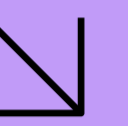# SEO cheat sheet for web designers

Created by Thomas Haynes

Introduction ⭧

What is SEO

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. By ensuring a website is well-structured with clear and engaging content about a topic, we can get it to rank higher in the search engine results when people search for that topic. This leads to more traffic, from the right audience, which helps to ensure the site is a success.

SEO is an ongoing process of continual improvement which can drive traffic growth year after year. SEO can be a very cost effective and beneficial way to drive traffic because there is no ad spend involved. It takes time and effort to convince search engines that your site deserves to rank well, so it's best to think of SEO as a long term activity rather than something which is a one-off task.

You can learn more in our full introduction to SEO.

Why SEO needs to be considered at the design stage

SEO starts with the website design and structure. At this stage, we have the chance to set our site up for SEO success, sidestepping any technical or structural roadblocks.

A design which does not account for SEO considerations can hold back a site's performance on search. We want to ensure the site is as SEO-friendly as possible from launch. Making retroactive changes could cost us time, taking focus away from other ongoing SEO tasks.

An SEO-friendly site design will give us the best foundation for ongoing SEO performance.

Key considerations

What key areas do you need to be aware of
when designing a site to ensure that it is SEO-friendly?

↘

UX

Good UX design isn't just for the user; it's a crucial factor for SEO as well. Users are drawn to websites that are clear and user-friendly. Search engines recognize this user preference and are more likely to rank such websites higher in search results.

High-quality UX elements contribute directly to your SEO strategy. For example, a clear page structure not only boosts user engagement but also aids in on-page SEO. Similarly, well-structured menus help search engines index your site more efficiently, while digestible content ensures that visitors find your site's content engaging.

In short, a well-designed UX can be your secret weapon for achieving better search rankings. It enhances user engagement and satisfaction, which in turn makes your site more attractive to search engines.

Mobile-first design

In 2018 Google started moving towards "mobile-first indexing" and this process is now complete. This means that when Google is considering your site, it is reviewing the mobile layout. Essentially you should now think of the mobile layout as the default version which search engines consider when ranking your site.

Considering the rising trend of mobile browsing, a well-optimized mobile layout isn't just good for SEO; it also enhances user engagement and conversions. So, it's a win-win to prioritize mobile design. Google provides some guidance and best practices for creating a mobile-friendly site which are worth familiarizing yourself with.

Learn more at Wix.com/seo/learn
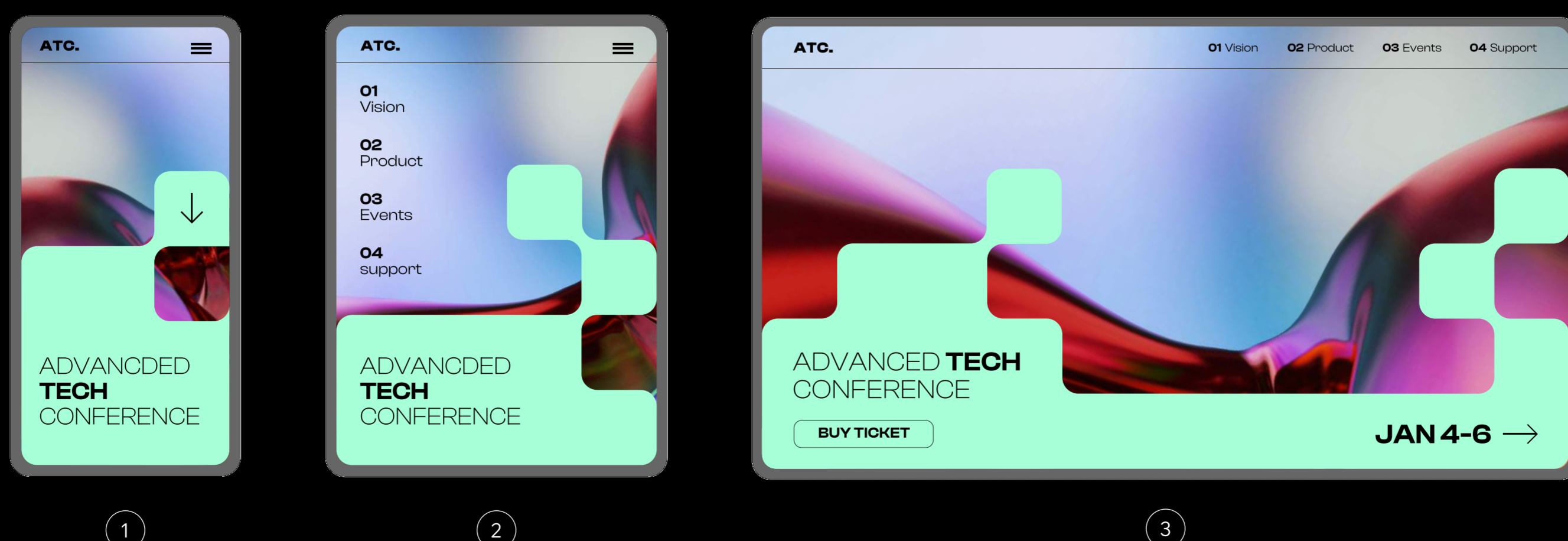
Core Web Vitals

