



**Fáilte Ireland**

National Tourism Development Authority

# **GUIDE TO SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION**

How to drive more traffic to your website

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# Introduction

This is a beginner's guide to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) which is a process of ensuring you appear more in search results and thus get more traffic to your website.

## Skill Level

**Basic** **Inter** The majority of the topics in this guide are suitable for anyone who has basic PC knowledge. Towards the end of the guide there are a few more advanced topics that are more suitable for intermediate users.

## Terminology

You will come across the following terminology in this guide which you need to be familiar with:

Term	Explanation
Anchor Text	If somebody is linking back to your website from another website the text that is visible on the page that links to your website is called the anchor text.
Organic Search Results	These are search results that appear as a result of a search that are not paid for. This is sometimes also referred to as natural search results.
Back link	When a website links to your website this is known as a back link (i.e. they link back to you).
Google Adwords	This is the paid advertisement system used by Google. When you do a search you generally see advertisements to the top and to the right of normal search results.
Long tail keywords	Long tail keywords are keywords that are not searched as often as the most popular keywords but still can drive a lot of traffic. For example if 'cars' was the keyword, a long tail keyword could be 'Ford Cars Ireland'. Although there are less searches on this it is more specific a term and there could still be a lot of traffic.
SERP	This is the search engine results page (i.e. what you see when you search).
Link Juice	When you provide a link to another site there is value associated with this link and this value is commonly known as link juice.

## Video Tutorials



Indicates a video tutorial. Click on the icon to watch the video. These videos demonstrate how to carry out a particular task. In order to watch the video tutorials in this guide, you will need to have Adobe Flash Player v9.0.28 or above installed on your computer.

**Note:** *When you go to watch the video, a check is done to make sure you have the correct software installed. If you do not have the correct version installed you will be provided with a prompt to download and install the correct version.*

## What is Search Engine Optimisation?

A search engine is a piece of software designed to index all relevant content on the web so that it can be found easily by internet users. The most well known and important search engine at the moment is Google.

When a search engine tries to index content on your website it tries to figure out what the content is about, how relevant it is and how useful is this content compared to content on other sites. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a process of ensuring that your content will be indexed correctly and will appear in the search listings in the highest possible place. For example, if I ran a hotel in Dublin I would really like it if my hotel website appeared as number 1 on Google when someone searches for "Hotel in Dublin". As well as ensuring that your content on some of your web pages is talking about your hotel in Dublin ideally you want other people to be talking about your hotel in Dublin and linking back to your site. Google finds out what you are saying about your hotel but what's even more important is what type of websites are talking about you and linking back to a page on your website.

The optimisation process consists of onsite and offsite optimisation.

- **Onsite optimisation** is where you ensure your website is presented to Google in the best possible way to ensure Google indexes your content according to how you would like it to be indexed.
- **Offsite optimisation** is getting links from external sites. A link from an external site which contains the keywords which you want to be indexed on is valuable. The more important the website the more value this is.

In this document we'll cover the basics of how to figure out if this website is considered important by Google.

## Your Questions Answered

### **Why does my competitor appear before me in search results for search terms?**

Google views their content more relevant and important. Relevance is assessed by content on the website and importance is calculated by how and what other websites reference this content.

### **How much do I pay for appearing number 1 on the list?**

If you manage to optimise your content correctly yourself you don't pay anything. If you need help then you'll need to pay a search engine optimisation person. The fee really depends on how competitive the keywords you want to optimise on are and how high you want to appear in the results. There are no guarantees that you will achieve number 1 position. Even if you achieve number 1 position optimisation is an ongoing process so you have no guarantees that you will stay there.

