



# Make money on SEO audits

How to perform SEO audit step by step

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## PART 6: URL STRUCTURE AND LINKING

	homepage	pages
<b>Domain</b>		
name of company/website in the domain		X
no exact-match domain		X
number of characters in the domain		X
number of separators in the domain		X
<b>URLs</b>		
SEO-friendly URLs		X
only ASCII characters in addresses		
appropriate separators in addresses		
no capital letters in addresses		
optimal number of variables in addresses		
address length		
page accessibility		
<b>Internal links</b>		
text menu		X
descriptive anchor texts		
optimal internal linking		
no links causing content duplication		
no broken links		
no nofollow links		
<b>Outbound links</b>		
descriptive anchor texts		
no broken links		
number of outbound links		
quality of outbound links		
location of outbound links		
marking of advertising links		
<b>Sitemap</b>		
HTML sitemap		X
XML sitemap		X

Description:

### ⤴ **Domain**

- ⤴ **name of the company/website in the domain** – in the process of selecting the domain name, it is important to focus on the name of the brand. Additionally, if a company operates on a local scale, it might be good to select a regional domain, such as *domain.city.com*. In this case, regardless of the evaluation, do not mark it red, as changing the domain is recommended only in extreme cases, when other elements dictate it.
- ⤴ **no exact-match domain** – in September 2012 Google introduced so called “EMD update” (*exact match domain*), as a result of which poor quality sites using domains with keywords in their names were adversely affected. Despite the fact that the key

factor here was site quality, currently purchasing a domain with the keyword increases risk at the same time giving a slight positive effect on the ranking of such a site. Put a "-" in the table if, in your opinion, using keywords in the domain name is not justified. However, do not mark it red, unless the content of the site raises your concerns and the website was already harmed by the above-mentioned update – then you may consider a domain name change.

- ⤴ **number of characters in the domain** – very long domain names are a characteristic feature of poor quality sites, which have their keyword in the domain. See if the length of the domain of the analysed website raises your concerns.
- ⤴ **number of separators in the domain** – sometimes there is a need to separate the domain name. If there are several separators, it means that the domain consists of several keywords and this is another characteristic feature of poor quality websites.

Judging the elements listed above you must remember that domain change should be advised only in extreme situations. Therefore, in most cases, despite a "-" mark, do not use red colour and do not recommend any changes.

### ⤴ **URLs**

- ⤴ **SEO-friendly URLs** – using SEO-friendly URLs is beneficial both for the users and for the search engine robots. In most cases, there is no need to visit the website to guess its content after viewing the URL structure. Take a look at the addresses below:

*<http://www.addictedtoseo.com/p=311>*

*<http://www.addictedtoseo.com/my-own-seo-ranking-factors.html>*

They lead to the same entry, but looking at the second line, you can see what the topic of the article is.

- ⤴ **only ASCII characters in addresses** – using non-ASCII characters characteristic for particular countries leads to several problems. First and foremost, such addresses are less legible due to the fact that they are replaced by many kinds of readers with strange characters. For example, the character "ś" (the Polish one) will be replaced with "%C5%9A". You may also have problems with quickly querying Google about indexation of such an address – try entering, e.g. <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/ś/>, then copying the address from the browser address field and then look it up with the Google command "site:." Therefore it is best to avoid non-ASCII characters in addresses.

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- ♣ **appropriate separators in addresses** – avoid using spaces in separating keywords in URLs. It reduces legibility of such addresses due to the fact that in search results and some browsers space is replaced with "%20." There will be a similar problem as with using non-ASCII characters – an attempt to query Google with the "site:" command will require you to change "%20" into a space so that the search engine can show correct results.  
An underscore character ("\_") is often used as a separator, although some search engines may not treat it as a character which separates two words, but as a linking character. The safest option is to use a hyphen ("-") as a separator.
- ♣ **no capital letters in addresses** – some search engines (including Google) treat addresses written with capital letters and their lowercase equivalents as different addresses containing the same materials. This results in a situation where several addresses, which should be considered as the same URL, are displayed in the search results and instead they cause content duplication within the domain.
- ♣ **optimal number of variables in addresses** – the more variables in addresses, the more difficult it is for the robots to determine which of the pages show the same content. If the analysed website has the so-called clean URLs, you will not have to evaluate this element.
- ♣ **address length** – if possible, page addresses should be relatively short. You cannot follow the principle that the search engine may promote pages whose addresses contain several keywords, because that may lead to over-optimised addresses, similarly to using EMD domains, i.e. those consisting solely of keywords.
- ♣ **page accessibility** – it is recommended that each of the pages of the website be available after 2-3 clicks. The most important pages are linked to from all the pages, but there are exceptions. The problem applies to complex websites with multi-level navigation – division into categories, subcategories and displaying links to pages only on the lowest level of navigation. Therefore, you should check if on the analysed website you can quickly reach all of its pages.

While analysing the structure of URLs, you may opt to change it if the existing organic traffic was not significant. In the case of websites which already enjoyed substantial search engine visibility, it should be taken into consideration whether a URL change is necessary – in such a case, it is recommended to use 301 redirects to the new equivalent of old pages; however, it will cause temporary variations in Google rankings. This is due to the fact that for some time duplicates of the same content may be visible in the index under both, old and

new formats of the address.

