



SEO GUIDE



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Search engine optimisation can have a significant positive impact on a site's performance in search results.

It is often about making incremental improvements which, individually, may be small, but when combined can make a noticeable difference.

This document presents information, with links to recommended tools (which are largely free), with a particular focus on content, on-page optimisation and page experience.

Fundamentals and offsite SEO

1. Set up Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools

<https://search.google.com/search-console/>

<https://www.bing.com/webmasters/about/>

2. Set up Google Analytics

<https://analytics.google.com/analytics/>

3. Set up and optimise Google Business Profile

<https://www.semrush.com/blog/google-my-business/>

4. Generate and submit a sitemap

Essentially this is a list of URLs that specify a site's main content to make sure that it gets crawled and indexed efficiently. Google supports a number of different sitemap formats, but XML is the most common. Submit the sitemap to Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools.

5. Add a robots.txt file

A robots.txt file helps manage web crawler activities.

- Avoid letting internal search result pages be crawled.
- Avoid allowing URLs created as a result of proxy services to be crawled.

(It is possible that pages blocked by robots.txt will still be crawled, so for sensitive pages a more secure method is recommended).

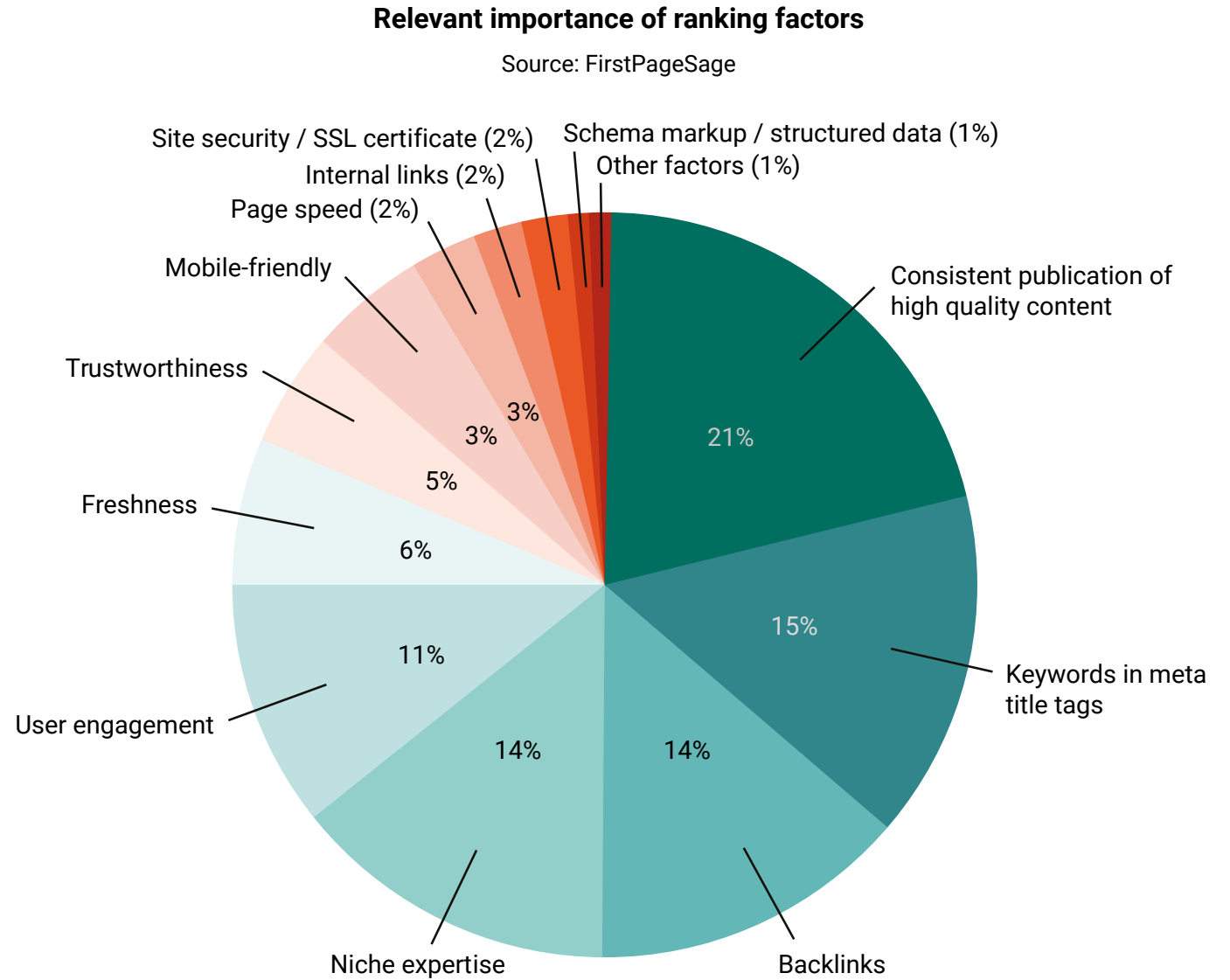
Google's ranking factors

75% of online searches are made with Google and there are a number of factors that Google considers when ranking sites.

<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ranking-systems-guide>

These include:

- The consistency, quality and relevance of the content
- Keyword distribution
- The URL and internal linking structure
- Backlinks and authority



On-page SEO

1. Create high quality content

Content that's unique, helpful for users and regularly updated is the most significant positive ranking factor of all.

Google pays particular attention to content. It needs to be high quality and different to other sites that are ranking for a search term.

Regularly updating posts and adding new information positively affects ranking.

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/blogging-frequency-benchmarks>

