

The Beginner's Guide to Website Optimization

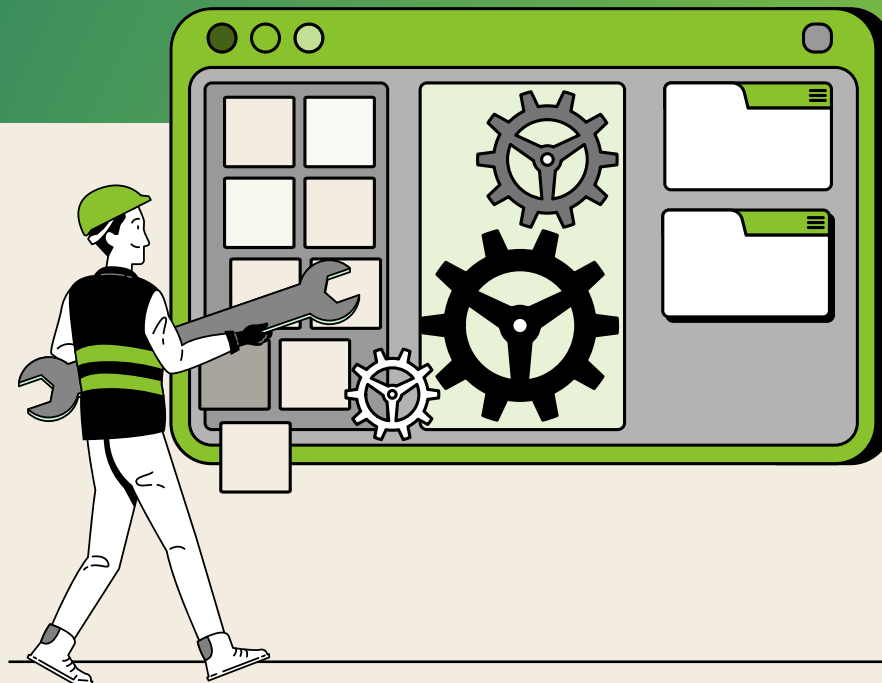


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What is website optimization?

Website optimization is the **process of improving website performance across core areas—including speed, usability, conversion rates, SEO, and content—to increase traffic, engagement, conversions, and revenue.**

The large scope of website optimization requires cross-functional collaboration from web, content, SEO, digital product, and design teams to ensure it's done right.

The best way to think about it is as a continuous process rather than a one-and-done effort. We've found the most effective approach to optimizing a website is to break it down into core focus areas for easier implementation and accountability.

The 5 core focus areas of website optimization

Optimizing a website can seem daunting when you consider everything it entails. Set your efforts up for success by categorizing needs based on the core focus area they fall under. This will make it easier to divide responsibilities between content, SEO, digital product, eCommerce, and web teams when it comes time to implement.

Get started by auditing your website to identify the improvements, investments, and resources needed for each focus area.

The five most common focus areas for site optimization are:

- On-page SEO and content optimization
- Technical SEO
- UX optimization
- Website performance optimization
- Conversion rate optimization (CRO)

Now, let's delve into each of these focus areas to identify what each entails, standard best practices to follow, tool recommendations, and helpful resources and experts to turn to for guidance.

On-page SEO and content optimization

Content optimization speaks to the process of planning, producing, and distributing value-driven, SEO-friendly content that educates users about your products while conveying your expertise and building trust.

On-page SEO is the practice of optimizing everything on the site for search engines and users. Technically (pun intended), technical SEO is also a component of on-page SEO, but given its importance and for the sake of clarity and easier implementation, we've decided to split them into different optimization focus areas in this guide.

These are the two core elements of every effective content marketing strategy with the overall goal of increasing website traffic.

Best practices to follow

1 Keyword research

In-depth keyword research is the best way to identify the right content topics for your business that will resonate with your audience and provide the best opportunity to rank well on SERPs.

Keep in mind **some keywords will be impossible to rank for**. For example, Mayo Clinic and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were the top-ranking content providers within healthcare subindustries in our [2023 Organic Benchmarks Report](#). Both are well-known institutions viewed with high authority by Google, making it extremely difficult to outrank them for medical, biotech, or pharma keywords with significant monthly search volume (MSV). This is why you don't want to rely solely on MSV to dictate which topics you go after.

