Website Tips & Tricks - Lesson 3: Findability

The theme we are going to start today is **Findability**. Today's lesson has screenshots and specifics I want you to look at and learn from. Get yourself a beverage (my beverage of choice is coffee) and settle in to learn.

We will be talking about Google quite a bit today. Before we wander into the intimidating world of Google - have you Googled yourself lately?

Why not do that before we go any further? Bring up a browser on your computer and type in Google.com to bring up the Google search screen. In the search field, type in your name (or your author name if you are working with a pen name).

What are the results? Did Google list your website on the first or second page? We'll table that information for a bit and go on to a few more details before coming back around to it.

Google is what's known as a "responsive" search engine program. In other words, it wants to make you happy! It wants to help you find what you are looking for. As a result, it remembers what you have done in the past and tries to respond more accurately if you repeat a search. Because of this, if you have searched yourself repeatedly on Google, Google will get better and better at finding you ☺

A true test is to use the public library computer or your neighbor/friend's computer - don't log onto anything as yourself and do a Google search for your author name. Are the results different? I suspect they are.

You'll remember in a previous lesson I said that most readers don't go to Google to find their next read. They don't open a Chrome browser window and search on Google for "great romantic suspense," or "great horror novel" or "educational children's book." It is much more likely that they search Amazon, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, Goodreads, or even Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. So, why pay attention to Google at all?

The short answer is that Google rules the world. They set the rules and they are the monster in the room that enforces the rules. Google is by far the most popular search engine in the world. Regardless of whether a large number of readers will search Google for us, we need to be there and findable if they do.

Part of being findable on Google is abiding by their rules. Google has brought in several rules over the last few years that we need to pay attention to.

Rule #1 - Mobile Responsive

Starting in 2015, Google required websites to be "Mobile Responsive." So…what the heck is "Mobile Responsive" for the non-technical person? And why is it so important?

Mobile Responsive is the ability of a website to reorganize its content and menu line to be small-size user friendly. Google has created a graphic to help with understanding - see it below:
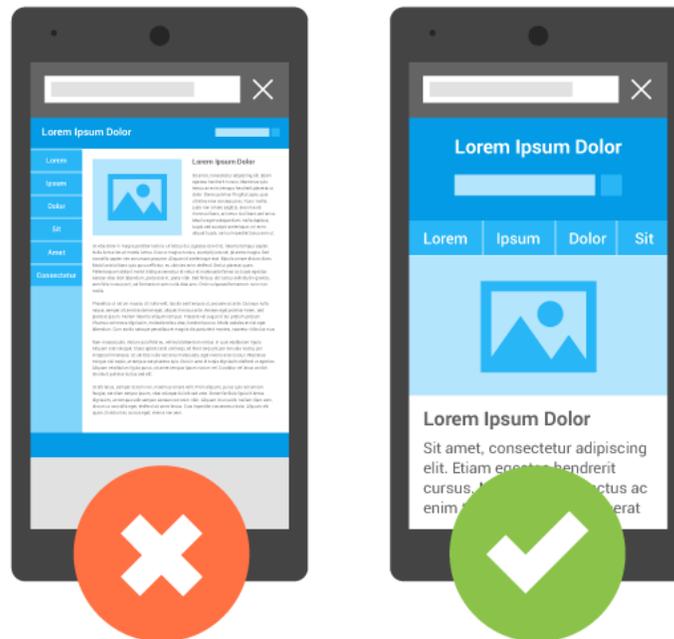
There are two ways that websites can "adjust" for a smaller screen - they can just get smaller to fit or they can completely reorganize their content. Looking at the graphics above, the version on the left is the "get smaller" version. My old eyes can't read content that just gets smaller to fit in the available space :) And don't get me started on trying to get my fingers tapping the right area on a menu line!

When the content is reorganized - as you can see in the right-hand graphic above - the content doesn't become smaller, it moves around. It becomes vertical - the sidebar is no longer on the side, it is viewed under the body content. A picture for a post or page is viewed first with the content below. And although it isn't shown on the graphic above, the menu line is typically converted into an icon with 3 horizontal lines (called "the hamburger menu" or "flyout menu") that can be tapped on to expand to a useable state.

So, the next question is why is Google forcing this? To quote Google:

> *"Mobile is changing the world. Today, everyone has smartphones with them, constantly communicating and looking for information. In many countries, the number of smartphones has surpassed the number of personal computers; having a mobile-friendly website has become a critical part of having an online presence."*

They then go on to say:

> *"In the USA, 94% of people with smartphones search for local information on their phones. Interestingly, 77% of mobile searches occur at home or at work, places where desktop computers are likely to be present."*

From my experience, most author websites are actually accessed via a desktop computer - unless the author focuses on a YA audience. However, since Google sets the rules - we must follow them.

Again, to quote Google:

> *"Google will be giving preferential search rankings to sites optimized for mobile."*

If your website is not mobile responsive, you will not be as visible in a Google search.

So how do you tell if your site is up to snuff according to Google?

You can use this handy-dandy test site ☺

https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly

Assignment #1 - click on that link and test your website's URL to see what Google says about your site and its mobile accessibility.

I'll wait ☺

What did you find? Is your site mobile friendly? How does your site appear on a mobile device? Is there room for improvement or are you pretty happy with the way it looks? We'll be talking more about this in future lessons, but for now, be aware that the theme that you use for your website is largely the source of the mobile responsiveness of your site to a large degree. If your theme is old - it is likely not compliant with the current rules.

On to the next topic.

