

Web visibility and journalism: SEO tips and best practices

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Abstract

This chapter explores the strategic integration of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in digital journalism, emphasizing its role in enhancing the visibility, credibility, and economic sustainability of media outlets. It begins by defining SEO and its evolution toward semantic SEO and Search Experience Optimization (SXO), stressing the balance between algorithmic optimization and journalistic integrity. The chapter outlines best practices for keyword research, headline optimization, semantic markup, and user experience improvements, providing actionable recommendations for journalists, editors, and technical teams. Finally, it discusses SEO as a critical component of sustainable business models in media, advocating for an ethical and quality-driven approach to digital content production.

Keywords

SEO; Digital journalism; Web visibility; SXO; Keyword research; Semantic SEO; user experience; Media sustainability; Newsrooms; Content optimization.

1. Introduction

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a key factor for online media outlets (Codina *et al.*, 2016), as it determines how many potential users (readers) can access the news published on the internet (Dick, 2011). To ensure that news articles and reports reach the widest possible audience, journalists must apply good SEO practices—a set of strategies aimed at improving the ranking of content such as news, articles, reports, etc., in search engines like Google.

SEO in the journalistic field involves aspects such as researching relevant keywords and optimizing headlines (Lopezosa & Codina, 2018), making optimal use of tags and categories (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015a), structuring texts clearly (Iglesias-García & Codina, 2016), and properly using technical elements such as meta descriptions and ALT tags for images (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015b). In addition, it is essential to create original, well-documented, and high-quality content (Lopezosa *et al.*, 2019).

Implementing all these strategies not only increases visibility and organic traffic, but also helps strengthen the credibility of the media outlet and makes it easier for readers to find reliable and relevant information (Lopezosa & Codina, 2018).

This chapter aims to provide a practical guide to understanding how SEO can be ethically and effectively integrated into journalistic newsrooms.

2. Fundamentals of SEO in digital media

As previously mentioned, SEO refers to the set of strategies and techniques aimed at improving the visibility of a website in search engines, primarily Google (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015a). In the context of journalism, this means maximizing the chances that a news article, report, or informational content appears among the top search results for a user's related query (Iglesias-García & Codina, 2016).

The importance of SEO for media outlets has two main components: not only does it allow a large portion of readers to access content through search queries (Asser, 2012), but it also enables media organizations to reach multiple target audiences, increase their influence as digital media, and better monetize their content—whether through advertising or subscription models.

One might think, then, that media organizations are forced to think more about search engines than readers, but nothing could be further from the truth. It is important to emphasize that integrating SEO strategies into journalistic production routines does not mean subordinating informational quality to the demands of Google’s algorithm. Rather, it involves adapting content to make it more accessible, discoverable, and visible (Smyrniaios & Rebillard, 2009).

Clearly, the rise of search engines as the main gateway to news has forced media outlets to reconfigure their routines, but as we will see, what ultimately matters is the quality of the content and keeping citizens at the centre (Ferran-Ferrer et al., 2013).

In addition, SEO has evolved significantly since its inception. The way it was done in the past is very different from how it is done today—and it will change in the future. In fact, in its early phase, known as traditional SEO, optimization was based on factors such as keyword density, HTML structure, or the use of links. However, this highly technical and rigid approach soon showed its limitations as Google’s algorithms began to prioritize content quality and user experience (Smyrniaios, 2015).

This led to the development of approaches such as semantic SEO and SXO (Search Experience Optimization). Semantic SEO emphasizes the meaning of content, using tools such as structured data, semantic tags (like those from Schema.org), and writing that aligns with natural language (Lopezosa et al., 2018). At the same time, SXO focuses on user experience, highlighting the need for content to be useful, easy to navigate, accessible, and capable of fostering interaction between the website and the user (Alcaraz-Martínez, 2024).

Today, both approaches—semantic and experiential—are increasingly integrated and complement each other within the visibility strategies of digital media (Giomelakis, 2023).

Google’s Search Quality Rating Guidelines, first published in 2013 and continuously updated (Google, 2025), offer valuable insight into the criteria used by the search engine to evaluate website quality. Among the most significant concepts outlined in these guidelines are the EEAT principles —Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (Alcaraz-Martínez, 2024). These principles address various dimensions related to content, authorship, and the overall credibility of a website, with the aim of determining whether the information presented is reliable—specifically, whether it is produced by individuals with relevant knowledge and whether it reflects direct or professional experience.