If content is duplicated or similar to other web pages, it could cause a negative impact and if duplicate content is regularly published, Google will slow down the crawling rate of a site.

There is a whole science that has arisen around content creation, including such things as whether content length has an impact on where you rank in the search results. (Apparently, the average page word count of a Google top ten result is 1,447 words).

There may be something in this, because long-form content tends to be best for link building (which is a significant ranking factor).

However – a more practical approach is to aim to create content that covers a subject in depth and with the amount of detail it requires. Google up-ranks pages that fully answer a user's question and provide detailed solutions.

A sound page hierarchy of information will help user engagement.

2. Understand users' search intent

Essentially, this is referring to the searches users are typing into search engines and why – their 'search intent'.

Understanding the search intent will help in deciding the type of content needed to match a user's query.

There are three primary search intent categories:

- Informational – when a user is looking for information about a subject.
- Transactional – when a user is searching for products or services which might lead to a purchase or online transaction.
- Navigational – when a user is looking for a specific brand or website.

The goal is to accurately match the content created with the user search intent, because if content satisfies the needs of search engine users, it will rank highly in the search engine results pages (SERPs) for that search term.

Results in SERPs

Results show up in lots of different ways, depending on which information Google's algorithm determines would be particularly relevant to the search term. This is based a number of factors, such as the type of business, the importance of location etc.

As an example, let's say a potential customer searches for 'old books'.

We can see below that the topmost results are paid advertisements and are marked as 'Sponsored' in bold type.

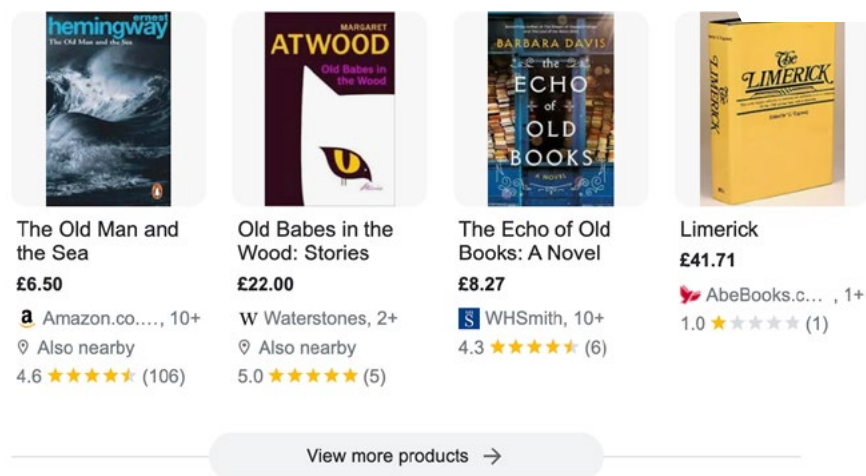
Google PPC/Google Ads or Ad Words are options that Google offers to sites and businesses that want to pay a fee to appear highly in the search results for relevant search terms.

