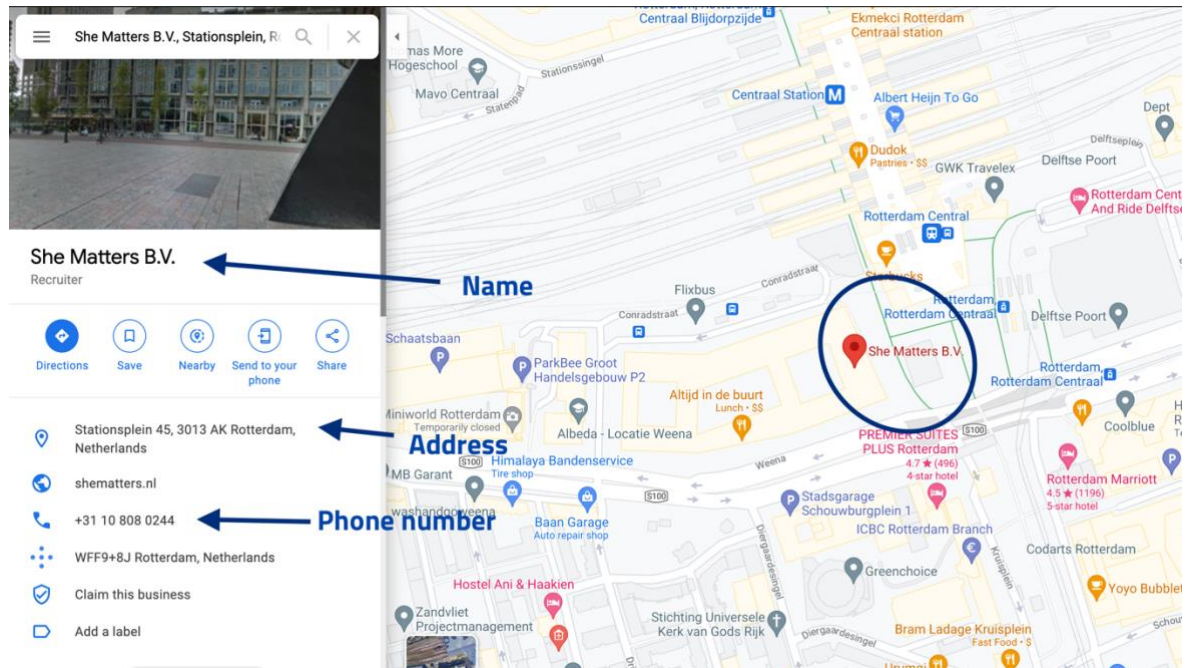
Figure 17. Shematters.nl NAP information on Google Maps

5 International SEO

International SEO refers to optimizing your search presence for people who are in different countries or speak different languages. Using geo-targeting (ccTLD), hreflang tags, and other localization signals, you can target content to your users around the world. (KIM KOSAKA, 2021). Understanding how to better satisfy visitors and tailoring the content and search experience to their needs are the first steps of international SEO. Implementing the 3 main elements of international SEO on shematter.nl can bring new leads from new countries.

Figure 18. International SEO elements

Before expanding to new countries, it is very important to study and analyze the situation in that country, some of the main questions to seek answers for are: What search engine is used in that country? Is there a demand for our services? Is there a market? A need? What about the competition there? And how difficult is it to compete with them?

