

PERIODIC TABLE OF SEO FACTORS 2019



SEARCHENGINELAND.COM

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Search Engine Land

ABOUT

Since it first debuted in 2011, Search Engine Land's Periodic Table of SEO has become a globally recognized tool that search professionals have relied on to help them understand the elements essential to a winning SEO strategy. In the last two years alone, it has been downloaded nearly 100,000 times by professionals from 74 different countries, and has been referenced and linked to thousands of times by marketing websites, blogs and pieces of industry content marketing. And, this year's might just be the best one yet.

While much of the foundation of search engine optimization has either stayed the same or has become further entrenched, much has also changed as the web has become more mobile, instantly accessible and aligned to new Internet-connected devices. So, we couldn't pass up the opportunity to give this infographic its biggest overhaul ever, especially because 2019 marks the 150th anniversary of Dmitri Mendeleev's original Periodic Table of Chemical Elements.

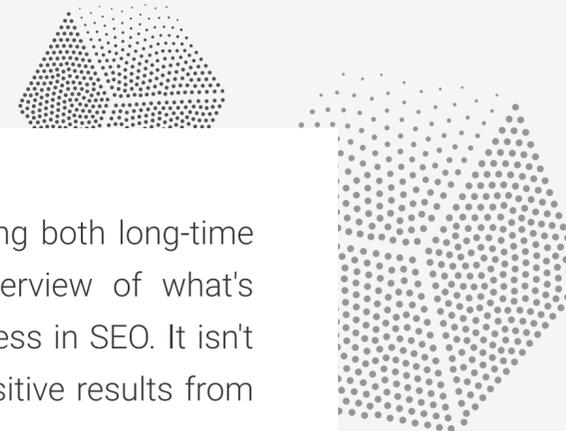
Previous versions of this table focused on elements dubbed "success factors," but this year's table contains elements that are either foundational, increasingly toxic to an SEO strategy or represent verticals that are still emerging.

With this relaunched infographic, we are offering both long-time SEOs and those new to the industry an overview of what's important when you're looking to achieve success in SEO. It isn't all about rankings, but it is about achieving positive results from greater visibility in search engines.

If you've seen the previous iterations of this chart, you will be familiar with the overall concept – each element in the table represents a factor that you need to consider to be successful in SEO. Depending on your vertical, the relative importance of factors may vary, but this updated Periodic Table provides a foundational understanding of the space as it exists in 2019, with its content based upon the contributions of our editors as well as info and opinions gleaned from a survey of our audience.

While SEO is indeed an art, it is also a science. We hope this refreshed tool serves as an essential reference for your experiments.

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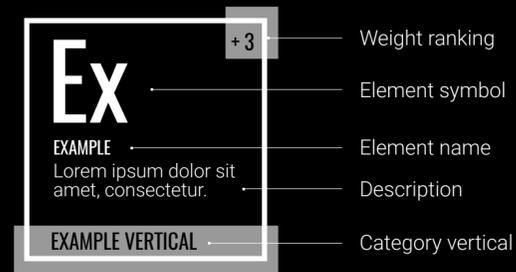
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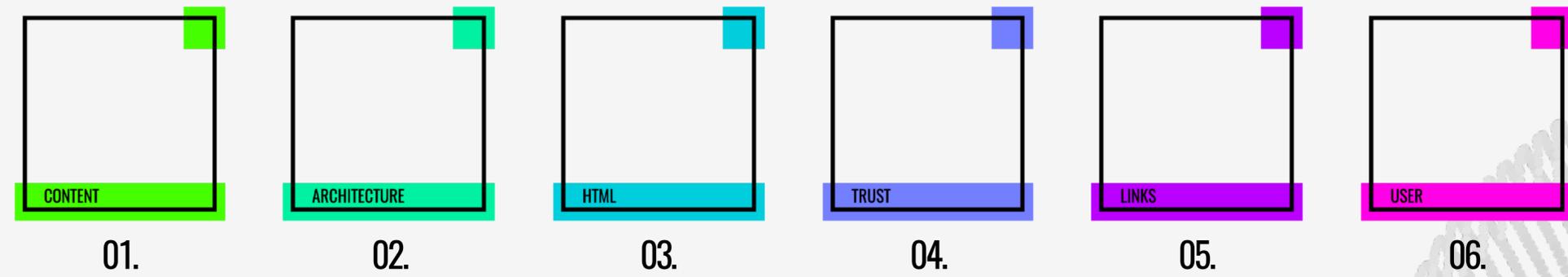
PERIODIC TABLE OF SEO FACTORS 2019

