

Transcripts from the How to Kick Ass at Meta Data episode:

So today I get to talk to you about one of my favorite and least sexy topics inside of SEO. And it's a bonus that I've learned over the last few years how important this topic also is to accessibility. And although I refer to it as a bonus, I sort of wonder if maybe this should be like the first thought and SEO, the second thought. But I know in marketing that a lot of times I've gotta give you the like how it's gonna make you more money, reason first. So here we go.

How does metadata matter to your bottom line? Well, it's one of the key things that a search engine is going to look at to figure out what your page is about. It's one of the key things that a potential customer, potential raving fan, potential VIP is going to see in a search engine to help them decide whether or not they wanna visit your website, whether it's from a Google search or a Facebook post. And metadata is important because it increases for us in search, something we call click-through rate as a result. How many people that see your search result in a Google search, click on it and go through to your website. That's going to substantially help increase your rankings. And we'll talk more about why and how that works in a few minutes.

So that's why it's really important to your bottom line. But metadata, particularly alt text for images did not come about to be for search engines. It was originally intended to help people with different accessibility needs access the internet. So for example, all text on images is there so that a reader that reads out what's on a website to someone

who is visually impaired can read what the image is to that person. Instead of just getting a basic image read out to them, that means nothing and doesn't contextualize that image for them.

Metadata is really important when it comes to accessibility for any type of machine accessibility. So whether it's a visual reader or a captioning device or something like that. We're also going to talk about in this episode, how you can caption your images like we talked about with Jennifer Brown, for people who are not using readers but are a little bit visually impaired or I guess a lot of it visually impaired.

The other thing that metadata does is it gives titles to your pages again so that readers can understand navigation throughout your site, rather than just reading out the slugs or the h1 on the page. So metadata is really important for a variety of reasons. And I love how this intersects because it, really I feel like this intersects in most of your business. We're just not aware of it, but this intersection between what is the right thing to do and what is best for your business is really clear when it comes to metadata.

Taking care of your metadata, making sure that it is done properly with intentionality and with empathy will get you more traffic, more sales and make your website more accessible to a variety of people. So it's an all around win and the great thing is it doesn't even cost you very much to do it.

All it takes is a few extra minutes, really less than five on most pages, towards the intentionality of setting it up. And if this happens every single time you set up a page on your website, whether it's a blog post or a podcast or a new core page or a sales

landing page, if you make sure you do this every time, your results are only going to grow and it's really going to contribute to how people feel about your digital presence. The sort of tough news is if you've never thought about this in the past, or you've kind of let your metadata slide because you were being a little lazy about it, it can be pretty painful to go back and update it over time.

So I recommend that you take a few minutes you know, a few times a week, to do each old page on your site, and then just make sure that you do it the right way going forward. And it'll just become a part of your content creation routine. So let's get super nerdy into this not so sexy topic and talk about metadata. What it is, how you do it properly, and some resources for keeping you on the right track over time. So basically, there are three types of metadata that we're gonna talk about today.

There are a few others but these are the three main core types. The first is meta titles. The second is meta descriptions and the third is image alt tags and captions. So meta titles show up in a Google search. And at the top of a web browser in the tab. Meta titles are one of the most important indicators to a search engine of what your page is about.

So your meta title, how do you create a good meta title? Well, it should be between 42 and 55 characters. That's because the length of a meta title is dictated by pixels which is pretty hard for us to measure as we're writing. So if we stay in the neighborhood of 42 to 55 characters that whole title is probably gonna show every time on any type of smartphone or browser desktop, or tablet. Your meta title is really essential. It is one of the key factors towards search ranking and it helps a user to see what your page is about.

So your meta title is what shows up as the blue link inside of a Google search or a Bing search. And it's really going to help someone decide whether or not they want to be on your page. Now the meta description, you will often hear SEOs say, it doesn't actually contribute to your ranking that it's not a ranking factor but hang with me here for a second.

The meta description is what shows underneath the meta title on a search query. It's what describes what the page is about. So, that helps someone decide whether or not they are going to click on that meta title link to get to the page. When someone clicks on a link in a search query that is going to affect our CTR, what we call click-through rate.