According to Statista, Google is the most used search engine in the United Kingdom, with almost 86% of the market share in 2021. Bing is in the second place with only 10.65% followed by Yahoo! with 1.96% and DuckDuckGo with only 0.87%. According to this information, shematters.nl can optimize its website according to Google requirements, without even giving any weight to the other search engines.
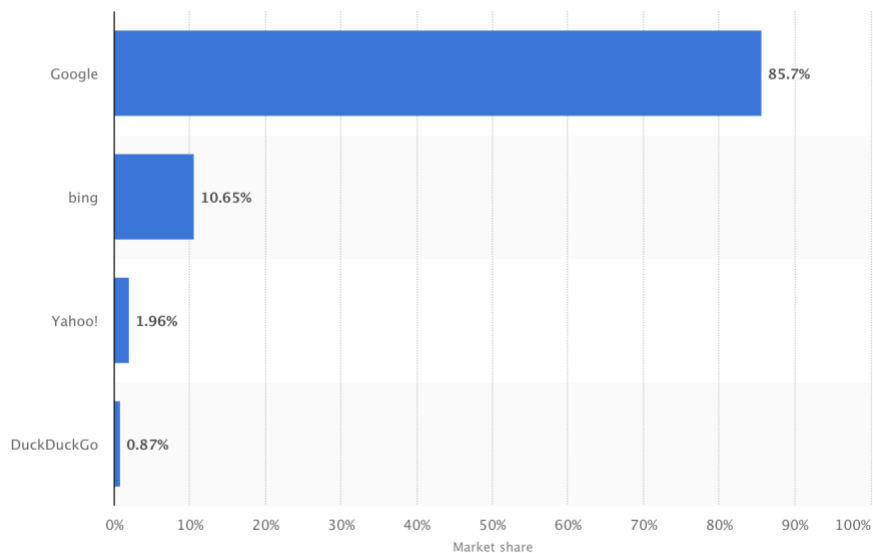
Figure 19. Market share held by the leading search engines in the United Kingdom (Statista, 2021)

Deep market research should be done before expanding to a new country. Shematters.nl plan is to expand to the United Kingdom, specifically to London. Quick keyword research shows that there is a huge demand for shematters.nl services, people in London search tens of thousands of times for "jobs in London", other people search for a specific geographical part of London "jobs in east London", not all these searches are the best leads for shematters.nl, but targeting these keywords, then bring people to the website, is the first step.

	Keyword	Volume	Trend	KD %
☑	jobs in london ▾	74,000		82.92
⊕	security jobs in london ▾	6,600		81.37
⊕	jobs in east london ▾	4,400		84.70
☑	cleaning jobs in london ▾	3,600		76.85
⊕	cash in hand jobs london ▾	2,400		82.20
⊕	accounting jobs in london ▾	1,900		83.51
⊕	hotel jobs in london ▾	1,900		76.94
⊕	job vacancies in london ▾	1,900		83.10
⊕	jobs in london uk ▾	1,900		85.64
⊕	jobs in north london ▾	1,900		83.42
⊕	jobs in west london	1,900		81.13

Figure 20. Keyword research in the UK

5.1 International SEO Strategy

People in the United Kingdom search for a job by combining the word "job" + "location" which make it easier to plan the International SEO strategy, shematters.nl only need to write topics about these main keywords, at the same time implement the technical aspect that will be mentioned in this section.

For international and multilingual websites, translated web pages and country-code top-level domains, such as ".de" for Germany and ".fr" for France, will work better for SEO, as will the use of multilingual or internationalized domain names. (Singh 2011, 242.)

The International SEO strategy to expand to the United Kingdom starts with international keyword research to understand the behaviour of prospects and their needs in the United Kingdom, then create an international content plan for the new country, then implement international SEO technical elements, then applying the 3 main elements of SEO (on-page, off-page, and technical SEO).

International Keword research / Market research → International Content plan → International technical implementation → Main elements of SEO (on-page, off-page, and technical SEO)
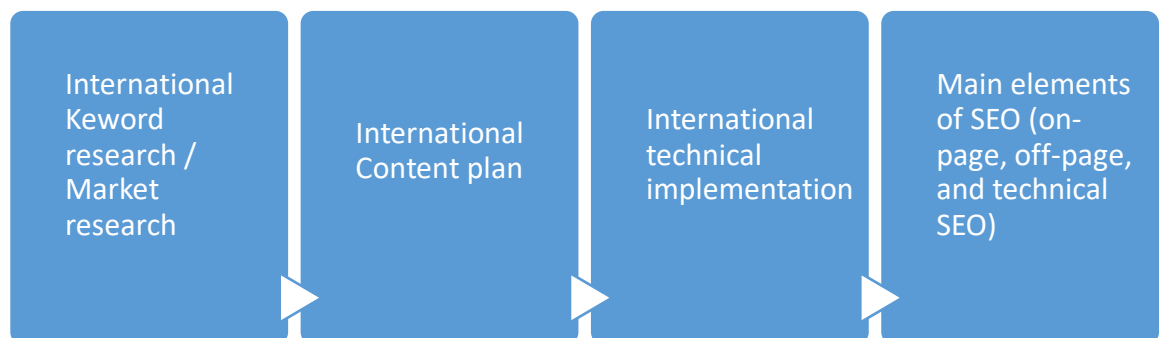
Figure 21. International SEO strategy