### **How much time does it take to go from way down the search result list to close to the top?**

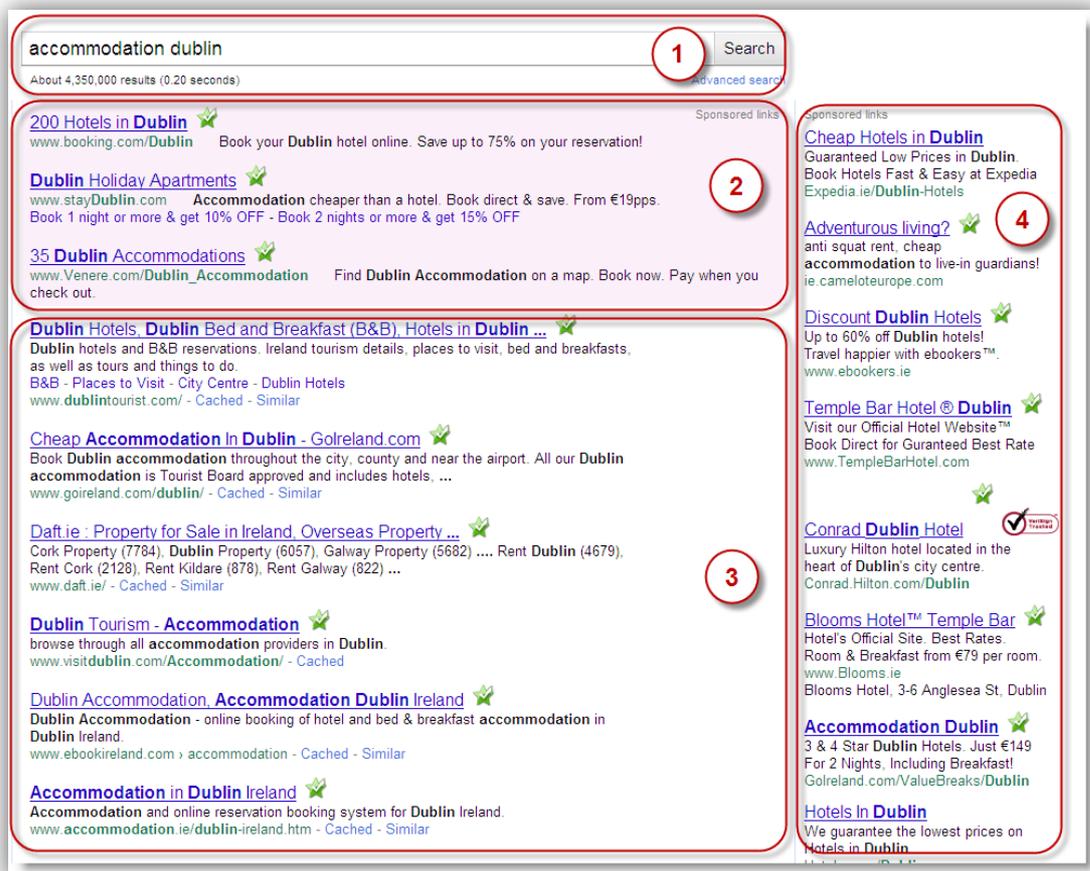
It really depends on how competitive the search term is, how far down the list you are and how high you want to go, however, if Google sees that you are optimising your site over a very short period of time it will look unnatural so it will be likely that you will get penalised for this.

## How do Search Engines work?

First of all what's important to understand is that search engines want to find good content and want to index it correctly so it's important to understand how they operate.

Search engines crawl the web to find new and interesting content. When it finds content it does it's best to index the content. When somebody performs a search through a search engine the search engine attempts to display the most relevant content.

The following shows a typical search on Google:



1. This shows the total number of results found for "accommodation dublin" so Google has over 3,960,000 pages indexed for this term so this is a highly competitive term on a global basis because there are just under 4 million pages that match the search 'accommodation Dublin' (Note: this is not an exact match so it will also match on phrases that contain these words and similar keywords)
2. This shows some sponsored advertisements

**3.** This shows some additional advertisements

**4.** This is the result of the search.

The advertisements are paid advertisements that are using Google Adwords. Advertisers are paying a fee every time one of their advertisements is clicked. The search results under these advertisements are called organic search results. Google orders these results in order of relevance and importance.