That means for every time you show in a search query how often does someone click on your result and go through to that webpage. And CTR does affect your search rankings. In fact from lots of testing I've done over the last few years, from lots of testing by SEOs, smarter than I am, your click-through rate makes a huge difference in your rankings. So does the meta description itself, technically impact your ranking? No. But does your meta description supporting your title properly, affect your click-through rate which does affect your ranking? Absolutely.

So you want to pay close attention to this meta description? The other thing that happens with the meta description is that social media sites often pull the meta description through with your meta title. And one final thing, your meta description can also on some readers for people who are visually impaired, be read out to describe what the page is about and support that meta title.

So you wanna make sure that you pay close attention to it as well. So how do we write good meta descriptions? Well, our meta description should be around 160 characters. That's going to make sure that the whole thing shows up. And our meta description should support the title. It should expand on why your result is the best one. So here are some key things to keep in mind for both meta titles and descriptions, to make sure that they are on track and done well every single time.

All right. The first thing is every single page, every single time needs a meta title and description. Do not be lazy here. Do not allow Yoast SEO on a WordPress site or whatever the tool is on a different site for you to auto-generate some crappy meta title and meta description for you. Those auto-generated titles and descriptions are just not good enough for something that is so important.

It's sort of like you spent years and weeks and months, and maybe even decades writing a book and then you let a bot create the title for your book. You wouldn't do that. So why are you allowing a bot to create the title and the subtitle for all of your hard work on your web pages and your podcast pages and your blog pages? It doesn't make a lot of sense. Does it?

So make sure that you take the time to customize these really important pieces so that you get the best performance possible because they are very much like the title of your digital book, the title of your website, the description of your website, they are very important. And here's how you're gonna win at those. Use your key phrase first.

So whatever your keyword phrase is that you are focusing on for that page, use it first at the front, within the first three words of your meta title, making sure that the way you use it makes sense. But only use it once. We wanna make sure it's very bad to keyword stuff in our meta titles and descriptions and in a 2020 world, it's pretty tough to do anyway, honestly, because we don't have a lot of space. All you gotta do is get that keyword phrase in there once.

So for example, say you were selling red shoes. We wouldn't wanna say buy my red shoes as your meta title because red shoes is the keyword and it's at the end. Instead, you would say, red shoes for sale, buy now. That puts the keyword phrase of red shoes at the front of the meta title and the action at the end. That's how you wanna make sure that it is formatted for a meta title. And that's a little backwards of what we do for headlines and other types of writing. So it's important to understand that.

Now it's not as important for your keyword phrase to be at the front of your meta description, but it is key that it is in your meta description because what happens in a Google search is that if your keyword phrase that someone is searching for is in your meta description, it will be bolded. You've seen this happen before where the phrase you search for is bolded in a description, and that makes it more likely that someone will click on your link. And again, that all important CTR, click-through rate, will be higher.

So take the time to make sure that you decide what the keyword phrase is for your page and you implement that keyword phrase at the front of your meta description, or excuse me at the front of your meta title and in your meta description. Okay. Once you've done that what other things are important to keep in mind with your meta titles and

descriptions? Well, if you want your click-through rate to be as high as possible, you're going to make sure that you use power words.

Power words really draw a lot of attention. And this comes from Ogilvy and it is over a hundred years old or not, not quite a hundred close to a hundred years old. It's been expanded on over and over. There are more power words than there used to be. I think Ogilvy's power words are like 10 or 12 if my memory serves me correctly, but you wanna use things like, for example, in my e-commerce example of red shoes for sale, for sale is a power word. Instead of saying red shoes available, saying red shoes for sale, sounds more powerful. Other things that you can use as power words are words like amazing and best and greatest and complete.

Now you don't wanna sound like an automatron and you'd certainly don't wanna sound like a gross internet marketer. So really take some time to think about what the right power word is for your meta title. But if you use one, it's really going to help a lot. It also helps a lot to use numbers if you can, but that doesn't always make sense. So prioritize your meta title power word. Then in your meta description, use a call to action. For example, you might say, read more or visit now. You can't say things if you don't wanna artificially lose your rankings like click through or things like that.

But you can say read more here or read about it now, or listen now. And those things in your meta description will make it more likely that someone will take the action. It sounds a little ridiculous but we really like as human beings to be directed. So direct people on what you want them to do, read more. That's really what you want them to do, right?

You want them to click that blue link and read more about whatever the thing is that they were searching for. Then you also want to if you can describe what the content is. You'll see this in brackets and meta titles a lot where we'll bracket at the end, podcast or case study or complete guide or video. Sometimes it can be tough to get that into the meta title with so few characters.