The image shows a Google search interface for the query 'old books'. The search bar contains the text 'old books' and has icons for clearing the search, voice search, image search, and a magnifying glass. Below the search bar are filter buttons for 'Products', 'Kids' Books', 'Images', 'Romance', 'History', 'Poetry', 'Biography', 'Fiction', and 'Non-fiction'. To the right of these buttons are 'All filters', 'Tools', and 'SafeSearch' options. Below the filters, it says 'About 10,760,000,000 results (0.26 seconds)'. The location is set to 'Mytown AB1'. The results section is labeled 'Sponsored' and shows eight product listings. Each listing includes an image of books, a title, a price, and the seller's name.

Product Title	Price	Seller
Books By The Foot: Green &...	£58.79	Used Country House... By Producthero
Books By The Foot: Leather...	£54.99	Used Country House... By Producthero
Books By The Foot: Distresse...	£29.99	Used Country House... By Producthero
Books By The Foot: Decorativ...	£58.79	Used Country House... By Producthero
Vintage Books For Decoration...	£40.00	Etsy ★★★★★ (30) By Google
HERCHR False Book Box, Vinta...	£16.59	Amazon.co.uk By Google
Buy Books by The Metre:...	£89.00	Used Country House... By Producthero
Vintage Large Collection Of T...	£497.00	Used vinterior.co By Google

Whilst improving organic results involves SEO optimisation, a paid ad can be an instant boost towards improved ranking. However, our focus is on organic results.

As we scroll down we see a product listing section. Content that's been crawled and is related to retail may also be shown in listings and annotations for free across Google.



The image shows a screenshot of a Google search results page for books. It features four product listings arranged horizontally. Each listing includes a book cover, the title, the price, and the retailer. The first listing is 'The Old Man and the Sea' by Ernest Hemingway, priced at £6.50, available on Amazon.co.uk with a 4.6-star rating from 106 reviews. The second is 'Old Babs in the Wood: Stories' by Margaret Atwood, priced at £22.00, available at Waterstones with a 5.0-star rating from 5 reviews. The third is 'The Echo of Old Books: A Novel' by Barbara Davis, priced at £8.27, available at WHSmith with a 4.3-star rating from 6 reviews. The fourth is 'Limerick' by Edward Lear, priced at £41.71, available at AbeBooks.co.uk with a 1.0-star rating from 1 review. Below the listings is a button that says 'View more products →'.

Book Title	Author	Price	Retailer	Rating
The Old Man and the Sea	Ernest Hemingway	£6.50	Amazon.co.uk	4.6 (106)
Old Babs in the Wood: Stories	Margaret Atwood	£22.00	Waterstones	5.0 (5)
The Echo of Old Books: A Novel	Barbara Davis	£8.27	WHSmith	4.3 (6)
Limerick	Edward Lear	£41.71	AbeBooks.co.uk	1.0 (1)

For other types of business, the 'Find Results On' feature might appear below any sponsored results and show directory results.

There is no markup that can be implemented to appear in this SERP feature as it redirects users to directories. However, having a high-quality listing can help to increase your visibility on these directories.

'Google My Business'

https://www.google.com/intl/en_uk/business/

'Google My Business' (previously referred to as 'Google Places For Business'), is a platform where business information such as address, operating hours, telephone number and website can be input and managed, to show up on your Google listing and Google Maps.

