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Nb: this article was originally published in issue 8 of the magazine La Linterna del Traductor (spring 2013) and is available at: www.lalinternadeltraductor.org/n8/seo.html (in Spanish). Many of the statements in this article may now be obsolete. Specifically, the 156 character limit for the description has been extended.

SEO for translators

Introduction

Have you ever wondered why, among the millions of results on Google, some appear higher than others? What determines this hierarchy? SEO (search engine optimisation) is a practice which aims to position websites as high as possible in the pages of results produced by internet search engines. It is a multifaceted discipline involving all kinds of considerations, most of which are interlinked, and which include –and this is the really interesting part– certain linguistic concerns.

It would be remiss of me not to warn readers of two things: firstly, SEO is a profession, so it's wise to leave it to the professionals; secondly, there are an almost endless number of guides such as this one. Despite this, I decided that it would nonetheless be useful to create this document; its added value lies in the fact that it is aimed primarily at translators and interpreters with their own websites, who can use it to capitalise on their strengths as linguistic professionals and empower themselves to make certain decisions. I cover some of the explanations in a very basic manner for those readers who lack previous knowledge of web design, although there are also a large number of technical matters outside the scope of our work which I do not address or which I mention only in passing.

Content, science, patience, sponsorship and guile – a hotchpotch of ideas and advance warnings

- Here's the **golden rule** of **SEO:** '***Content is King***'. In order for a website to acquire a good reputation, it is essential that the text is original and interesting to readers. No matter how closely you follow lists of good practices, anything that isn't content is secondary. This means there's no point in creating a run-of-the-mill website which does little more than rehash the usual clichés.

- **SEO is not an exact science**. Indeed, it would be difficult to argue that it is a science at all. The logical and mathematical operations carried out to calculate a website's ranking are considered business secrets, and the recommendations provided by search engines are few and far between. When such advice is released, it tends to be extremely brief and somewhat cryptic.

- It would be a real feat for your website to appear on the first results page on Google if the search term entered is nothing more than 'translator', as competition is fierce. Nonetheless, for those translators with a **more unusual profile** or those for whom the place where they work is a significant factor (sworn translators in Spain), it is worth investing some effort into this area. However, don't expect miracles; it's likely to take months or even years before you see results.

- **There's no reason to pay.** As well as **sponsored** (paid) positioning, there is also **organic** positioning, which consists of adopting strategies which are accessible to all. In fact, only a handful of links on a results page are sponsored, with the rest earning their position on their own merits. With due dedication and a certain amount of luck, the prospect of competing in this area with large companies which invest a fortune in advertising is not so far-fetched.
- It's important not to get ahead of yourself. If you know the little tricks used to calculate a website's rank, you'll be tempted to manipulate your page accordingly, but the main search engines claim to be able to detect **malpractice** and use a system of **penalisations** to punish what they consider to be fraud. With this in mind, it would not be at all wise to fill your title with repetitions of keywords in the knowledge that priority is given to the words in the title when establishing the subject of a page.

URL, wording, headings, titles and descriptions: what to focus on

THE URL

The **URL** (universal resource locator) is what we usually refer to as the address, which begins with 'www'.

When navigating the different **web pages** of a **site** (it's important not to confuse these concepts: a website consists of one or more web pages), we can see that each one has a URL, which usually differs from the others in the last string of characters.

Let's take the fictitious website www.triumphant-translations.com. By typing in this address, you'll be taken to the home page, where you'll be able to click on several pages highlighted in blue: 'Scientific' and 'Legal', for example. You'll find that you've accessed www.triumphant-translations.com/scientific.html and www.triumphant-translations.com/legal.html. The 'scientific.html' and 'legal.html' are no more than the names of the two files containing the content for these web pages, in a similar manner to a Word document, which are stored in the space assigned to you by the web server.

