

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GOOGLE AND YANDEX SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

Case: Company X

Abstract

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Title of publication Differences Between Google and Yandex Search Engine Optimisation Case: Company X		
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Abstract <p>This thesis is about search engine optimisation (SEO) and how to apply it for different search engines. The author implemented this thesis for the +Russian department of Company X, which faced several problems with optimising the website for Google and Yandex at the same time. The thesis aims to develop suggestions for improving the current SEO strategy of the case company.</p> <p>The author uses a deductive research approach and both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Secondary data for the theoretical background is retrieved from reliable books and articles of SEO experts. Primary data is collected in the frames of the case study by analysing SEO performance of the company's competitors.</p> <p>The author utilises theories about a difference of search engines and as a result a difference in SEO practices for them. Since the thesis aims to develop suggestions, the SWOT – analysis is used in order to get a clear overview of the current SEO strategy.</p> <p>Key findings include different programs, which search engines use for their operations and algorithms. This core distinction leads to a difference in effective SEO practices for them. The author utilised these outcomes to develop the action plan. To conclude, the thesis met all objectives and can be considered valid and reliable.</p>		
Keywords Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Search Engines, Google, Yandex		

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HTML	Hypertext Markup Language
SE	Search Engine
SEO	Search Engines Optimisation
SERP	Search Engine Results Page
URL	Uniform Resource Locator

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides information about the framework of the thesis. Firstly, it introduces the background of the thesis, where the author describes the topic and her motivation towards the research. Secondly, it presents clearly stated thesis objectives, research questions and limitations. These are followed by the theoretical framework and research methodology. This chapter finishes with the presentation of the thesis structure.

1.1 Thesis Background

In the past decades, humanity has experienced rapid technological changes. Today people can access the internet not only with a personal computer and laptop but also with smartphones, tablets, TVs, smartwatches and other digital devices at any time anywhere. The internet has become an integral part of human lives from information search to booking tickets and everything in between.

These changes have greatly affected customer behaviour and business field. With the internet, it became easy to compare different offers, find characteristics of products, read reviews. In 2016 64% of offline sales were influenced by a shopper's use of any digital device (Deloitte 2016). This figure proves that it is critically important for businesses to be present on the internet.

Having a website brings a lot of advantages for a business. Firstly, your customers can access your business from anywhere anytime. Accordingly, they can make purchases without time limitations. Moreover, an online advertisement for a website is comparatively low-cost and efficient. (Jackson 2018.) One of the ways to increase awareness of a business and to advertise a website is search engine optimisation or SEO. Search engine optimisation is a marketing discipline aimed at improving a website position in a search engine results page. (Fishkin 2015.)

The author spent her internship at the German leading cruising agency Company X, where she was responsible for search engine optimisation for the Russian market. In most countries, Google is the market leader among search engines, but in Russia, the market is shared almost equally by Google and Yandex (Yandex Radar 2018). A challenging problem which arises in this situation is a different performance of the website in search engines results pages in Google and Yandex. The current Company X's SEO strategy is successful for Google but relatively weak for Yandex. The author faced a problem, how to do SEO to perform well in both engines at the same time?

1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Question and Limitations

Research objectives of a thesis define a clear sense of its purposes and direction (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 34). The main aim of this thesis is to develop SEO suggestions for the case company, which it can use for Google and Yandex at the same time in order to maintain a good visibility in both. Additionally, the author sets up several objectives to support the main aim:

- introduce and compare Google and Yandex,
- explain search engine optimisation,
- determine differences in search engine optimisation for Google and Yandex,
- analyse Company X's competitors.

It is vital to define research questions for a successful research. There are three main types of research questions: descriptive, evaluative and explanatory. Descriptive research questions start with "What?", "When?", "Where?", "Who?", "How?" and lead to definitive answers. Explanatory research questions commence with "Why?" and determine explanations of a problem. Evaluative research questions seek to identify values of a problem. (Saunders et al. 2012, 41.) Main research question serves as a fundamental for a thesis. It is advisable to avoid non-specific questions, which cannot be answered objectively. (Swain 2016.) The author formulates a mixture of a descriptive and an evaluative research question, to which a clear, specific and objective answer can be given.

The main question of the thesis is:

How to improve the current SEO strategy of Company X, so that it will be effective for both Google and Yandex in Russia?

To answer the main research question, the author raises several descriptive sub-questions:

1. How Google and Yandex operate?
2. What is SEO?
3. What is the difference between SEO practices for Google and Yandex?
4. What kind of SEO strategies Company X's competitors use?

The author uses the Goldilocks test to validate the main research question. The test divides all research questions into four categories: too big, too small, too hot, just right (Clough & Nutbrown 2002). The research question is not too big since it does not require

too many sources. The research question has sufficient substance, so it is not too small. The research question does not arise sensitive topics, so it is not too hot. According to Clough and Nutbrown (2002), the appropriate research question is "just right for investigation at this time, by this researcher in this setting". The main research question of this thesis falls into the just right category.

Research limitations are characteristics influencing the interpretation of findings (Price & Murnan 2013, 66). There are several limitations to this study. First, it is narrowed down to the case company, so the results cannot be applied precisely by other companies. However, other European companies can use this study as a SEO guide when entering the Russian market. Secondly, due to a confidentiality policy of the case company the author is not permitted to use internal data such as traffic, conversion rates and other figures. The author utilises only publicly available information. Among the theoretical limitations, there is a lack of literature about search engine optimisation, so the author employs official statements of Google and Yandex representatives as well as articles from SEO experts.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The key theory of this thesis is a difference in search engine optimisation for different search engines. Firstly, it is essential to understand what are search engines, how they operate and how they differ from each other. These concepts are defined in the second chapter. The third chapter introduces search engine optimisation, its different practices and trends. The author utilises information from experts in the SEO field such as Moz and Meditative agencies. The author also refers to several reliable books about search engines. As for information about Google and Yandex, the author retrieves facts from their official websites and blogs. This information is then used as a base for the case study.

Main concepts of this study are search engines, search engine optimisation, ranking factors, Google and Yandex.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The author uses the research «onion» of Saunders to design effective research. The research «onion» includes six layers: philosophy, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon and techniques, which are presented on the graph below (Saunders et al. 2012, 34).

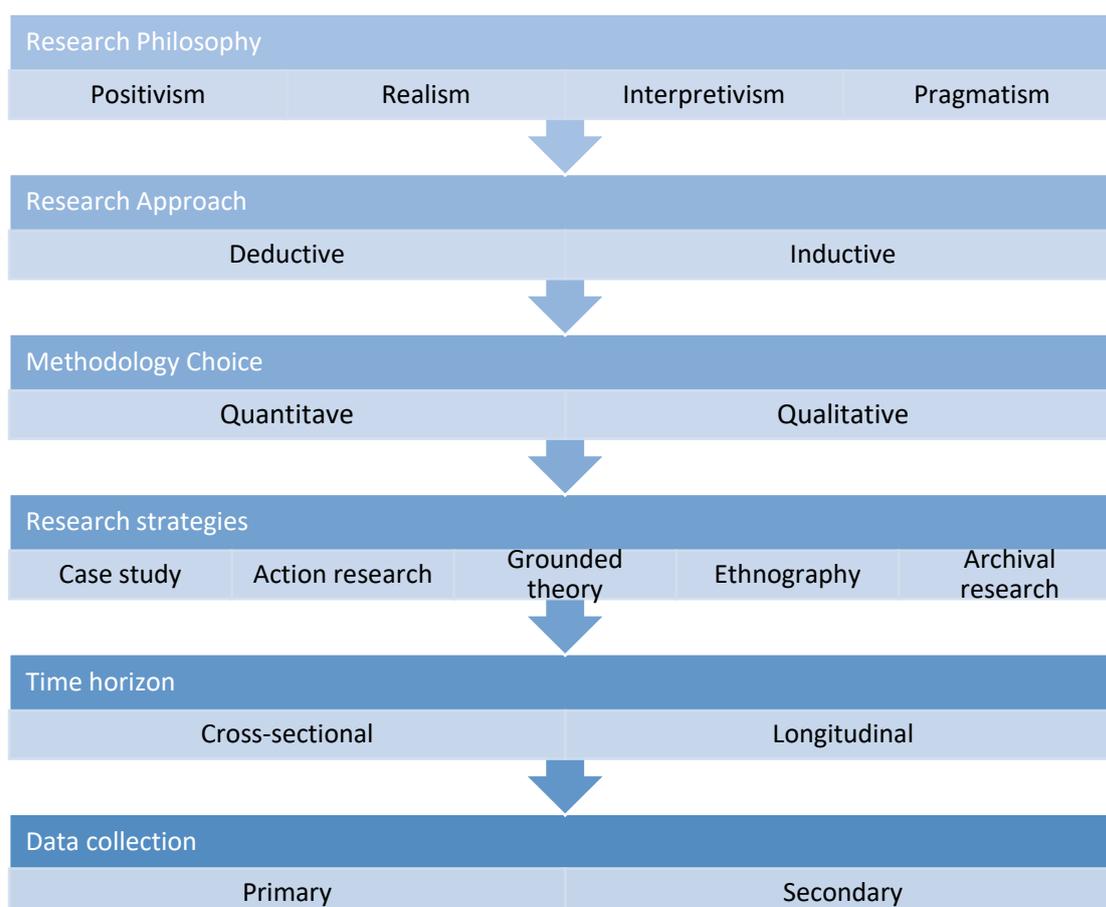


Figure 1 The Research «Onion» (adapted from Saunders et al. 2012, 128)

The first layer of the research «onion» is research philosophy. Research philosophy is a way in which a researcher develops knowledge. There are four main research philosophies: positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Positivism is objective, value-free and based on a view that only observable phenomenon can provide credible data. Realism is similar to positivism regarding objectivism, but it is value-laden. It is also based on a view that only observable phenomenon can provide reliable data. However, it admits that observations may be fallible. Interpretivism is opposite to positivism. It is subjective, value-bound and focuses on different social actors, meanings and details. Pragmatism is a mixture of mentioned above philosophies. In pragmatism both observable data and meanings are important. Values are important, and a researcher may use both objectivism and subjectivism. The main idea of pragmatism is to use different views to be able to answer research questions. (Saunders et al. 2012, 107.) Search engine optimisation consists of technical and creative elements, so it is wise to observe it using different philosophies. Due to the nature of search engine optimisation, this research is based on the pragmatism research philosophy.

The next layer of the research «onion» is a research approach. There are two main research approaches called deduction and induction. In deduction, a particular finding is drawn from a general idea, while in induction a particular finding forms a general idea.

Deduction research approach follows this path:

1. a hypothesis is developed from a theory;
2. the hypothesis is described in clear terms;
3. the hypothesis is tested;
4. outcomes are analysed;
5. the hypothesis is approved or modified based on findings.

Inductive research goes the opposite way:

1. data is collected;
2. the data is analysed;
3. a hypothesis is build based on outcomes. (Saunders et al. 2012, 124-127.)