Non-sponsored results

As a book seller, to understand the content that would need to be included in our page in order to rank, we can simply open the non-sponsored pages ranking in the top ten results and look at the content – the approach, the headings, the number of images and common keywords.

To fully optimise on-page content, we would need to boost the topical relevance.

We can do this by making sure we've clearly included related subtopics.

An easy, free way to find subtopics to include is to search a chosen keyword in Google and check the suggested search phrases.


This can be taken a step further by looking at the 'People Also Ask' snippet which will show the most popular questions asked around that topic.

People also ask :

Are any old books worth anything? 

What is the best website for old books? 

What are very old books called? 

Are books over 100 years old worth anything? 

[Feedback](#)

Rich snippets

Rich Snippets are more eye-catching than standard search results and can lead to a higher organic click through rate.

They are standard Google search results with additional data, such as an image, reviews and events, to supplement the standard title tag, meta description and URL. This extra data is made available by adding structured data to the html of a page.

<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/structured-data/search-gallery>

3. Formulate a keyword strategy

Keywords and phrases are the search terms users type, so it's important a site contains the keywords its audience is searching for.

Keyword research and a keyword strategy are required in order to rank for the right search terms. (If a site is not ranking for the right terms, traffic isn't going to convert at the rate it could).

Optimised keywords which match site content to the search intent help to reduce bounce rate (the percentage of visitors that leave a webpage without taking an action), because users will tend to spend more time on the site.

Specifically, increasing dwell-time on site by three seconds correlates to ranking one position higher in search results.

Keyword research tools

There are tools for discovering new keywords related to a business and seeing estimates of the searches they receive.

The priority is to decide what the main 'head terms' should be – the ones that are going to drive leads, sales and conversions.

One of the most effective ways to conduct keyword research is to look at what competitors are doing and follow their lead. If a competitor is ranking highly for a particular keyword, a keyword research tool will allow a researcher to input the competitor URL and see what keywords they're using.

<https://ads.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>

<https://trends.google.com/trends/>

<https://www.wordstream.com/keywords>

There is a Chrome extension – 'Keywords Everywhere' – which displays search volume, related keywords, and other data directly in the search query.

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/keywords-everywhere-keywo/hbapdpemoojbophdfndmlgdhpljgmp?hl=en>

(free for some features)

<https://www.semrush.com/analytics/keywordmagic/start>

(free for a limited number of enquiries)

<https://www.semrush.com/analytics/keywordgap/>

(free for a limited number of enquiries)

<https://ahrefs.com/keywords-explorer>

(paid)