Rule #2 - Page Loading or Loading speed

Early in 2019, Google released some research and concluded the following:

> *"The average time it takes to fully load the average mobile landing page is 22 seconds. However, research also indicates 53% of people will leave a mobile page if it takes longer than 3 seconds to load."*

Google (and other search engines) penalize sites that load slowly. So do users. If a site loads too slowly, they will give up. You know as well as I do, a voracious reader - a reader determined to find information - will tolerate a lot more than someone searching on their phone for the closest hairdresser.

So - is 3 secs a hard-and-fast rule? Not really.

However, you want your site to load as fast as possible.

And yes, like the previous section - I have a website you can go to test your site ☺

https://gtmetrix.com/

Click on the link above and type in your website address or URL. Click on the blue "Analyze" button. It will whirl and think and then it will spit out all sorts of information that likely makes you cross-eyed. You are looking for the information that looks like the graphic below:
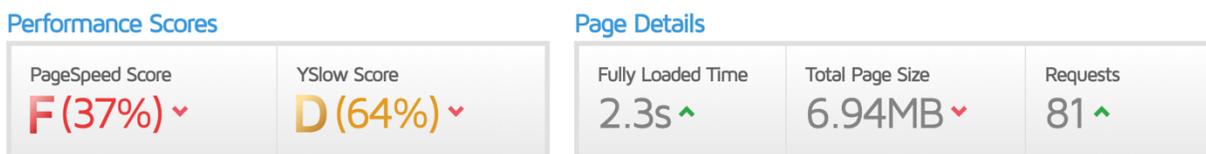
The graphic above is from my Author website. You'll notice it loads in 2.3 seconds but is given an "F" for a whole bunch of reasons. If you scroll down from the above box on your results, likely the first error that is listed is something about images. We will be spending time on preparing images for your website!

So - do I care that I received an F? Not really, I just want my site to load relatively quickly - and by relatively quick - I mean in under 4 or 5 seconds. How fast does your site load? Take note - we'll come back to this in a future lesson. It is possible to improve on this number fairly easily.

Rule # 3 – SSL (Secure Sockets Layer)

The last requirement to make Google a happy camper is the presence of an SSL.

Google started sanctioning websites that didn't have an SSL in July 2019.

Most authors don't want to get into the weeds of technology, so let's explain SSL as a function your hosting company puts in place to signal your website has a secure connection to the internet. It is supposed to give folks peace of mind when they are purchasing from websites.

What does it look like? To easily spot the presence of an SSL, your domain or URL has an "https://" rather than an "http://" at the beginning. The presence of that little "s" has a lot of meaning.
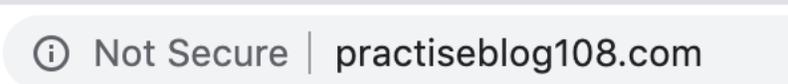
Also, the browser may add comments.

Here is a site WITH an SSL viewed on a Chrome browser:
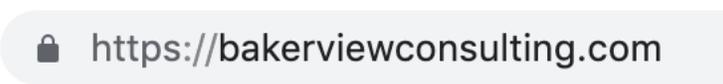
🔒 https://bakerviewconsulting.com

Here is a site WITHOUT an SSL:

ⓘ Not Secure | practiseblog108.com

Depending on the computer, the browser being used, and the presence or absence of antivirus software, the warning may be much more visible and in fact, access to the website might be blocked.

If your site is missing an SSL – reach out and I'll send you instructions on how to fix this.

Rule #4 Domain/URL

What I've labeled as "Rule #4" isn't as much a rule as it is information. I do, however, find this information to be fairly important.

Did you know that many people will try to find a website by simply bringing up a browser window and typing the name of the company (or in our case, author) followed by ".com" and hitting enter?

Likewise, if Google is trying to find something for a searcher, frequently the first place it will look is for a matching URL or Domain. Having a domain that matches a potential search gives a huge advantage. And having a domain that matches your author name makes it easier for your readers to find your website.

I am well aware that by marrying my lovely husband, I went from being Barb Smith to having the more unique name of Barb Drozdowich. As a result, I have never been confronted with trying to choose a domain for a common name. People can't spell my last name - and sometimes I can't spell my last name, but no one else reserved http://barbdrozdowich.com before I did. If your name is more common, you likely found that you had to be creative when choosing a domain

name. You might have had to add the word "Author" or "Writer" or "Writes" after your name to find an available domain.

We're going to talk about two aspects of a domain name in this section:
1) matching
2) multiples

Let me explain.

1) Matching

Does the URL for your site match your author's name? Or is it some version of your name? If we ignore the addition of the word "Author" or "Writer," can one of your readers hold one of your books (or their Kindle) in one hand and type what they see on your book cover into Google and come up with your website? Or is there a mismatch? In my case - what if my author's name was B.E. Drozdowich and my domain was http://barbdrozdowich.com? How would my readers figure that out? Some would, but you want the two to match as closely as possible. You want to make it as easy as possible for your readers to find you.

2) Multiples

If you have multiple websites - how does your reader choose which one to click on? Years ago, authors were encouraged to have a website and a blog - separate entities. This resulted in two entries in Google for one person - confusing for readers. I always suggest that everything is combined into one site. I know that several of you have questions about this and they can be addressed - but you want things to be as simple as possible for readers searching for you!

As we approach the end of a content-heavy day, I want you to make a list of things that you found through today's exercises. Things that perhaps need to change - things you need help with. Some of these will be resolved in future lessons but make notes as you go.

Your last bit of homework is back to the beginning of this lesson. Remember I suggested you Google yourself? I want you to take a screenshot of what you see - or if you prefer - write the information down. Mine is pictured below:

Barb Drozdowich - Author
https://barbdrozdowich.com/ ▼
Barb Drozdowich has worked with non-technical authors for years & understands how to break complex topics down using non-technical language. She has ...

We will start at this point in the next lesson.

Fire any questions at me that you might have.