Outline of current factors plus what is changing in 2024.

Go ogle's Core Web Vitals are a set of metrics that measure how user-friendly your site is. They focus on things like loading speed, interactivity and visual stability. In short, they're Google's way of quantifying a good user experience. Falling short on these could affect your search rankings, so they're worth paying attention to during the design phase.

The main metrics you need to be aware of are:
- Largest Contentful Paint (LCP), First Input Delay (FID), and Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS). You can find scores for these using real user data and "lab data".
- LCP measures how quickly the main content on a page loads
- FID gauges interactivity
- CLS assesses the visual stability of a page

Your site's performance for these is measured on a scale from "Poor" to "Good." Falling into the "Good" range is your goal, as it can positively influence how your site ranks in search results. Design decisions regarding content types, font choices and DOM order can form part of how you optimize for Core Web Vitals.

In March 2024 First Input Delay (FID) will be replaced as the measure of interactivity by Interaction to Next Paint (INP). You can find a full breakdown of each metric, and how to improve your scores, on Google's Web.dev site here.

Site speed

Site speed is more than just a user preference; it's an SEO imperative. Slow-loading pages can deter visitors and make search engines think twice about ranking you higher. A faster site can lead to better user engagement, lower bounce rates and improved SEO.

Visually powerful elements like large hero images, homepage sliders and video backgrounds can be problematic when it comes to page speed. Remember that search engines, and most visitors are seeing the mobile view of your site, so you'll need to strike the right balance between an impactful design and faster page load times.

Google's PageSpeed Insights tool can provide lab data to test your performance and identify areas for improvement.

Site hierarchy
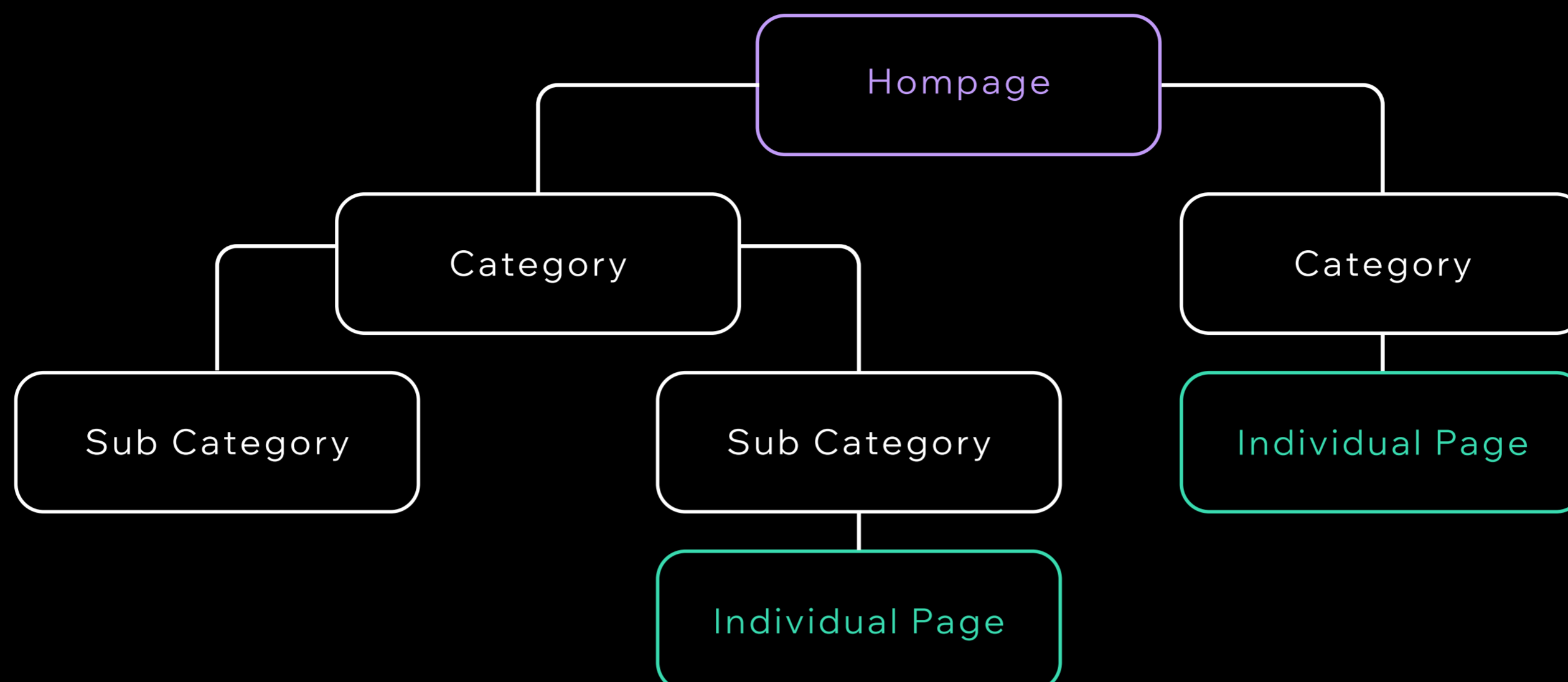
A well-thought-out hierarchy or information architecture makes your site easier to navigate for both users and search engines. It's essentially the blueprint of your website, outlining how pages and content are organized. Keep it intuitive; the easier it is for people to find what they're looking for, the better it is for SEO. Think of it as creating a roadmap that helps search engines understand the importance and relationship between pages.