You also want to focus on the intent behind the keywords. Analyze search intent to ensure it aligns with your product offerings and provides an opportunity to showcase expertise or first-hand experience within content to help users solve a problem.

2 Audience research

The best way to create engaging content that reaches your target audience is by knowing their needs, pain points, day-to-day challenges, and goals.

Take the time to build detailed personas for each member of your target audience so you can map them to the corresponding funnel and customer journey stages they fall into.

From there, identify niche, comprehensive content topics—with the keyword research to back it up—for each persona and customer journey stage to ensure you're speaking to them wherever they are in the funnel.

3 Create quality, value-driven content

Quality beats quantity every single time when it comes to content creation. The rise of AI-generated content over the last 12-18 months has increased user demand for content created for humans by humans who have proven experience in solving their specific problems.

Invest in comprehensive, niche content topics that provide an opportunity to build trust with your audience by conveying your proven experience. This helps establish you as an authority on the topic and makes users more likely to consider your product or solution offerings. Google is doubling down on efforts to reward quality content on SERPs and penalize or de-index low-quality content, so now is the time to make the shift and future-proof your content.

4 Optimize on-page content for search

On-page SEO encompasses all the technical aspects needed within content to improve overall UX and readability and increase the likelihood of ranking well on SERPs.

Some common on-page strategies to prioritize include:

- **Optimize URL structure.** Follow [best practices for URL structure optimization](#), like keeping them as short as possible.
- **Use headings, title tags, and meta descriptions.** Include optimized title tags, headings via H1-H6 tags, and meta descriptions to help pages stand out in search, improve readability on the page, and drive more traffic.
- **Incorporate visual elements.** Users don't want an endless wall of text when Googling an answer to their problem. Incorporate visual elements like images, screenshots, illustrations, videos, and more to break up the content and improve UX.
- **Include image alt text.** Write alt tags that include the relevant SEO keyword or phrase for all images used on a web page. Alt tags should describe the image clearly for the viewer and search engines. These ensure accessibility for visually impaired users.
- **Add external links.** Include helpful external links in long-form content to reputable and relevant websites to indicate to search engines that the content is valuable, trustworthy, and authoritative.

5 Run regular content audits

A [content audit](#) offers a holistic view of your content's performance, providing key insights to inform and adjust your overall content strategy. Run content audits at least twice a year to identify:

- Gaps in your conversion funnel
- Opportunities to boost your existing content with new or supporting pieces
- Instances where keyword cannibalization is harming your traffic
- Opportunities to improve your overall site's content quality

Tool recommendations

Conductor:

For keyword and audience research. The [Explorer feature](#) is an all-in-one keyword, topic, and audience research tool to evaluate MSV and identify opportunities.

For content recommendations. [Content Guidance](#) takes the guesswork out of creating winning content by analyzing the latest top-ranking pages to determine recommendations on keywords, title tags, headers, length, questions to answer, and more.

For real-time content optimization. The AI-powered [Writing Assistant](#) provides ways to improve your content—as you write—with real-time SEO recommendations to ensure your content ranks on SERPs and resonates with your target audience.

ContentKing:

For 24/7 content and website auditing. Ensure your content is always set up for search engine success with [ContentKing's 24/7 auditing and custom alerting](#). Find out the moment links break, H1 tags get removed, content performance gets impacted, and more so you can take action before rankings get impacted.

Free Google Resources:

[Google Analytics 4 \(GA4\)](#). Analyze the user journey across pages on your website and identify top-performing pages.

[Google Search Console](#). Turn to Google Search Console (GSC) to measure content performance in search and identify opportunities to improve visibility in Google search results.



Helpful resources

- [The Conductor Dispatch](#). Subscribe to a monthly newsletter that covers the latest in SEO and content marketing with comprehensive guides, top resources from around the web, and an actionable SEO tip every month.
- [On-page SEO checklist](#). Download this SEO cheat sheet so you never forget an on-page SEO element again.
- [Content Optimization Guide](#). Read this in-depth article for more insights on optimizing content effectively.