To return to the matter of SEO, the URL for a web page must include one or more **keywords** which are relevant to the subject in question. That is, you will have to consider the words which potential readers of your page may enter into the search engine, because, as is to be expected, the engine is not only informed by reputation when returning one search result or another, but also by the search algorithm.

It is possible that the designer not only failed to use a relevant term, but that they also assigned an arbitrary name to each page, such as www.triumphant-translations.com/doc1.html, wasting a valuable opportunity.

To correct this issue, all you have to do is log onto the account provided to you by the web server, access the folder which should contain all the files, and simply replace 'doc1' with 'scientific' using the 'change name' function similar to that used in Windows which should be available. Note that these systems do not usually accept diacritics.

Warning: After completing this operation, the links leading to the page previously entitled 'doc1' will cease to function. As a result, you must carry out an

inventory of the pages which contain any of these links on your own website, and change the same text string in the source code page by page.

You can access the text in the following manner: open each page in Notepad (starting with the home page, which is usually entitled 'index.html'), and you will see the content in HTML, which will include the following:
`<a href="doc1.html"><strong>Scientific</strong></a>`. There's that intruder again, 'doc1', which will have to be replaced. It's important to avoid changing anything else.

Now you've corrected the links on your own website. The bad news is that any inbound links, or those coming from external sites, will also have stopped working (this glitch is known as a broken link or dead link). It is recommended that you contact the owners of these websites to ask them to make the necessary changes. If this is not possible, it is preferable to avoid making changes, as the number of valid inbound links is a crucial factor for the reputation of the website, and it would certainly be counterproductive to lose them. One solution would be to dig deeper into web design and study redirection methods (code 404, 301, etc.).

The wording

Seriously? How dare these IT types come along and tell me my website has to be well written. And on top of that, my colleagues play along with them instead of sympathising with me!

Indeed, SEO experts frequently recommend paying close attention to the text, but too often their advice stops at ensuring correct spelling. Personally, I would like to highlight two issues:

- Although it may seem obvious, it is worth emphasising: **keywords** must appear in the text, even if it is only once. Here, it is important to clarify that by keywords I am not referring to a written text string[1], but instead to an imaginary list containing the words or phrases which, as well as being the most representative of the text, are most likely to be entered into search engines by potential readers. For various reasons, it is possible that you may forget some of the most important keywords.

- As such, it is important to note that, despite the fact that data processing for websites takes place automatically using computers and without any critical input from humans –except in terms of designing and testing programmes–, and that generally what is adequate for readers will also be adequate for search engines, in practice it is possible that you will be faced with dilemmas in which you will have to decide how to satisfy both 'species', robots and *Homo sapiens*. For example, should you use the orthodox term 'simultaneous interpreting' to educate your readers or is it better to call it 'simultaneous translation' because you know that in this way the machines will include your page in the results when the person performing the search uses the wrong word?

- Don't go too far. The wording should never be forced to increase the presence of a keyword. Apart from the fact that the resulting eyesore might scare away readers, the search engine robots are able to detect this type of malpractice. In this regard, people often talk about the idea of density (the number of times a word appears

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[1] It is possible to create a meta tag from them, but this will not have a significant impact on the rank of the website.

- in relation to the total) and guess at the ideal number. It's a waste of time engaging in speculation and juggling decimals, as the most important thing is whether or not the word in question appears.

The headings

These are the items which are named *Title 1, Title 2, Title 3,* etc. in Word. The headings of web pages represent a hierarchy which is determined by tags in the format <h1>, <h2>, <h3> and so on. The first will usually correspond to the title of the page.

It goes without saying that the headings must also contain relevant words. In addition, they must also create an outline of the contents as a whole. This very article provides a good example of how to write headings: the section entitled 'URL, wording, headings...', along with its corresponding sub-sections. Meanwhile, the heading 'Content, science, patience...' is more of a 'what not to do'.