Search engine optimization seems like alchemy to the uninitiated. This guide to success factors, best practices and potential pitfalls can build the framework for your SEO strategy.



TOXINS											
Qu +3 QUALITY Pages must be well-written and highly valuable. CONTENT	Rs +3 RESEARCH Investigate keywords people may use to find your content. CONTENT	Cr +3 CRAWL Search engines must easily crawl your pages. ARCHITECTURE								Cl -3 CLOAKING Don't show the engines different pages than your searchers. TOXINS	Sc -3 SCHEMES Buying links, spamming blogs, all terrible tactics. TOXINS
Kw +2 KEYWORDS Build target keywords into your pages. CONTENT	Mo +3 MOBILE Optimize for today's smartphones and tablets. ARCHITECTURE	Tt +3 TITLES Build keywords into your titles. HTML						Co +2 COUNTRY Consider the country of your searcher. USER		Sf -2 STUFFING Don't be excessive with packing keywords into your copy. TOXINS	Hi -2 HIDING Making keywords invisible is a dirty trick. TOXINS
Fr +2 FRESHNESS Create timely content; refresh or retire stagnant pages. CONTENT	Dd +2 DUPLICATE Be smart. Use canonicals, redirects. ARCHITECTURE	Ds +2 DESCRIPTIONS Meta tags should describe what pages are about. HTML						Lo +2 LOCALITY Consider the region of your searcher. USER		Ar -1 PIRACY Hosting stolen content can get you flagged. TOXINS	Iv -1 INTRUSIVE Ad-heavy content, intrusive interstitials are a bad idea. TOXINS
Mm +2 MULTIMEDIA Images, video and audio can set your content apart. CONTENT	Sp +2 SPEED Your site should load quickly on any device. ARCHITECTURE	St +2 STRUCTURE Use Schema and more to turn data into enhanced listings. HTML	Au +3 AUTHORITY Authority is everything. Covet links, shares and other signals. TRUST	Va +3 VALUE Seek links from trusted, quality websites. LINKS	Ux +2 USER EXPERIENCE Experience matters more every day. USER						
An +2 ANSWERS Create content that can be turned into answers in the SERP. CONTENT	Ps +2 HTTPS Provide a secure connection for visitors. ARCHITECTURE	Hd +2 HEADINGS Build keywords into your H1 - H2 tags, especially H1. HTML	En +2 ENGAGEMENT Visitors should spend time with your pages, not bounce. TRUST	Ac +2 ANCHORS Seek links from pages that use similar keywords. LINKS	Hs +1 HISTORY Consider how regularly someone has visited your site. USER						
Dt +2 DEPTH Shallow content fails. Aim for substance. CONTENT	Ur +1 URLS Build keywords into your page addresses. ARCHITECTURE	Am +1 AMP Google's mobile page format is built for speed. HTML	Re +1 REPUTATION Sites operating the same way for years carry weight. TRUST	Ba +1 BACKLINKS The more high-quality links, the better. LINKS	In +1 INTENT Consider why someone is conducting a specific search. USER						
EMERGING VERTICALS											
										Voi VOICE Say hi to Alexa, Google, Siri. EMERGING VERTICALS	Loc LOCAL Listings, reviews, maps and more EMERGING VERTICALS
										Img IMAGE Photos, illustrations are rising in the SERP. EMERGING VERTICALS	Vid VIDEO Searchers are looking for live action. EMERGING VERTICALS

THE ELEMENT GROUPS



The table's elements are organized into groups of similar factors, and each individual element is weighted based upon its overall importance to SEO. Those weightings, from +1 to +3 on the positive side and -1 to -3 on the negative side, are shown in the top right-hand corner of the element's symbol, and the elements are organized with the most important – highest weighted – items at the top of each group.