5.2 Geo-targeting (ccTLD)

A ccTLD is a country code top-level domain extension that is assigned to a country in the world. Each country has their own domain extension based on the ISO 3166-1 alpha-2 country codes. This means that all ccTLDs are only two characters, and all two-character TLDs are ccTLDs. The first ccTLDs delegated were .US for the United States, .UK for the United Kingdom, and .IT for Italy in 1985. (dynadot.com, 2021).

ccTLD or geo-targeting is a great way to tell the search engines what countries this particular website is targeting, for instance shematters.nl uses the ccTLD as it uses the extension of .nl, for United Kingdom geo-targeting, a new domain could be purchased with the extension of co.uk so the new domain should be www.shematters.co.uk.

Geo-targeting using the ccTLD is the strongest and the clearest way of telling search engines what countries the website is targeting, but this not used for language targeting, for instance, the website could use the extension .co.uk but the content of the website is in French, this means that the website targets French speakers who live in the United Kingdom. Using the ccTLD gives a strong signal to Google that this website and its content serve people who live in that country, therefore, Google will show that website in that specific country' SERP, that means the website could be on the first page on Google when someone in the United Kingdom searches for relevant content, but the website will not be on the first page on Google when someone from France searches for relevant content. When using the ccTLD extension, the SEO work will be doubled, say the organization decided to apply the ccTLD and they purchased a new domain, so now they have shematters.nl and shematters.co.uk, in this case, Google sees the new website as an absolutely new website, a full SEO campaign should be implemented to the new website, keeping in the account that the new domain will have 0 authority, in addition to that, the new website should have completely new content, the organisation cannot use the same content from the old website, as Google will see it as a duplicated content, and the new domain will receive a penalty.

5.3   Hreflang Tag

Hreflang is an HTML attribute used to specify the language and geographical targeting of a webpage. If you have multiple versions of the same page in different languages, you can use the hreflang tag to tell search engines like Google about these variations. This helps them to serve the correct version to their users.(Joshua Hardwick, 2020).

Hreflang tag is a very important element in the international SEO campaign, using hreflang tag has a direct effect on ranking the website, hreflang tag also resolves a very important issue that almost all webmasters face when implementing an international SEO campaign, which is the duplicated content penalty from Google. If shematters.nl has English content with American spelling, but now the company wants to target UK users, new content will be published with British spelling, Google might see these two pages as duplicated content and will decide to show only one page in the SERP. Hreflang tag solve this issue, by telling Google that these pages have almost the same content, but one of them is for a specific group of people who speak this particular language and the other

one for a different group, then Google understands the relationship between these two pages, however, that does not mean Google will take actions as hreflang tag suggests, the last decision is made by Google itself, as the hreflang is only a signal, and not an order.

How to Implement Hreflang Tags Correctly
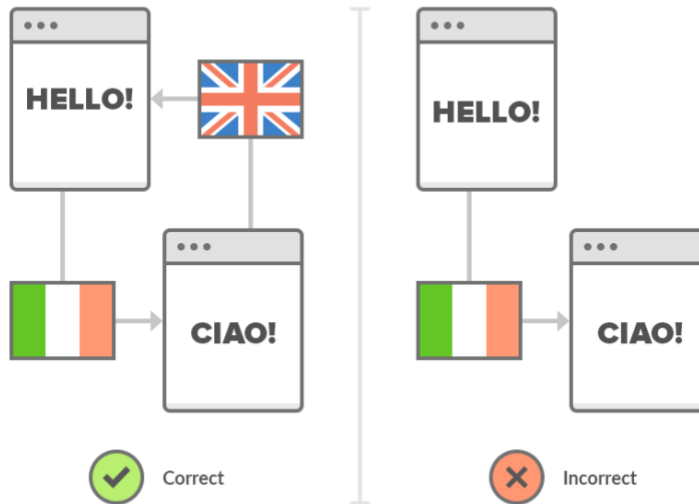
Figure 22. Implementation of hreflang (ahrefs.com, 2020)