Each page on the site should sit within a wider topic or category and this should be reflected in the URL structure. This provides context clues for search engines and users to understand where they are on the site and how they can navigate further.

For example, if you are designing an eCommerce site and one of the product lines is men's t-shirts, the folder structure might look like this:

site.com/mens/tops/t-shirts

As well as providing context, a hierarchical site structure will ensure you have the right landing pages to target a range of keywords people are typing into search engines. The example structure above would allow you to target keywords like these:

- Men's clothing
- Men's tops
- Men's t-shirts

Learn more at Wix.com/seo/learn

Navigation

When it comes to navigation, structure matters. Opt for a menu that's logical, easy to follow, and grouped by themes or topics. Use descriptive labels that directly relate to the content on the respective pages. For instance, instead of a generic "Services," go with "Digital Marketing Services" if that's what you offer.

Search engines find the pages on your site in part by "crawling" links between pages, including those in your navigation. Make sure there is a way for them to be able to find all important pages on your site this way. Adding submenus can help further categorize information, making it easier for users and search engines to find what they're after. And don't forget to include clear call-to-action buttons to guide user journeys.

Topic specific pages

Each page on your site should be a deep dive into a single topic, rather than a broad overview of multiple subjects. For instance, if you're working on a B2B site that serves various industries, resist the urge to lump them all into one "Industries" page. Instead, create an "Industries" section with individual pages for each industry you cater to. This allows for better keyword optimization, making it easier to rank for terms specific to each industry.

This targeted approach is both beneficial for SEO and more user friendly. Pages which cover one topic well are more useful and are likely to convert better.

Page headings

Your heading tags, H1, H2, H3 etc., are more than just formatting choices; they play a crucial role in SEO. Think of your H1 as the main headline that sums up what the entire page is about. It's what search engines look at first to understand the primary focus of your content.

Most pages should only use one H1, unless the page has multiple sections that function as distinct pieces of content. In these cases, each section could have its own H1 to clearly define its purpose.