Technical SEO

Technical SEO encompasses any technical website optimizations that make it easier for search engines to discover, crawl, index, and render pages on your website more effectively.

The goal of these optimizations is to improve your organic search rankings and increase organic traffic. While on-page SEO and content optimization focus on the front-end, technical SEO is all about the behind-the-scenes work on the back-end that determines website health and performance.

Best practices to follow

1 Optimize XML sitemap and site structure.

Google still needs an XML sitemap to find your site's URLs. Create a clean and optimized sitemap and implement regular audits to ensure new pages are getting indexed.

Your site structure, or your website's information architecture, helps search engine bots understand the most essential content on your site. Related pages should be grouped together via subfolders to help bots understand the relationship between your pages. Related strategies to implement include:

- **Addressing hierarchy issues within your site structure** ensures that the most important pages for your business are at the top of the hierarchy with the highest number of relevant links.
- **Implementing a consistent, logical URL structure** (if you haven't already) to help users and bots understand where they are on your site.
- **Adding breadcrumb menus** for improved navigation.

2 Maximize your crawl budget.

Your crawl budget refers to how many pages are crawled by search engines in a set period of time. For smaller sites, this isn't a major concern. For larger sites, maximizing your crawl budget is critical, as search engines only crawl your site for a set timeframe, so you want to provide them with the most efficient and issue-free pages.

Two effective strategies to make the most of your crawl budget:

- **Implement a solid internal link structure.** How pages within your website link to one another plays a big role in crawl budget optimization because pages with few internal links from moderately important pages get much less attention from search engines than, say, a page that's linked from your homepage. Make sure that your most important pages have plenty of internal links, but don't overlook this for top-performing historical pages and new pages.

For example, if you have a blog from 2015 that drives a lot of organic traffic, make sure you're still linking to it from other content. Because you've created more blog content since then, it's likely getting pushed down your website's internal link structure and could be overlooked in crawls.

- **Prevent duplicate content.** You can use canonical tags to avoid duplicate content issues or prevent search engines from indexing pages with very similar content to other pages, but a better strategy is to prevent duplicate content in the first place. You can prevent, or at the very least minimize, duplicate content by:
 1. Setting up website redirects for all domain variants (HTTP, HTTPS, non-WWW, and WWW).
 2. Making internal search result pages inaccessible to search engines using your robots.txt. Here's an [example robots.txt for Magento](#) that makes internal search results, login pages, session identifiers, and certain filtered result sets inaccessible to crawlers.
 3. Disabling dedicated pages for images.
 4. Being careful around your use of taxonomies such as categories and tags.

3 Optimize your structured data.

In an SEO context, **structured data refers to the markup on a page (schema) that provides additional details about the content on that page.** Effective implementation of structured data leads to higher CTRs by winning SERP features, more SERP visibility, better indexing, and more by helping search engine crawlers and AI crawlers better understand the information on your website.

Making sure you're correctly implementing schema is essential to boosting your organic results and, in turn, your organic traffic. Optimizing your structured data can increase your odds of winning Rich Snippets and different SERP Result Types. Because Rich Snippets and Result Types appear at the top of page 1 in Google, winning one or more of these results drastically improves the organic CTR for the featured page.

4 Implement 24/7 auditing and monitor your site in real-time.

One of the biggest challenges for SEOs is how long it can take to become aware of an SEO issue on your site. Over one-third of critical SEO incidents went unresolved for **at least four weeks**, according to a recent ContentKing survey.

The negative impact this can have not only on your rankings but also on your bottom line can be disastrous. This is why implementing 24/7 auditing to monitor your site in real-time should be a top priority so you can take action before traffic is impacted.

Tool recommendations

ContentKing: 24/7 Technical Auditing

For sitemap monitoring. Monitor the status of your sitemap(s) more frequently with ContentKing's Sitemap Monitoring functionality to boost efficiency, save time, and identify issues sooner. ContentKing audits all of your XML sitemaps and sitemap indexes every hour.