So if you can't try to get it into the meta description. It helps people to understand what your content is and makes it more likely that they will click through as a result. For example, if I'm searching for something on the go and I'd really rather listen, then a podcast is gonna be what I need at that moment. But say I'm really doing in depth research and what I really want is a case study or a complete guide.

I'm going to probably be more likely to click on the link that tells me that what that link is because people are busy. We don't wanna have to click-through to the website to figure out what type of content it is. So tell them right there in the meta title and or the meta description. Then the final thing to do in your meta title and meta description is use your branding and or your URL if possible. Meta titles and meta descriptions are really underserved place for using our branding.

That's why the crappy auto-bot-generated meta titles will always have the name of your website in it, or the name of your website or the URL in your meta description. Because even if someone doesn't click that time them seeing your brand is still more exposure to your brand. So for example when you search for something on Google and Amazon comes up you're always gonna see Amazon in that title because that's brand trust. So

do the same thing for your own brand. Try to get the name and or URL of your website in the meta title if possible, and if not possible in the meta description.

So for example, you'll often see me use a dash Genevieve Digital in my meta titles. That's usually the easiest way because URLs can sometimes be or often be a little bit long for metadata in a 2020 world. So what are we doing just to recap with our meta titles and descriptions, we're gonna make sure that we do them every page, every time. If you're using WordPress, this is really easy to do with the Yoast SEO plugin.

You just make sure that you get a green light every time. In fact, you can roll back, scroll back through your pages and your old blog posts, once you have Yoast in your browser and see whether or not you have a green light on those pages. Then you're gonna watch your length. You really don't wanna be too long and get that dreaded period, period, period cut off at the end that kills your click-through rate.

So make sure that our meta titles are between 42 and 55 characters. And our meta descriptions are 160 characters or less. Then think about that keyword phrase, get it in the front of your meta title, if at all possible but you only need to use it once in the title and once in the description. Do not ever keyword stuff, not on a page, not on the title, not in a description, not on an alt texts. Nowhere. Then describe what the content is.

Is it a podcast, a case study, a video, and as much as possible use your branding in either the meta title or the meta description. That's going to get you a really well optimized search results and or social media results. Now, if you're using Yoast on WordPress, you can actually customize your social media meta data as well. That's an

extra step that I'm not gonna talk to you about today because I want you to really prioritize search for these purposes. All right, once you've done that the next thing that you always wanna look at for metadata is your alt text.

Now alt text is perhaps the most important for accessibility because it really ruins the internet for someone who is visually impaired and using a reader if they cannot get context about what your images are. So doing our alt text properly is prioritizing people. Remember how many times I've told you and I will keep repeating this until you're tired of hearing it that we always think about people first, bots second, right? So our alt text, alt text has really been screwed by marketers.

Marketers have used alt texts to show up in a Google image search and to help support their on page SEO at the expense of people who really need that all texts to be done properly. So SEOs have stuffed their keywords into alt text and made alt texts that is totally nonsensical and not really what the image is about and created a really poor web experience as a result for people who really need what the alt text was designed for.

So if this is you, if this is something that you're doing now or you've done in the past, I really wanna urge you to quit it and let's make that alt text better. And if you haven't thought about alt text, so you're not making sure that every single image has alternative text on it every single time. I know that it's going to be a really big project to go back and update this, but it's going to contribute in a huge way to how people can access your website and how often you show up in search and how many people interact with you as a result. So it is well worth the effort. And it's not difficult to do. It does take a little bit of time, but it is well worth the time. So how do we do it? It's pretty simple.

Prioritize people. Do it every image, every time, not just on photos and what do I mean by that? Well, if you have calls to action buttons where you are using an image for a button, for example if you have image elements that are not a photograph or a illustration, but they contribute to the feel of your website, you need to make sure that those image elements also have alt texts added to them so that someone's visual reader can read out what that is.

For example, a button that is an image should have alt texts that says what the image is and what the button action is. That helps someone to understand what's happening on your website. And if you've never tested this, if you've never tried this out, I highly recommend turning on a reader. There are some free ones that are not great, but you can turn one on to just get a sense of how this works. You can turn it on in the Google Chrome tools to get a sense of how this works.