This study is based on existing theories about search engine optimisation, which are tested later, so the author uses deduction research approach.

The next layer defines a methodology choice. It is essential to understand the difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods. In quantitative research, outcomes are numerical data analysed using statistical methods. In qualitative research results are non-numerical. (Saunders et al. 2012, 124-127.) This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

The third layer of the research «onion» includes research strategies: experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research. A case study is «a single, bounded entity, which is studied in detail, with a usage of different methods, over an extended period of time» (Creswell 1994, 61). Since this thesis is focused on one particular case, the case study strategy is chosen.

After the selection of a research strategy, a time horizon needs to be defined. Research may be cross-sectional when a particular phenomenon is studied in a specific time or longitudinal when a phenomenon is studied over a long period of time. (Saunders et al. 2012, 190.) Since this thesis is limited and moreover as the search engine industry is fast-changing, this study is cross-sectional.

The last layer of the research «onion» is data collection. There are two types of data. Primary data is collected directly by a researcher. Secondary data is already collected and published by other researchers. The author utilises both kinds of data. Primary data is received from the case study presented in the fifth chapter. Secondary data collected from the theoretical review in the second and third chapters.

To sum up this subchapter, figure 2 shows the research methods of the thesis.

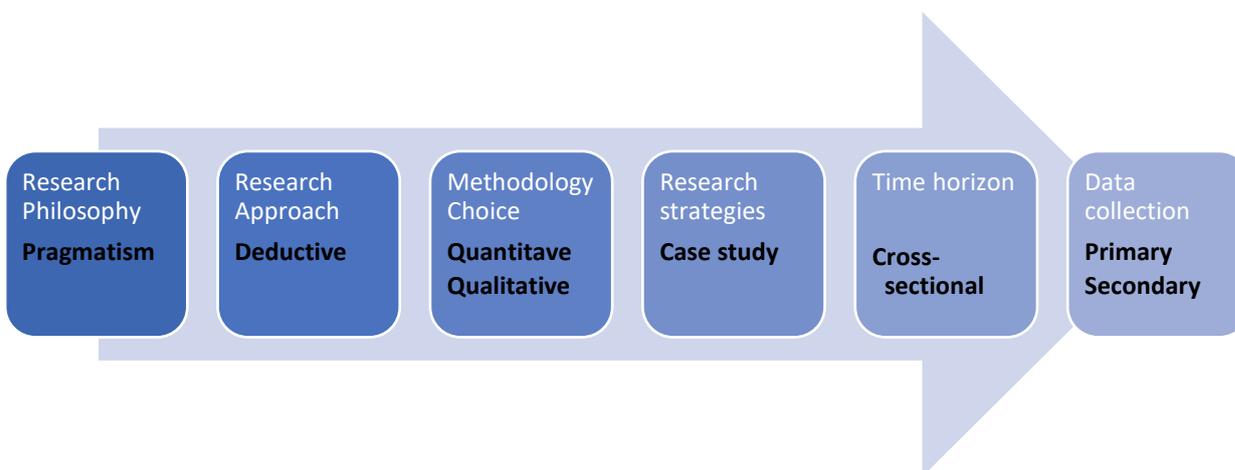


Figure 2 Research methods of the thesis

The author utilises pragmatism philosophy, deductive research approach, both quantitative and qualitative methods, case study research strategy, cross-sectional time horizon and collects primary and secondary data.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis contains eight chapters. The graph below represents its overall structure.

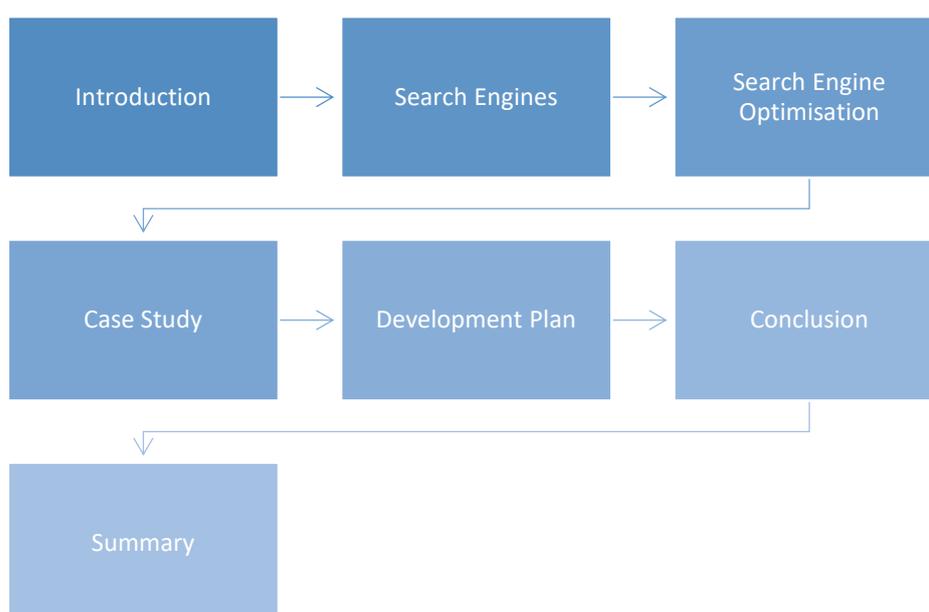


Figure 3 Thesis structure

The thesis starts with the introduction, where the author explains the topic, sets up the research questions and objectives, defines the main research methods. The second chapter contains theories about search engines. It explains how they operate and introduces Google and Yandex. The third chapter provides an overview of search engine optimisation including its definition and different practices. In the fourth chapter, the author introduces the case company and its competitors. It also presents findings from the case study. The fifth chapter contains the development plan for the case company. In the sixth chapter, the author discusses the reliability and validity of the thesis. The seventh chapter is the last chapter of the thesis, and it summarises the whole study.

2 SEARCH ENGINES

This chapter starts with a clear definition of search engines and describes their history. The second subchapter discusses different types of search engines. The next subchapter explains how search engines operate. In the last subchapters, Google and Yandex are introduced.

2.1 Definition and History of Search Engines

A search engine is a comprehensive term, and it may be described from a front end (client side) and a back end (server side) perspectives. From the front end, a search engine is a software with a user interface, which provides users with lists of links in response to their queries. It usually involves a search bar, where users may type their queries. From the back end perspective, a search engine is a software that collects information from the web, stores it in massive databases and returns lists of results to searchers. (Ledford 2010, 5.)

Taking into consideration both definitions, a search engine is a comprehensive program, which enables people to search for information (Ledford 2010, 5).

According to Langville & Meyer (2012) roots of modern search engines go to information retrieval, which "is a process of searching within a document for particular information needed". This term refers to non-linked collections of documents. The first document collections are wall paints, but for searching a query, it was needed to travel and spend much time looking at paintings. Ancient Roman and Greeks used papyrus rolls for recording information. Each papyrus roll was equipped with a tag with a summary of the document for easiness of an information retrieval. During Medieval ages, information was passed orally. Accordingly, people did information retrieval by talking. With the invention of paper, information recording accelerated again. When books collections grew, people started to split holdings by different groups for saving time during searching for a query. In 1450 Johann Gutenberg invented a printing press, which dramatically increased libraries holdings. They became publicly accessible and stimulated a desire for information retrieval. Different card catalogues were invented, but still, it was difficult to search for information. In the 1960s one of the earliest and most influential retrieval systems SMART was developed by Gerard Salton. Already in 1989, Tim Berners-Lee changed the way people retrieve information by inventing World Wide Web. (Langville & Meyer 2012, 1-2.)

With the invention of the World Wide Web, the Industrial Age was replaced with the Information Age, but people still used traditional information retrieval methods. Most

search engines were simple. They returned thousands of results and people had to search for appropriate websites manually. The situation changed in 1998 with the invention of link analysis. This invention dramatically improved search engines' performances. They started to return better results to users. Massive amounts of information stored on the web made search engines indispensable. People finally went from traditional information retrieval to web information retrieval, which is a search within linked collections such as the World Wide Web. (Langville & Meyer 2012, 3-4.)

2.2 Types of Search Engines

Modern search engines are based on three classical computerised information retrieval techniques: Boolean, vector space and probabilistic.

Search engines based on the Boolean information retrieval technique analyse if there is any match between a query and a document. Based on that they decide if the document is relevant or not. Main advantages of Boolean based search engines are easiness of programming them and high speed of processing queries. However, these search engines cannot take into account synonyms and polysemy, which is their main disadvantage. (Langville & Meyer 2012, 5-7.)

Search engines based on vector space information retrieval transform text data into numeric vectors and matrices, then employ matrix analysis techniques to discover key features. Unlike Boolean search engines, these engines can understand synonyms and polysemy. Moreover, vector space engines can sort documents by their relevance by assigning each document with a relevance score. (Langville & Meyer 2012, 5-7.)

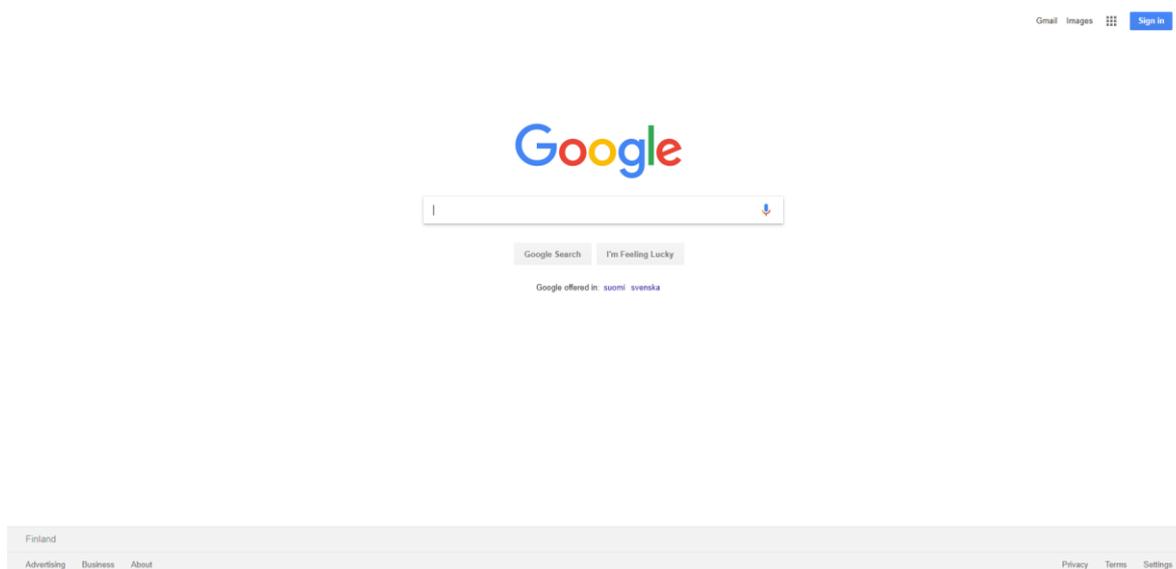
Search engines based on probabilistic information retrieval technique estimate a probability of a document's relevancy to a search query. They can take into account prior parameters and references, which lead to more tailored search results based on a user's preferences. However, these engines require very complicated algorithms, which are very hard to programme. (Langville & Meyer 2012, 5-7.)