Now that you've lost your fear of HTML, you can see what I'm talking about by opening the source code[2] for a page, using the shortcut Ctrl+U on most browsers. You'll see that, with a few exceptions, one tag is followed by another similar tag which includes a slash: for example, <h2> and </h2>. The text contained within these tags is the text which will be affected by the feature in question; in this case, it will be highlighted as a subtitle.

You now have sufficient knowledge to manage the headings on your website.

The title

The title is not always expressed by the tag <h1>; it can also appear in the tag <title>, which can be found at the top of the page.

A page is composed of 'body' and 'head', represented by the tags <body> and <head> respectively. The body contains the information which the reader sees. As well as the title, the head features a series of tags related to aspects of the design which affect the whole page, as well as others which provide information to the search providers about the page. The latter are known as *meta tags*.

Now you've located the tag for the title, and you can see that the text which you will link to it does not necessarily have to coincide with the text contained in the <h1> tag. In theory, these should be the same, as to do the opposite could give rise to a form of malpractice known as *cloaking* which consists of sending different information to the search engines to that offered to readers, but if you do decide to establish this dichotomy for some reason, it is useful to understand the implications of using both: the text for the <title> tag will be what is shown on the SERP (search engine results page) and on the top right corner of the page once it is opened; however, the text for the <h1> tag will be what is shown in the body of the page, also once it is opened. Here is a real-life example from an article from this magazine:

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[2] The text of a web page as viewed by machines, in HTML, XML or other similar languages, that is, with tags. The source code is a text file which is saved with a different extension to the one usually used.

Finally, it is important to take into account that the text for the <title> tag must contain a maximum of 70 characters: if you exceed this figure, Google will display a shortened version. This is not the only restriction: the most important words must go at the start, because in some circumstances, the excerpt of the title shown is still smaller, so you must ensure that the main idea is conveyed even in these cases. The same is also true of the *site links*.

What are site links? This term refers to the short list of links which Google sometimes shows on the SERP beneath the main title of the website. A group of site links can be seen below:

The site links for this website would be 'EUR-Lex', 'Europe', 'Countries', etc. In this case, they are all sufficiently concise and pose no problem.

The description

Now it's time to consider the most creative part of the process, and there's no doubt that writing an adequate description is a real challenge.

The description is one of the meta tags, a category mentioned in the previous section. To alter it, you will have to access the source code once again, look for the text string `<meta name="Description" content=" " />` in the head, and write the text you want to appear between the quotation marks which appear after 'content'. It is vital that every page on the site has a dfferent description, which reflects the theme it covers: scientific or legal translations, according to the previous example. The corresponding descriptions will relate to the services offered, divided into areas, instead of repeating the message of the home page, which should be more generic. This will provide you with various hooks to attract potential clients.

The description is the text which appears in the SERP just under the title. A description is not necessarily a summary. Depending on the circumstances, it may also be a quotation or phrase which hints at the content (in fact, this is the most realistic option). The descriptions of two articles from this magazine are shown below as they appear on Google, highlighted in red boxes.

The Business of Translation in Sweden. La Linterna del Traductor
www.lalinternadeltraductor.org/n11/translation-sweden.html ▾
On translators' associations, codes of conduct, language pairs, employers and agencies, rates and the options available to set up a business.

Nuestro equipo. La Linterna del Traductor: revista de Asetrad
www.lalinternadeltraductor.org/n11/equipo.html ▾
PANORAMA · La Tertúlia de les lletres, un proyecto común pensado por y para los amantes de las letras · **The business of translation in Sweden** ...

Interpretación. N.º 11. La Linterna del Traductor
www.lalinternadeltraductor.org/n11/interpretacion.html ▾
PANORAMA · La Tertúlia de les lletres, un proyecto común pensado por y para los amantes de las letras · **The business of translation in Sweden** ...

spanish cuisine conquering the english language palate	🔍

Todo	Imágenes	Shopping	Vídeos	Noticias	Más	Configuración	Herramientas

Aproximadamente 42.500 resultados (0,32 segundos)

Spanish Cuisine: Conquering the English-Language Palate? La ...
www.lalinternadeltraductor.org/n13/spanish-cuisine-terms.html ▾ Traducir esta página
A study of how **Spanish** gastronomy **is** cultivating America's **palate and language** through new culinary terminology.