An element with a weight of +1, for example, wouldn't have as much of an impact as one weighted at +3. When you see negative numbers – which are associated with the Toxins – a -3 weighting indicates the practice can do maximum damage to your strategy, while a -1 could be harmful but isn't generally as dangerous as a -2 or -3.

The main table consists of six positive groups – Content, Architecture, HTML, Trust, Links and User – and you'll find two sub-groups on the right side of the table. The Toxins represent practices that can harm your SEO, even getting you penalized by the search engines. They're therefore weighted with negative numbers. Below that, the Emerging Verticals group illustrates some of the factors that are growing in importance. We'll explore each of these groups in more detail below.

THE ELEMENT GROUPS

01.

Ever since February 2011, when Google's Panda algorithm update took the web by storm and affected nearly 12% of U.S. results, webmasters have been on notice that content counts – and it counts a lot. Panda was said to be Google's way of weeding out "content farms" – groups of sites with thin content that was often even copied from other places. But, because the algorithm's emphasis was on penalizing shallow and low-quality content, it meant that efforts to develop in-depth, high-quality content would be rewarded.

In the Content element grouping, we explore the facets of high-quality, in-depth content. It starts with tried-and-true methods like performing keyword Research (Rs) to identify what users are looking for and then incorporating those Keywords (Kw) into your content. More important, however, at +3, is Quality (Qu) – which indicates how critical it is to have well-written pages that provide value to readers. Additionally, search engines reward Freshness (Fr), ranking sites higher if they're frequently updated.

Qu +3
QUALITY
Pages must be well-written and highly valuable.
CONTENT

Rs +3
RESEARCH
Investigate keywords people may use to find your content.
CONTENT

Kw +2
KEYWORDS
Build target keywords into your pages.
CONTENT

Fr +2
FRESHNESS
Create timely content; refresh or retire stagnant pages.
CONTENT

Mm +2
MULTIMEDIA
Images, video and audio can set your content apart.
CONTENT

An +2
ANSWERS
Create content that can be turned into answers in the SERP.
CONTENT

Dt +2
DEPTH
Shallow content fails. Aim for substance.
CONTENT

Images and video – Multimedia (Mm) – are important ways of delivering high-quality in-Depth (Dt) content, especially as the prevalence of higher-bandwidth connections makes it easier to consume these formats, even when users are browsing on their phones. And, speaking of new ways to access content, the Answers (An) element represents the value of explicitly answering users' questions on your pages – because, if you do so well enough, your page may be displayed as a featured snippet or returned as a voice search result on Google Assistant.

This year, rather than list "Thin" content as a negative factor (Vt) as we have in the past, we've flipped it around and made Depth (Dt) a positive factor – because it's easier to craft a strategy to reach a positive goal than it is to focus on what to avoid.

CONTENT

THE ELEMENT GROUPS

02.

How your site is built – the URLs you use, the page load speed, your security and crawlability – helps search engines know what your pages are about and helps ensure these platforms that users will be greeted with a fast-loading, malware-free landing page if they click through from a search engine results page (SERP).

The most important element here, at +3, is Crawl (Cr). If a search engine can't crawl and index your pages, you've got no hope of appearing in the search results at all, let alone ranking well. Next comes Mobile (Mo), which represents optimizing your content so that mobile searchers can see everything that desktop users see on your site. As early as 2015, Google noted that more searches took place on mobile devices than on desktop computers, and mobile devices have only grown in importance since then. In fact, Google is aggressively migrating to a mobile-first indexing framework. Hand in hand with Mobile is Speed (Sp). Not only do page load delays frustrate users and decrease conversions, Google has made it clear that speed is a ranking factor.