For structured data auditing. Audit your structured data types using ContentKing to identify opportunities where optimization is needed and get visibility into the schema markup across your entire site.

For evaluating the impact of optimizations. As a part of your audits, ContentKing's Changelog provides a complete stateful index on every optimization made at the page level and tracks how issues have changed over time across any date range. That way, you can track the impact of optimizations on overall site performance..

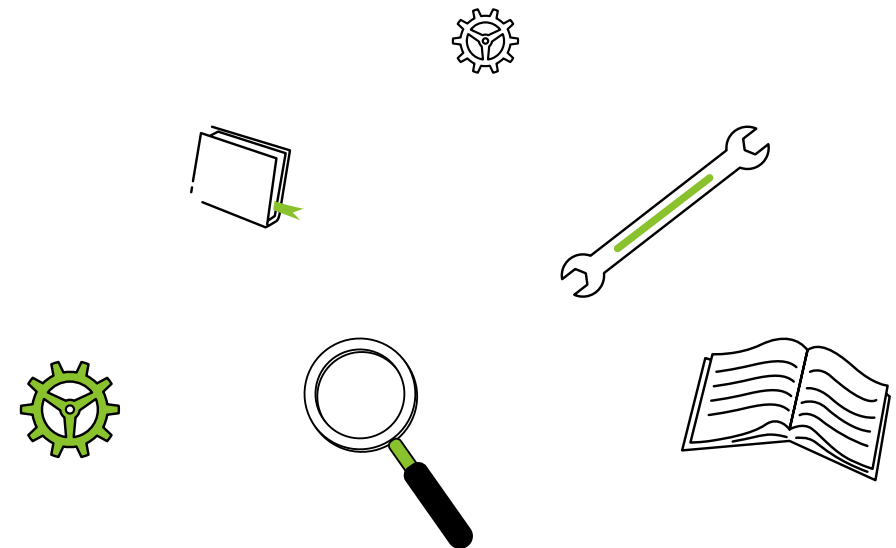
For real-time alerting. ContentKing's real-time alerting means you don't have to wait for a crawl to know if any changes or issues occur; you can fix technical issues and maintain compliance before your traffic and rankings get impacted.

- Plus, automatic prioritization of issues by impact and unlimited customization across page segments, alerts, and more deliver the relevant data you need for your specific goals.

Free Google Resources:

Google Search Console. A free tool for monitoring, managing, and troubleshooting your website's indexing, visibility, and performance in Google search results. GSC also monitors your website's health by alerting you about crawling or indexing issues.

Google Analytics 4 (GA4). Audit your website content and check traffic stats in GA4 to identify technical SEO issues.





Helpful resources

- [**XML Sitemap Guide**](#). Read this in-depth article for everything you need to know about XML sitemaps, including limitations, best practices, FAQs, and more.
- [**Site Structure Guidance**](#). Learn the importance of information architecture and how to structure your site accordingly.
- [**URL Structure Guide**](#). Find out how to build an SEO-friendly URL structure.
- [**Crawl Budget Explained**](#). Get answers to all of your crawl budget questions with this in-depth article.
- [**How to Use Canonical URLs**](#). Learn how to implement canonical URLs to resolve duplicate content issues on your site.
- [**Schema Guide**](#). Discover the most popular schema types and learn how to implement structured data using Schema.org.
- [**Conductor Academy Technical SEO Hub**](#). Make the most of the resources Conductor's Academy has to offer by checking out our Technical SEO guides for more in-depth guidance.
- [**SEO experts to follow**](#). Check out this roundup by Search Engine Journal to find the top SEO experts to follow on LinkedIn and Twitter/X.
- [**SEOFOMO newsletter**](#). SEOFOMO's 30,000+ subscriber count speaks for itself in terms of the value it delivers. Aleyda Solís, a well-known SEO expert and thought leader, pulls together the latest in SEO to deliver a weekly newsletter she would want to receive herself.
- [**Search Engine Roundtable**](#). Founded and edited by SEO expert Barry Schwartz, Search Engine Roundtable is a go-to SEO resource on the latest algorithm updates, changes from Bing and Google, and more. You can also [**subscribe**](#) to make sure you never miss an update.