Following your H1, use H2 and H3 tags to structure your content into subsections. These should be logically organized to expand upon the main topic. This not only makes your content more readable for your audience but also helps search engines navigate through the topics and subtopics on your page, enhancing your SEO strategy.
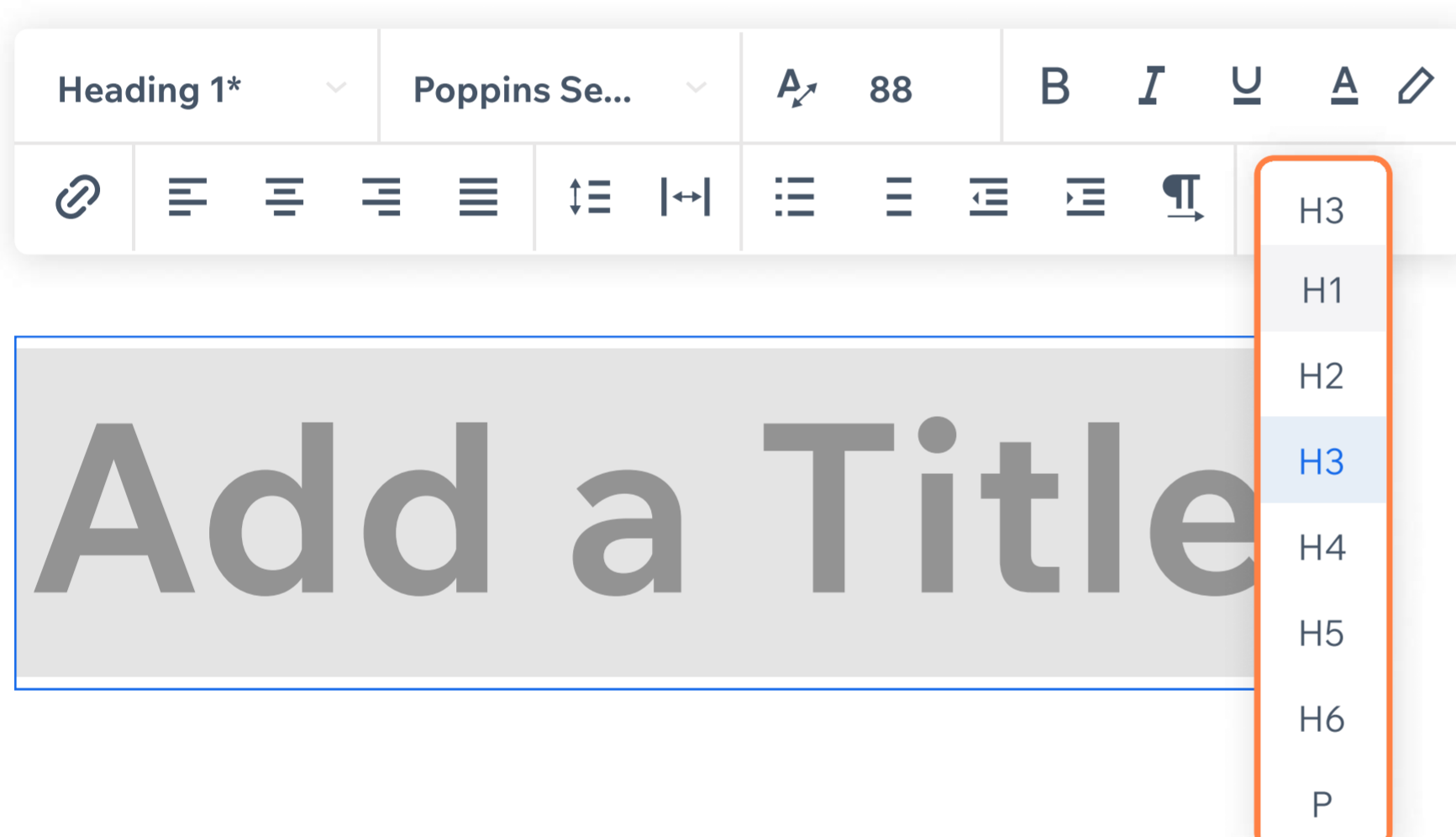
Content

As a web designer, understanding how content fits into your design is key. For category pages, leave space for short blurbs that'll give a snapshot of each section. This allows for easy navigation and helps search engines quickly understand the page's content.

For areas like product or service descriptions, plan for more content real estate. You'll need to accommodate text that not only details the product or service but also sells it. Design with adaptability in mind, as future content changes shouldn't require a design overhaul.

By planning ahead for how content will be laid out, you're not just making the content team's life easier—you're also setting the stage for SEO success.

Learn more at Wix.com/seo/learn

Local SEO

For businesses with a physical location or local service area, <u>Local SEO</u> is a game-changer. One basic yet essential aspect is including your NAP—Name, Address, Phone Number—in a consistent format across your site. Common placements include the footer or a dedicated "Contact Us" page.

If you're designing for a multi-location business, consider creating <u>individual location pages</u>. These pages can be optimized for local keywords and offer specific information like store hours, local promotions, or even staff profiles. By giving each location its own page, you're setting the stage for better local search rankings and providing a more tailored user experience.

Images

Images can make or break a user's experience on your site, but they can also impact SEO. It's essential to strike a balance between high-quality visuals and website speed. Overloading on large image files can slow down your site, and speed is an SEO factor.

Make sure to use a relevant image filename and an alt text which describes the image. These may seem minor, but they're really important for SEO. Properly named files and well-crafted alt text not only improve accessibility but also help search engines understand the content of the image, boosting your site's SEO performance.