Cr +3
CRAWL
Search engines must easily crawl your pages.
ARCHITECTURE

Mo +3
MOBILE
Optimize for today's smartphones and tablets.
ARCHITECTURE

Dd +2
DUPLICATE
Be smart. Use canonicals, redirects.
ARCHITECTURE

Sp +2
SPEED
Your site should load quickly on any device.
ARCHITECTURE

Ps +2
HTTPS
Provide a secure connection for visitors.
ARCHITECTURE

Ur +1
URLs
Build keywords into your page addresses.
ARCHITECTURE

A SITE USING ENCRYPTION, OR HTTPS (PS), MAKES USERS FEEL SECURE ENOUGH TO INPUT PERSONAL INFORMATION. AND, SINCE GOOGLE'S CHROME BROWSER BEGAN WARNING THAT SITES WITHOUT HTTPS COULD BE INSECURE, THIS HAS RISEN IN URGENCY.

More nuts-and-bolts architecture concerns include the proper handling of Duplicate (Dd) content by setting canonical URLs – this gets back to the above mentioned algorithmic crackdown on sites simply copying other sites' content without their permission. Additionally, using appropriate contextual keywords in your pages' permalinks sends a signal to the engines, and to users, that the page contains the info they're seeking.

ARCHITECTURE

THE ELEMENT GROUPS

03.

These elements encompass the HTML tags that you should be using to send clues to search engines about your content and enable that content to render quickly. Are you describing movie showtimes? Do you have ratings and reviews on your e-commerce pages? What's the headline of the article you've published? In every case, there's a way to communicate this with HTML.

Search engines look for ordinary formatting elements like Titles (Tt) and Headings (Hd) to determine what your page's content is about, figuring that these cues to human readers will work just as well for them.

But search engines also utilize special fields like structured data (St) markup and meta descriptions (Ds) as clues to the meaning and purpose of the page.

This year, we've added a special category of HTML used to speed page load on mobile devices, AMP (Am), formerly dubbed Accelerated Mobile Pages. Using AMP signals your intentions to serve mobile users as quickly and efficiently as possible, though Google has said it is not a ranking factor.

Tt +3
TITLES
Build keywords into your titles.
HTML

Ds +2
DESCRIPTIONS
Meta tags should describe what pages are about.
HTML

St +2
STRUCTURE
Use Schema and more to turn data into enhanced listings.
HTML

Hd +2
HEADINGS
Build keywords into your H1 - H2 tags, especially H1.
HTML

Am +1
AMP
Google's mobile page format is built for speed.
HTML

THE ELEMENT GROUPS

04.

You may have heard of EAT – Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness – as being the measure of a high-value site to search engines. Of course, Google has never explicitly said EAT is a ranking factor, but it hasn't been silent on what it considers good content either.

Authority (Au) and Reputation (Re) speak directly to these signals, encompassing how your site fits into its niche – is it the most authoritative in its field and has it established that reputation by being around for many years? That's the ideal when it comes to these elements. Additionally, engines look at the Engagement (En) of the traffic they send to your site – do they seem satisfied, or do they come right back for an alternative result?

Au ⁺³
AUTHORITY
Authority is everything. Covet links, shares and other signals.
TRUST

En ⁺²
ENGAGEMENT
Visitors should spend time with your pages, not bounce.
TRUST

Re ⁺¹
REPUTATION
Sites operating the same way for years carry weight.
TRUST

TRUST

THE ELEMENT GROUPS

05.

Of all of the elements, this group has been around the longest. When Google burst onto the scene with its then-revolutionary PageRank algorithm in 2000, the company made clear that links were a factor in how well a website would perform in search. The higher-quality and more relevant the sites that link to your own are, the better it is for your SEO.

MOST IMPORTANT HERE IS VALUE (VA), AT +2, WHICH REPRESENTS THE QUALITY AND REPUTATION OF THE SITES THAT ARE LINKING TO YOU.