Each search engine type has its advantages and disadvantages. There is no ideal model of a search engine. Thus, all search engines in a modern reality differ in one or another way.

2.3 Search Engines' Operations

Understanding main search engines' operations is critical for proper search engine optimisation. However, it is hard to get a precise answer on how search engines operate. Search companies keep this information in secret since it is patented. (Ledford 2009, 5.)

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, search engines can be described from the front end and the back end perspectives. In the front end, search engines have a search page and a search engine results page. The search page is a page, where a user can enter his search query. Below presented the search page of Google.



Picture 1 Google's search page

When the user performs the search, the search engine returns a list of links at the search engines results page (SERP). The search engine results page includes traditional organic (non-paid) results and paid results. The paid results are marked with an «ads» sign and usually occupy bottom lines. The organic results follow them. Additionally, the organic results may include different features like shopping results, news box, image pack and others as shown on picture 2. (Moz 2018a.)

The image shows a Google search results page for the query "cruise". The search bar at the top shows "cruise" and "About 412 000 000 results (0.52 seconds)". The results are categorized into several sections:

- Paid results:** A sponsored advertisement for "Cruise Hotel, Tbilisi" from booking.com, featuring a "Turvallinen varaus" (Safe booking) badge and promotional text in Finnish.
- Organic results (knowledge graph):** A knowledge panel for "Cruise ship" (Ship class) with a definition, owner information (United Kingdom), and related search terms like "Yacht", "Ferry", "Ocean liner", "Train", and "Sailing ship".
- Organic results (stories):** A "Top stories" section with three news snippets: "Passengers panicked after Carnival cruise ship tips over", "It was really like a scene from the Titanic: Passengers panic when Carnival cruise ship tilts", and "Carnival cruise ship listed, frightening passengers".
- Organic results:** Standard search results for "Cruise.com - Find the best Cruise Deals and Discount Cruises" and "Norwegian Cruise Line: Cruises & Cruise Deals | Caribbean Cruise ...".

Picture 2 Google's search engine results page

Besides traditional paid and organic results, picture 2 shows such features as a knowledge graph and stories. Each search engine has its own features, which are discussed in the following subchapters.

Both a search page and a SERP belong to the front end, so they are visible to users. However, the most critical part of any search engine is the back end. (Ledford J.L. 2008, 7.)

As figure 4 shows, the back end of search engines has three primary functions: crawling, indexing, ranking and returning results.



Figure 4 Search engines' operations

A web crawler is a program, which scans or crawls information in the web by following links from one page to another. All pages are stored in massive databases after the crawling process. This process is known as indexing. When a user performs a search, a search engine recalls indexed pages with relevant content and places them in an order. It is done with the help of different algorithms, which consider hundreds of ranking factors. Each search engine has its own list of ranking factors placed in different priorities. (Fiskin 2015.) They will be discussed later in this and the following chapters.

2.4 Search Engines Overview In Russia

The Russian search market is huge. There are 87 million internet users in Russia, which equals 71% of the total population. Every year the whole internet penetrates by 1%, mobile internet penetrates by 9%. (Media Scope 2017.) Moreover, it is essential to understand that Russia covers 17 125 191 km² area and each region has its features. For example, in Siberia area, internet penetration is 68%, while in North West area internet penetration reaches 78%. (FOM 2017.) Among different devices, 52% of Russians prefer laptops to access the internet, 51% of searchers use smartphones (Mediascope 2017).

Figure 5 shows that the whole search engine market is shared by two main players: Yandex and Google (Yandex Radar 2018).

Search engines' shares in Russia

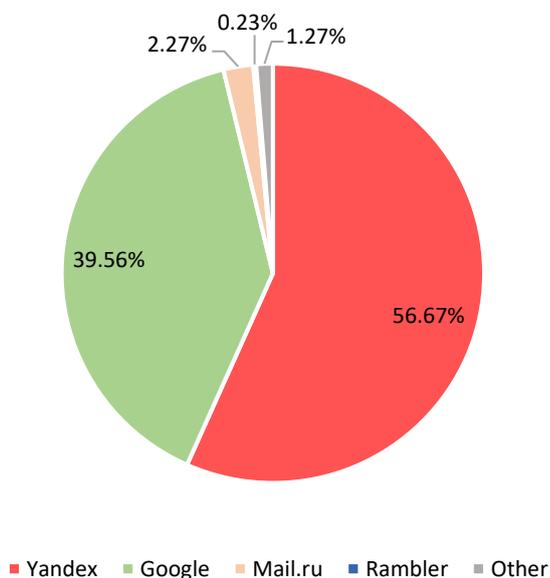


Figure 5 Search engines in Russia (adapted from Yandex Radar 2018)

Yandex owns 56% of the market share, while Google possesses only 39%. The following subchapters describe both search engines in detail.

2.4.1 Google

Today Google owns not only the search engine but also YouTube, Android and Smartbox. The mission of Google is “to organise the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful”. It employs more than 60 000 people in more than 50 countries. (Google Search 2018a.)

The Google search was invented in 1996. The main idea was to create a search engine, where a page with higher popularity would get more weight. Its name originated from “googol”, which is a mathematical term for the digit 1 followed by one hundred 0s. This name also reflects the mission of the company. (Burns & Sauers 2013, 2.)

The Google search follows the basic operational steps described in the previous subchapter: crawling, indexing, ranking and returning results. For crawling the internet, Google uses a special program called Googlebot. Googlebot determines new sites, changes in previously crawled sites and dead links. For finding a page, Googlebot uses links from other pages and reads sitemaps. The sitemap is a file, which consists of information about a website itself, its pages, videos and pictures. Thus, it is essential to have a clear website structure, where all the pages are linked. (Search Console Help 2018a.) Otherwise, during the crawling process, the search engine would not be able to access all the pages.

All crawled pages are indexed. There are more than 200 algorithms involved in indexing, which are continuously updated. The basic algorithm is a words analysis. Google attempts to understand each search query by interpreting spelling mistakes, synonyms, multiple definitions and natural language in general. After analysing the query, Googlebot seeks possible matches in its databases. It evaluates websites’ texts and other content parts like titles. However, Googlebot cannot process rich media files. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that all important content parts have an accessible format for Googlebot. (Google Search 2018b.) Another important Google’s algorithm is Page Rank. It analyses a quantity and quality of other pages that link to a website (Soulo 2018). In 2018 Google released Mobile First algorithm, which uses mobile versions of websites for indexing. Therefore, Google shows mainly mobile-friendly results for users searching with smartphones. (Zhang 2018.) As was stated in the previous subchapter, in Russia 51% of searchers use smartphones, so this algorithm is especially important for the case.

Google search returns different kinds of results because users seek not only for relevant links but also for fast and helpful formats of information. For example, people searching for weather most likely want to see a weather forecast on SERP. The same with people

searching for directions, they want to see a map instead of useful links. For these reasons, Google developed different kinds of useful responses presented in figure 6. (Google Search 2018c.)

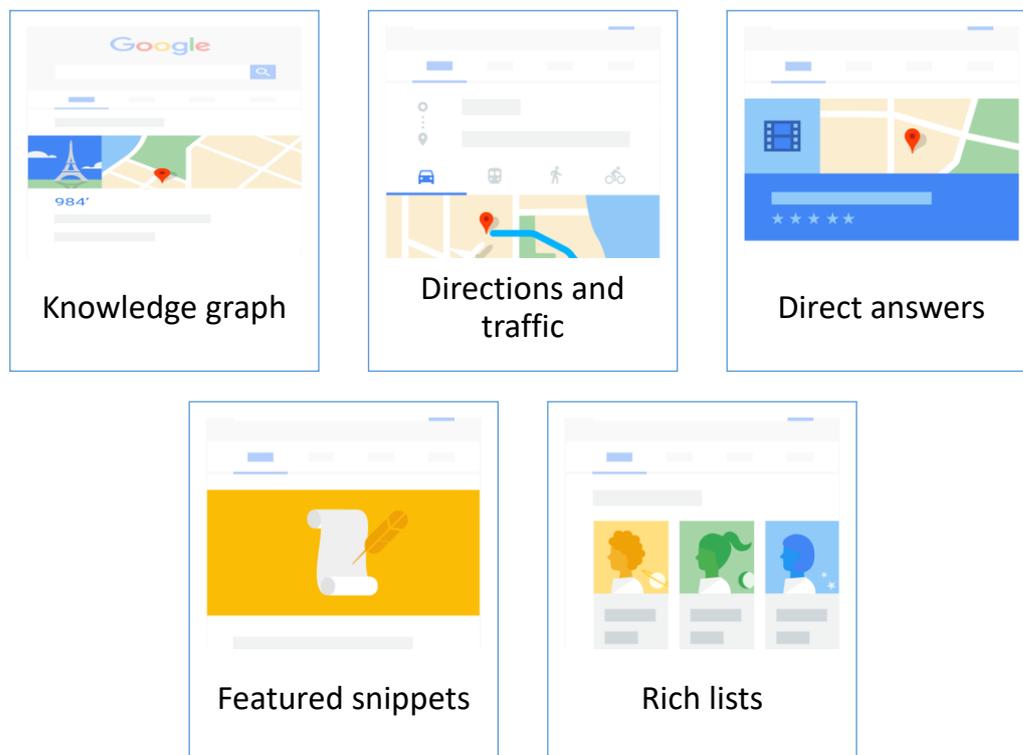


Figure 6 Google useful responses (adapted from Google Search 2018c)

A knowledge graph shows different connected facts. For example, a user searching for the [Eiffel Tower] can quickly get interesting facts about it, directions and opening hours. Google shows draggable and clickable maps with routes in response to directions and traffic queries. For some queries Google shows direct answers like a weather forecast. For other queries, Google may return featured snippets, which include information quoted from a website. Rich lists show lists of connected things, places or people. For example, a list of famous actresses. (Google Search 2018c.)

2.4.2 Yandex

Yandex is a technological company. It owns Yandex search and several intelligent products. Yandex's mission is "to help consumers and businesses better navigate the online and offline world". It employs more than 8 000 people in 9 countries. (Yandex 2018a translated by the author.)

Yandex follows the same operational steps as Google, but in another way. For crawling the internet, Yandex uses two programs: a basic crawler and a fast crawler. The basic crawler is responsible for indexing the whole internet, while the fast crawler is responsible for the latest updates on the internet. Each crawler has its list with a priority order of websites. The higher a reputation of a website and a frequency of its updates, the higher priority it gets. The basic crawler updates its databases once in a few days. The fast crawler performs updates on an ongoing basis. (Yandex 2018b translated by the author.)