- **Relevance** is related to how Google considers the content on a particular page relative to the keywords searched and to the competition.
- **Importance** is related to websites that validated that your content is related to these keywords. For example, if the BBC website home page linked back to you using the keywords as part of the link that would be very positive from a Google point of view as the BBC website has a very high rank.



**VIDEO: Introduction to Search Engine Optimisation**

*This video steps you through the various methods you can use to see how your website is viewed by Google, such as, seeing what pages on your site are indexed, what the titles and descriptions are for each of your pages, and so on.*

*When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.*

## Keyword Research

If you want to ensure that you start appearing more for relevant search terms on Google you need to do some keyword research first. With keyword research you want to understand how many people are searching for particular keywords, how competitive these keywords are and how useful these keywords are. So here are some steps that can be used to perform some keyword research.

### Make a list

Make a list of the keywords that are relevant to your industry and the business you offer. For example if you had a B&B in Cork, some of the keyword combinations could be:

- Book Bed and Breakfast Cork
- Cork Accommodation
- Bed and Breakfast Ireland
- Inexpensive accommodation Cork

Have a look at your existing site and extract some keywords that you tend to use a lot. If you are currently running an advertising campaign (e.g. Google Adwords) then have a look at the keyword combinations on this also.

### Competitor Analysis

Have a look at your competitor sites and see what phrases stick out on this site. Perform a search on Google with your keywords and see what competitor sites come up. When you click on the links check the pages that are displayed and see what keyword combinations they have on these pages also.

Check to see what title's they are using. When you go to a webpage and look at the address bar at the top of the page you will see the page title which describes what the page is about. This is very important so have a look at your competitor's page and see what titles they are using.



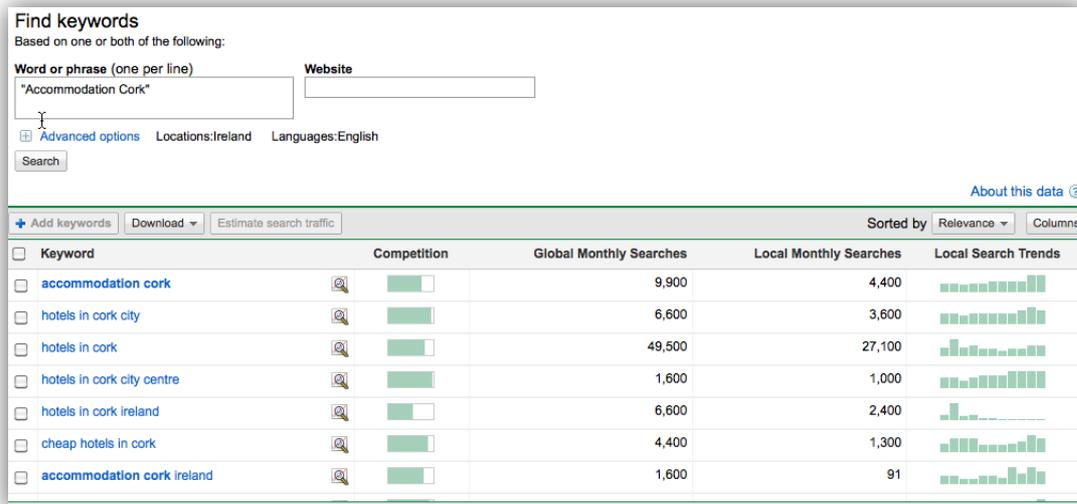
## Keyword Research Tools

There are various keyword research tools that can be useful to estimate how many times people are searching for particular keywords. The most useful (and free) tool to use is Google Keyword tool. It's not always 100% accurate but it's a good gauge of what people are searching for.

To access it go to: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

**Note:** For more information on how to use the Google Keyword Tool, take a look at the "Google Keyword" guide that is part of this series of training guides.