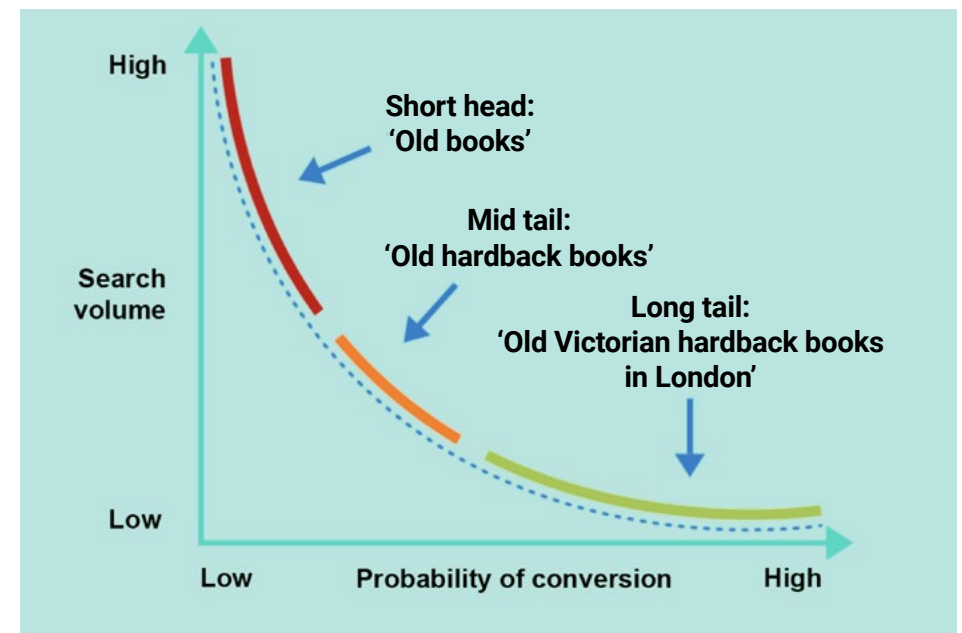
Long-tail keywords

A sound SEO strategy is one that targets long-tail keyword variants as well as head terms.

Long-tail keywords attract a lower volume of more specific searches, which are more likely to result in conversions.

(The term 'head keyword' comes from the relationship between high volume search words and low volume, or 'long-tail' keywords).

Volume to conversion relationship of long-tail keywords



Add keywords in URLs

A sound keyword optimisation practice is to include the keyword in the URL of a post or page.

Avoid keyword stuffing

Keyword stuffing – the practice of excessively filling a web page with keywords with the goal of gaming a search engine’s ranking system – is likely to be penalised and harm a site’s rankings.

LSI keywords

Besides the primary keyword and head terms, there are other related terms that users search for which are called LSI (latent semantic indexing keywords).

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/what-is-latent-semantic-indexing-why-does-it-matter-for-your-seo-strategy>

4. Optimise title tags and meta descriptions

Title tags and meta descriptions are added to the HTML code in the header of a web page. They help search engines understand the content on the page. They describe the content and explain how it relates to a user’s search query.

A page’s title tag and meta description are often shown when that page appears in search engine results (although Google will sometimes select other text from the page if it deems it more representative of the page content).

The title tag should be engaging and the primary keyword should be included. (Most title tags on Google’s first page contain all or part of the keyword they rank for).

In search engine results, the meta description is displayed below the title tag – this is a chance to tell the user and the search engine what the content is about. It’s important to keyword-optimize the meta description, and to keep it no longer than 160 characters.

Well written and compelling meta tags can attract more users to click through to a site from search engine results.

Image alt text

Over 30% of search engine results are images. Best practice for adding ‘alt tags’ is to describe the image, being specific and using both the image’s subject and context as a guide, but alt text is also an opportunity to use some keywords. (Images that are only decorative should have an empty alt attribute).

Anchor Text

Anchor text within a page provides another opportunity for SEO optimisation by adding keywords.

5. Generate backlinks

Search engines consider backlinks (or 'inbound links') as 'votes' for a page and pages with a high number of backlinks tend to have higher organic search engine rankings. In fact, the number one result in Google has an average of 3.8x more backlinks than positions two-ten.

Getting backlinks from multiple different sites is important and the number of domains linking to a page has a correlation with ranking.

The most effective way to generate backlinks is to create content that bloggers and industry experts can use and link back to.

By looking at the top referral sources of a page (the sites that are already linking to its content), new opportunities can be found to create content that will increase backlinks.

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9049606?hl=en#zippy=%2Ctop-linking-domains-which-sites-link-to-me-the-most>

Domain Authority

This is a ranking metric that shows a site's expertise about a particular topic and its ability to rank on search engines.

Domain authority is a Moz initiative and it assigns a score between 1 and 100. It is calculated by evaluating multiple factors, including linking domains and total number of links, into a single score. This score can then be used when comparing websites or tracking the 'ranking strength' of a site over time.

Domain Authority is not a Google ranking factor as such, rather it is another tool to help in understanding the impact that Domain Authority and other link-based metrics have on a site's rankings and popularity.

Generally speaking, sites with large numbers of backlinks (such as wikipedia.com or google.com) are at the top end of the Domain Authority scale, whereas smaller businesses and sites with fewer inbound links have lower scores. A new site will always start with a Domain Authority score of one, and that score will increase as the site earns more authoritative backlinks over time.