UX optimization

UX research and optimization is the continuous process of analyzing user behavior on your website and implementing changes to create a more intuitive, accessible, and visually appealing experience that increases conversions and customer loyalty.

Providing a smoother UX can make all the difference in keeping users on the page, getting them to convert, and increasing the likelihood that customers will be more likely to return and make additional purchases. Plus, dwell time—how long a Google searcher spends on your site before returning—is a significant ranking factor for Google, so improving this can boost website visibility in Google's SERPs.

Best practices to follow

1 Start with a UX audit.

It's easy to think you know what's working and what's not, but the best first step is to conduct a UX audit to gather quantitative data that provides clear insights you can take action on. A UX audit is a deeper dive that helps you learn what is happening with users on your site and why. UX audits often include more advanced analyses, like session recordings, heatmaps, user surveys, and more.

It might not be realistic to do a significant UX audit multiple times a year, but it should be a regular occurrence. A full audit should be done at least once a year, with regular UX performance check-ins to identify pages with the highest bounce rates or longest time-on-page so you can improve those as needed vs. waiting to take action during the annual audit.

2 Optimize menus.

Users want a website that makes it easy to get where they want to go. Reassess the menus on your website to ensure they are straightforward and intuitive, and make sure you're also providing a complete menu on the footer for direct access to harder-to-access pages, like return policies, FAQs, and more.

3 Implement multivariate and A/B testing.

If you're considering making complex changes to your website, like changing the top navigation menu and editing your homepage or other key pages, multivariate testing is the best way to test how those edits fit together and what combination works best for users.

A/B testing is a better option when launching a new landing page or if you have a large audience. A/B tests compare two elements on your website to see which performs best. This is always the best strategy for testing new CTAs, product pages, landing pages, and new business initiatives.

Tool recommendations

For website analytics. [Google Analytics 4](#) (GA4) is a free analytics tool that can help you pinpoint which pages have the highest bounce rates, lowest conversion rates, or longest time-on-page, so you know where to get started.

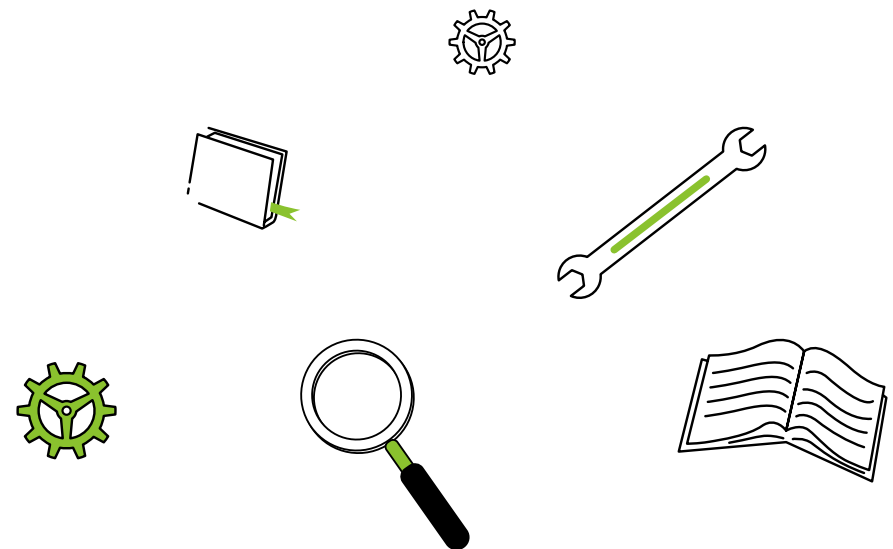
For heatmaps. Hotjar's [Heatmap feature](#) helps visualize how visitors interact with your website by showing where users click most frequently, how far they scroll, and which areas they ignore.

For user session recordings. Another feature from Hotjar, [Recordings](#) makes it possible for you to record user sessions and watch their full journey on your website so you can find and fix issues.

- Another UX research option that provides much of the same functionality as Hotjar is [Lucky Orange](#).