For indexing, Yandex utilises two main systems: a metasearch and a basic search. When a user submits a query, the metasearch analyses it and then checks whether the search results for this query have been formed recently. If there are some recent search results for this query, Yandex will display it. If there is nothing similar, the query is transmitted to the basic search system. The basic search system seeks for possible results in its databases. After that, the system returns a list of documents to the metasearch. Results from both systems are combined, indexed and then placed on the SERP. (Yandex 2018b translated by the author.)

Due to uncertain bases of many search queries, Yandex developed a special technique called Spectre. For example, users searching for [Pushkin] may seek for the author or the town in Russia. Spectre analyses different queries and divides them into several categories. This technique helps Yandex to define different meaning in queries. Moreover, Spectre assigns some special features for each category. For example, results for queries falling into product categories most likely will include prices and reviews. With the help of Spectre Yandex can deliver precise results even if searches formulate abstract queries. (Yandex 2018c translated by the author.)

Figure 7 shows that Yandex also provides different kinds of useful responses.

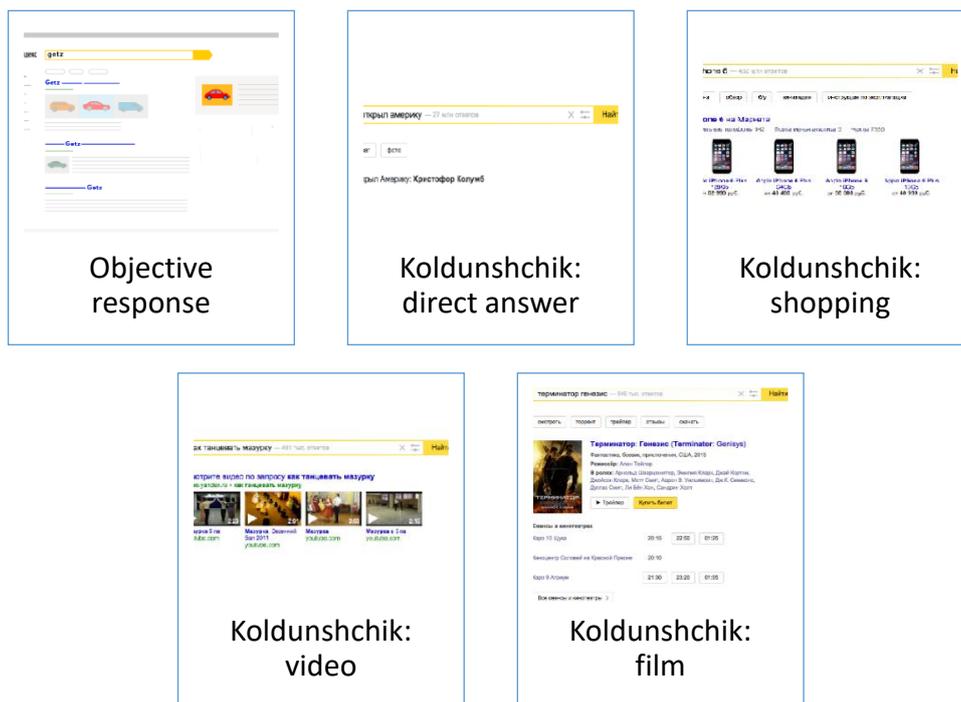


Figure 7 Yandex useful responses (adapted from Yandex 2018)

Besides general paid and non-paid results, it can show knowledge graphs just like Google. These graphs contain several connected facts about a query. Additionally, besides showing a list of relevant websites, Yandex offers direct answers retrieved from its internal services. They are called Koldunshchik. For example, for the search query [iPhone 6], Yandex shows general organic results relevant for the query, but also it displays results from Yandex Market, which is a huge shopping platform. (Yandex 2018d translated by the author.)

To sum up this chapter, search engines are comprehensive programs aimed at providing people with information. They differ in terms of information retrieval techniques, crawling and indexing programs, algorithms and results.

Russia is a challenging market. It is important to consider internet penetration in different regions and usage of smartphones and laptops. Another important factor is the dominance of Yandex in Russia, which proves that it is essential to adapt the current SEO strategy of Company X.

Regarding the difference in Google and Yandex, they follow the same operational steps but employ distinct programs and algorithms for crawling and indexing. Both engines show paid, organic and featured results.

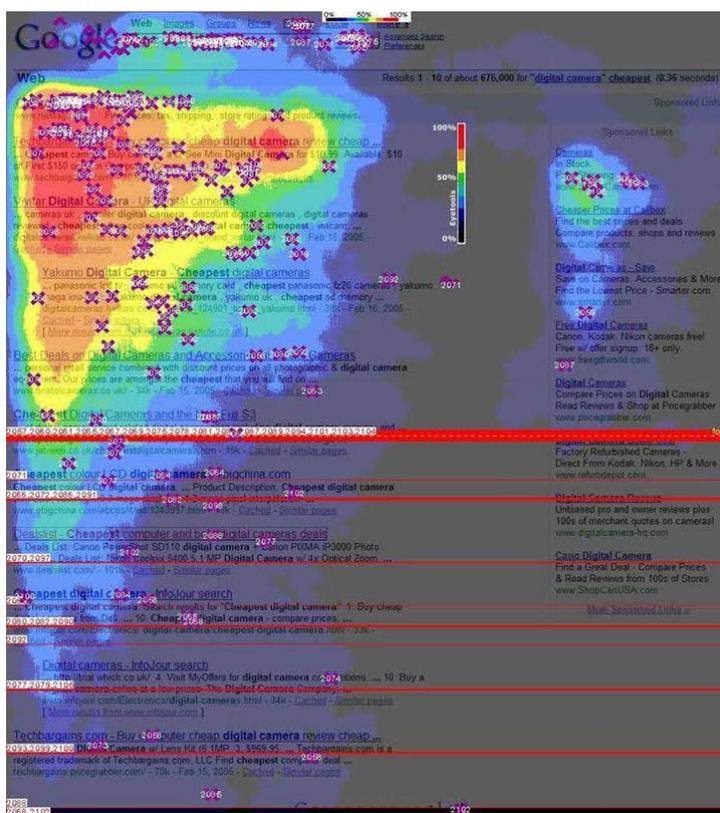
3 SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

This chapter gives an overview of search engine optimisation. The first subchapter gives a definition of SEO and describes on-page and off-page practices. The second subchapter compares the ranking factors of Google and Yandex.

3.1 Search Engine Optimisation Overview

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a marketing discipline aimed at increasing visibility of a website in organic (non-paid) search engine results (Fishkin 2015).

It critically important to be visible in search engines for e-commerce companies like Company X. Search engines show approximately 10 links on SERP. In 2004 digital agency Mediative discovered that people search in a distinctive "triangle" pattern, which is called Golden Triangle (picture 3). Therefore, websites occupying positions 1, 2, 3 get much more traffic than the rest of the results down the page and especially results from other pages. (Mediative 2014.)



Picture 3 Google's Golden Triangle (Mediative 2014)

Moreover, Mediative's research showed that top 4 links capture 84% of all clicks. Only 1% of searchers go to a second results page (Mediative 2014). Thus, it extremely important to

have an effective SEO strategy for an e-commerce website like Company X. Otherwise it likely to get no clicks and accordingly no sales.

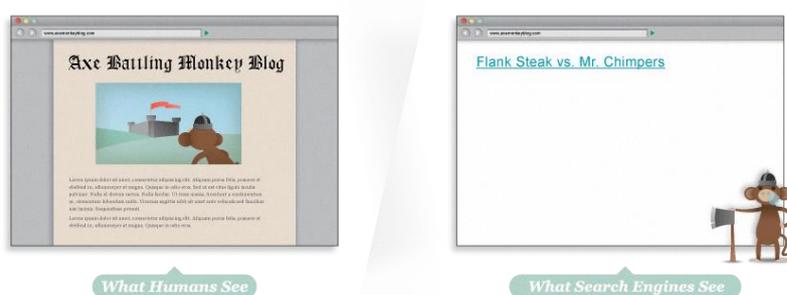
Search engine optimisation includes many different activities from creative to technical sides. Therefore, SEO is divided into two categories: on-page and off-page.

3.1.1 On-page

On-page SEO actions deal with elements on a website like content and HTML codes. These elements are ranking factors for search engines, so by optimising them, the site becomes friendly to search engines. On-page SEO helps to get higher positions in SERP and improves user experience. The main on-page activities include keyword research, creating and optimising content, title tags, URLs, alt texts, meta keywords and meta descriptions. (Moz 2018b.)

Keyword research is a key activity of on-page SEO. First, it is vital to define the most important keywords. Keywords differ by their search volumes. Some keywords acquire just a few searches a month like [cruise on MSC ship from Saint Petersburg in May], while general terms like [cruise] reach thousands of searches. Moz introduces a theory saying that popular search terms account only for 30% of the total searches, while less popular keywords comprise the rest 70%. They are called long tail keywords. Another reason behind targeting long tail keywords is a conversion rate. People searching for general terms probably are researching a market, while people searching for a precise term most likely to complete an order. (Fishkin 2015.)

When the list of important keywords is done, it is time to create or optimise content in accordance with chosen keywords. Content is a core element of any website because it contains information for searchers. Content may be presented as a text, image, video or even sound. (Moz 2018c.) What kind of content ranks well by search engines? First, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, content should be accessible by search engines. For example picture 4 shows how search engines see websites build entirely in Flash.



Picture 4 How search engines see rich media files (Fishkin 2015)

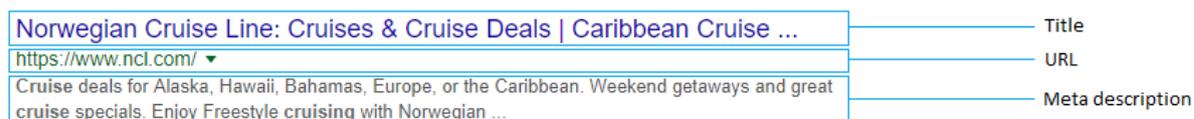
Search engines consider websites full of Flash elements as empty ones since they cannot access rich media files. (Fishkin 2015.) Secondly, content should be unique. Usually, search engines ban websites with plagiarised content. Thirdly, content should create good user experience by loading quickly and being easy to navigate. Finally, content may be keyword targeted. (Moz 2018c; Fishkin 2013.)

A title tag is a HTML element, which describes a title of a webpage. Title tags should accurately describe web pages. It is recommended to watch a title length since search engines display only 60-70 characters of a title tag (picture 5). Relevant keywords should be placed in a beginning of a title tag. It is also a good technique to put a brand name in it. Every page should have a unique title. (Moz 2018d.)

A Uniform Resource Locator (URL) specifies the location of a web page on the internet. The optimal format of a URL is: *http://www.example.com/category-keyword/subcategory-keyword/primary-keyword.html*. An optimised URL should be accurate and straightforward. (Moz 2018e.)