The following is a search for the phrase match "Accommodation Cork". When you put double quotes around the words, Google will show results based on a phrase match. This means that "Accommodation Cork" must appear in the search but there can be other words either side of it also (e.g. Accommodation Cork Ireland).



In the above search we see that Google estimates that there are 9,900 global monthly searches for "accommodation cork" and 4,400 local searches. It also shows you similar words, for example, there are 1,600 global monthly searches for "accommodation cork Ireland".

So if I'm deciding to focus in on 'accommodation cork' the keywords I will use would probably be "accommodation cork" and "accommodation cork Ireland". So by focussing on "accommodation cork Ireland" I get both keyword combinations as this contains "accommodation cork" anyway.

## Run an Advertising Campaign

One very effective way of picking out the most suitable keywords is to run an advertising campaign within Google and see which keyword combinations attract traffic and which ones convert to buying customers after you attract that traffic. At least then you'll see what keywords work for you.

Google advertising is managed through Google Adwords. For more information on setting up and using Google Adwords, see the "Guide to Google Adwords" which is part of this series of training guides.

## Competitive Keyword Analysis

When you have identified your keywords you need to do some competitive analysis to possibly rule out very highly competitive keywords and focus on different keyword combinations. Here are a few ways of doing the competitive analysis:

1. Check out how many people are searching for your terms (see "

2. Keyword Research Tools” on page 11).
3. Strength of top 10 results. Have a look at what the top 10 results are and see what type of sites they are. If they are big Accommodation booking sites then it’s likely they are going to have big budgets and lots of websites linking to them so it’s going to be hard to beat them on search. If they are similar businesses to yourself then it may be easier. Google rates each page on a website from 0 to 10, and this is known as the page rank. So a useful thing to do is check the page rank of each of the home pages of the top 10 websites using [www.prchecker.info](http://www.prchecker.info) (or an equivalent tool) to see what you are competing against. If their page rank is less than 4 that’s good news for you. A higher page rank will generally indicate a much harder site to beat on search engine rankings.

**TIP:** *If you find a website with a high page rank that is not a competitor and is a company that could promote your services it is useful to contact them to see if they will link back to you.*

4. Check out the number of search results. When you do a search on Google you will see how many results there are for this search. It’s also useful to do the following searches:



- allintitle – When Google is indexing a page it looks at the title of the page. This is a very important part of your webpage and it appears on the address bar at the top of a web page and also appears as the first line in the search results. It is useful to see how many web pages have your keywords in the page title. For example, search “allintitle:”Cork Accommodation”
- allinurl – Google also reads the web addresses and takes this into account when indexing sites so it’s important to check this also. For example, search “allinurl:”Cork Accommodation”

**Note:** *Be careful with search results, Google will personalise search results based on your previous searches and also when you search on ‘Google.ie’ the results will be different if somebody is based in another country. If your main market, for example, is in the US then get somebody in the US to perform similar searches.*

## Evaluating Research

So as this stage you should have a good idea of what keywords will be useful and how competitive they are so it’s now a case of implementing them. Your home page is the most important page of your website so focus your efforts on optimising these for the most important

keywords. For all other keywords we advise you to create specific pages focussing on these terms and ideally one page for each keyword combination. A blog post is a good way of creating information on individual pages with focussed content around a particular keyword combination.

So here's an example of how to optimise the home page on your website.

- Title – The 'title' of the page needs to have the keywords included
- Description – The 'description' of the page is an expanded version of these keywords. You do not see the description on a page but if you have a content management system generally you will be able to update it on this, if not you will need to get your developer to update it.
- Keywords – This is not used by Google but is used by other search engines. So you would enter in appropriate keywords that relates to the content on your page.
- Heading – When you read an article in a newspaper the heading is important as this attracts attention. A heading also attracts the attention of Google so make sure you have one that is related to and/or includes your keywords.
- Content – When Google goes through the content of your page it uses the title, description etc to figure out what you are telling Google the page is about. It then reads all the content to see if this matches up with what you describe.
- Images – If you have images on the page make sure they are named appropriately.

