

Design Chemical 88-point SEO Guideline Checklist

The **Design Chemical 88-point SEO Guideline Checklist** has been developed to allow us to systematically evaluate sites and implement changes to make them perform as well as possible. While the checklist is technically oriented, we are sensitive to human usability and purpose of the site, and this process often uncovers design or philosophical shortcomings that keep sites from maximizing results. While we label this a SEO checklist it is also a usability checklist. Hey, we're efficient and try to do as many things as possible at the same time. Jugglers *and* alchemists!

We will start using the checklist as soon as you contact us and ask for a bit of help. We can quickly determine the scope of work you need and the scale of the project. Remember, the internet has few true secrets and many things can be revealed under the Design Chemical microscope. A lot of what we do can be done without access to your hosted files, other issues will require some passwords and permissions.

Checklist Item 1 – first the bad news. The Code. For an existing site we make a quick technical evaluation to uncover coding errors or other issues that may prevent spiders from crawling and indexing the site properly, and that often lead to many different performance issues. We still find it shocking how many poorly put together websites there are out there. We know very quickly if repairs are in order, or its time for a transplant or replacement clone.

Checklist Item 2 – more bad news. Flash. If your site is all Flash or uses mostly Flash then you are probably aware that your site doesn't get very good search engine results. While there are techniques to help Flash site SEO, they generally require involvement from the original Flash page developer and we have found them to be less than helpful, if they are even still around. If you're thinking of adding it to your site... don't. We can help develop an original Flash site to have some SEO value, but Flash is more trouble than it is worth and many desirable graphic affects can be achieved without it. Slow, cumbersome, hard to edit, with no SEO or quality score content value... yes, we don't like Flash. Sorry Mr. Adobe. If a site is all Flash we know right away we are going to be the bearers of bad news. Please don't shoot the messenger.

Checklist Item 3 – no news is *not* good news. Web Presence. We reach into our bag of tricks and make a profile of the site to determine what the internet thinks of it. While we are certainly opinionated about what we like, ultimately our opinion doesn't matter. What matters most is how well it performs by various ranking tools and services. We also like to have reliable benchmarks to measure against so we can boast about improvements later.

Checklist Item 4 – just news. Content and Keywords. Of course the scope and scale of this checklist item can grow into many tasks and even stand-alone projects. For existing sites that aren't looking for reconstructive surgery we perform an initial analysis of the content. While we may actually read it, especially if we think it is interesting, what this really means is that we check to see what the spiders are seeing. After Checklist Item 1 we usually have the answer "probably not much" but it gives us all a good idea of what we need to change to help improve sites.

Checklist Item 5 – just the facts. Usability and Intent. This is actually not really about facts; it is about subjectivity and purpose. Review of this helps us define what the site needs to be more effective. While we may have been asked to 'just do something about my SEO', ultimately there are many other issues that come together that determine success or failure. Sometimes a minor technical tweak releases the power of SEO, other times a major do over is the only thing that will help. At this stage, we have a pretty good idea what is required and can prepare an initial proposal, or sit down with a client and go over our recommendations.

Checklist Item 6 – If a site doesn't have Google Analytics or other visitor tracking software, we will install and set it up on sites. It is a very powerful tool for determining where visitors come from and what they do on websites. Advanced reporting and client training are options we include in proposals.

Checklist Item 7 – Links police. Bad links, are well, bad. When clients have paid to have someone generate links we're usually faced with a do over to start generating quality incoming links. We definitely will eliminate questionable outgoing links. The next several check- list items involve evaluating the link situation and making recommendations on how to proceed.

Checklist Item 8 – Get Blogging. We recommend a blog on your site, as well as making the rounds of related sites and posting information about your site. Forums too.

Checklist Item 9 – Social Bookmarks – they tend to be a bit overrated for SEO because most set links for search engine spiders as ‘no-follow’, but they can get real people involved with your site, which is good.

Checklist Item 10 – Directory Submissions are not what they used to be but still matter. Website directories give your site a quick description and a link back to your site. This is a proven way to build a many backlinks in a short period of time. They won’t perform miracles, but directories can help when combined with other SEO techniques.

Checklist Item 11 – Press Releases and Article Marketing is hard work, writing quality articles on your topic and submitting them to PR submission services and article directories will give you relevant backlinks from quality websites. We can either produce these, or at least advise on how to get the best results from them.