Alternative text or alt text is a tag, which describes an appearance or function of a photo. Search engines are not able to recognise pictures without alt tags. (Moz 2018f.)

A meta description and meta keyword tags are not ranking factors for some search engines, but they still can be significant. A meta description tag briefly describes a content of a web page. It is displayed in SERP. A meta keyword tag accordingly describes main keywords of a web page. (Fishkin 2013.) Picture 5 demonstrates how Google displays information from these tags in a SERP.



Picture 5 Single search engine result

To sum up this subchapter, main on-page SEO activities include keyword research, content creation, optimisation of titles, URLs, meta descriptions and meta keywords.

3.1.2 Off-page

Off-page SEO deals with actions outside of a website like improving popularity and authority. Search engines determine it by checking backlinks of a site. If the website has a lot of backlinks from high-quality websites, search engines assume that the website is high-quality as well. Search engines also consider anchor texts of the backlinks. Anchor texts are visible, clickable text in a hyperlink. (Moz 2018g.)

There are three types of backlinks: natural, manually built and self-created links. Natural links are given to a website without any actions required, for example when somebody refers to it. Manually built links are acquired through link building activities, for example manually asking influencers to place it. Self-created links created by adding them to online forums, blogs and directories. (Moz 2018g.)

3.2 Ranking Factors

As was stated in the previous chapter search engines consider many different ranking factors in an indexing process. In other words, ranking factors serve as criteria of a website's performance. Each search engine gives general recommendations concerning SEO practices and ranking factors, which are discussed below.

3.2.1 Google

Among on-page activities, Google suggests optimising content by making it engaging and well-structured and avoid poor texts with mistakes. It is also a good practice to update a website with new content. Concerning title tag, Google advises writing accurate, brief titles and avoid too general or too keywords stuffed titles. Having a unique title for each page is essential. Regarding URLs, Google recommends using words instead of numbers or generic page names. Google also says that a website navigation with naturally flowing hierarchy is important. For a keyword research, Google offers such services as Google Trends or Google AdWords Keyword Planner. (Google Search Console 2018b.)

Among good off-page practices, Google mentions social media. Likes and shares may influence rankings as well. On the contrary, Google reminds avoiding spamming link requests and purchasing links. (Google Search Console 2018b.)

3.2.2 Yandex

Concerning on-page activities, Yandex gives recommendations similar to Google's. It requires high-quality content, but additionally, it specifies that key information should be at a beginning of a text. Yandex also pays a lot of attention to a webpage structure. Yandex suggests writing informative titles and restricting keywords stuffing. The same principle applies to URLs. For a keyword research, Yandex has a service called Wordstat. (Yandex 2018e translated by the author.)

For off-page SEO Yandex advises acquiring backlinks with accurate anchor texts of URLs instead of general terms like "click here". Yandex also restricts paid links by banning websites involved in it. (Yandex 2018d translated by the author.)

Paananen A. (2012) conducted research comparing Google and Yandex in the frames of her master thesis. She stated that Yandex, unlike Google, uses geographical location as a ranking factor and thus returns more of regional websites. She also found that Google pays a lot of attention to such ranking factors as textual and graphical content and links.

To conclude this chapter, search engine optimisation is a marketing discipline aimed at improving a website's visibility in a SERP. Usually, SEO is divided into on-page and off-page. On-page SEO activities include creating and optimising websites' elements, while off-page SEO refers to improving popularity of the website.

Table 1 summarises findings about ranking factors of Google and Yandex.

Table 1 Comparison of Google and Yandex ranking factors

Google	Yandex
<p>On-page SEO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging, fresh textual and graphical content • Restricts keyword stuffing • Unique and descriptive title tags • Clear URLs with words instead of page numbers • Clear website navigation 	<p>On-page SEO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality content with keywords in the begging • Restricts keyword stuffing • Informative titles and URLs • Geographical location
<p>Off-page SEO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricts purchased or spammy links • Shares from social media 	<p>Off-page SEO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricts purchased links • Links with descriptive anchors

As seen from the table, both search engines use many similar ranking factors but still, there are some differences. It is also important to understand that Google and Yandex give different weight to their ranking factors. For this reason, the case study was conducted.

4 CASE STUDY

This chapter describes the case study, which was implemented in order to answer the research questions. The chapter starts with the case company introduction and its SEO strategy. This part is followed by the case study description. It includes a description of the research, data collection methods and analysis of outputs.

4.1 Case Company

Company X is a leading German cruising agency. It was founded in 2011 by Felix Schneider in Hamburg. Today the agency operates in 8 countries: Australia, Germany, France, Italy, Brazil, Russia, Netherlands and USA. Company X sells sea and river cruises from more than 35 cruising companies including such market leaders as Costa Cruises, MCS cruises, Royal Caribbean International and others. It also has a wide range of offers from economy to luxury class. (Company X 2018.) This thesis focuses on the Russian department only.

Company X employs basic SEO practices. Concerning on-page SEO, Company X focuses on filling the website with textual content and optimising titles, meta descriptions and meta keywords. Regarding keywords, the company mainly targets generic keywords. They are divided into the following categories: generic cruise terms, cruise destinations, cruise lines and cruise ships. Generic cruise terms and destinations have higher monthly search volumes than names of cruise lines and cruise ships. As for off-page SEO activities, Company X acquires natural and manually built links from other tourism websites. (Stancikas 2018.)

4.2 Case Study

The case study examines the results of search engines for five cruise related queries. The outcomes help to understand what kind of websites rank better in Google and Yandex. This information is utilised for answering the main research question.

4.2.1 Research Description

As was mentioned in the first chapter, the author employs the case study research strategy, which is «a single, narrowed down, study, examined in detail, with a variety of research methods, over an extended period» (Creswell 1994, as cited in Maylor & Blackmon 2005, 243). The author uses a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Figure 8 represents the main stages of the case study.

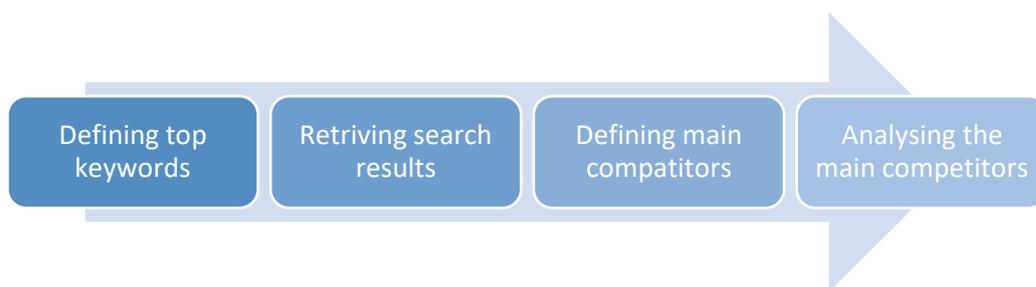


Figure 8 Stages of the research

The first part of the case study included defining important search queries or keywords. The author focused on five important queries related to the cruise industry. The queries cover most of Company X's offers. Table 2 shows the list of the queries with translations and their monthly search volumes.

Table 2 Selected keywords

Query	Translation	Category	Monthly search volume
Купить круиз	Buy a cruise	Generic cruise term	13 616
Круизный лайнер	A cruise ship	Generic cruise term	52 276
Речной круиз	A river cruise	Generic cruise term	81 722
Морской круиз	A sea cruise	Generic cruise term	24 767
Круиз по Средиземному морю	Mediterranean cruise	Destination	17 613

As was mentioned earlier names of cruise lines and ships acquire comparatively low monthly search volumes, so the author focuses on the most important generic cruise terms and destinations. Their monthly search volumes exceed 10 000, so they can be considered as important.

The second part of the research included retrieving search engine results for these queries. The author retrieved search engine results from Google and Yandex for these queries from February, March, April, May, June, July and August. The author also considered results for Moscow and Saint Petersburg separately. For retrieving data, the

The author started the research by collecting theoretical information in April. Theoretical information helped to understand how to answer the research questions and what kind of research to design.

In May the author started implementing the research. First, the author analysed the most popular cruise queries and defined top five of them. In July and August, the author retrieved search results for these queries from the Megaindex SEO tool.

In September retrieved results were analysed, so the author could define the main competitors and allocate them into different categories. In October competitors from different groups were analysed. Finally, in November the author drew results and developed suggestions for the case company based on them.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

The first query [buy a cruise]

The table below represents the top ten results from Google for [buy a cruise] query. It is clearly seen that Company X maintains the first position without any fluctuations.

Table 4 Organic search results for [buy a cruise] in Google, Moscow

01.02.2018	01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru
neptun.ru	malibu.by	malibu.by	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru
gocruise.ru	navimba.com	navimba.com	breeze.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	gocruise.ru
sea-cruise.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	atlantisline.ru
breeze.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	atlantisline.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	breeze.ru
mcruises.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	gocruise.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	cruiz.ru
inflottravel.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cruiseqid.ru	mcruises.ru	cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru	cruiseqid.ru
atlantisline.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cruiseqid.ru	mcruises.ru
navimba.com	natalie-tours.ru	natalie-tours.ru	navimba.com	natalie-tours.ru	natalie-tours.ru	neptun.ru
cruiseqid.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	viamaris.ru	navimba.com	navimba.com	cruiseluxe.ru

Such websites as Gocruise.ru, Seacruise.ru and Atlantisline.ru also get high positions in Google. On the contrary, Navimba.ru, Breeze.ru, Mccruises.ru and Inflottravel.ru have downwards trends in search results of Google.

For the same query, Yandex shows other results, which are presented below, Table 5. Company X fluctuates between positions 1 – 4. Moreover, it disappeared from the results list in May. Among websites performing good in Yandex are Cruclub.ru, Gocruise.ru and Mccruises.ru. Websites with downwards trend are Cruiz-line.ru, Natalie-tours.ru, Sea-cruise.ru and Neptun.ru. The situation with Sea-cruise.ru is similar to Company X. It has much better visibility in Google comparing with Yandex.

Table 5 Organic search results for [buy a cruise] in Yandex, Moscow

01.02.2018	01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
cruiz-line.ru	cruiz-line.ru	natalie-tours.ru	rechflot.ru	cruclub.ru	cruclub.ru	dreamlines.ru
dreamlines.ru	natalie-tours.ru	dreamlines.ru	vbp.ru	gocruise.ru	natalie-tours.ru	cruclub.ru
natalie-tours.ru	dreamlines.ru	sea-cruise.ru	ntt.com.ru	natalie-tours.ru	dreamlines.ru	natalie-tours.ru
sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	cruiz-line.ru	infoflot.com	dreamlines.ru	cruiz-line.ru	cruiz-line.ru
neptun.ru	cruclub.ru	gocruise.ru	mcruises.ru	cruiz-line.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru
vipcruise.ru	cruclub.ru	neptun.ru	yandex.ru	sea-cruise.ru	mcruises.ru	gocruise.ru
gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	vipcruise.ru	mirkruizov.ru	viamaris.ru	gocruise.ru	mcruises.ru
cruiseluxe.ru	ap-travel.ru	cruclub.ru	rech-agent.ru	ntt.com.ru	viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru
market.yandex.ru	neptun.ru	mcruises.ru	yandex.ru	mcruises.ru	vipcruise.ru	ntt.com.ru
mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	ntt.com.ru	rusreki.ru	vipcruise.ru	neptun.ru	vipcruise.ru

Google showed 15 unique websites for this period, while Yandex returned 21 websites. Therefore, Yandex shows more diverse results and change their positions constantly. It may be connected with the features of Yandex's crawlers described earlier. Moreover, Yandex returns results from its own shop called Yandex Market. In contrary, Google tends to keep the same websites on similar positions.