For market research, surveys, and user feedback. If you're launching new messaging or repositioning your brand, [Wynter](#) can be a great resource for B2B SaaS companies. You can test new landing pages, CTAs, homepage messaging updates, and more with customers and prospects and get in-depth feedback on what resonates most and leads them to buy.

For evaluating accessibility. [WAVE](#) provides a free suite of evaluation tools that identify anything on your website that harms its accessibility. It highlights issues such as missing alt text, color contrast errors, and more.





Helpful resources

- [How to conduct a successful UX audit.](#) Hotjar’s helpful 6-step guide can set your audit up for success.
- [UX Collective newsletter.](#) Subscribe to this weekly newsletter from the UX Collective for a roundup of the best UX design articles, resources, and tools (curated by a community of UX designers and developers) on topics ranging from user research to interaction, UX design, testing, and more.
- [UX Design Weekly.](#) Check out this weekly newsletter for the best UX design articles, tutorials, resources, and tools. It covers the latest best practices on a variety of relevant UX topics and includes a “Featured UX Designer” section where you can learn from the most influential UX designers today.

Website performance optimization

When we talk about website performance optimization, we're really talking about increasing your site's speed. The primary goals are ensuring the website is as fast as possible, maintainable, and user-friendly.

Page speed is a direct ranking factor for desktop and mobile search results, meaning faster-loading sites are more likely to rank higher in SERPs. Not only is speed key for search engine rankings, but it also has a **significant impact on revenue generation.**

Think about the last time you landed on a website that took more than one or two seconds to load. You probably exited the page and never went back. That's what's happening on your site if pages aren't optimized for speed. Fast-loading sites generate more revenue because users are more likely to stay on the page and convert.

The best approach is a cross-functional strategy involving content, design, SEO, analytics, and web dev teams to ensure everyone is doing their part.

Best practices to follow

1 Focus on the metrics that matter.

Here's a look at the three page speed metrics accounted for in Google's Core Web Vitals that matter most when evaluating page speed, along with the ideal times or scores you want to work towards for each.

Largest Contentful Paint (LCP):

Measures when the largest element above the fold appears to the user.

Ideal Time = <2.5 seconds

Interaction to Next Paint (INP):

Replaced First Input Delay (FID) in March 2024 to take all interactions into account, not just the first input delay. It measures the time between interactions and the time the browser starts processing event handlers in response to it.

Ideal Time = <200 milliseconds

Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS):

Measures stability by monitoring how many significant, unexpected shifts of web page elements occur due to content loading at different speeds.

Ideal Score = <0.1

That's by no means a definitive list. Consider it a helpful starting point.

2 Reduce latency with a Content Delivery Network (CDN).

Use CDNs to distribute website content across multiple servers worldwide, reducing latency and improving page load times for users in different geographical locations.

Most websites are delivered from a single server that's located in a single location. The problem arises when your website visitors are located in a different state, country, or region from your origin server. The farther away they are from that server, the slower the website loads.



CDNs resolve this by replicating assets like images—or your entire website—across a global network of servers. So, when a visitor from Australia opens your page, they receive all of your content via their nearest CDN location (Sydney), and not your New York-based server, for example. The content doesn't have as far to travel and website speeds increase dramatically.

Another best practice is implementing GZIP compression to reduce file size during transfers.



3 Optimize code.

Ensure that HTML, CSS, and JavaScript code is clean, concise, and well-structured. Minify and concatenate CSS and JavaScript files to reduce file sizes. Remove unnecessary white spaces, comments, and code that isn't used.

4 Optimize content delivery.

Prioritize critical content above the fold to ensure faster rendering of the initial viewport. Defer non-critical scripts and stylesheets and use asynchronous loading techniques to improve page loading speed.