### ⤴ **Internal links**

- ⤴ **text menu** – text menu is the easiest to read for search engine robots.
- ⤴ **descriptive anchor texts** – one of the elements which "hints" the search engine robots about the linked website are anchor texts, commonly called "anchors." They should be descriptive and they should contain a relevant keyword of the page.
- ⤴ **optimal internal linking** – while analysing internal linking, it is important to make sure that pages are easily accessible and that there are not too many links on each page. Some websites (it applies mostly to the more complex ones) use the footer for linking offers from many different cities, but such attempts are made mostly with SEO in mind, and not the users. Because search engines do not like when websites are optimised without taking user needs into account, it is necessary to find a compromise.

Also, pay attention to anchor texts – if you list 20 cities and in each of them you add a keyword apart from the location (e.g. *New York Apartments, Manhattan Apartments*, etc.), search engines may treat this as a manipulation attempt, which may have opposite effect than expected.

- ⤴ **no links causing content duplication** – I have already described several situations in which search engines may index several page addresses with the same content. Make sure that this problem is not present on the analysed website, starting with the link in menu leading to the homepage. The standard problem of most websites is that it links to the file *index.\**, instead of linking to the address in the form *www.domain.com*.

For this purpose, you can use the program which was already mentioned several times called Screaming Frog, checking page titles. If for each page a different title was made and the tool finds duplicates, probably the same page is available under different addresses.

- ⤴ **no broken links** – when analysing this element, the program called [Xenu](#) can be helpful [<http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>], its task is to find broken links – both internal and outbound. At this stage of analysing the website you may mark if outbound links are to be examined in this way – you can note that, as information on that subject will be helpful in the next section.

If the program finds broken links on the website, generate a list of them, which will later on be attached to the audit.

- ✦ **no *nofollow* links** – remember that for now we are analysing only internal links, which lead to pages of the analysed website. If any of the pages is to be omitted in indexation, this should be achieved by using a *noindex* metatag, but on small company websites there is usually no need to use *nofollow*.

In the past, *nofollow* was used to secure against flowing of PR through such links and at the same time increase PR of the links without this attribute – if a website had 5 *dofollow* links and 1 *nofollow* link, each of the *dofollow* had 1/5 of the power. However, several years ago Google announced that they are changing what the *nofollow* attribute does. Currently, with respect to PR behaviour for other links, their type does not have any importance – if the website contains 5 *dofollow* links and 1 *nofollow* link, each of the *dofollow* links has 1/6, not 1/5 (as it was earlier) power, despite the fact that the pages linked with the *nofollow* attribute do not receive even the minimum part of PR.

Therefore, check whether it is justified to use the *nofollow* attribute in internal links.

### ✦ **Outbound links**

To quickly find all the outbound links, you can use a Firefox extension called [LinkParser](https://addons.mozilla.org/pl/firefox/addon/linkparser/) [https://addons.mozilla.org/pl/firefox/addon/linkparser/], with which you may set the colours for internal links and outbound links, distinguishing the links with and without the *nofollow* attribute.

- ✦ **descriptive anchor texts** – similarly to internal links, the links to other websites should be appropriately described.
- ✦ **no broken links** – in the previous section you have already analysed broken links, so now pay attention only to the outbound links and advise them to be updated or removed.
- ✦ **number of outbound links** – due to the suspicion of link trading or participation in link exchange systems, special attention needs to be paid during the analysis of outbound links. Pay attention to what pages they lead and whether the links seem to be useful from the point of view of a regular Internet user.
- ✦ **quality of outbound links** – website authority for search engines may drop if it links to poor quality sites. It should be advised to remove links, among other things, to web directories, which require backlinks or encourage placing backlinks, unless they have existed for many years and are useful for the users.
- ✦ **subject of outbound links** – in the event of link trading, it is a common practice that links lead to websites with completely different subject than the analysed website.

This is one of the indicators that the link was not editorial, but was intended to provide PR. By most search engines, these type of actions are seen as a manipulation attempt, therefore you need to pay special attention to it.

- ⤴ **location of outbound links** – another element which signals a manipulation attempt is the location of links. Links placed in the footer, except those which lead to the authors of the graphic layout or the whole website, in most cases result from link exchange or link trading. Another exception are image links which often appear on popular websites and lead to partner websites.
- ⤴ **marking of advertising links** – according to the Google guidelines, *nofollow* attribute should be used to mark advertising links whose publication was paid for. Therefore, if the analysed website sells advertising service, they should be marked this way regardless of whether they are text or image ads.

### ⤴ *Sitemap*

- ⤴ **HTML sitemap** – a HTML sitemap makes it easy to navigate the website both for the users and for search engine robots. In the case of small company websites, it is best if the map contains links to all pages. In the case of e-commerce and other complex websites, however, links to the most important pages will suffice.
- ⤴ **XML sitemap** – for search engine robots, an XML sitemap is much more important, mainly because the fact that this format allows additional information to be sent to search engines. These include: frequency of site updates or setting particular priorities for pages. A sitemap may be generated at <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/> and then submitted in the webmaster tools panel.