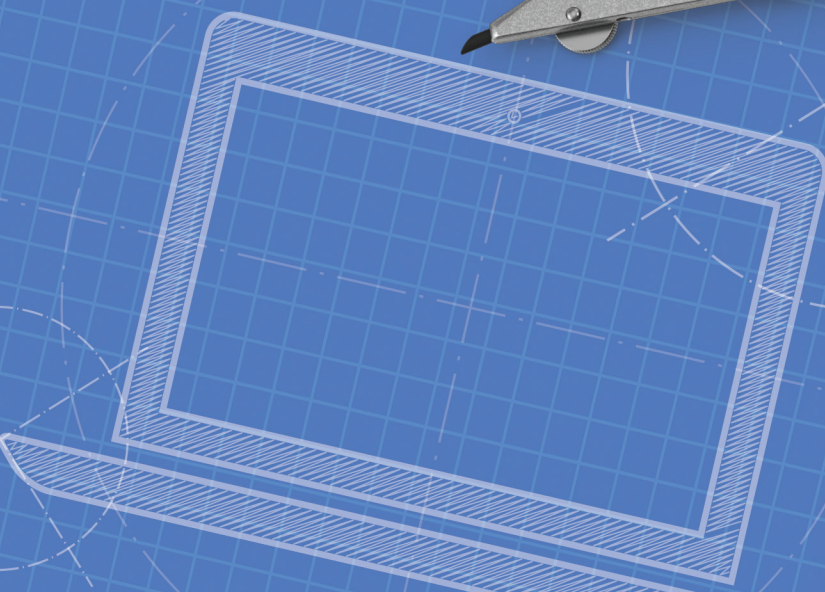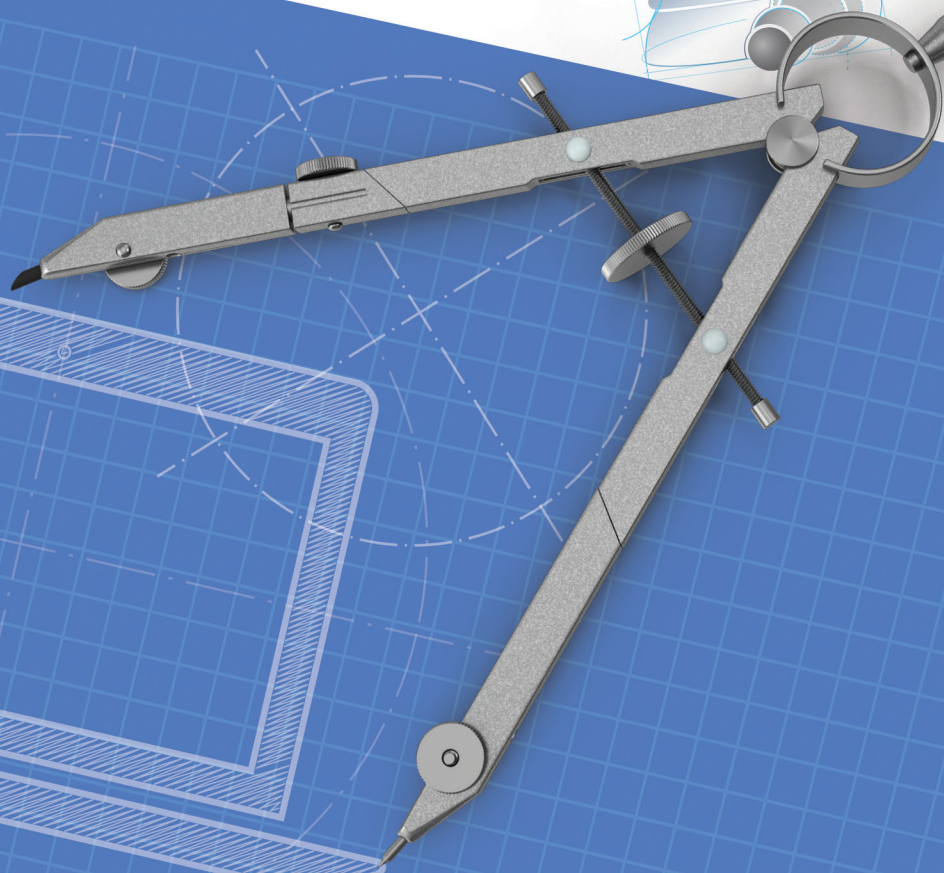# HOW TO:

OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE

FOR SEARCH

> *With Google and other search engines being more intelligent than ever, it can be challenging for your site to stand out against the competition.*

HOW TO OPTIMIZE
A POLITICAL WEBSITE FOR SEARCH ENGINES

Too often, political campaigns underutilize search engine optimization (SEO) as a cost-effective way to promote a message. This lack of planning is unfortunate, as SEO is a free way to gain attention from voters.

Like any other part of a campaign, optimizing for search should be approached strategically to maximize results within the available budget.

The most obvious benefit of political SEO is the ability to control your online identity. If a voter searches for your candidate's name and the site is not the top result, you are allowing someone else to steer the online conversation into an uncontrolled direction.

By following these seven essential rules, you can increase organic website traffic to your political website:

1: LAUNCH YOUR WEBSITE EARLY!

Having your SEO-optimized content fully listed on Google can take months.

As many political campaigns are built from scratch, Google will be indexing a new domain for the first time. The earlier you start your site and implement a strategy, the better off you will be.

If possible, include a blog. With frequent updates of meaningful content, a campaign will continually add fresh information to Google's index through keywords. Or, if a blog is not possible, keep an updated "news" section.

Starting early also gives more time for supporters to be excited about your site and potentially generate meaningful inbound traffic, which will improve your Google index rankings.

PRO TIP: There are no shortcuts for SEO. Start early, generate content that voters are looking for, and make adjustments as needed.

2: HAVE A SITE DESIGN THAT LOADS QUICKLY

At Majority Strategies, our campaign site designers think strategically. They know your website must be personable and legible, with easy-to-read fonts.

One major factor that Google uses to affect the rank of your site is how quickly it loads. If the site uses large images and videos, the page load will increase.

You do not want to lose voters' attention because your site is too slow or difficult to read.

Also, the quality of your mobile template is essential. As Pew Research reported, 81% of Americans have a smartphone, and approximately one-in-five American adults use their smartphone as their only access to the internet. That means a large percentage of your visitors will never see your full desktop template.

Image files should be compressed and optimized for internet use. Instead of posting many photos from different campaign events on the site, consider using one photo and save the additional content for the campaign social media accounts.

Here is Google's tool for testing the speed of your site: https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/

## 3: PUT THE CANDIDATE AND STATE/RACE IN THE TITLE BAR

The words used in the title bar of your site will be the words that search engines most associate with it. Use the candidate's name as well as details about the race (such as state and district) to perform best for those crucial keywords. Wordpress and other content management systems should give you control to edit title tags.

4: MAKE SURE YOUR WEBSITE HAS QUALITY CONTENT

Google's frequent search algorithm changes happen with the goal of improving the end-user experience. Today, Google evaluates your site based on expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness.

One of the biggest mistakes campaigns make is adding copy to a website without thinking about word choice. This copy is your introduction to people interested in learning about your candidate or cause and should be drafted carefully.