Va +3
VALUE
Seek links from trusted, quality websites.
LINKS

Ac +2
ANCHORS
Seek links from pages that use similar keywords.
LINKS

Ba +1
BACKLINKS
The more high-quality links, the better.
LINKS

After all, sites of outstanding quality usually provide their audiences with links to equally high-value sites and avoid linking to stinkers. Next, also at +2, is Anchors (An) – the text that other sites use when linking to yours. Are they linking with words like "the foremost authority on butterflies" or is the link text more like "disseminating incorrect information on lepidoptera"?

Finally, there is the question of volume. How many Backlinks (Ba) does your site inspire? If you're at the top of your area of expertise, it's likely to be a lot.

THE ELEMENT GROUPS

06.

User-specific factors will also affect how you rank in particular Countries (Co) and Localities (Lo), and, while this is important (+2 each), there's not much you can do about it other than to make sure your site really speaks to users in the area where your audience resides. For example, use hreflang to indicate your site's language (eng-us for the U.S. and eng-gb for Britain, for example) and, if you're a local business targeting specific cities or neighborhoods, make sure you include your address as well as mentions of the neighborhoods or cities you serve.

The way users interact with your site, User Experience (Ux), is also important (+2). For example, the engines consider pogo-sticking – when users jump to a search result page and come right back because they haven't found what they were looking for – as a sign of a bad user experience. Intent (In) is important here, too, as the extent to which your page meets the user's intent will play a role in how your site is ranked for similar searches. As for History (Hs), which considers how regularly a user engages with your domain, its significance is waning but it still should be factored into your SEO strategy.

Co ⁺²
COUNTRY
Consider the country of your searcher.
USER

Lo ⁺²
LOCALITY
Consider the region of your searcher.
USER

Ux ⁺²
USER EXPERIENCE
Experience matters more every day.
USER

Hs ⁺¹
HISTORY
Consider how regularly someone has visited your site.
USER

In ⁺¹
INTENT
Consider why someone is conducting a specific search.
USER

TOXINS

Anyone entering the realm of search engine optimization is likely to encounter some questionable (aka "black hat") tactics, or Toxins, as we call them here. These are shortcuts, or tricks, that may have been sufficient to guarantee a high ranking back in the day when the engines' methods were much less sophisticated. And, they might even work now, at least until you're caught. However, we recommend staying far away from these tactics, because employing them could result in a penalty or ban, which will achieve the exact opposite of what you intended.

This is the first year we've broken out the Toxins into their own mini-table. Previously they were incorporated along with the primary elements, but with negative weightings. We wanted to make their place – far away from legitimate practices – more clear by keeping them separate.

Cl CLOAKING Don't show the engines different pages than your searchers. TOXINS	Sc SCHEMES Buying links, spamming blogs, all terrible tactics. TOXINS
Sf STUFFING Don't be excessive with packing keywords into your copy. TOXINS	Hi HIDING Making keywords invisible is a dirty trick. TOXINS
Ar PIRACY Hosting stolen content can get you flagged. TOXINS	Iv INTRUSIVE Ad-heavy content, intrusive interstitials are a bad idea. TOXINS

Cloaking (Cl) involves setting up your site in such a way that the search engines' crawlers see something different than the actual humans visiting. This is a big no-no, as – apart from things like structured data markup – you should be building your site for people, not for search engines, and the more sophisticated the engines' technologies become, the less likely it is that you'll be able to fool them.

Three of these Toxins – link Schemes (Sc), keyword Stuffing (Sf) and Hiding (Hi) – represent ways to turn the search engines' signals against them. As we've talked about previously, seeking links and incorporating Keywords (Kw) are perfectly legitimate practices, but paying for links and going overboard with keywords can get you in trouble.