The best way to influence the Domain Authority metric is to improve a site's overall SEO health, with a particular focus on the quality and quantity of inbound links.

Niche expertise

Some products or services are very specific, meaning their target market is small. Specific (long-tail) keywords and phrases may not have high search volumes, but can generate more click-throughs and conversions. (Keyword research is vital because, although there may be some specialised terminology for a niche market, it may not be what users are using to search).

Niche markets have specific needs. By creating content that meets their needs and optimising it for search engines, trust and loyalty can be built in a site's niche expertise. Structuring a site in a way that encourages engagement can lead to an opportunity to build a community.

6. Install and Configure an SEO Plugin

An SEO plugin can be of help by providing useful dashboard tools for items such as:

- SEO analysis
- Readability analysis
- Insights
- Link suggestions
- XML sitemap
- Security

Page experience

1. Research Google's page experience system

Google's page experience algorithm is designed to reflect the fact that multiple factors influence user experience, and to consider the full site experience rather than a single metric, like relevance.

From Google:

'People prefer sites that offer a great page experience. This is why we have a page experience system that assesses a variety of criteria, such as how quickly pages load, mobile-friendliness, if pages lack intrusive interstitials, and if pages are served in a secure fashion. In situations where there are many possible matches with relatively equal relevance, the system helps give preference to content with a better page experience.'

<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ranking-systems-guide>

Each factor is a small portion in itself, but together they add up to a significant percentage of the total.

2. Check core web vitals

Core web vitals are metrics Google uses to capture the experience of users and attempt to measure a site's qualitative feel to inform the ranking algorithm. These are in three categories: loading speed, interactivity and visual stability.

Largest Contentful Paint

A metric that reports how long it takes the largest element on the page to load. Google defines a 'good' LCP time as under 2.5 seconds and a 'poor' one at more than 4 seconds.

First Input Delay

A measure of the time delay between a user interacting with a page and the browser being able to respond (eg via clicks on links and buttons).

Google defines FIDs under 100ms as 'good' and above 300ms as 'poor.'

Cumulative Layout Shift

This relates to visual stability and attempts to measure the degree to which page elements move about unexpectedly as the page loads or the view window changes. A score of less than 0.1 is 'good,' while one above 0.25 is 'poor.'

<https://gtmetrix.com/>

The direct correlation between site speed and Google rankings is actually small. Google's algorithm penalises extremely slow pages and up-ranks faster ones, but the main effect since their algorithm started considering page speed has been to improve website page loading speed overall. The average page loading speed for a first page result is 1.65 seconds.

3. Optimise for mobile

Mobile-friendliness impacts conversion rate (40% of transactions happen on mobile). Users are less likely to engage with a business if a site isn't optimised for mobile content and experience and Google penalises those sites.

Google's mobile page testing tool:

https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly/result?id=byWqI915BKQ1DyGzz_B5zg

4. Ensure safe browsing

Sites that are free of malicious software and deception are up-ranked and those that are not are penalised.

5. Use HTTPS

Google is an advocate for the technology to improve online safety (particularly for customer transactions) and improve overall web experience.

6. No intrusive interstitials

Google wants sites to stop using intrusive interstitials (pop-ups) that delay access to the site and harm the experience. The algorithm penalises pages that display standalone or pop-up interstitials that users have to dismiss before accessing the main content.

7. Use structured data

Google uses structured data to understand the content on a page. It is a way of describing a site to make it easier for search engines by using a semantic vocabulary that presents content in a way that they can understand. The vocabulary used by the main search engines is schema.org.

Google's Structured Data Markup Helper can be used to assist with page markup.

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/markup-helper/u/0/>

Semantic HTML

Ensuring semantic HTML (semantic markup) – use of a doctype and semantic tagging (such as <head>, <body>, <nav>, <h1>, <p>, <h2>, , etc) – will enable search engines to crawl a site efficiently.

For more information about how can work with you to develop and implement an SEO strategy, prioritising the factors where improvements can be most effective, visit:

<https://workingtreestudio.com/service/seo/>



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