Keywords

Checklist Item 12	Keywords in <title> tag	Very important The title tag must be short (6 or 7 words) and the keyword must be near the beginning.	3
Checklist Item 13	Keywords in URL	Keywords in URLs are important, but the keywords need to be in the content as well.	3
Checklist Item 14	Keyword density in document text	3-7 % for major keywords is best, 1-2 for minor.	3
Checklist Item 15	Keywords in anchor text	Very important, especially for the anchor text of inbound links	3
Checklist Item 16	Keywords in headings (<H1>, <H2>, tags)	Very important	3
Checklist Item 17	Keywords in the beginning of a document	Also counts, though not as much as anchor text, title tag or headings. Upper left of the page is best.	2
Checklist Item 18	Keywords in <alt> tags	Spiders read image <alt> tags,	2
Checklist Item 19	Keywords in metatags	Less and less important – but Google likes meta description	1
Checklist Item 20	Keyword proximity	How close to each other in the text the keywords are.	1
Checklist Item 21	Keyword phrases	Optimizing for keywords phrases is fundamental.	1
Checklist Item 22	Secondary keywords	Optimizing for secondary keywords is fundamental.	1
Checklist Item 23	Keyword stemming	Applicable to non-English language pages. For English dog, dogs, doggy, are considered related and if “dog” is on the page, it will get hits for “dogs” and “doggy” but for other languages different words that stem from the same root are considered as not related and may need to be optimized.	1
Checklist Item 24	Synonyms	Synonyms of the target keywords, in addition to the main keywords.	1
Checklist Item 25	Keyword Mistypes	While possibly offering some SEO benefit, it lowers perceived quality	0
Checklist Item 26	Keyword dilution	When you are optimizing for an excessive amount of keywords, especially unrelated ones, this will affect the performance of all your keywords and even the major ones will be lost (diluted) in the text.	-2
Checklist Item 27	Keyword stuffing	Any artificially inflated keyword density (10% and over) is keyword stuffing and you risk getting banned from search engines.	-3

Links - internal, inbound, outbound

Checklist Item 28	Anchor text of inbound links	This is one of the most important factors for good rankings. It is best if you have a keyword in the anchor text but even if you don't, it is still OK.	3
Checklist Item 29	Origin of inbound links	Besides the anchor text, it is important if the site that links to you is a reputable one or not. Generally sites with greater Google PR are considered reputable.	3
Checklist Item 30	Links from similar sites	Having links from similar sites indicates that the competition is voting for you and you are popular within your topical community.	3
Checklist Item 31	Links from .edu and .gov sites	These links are precious because .edu and .gov sites are more reputable than .com. .biz, .info, etc. domains.	3
Checklist Item 32	Number of backlinks	Generally the more, the better. But the reputation of the sites that link to you is more important than their number. Also important is their anchor text, is there a keyword in it, how old are they, etc.	3
Checklist Item 33	Anchor text of internal links	This also matters, though not as much as the anchor text of inbound links.	2
Checklist Item 34	Around-the-anchor text	The text that is immediately before and after the anchor text also matters because it further indicates the relevance of the link – i.e. if the link is artificial or it naturally flows in the text.	2
Checklist Item 35	Age of inbound links	The older, the better. Getting many new links in a short time suggests buying them.	2
Checklist Item 36	Links from directories	Depends on which directories. Being listed in DMOZ, Yahoo Directory and similar directories is a great boost for your ranking but having tons of links from PRO directories is useless and it can even be regarded as link spamming.	2
Checklist Item 37	Number of outgoing links on the page that links to you	The fewer, the better for you because this way your link looks more important.	1
Checklist Item 38	Named anchors	Named anchors (the target place of internal links) are useful for internal navigation but are also useful for SEO because you stress additionally that a particular page, paragraph or text is important. In the code, named anchors look like this: Read about dogs and “#dogs” is the named anchor.	1
Checklist Item 39	IP address of inbound link	For Google the IP address is considered neutral to the weight of inbound links. However, Bing and Yahoo! may discard links from the same IPs or IP classes.	1
Checklist Item 40	Inbound links from link farms and other suspicious sites	This does not affect you in any way, unless they are reciprocal. The idea is that it is beyond your control to define what a link farm links to, so you don't get penalized when such sites link to you because this is not your fault but in any case you'd better stay away from link farms and similar suspicious sites.	0
Checklist Item 41	Many outgoing links	Google does not like pages that consists mainly of links, so you'd better keep them under 100 per page. Having many outgoing links does benefit ranking and could even make results worse	-1
Checklist Item 42	Excessive linking, link spamming	Not recommended.	-1
Checklist Item 43	Outbound links to link farms and other suspicious sites	Unlike inbound links from link farms and other suspicious sites, outbound links to bad neighbors can drown you. You need periodically to check the status of the sites you link to because sometimes good sites become bad neighbors and vice versa.	-3
Checklist Item 44	Cross-linking	Cross-linking occurs when site A links to site B, site B links to site C and site C links back to site A. Cross-linking looks like disguised reciprocal link trading and is penalized.	-3