Google places particular emphasis on applying these principles in sensitive domains such as health, finance, law, and journalism, where content quality, accuracy, and editorial responsibility are critical to preventing misinformation and safeguarding users. Experience assesses whether the author possesses first-hand knowledge of the subject matter. Expertise refers to the author’s education, competence, or specialized knowledge in the field. Authoritativeness evaluates whether the author, page, or website is recognized as a reputable source within its domain. Finally, Trustworthiness measures whether the content is secure, accurate, truthful, and transparent.

3. SEO Best practices for journalists and newsrooms

Below are some of the most common SEO practices used in news media, specifically focusing on keyword selection and optimized writing, dual headlines, semantic markup, and the optimization of design, navigation, and website architecture.

To a large extent, any search engine optimization strategy begins with the identification of relevant keywords (Smyrnaioi & Sire, 2014). In the journalistic sector, these keywords should accurately reflect the core topic of the news story and match the search terms users commonly employ to find information. To carry out keyword research, journalists can rely on third-party tools such as Google Trends, SEMrush, Ahrefs, Majestic, Sistrix, or even Google's own auto-complete and suggested search terms.

Once the primary and secondary keywords have been identified, they can typically be integrated into the headline (H1 tag), the first paragraph, subheadings (H2, H3), the body of the text, the URL, and the meta descriptions.

This integration should be done naturally—without forcing the writing or compromising the content's quality. Therefore, narrative fluency and journalistic rigor remain priorities above any SEO tactic.

Another widely used SEO strategy in newsrooms is the practice of dual headlines (Asser, 2012). This involves using a short, direct headline on the media outlet's homepage, while applying a second, more SEO-optimized headline within the article itself. This practice, first adopted by the BBC and later standardized, allows media outlets to combine editorial impact with web visibility (Smyrnaioi, 2015).

Beyond the headline, it is also recommended to structure content strategically. This usually involves including hierarchical subheadings using H2 and H3 tags to guide the reader, writing short paragraphs in clear and simple language, using lists, and incorporating internal and external links that provide added value to the reader.

Additionally, it is essential to apply semantic markup correctly, using technologies such as Schema.org. For news media, it is recommended to at least implement the NewsArticle schema. This can be added directly to the HTML code or through specialized plugins within the content management systems (CMS) used by each media outlet. The result is the appearance of rich snippets in search results—enhanced listings that may include news headlines, ratings, images, dates, authors, categories, knowledge graphs, etc.—which both increase click-through rates and enhance the perception of the outlet as a trusted source (Giomelakis, 2023).

As already mentioned, SEO has moved beyond simply ranking content through keywords or backlinks. In recent years, search engines—especially Google—have begun to consider user behaviour as a quality signal. This has led to the emergence of Search Experience Optimization (SXO) (Alcaraz-Martínez, 2024), which combines SEO and usability to ensure that content is both visible and meets the reader's expectations.

In journalism, this means that a news article must not only be well-ranked, but also deliver a satisfying reading experience through clear, useful content and optimized navigation. If users quickly abandon the page, do not interact, or fail to navigate to other articles, Google interprets this as a negative signal, which can harm the website's ranking.

Within SXO (Search Experience Optimization), website architecture plays a key role, as its main objective is to encourage reader retention and enhance their experience while navigating the site. In general, some key recommendations to improve user experience in this regard include:

- Responsive website design, meaning the digital news platform must adapt seamlessly to mobile devices and tablets.
- Optimized loading speed, as slow pages reduce the time users stay on the site.
- Clear hierarchical structure, with well-organized menus, categories, and tags.
- Breadcrumb navigation, to guide users effectively and help them understand their location within the site.
- Internal linking, encouraging readers to explore related, valuable content.

All these strategies are part of a semantic architecture, which not only improves the user experience but also helps search engines interpret and rank a website's content more effectively.

In addition, search engines use multiple interaction metrics to determine whether a piece of content satisfies the user and meets quality standards. Some of the most relevant indicators include:

- Bounce rate: the percentage of users who visit a website and leave without interacting.
- Dwell time: the average duration of a visit.
- Pages per session: how many pieces of content a user consumes during a single visit.
- CTR (Click-Through Rate): the percentage of clicks a result receives in relation to the number of impressions.
- Pogo-sticking: clicking on a result and immediately returning to the search results page to choose another link, which signals user dissatisfaction.
- Core Web Vitals: a set of specific metrics defined by Google to evaluate key aspects of user experience, related to speed, interactivity, and visual stability.
- Other technical signals: mobile compatibility, use of HTTPS, etc.