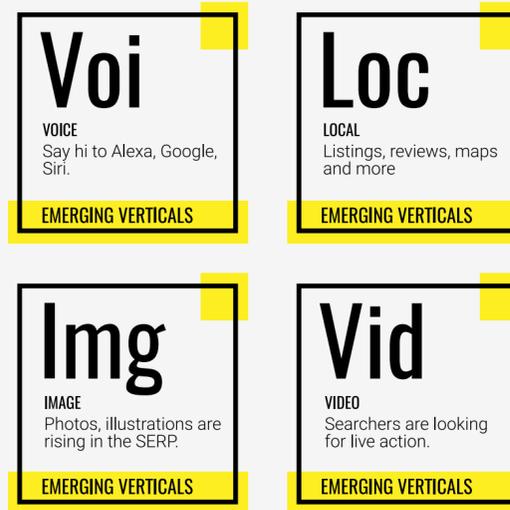
The Piracy (Ar) Toxin involves hosting stolen content – either items scraped from other sites or copyright-violating downloads of music or videos – which is flat-out illegal as well as bad for SEO. And being Intrusive (Iv) by delivering pop-ups or invasive ads of any format, damages your user experience.

EMERGING VERTICALS

These factors, new to the chart for 2019, are those that we believe wield growing influence on SEO. The bottom line: Ignore these at your own peril.

While the items in Emerging Verticals often correspond to one or more of the base elements, they represent a new way of looking at things – because of consumer behavior or search engine innovations – that we believe will grow in importance in the coming years.

Much of this is driven by consumer adoption of new technologies: 77% of Americans have smartphones, and most people (89%) with a smartphone, tablet or other mobile device, report being online at least once a day, with some (31%) saying they're online "almost constantly," according to data from the Pew Research Center. So, it's no wonder that they're pulling out their phones for information about Local (Loc) businesses, and consuming Images (Img) and Video (Vid) at a higher rate.

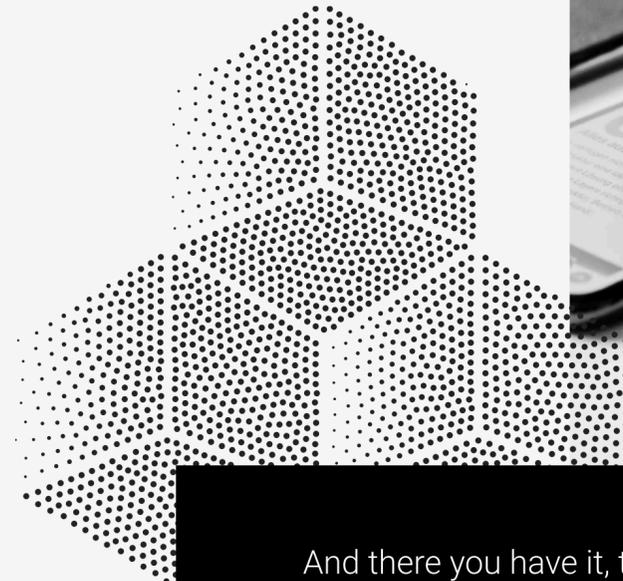


Those smartphones are also likely to offer a voice-controlled digital assistant like Google Assistant, Siri or even Amazon's Alexa. At the end of 2017, Pew found nearly half of Americans (46%) employing digital assistants, primarily via their smartphones. But, since then, we've seen a giant wave of standalone devices – smart speakers, video screens and devices meant for in-car use – that incorporate these assistants.

Search engines, too, have indicated their increased focus on some of these areas, specifically Images (Img) and Video (Vid). In January, Google's Senior Webmaster Trends Analyst John Mueller tweeted an observation, "that images are (once again) gaining importance overall on the web, and a reminder to think of them as a way of enabling users to find your content through Google Images / image search." Gary Illeys, another Google Webmaster Trends Analyst, has also recently spoken to the multimedia opportunity, saying in a February Reddit AMA that, "media search is way too ignored for what it's capable of doing for publishers, so we're throwing more engineers at it as well as more outreach."

However, addressing these emerging opportunities doesn't require a completely new way of looking at SEO. Techniques to optimize for Voice (Voi), for example, involve the foundational elements of Answers (An) and the intelligent use of Structured (St) data. Meanwhile, Images (Img) and Video (Vid) correspond with Multimedia (Mm), Depth (Dt) and Engagement (En). We felt Local (Loc) could have been a Periodic Table all its own, but it also uses core techniques like Structured (St) data, Mobile (Mo) and Locality (Lo) – among many others.