## Website Search Engine Friendly Design

To give yourself the best chance for your website to be effectively indexed you need to ensure that your website is created in an SEO friendly way. Following your keyword research you now have a better idea of what keywords will work for you so then you need to add content to reflect this. The following is a guideline of the areas you need to consider.

### Search Engine Friendly Software

You need to ensure that the software/content management system you use to create and manage your content is search engine friendly. For example:

- Page Names - These need to be configured so they are keyword rich containing the keywords you want to optimise your site on. So for example:

<http://www.cork-hotels.com/12345679.htm> - Not Good

<http://www.cork-hotels.com/book-hotel-accommodation-cork> - much better.

- Title – This can be up to 65 characters long and the most important words are the ones that appear at the start. Please make sure you have unique titles for every page. This is very important.
- Description – This is not used when indexing content but it is displayed when you perform a search on Google. This can be up to 156 characters in length. The two lines below the blue title is the description.



- Keywords – Keywords are not used by Google for search engine ranking but are used by other search engines. Put in keywords that are relevant to the page in question.

## **Unreadable Content**

There are certain types of content that are either unreadable to Google search engine or are just difficult to read so it's better to avoid them. If you go to a website and right click on the page with your mouse and select the view source option this is what the search engine is indexing. It can't index flashy images on your website or chunks of code. You often see websites where the first page of the website (most important page) is one big Flash image (a multimedia application for adding animation, video, etc). Google attempts to parse this information but most of the time it cannot. It can look good but not great for search engines. So make sure your content is readable by search engines.

## **Navigation and Information Presentation**

It is very important to have clear simple navigation and information presented in a clear and understandable manner.

### ***Linking Content***

When you have related content in multiple pages it's important to link between this content. Google is trying to see what the content is related to and what other pages are linking to it using the relevant keywords. Don't link every piece of content with every page and don't over do it on the linking but link relevant content. For example, if you have a 'things to do in cork' page it is worthwhile having a link using the words 'book accommodation cork' on the page because people may be interested in this.

As your home page is the most important page on your site, you should link to the most important content on other pages from your home page.

### ***Headings/Sub Headings***

If you are reading a document online and you are asked to summarise what the document is about and you only had a couple of seconds you would probably look at the headings, sub headings, links on the page, and so on. Google goes through your page to see what is important about the page and this helps it index it. If you've devoted a heading to a particular section then Google will give extra importance to this.

## XML Site map

XML is a standard for describing how information is presented. When Google comes to a web page it searches to see if there's a sitemap.xml file and if there is it tries to read this. This file gives Google information about what pages it should index and this speeds up the process of indexing the content. Anything that is good for Google is good for you so make sure to include this file. There are plenty of software programs that will automatically generate this file. You can automatically build a site map by going to - <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/>. When you build the site map you will need to upload it to your website.

## Page Rank & Building links

Google ranks every page that it indexes from 0 to 10. Generally if your page is a higher page rank it is considered more important from a Google point of view. There are various tools for checking your page rank for example, [www.prchecker.info](http://www.prchecker.info). Google also ranks your website but this information is not available. The page rank of your home page is generally a good indicator of what the page rank is of your site.

Generally if your page rank is higher than a competitor you have a better chance of appearing higher on search results for searches based on keywords that you are both competing for. To get some page rank you have to get links from external sites. The better the sites (i.e. the ones with page ranks that are high), the higher your page rank will be for the page.