Although it may seem daunting, it is possible to create a phrase which will make your page stand out from the other nine on the SERP and encourage potential readers to click on the link using the 156 characters (including spaces) which are allowed for the description. Not only is it possible to leverage this resource, it is essential given the considerable visibility of the description. A description which is left blank or which is written without due care and attention will easily give a negative impression. In the first case, the search engine may decide on the text which appears after the title, often 'Skip intro', or something equally unhelpful.[3]

As an extreme example, the two possible descriptions below relate to a single imaginary web page:

✗	At Optimum Translation, we're proud to offer an extensive network of translators specialising in the automotive industry...
✓	Experts in the automotive industry in combinations including Scandinavian languages and Spanish. quotes@optimum.es, tel.: 9000000.

In the case of the second solution, the client could get in touch even without opening the page, and this is vitally important.

I believe I have provided sufficient arguments for the potential of the description, and I will conclude this section with several additional observations:

- The title and description should be considered as two parts of a whole, mostly in order to avoid repeating words.
- There is no need to worry about entering keywords in the description or to consider any other aspect relating to search engine behaviour. You should write your description with the human reader in mind, as Google barely takes it into account in any of its calculations, simply displaying it when it considers this to be relevant.
- The description can also be helpful in dissuading readers who will not be interested in the page, as it is rumoured (I have been unable to corroborate this information) that the average time spent reading a page is used as a quality criterion. You should therefore attempt to minimise the number of 'bounces', as single-page sessions are known, as far as possible, by avoiding descriptions which trick readers or provide an ambiguous message.

Conclusion and bibliography

You have now reached the end of this guide. The objectives of the guide were not especially ambitious, and the strategies followed by each individual on the basis of the recommendations set out within it will only influence the reputation of their website indirectly. Considering the elements explained in this guide will mainly serve to adapt your website to searches made by potential readers.

Besides this, there are a series of factors (Google boasts that it considers more than 200 in total) which do directly affect the ranking, with the general opinion being that one of the most valuable is the number of inbound links. With all due reservations, given that I do not work in SEO, I would like to mention several others by way of curiosity: the reputation of the pages which link to the website in question, the quality of the source code (which must not contain junk tags), the weight of the images (this must

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[3] Despite all of this, creating a description provides no guarantee that it will be displayed. On some occasions, Google decides not to display descriptions, replacing them with an excerpt from the page.

not be higher than necessary), the time which the page takes to load (related to the previous point), the age of the website, the absence of an excessive number of reciprocal links, etc.

The significance of Google is demonstrated by the fact that I have often used the terms 'search engines' and 'Google' interchangeably. Indeed, I consider that given the current state of affairs (at the time of writing in 2012), it is not worth concerning yourself with other search engines if your experience with SEO will be limited to occasional forays.

Finally, I would like to touch upon the bibliography: I have endeavoured to include the smallest possible number of references, and inevitably, they were all written by the company which holds the *de facto* monopoly. I am aware that numerous experts provide rather more extensive information on their respective blogs, but I have decided to ignore them deliberately given that their advice, despite being highly thorough and well-argued, is based solely on personal experience. I have preferred instead to give credit to those who are familiar with the mechanisms of SEO from the inside. Without further ado, please find the bibliography for this guide below.

https://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=es&answer=35624&ctx=cb&src=cb&cbid=-j6tyf5uouj6q&cbrank=1

https://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=es&answer=35291&ctx=cb&src=cb&cbid=1o2sem53gtjh7

http://www.youtube.com/user/GoogleWebmasterHelp/videos?view=1