Hreflang tag is as the following: <link rel="alternate" hreflang="language code" href="the new page link here" /> to implement the hreflang tag on shematters.nl we can add the following code in the page for the UK users: <link rel="alternate" hreflang="en-gb" href="https://shematters.nl/for-uk-users" />

6 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis covers four key areas: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This is a true back-to-basics approach you can use to understand where you currently are in regard to optimizing your website and improving your SEO. (Marcus Miller, 2017).

After finishing analysing shematters.nl, it was possible to conduct a SWOT analysis to get an idea of what things should be improved and what are opportunities that the website could use.

STRENGTHS:

- Mobile friendly
- Old domain
- Using TLD domain .NL
- Fresh content
- Social signals on site
- Backlinks gaining increase without off-page campaign
- Branded website with own pictures and content

OPPORTUNITIES

- Improve on-page, technical and off-page SEO
- Fix alt pictures
- Publish new content after conducting keyword research
- Improve the domain authority
- Improve the website structure
- Improve UX
- Minimize pictures size
- Use Google ads to boost new blogs and new content

WEAKNESSES

- Poor ranking for main keywords
- Not all pages optimized for search engines
- Pages missing headlines and meta tags
- Poor ranking
- Low engagement level on the website
-

THREATS

- Competitors have better positions on Google
- Competitors have budget for SEO
- New Google's algorithm updates
- Not monitoring SEO for the long term
- New competitors with experienced SEO

Figure 23. SEO SWOT Analysis

7 A step-by-step Strategy

An SEO strategy is a guide to implement SEO factors discussed in this thesis, factors related to on-page SEO, off-page SEO and technical SEO on a local and international level. The purpose of this strategy is to boost the website position on the search engine results page and to gain more visitors to the website who are going to make contact with She Matters and eventually be a client or a trainee.

To gain the best results with the best timeframe and productivity, it is recommended to manage the strategy by applying the agile method for the entire project as well as applying agile on each element of SEO.
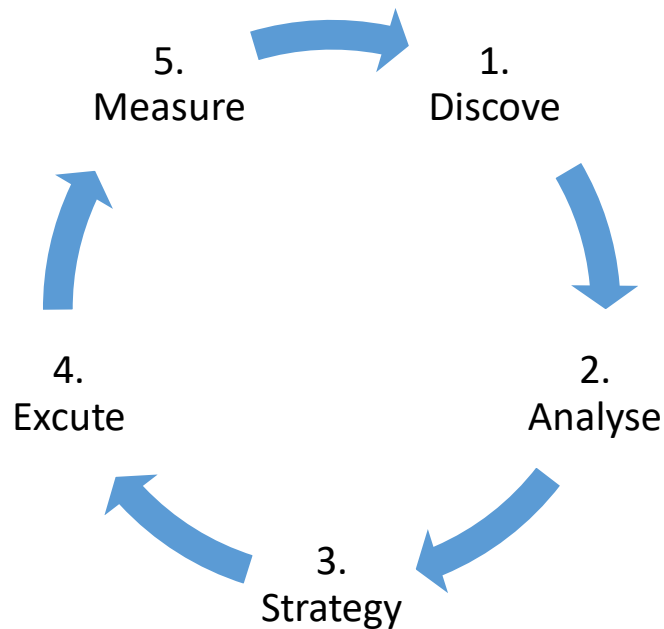

Figure 24. Applying Agile method to the project

First, a technical audit should be done to identify and analyse technical issues on the website, we are looking here specifically at the following factors:

- Page speed
- HTTPS
- Redirection
- Mobile friendly
- Sitemap
- Robots.txt

31

Then, an on-page audit should be done to learn more about what are the main keywords related to the business, and to identify the customer behaviour when searching for services similar to she matters services, the main factors to be looked at are:

- Keyword research
- Long-tail keyword
- Tags and meta description
- Internal links

Next, planning for off-page SEO campaign, to gain more backlinks from different websites, to boost the website's authority around the web. The best practice is to find relevant websites that share the same idea of recruiting or news websites or websites that talk about social enterprises and social initiatives.