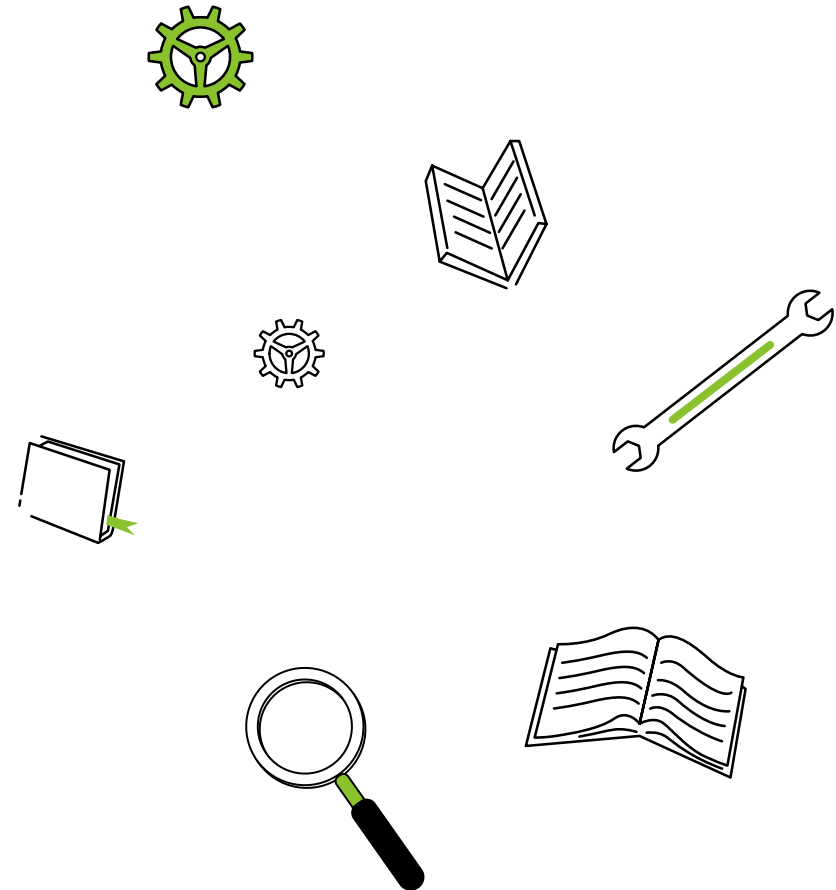
Tool recommendations

For measuring page speed. [Google's PageSpeed Insights](#) (PSI) is Google's free tool for measuring website speed and performance on mobile and desktop devices. It's heavily based on the Core Web Vitals (CWV), which are the three metrics Google uses to gauge your UX, and provides performance scores and reports on whether your page passes the CWV test.

- [Google Search Console](#) now provides a [CWV report](#), showing URL performance grouped by status, metric type, and URL group.

For improving page quality. [Lighthouse](#) is an open-source, automated tool developed by Google to help web developers enhance the quality of any page. It has audits for performance, accessibility, and more.

For real-time performance monitoring. [ContentKing](#) provides 24/7 website monitoring and allows you to track the Web Vitals metrics for every page on your website so you know the moment performance drops. It monitors for all CWV metrics and additional metrics like Total Blocking Time and Speed Index.





Helpful resources

- [**Why Page Speed Matters: 10 Case Studies.**](#) Prove why page speed matters and get buy-in from leaders on website optimization investments with these ten case studies.
- [**The Ultimate Guide to Core Web Vitals.**](#) Learn how to measure, intercept, and improve your Core Web Vitals to deliver a better user experience with this in-depth guide.
- [**Speed Tweak of the Week.**](#) Check out this weekly online publication for news, tips, and tutorials on front-end web performance optimization. They've been at it since 2003, so you can trust they know what they're talking about.

Conversion rate optimization

Conversion rate optimization (CRO) is hyper-focused on—you guessed it—increasing the percentage of conversions on a website.

On-page SEO, content optimization, technical SEO, and performance optimization all lead to an increase in conversions because you're getting more traffic to your site. Conversely, CRO will lead to more conversions even if your website traffic remains the same. This is why it's a crucial optimization strategy for all websites focused on driving conversions, including eCommerce sites.