When comparing results for the same query [buy a cruise], but for Moscow and Saint-Petersburg separately, both search engines return different results as presented below, Table 6.

Table 6 Comparison of search results for Moscow and Saint-Petersburg

Yandex, Moscow 01.08.2018	Yandex, Saint-Petersburg 01.08.2018	Google, Moscow 01.08.2018	Google, Saint-Petersburg 01.08.2018
dreamlines.ru	sea-cruise.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru
cruclub.ru	mcruises.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru
natalie-tours.ru	cruiz-line.ru	gocruise.ru	atlantisline.ru
cruiz-line.ru	dreamlines.ru	atlantisline.ru	gocruise.ru
sea-cruise.ru	cruclub.ru	breeze.ru	cruiseluxe.ru
gocruise.ru	tour-spb.ru	cruiz.ru	breeze.ru
mcruises.ru	natalie-tours.ru	cruisegid.ru	mcruises.ru
viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru	mcruises.ru	cruiz.ru
ntt.com.ru	cruises.soleans.ru	neptun.ru	cruisegid.ru
vipcruise.ru	breeze.ru	cruiseluxe.ru	neptun.ru

It is clearly visible that Yandex returns more regions specific websites like tour-spb.ru and cruises.soleans.ru. Both have head offices in Saint Petersburg. Google shows almost the same results with small changes in positions for searches from Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The second query [cruise ship]

The next query is [cruise ship]. Recently Company X performed an optimisation campaign of main cruise ships' pages (Stancikas 2018). Table 7 shows that there is already some progress in Google.

Table 7 Organic search results for [cruise ships] in Google, Moscow

01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
tourprom.ru	tourprom.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru
gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru
youtube.com	youtube.com	tourprom.ru	tourprom.ru	tourprom.ru	tourprom.ru
youtube.com	youtube.com	mcruises.ru	youtube.com	youtube.com	youtube.com
rbc.ru	rbc.ru	mcruises.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru
news.bigmir.net	news.bigmir.net	breeze.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cruiseqid.ru
forbes.ru	forbes.ru	youtube.com	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru
neptun.ru	neptun.ru	youtube.com	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru
korrespondent.net	korrespondent.net	cruiseqid.ru	travel.ru	travel.ru	travel.ru
mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	cruiseqid.ru	rbc.ru	rbc.ru	rbc.ru

In June Company X took the seventh position and was able to keep it. Tourprom.ru and Gocruise.ru take the leading positions. In Yandex, the situation is different (Table 8).

Table 8 Organic search results for [cruise ship] in Yandex, Moscow

01.02.2018	01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
infoniac.ru	infoniac.ru	infoniac.ru	moskva.trud.com	triphints.ru	cruiseqid.ru	infoniac.ru
cruiseqid.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cpykami.ru	ru.jobble.org	cruiseqid.ru	infoniac.ru	cruiseqid.ru
topsweet.ru	cpykami.ru	cruiseqid.ru	cruiseluxe.ru	cpykami.ru	cruisetips.ru	cpykami.ru
cruisetips.ru	fb.ru	fb.ru	rabota.yandex.ru	infoniac.ru	cpykami.ru	cruisetips.ru
tourweek.ru	topsweet.ru	triphints.ru	sea-cruise.ru	topsweet.ru	fb.ru	fb.ru
cpykami.ru	novate.ru	topsweet.ru	ap-travel.ru	fb.ru	ru.wikipedia.org	ru.wikipedia.org
masterok.livejournal.ru	tourweek.ru	novate.ru	moskva.gorodrabot.ru	tourweek.ru	horosho-tam.ru	decem.info
novate.ru	masterok.livejournal.ru	tourweek.ru	yandex.ru	s-zametki.ru	topsweet.ru	style.rbc.ru
top10a.ru	cruisetips.ru	masterok.livejournal.ru	dreamlines.ru	cruisetips.ru	masterok.livejournal.ru	cruiz-line.ru
triphints.ru	triphints.ru	myotpusk.mirteser.ru	rabota-ipoisk.ru	masterok.livejournal.ru	myotpusk.mirteser.ru	cruiseluxe.ru

In May Company X got into the top ten results but disappeared again in June. Yandex also shows general online journals such as Infoniac.ru and Cpykami.ru. For the given period, Yandex returned 28 different websites, while Google returned only 13.

The third query [river cruise]

For [river cruise] query, Google returns the following results. Table 9 shows that Company X do not rank for the query at all.

Table 9 Organic search results for [river cruise] in Google, Moscow

01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	vbp.ru	vbp.ru	vbp.ru	vbp.ru
vbp.ru	vbp.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru
mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru
turizm.ru	turizm.ru	rtooperator.ru	vodohod.com	vodohod.com	vodohod.com
vodohod.com	vodohod.com	vodohod.com	rtooperator.ru	rtooperator.ru	rtooperator.ru
vodohod.com	vodohod.com	vodohod.com	infoflot.com	infoflot.com	infoflot.com
gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru	infoflot.com	infoflot.com	infoflot.com
rugordon.com	rugordon.com	gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru
radissonblu.com	radissonblu.com	infoflot.com	gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru	gama-nn.ru
volgaline.com	volgaline.com	infoflot.com	rivertickets.ru	rivertickets.ru	rivertickets.ru

The same situation occurs in Yandex. Table 10 also shows that Company X also does not rank in Yandex for the query. As was mentioned earlier the query has approximately 80 000 of searches a month, so Company X misses a lot of possible traffic.

Table 10 Organic search results for [river cruise] in Yandex, Moscow

01.02.2018	01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018
rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru	rechflot.ru
mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru	mosturflot.ru	rech-agent.ru	infoflot.com	mosturflot.ru
mirkruizov.ru	vodohod.com	infoflot.com	infoflot.com	mosturflot.ru	infoflot.com
vodohod.com	infoflot.com	rechcruiz.ru	mosturflot.ru	vbp.ru	rechcruiz.ru
vbp.ru	vbp.ru	vodohod.com	vbp.ru	vodohod.com	vbp.ru
infoflot.com	rechcruiz.ru	riverflot.ru	yandex.ru	yandex.ru	mirkruizov.ru
otzovik.com	mirkruizov.ru	vbp.ru	rtooperator.ru	rtooperator.ru	vodohod.com
rtooperator.ru	argoflot.ru	mirkruizov.ru	mirkruizov.ru	rechcruiz.ru	rtooperator.ru
bravedefender.ru	peku-pocuu.ru	yandex.ru	yandex.ru	otzovik.com	oncruise.ru
argoflot.ru	rtooperator.ru	otzovik.com	argoflot.ru	mirkruizov.ru	riverflot.ru

Comparing results of both engines over the given period, Yandex returned more different websites. Yandex returned 16 websites, while Google showed only 12.

The fourth query [sea cruise]

For [sea cruise] query Company X slowly gets higher positions as Table 11 illustrates. However, the third place is already quite good position. Atlantisline.ru and Sea-cruise.ru occupy the first positions.

Table 11 Organic search results for [sea cruise] in Google, Moscow

01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru
sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru
gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru
dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	inlottravel.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru
viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru	gocruise.ru	inlottravel.ru	inlottravel.ru	inlottravel.ru
mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru	mcruises.ru
tourprom.ru	tourprom.ru	viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru
inlottravel.ru	inlottravel.ru	tourprom.ru	cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru
grouptravel.ua	grouptravel.ua	mosturflot.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru
breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru

In Yandex, there is no clear trend of Company X's performance. Table 12 shows that Company X's position fluctuates a lot. However, Company X usually gets into the top ten results. Gocruise.ru and Cruiz.ru usually get the highest positions. Mccruises.ru and Sea-cruise.ru have an upward trend.

Table 12 Organic search results for [sea cruise] in Yandex, Moscow

01.02.2018	01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru	sea-cruise.ru	cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru	gocruise.ru
gocruise.ru	cruclub.ru	cruclub.ru	ap-travel.ru	gocruise.ru	dreamlines.ru	cruiz.ru
cruclub.ru	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	mosturflot.ru	mcruses.ru	gocruise.ru	mcruses.ru
atlantisline.ru	natalie-tours.ru	sea-cruise.ru	infoflot.com	vk.com	mcruses.ru	dreamlines.ru
natalie-tours.ru	mcruses.ru	natalie-tours.ru	best.itour.ru	sea-cruise.ru	cruclub.ru	sea-cruise.ru
mcruses.ru	atlantisline.ru	cruiz-line.ru	yandex.ru	dreamlines.ru	mosturflot.ru	cruclub.ru
satellit-travel.com	sea-cruise.ru	atlantisline.ru	cruclub.ru	natalie-tours.ru	sea-cruise.ru	atlantisline.ru
sea-cruise.ru	dreamlines.ru	yandex.ru	neptun.ru	cruclub.ru	natalie-tours.ru	mosturflot.ru
cruiseline.ru	satellit-travel.com	ru-ru.facebook.com	yandex.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	cruiz-line.ru
kruizi.ru	cruiseline.ru	vk.com	mirkruizov.ru	satellit-travel.com	vk.com	natalie-tours.ru

Regarding the number of unique websites, over the period Yandex returned 21 websites. Google showed only 13.

The fifth query [cruise Mediterranean Sea]

Search results from Google for the last query [cruise Mediterranean Sea] are presented below (Table 13). It is clearly visible that Company X maintains the leading position over the whole period of time.

Table 13 Organic search results for [cruise Mediterranean Sea] in Google, Moscow

01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
dreamlines.ru					
breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru
atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	neptun.ru	mcruses.ru
neptun.ru	neptun.ru	atlantisline.ru	atlantisline.ru	mcruses.ru	inflattravel.ru
tonkosti.ru	tonkosti.ru	inflattravel.ru	inflattravel.ru	inflattravel.ru	neptun.ru
naftacruises.com	naftacruises.com	cruiz.ru	cruiz.ru	inflattravel.ru	atlantisline.ru
satellit-travel.com	satellit-travel.com	mcruses.ru	mcruses.ru	atlantisline.ru	cruiz.ru
malibu.by	malibu.by	sea-cruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	cruiz.ru	viamaris.ru
princesscruises.com	princesscruises.com	satellit-travel.com	satellit-travel.com	viamaris.ru	sea-cruise.ru
cruishop.com	cruishop.com	gocruise.ru	gocruise.ru	sea-cruise.ru	gocruise.ru

In Yandex, the situation is quite similar except of small fall in May and June (Table 14).