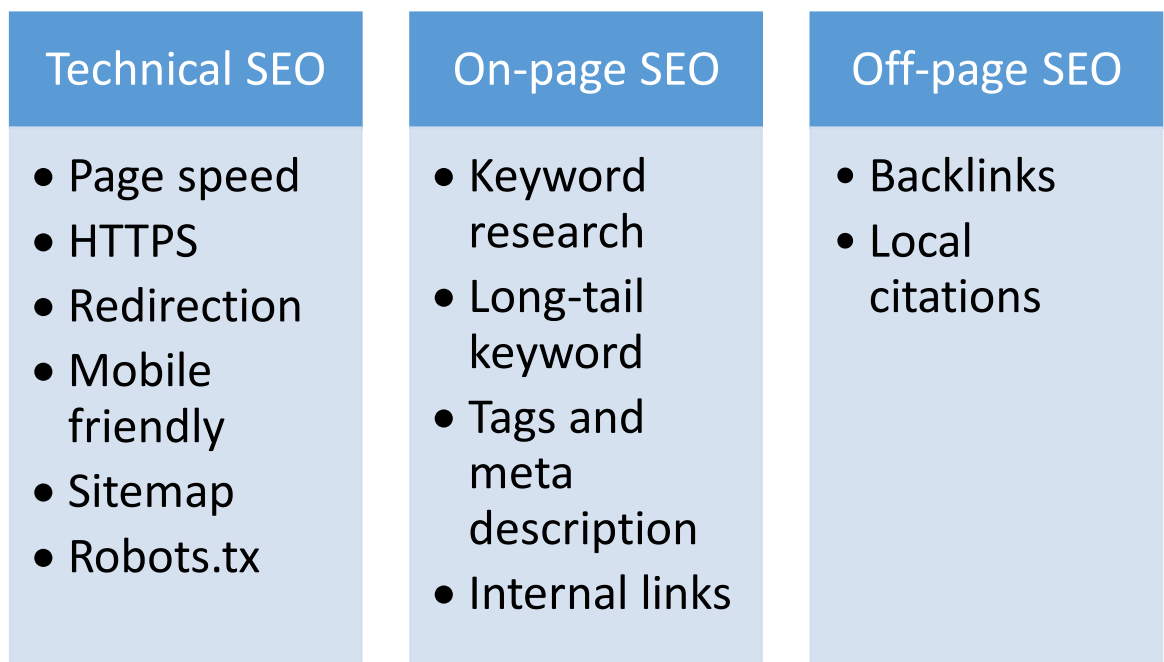| Technical SEO	On-page SEO	Off-page SEO
• Page speed • HTTPS • Redirection • Mobile friendly • Sitemap • Robots.tx	• Keyword research • Long-tail keyword • Tags and meta description • Internal links	• Backlinks • Local citations

Figure 25. SEO factors to implement

8   Discussion

The discussion part in this thesis describes the objectives of this research and the research question, with recommendations to the case company to implement, the recommendation regarding search engine optimization and international SEO plan, so their website gets a boost on search engine results page. This part also discusses reflection on the author's own learning, and what new things regarding search engine optimization the author learnt.

8.1   Objectives & Research Question

The objective of this product theses was to discuss and create a search engine optimization strategy for the case company, She Matters. To bring more organic traffic to their website, and to convert these visitors into clients. The company also plans to expand to the United Kingdom in 2021, so an international search engine optimization strategy introduced in this thesis.

The research mainly focused on the 3 main elements of search engine optimisation: on-page SEO, off-page SEO and technical SEO. The author also added the 4th element which is international SEO to help the company optimising its website for the new planned location to expand which is The United Kingdom.