Structured data

Incorporating structured data into your designs can give the site a significant SEO advantage. Structured data helps search engines better understand the site's content, making it easier for them to present it in a more organized way in the search results.

Design-wise, plan for elements like customer reviews, product information, or FAQs that can be marked up with structured data. This allows the SEO team to optimize these sections later, enabling search engines to provide richer search results and, ultimately, driving more quality traffic to the site.
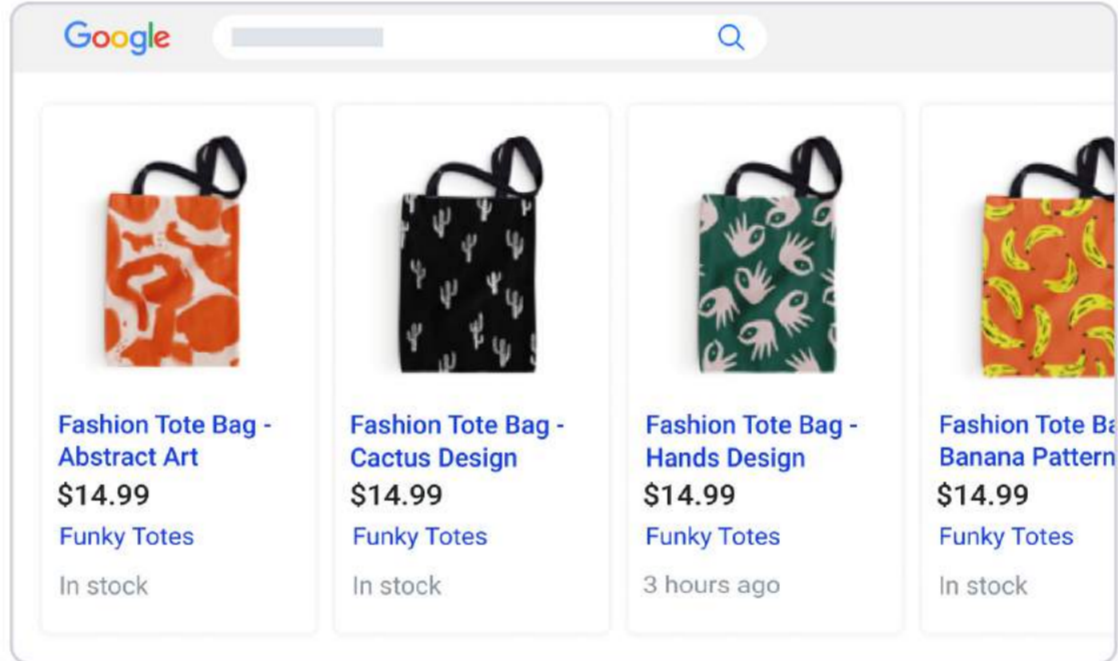
Cheat sheet for web designers checklist

Use this checklist to ensure you've given consideration to key areas of SEO.

User experience (UX)

- [ ] Is your site design clear and user-friendly?

Mobile-first design

- [ ] Have you prioritized the mobile layout in your design strategy?
- [ ] Did you consult Google's best practices for mobile-friendly design?

Core Web Vitals

Have you given consideration to LCP, FID, and CLS metrics by:

- [ ] Reducing images to the lowest file size with the highest resolution.
- [ ] Optimizing fonts by reducing the file types on each page and including them in your theme.
- [ ] Avoiding unnecessary animations and GIFs.

Site speed

- [ ] Have you used Google's PageSpeed Insights to test the site?
- [ ] Have you reviewed the impact of large visual elements on page load times?

Site structure

- [ ] Is the URL structure hierarchical and logical?
- [ ] Does each page focus on a specific topic or category?

Navigation

- [ ] Is the menu logically structured and easy to follow?
- [ ] Are all important pages accessible through the menu?

Topic specific pages

- [ ] Have you created templates for individual topic pages for better keyword targeting?
- [ ] Is the keyword and content clearly focused for each page?

Page headings

- [ ] Does each page have one H1 tag that encapsulates its main focus?
- [ ] Are H2 and H3 tags used for subsections in a logical manner?

Content

- [ ] Have you left space for short text blurbs on category pages?
- [ ] Is the design adaptable to varying content lengths?

Local SEO

- [ ] Have you included the Name, Address and Phone number of the organization in the footer and on the "Contact Us" page?
- [ ] Have you created individual location pages for a multi-location business?

Images

- [ ] Have you optimized images for both quality and speed?
- [ ] Have you used a relevant image file name for each image?
- [ ] Have you described each image in the alt text?

Structured data

- [ ] Have you planned for content elements like reviews or FAQs that can use structured data?