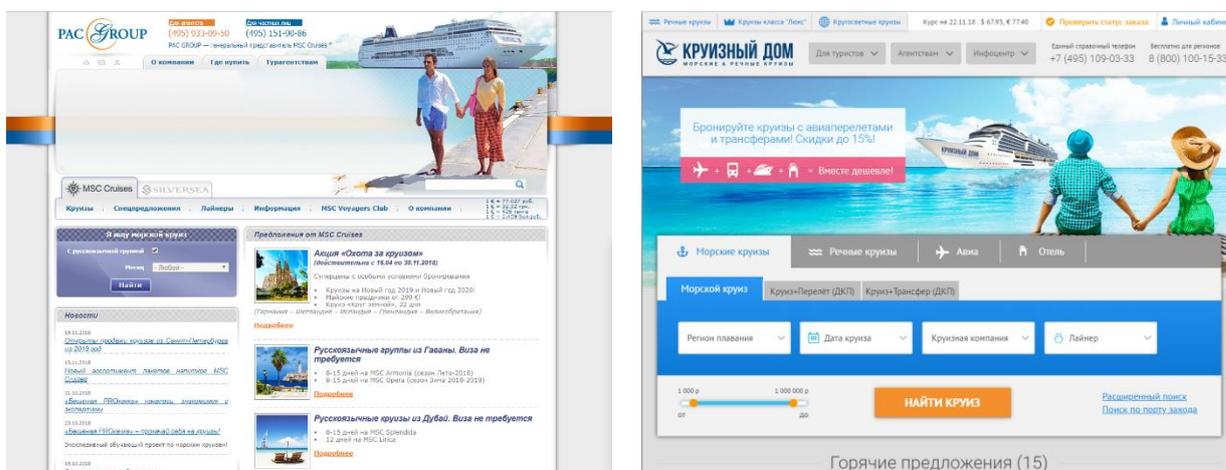
Table 14 Organic search results for [cruise Mediterranean Sea] in Google, Moscow

01.02.2018	01.03.2018	01.04.2018	01.05.2018	01.06.2018	01.07.2018	01.08.2018
dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru	mcruses.ru	mcruses.ru	dreamlines.ru	dreamlines.ru
mcruses.ru	mcruses.ru	mcruses.ru	breeze.ru	dreamlines.ru	mcruses.ru	mcruses.ru
breeze.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	dreamlines.ru	viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru
satellit-travel.com	satellit-travel.com	satellit-travel.com	sea-cruise.ru	inflattravel.ru	inflattravel.ru	breeze.ru
viamaris.ru	viamaris.ru	cruclub.ru	cruclub.ru	breeze.ru	breeze.ru	gocruise.ru
gocruise.ru	royal-cruise.ru	viamaris.ru	satellit-travel.com	tonkosti.ru	gocruise.ru	favorit-cruise.ru
cruclub.ru	inflattravel.ru	inflattravel.ru	viamaris.ru	cruclub.ru	favorit-cruise.ru	inflattravel.ru
clubcruise.ru	yandex.ru	saletur.ru	atollcruise.ru	royal-cruise.ru	tonkosti.ru	cruclub.ru
cruisetips.ru	sea-cruise.ru	royal-cruise.ru	yandex.ru	sea-cruise.ru	cruclub.ru	tonkosti.ru
sea-cruise.ru	cruise.sletat.ru	sea-cruise.ru	inflattravel.ru	saletur.ru	saletur.ru	sea-cruise.ru

As in the previous cases, Yandex returned 18 unique websites, while Google returned 16 of them.

Based on all retrieved data, the author identified the following competitors: gocruise.ru, mcruises.ru, sea-cruise, atlantisline.ru, neptun.ru, natalie-tours.ru, cruclub.ru, satellite-travel.com, breeze.ru, inflottravel.ru. These websites are shown in results more often than others.

The research showed that gocruise.ru and mcruises.ru maintain grow of their positions in Google and Yandex. Therefore, the author used them as examples of effective SEO practices. Below, Picture 6, are home pages of gocruise.ru and mcruises.ru. Both have easy navigation and plenty of textual and graphical contents. Textual contents are well structured. Graphical contents have alt tags.



Picture 6 Comparison of gocruise.ru and mcruises.ru main pages

Picture 7 shows their meta descriptions and meta titles from their main pages with brief translations.

<p>Dreamlines.ru https://www.dreamlines.ru/ Круизы 2019-2020 по всему миру. Скидки и Акции. Онлайн-подбор за 5 минут, консультации экспертов: ☎ +7 (499) 753 2994. Планируйте Ваш отдых с ...</p> <p>Акции и Скидки Акции и специальные предложения на круизы ...</p> <p>Круизные эксперты Круизные эксперты с удовольствием помогут Вам в ...</p> <p>FAQ DREAMLINES – это круизный портал, на странице которого ...</p> <p>О компании RU - ИНФОРМАЦИЯ О КОМПАНИИ. О компании ...</p> <p>Другие результаты с сайта dreamlines.ru »</p>	<p>Meta title: Brand name</p> <p>Meta description: Cruises 2019-2020. Discounts and promotions. Vacation suggestions from our cruise experts: +7 (499) 753 2994.</p>
<p>PAC GROUP - Морские круизы по Средиземному морю ... https://www.gocruise.ru/ С 2006 года мы сотрудничаем с итальянской круизной компанией MSC Cruises и оказываем наши услуги на уровне европейских стандартов.</p> <p>Круизы компании MSC Cruises MSC Meraviglia - Silversea - MSC Seaview - MSC Preziosa - ...</p> <p>Спецпредложения от MSC ... Спецпредложения от MSC Cruises. Текущие ...</p> <p>Другие результаты с сайта gocruise.ru »</p>	<p>Meta title: Brand name - Mediterranean sea cruises</p> <p>Meta description: We cooperate with Italian cruising company MSC Cruises and provide high quality service.</p>
<p>Круизный Дом: морские и речные круизы по всему миру https://www.mcruises.ru/ Круизный Дом МК: онлайн поиск и покупка круизов по всему миру, скидки, акции, выгодные цены на круизы с авиaperелетом и трансферами.</p> <p>Календарь низких цен Календари низких цен. В разделе "Календари низких ..."</p> <p>Личный кабинет Удобный поиск круизов по всему миру, онлайн бронирование с ...</p> <p>Высокотехнологичный ... Высокотехнологичный круизный туроператор.</p> <p>О компании О компании. Компания Круизный Дом "МК" многопрофильный ...</p> <p>Круизный Дом МК: вакансии ... Вакансии Круизного Дома МК ... Если Вас интересует ...</p> <p>Мы открыли ... Главная > новости > Мы открыли представительство в Санкт ...</p> <p>Другие результаты с сайта mcruises.ru »</p>	<p>Meta title: Brand name - sea and river cruises</p> <p>Meta description: Brand name - search and buy cruises online, discounts, promotions, best prices.</p>

Picture 7 Comparison of gocruise.ru and mcruises.ru meta tags

As seen from the picture, gocruise.ru and mcruises.ru have clear and descriptive meta titles. Company X should consider adding more information into its meta title. Meta descriptions vary a lot. Gocruise.ru highlights its cooperation with huge cruising company, while mcruises.ru lists its main advantages. Company X has the most informative and eye-catching meta description due to years and telephone number. Gocruise.ru and mcruises.ru do not use meta keywords.

Speaking about off-page SEO, they have high Page Ranks and many backlinks with diverse anchor texts.

On the contrary, breeze.ru lose its positions in Google and Yandex. Picture 8 shows its main page. The navigation is messy and unstructured. There are too many links and almost no categories.



Picture 8 Main page of breeze.ru

Moreover, breeze.ru has simplified URLs, which miss subcategories. Regarding content, texts are poor and keyword stuffed. Breeze.ru also has keyword stuffed and not informative meta titles and meta descriptions as shown on the following picture.

<p>Морские круизы от Бриза - купить морской круиз 2019 с русскими ... https://breeze.ru/</p> <p>Компания Бриз Лайн предлагает морские круизы по всему миру на лайнерах класса премиум 5* и люкс 6*. Еще больше круизов с русскими группами в ...</p>	<p>Meta title: Sea cruises from Brand name - buy a sea cruise 2019</p> <p>Meta description: The company offers sea cruises on luxury ships.</p>
<p>Поиск круиза Все круизы, Расширенный поиск. Бюджет круиза, Название ...</p> <p>Круизы с Русскими Группами Мы готовы предложить специально для Вас круизы с ...</p> <p>Princess Cruises Компания Princess Cruises объявила, что первые круизы ...</p> <p>Другие результаты с сайта breeze.ru »</p>	<p>Купить морской круиз 2019 с ... Еще больше круизов с русскими группами в 2019 году! ... Где ...</p> <p>Отзыв о круизе Столицы ... Отзыв о круизе Столицы Северной Европы на Regal ...</p> <p>Спецпредложения Спецпредложения по морским круизам по Средиземному ...</p>

Picture 9 Meta tags of breeze.ru

Concerning off-page SEO, breeze.ru has high Page Rank, but its backlink profile decreases every month. Most of the anchor texts contain the name of the website.

To conclude this chapter, the case study outlined that Google shows a smaller number of different websites over the given period. Google also tend to keep the same websites in similar positions. Google gives high positions for websites with fresh and graphical content, high Page Ranks and enough backlinks. Google does not rank well websites with unclear navigation. On the contrary, Yandex revises its results list each month at least. It returns more different websites and constantly changes their positions. The search engine values long texts, clear and descriptive titles and meta descriptions, a big number of backlinks. Yandex does not rank well website with short texts, keyword stuffed titles and meta descriptions and small backlinks profile. Both SEs does not react to meta keywords.

5 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The author has studied the basics of search engines, compared Google and Yandex, revised theory about search engine optimisation, and examined the competitors of the case company. This chapter provides an answer to the main research question by drawing suggestions. First, the author performs a SWOT analysis of the current Company X's search engine optimisation. Secondly, the author develops suggestions based on the theory review, the case study and the SWOT analysis.

5.1 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a marketing tool used for representing the current marketing situation. It considers internal and external factors such as strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. Strengths are internal company's capabilities, which can help to take advantage over competitors and achieve a company's goals. Weaknesses are internal limitations of a company preventing it from achieving goals. Opportunities are external factors, which can be beneficial for a company. Threats are external factors, which can interfere with achieving a company's goals. (Kotler & Armstong 2012, 78.) Figure 9 shoes SWOT analysis of the current Company X's SEO performance.