Google is going to make judgment calls on the quality of your content. Make sure searchers can find what they are looking for.
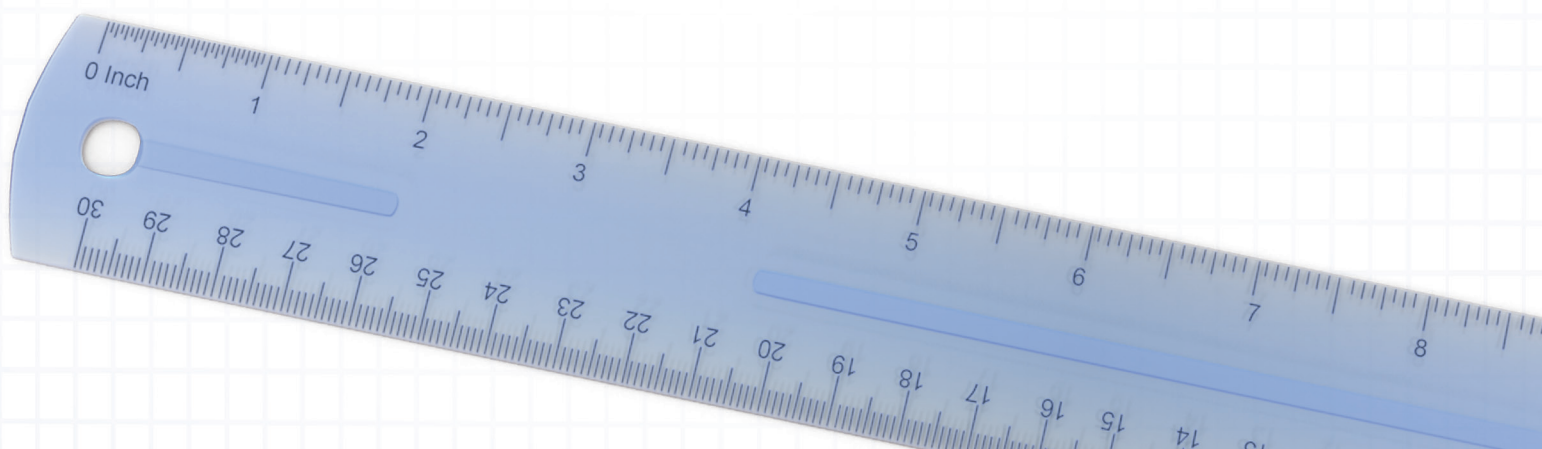
5: SPEAK TO LIKELY SEARCHER'S INTENT WITH MEANINGFUL KEYWORDS

The quality content mentioned in step #4 should have relevant keywords that help Google index the site.

Begin by thinking about what search phrases might be to find your site.

Generally, the focus should be on high-value search keywords that are easy for Google to rank. Shorter keywords are searched more frequently but are harder to stand out because many other sites utilize them.

PRO TIP: Focusing on *searcher's intent* is the foundation for SEO success. Figure out why visitors entered a search query and make sure they can easily find the most relevant page or blog post.

However, keywords that are a longer phrase ("long tail searches") will target a niche audience with a strong chance of appearing higher on the result list. They are especially useful for lower-ticket campaigns, which have a smaller potential audience.

These keywords should be used in the page headlines (html <h1> tags), subheadlines (<h2>, <h3>, etc), and the url (i.e., yourcandidate.com/your-keywords).

The site should also be informative. Google is scanning the content of your copy and is ensuring your site viewers feel satisfied with the answers they receive from your website. If Google notices users quickly exit the site, your ranking will suffer.

6: UTILIZE GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

While Google may find your website organically, you can initiate the indexing process by visiting https://www.google.com/webmasters/ and verify a new site.

It is ideal for the site to have a sitemap, which is a simple directory that lists the pages on the site and serves as a roadmap for how Google will scan it. Sitemaps are updated when new content is added and is not visible to the end-user. Generally, a sitemap is included by default in Wordpress (i.e. yourcandidate.com/sitemap.xml) and other popular content management systems.

7: GET SOCIAL

Social media platforms are increasingly important for SEO.

Facebook pages, Instagram feeds, and Twitter accounts are indexed at the top of search results. If your Twitter following is large enough, your Google results will include a highly visible carousel of recent tweets.

Search engines view backlinks to your site on social media as "recommendations." If links are shared often, Google has more evidence that your content is useful and authoritative, which improves rankings.

By launching your site early and following these seven steps, your campaign or advocacy site will have more opportunities to attract meaningful useful search traffic.

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