So if you are trying to get links back from other websites here's some things to consider:

- **Page rank** – If the page on the website where your link will be has a page rank of zero then that's not really worth getting the link. If the page rank is 3 that is good, if it is 5 that's better. So pick a page with a high page rank. But there are other things to consider. If you get a link from a site with a page rank of 5 Google will pass some of the page rank on to you. If there are 2 links on the web page (one to your site and one to another) Google is only going to pass half of the page rank on to you. So try to be the only link on the web page. Also, the higher up the page the link is, the better!
- **Anchor Text** – If you want your website to be found when somebody searches 'Galway Hotel' make sure you follow the guidelines in this document to get your website indexed correctly. But also, you need to see if you can get links back to your website with these words displayed as the link. So you will see these words and when you click on them you are brought to your website. This is known as anchor text. It is also useful to have variations of the anchor text (e.g. Galway bay Hotel, Galway 5 star hotel)
- **Internal Links** – If you link between pages on your own website that can also be useful to promote a page. Your home page will probably have the highest page rank so link to important pages on your website using the relevant anchor text.
- **Relevance** – It's better to get a link from a site with relevant information on the site. So if you are a hotel in Ireland and getting a link from a website with lots of tourism information related to Ireland, this is better than getting a link from a sports related site.

Page rank is very complex and there are lots of different combinations and permutations but for now just consider that a high page rank is good for you and the way you get this high page rank is to get links from other web pages with high page ranks.

## What type of links should I look for?

The following are some examples of links you should look for:

- Natural links – If you provide really good content on your website then people will find this content and link back to you. This is the best form of linking.
- Industry Organisations – It is great if you get a link back from a well established website that has lots of relevant content from your industry. For example, a very high profile tourism site that doesn't link to too many websites agrees to link to yours. As yours is a tourism business this is a relevant link and probably from a site that Google thinks as an authority site. With this in place and good 'anchor text' this could be a very useful link.
- Partners – Do you work with other companies in similar industries with high profile sites? Maybe you could talk to your partners to see if they will link to your website.
- Directories – If there are really good directories that give listings of tourism organisations see if you can get a link from them.
- Article Writing – Could you write articles for high profile tourism related sites and get links back? Check out sites such as Ezinearticles.com. They have some value but would generally be considered low value links.

**TIP:** *If you want to check what links you already have or what links your competitor has then install [SEO Spyglass](#). This is free for displaying up to 1100 links!*

### Things to note:

- If a website is linking to you and you are the only link on the page that is much better than if there are a lot of links on the page.
- If you are exchanging links with other companies where you link to them and they link to you make sure that this is no more than 20% of all links.
- Don't get links from, or link to, really poor quality websites.
- A link appearing higher up on a page is better than lower down the page.
- 10 links from high profile websites is better than 100 links from low quality sites. So focus on the high quality ones first.
- Using variations of your keywords is better. For example, if the keywords you were trying to get links on were "Accommodation Dublin" then you could use variations such as, "5-star accommodation Dublin", "city centre accommodation Dublin". This looks more natural to Google.

### **Things to Avoid:**

- Don't get too many reciprocal links where you link to someone and someone links to you. If you are getting reciprocal links make sure it's from high profile websites.
- Don't put lots of keywords into your content just for the sake of it. Consider Google search engine to be a really smart person. When it reads content it knows what you are trying to do.
- Don't sign up to any scheme that offers you thousands of links for a price. They will do you no benefit and will really harm you.
- Don't have a splash page as your home page. This generally is a big flashy image where you have a button to click to enter the site. This is not good for search engine optimisation even though it can look pretty!
- Don't use too much flash – Flash is a multimedia format that is used to present colourful looking images. Using a bit of flash is fine but Google has difficulty reading it so avoid using too much of it.
- When you're linking between pages don't use text such as 'Click here'. This is such a waste. Use relevant anchor text e.g. 'Book Accommodation in Cork'.
- Don't have the same title on every page. If you go to a website have a look at the address bar at the top where it will show the title of the page. It amazes me that so many pages have the same title. Another way of checking this is to go to google search and type 'site:<name of website>'. Put in the website you want details of and google will be display all titles and descriptions.
- Nofollow links – When you get a link from an external website a bad link is one that is identified as a Nofollow link. A nofollow link is one that search engines more or less ignore, as they don't pass on any link juice to the site the link refers to. Unfortunately the best way to check if it's a nofollow link is to check the source code for the page (right click on the page and select view source from the menu) and look at the links on the page and search for "nofollow". If you see something like the following it's likely that your link will be a nofollow link also:

```
<a href=http://www.failteireland.ie rel="nofollow">Failte  
Ireland</a>
```