The main goal of this thesis was to create a guide for the company in how to optimise the website for Google, locally and internationally, and to apply best practices to see fast results to increase organic traffic and to avoid ambiguous practices. Therefore, elements considered in this thesis are the most important elements to consider for any company that starts to optimise its website for search engines. In addition to that, the author did SWOT analysis to understand the current situation of the website from an SEO perspective, and to understand what are the opportunities that could be utilized to boost the performance of the website organically.

The outcome of this thesis is a full guide for the company to optimise their website and be on the first spot on Google for specific keywords that potential clients search daily on Google. When done correctly, shematters.nl will get boost on search engines and will receive high quality organic traffic that could be converted.

The most challenging task for the company is to decide on the international SEO strategy, as the main website ends with .nl extension, which is not suitable for an international domain, if changed, the website might lose its existing authority, if the company decides to

design a new website for the UK market, the company will be required to implement SEO strategy from the scratch, which will take time to see real results.

8.2   Recommendations

In addition to all the information and the strategy delivered in this thesis, the author provides recommendations to the company, so the company gets the most benefits from this research. It is very important to implement the strategy that provided in this paper, but it is also important to prioritize some of the tasks as the following recommendations suggest.

First, She Matters could receive more organic traffic by starting to implement the on-page SEO in the first place, hire freelancers to write high-quality content that answers potential clients' questions. Content should contain keywords from figure 12, but also add variations of those keywords.

Second, start with the technical search engine optimization strategy discussed in this thesis, so the website gets the proper technical elements required by Google and other search engines. A website has high-quality content that provides value for the end-user and has correct technical elements, it might appear on Google for some keywords, but it is not going to compete with other websites unless the website is popular and mentioned in media/news websites as well as other top industry authoritative websites, which lead to the third recommendation.

Third, an off-page campaign is essential for completing the implementation of the strategy. A website without backlinks from other authoritative websites will always stay on the second or even third page of the search engine results page, maybe even more. Off-page SEO campaign should focus on value and popularity, where She Matters will be seen as one of the industry masters.

Fourth, never stop developing an SEO strategy, and always let SEO professionals implement the strategy for She Mattes. If you can't budget for 6 to 12 months of SEO, you might be better off putting that budget somewhere else. Paying for just a few months of SEO is, in many cases, no better than throwing your money away. SEO is a long-term marketing tactic, and shouldn't be seen as a way to generate sales quickly. However, if you make the proper investment, and plan on being in it for the long haul, SEO is a marketing tactic with one of the best ROIs out there. (Josh Steimle, 2015).

8.3   Reflection on Learning

The process of this thesis took about six months, from the beginning of 2021 till the end of May 2021, on February 10th Google launched a huge update for its algorithm, where they introduced a new ranking system. As a professional SEO and webmaster, the author learnt constantly about SEO, as it is evolving every day, this thesis was not a "usual" way to learn more or to learn something new about SEO, but it was a complete guide in how to create and implement a complete SEO plan for a company, but furthermore, create an international SEO plan.

The main challenge was to go international and learn more about the technical elements in international SEO, and how to organize the site structure in term of languages and locations, not mentioning the debate in how to re-structure the website for the new country, do we use a subdomain as en.domain.com or do we use the extension as domain.com/en. The author found that there is no wrong or right answer here, it is always depending on the case, and how the website structured in the first place.

The author got a tremendous amount of new information related to search engine optimization and it is implementation from this thesis. Another big challenge was to prove some of the techniques used in this research, as there is no clear guidance done by Google or other search engines, the author chose SEO elements mentioned in this research based on his experience in the field and his reading many industry-related books and peer-reviewed articles.

This thesis taught the author that he should focus more on the strategy before starting to work on any SEO projects, the author also learnt that a strong plan means better results and more customer satisfaction. Overall, the author is very satisfied with this thesis and the SEO element is chosen in this thesis.

There has been a lack of contact between the author and the company, for different external reasons, therefore, the author did not receive feedback from the company as he did not send this thesis yet, however, the author is very keen to get the proper feedback from the company and to wants to ensure that the company will benefit from this thesis.

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