

FREE DOWNLOAD · CHECKLIST

The new-website SEO checklist.

Every technical box worth ticking before and after you launch, in the order we tick them on real client sites.

PDF

8 SECTIONS

NO EMAIL GATE

WHAT'S INSIDE

01 · Before you build	4 checks
02 · Sitemaps & redirects	6 checks
03 · On-page & content	7 checks
04 · Schema markup	6 checks
05 · Page speed	6 checks
06 · Crawl & indexation	6 checks
07 · Launch day	5 checks
08 · First 30 days	5 checks

A studio checklist from Initiate Digital · Wexford, Ireland · initiate.ie

How to use this checklist

This is the list we actually run when we launch a website, refined every time something bit us a fortnight after go-live. It is not a course and it is not exhaustive marketing advice. It is the technical groundwork that decides whether Google can find, understand and trust a new site, plus the handful of on-page basics that do the heavy lifting.

Most of it is meant to be done **before** you go live. Work top to bottom, tick as you build, and treat the last two sections as your launch-day and first-month routine. If you are not the one building the site, hand this to whoever is and ask them to walk you through it.

HOW TO READ IT

Empty box = still to do. The order matters: crawlability first, then content, then the extras. Skipping ahead to schema before your pages are even indexable is the most common way people waste an afternoon.

You cannot rank a page Google cannot crawl, read and trust. This list is those three things, in that order.

A quick note on honesty: no checklist gets you to the top of Google, and anyone promising that is selling something. What this does is remove the self-inflicted problems, the broken redirects, the blocked pages, the missing basics, so your actual work has a fair chance of being found.

01

Before you build

Decisions that are painful to change later.

Five minutes here saves a migration later. Lock these down before a single page is built.

- ☐ Pick **one** canonical domain (www or non-www, https) and commit to it everywhere.
- ☐ Decide your URL structure: short, lowercase, words separated by hyphens, no dates you will regret.
- ☐ Map every important old URL to its new home if you are replacing a site (you will need this in section 02).
- ☐ Agree who owns the domain, hosting and DNS logins, and write it down somewhere you will find it in a year.

WHY IT MATTERS

Changing your domain or URL pattern after launch means redirects, lost signals and a nervous week watching traffic. Deciding once, up front, costs nothing.

02

Sitemaps & redirects

Getting found starts with being crawlable.

This is the plumbing. If it leaks, everything downstream suffers quietly.

- ☐ An XML sitemap is generated and lists only real, indexable pages.
- ☐ The sitemap is submitted in Google Search Console (section 06).
- ☐ A redirect map covers every old URL that is changing.
- ☐ Permanent moves use 301 redirects, not 302 (temporary) ones.
- ☐ No redirect chains or loops (A to B to C). Point straight to the final URL.
- ☐ A canonical tag on every page tells Google the preferred version.

EASY TO MISS

Redirect chains are the silent killer. Each hop loses a little, and three hops on a slow server is a real speed hit. Always redirect straight to the destination.

03

On-page & content

The basics that still do most of the work.

Unglamorous, but this is where most small sites win or lose the easy rankings.

- ☐ Exactly one **<h1>** per page, describing what the page is actually about.
- ☐ A unique, descriptive title tag per page (roughly 50–60 characters).
- ☐ A unique meta description per page that reads like a human wrote it (~150 characters).
- ☐ Headings (h2, h3) used in a logical order, not chosen for how they look.
- ☐ Every meaningful image has honest, descriptive alt text.
- ☐ Internal links connect related pages with clear, plain-English link text.
- ☐ One clear primary action per page, so visitors and Google know the point of it.

QUICK TIP

Write the title and meta description for a human first, then check the length. A description that reads like keyword soup gets rewritten by Google anyway.

04

Schema markup

The structured data that earns its keep.

Add the types that can actually change how you appear in search. Skip the rest.

- ☐ Organisation or LocalBusiness markup with your real name, address and contact.
- ☐ Breadcrumb structured data so search results show your site hierarchy.
- ☐ Article or Product markup where the page genuinely is one.
- ☐ FAQ markup only on pages that really do answer questions.
- ☐ One clear primary type per page, not five competing ones.
- ☐ Every page validated in Google's Rich Results Test with no errors.

BE HONEST WITH IT

Schema describes what is on the page, it does not invent it. Marking up FAQs you do not have, or reviews you did not receive, is against Google's guidelines and can earn a penalty. Only mark up what is genuinely there on the page.

05

Page speed

A ranking factor and a conversion factor.

Set the ceiling before you build, not after a client complains it feels slow.

- ☐ Core Web Vitals targets agreed up front (LCP, CLS, INP).
- ☐ Images sized to how they display, compressed, and served in a modern format.
- ☐ Fonts subset and preloaded, with a sensible fallback so text shows immediately.
- ☐ Render-blocking scripts deferred or removed.
- ☐ Lazy-loading on below-the-fold images.
- ☐ Checked in Lighthouse on a **mobile** profile, not just desktop.

THE COMMON TRAP

One hero image exported at full camera resolution can undo every other optimisation. Check your largest image first, it is almost always the problem.

06

Crawl & indexation

Making sure Google can actually index it.

You have built it. Now confirm search engines can find and keep it.

- ☐ Search Console verified for the site.
- ☐ Sitemap submitted and reporting as read, with no errors.
- ☐ The Index Coverage / Pages report is clean of surprises.
- ☐ robots.txt is not accidentally blocking anything important.
- ☐ No stray **noindex** tags left over from the staging site.
- ☐ Your key pages confirmed indexed with a live **site:** search.

THE CLASSIC LAUNCH BUG

Staging sites are usually set to noindex so Google ignores them. The number one launch-day SEO mistake is going live with that tag still in place. Check it first.

07

Launch day

The 30-minute go-live routine.

Do these in the first hour after the site is live on the real domain.

- ☐ Remove the site-wide noindex and confirm robots.txt allows crawling.
- ☐ Re-submit the sitemap on the live domain in Search Console.
- ☐ Click through every navigation and footer link for 404s.
- ☐ Test the contact form and confirm the message actually arrives.
- ☐ Load the site on a real phone, not just a resized browser window.

08

First 30 days

What only shows up on the live site.

Some problems only appear once real people and real crawlers arrive.

- ☐ Check Search Console Coverage weekly for new errors.
- ☐ Watch for pages indexed that should not be (tags, filters, duplicates).
- ☐ Confirm your most important pages are ranking for their own name at least.
- ☐ Fix any 404s appearing in the Crawl / Pages report.
- ☐ Set a reminder to review this list again before your next big change.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

This is the technical floor, not the ceiling. Once it is solid, the compounding work is content and local signals, the slow stuff that actually moves rankings over months.

That's the list.

If you worked through all eight sections, your new site is crawlable, readable and honest about itself, which is more than a surprising number of live sites can say. Everything from here is content and consistency, done over months.

We're Initiate Digital, a small design, web and marketing studio in Wexford working with businesses across Ireland and the UK. We run this exact checklist on every site we launch. If a check on it ever lets you down, or you'd like a hand with any of it, we'd genuinely like to hear about it.

WORK WITH US

Web & SEO builds, done properly from the technical floor up. See the full write-up at initiate.ie/article-seo-setup.html or tell us what you're working on at initiate.ie/contact.html.

Version 1 · A working draft, kept up to date. © Initiate Digital · initiate.ie