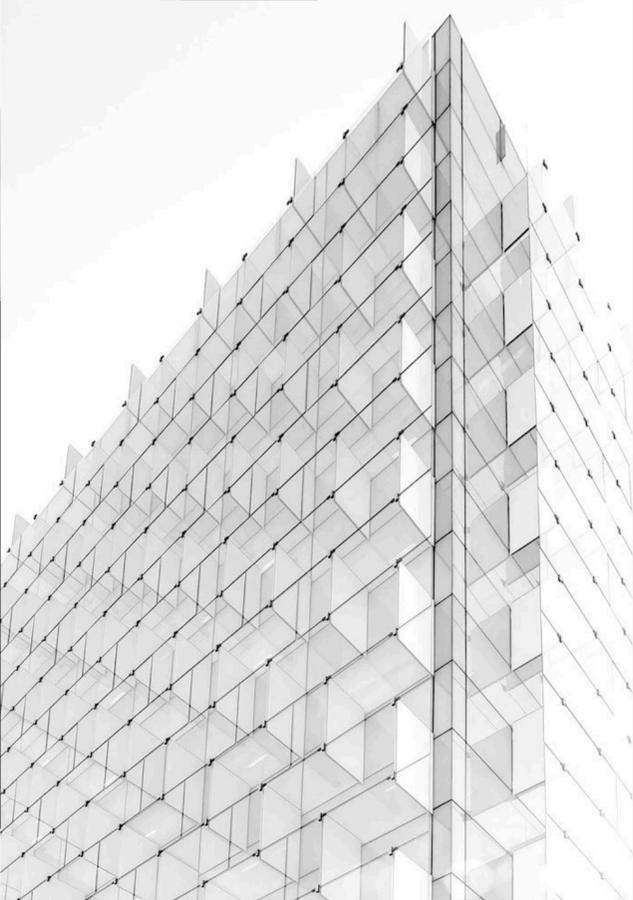
CONCLUSION



And there you have it, the science of SEO, decoded.

We hope the Periodic Table of SEO serves you well as the first visual aid you turn to when trying to plot out an SEO strategy for the properties you own or manage. But, as a reminder, let's agree that what's emerging today will be foundational tomorrow. That's the case in science and tech and it's just as true in search marketing.

What elements will be discovered next year? We'll see.



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In addition to the editorial news staff coverage, Search Engine Land features contributed articles by subject matter experts across all digital marketing disciplines, filled with practical tips, tactics and strategies for running successful marketing programs.

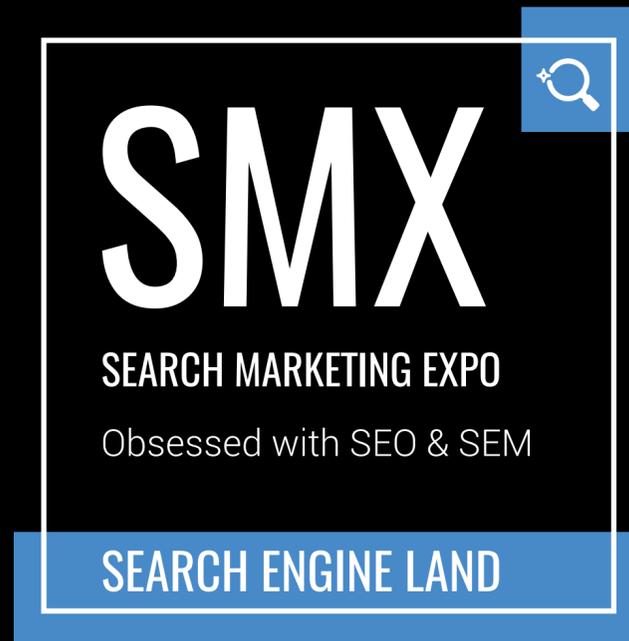
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