## Local Versions of the Search Engine

If I am in Ireland and perform a search I automatically go to Google.ie instead of Google.com. When you are on Google.ie the search results are geared towards Ireland so you are more likely to see results related to companies that are based in Ireland. If I am in the US and do a search on Google.com using the exact same phrase then most of the time the search results are different.

Google uses a variety of things to figure out what local version of the search engine should give preference to your website:

- Your domain name i.e. if it's .ie it is likely to be based in Ireland
- Hosting – Where the files for your website are situated
- Address – The company address on your web pages
- Google Webmaster configuration – In Google Webmaster (see later in this document) you can configure the country you want to target.
- Google Maps – Your verified address
- Links from other in country sites
- Use of local language on the site

So it's not one particular item, it's a combination. So what happens if you are an Irish company but you want to target international countries and your two main markets are Germany and the US. You really have 3 options:

### **Option A – Irish Site**

You can have a .ie site with everything configured such that Google thinks it's an Irish site. You will get plenty of local traffic but very little international traffic. To get international traffic you rely on getting links or listings on international sites and you do some Google advertising, targeting specific countries.

### **Option B – Multiple Sites**

You set up multiple websites in each country you are targeting. This is expensive because you have to maintain multiple sites and if you want to optimise each site locally this will cost money. However, you will have a better chance of getting international traffic. You may also have the cost of localising content.

### ***Option C – Multiple Domains***

You can set up your website such that if somebody searches in French and finds your site you automatically route them to a French version of the website running on a sub domain (e.g. fr.hotelwebsite.com). This means that they automatically see the French version. However, as Google search engine is based in the US it will be presented the US/English version all the time so Google won't be indexing the non English content (unless you have links to this content that Google can follow).

The above also depends on how big and powerful your website is and if your marketing/PR teams are located in one place. For example, if I have strong local teams in Marketing/PR in different countries and my website is not very high profile then I'll create separate websites for each country. If I have a centralised Marketing/PR team with a very high profile website then I'll create sub domains.

# Google Tools

There are some useful free Google Tools that will help you for SEO.

## Google Keyword Tool

This is explained already in this document. It is used to do some keyword research. To get access to it go to this address: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>.

**Note:** For more information on how to use the Google Keyword Tool, take a look at the "Google Keyword" guide that is part of this series of training guides.

## Google Analytics

Google Analytics allows you to see details of who visited your website, what keywords they used to find it, what country they originated from, and much more. It's a very powerful and free tool and you should certainly use it. To get it up and running on your website you need to copy some code from Google onto each of your web pages and after this Google starts tracking visitors.

It is such a useful tool, you can even track the parts of your site that visitors are clicking on when they arrive and then you can see what parts of your page do/don't work.

**Note:** For more information on how to setup and use Google Analytics, take a look at the "Monitoring your Website with Google Analytics" guide that is part of this series of training guides.

## Google Webmaster Tools

Google Webmaster Tools provide you with detailed reports on your website that will influence your position in Google's search engine. It's very important to monitor this to resolve any errors and to make improvements. The type of information displayed in this include:

- How many pages out of all your pages that Google has indexed
- Any errors that Google finds
- What keywords Google is indexing and where they are appearing in searches
- Where links to your sites are coming from
- Non-indexable content on your site

## Google Trends

Google Trends ([www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends)) shows you the trends for keywords for searches. It can be useful to see if the keywords you are going to focus on are getting more or less popular for searches.



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