Checklist Item 45	Single pixel links	obvious that this link is an attempt to manipulate search engines.	-3
Metatags			
Checklist Item 46	<Description> metatag	<Description> metatag is used by some search engines as the snippet describing your site on the SERP. Google considers it to be important. Best if keywords are found in title, description and content.	1
Checklist Item 47	<Keywords> metatag	The <Keywords> metatag gets almost no attention from Google and some attention from Bing and Yahoo! 10 to 20 keywords that are also found on the page, this is bad for your rankings. It is also visible to competitors.	1
Checklist Item 48	<Language> metatag	If your site is language-specific, don't leave this tag empty. Search engines still consider it.	1
Checklist Item 49	<Refresh> metatag	The <Refresh> metatag is one way to redirect visitors from your site to another. Only do it if you have recently migrated your site to a new domain and you need to temporarily redirect visitors. When used for a long time, the <refresh> metatag is regarded as unethical practice and this can hurt your ratings. In any case, redirecting through 301 is much better.	-1
Content			
Checklist Item 50	Unique content	Having more content (relevant content, which is different from the content on other sites both in wording and topics) is a real boost for your site's rankings.	3
Checklist Item 51	Frequency of content change	Frequent changes are favored. It is great when you constantly add new content but it is not so great when you only make small updates to existing content.	3
Checklist Item 52	Keywords font size	When a keyword in the document text is in a larger font size in comparison to other on-page text, this makes it more noticeable, so therefore it is more important than the rest of the text. The same applies to headings (<h1>, <h2>, etc.), which generally are in larger font size than the rest of the text.	2
Checklist Item 53	Keywords formatting	Bold and italic are another way to emphasize important words and phrases. However, use bold, italic and larger font sizes within reason because otherwise you might achieve just the opposite effect.	2
Checklist Item 54	Age of document	Recent documents (or at least regularly updated ones) are favored.	2
Checklist Item 55	File size	Generally long pages are not favored, or at least you can achieve better rankings if you have 3 short rather than 1 long page on a given topic, so split long pages into multiple smaller ones.	1
Checklist Item 56	Content separation	From a marketing point of view content separation (based on IP, browser type, etc.) might be great but for SEO it is bad because when you have one URL and differing content, search engines get confused what the actual content of the page is.	-2
Checklist Item 57	Poor coding and design	Search engines say that they do not want poorly designed and coded sites, though there are hardly sites that are banned because of messy code or ugly images but when the design and/or coding of a site is poor, the site might not be indexable at all, so in this sense poor code and design can harm you a lot.	-2
Checklist Item 58	Illegal Content	Using other people's copyrighted content without their permission or using content that promotes legal violations can get you kicked out of search engines.	-3
Checklist Item 59	Invisible text	This is a black hat SEO practice and when spiders discover that you have text specially for them but not for humans, don't be surprised by the penalty.	-3
Checklist Item 60	Cloaking	Cloaking is another illegal technique, which partially involves content separation because spiders see one page (highly-optimized, of course), and everybody else is presented with another version of the same page.	-3
Checklist Item 61	Doorway pages	Creating pages that aim to trick spiders that your site is a highly-relevant one when it is not, is another way to get the kick from search engines.	-3