So you can get some empathy around describing your images. And we wanna describe images sufficiently but not so long that it's going to get cut off. So for example, here's how this would work. Let's go back to our red shoes analogy. Say you have an image of a pair of red tennis shoes. I really like Chuck Taylors. So let's go with red Chuck Taylors. So my red Chuck Taylors are for sale, and I have an image of them on my product page. So I could put Chuck Taylors for sale, or I could put shoes or tennis shoes as alt text. And that would get the job done.

But it really wouldn't be great for a person because it's not descriptive enough. There are thousands of different types of Chuck Taylors. There's high tops and low tops and

red ones and blue ones and pink ones and purple ones and ones made out of leather and one's in box with my logo and all kinds of different Chuck Taylors. So what would be a better description? Red, low top, Chuck Taylors for sale. Red, high top, Chuck Taylors. Red, canvas Chuck Taylor tennis shoes.

These are examples of sufficiently descriptive, but not too long descriptions. Those are how your alt text should be formatted. Now it is really good for SEO to get a keyword phrase in there. So Chuck Taylors or tennis shoes might be a keyword phrase that you wanna have in there but you always wanna prioritize people first. So if you can't put a keyword phrase in your alt text and have it still be a people first description of the image, skip the keyword phrase and default to people.

Over time, that is going to help you more because remember, Google is always prioritizing people. And by the way, your alt text on your images is not just about people who are visually impaired, because if for some reason your image is not loading on a browser, on a device, that alt text is going to show instead. You've all seen it before.

That's square with the broken image in the alt text. Oh, are you looking at your broken image and, or a broken image on a website and not seeing anything there that's because someone didn't put alt texts there. So it's really important that we describe that image sufficiently but not overdoing it. So what do you do if you really do need a really long description? Well, there is a piece of code that can be used to indicate that you have a longer than average description, but in my testing, I haven't seen that work well enough to be worth the extra effort.

So I recommend doing this instead. And this was a tip that I talked about a few episodes or excuse me, Jennifer Brown talked about a few episodes ago. I think it was in episode 36. Instead of putting that extra long description in the alt text, use a caption. Now a caption is going to show on page. It's not going to be hidden in most browsers the way alt text is but that's okay because it works really well for people who are having some level of visual impairment but don't actually use a reader for websites as well. And captioning is something that we'd see on images all the time. We're used to captioning on images, both online and off.

I know you've seen a newspaper at some point that has captions on the images. Captioning can help people contextualize what your image is about, even if they have no visual impairments. So if you need to make a longer description I recommend putting it in the caption.

So say there's lots of things going on in your image, and your description really needs to be two or three sentences. Do a short alt text and a longer description in the caption. This is going to really help you especially if in that longer caption description, you take the time to make sure one or two of your keyword phrases for that page are in it. So meta titles, meta descriptions and alt text are so important to both your website's performance and its accessibility to lots of different people with different ability levels, and different types of user needs.

So make sure that you take the time and if you need some resources to help you there's a couple that I really enjoy. If you have WordPress, your website is operating off of WordPress, I recommend the SEO Yoast for WordPress plugin. I'm not affiliated with

SEO Yoast anymore or excuse me at all, but it's a really easy to use plugin and it makes maintaining your metadata and other pieces of your SEO really easy over time.

Because if you're checking in on other people, working on pages, all you gotta do is look for a green light. Then if you have that green light, your metadata is going to be in there. It may not be perfect but at least, you know that it's done because you can't get a green light from Yoast SEO if there is no metadata. Then if you're not using WordPress, Moz has a meta title checker that not only will it check the link of your meta title, but it will also walk you through on the page, how to make sure that your meta title and meta description are just right.

So we're gonna link up to that in the show notes for those of you who are not WordPress users. And then finally, I have a metadata cheat sheet for meta titles, meta descriptions and alt text that I give to every one of my clients. And so I'm going to give that to you as well.

If you want it, [click here](#) and we will have it waiting for you there. This metadata thing is I get that it's not sexy. It is one of the least sexy things that you will ever do for your website possibly but it's so important for so many reasons. And I will tell you over the last seven to eight years of working as an SEO on websites, it is the first and most impactful thing that I optimize on every new site, because it's easy to get done, it's inexpensive, and it always, always, always improves performance. So go to it. And let me know how your performance improves as a result. I see y'all next week.