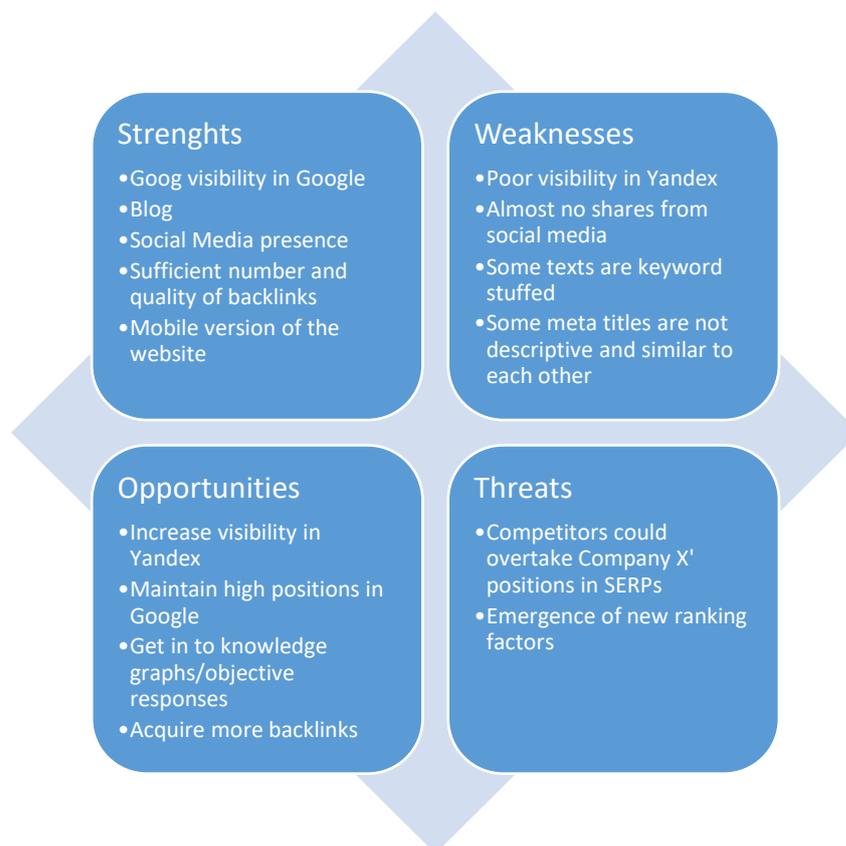


Figure 9 SWOT analysis of Company X's SEO performance

Strengths

Among strengths of the current Company X's SEO is a good visibility in Google. The research showed that in most cases Company X occupy first positions or have a positive trend. Company X also use social media, which is important for Google. Company X continually updates its blog and website with new and unique information and possesses sufficient number of high-quality backlinks, which is highly valuable by both engines. Company X has a mobile version of its website, which helps to rank better in Google as well.

Weakness

The main weakness of the current Company X's SEO performance is a poor visibility in Yandex. Company X also does not get enough shares and mentions from social media. There are some minor weaknesses concerning on-page elements like content and meta titles. On several old web pages, Company X has keyword stuffed texts and not descriptive meta titles.

Opportunities

Regarding opportunities, Company X can overtake its competitors' positions in Yandex and maintain high positions in Google. Another great opportunity is to be displayed in Google's knowledge graph or Yandex's objective responses. Company X also can continue getting backlinks and shares to enhance its profile.

Threats

As for threats, there is always a risk that competitors will overtake Company X's positions. Additionally, search engines can issue new algorithms or ranking factors affecting the current Company X's positions.

5.2 Action Plan

The main objective of this thesis is to provide the case company with suggestions on how to perform SEO to be effective in both search engines. The author studied related theory and completed the case study. Therefore, it is time to answer the main research question and meet the thesis' objectives.

In response to the described above current situation of Company X, the author developed several improvements suggestions. To get better visibility in Google and Yandex in Russia at the same time, Company X should follow several steps, which are presented in Table 15 and Table 16.

Table 15 On-page SEO suggestions for Company X

Suggestion	Actions
Expand keywords list	Target more long tail keywords. Consider stopping using meta keywords.
Optimise content	Optimise old keyword stuffed texts. Update the website on a regular basis. Make content more informative. Add graphical content with alt texts.
Optimise titles	Add the brand name into meta titles.
Optimise meta descriptions	Avoid keywords stuffing.

First, Company X should consider revising its list of keywords. The company may target more long tail keywords by describing different cruising options instead of focusing on general terms. As was discussed in the third chapter this practice may lead to better conversion rates as well increase of visits. Growing number of visits lead to better visibility in both engines. The case study also proved that meta keywords do not influence positions in search results, so Company X may stop filling them.

Regarding the content of the website, Company X should revise all old texts and reduce keyword stuffing. Content should be updated on a regular basis. The case study showed that for improving visibility in Yandex, Company X should create text at least 400 words long. It is also important to keep them informative, since it helps to be shown in objective responses of Yandex. For keeping good visibility in Google, Company X should add more graphical content like pictures with alt texts.

As for meta tags, Company X should add its brand name to meta titles and avoid keywords stuffing in meta descriptions. In general, Company X has good meta titles and meta descriptions, but it is advisable to make them more unique for each page.

The following table illustrates recommendations concerning off-page SEO activities.

Table 16 Off-page suggestions for Company X

Suggestion	Actions
Acquire backlinks	Acquire only natural and manually built backlinks and avoid purchasing links.
Social Media	Acquire mentions and shares in social media

The theoretical review with the case study showed that both search engines pay attention to the quality and quantity of backlinks. Both ban websites with purchased links. However, Yandex also considers anchor texts of that backlinks. Company X should acquire natural and manually built backlinks preferably with precise anchors texts. Additionally, Google measures a number of shares and mentions from social media.

6 CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the whole thesis. The author gives answers to research questions, describes validity and reliability and makes suggestions for a further research.

6.1 Answers to the Research Questions

This research aimed to develop recommendations, which can be useful for Google and Yandex at the same time. Below are answers to the research questions. The main research question is answered at the end of this subchapter.

1. How Google and Yandex operate?

Google and Yandex follow three basic operational steps: crawling, indexing, ranking and returning results. First, they crawl the web by following links from one page to another. Secondly, they store all crawled pages in massive databases called index. Finally, when a user performs a search, they recall all crawled pages from the index. All relevant pages are placed in order based on ranking factors and returned to a SERP.

2. What is SEO?

SEO stands for search engine optimisation. It is a marketing discipline aimed at improving a website's visibility in a search engine results page. SEO is divided in two categories: on-page and off-page. The on-page SEO activities include optimising content and HTML elements, while the off-page SEO refers to a popularity and a reputation of the website through acquiring high quality backlinks.

3. What is the difference between SEO practices for Google and Yandex?

Google pays a lot of attention to fresh content, while Yandex does not consider it as a crucial ranking factor. Google also gives more weight to websites with graphical content, while Yandex values long texts. Yandex provides high priority for geographical location and shows regional results, unlike Google.

4. What kind of SEO strategies Company X competitors use?

Company X's competitors follow basic SEO guidelines. The most successful websites have textual and graphical content, diverse backlinks profiles. However, some of them practice keywords stuffing and do not pay attention to acquiring quality backlinks, which results in losing their positions.

When all subquestions are answered, it is time to answer the main research question.

How to improve the current SEO strategy of Company X, so that it will be effective for both Google and Yandex in Russia?

The theoretical review from chapter 2 and 3 showed that Company X misses several opportunities for better rankings. Company X should create more specific content, which search engines can use in their knowledge graphs or objective responses results. Moreover, Company X should pay more attention to backlinks and shares from social media, since Google consider them as a ranking factor.

The case study outlined that Company X should avoid keywords stuffing. It also showed that meta keywords are not important for rankings, so Company X can stop using them. The last but not the least finding from the study is that content plays a huge role in rankings. Company X should focus on creating fresh and informative textual and graphical content.

6.2 Validity and Reliability

A research is valid when findings match initial objectives (Saunders et al. 2012, 157). The author used primary and secondary data. The secondary data was retrieved from books and online publications. The primary data was gathered through the case study. The author met all the objectives and found the answers to all the research questions, so the research is valid.

A research can be considered as a reliable if its results are transparent and could be reached by other observers (Saunders et al. 2012, 156). The author described the research in detail and attached its parts to appendices, so it is transparent. The research could be repeated by other researches and results will be the same, so the research is reliable.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As was mentioned in the begging of this thesis, it is narrowed to the case company and the Russian market. In order to get more comprehensive results, similar research for other markets, for example, China, is suggested.

Since search engines regularly update their algorithms and ranking factors, it is also suggested to repeat the research later.

7 SUMMARY

Search engines are very important for e-commerce businesses because they bring customers to them. Search engine optimisation is a marketing discipline focused on improving a website's positions in a search engine results pages. SEO is divided in two categories: on-page and off-page. On-page SEO activities include creating and optimising content and HTML elements of a website. Off-page SEO activities include acquiring backlinks and increasing popularity of a website. SEO is a very competitive field. Moreover, it is essential to consider dozens of factors when doing SEO.

The thesis aimed at developing improvement suggestions for the current SEO strategy of the case company. The author used a deductive approach. The primary data was retrieved from books and articles from SEO experts. The theoretical part consisted of search engines and search engine optimisation overviews in the second and the third chapters. Altogether, they formed a solid basis for the case study.

The case study is presented in the fourth chapter. It consisted of the case company introduction and the research description. The research included four parts. First, the author determined top keywords for the company. Secondly, the author retrieved results for these queries from Google and Yandex from the 5 months. Thirdly, the main competitors were defined and assigned into different categories. As for the last step, the author analysed their SEO performance.

Outcomes from the theoretical part and the case study served as a foundation for the development plan, which was presented in the fifth chapter. According to the outcomes, the case company should make more emphasis on creating diverse and fresh content as well as targeting more long tail regional queries. The company also should develop link building activities with descriptive anchors and acquire shares in social media.

The following chapters outlined the answers to the research questions, discussed validity and reliability, presented the suggestions for further research and the summary of the whole thesis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Search volumes for chosen queries

Total number of impressions for "купить круиз": 13 616

All	Regions	Cities	Displays per month	Regional popularity
			2 717	120%
			1 390	172%
			430	130%

Total number of impressions for "круизный лайнер": 52 276

All	Regions	Cities	Displays per month	Regional popularity
			10 345	119%
			4 139	133%
			1 252	99%

Total number of impressions for "речной круиз": 81 722

All	Regions	Cities	Displays per month	Regional popularity
			31 653	233%
			7 754	159%
			4 071	291%

Total number of impressions for "морской круиз": 24 767

All	Regions	Cities	Displays per month	Regional popularity
			5 904	143%
			3 235	220%
			653	109%

Total number of impressions for "круиз средиземное море": 17 613

All	Regions	Cities	Displays per month	Regional popularity
			4 650	159%
			1 504	143%
			438	103%