Checklist Item 62	Duplicate content	When you have the same content on several pages on the site, this will not make your site look larger because the duplicate content penalty kicks in. To a lesser degree duplicate content applies to pages that reside on other sites but obviously these cases are not always banned – i.e. article directories or mirror sites do exist and prosper.	-3
Visual Extras and SEO			
Checklist Item 63	JavaScript	Implemented properly JavaScript is not a problem, but if main content is displayed through JavaScript it is more difficult for spiders to follow. Poorly implemented JavaScript causes many problems.	0
Checklist Item 64	Images in text	<alt> tag with meaningful description of an image but don't stuff it	0
Checklist Item 65	Podcasts and videos	Podcasts and videos are becoming popular but search engines can't read them.	0
Checklist Item 66	Images instead of text links	Text links perform better than images.	-1
Checklist Item 67	Frames	Frames are very bad for SEO. Avoid them.	-2
Checklist Item 68	Flash	Spiders don't index the content of Flash movies, alternative text description is needed.	-2
Checklist Item 69	Flash home page	A Flash home page without an HTML version, is SEO suicide.	-3
Domains, URLs, Web Mastery			
Checklist Item 70	Keyword-rich URLs and filenames	A very important factor, especially for Yahoo! and Bing.	3
Checklist Item 71	Site Accessibility	Another fundamental issue, which that is often neglected. If the site (or separate pages) is unaccessible because of broken links, 404 errors, password-protected areas and other similar reasons, then the site simply can't be indexed.	3
Checklist Item 72	Sitemap	Google compliant XML sitemaps at a minimum, dynamically generated sitemaps are preferred.	2
Checklist Item 73	Site size	Spiders love large sites, so generally it is the bigger, the better. However, big sites become user-unfriendly and difficult to navigate, so sometimes it makes sense to separate a big site into a couple of smaller ones. On the other hand, there are hardly sites that are penalized because they are 10,000+ pages, so don't split your size in pieces only because it is getting larger and larger.	2
Checklist Item 74	Site age	Similarly to wine, older sites are respected more. The idea is that an old, established site is more trustworthy (they have been around and are here to stay) than a new site that has just popped up and might soon disappear.	2
Checklist Item 75	Site theme	It is not only keywords in URLs and on page that matter. The site theme is even more important for good ranking because when the site fits into one theme, this boosts the rankings of all its pages that are related to this theme.	2
Checklist Item 76	File Location on Site	File location is important and files that are located in the root directory or near it tend to rank better than files that are buried 5 or more levels below.	1
Checklist Item 77	Domains versus subdomains, separate domains	Having a separate domain is better – i.e. instead of having blablabla.blogspot.com, register a separate blablabla.com domain.	1

Checklist Item 78	Top-level domains (TLDs)	Not all TLDs are equal. There are TLDs that are better than others. For instance, the most popular TLD – .com – is much better than .ws, .biz, or .info domains but (all equal) nothing beats an old .edu or .org domain.	1
Checklist Item 79	Hyphens in URLs	Hyphens between the words in an URL increase readability and help with SEO rankings. This applies both to hyphens in domain names and in the rest of the URL.	1
Checklist Item 80	URL length	Generally doesn't matter but if it is a very long URL-s, this starts to look spammy, so avoid having more than 10 words in the URL (3 or 4 for the domain name itself and 6 or 7 for the rest of address is acceptable).	0
Checklist Item 81	IP address	Could matter only for shared hosting or when a site is hosted with a free hosting provider, when the IP or the whole C-class of IP addresses is blacklisted due to spamming or other illegal practices.	0
Checklist Item 82	Adsense	Adsense is not related in any way to SEO ranking. Google will definitely not give you a ranking bonus because of hosting Adsense ads. Adsense might boost your income but this has nothing to do with your search rankings.	0
Checklist Item 83	Adwords	Similarly to Adsense, Adwords has nothing to do with your search rankings. Adwords will bring more traffic to your site but this will not affect your rankings in whatsoever way.	0
Checklist Item 84	Hosting downtime	Hosting downtime is directly related to accessibility because if a site is frequently down, it can't be indexed. But in practice this is a factor only if your hosting provider is really unreliable and has less than 97-98% uptime.	-1
Checklist Item 85	Dynamic URLs	Spiders prefer static URLs, though you will see many dynamic pages on top positions. Long dynamic URLs (over 100 characters) are really bad and in any case you'd better use a tool to rewrite dynamic URLs in something more human- and SEO-friendly.	-1
Checklist Item 86	Session IDs	session IDs should not be used for information to be indexed by spiders.	-2
Checklist Item 87	robots.txt	If indexing of a considerable portion of the site is banned, this is likely to affect the nonbanned part as well because spiders will come less frequently to a "noindex" site.	-2
Checklist Item 88	Redirects (301 and 302)	When not applied properly the target page might not open, or worse – a redirect can be regarded as a black hat technique, when the visitor is immediately taken to a different page.	-3

Contact Design Chemical at info@designchemical.com or use our [online contact form](#) for a free site evaluation