Best practices to follow

1 Optimize and rearrange CTA elements.

Optimizing and rearranging CTA elements is crucial for CRO. Here are a few elements to focus on or incorporate:

- **Placement and visibility.** For maximum visibility, you want to make sure CTAs are in prominent positions above the fold. Using contrasting colors or design elements makes CTAs stand out from surrounding content.
- **Clear and concise language.** Always use action-oriented, straightforward language and communicate the specific value or benefit the user will receive by clicking the CTA.
- **Specificity and relevance.** Tailor CTAs to match the user's intent and current stage in the funnel or buyer's journey. Use more specific CTAs on product or service pages ("Add to cart," "Purchase now") than on informational pages ("Learn more," "Get a quote").
- **Urgency.** Creating a sense of urgency is an effective way to increase demand and conversions. Incorporate urgency-inducing language or countdown timers to create that sense of urgency ("Limited time offer," "Sales ends tomorrow"). You can also convey limited availability or exclusivity to increase a sense of urgency ("Only 3 spots left," "Exclusive access").
- **Mobile optimization.** Ensure your mobile users are still optimized to convert by ensuring CTAs are large enough for easy tapping on mobile devices. Consider using sticky or floating CTAs that remain visible as mobile users scroll on smaller screens.

2 Improve microcopy.

Microcopy refers to the short-form copy elements that help users understand what actions to take. Within CTAs, microcopy communicates what action they'll take if they click the button. Think: "Download now," "Start your free trial," "Add to cart," etc.

It's only a few words but can greatly impact whether users convert. Experimentation is key to finding what works best across different pages or products. What works in your head might not work well with your audience. This is where A/B testing and user surveys come in handy to provide accurate data and feedback on the best options to drive users to convert.

3 Add social proof.

Users want a reliable source of information on why they should trust your product, services, or solution is the best option available. That's where social proof comes in.

Incorporating customer testimonials, quotes, reviews, ratings, and other trust signals within the CTA block or on the same page builds credibility. It increases confidence in your products or services, leading more users to convert.

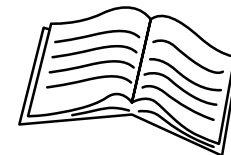
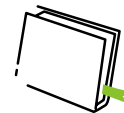
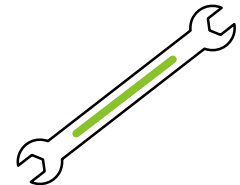
Providing authentic social proof can be the difference between securing a high-quality conversion or risking another abandoned landing page.

Tool recommendations

For A/B testing CTAs. [VWO](#) (Visual Website Optimizer) is a behavioral analytics tool that offers A/B testing so you can experiment with CTAs.

For landing page optimization. [Unbounce](#) is a landing page builder and CRO platform that can help you create more effective landing pages. The platform includes A/B testing, so you can also experiment with CTAs.

For tracking user conversion behavior. [Hotjar](#) enables user behavior and conversion tracking across your website via heatmaps, session recordings, user surveys, and more. It helps identify areas for improvement and issues holding users back from converting.





Helpful resources

- [**CRO experts to follow.**](#) Check out this roundup by VWO to find the top CRO experts to follow on Twitter.
- [**B2B CRO Strategies.**](#) Speaking of VWO, the CRO platform also has this helpful blog on optimizing conversions for B2B websites.
- [**CXL CRO & Testing Blog.**](#) Explore a wealth of resources on CRO and testing with CXL's blog. Plus, [**subscribe to the CXL newsletter**](#) for a weekly update on the latest conversion tips, tricks, and insights.

Ready, set, optimize

Website optimization isn't a one-and-done deal. It's an ongoing process that requires collaboration across multiple teams. By breaking it down into those five core focus areas and following the expert tips and best practices provided, you'll be well on your way to transforming your website into a lead-generating, revenue-driving machine.

Remember, small tweaks can make a big impact, so don't be afraid to experiment, iterate, and continuously refine your approach.

Stay tuned for comprehensive guides that delve deeper into each of these five core optimization areas coming later this year.

Start Optimizing with Conductor

Maximize your website's potential with the top-rated Website Optimization & Intelligence Platform. Access actionable SEO, content, and technical insights, real-time website monitoring powered by ContentKing, and smarter optimization workflows to boost traffic and revenue.

Try Conductor for free