These indicators help understand and improve the user experience, and therefore also impact SEO and SXO. In the journalistic sector, this ultimately translates into well-written content that provides added value, includes engaging visuals, useful links, and a clear navigation structure.

4. Business models in digital media and sustainability through SEO

Beyond its importance as a visibility strategy, search engine optimization (SEO) is a key tool for the economic sustainability of digital media. In other words, strong search engine rankings not only attract more readers but also improve a media outlet's ability to monetize web traffic through advertising, subscriptions, sponsorships, and other hybrid models.

Organic traffic resulting from well-implemented SEO (focused on the user) is especially valuable because it is generally stable, targeted, and free in terms of acquisition costs.

However, media sustainability cannot be achieved through technical or commercial means alone. It must be grounded in a commitment to quality, independence, and journalism's social role. In this regard, SEO can be a strategic ally—as long as it is used ethically. That is, search

optimization strategies must respect content integrity, avoid information manipulation, and help quality journalism reach the widest possible audience.

The challenge, therefore, lies in integrating SEO into a responsible editorial culture, where metrics do not replace journalistic values, but rather serve as a tool to support high-quality information.

5. SEO Recommendations for media outlets

Incorporating SEO into journalistic newsrooms does not require a radical transformation, but rather a smart and gradual integration. Below, we present a set of practical recommendations that can serve as a guide for building an SEO culture within media organizations.

For reporters and journalists:

- Use clear, informative headlines with relevant and strategic keywords.
- Organize content using hierarchical subheadings, especially H2 and H3 tags.
- Include internal links to other content from the same media outlet to expand on the information being presented.
- Cite external sources using high-quality, relevant links.
- Add images with appropriate alternative text (alt attribute) and descriptive titles.
- Improve the perception of accuracy, truthfulness, and transparency of the content.

For editors and content managers:

- Implement an editorial policy that incorporates SEO criteria.
- Monitor publications in terms of length, frequency, and quality.
- Regularly review the headlines and meta descriptions of published articles.
- Apply dual headline techniques when appropriate.
- Showcase each writer's expertise and specialized knowledge through author pages with biographies and content.
- Train the entire team in SEO, usability, and user experience.

For technical and web teams:

- Ensure a clear and scalable website architecture.
- Optimize page loading speed and mobile/tablet responsiveness.
- Integrate semantic markup (Schema.org), at a minimum using the NewsArticle schema.
- Generate updated sitemaps (general and news-specific).
- Use SEO analysis tools (such as Google Search Console, Ahrefs, or SEMrush) to monitor the ranking and visibility of news content.

About the tools:

There are numerous tools—both free and paid—that support the practical application of SEO in media environments.

Type	Tools
For SEO auditing	Screaming Frog, SEMrush, Sistrix
For user behaviour analysis	Google Analytics, Hotjar, Matomo
For backlink and web authority analysis	Majestic, Ahrefs

It is worth noting that while having SEO knowledge within newsrooms is very important, the essential goal is to build an SEO mindset across the organization. To achieve this, key steps may include fostering collaboration between writers, editors, and SEO specialists, and helping the team understand that quality and journalistic ethics must always take precedence over rankings and clickbait.

Ultimately, a newsroom oriented toward implementing SEO strategies not only enhances the visibility of its content, but also helps improve the quality of its journalistic product, broadens its social impact, and strengthens its sustainability.

6. Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, we have aimed to provide a practical overview of the key concepts, techniques, and recommendations for applying SEO in the media sector.

As we have seen, integrating SEO ethically and professionally into journalistic newsrooms does not mean abandoning the principles of good journalism, but rather adapting them to the demands of the present. For example, an optimized headline is not incompatible with truthfulness, a well-constructed link does not diminish the quality of a report, and a user-centred architecture does not weaken the narrative. On the contrary, all these elements strengthen the final outcome of journalistic products.

We would like to conclude this chapter by emphasizing that SEO should not be seen as a threat, but rather as a tool in service of journalism. In fact, we believe that when applied with judgment, rigour, and professional sensitivity, quality content reaches more people, at the right time, and in the most accessible format.

Therefore, far from distorting the profession, SEO can help amplify its social impact—reinforcing journalism’s commitment to truth, its public value, and the citizen’s right to be informed.

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