Basic SEO Checklist for a New Website

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What is SEO and Why It Matters from Day One

What is SEO? SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is simply making your website easy to find on Google and other search engines. It's about helping people who are looking for what you offer to discover your website.

Why think about SEO from the beginning?
- It's much easier to set up things correctly now than fix them later
- You'll start appearing in search results sooner
- You'll avoid having to redo work or redesign your site
- Your website will work better for both visitors and search engines

Think of SEO as putting up proper road signs to your organization or work. Without these signs, people might never find what you have to offer.

Tools to Set Up Beyond Your Website

Google Analytics 4 (GA4)
What is Google Analytics 4? Google Analytics 4 is a free tool that shows you who visits your website, which pages they look at, how long they stay, and where they came from. It's like having a visitor logbook for your website.

Google Search Console
What is Google Search Console? This is another free Google tool that helps Google find and understand your website.
Why you need it:
- It tells Google your website exists
- It shows you if Google is having problems reading your site

- It reports which keywords people are using to find your site
- It alerts you to any issues that might be hurting your search ranking

Need help setting these up? DCN Tech Champion for Analytics, James Akers, will be able to help you get these tools configured correctly.

Mobile-Friendly Check
- Check your website on your phone to make sure it looks good
- Most website builders automatically create mobile-friendly designs, but it's always good to check

Website Compliance and Security

Cookie Consent
What is cookie consent? When you use Google Analytics, your website places small files called "cookies" on visitors' devices to track their activity. By law, you must ask visitors for permission to use these cookies.

Why you absolutely need cookie consent:
- It's required by law in many places (GDPR in Europe, CCPA in California)
- Without it, you could face fines
- It builds trust with your website visitors
- Most cookie consent tools let you add a simple popup banner that asks for permission

How Google Analytics and cookie consent work together: GA4 uses cookies to track visitors, and your cookie consent banner asks permission to use these cookies. They're two separate things that need to work together.

Website Security (HTTPS)
What is HTTPS? HTTPS is basic security for your website. When it's working, you'll see a padlock symbol in the address bar next to your website address.

What it looks like:
- Secure: 🔒 https://www.yourmusic.com
- Not secure: http://www.yourmusic.com (no padlock)

What happens without it:
- Browsers show scary warnings saying "This site is not secure"
- Visitors may leave immediately when they see this warning

- Google ranks secure websites higher in search results

Good news: Most website builders automatically include HTTPS security, so you shouldn't have to worry about setting this up yourself.

Creating Simple and Logical Web Addresses (URLs)

What a good web address looks like:
- Simple: www.yoursite.com/events/summer-exhibition
- Logical: Shows a clear path from main site → category → specific item
- Easy to read: Uses normal words separated by hyphens

Why this matters:
- Helps visitors understand where they are on your website
- Makes it easier for Google to understand your website structure
- Creates a breadcrumb trail (Home > Events > Summer Exhibition)

Example of a good structure for cultural organizations:
- Main pages directly off your homepage: www.yoursite.com/about
- Category pages next level down: www.yoursite.com/events
- Specific items at the deepest level: www.yoursite.com/events/poetry-reading

Avoid complicated addresses with numbers, codes, or random letters.

Understanding Keywords

What are keywords? Keywords are the words and phrases people type into Google when looking for something. If your website uses these same words, you're more likely to appear in their search results.

How to find good keywords for cultural organizations and artists:
- Think like your audience: What would they type to find what you offer?
- Start with broad terms: "art gallery," "poetry workshop," or "dance classes"
- Get more specific: "contemporary art gallery in [your town]" or "children's theatre workshop"
- Use free tools like Google's search suggestions: type a word and see what Google suggests

Best keywords for cultural sector websites:

- Specific phrases that describe what you offer: "community theater performances"
- Location-based terms: "art exhibitions in [neighborhood/city]"
- Genre-specific terms: "contemporary dance classes" or "folk music venue"
- Experience level terms: "beginners pottery workshop" or "advanced photography course"

Making Your Pages Work with Your Keywords
For each important page:
- Choose one main keyword phrase that matches what the page is about
    1. Example: "community pottery classes"
- Put this keyword in your page address: www.yoursite.com/community-pottery-classes
- Include it in your page title: "Community Pottery Classes in [Your Town] | Your Organization"
- Use it in your main headline: "Community Pottery Classes for All Ages"
- Mention it naturally 2-3 times in your page content
- Include it in at least one image description: "Participants enjoying our community pottery class"

Keep it natural: Write for real people first, not just for Google. Describe what you offer, what visitors can expect, and share testimonials. This helpful content will naturally include your keywords.

Got questions?

Get free advice from our SEO Tech Champion by completing this form:
https://digitalculturenetwork.org.uk/ask-a-tech-champion/